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Comic Books as Extensive Reading Materials in EFL Classrooms: Impacts on Vocabulary Acquisition and Student Engagement

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This study explores the pedagogical potential of comic books as extensive reading (ER) materials in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. While often regarded as entertainment, comics combine visuals and narrative text, offering a multimodal reading experience. Addressing a gap in the literature, this mixed-method study investigates the effectiveness of comics as primary ER materials among 22 Japanese university students. Results show that students exposed to comics demonstrated greater vocabulary gains, enhanced comprehension, and higher motivation compared to those reading traditional textbooks. These findings support the integration of comics into EFL curricula as a means of promoting engagement, creativity, and language development.

Keywords: Extensive Reading, Comic Books, EFL Education, Vocabulary Acquisition, Multimodal Literacy

In an increasingly globalized world, English proficiency is vital for academic success, career advancement, and cultural exchange. Reading plays a central role in language development, reinforcing grammar, vocabulary, and comprehension. However, language learners often struggle with conventional reading materials that are overly academic, abstract, or culturally inaccessible. As a result, learners may disengage or avoid reading altogether.

Extensive reading (ER) addresses this issue by encouraging learners to read large amounts of accessible material, supporting language acquisition through immersion rather than formal instruction. Stephen Krashen (2004) emphasized the value of voluntary reading in acquiring a second language, suggesting that enjoyment is a major predictor of sustained learning. Comic books, through their integration of visual and textual elements, present a compelling alternative to traditional texts. They lower cognitive load, support contextual inference, and sustain reader interest.

While several studies have explored comic books in English as a Second Language (ESL) or general literacy settings, limited research has examined their systematic use in Japanese university English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms as a structured extensive reading intervention. This paper investigates whether comic books can function as more than auxiliary tools in language learning. It explores their potential to serve as primary reading materials in EFL programs, with attention to their effects on vocabulary acquisition, comprehension, learner motivation, and creative language use. This study employs a mixed-method design, combining vocabulary and comprehension assessments with qualitative reflections to evaluate the effectiveness of comics in an EFL context.

Literature Review

Extensive reading has been widely recognized for its benefits in vocabulary growth, grammatical awareness, and reading fluency (Nation, 2001). However, the effectiveness of ER programs often hinges on the appeal of the reading materials. Textbooks, while informative, can be overly formal, monotonous, or culturally distant from learners' experiences (Syahid & Khoirotunnisa, 2021).

Despite these benefits, some critics question the academic value of comics in language education, arguing that they may lack the lexical density or formal register needed for developing academic English proficiency. Such concerns are especially relevant in contexts where learners are preparing for standardized tests or academic writing tasks. Acknowledging this limitation is important; however, the motivational and contextual advantages of comics may counterbalance these concerns by promoting more frequent and sustained reading, which in turn supports vocabulary acquisition through context (Krashen, 2004).

To address these concerns, educators can adopt a balanced approach by supplementing comic-based reading with targeted academic texts. For example, after students complete a comic-based reading unit, instructors might assign short academic passages that explore related themes or vocabulary in greater depth. This pairing strategy allows learners to build foundational vocabulary and comprehension through comics, then apply those skills to more formal texts.

Additionally, teachers can point out how the writing style and vocabulary in comics differ from academic texts. This helps students understand when to use casual or formal English, depending on the purpose and audience of their writing.

In contrast, comics offer what Liu (2004) describes as "dual input"—a combination of text and imagery—which aids comprehension, memory, and contextual inference. Rengur and Sugirin (2019) found that students exposed to comics outperformed peers in comprehension tasks, attributing this to increased visual engagement and narrative cohesion. Avaroğulları et al. (2019) echo these findings, suggesting that comics serve both educational and recreational purposes, particularly for adolescents and young adults.

Visual storytelling, as Schwarz (2002) argues, allows learners to grasp subtleties in tone, emotion, and interaction—elements often difficult to access through text alone. This multimodal input enhances motivation and encourages repeated reading, aligning with Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1993), which highlights the importance of accessible yet challenging language input.

Recent scholarship has emphasized the role of comics and graphic novels in fostering critical literacy and engagement through multimodal narratives (Chun, 2023; Dallacqua & Kersten, 2022).

Comics also serve as cultural artifacts. Cary (2004) contends that learners gain exposure to idiomatic expressions, social norms, and humor, promoting intercultural competence. Furthermore, Kohnke (2019) emphasizes that inviting students to create comics themselves fosters language production, imagination, and personal investment in learning.

Methodology

Participants

The study involved 22 second-year English Education majors at a private university in Gifu City, Japan. Participants were balanced in gender, aged between 19 and 21, and represented varied levels of reading interest. Seven participants identified as regular readers of comics, while the remaining 15 had minimal prior engagement with the medium.

Research Design

This was a quasi-experimental, mixed-method study. Participants were divided into:

- 🕮 Experimental Group (n = 11): Assigned English-language comic books and graphic novels.
- 🕮 Control Group (n = 11): Assigned traditional EFL textbook passages.

Over four weeks, both groups met three times weekly. Sessions included assigned reading, peer summaries, and guided discussions. The comics selected varied in genre (e.g., superhero, slice of life) but were appropriate in linguistic complexity and content. Titles included selections from English-language graphic novels such as *Bone* by Jeff Smith and excerpts from *Ms. Marvel* (Marvel Comics), chosen for their CEFR B1–B2 vocabulary level and accessible cultural themes.

Instruments

- 💻 Vocabulary Test: A 20-item test featuring vocabulary drawn from both reading materials. Sample vocabulary items included: 'stealth', 'confront', 'ally', 'betrayal', and 'hideout'. These were selected based on their appearance in the assigned comic texts and relevance to narrative comprehension.
- 💻 Comprehension Test: Two short passages with inferential and factual questions.
- 💻 Creativity Rubric: Used to evaluate summary tasks on originality, cohesion, and vocabulary richness (rated on a 5-point Likert scale).
- 💻 Semi-Structured Interviews: Conducted post-treatment in English or Japanese.
- 💻 Reflection Logs: Weekly entries tracked engagement, perceived difficulty, and personal responses to the texts. Sample vocabulary items, interview prompts, and the creativity rubric are provided in Appendices A–C.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using paired sample t-tests to assess changes within groups and independent sample t-tests to compare between groups. Effect sizes (Cohen's d) were calculated to evaluate practical significance. Qualitative responses were coded inductively to identify themes related to motivation, comprehension strategies, and vocabulary use.

Results

Vocabulary and Comprehension Gains

The experimental group showed statistically significant improvement in both vocabulary and comprehension.

Table 1. Vocabulary and Comprehension Score Comparison Between Groups

Group	Pretest Score (Avg.)	Posttest Score (Avg.)	Gain	t-value	p-value
Experimental	5.81	8.12	+2.31	3.02	< .01
Control	5.68	6.92	+1.24	1.87	> .05

The effect size ($d = 0.84$) indicated a large effect.

Creativity in Summaries

Summaries from the comic-reading group displayed higher creativity, narrative richness, and vocabulary range. Students often included hypothetical scenarios and character analysis, reflecting deeper engagement with the text.

Engagement and Motivation

The experimental group rated their reading experiences more positively across multiple dimensions.

Table 2. Student Motivation Ratings by Group (Likert Scale 1–5)

Motivation Factor	Control Group	Experimental Group
Enjoyment of Reading	2.7	4.3
Willingness to Reread	2.1	4.0
Self-Reported Confidence	2.8	4.1

Qualitative data supported these findings. One student remarked, "I usually don't read English books, but with comics, I wanted to see what happened next."

Discussion

The findings support the hypothesis that comic books positively impact EFL learners' vocabulary acquisition, comprehension, and motivation. The significant improvement in test scores for the experimental group affirms the value of multimodal texts in language learning.

Krashen's comprehensible input theory (1982) explains how learners engage with slightly challenging texts more effectively when aided by visual context. Comics, by pairing concise dialogue with rich visuals, lower the affective filter and sustain learner interest.

Paivio's dual coding theory (1986) further elucidates the mechanism: verbal and visual inputs reinforce each other, enhancing memory encoding. This likely accounts for the superior recall and vocabulary application in the experimental group.

For additional materials including vocabulary items, interview questions, and rubrics, see Appendices A–C.

Creativity and narrative exploration flourished in the comic group. Their summaries reflected deeper investment, drawing connections beyond the text—an outcome consistent with Kohnke's (2019) findings on comics stimulating imagination and active learning.

Comics also offered intercultural insights. Exposure to idioms, humor, and cultural references enhanced students' pragmatic competence—skills difficult to teach through textbooks alone (Cary, 2004).

Despite their advantages, comics may offer limited exposure to formal or academic English, which could affect learners preparing for standardized assessments or academic writing tasks.

Implications for Teaching

EFL educators should consider integrating comics into reading curricula for the following reasons:

1. Higher Motivation: Learners show increased enjoyment and persistence.
2. Better Comprehension: Visuals aid in deciphering meaning and structure.
3. Cultural Context: Comics convey authentic language and sociocultural cues.
4. Creative Output: Comic-based activities promote imaginative language use.
5. Flexibility: Comics can be adapted to different proficiency levels and classroom goals.

However, careful selection of materials is critical. Educators must assess linguistic level, cultural appropriateness, and educational relevance. Training on how to teach with comics may enhance their effective classroom use. Providing teacher support on how to effectively incorporate comics into language lessons is also key to successful implementation.

To support practical integration, teachers could use structured activities that align with curriculum goals. For example, a "Comic Book Discussion Circle" can prompt students to read a short comic excerpt, discuss character motivations and language use, and then collaboratively rewrite a scene using new vocabulary. Alternatively, students might storyboard and script a

short comic of their own based on a classroom theme or prompt. These activities support both receptive and productive skills, while encouraging creativity, collaboration, and vocabulary application.

Limitations and Future Research

This study's small sample size and short duration limit generalizability. Additionally, genre familiarity may have influenced outcomes, as some students were more receptive to comic-style storytelling.

To strengthen future research design, a follow-up study could implement a longitudinal model across a full academic semester, using a larger and more diverse sample. Including delayed post-tests would provide insight into vocabulary retention and long-term language development. Such a study could also investigate how comic-based ER impacts academic writing or standardized test preparation over time, helping to address concerns about the balance between engagement and formal language learning.

Future research should investigate the longitudinal effects of comic-based reading, especially on academic writing, speaking fluency, and listening comprehension. Comparative studies across different age groups, regions, and comic genres would also enrich understanding. Investigating learner-produced comics as a form of assessment or instruction could further expand pedagogical applications.

Conclusion

Comic books hold untapped potential as core components in EFL extensive reading programs. By combining narrative, visuals, and cultural context, they provide a powerful medium for language learning. This study demonstrates that comics can significantly enhance vocabulary acquisition, reading motivation, comprehension, and creativity. When used thoughtfully, comics can transform reading from a passive activity into an engaging, meaningful, and culturally enriching experience.

Educators should reconsider long-held assumptions about reading materials. Comics are not merely entertaining diversions—they are multimodal texts that reflect and shape language use. Recognizing their pedagogical value could reshape how language is taught and learned in the 21st century.

As literacy continues to evolve beyond traditional text, embracing multimodal resources like comics can position EFL instruction at the forefront of innovative, inclusive, and culturally rich language education.

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Appendix A: Sample Vocabulary Test Items

1. Stealth
2. Confront
3. Ally
4. Betrayal
5. Hideout

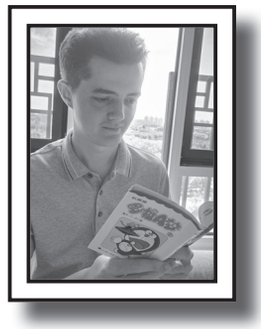
Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. *How did you feel about reading English comic books?*
2. *Did you understand the story easily? Why or why not?*
3. *Did the images help you learn new vocabulary? Can you give an example?*
4. *Would you continue reading comics in English outside of class?*

Appendix C: Creativity Rubric Overview

Criteria	Description	Scale
Originality	**Novelty and uniqueness of ideas in the summary**	**1–5**
Vocabulary Use	**Range and accuracy of English vocabulary**	**1–5**
Narrative Coherence	**Logical flow and structure of the retelling**	**1–5**

Implementing Extensive Reading at a Chinese Middle School



Edward Linton

Introducing an extensive reading programme has been hailed as the "single most effective change that a teacher could make to a language programme" (Nation & Macalister, 2020). However, doing so constitutes making substantial changes to the curriculum, which is inevitably going to result in some resistance, especially in large institutions. This article details how I, as an ordinary English teacher (i.e. not in a leadership position), pitched and led an extensive reading programme for around 300 students at a private middle school in Beijing, China. The steps detailed here provide a reference for in-service teachers at large institutions who have ambitions to implement ER in their own contexts.

While working at a private middle school in Beijing, like many teachers who learn about ER, I found myself dissatisfied with the low quantity of comprehensible input that my students, as well as other teachers' students, were receiving. I mentioned my hunger for a systematic, curriculum-level ER programme to a newly appointed campus director, who instructed me to formulate a plan and pitch it to the leadership. This article details the steps I took in the following year to see our ER programme realised.

To briefly detail our resulting ER implementation, from September 2024 through May 2025, all our students in the A1-B2 English courses (roughly 300 students) participated in a compulsory ER programme. One of eight 40-minute weekly English lessons was replaced with an in-class reading session where students used the Xreading platform for sustained silent reading. Students were also expected to do some more reading as homework. Teachers had the freedom to set weekly reading targets and reward systems via the school's discipline management system (the Xiaoguanjia app) for their own classes. Typically, students would be awarded merit points for meeting the weekly reading requirement (e.g. 1,000 words per week for the A1 cohort), and demerit points for not meeting the requirement. Formal evaluation and my personal experience while managing the programme

has shown the reception to be very positive, from teachers, students, parents, and administrators. Two classes in the C1 cohort, who were initially excluded from the programme, voluntarily joined for the second semester.

The steps that I took to see ER implemented at my organisation were:

1. Do as much initial planning as possible, and develop a detailed implementation plan
2. Pitch the idea and plan to other teachers who will be involved
3. Pitch the idea and plan to admin, and ask for permission for a trial
4. Conduct a successful trial
5. Rework the plan and apply for a full implementation

Developing an implementation plan

In developing an implementation plan for an ER programme, I believe that time, logistics, and finance are the three main considerations. Regarding time, schools tend not to have empty space in the curriculum waiting for something to come fill it up. In the vast majority of situations, something is going to have to be removed to make space for ER, especially as it is a very time-consuming activity. Even if ER is assigned primarily as homework, it still competes with other homework (both in English and other subjects) for time. Even if space can be found in the curriculum, it may not turn out to be suitable for ER. For example, my initial implementation plan involved 20 minutes of digital ER in the homeroom class before the first lesson of each day, four days a week. This was chosen because the students had previously voted to have in-class study time instead of a morning run, which caused subject teachers to be burdened with providing extra study tasks. By replacing this with ER, I had saved work for the subject teachers, but soon discovered that homeroom teachers were not jumping for joy at the idea of learning about ER and how to effectively monitor it. Another issue was that our Grade 6 students, who do not have school-issued laptops, would have been excluded from this model. School iPads were considered as a solution for Grade 6, but later proved to be logistically unfeasible. These were problems that were not made clear until the trial implementation began.

The main incentive to choose digital ER over paper ER was the number of students at the school. The more students there are, the more of an upfront investment is required by the school to supply enough graded readers. With around 300 students at our school at any given time, a digital solution financially made much more sense, and also made the programme a much easier sell for the administrators. I left the specific question of 'who will pay for it?' to admins, who ultimately chose to charge parents for the Xreading fee as part of our curriculum.

The first draft of my implementation plan detailed considerations such as the time and place for ER, devices and logistics, Xreading platform content, student training procedures, disciplinary measures, reading rewards, steps for dealing with issues encountered during reading, a 'pipeline' out of Xreading for high-proficiency students who wish to transition to 'native' content, and a to-do list that needed to be completed before the programme could begin. In retrospect, one conspicuously absent item on this list is the goals of the programme, or the rationale for implementing it, which I only communicated verbally during presentations.

Pitching the idea to the English teachers

Before proposing the ER programme to administrators, I wanted to ensure there was a desire for this change within the English department. It is much easier to get changes implemented if there is dissatisfaction with the status quo (Macalister & Nation, 2020, p. 199). Fellow English teachers are usually sympathetic to classroom issues and likely to have similar issues to your own.

During one of our weekly English department meetings, I shared a slideshow presentation to explain the proposed programme. My presentation contained four sections:

1. What is ER?
2. What are the benefits of ER?
3. The implementation plan, described in plenty of detail
4. A link to a questionnaire for teacher feedback (see Figure 1)

The goals of this presentation were to ensure everyone had a common understanding of ER, understood the benefits, felt comfortable in participating in an ER programme, and had an opportunity to have their questions answered. At this stage, our implementation plan still involved students reading in their

Figure 1: Questionnaire for English teachers

4. How beneficial do you believe an extensive reading programme would be for your learners' English learning?
   1 - Useless
   2 - Somewhat useful
   3 - Moderately useful
   4 - Very useful
   5 - Extremely useful
   *

1	2	3	4	5

5. Please explain your above answer (in English or Chinese).
   *

Enter your answer

6. Do you have any comments, critiques or questions about the extensive reading programme proposal?

Enter your answer

Note: Questions 1-3 were about which grade and class each teacher is in charge of and have been omitted for brevity.

homerooms, not under the supervision of their English teacher. English teachers would have simply monitored reading progress remotely from the Xreading backend.

Responses to the questionnaire were very positive, with ten teachers selecting 'Very useful' or 'Extremely useful', and one teacher selecting 'Somewhat useful' because she already ran a reading programme with her advanced-level students.

Pitching the idea to admin

I took the conservative approach of getting approval from all key members of our admin staff, whether or not they would necessarily be involved in the programme. In my case, this included the heads of teaching affairs and student affairs, the IB-MYP director, the teacher in charge of school iPads, the members of the principal's office, and the campus director. While pitching the programme to admins, I brought the results of the teachers' questionnaire to demonstrate the strong support from the department. Ultimately, our principal agreed to a one-semester trial with one A1, grade 7 class, co-taught by myself and a local teacher.

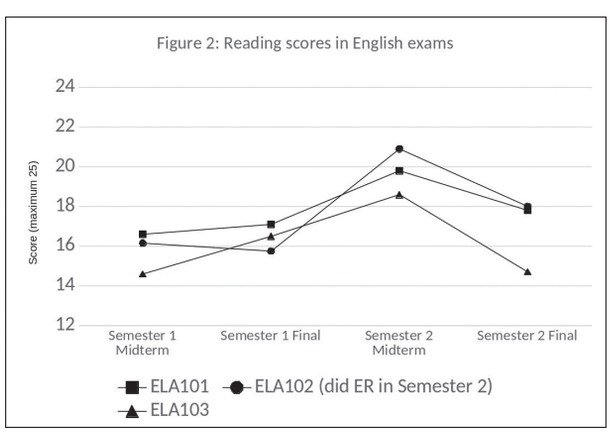
Conducting a successful trial

The trial class had ER time allocated for 20 minutes a day, four days a week, for twelve weeks. By the end of the programme, the average credited reading time logged on Xreading was 2hr 31m, and the average words read was 10,735. During the trial, I wrote detailed progress reports each week to ensure that all issues and successes were on record.

The trial class (ELA102) was one of three classes within the same grade and proficiency stream (A1). This allowed me to conduct some informal research comparing their performance on the reading section of our internal examinations with that of the other two classes (see Figure 2). Although all students took the same exams, each exam is different, so they are not directly comparable, but the results were promising nonetheless.

After starting the ER programme, the students in the trial class made greater gains in their reading scores on subsequent exams than the comparison classes. Although literature shows that ER can have a positive effect on reading comprehension test performance (Krashen, 2007), I was surprised to see a visible improvement after only half a semester of ER. I suspect there were two factors that could have caused this. Firstly, the students' proficiency level was very low, and secondly, their exposure to English reading was scarce, primarily consisting of a ~200-word intensive reading passage in each coursebook unit. In both cases, even just a small amount of ER was perhaps enough to

Figure 2. Reading scores in English exams



make a noticeable difference at this level.

Besides the exam data, I also administered a questionnaire to all students with Likert and open-ended questions to elicit student perceptions on ER and feedback for our programme. The majority of students reported enjoying the programme, wanting to continue, usually understanding what they read, not seeing it as too difficult or boring, and especially emphasized preferring to find books to read by themselves instead of having the teacher select compulsory books.

Reworking the plan and getting the green light

Ironing out the kinks in the plan involved a lot of communication with relevant parties, such as the head of department, the teacher in charge of the electronic device usage policy, and the librarian. As previously mentioned, one key issue with the initial implementation is that it required homeroom teachers to be in charge of something unfamiliar to them. Not all teachers are comfortable with digital learning, and although I set up accounts for the homeroom teachers to use Xreading's live monitoring feature, they were not used. Some teachers felt it should not be their job to keep students on-task in the morning sessions, and thus made no effort to remind or encourage them. Adding ER to a curriculum inevitably involves creating new work for other people, even if it is not more work, and this alone can be a deal-breaker for those who are not themselves invested in the idea. This was the impetus for replacing one of our weekly English lessons with ER, a decision that could only be made if the teachers and the head of department all believed in ER strongly enough to sacrifice an eighth of their teaching time for it. Moving ER to a strictly department-internal affair also made administrators much warmer to the idea, as nobody else's toes were being stepped on. It also allowed us to book library time for Grade 6 classes, including them in the programme. Finally, it ensured that an ER expert was always in the classroom and available to help students during reading sessions.

The second biggest issue arising from the trial was that of device access. Students were required to bring their laptops to class, and inevitably some devices would be forgotten, out of battery, or confiscated due to misuse. In some cases, lazy students would deliberately 'forget' their laptop and then sleep, chat, or cause mischief during reading sessions. Two solutions were devised - first, to give students with no device a boring but useful writing task, and second, to bring backup devices (school iPads) whenever possible.

A much smaller issue we found, that I feel is very much worth mentioning, was students forgetting their login details. We used the students' school email accounts as their usernames. However, I later discovered that most students in this demographic struggle to remember and type email addresses with a keyboard, resulting in teachers wasting a lot of time helping younger students login each week.

Conclusion

At the time of writing, our ER programme has been running successfully for one year. It has been widely popular with students, teachers, administrators, and parents. Still, I have perceived a number of issues with our system that need addressing. Total reading time logged on the Xreading platform remains lower than expectations, due to students struggling with the system, not understanding how to do ER effectively, or being uninterested in reading. All of these issues can be solved with more rigorous 'onboarding' in the first weeks of the semester, ensuring that all students are clear about what ER is, why it is useful, and how to find appropriate books.

I hope that this article can inspire others to see an ER programme proposal as not simply the domain of leaders. Remember that some obstacles to innovation and reform exist only in the eye of the beholder, and that the process requires not only planning, effort and collaboration, but also a generous serving of time. In my case, it took one school year – time very well spent, considering the impact ER has had on our students.

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Reading Graded Readers Aloud to Promote Extensive Reading

Kemper Johanson
Kochi University of Medicine

The study examined Japanese undergraduates' comprehension and reading motivation through read-aloud activities. The students were read a different graded reader each week to encourage more engagement and better understanding for their Extensive Reading (ER) homework. At the conclusion of the 16 week semester the students' reading data and opinions on the read-aloud activity were collected. The number of the words read in the second semester slightly increased in comparison with the first semester, which did not include a read-aloud component. The students found the read-aloud activity beneficial in terms of comprehension, pronunciation support, and reading enjoyment. Therefore, reading aloud is a valuable practice for promoting and supporting ER.

Reading aloud in class

There is something special about being read to, from story time before bed during childhood to a university professor who can bring Shakespeare to life with his voice. Being read to resonates with people. It is one of the most memorable primary school experiences for future educators (Artley, 1975). It is something students take home with them. In native language classes, read-aloud time even inspires students to read more on their own (Ivey & Broaddus, 2011).

While it is fair to separate reading and listening as different skills in the ESL classroom, listening to a book or a graded reader is drastically different from listening to a dialogue. No one speaks like a book. Stories pull back the veil on emotion and thought that would never surface in a conversation. Undoubtedly, the difference between processing the target language aurally and visually remains. It would be hard to imagine a child who never reads on their own being able to read fluently just from the experience of listening to books. Being read to does, however, provide solid support for learning to read more fluently. It helps students identify units of meaning in a text and leads to better comprehension by focusing on larger meaningful phrases rather than simply processing each word individually (Amer, 1997).

A narrator brings themselves to the story. Character voices, intonation, pacing and numerous other vocal inflections make the story enjoyable for the listener. For EFL students, this type of listening can model word groupings, punctuation signals, tone, and inflection (Amer, 1997). A question is immediately apparent due to a shift in the orator's inflection, but it may go unnoticed by a novice reader until they stumble upon the question mark at the end of the sentence. Vocal cues like these that humans receive when listening can create a more engaging experience for the students and help them become interested in the story. I think most teachers who practice ER will agree that any way of increasing students' interest in reading feels like a win.

When ER meets reading aloud

Reading aloud and ER are both holistic approaches to language acquisition. They are also both based on learning through engagement with the reading material. As such it is probably no surprise that the research into these two methods shares many similar outcomes.

Reading aloud when paired with ER encourages the students to read-while-listening (RWL). This provides learners who have limited exposure to aural input with an opportunity to match words and phrases to their spoken equivalents (Tajika, 2022). In terms of vocabulary acquisition, RWL outperforms simply listening, and shows similar results as ER, while being viewed more favorably by students (Brown et al., 2008; Webb & Chang, 2015). Students who learn through RWL also score better on comprehension assessments than students who only read the text themselves (Chang & Millett, 2015; Woodall, 2010).

Research aims

After seeing that only 16.1% of my students were able to achieve the class goal of reading 60,000 to 80,000 words in a 16-week semester, I knew I needed to do something. ER is meant to be fun and motivational, but the students were obviously having trouble fitting it into their busy schedules. I really wanted them to see what ER has to offer, not just in terms of learning gains, but also as entertainment. I also knew that they would respond best to any activity that helped them get words easily. This led me to the idea of reading different ER books at the beginning of each class. I decided I needed to find out:

1. Will students be inspired to read more after being read to in class?
2. Will students have an easier time understanding the comprehension questions after reading along with the teacher?
3. How will university students feel about being read to by the teacher?

Methodology

For this course, the ER component was integrative (Waring & McLean, 2015), functioning as one part of an English conversation class. ER accounted for 20% of the final grade, with students earning full marks by reading 80,000 words or more. However, words were only counted toward the total if the student passed a short comprehension quiz on the story's content.

The course was a mandatory English communication class that met once a week for two 16-week semesters. The read-aloud component was included only in the second semester's curriculum. The participants were Japanese university students (aged 18–22) majoring in medicine. There were 56 students across two classes, of whom 49 chose to participate in the study. Their English proficiency varied considerably, particularly in listening and speaking, though the majority were identified at the CEFR A2 level.

For this study, I read graded readers aloud at the beginning of each class for 12 weeks. Each week I would choose a different ER book to read to the class. The students were encouraged to follow along online, so they would be able to take the comprehension quiz afterwards. The Xreading site used in the class ensures that if they did not spend enough time on each page, they would not be able to take the quiz. This strongly incentivizes students to read along. I also put the reading up on the projector in case anyone forgot their device. The students were able to choose their own way of interacting with the activity. They had to flip the pages to ensure the words-per-minute counter read correctly, but otherwise they could choose to RWL, listen, or switch between the two methods.

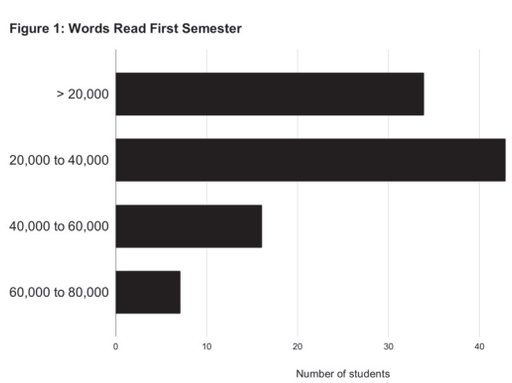
Each week I tried to introduce a new type of graded readers in the hopes of finding something of interest for each of the students. I read different graded readers to each class, but they were of a similar word count and level. The books were always in the same genre. This was by design, so the results were less based on exact books.

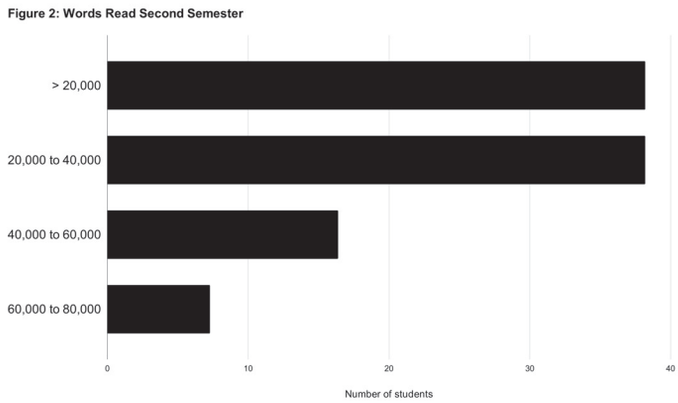
Results and discussion

The first thing I looked at was how reading aloud affected the number of words the students read for the semester. By simply listening while reading, students would have reached approximately 15,500 words towards their semester goal. However, attendance issues and tardiness meant that many students did not actually engage with all the books presented in class. While reflecting on the read-aloud activity, one student explained their own circumstances, "I was not able to do Xreading as well as in the first semester due to independent study." The added pressure, to perform in classes connected to their major, clearly plays a role in the amount of time they can dedicate to English class.

Table 1. Reading aloud and extensive reading.

	Reading aloud	**Extensive Reading**
Comprehension and Retention	**Helps students grasp difficult content and aids in comprehension. Reading academic and literary texts aloud help college students retain information (Rasinski, 2003).**	**Effective in improving reading comprehension skills (Yang et al., 2021) and vocabulary retention (Liu & Zhang, 2018).**
Language skills	**Benefits ESL students by modeling pronunciation and rhythm, as well as introducing vocabulary in context (Fisher & Frey, 2008).**	**Students demonstrate improved reading level and linguistic competence (Aka, 2019). ER helps improve students' grammatical knowledge (Yoshizawa et al., 2018) and has a positive effect on vocabulary (Nakanishi, 2015).**
Reading Motivation	**Inspires students to read on their own (Ivey & Broaddus, 2011).**	**An increase in positive attitudes towards reading activities (Yamashita, 2013)**
Increased Engagement	**Listening to a text increases student interest in narrative and challenging materials (Allyn & Morrell, 2016).**	**ER increases participants' enthusiasm and engagement in reading activities even for non-English language majors. (Tharanatham, 2023).**





The read-along activity was designed to help them get more words and find more enjoyment in the process of ER.

As can be seen in Figure 1 and 2, the students were able to read more words by reading along with me in class. The increase of 0.3% of students achieving the goal of 60,000 to 80,000 words is not remarkable, but it did counter the negative trend I had encountered in previous years. I do feel that many students relied too heavily on the in-class read-along time, though. This may have led to a decrease in independent reading. One student even felt, "It's not necessary for those who read on their own. Students who don't read on Xreading regularly don't even listen to the read aloud activity." While I feel this is a fair criticism, most of the 43 out of 49 students who were willing to comment on the read-aloud activity responded positively.

The most cited positive was comprehension. Six students commented that they were able to understand the story better when they listened while reading along. Notably, one student said, "It was easy to understand the story because the emotions were easy to understand." In this case, simple emotion transcended language and made the content much easier to process for the learner. The students would need to stop and think about the character's emotional state, but when they are reading along, it came from the narrator's voice. This makes for a more engaging experience, as noted by another student, "By (listening to the teacher) reading aloud, I was able to get more into the content than when I read, so I felt the quiz was easier." Little hints can grow into a greater understanding of the narrative and make it a more memorable reading/listening experience.

It is important not to overgeneralize, however. While some students are able to integrate listening with what they are reading, other students find reading alone the easiest way to process the content. As one student pointed out, "I thought it was a good point because it was easy to understand and I was able to get the content into my head. However, it is easier to understand the contents of a book if you read it by yourself rather than having it read to you." Listening can provide its own mental burden when students are already working hard to comprehend the reading.

The second most commonly cited positive of the activity was understanding the pronunciation of new vocabulary. Five students felt more at ease during the read-aloud activity because they did not have to try to decipher the phonetics on their own. This is likely a greater burden to mental processing during reading than many native speaker speakers realize. Hearing the words is also a gentle means to correct pronunciation mistakes. One student explained, "I was able to notice pronunciation mistakes by listening to the teacher read words that I had read incorrectly when reading silently by myself."

On the other hand, two students had difficulty keeping up with the reading speed. One of them shared, "The bad part was that it was difficult to keep up with the speed of reading aloud. If I had been told in advance where to read aloud, it would have been easier for me to grasp the content by reading through it lightly." This is a very simple way to adapt the activity. I just had not imagined the students would want to read through the book more than once. I do worry this may discourage some students from fully participating in the activity during class, though. Also, nothing was stopping any students from reading the text on their own before taking the quiz.

One of the challenges I faced with my ER program is introducing students to all the different genres that ER covers. Most graded readers are not a huge investment of time for students, so I really think they would benefit from reading many different types

and genres of books. One of the students echoed my feelings on this, "I think we should do it again. I think we should do it again because it would give us a wider variety of books to read and open our eyes to new genres of books." Reading in many different genres could have vocabulary acquisition effects and just simply help the students become more comfortable with reading different types of materials in English. One student commented, "It was a good opportunity to learn which books are easy to read." This aligns with my own goals for the activity and ER goals in general.

Conclusion

While the number of words did not increase significantly, the overall sentiment towards the read-aloud activity was positive. I believe this is a good way to introduce the students to ER. It sets expectations clearly by letting the teacher choose level-appropriate books. That way, the students do not try the longest, hardest book in the ER library just to augment their word count. Reading aloud also allows the teacher to introduce all the different genres ER covers. The students might even find they like reading a book they would never have chosen on their own. The students gain support in the phonetic aspects of the language and a model for how to pronounce words they have forgotten or never heard before. The enjoyment of this aural component is also relevant. As one student stated, "I liked how the teacher read the story aloud with intonation, which made it easier to get the flow of the story in my head than when I just read."

To answer whether or not students were inspired to read more, the data only shows a small increase in the number of words read/listened to. It is clearer however, that even university students enjoyed being read to and could see the benefits of having a verbal model. Many students stated that they would like to continue the read-aloud activity and would recommend it for future classes.

The study was not set up to measure comprehension gains directly. However, the words did not count towards their total if they did not pass the comprehension quiz, so all words counted could be said to come from a graded reader that the students understood. For more conclusive data on the comprehension gains, I would need to design a dedicated means of measuring their understanding. I was more interested in how the students perceived their own understanding of the story, though, and the most common response, when questioned about their opinion on the activity, was that it made the books easier to understand.

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PART—The Practical Applications of Research and Theory: a continuing series

Each of these short articles takes a piece of language teaching research and theory and suggests its practical applications for language learning and teaching. The aim of this series is to bridge the gap between research and practice. Most language teachers who are not currently involved in academic study do not have easy access to journals and often do not have the time to read academic articles and reflect on how to apply their findings to their teaching. These short articles do this. They are not summaries of a piece of research but simply attempts to apply the findings of research to practice. The quality of the research has been carefully considered when choosing the articles.

PART 1: Designing a Well-balanced Course

Paul Nation

Source: Nation, I. S. P. (2007). The four strands. Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching, 1(1), 1-12. This article is available from Paul Nation's web site under Publications

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This article tries to answer the question *What opportunities for learning should there be in a well-balanced language course?* I arrived at the idea of the four strands by struggling to put together the various ideas I had gathered through reading lots of research on language teaching and learning. The research showed the importance of spoken interaction and negotiation of meaning. The research showed the importance of comprehensible input and developing fluency in reading through speed reading courses. The research also showed the effectiveness of deliberate decontextualized vocabulary learning using word cards. Some of this research seemed contradictory, for example, the importance of interaction and input, and the effectiveness of deliberate study.

The answer I eventually arrived at was that a well-balanced course needed to have all of these things but they should be in the right proportions.

The principle of the four strands says that a well-balanced language course should have four equal strands of meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning, and fluency

development. Meaning-focused input covers learning through language use in listening and reading. Meaning-focused output covers learning through language use in speaking and writing. Language-focused learning covers learning through deliberate study and teaching. Fluency development covers learning to make the best use of what you already know across each of the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. An equal amount of time should be given to each strand. The time calculation includes both class work, homework and opportunities for learning outside class.

When applying the principle of the four strands, it is useful to keep a note of the various activities that you use in a course and how much time you spend on each activity. The activities should then be classified into the four strands and the time added up for each strand. If each strand does not get roughly equal time, then it is worth considering how you could get a better balance of time.

The four strands work best if the content covered in each strand is the same because this provides opportunities for the important principles of repetition and varied meetings and use (quality of processing) to be applied.

Several years after working out the idea of the four strands I realized that the principle had implications that I had not at first thought of. For example, to answer the question How do you teach writing? you just need to apply the principle of the four strands. That is a well-balanced writing course should spend about half of the writing course on meaning-focused writing (meaning-focused output). A small amount of time could be spent on meaning-focused input as preparation for writing. About one quarter of the course time should be spent on language-focused learning as it relates to writing (getting correction and feedback on writing, memorising useful phrase and sentences to use in writing, spelling, forming English letters and typing, learning the format of various types of writing, and so on), and getting fluent at writing quickly, especially when assessment involves timed written assessment. Similarly, the principle of the four strands can be used to guide the design of courses on listening and speaking and reading.

The principle of the four strands can also be used to answer questions related to particular techniques or activities. For example, is it worth doing grammar-translation? The way to answer the question is to see which strand the activity fits into and then consider what other activities it needs to share time with in that strand. The activities then need to be ranked in order of effectiveness and the least effective activities should be left out to allow time for the others.

What should teachers do about the four strands?

1. Learn the principle of the four strands and how to apply it to looking at the balance of learning opportunities in your course.
2. Apply the principle of the four strands to your course.
3. If you use a course book, apply the four strands to your course book. You will find that a course book does not provide enough meaning-focused input and fluency development, especially for reading. You should then consider what you need to be doing in addition to course book work to get a good balance of the four strands. This is likely to include setting up substantial extensive reading and extensive listening programs.

The principle of the four strands is one of the most important principles of language course design. One of its very important implications is that around three-quarters of the time in a course should be spent on meaning focused language use (meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output and fluency development), and about one-quarter of the time on deliberately learning about the language (this includes language teaching) and on language learning strategies (language-focused learning). Teaching should make up only a small amount of the time in a language course.

Further reading

Nation, P. (2013). *What should an EFL Teacher Know?* Seoul, Korea: Compass Publishing. The first chapter of this book deals with the four strands and the rest of the book shows how each of the strands can be realized in a course. It is also worth looking at Nation, I. S. P., & Yamamoto, A. (2012). Applying the four strands to language learning. *International Journal of Innovation in English Language Teaching and Research, 1*(2), 167-181. This article applies the idea of the four strands to learning without a teacher.

Remembering Marc Helgesen: Mentor, Colleague, and Champion of Extensive Reading

Cory Koby

Tezukayama Gakuin University & the ERF

It is with deep sadness that we share the passing of Professor Emeritus Marc Helgesen, who left us on March 11, 2025, in Sendai. I had the privilege of working alongside Marc for several years at Miyagi Gakuin Women's University, and like so many others, I was profoundly shaped by his mentorship, generosity, and unwavering commitment to education.

Marc was a driving force in the global Extensive Reading movement. As the second Chair of the Extensive Reading Foundation (ERF), he helped expand its reach and deepen its impact. He was instrumental in launching the Language Learner Literature Awards, celebrating accessible, high-quality texts for learners worldwide. Within JALT, Marc was a founding member of the ER Special Interest Group (ER SIG), where his vision and energy helped build a vibrant community of educators dedicated to fostering reading fluency and learner autonomy.

But Marc's influence extended far beyond ER. At Miyagi Gakuin, he inspired generations of students through his dynamic, hands-on teaching. His learners—often seen volunteering at JALT events—embodied his belief in being active, curious, and kind. That same spirit lives on in English Firsthand, the textbook series he co-authored, which has reached classrooms across the globe.

Marc's path to teaching began early, with a focus on child development and a passion for inclusive education. From teaching in a maximum-security prison to ESL classes for Hispanic communities, and eventually to his decades in Japan, he never stopped believing in the power of education to change lives.

In English Firsthand, Marc included a letter to one of his own teachers—a quiet, powerful reminder to be grateful. That was Marc: always teaching, always giving, always thankful.

He didn't just teach English. He taught us how to live with purpose and joy. Thank you, Marc. You'll always be part of who we are.

Extensive Reading Foundation Language Learner Literature Awards: 2025 Winners

Cory Koby
Tezukayama Gakuin University & the ERF

The Extensive Reading Foundation (ERF) organizes an annual international competition to recognize the best new works of language learner literature. Publishers are invited to submit titles published in the preceding year, from which an international jury selects a shortlist of finalist books. These Finalists, announced in March, are chosen for their outstanding overall quality and likely enduring appeal.

To incorporate the perspectives of educators and learners, ten teachers—each receiving two copies of every Finalist title—work with their students to read and provide feedback between March and the end of July. This feedback is considered alongside online voting when the jury selects the winning books.

Winners are announced at the end of August on the ERF website, in the ELT press, and at language teaching conferences around the world, including the ER World Congress. Publishers of finalist and winning titles are entitled to display the ERF Award logo on their book covers.

Below are the 2025 Winners.

Adolescents and Adults: Upper Intermediate and Advanced

(1501+ headwords; CEFR B2, C1, C2)

The Blue Castle

Retold by: Raina Ruth Nakamura

Publisher: KISS Books

ISBN: 9798324150884

Juror comment: A witty yet sentimental story about Valancy Stirling, who rebels against her strict family, speaks her mind in pursuit of happiness, and transforms into a strong and independent woman. The engaging storyline and the unexpected ending offer a unique take on important issues, including appearances, criticism, prejudice, and societal pressure.

Online voter comment: This is one of the most engaging leveled readers I have encountered in a long time. The story is fresh, and the writing style, while adhering to the limits of what is appropriate for the book's level, flows smoothly and incorporates accessible figurative language. As an instructor, there's a lot to work with in this text that is beneficial for language learners. Really well done!

Adolescents and Adults: Intermediate

(801-1500 headwords; CEFR B1)

1984

Retold by: Karen Kovacs

Publisher: Read Stories - Learn English

ISBN: 9781914600104

Juror comment: This adaptation of George Orwell's 1984 employs straightforward language and a brisk romantic subplot, making it accessible to language learners. The quote "The past was removed, then it was forgotten, and finally, the lie became the truth" emphasizes betrayal. Despite lacking illustrations, it effectively depicts the dystopian setting. Clear typography and simplified synonyms enhance comprehension, providing insights into the state's manipulation of truth and history.

Online voter comment: I really like about the story that connected between the start to the end. The pictures were interesting,

Write for ERJ!

Send anything related to extensive reading or extensive listening, or of interest to members of the JALT ER SIG to erj@jalt.org. Back issues can be seen at jalt.org/er. Use APA7 style, no footnotes, MSWord or text format. If you have any layout requests, send separately or consider the position of layout editor!

Adolescents and Adults: Elementary

(401-800 words; CEFR A1 & A2)

The Drum

Written by: Michael Lacey Freeman

Illustrators: Bethany Lacey Freeman & Craig Bulloch

Publisher: Michael Lacey Freeman

ISBN: 9781739445942

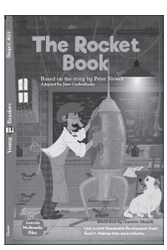
Juror comment: The Drum is a touching and meaningful children's story that addresses grief and healing through a mix of reality and magical storytelling. The book includes comprehension and grammar exercises, and a theme song. Colorful illustrations help readers understand the story. Each sentence is beautifully crafted - one can tell a lot of thought went into each word. And it's written intelligently; the words leap off the page into the reader's imagination.

Online voter comment: I like drawing part on this book and so colorful easy to read.

Adolescents and Adults: Beginner

(up to 400 headwords)

The Rocket Book



Retold by: Jane Cadwallader

Illustrator: Gustavo Mazali

Publisher: ELi srl

ISBN: 9788853643841

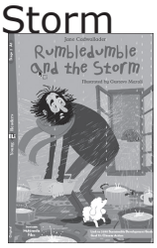
Juror comment: A 1912 short story by Peter Newell reimagined for a modern LLL audience, with gorgeous illustrations and a diverse cast. It is very accessible thanks to its simple language and expressive art, and conveys both a charming old-fashioned style and a contemporary focus on SDG values such as inclusiveness.

Online voter comment: I could understand the content immediately just by looking at the photos, and English was easy.

Young Learners

(ages 6-11 / 2nd-6th Grade)

Rumbledumble and the Storm



Written by: Jane Cadwallader

Illustrator: Gustavo Mazali

Publisher: ELi srl

ISBN: 9788853643827

Juror comment: Rumbledumble and the Storm is a heartwarming picture book that blends adventure with important themes like kindness, courage, and climate awareness. With vibrant illustrations, relatable characters, and child-friendly language, this book invites young readers to explore big ideas in a fun, imaginative, and meaningful way.

Online voter comment: We loved the fact that Rumbledumble helped and cared for the people in danger even though they didn't like him. He showed empathy for all his fellow villagers.

Very Young Learners

(Up to age 5 / 1st grades)

The Little Red Hen

Retold by: Maria Cleary

Illustrator: Mariagiovanna Bornia

Publisher: Helbling

ISBN: 9783711402158

Juror comment: This retelling of the classic story, The Little Red Hen, is engaging for very young learners, as well as being appropriate for storytelling activities. The language is repeated and uses words the children probably already know. The illustrations are soft and support the flow of the story.

Online voter comment: I liked The Little Red Hen didn't get any help from the other animals but she offered them bread. She is a true friend

Recent Research in Extensive Reading

Compiled by Imogen Custance

Arai, Y., & Takizawa, K. (2025). Day and Bamford's (2002) ten principles for teaching extensive reading revisited: A methodological synthesis of research practice. *Reading in a Foreign Language, 37*(1): 1-23. https://doi.org/10.64152/10125/67493

Despite the preponderance of research on extensive reading (ER), the research field still suffers from a lack of common understanding of what ER is and how it should be implemented. From the perspective of Day and Bamford's (2002) seminal ten principles for teaching ER, the present methodological synthesis aimed to systematically review and critically appraise the reporting practice of how previous studies implemented ER. A total of 72 primary studies were retrieved and reviewed. The findings suggested that many studies did not explicitly report ER characteristics in their articles, making it difficult to understand how ER was operationalized and practiced. Suggestions for future studies are discussed.

Elam, J. R., Thomas, D., & Grimes-MacLellan, D. (2025). Online extensive reading: Japanese EFL university students' attitudes, perceptions, and outcomes. *Reading in a Foreign Language, 37*(1): 1–27. https://doi.org/10.64152/10125/67506

During the COVID-19 pandemic, an exploratory mixed-methods study was conducted on the reading attitudes, perceptions, and outcomes of 50 first-year Japanese EFL university students participating in an online extensive reading (ER) enhanced curriculum using Xreading in order to better understand its affective and cognitive effects. Quantitative data was collected using an adapted version of Yamashita's (2013) Reading Attitudes Inventory and the Extensive Reading Foundation Online Self-Placement Test (ERFOSPT). Qualitative data was gathered using open-ended surveys and converged on the constructs of the inventory where statistical changes were observed. Other qualitative data was collected about Xreading using an ER perceptions survey to assess students' views of participating in online ER. Results from this study illustrate that students' feelings about ER and their perceptions of reading online were generally positive. Furthermore, students' ERFOSPT levels increased, suggesting online ER is a suitable approach in the context of this study.

Fujii, K. (2025). A comparative study of vocabulary levels between Japanese junior high school textbooks and beginner-level extensive reading books. J*ournal of Extensive Reading, 12*(2). https://jalt-publications.org/content/index.php/jer/article/view/1418/121

This study aims to establish a bridge in terms of vocabulary levels between school curricula in Japan and extensive reading (ER) programs by investigating the appropriate levels of ER books for Japanese junior high school learners. To achieve this goal, the study created three corpora: a textbook corpus, consisting of three series of textbooks authorized by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) for junior high school students in Japan; a Graded Readers (GRs) corpus, comprising 161 titles at Yomiyasusa Level (YL) 0.1 to 1.0; and a Leveled Readers (LRs) corpus, comprising 444 titles at YL 0.1 to 1.0. The vocabulary levels of the three corpora were analyzed to determine the optimal positioning of ER book levels for each grade level of junior high school. The results indicated that GRs with YL 0.5 to 1.0 generally fell below the lexical difficulty found in first-year junior high school textbooks. This suggested that GRs with YL 0.5 to 1.0 could be effectively incorporated into ER programs targeting Japanese junior high school students in their second and third years, assuming acquisition of first-year vocabulary. The findings of this research contribute to providing a valuable baseline for teachers when selecting and introducing ER materials suitable for their junior high school students in Japan.

Junn, H. (2025). Evaluating extensive reading speed and words read with IELTS reading scores. *Reading in a Foreign Language, 37*(1), 1-24. https://doi.org/10.64152/10125/67485

This evaluation report examines extensive reading (ER) speed and words read by students at a Japanese university using a digital ER platform called Xreading and compares them to standardized test reading performance using the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). The study focuses on first- and second-year students who participated in ER for one year in an academic reading and writing class. The research combines quantitative data on reading speed and words read with their IELTS reading performance over two testing points during the academic year. The findings indicate significant reading progress in reading speed and words read. Total words read showed a moderate correlation with IELTS reading scores; however, no significant correlation was found between increased reading speed and IELTS reading score changes across semesters. Based on the findings,

the study concludes with future implications to improve and streamline the ER program for better results and participation.

Lien, C.T.X. (2025). Encouraging EFL students' extensive reading through LMS-based reading logs. *Reading in a Foreign Language, 37*(1), 1-27. https://doi.org/10.64152/10125/67478

This research explores the perspectives of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students about using Learning Management System (LMS)-based reading logs as a measure to encourage extensive reading in the digital age. An online questionnaire was administered to 125 third-year English majors at a public university in central Vietnam to examine their attitudes, preferences, and perceptions of benefits as well as challenges associated with LMS-based reading logs. The findings show that most students had positive attitudes toward LMS-based reading logs, emphasizing benefits like improving their reading skills, enhancing positive reading habits, enhancing self study skills, and increasing their learning motivation. However, students faced several challenges when making LMS-based reading logs, including time constraints, workload, lack of cognitive skills for reflection, self-discipline issues, and insufficient teacher support and feedback. These problems can suggest some further improvements to increase the effectiveness of applying this kind of activity in EFL reading courses.

Nkomo, S. A. (2025). Teacher reflections on implementing an extensive reading intervention during COVID-19. *Journal of Extensive Reading, 12*(1). https://jalt-publications.org/content/index.php/jer/article/view/1394/122

Teaching reading is a complex act, and is made more challenging if the teaching environment is very complicated as it was in many contexts during the COVID-19 pandemic. This unfavourable context required teachers to engage in regular reflections to make critical decisions about how to respond to the pandemic and its regulations to improve their practice. Post-pandemic, the current study captures the reflections of two Foundation Phase (FP) teachers who were asked to reflect on their experience of implementing an extensive reading programme with 7–10-year-old learners amidst COVID-19 lockdown in a township in South Africa. This qualitative, interpretative study used data generated through self-reflective journals and focus group discussions to document experiences of two participating teachers. Analysis of the reflections show that COVID-19 regulations negatively impacted the successful implementation of the programme. However, teachers were overwhelmingly positive about the benefits of implementing the programme during this time, as they became more reflexive and reflective in their practice. Findings imply that challenges in implementation should not be regarded as obstacles of weakness but as new opportunities of knowledge. Recommendations for implementing reading programmes post-COVID-19 are provided based on the data collected.

Rothville, K. (2025). Japanese extensive reading: Responses of an intact university cohort of beginner learners. *Reading in a Foreign Language, 37*(1), 1-26. https://doi.org/10.64152/10125/67513

Increasingly, research attention has turned to the benefits of extensive reading (ER) in languages other than English, such as Japanese. Yet significant issues remain with participant numbers in studies of Japanese ER, which are often low, meaning they may not be representative of the rest of the cohort, let alone students in other contexts. An intact cohort (N = 52) of first-year second-semester beginner learners were introduced to the principles and benefits of ER and given the opportunity to borrow twice weekly from more than 150 graded readers in class. Students' reading logs provided data on their reading habits and amounts, and a nine-question, anonymous survey probed reasons for choosing to read and the perceived benefits of and responses to ER. Around 50% of the cohort read on average one book per week and reported perceiving a wide range of benefits as a result of doing ER.

Rothville, K., & Skalicky, S. (2025). An examination of the utility of the Aozora Repository to support reading comprehension development, reading fluency, and extensive reading for L2 learners of Japanese. *System, 129*, 103564. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2024.103564

Despite a recent boom in the development of graded reading materials for L2 Japanese learners which can be used for extensive reading (ER), the total amount of material remains low, and the highest stated vocabulary level of these texts is only 4500 words. However, achieving a 95% coverage rate of tokens in Japanese texts requires knowledge of 9500 words (Matsushita, 2014) – a substantial gap between these graded texts

and what is needed for independent reading. To meet learner needs to move beyond the beginner reading level while engaged in ER, the free digital collection of copyright-free literature known as "Aozora Bunko" was assessed to determine if, based on vocabulary coverage profiles, there might be a significant number of texts that would be useable for L2 Japanese learners. Of 18,552 works analysed, nearly 3400 were found to have a 95% vocabulary coverage level of between 1500 and 9500 words, indicating they may be suitable for learners for Japanese ER and may be able to bridge the gap between beginner texts and independent reading. The method demonstrated in this paper may be useful for instructors of other languages seeking to increase the volume of material available for their learners.

Strong, B. (2024). Word by word: Investigating L2 vocabulary acquisition through extensive reading. *The Reading Matrix, 24*(2), 38-54. https://www.readingmatrix.com/files/33-4nwfo23q.pdf

While previous research has provided insights into vocabulary learning through ER, the differential effects of word frequency and word class on active form and passive meaning word recognition remain less understood. By evaluating learners' post-test performance in active form recognition and passive meaning recognition, this study offers a comprehensive view of how these factors influence incidental vocabulary acquisition. The findings reveal a complex picture: while verbs showed a more significant improvement in active form recognition with increased exposure, underscoring the importance of repeated encounters, nouns were more effectively acquired in passive meaning recognition, suggesting differing cognitive processes involved in learning nouns versus verbs. Additionally, the study highlights that word frequency had a varied impact on learning outcomes, with multiple exposures facilitating a deeper understanding of verb forms, whereas noun learning showed less sensitivity to frequency. These results challenge the assumption that pleasure reading uniformly enhances all facets of word knowledge and suggest a complex interplay between word frequency, word class, and type of vocabulary recognition. The implications of these findings underscore the need for tailored strategies in L2 vocabulary instruction, advocating for a diversified approach to reading materials selection and emphasizing the importance of exposure diversity for effective vocabulary acquisition.

Sun, X. (2024). Scaffolded extensive reading: a case study of an extensive reading programme in China. *Education 3-13, 52*(5), 678–689. https://doi.org/10.1080/03004279.2022.2119092

With the aim of investigating effective approaches to extensive reading (ER) implementation, this study examines a reading programme carried out in an EFL classroom in China. Data were collected from two interviews with the teacher participant, teacher's reflective journal, student survey (n = 59), student focus group interview (n = 5) and various documents related to the reading programme. Findings of the study indicate that teacher scaffolding, embodied in the roles of motivator, strategy guide and monitor, is essential for students' sustained pleasure reading. In light of this, scaffolded extensive reading (SER) is put forward to denote a student-centred and teacher-facilitated reading approach.

Waring, R. & Puripunyavanich, M. (2025). Perceptions of extensive reading practitioners in four Asian countries. *Reading in a Foreign Language, 37*(1), 1-25. https://doi.org/10.64152/10125/67479

This study reports the perceptions and understanding of extensive reading (ER) of 259 ER practitioners in Japan, Thailand, Mongolia, and Vietnam. The majority of participants understood the core principles of ER, namely (a) the fluent reading of (b) a lot of (c) easy texts. However, about 25% of the participants in Thailand, Mongolia, and Vietnam did not understand that the texts need to be easy and read fluently. Despite all the participants being self-declared ER practitioners, a large number of participants in Mongolia, Thailand and Vietnam often reported the desire for intensive reading practices in their ER classes. This suggests more training on ER is necessary. Participants highly rated all questions regarding the need for more ER training, showing that even experienced ER practitioners still need assistance.

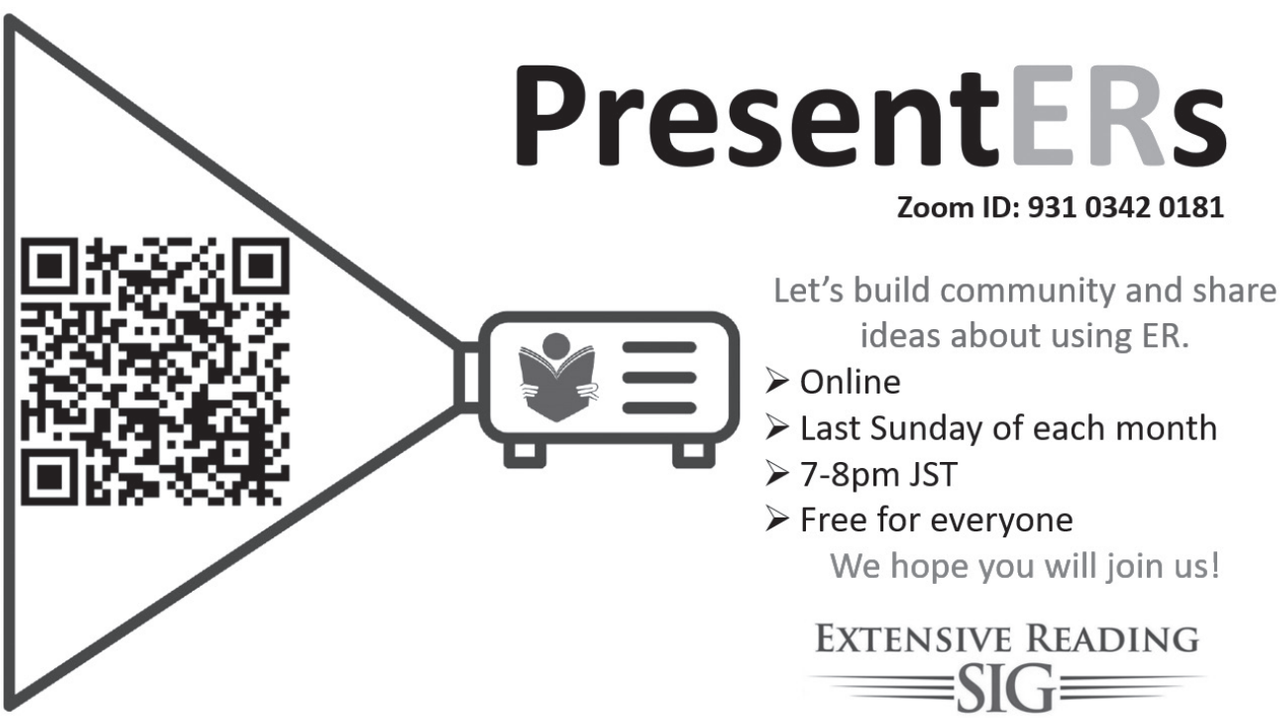
Yang, Y., Majumdar, R., Li, H., Flanagan, B., & Ogata, H. (2024). Design of a learning dashboard to enhance reading outcomes and self-directed learning behaviors in out-of-class extensive reading. *Interactive Learning Environments, 32*(3), 892–909. https://doi.org/10.1080/10494820.2022.2101126

Self-directed learning (SDL) requires students to take initiative to learn and control their own learning process. Literature highlights the importance of SDL for lifelong learning. Yet, little understanding is known regarding how to support SDL at the school level,

specifically for out-of-class learning context. To fill this gap, this research developed a learning dashboard and integrated SDL process management in the GOAL system. It was implemented to provide support for out-of-class online self-directed extensive reading (SDER) at a high school level. A two-group study conducted during a three-week spring vacation found the experimental group (n = 35, with SDL support) achieved significantly more reading outcomes than the control group (n = 12, without SDL support). Detailed GOAL interaction behavior analysis of the experimental group showed that viewing the learning dashboard was significantly correlated with reading outcomes as well as interactions related to SDL process management. These findings highlight positive effects of SDL support in GOAL on students' out-of-class SDER outcomes as well as their SDL behaviors. The study provided implications for research related to ER and SDL support for out-of-class learning.

Zhang, Y., Hashim, H., Sulaiman, N. A., & Karim, A. A. (2025). Enhancing EFL students' reading competence through a community of inquiry-based mobile-assisted extensive reading approach. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*, *24*(8), 517–540. https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.24.8.22

As mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) becomes more prevalent, extensive reading (ER) is being transformed through digital tools that enable flexible access, interactive content, and peer engagement. This study investigated how a mobile-assisted extensive reading (MAER) program, grounded in the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework, affected the reading competence of Chinese non-English majors. CoI conceptualizes an effective online learning environment as comprising three core elements: teaching presence (instructional guidance), social presence (peer interaction), and cognitive presence (meaning construction). A 17-week quasi-experimental study was conducted with three groups: a CoI-based MAER group, a traditional print-based ER group, and an intensive reading (IR) group. Reading comprehension tests and a CoI presence survey were used to collect quantitative data. The CoI-based group showed significantly greater reading gains than the other two groups. Regression analysis identified teaching and social presence as significant predictors of improvement, while cognitive presence contributed less. By demonstrating how a supportive reading community can be cultivated through structured mobile reading experiences, the study offered practical insights for designing effective MALL-based ER programs. It also extended the application of CoI theory into mobile EFL contexts, highlighting the importance of balancing technology use with intentional instructional and social support.



New Graded Readers Releases

Bjorn Fuisting

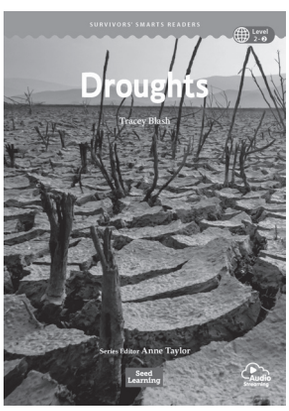
ER teachers in Japan hopefully received a boost to their knowledge and inspiration from the 7th edition of the ER World Congress held in Hokkaido this September. I know I did! It was really nice to see ER practitioners, researchers, authors, and publishers from all over the world — and all over Japan.

In the last two years (apologies for not publishing the column in last year's issue of ERJ), there have been several additions to the graded reader offerings in Japan. Seed Learning have continued to expand their range with three new non-fiction series (see below). Penguin Random House have continued to publish more titles in their Penguin Readers series. Among their 36 new titles are 15 Roald Dahl books (some of which may have been available previously as part of different series). Oxford University Press have released ten new titles in their Oxford Bookworms Library. These include four Factfiles, four original titles, and the classics Animal Farm and 1984 retold in graded reader format. Pearson have been refreshing their graded readers and have released updated editions of all 204 titles of their Pearson English Readers and Pearson English Active Readers series. Finally, if you are a fan of the Japan-based Pomaka books, they have added another 11 titles, including three new stories in the popular The Night Delivery series. Full details of the new titles, with levels, headwords, word counts, and prices, can be found on the ER SIG website: https://er.jalt.org.

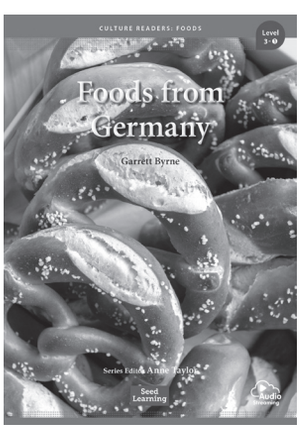
Survivors' Smarts Readers, Classic Art Readers and Culture Readers: Foods

by Seed Learning — https://www.seed-learning.com

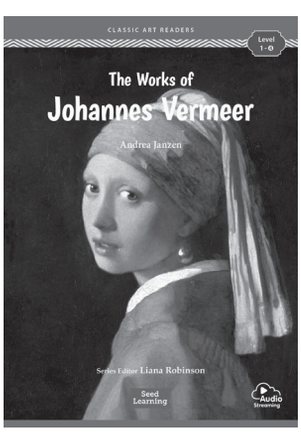
The Korean publisher Seed Learning continues to expand its range of graded readers with three new non-fiction series.



📖 **Survivors' Smarts Readers** focuses on natural and human-caused disasters around the world. Whilst the books are quite short, ranging from 530 to 865 words, they contain many useful illustrations and images that help readers understand the, at times, complex topics. Each level has five titles, and the headword range is from 500 to 1,000.



📖 **Culture Readers: Foods** showcases cuisine from 20 different countries around the globe. It is an excellent choice for learners who enjoy real-world cultural topics such as food, global cuisine, and traditions. The series has four levels, ranging from 500 to 1,250 headwords. Level 1 books are just over 400 words in length, while Level 4 books are around 1,000 words. The series is well illustrated and takes readers on a cultural journey around the world.



📖 **Classic Art Readers** introduces 20 famous artists and the works they are known for, ranging from Leonardo da Vinci to Frida Kahlo. Each book is richly illustrated with images of the artists' works, as well as maps and other visuals that guide the reader. The series is also well supported with additional teacher resources such as videos, slides, and more. This makes the books suitable not only for graded reading programmes but also for classes that deal with art or art history. The series has four levels, starting at a slightly higher headword count of 750 and going up to 1,500. The books range in length from around 600 to just over 900 words across the four levels. Each book in the three series is priced at ¥1,760 but can also be purchased as a complete set.

Overall, the three series offer a very good variety of non-fiction topics written at an easy-to-understand level, yet they manage to convey a great deal of information in an engaging way.