

Examining Graded Readers in the Internet Age

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1. Introduction

This analysis was completed through the support of the 2018 Special Research Fund from Matsuyama University, Ehime, Japan. This financial support provided travel to and from Chile along with the opportunity to present at the World CALL (Computer Aided Language Learning) 2018 conference at the University of Concepcion (Concepcion, Biobío Region, Chile). In addition attendance at numerous other conferences along with presentations allowed for interactivity with scholars from around the globe. This in turn, augmented and complimented the body of knowledge that this author acquired through the research project. The primary focus at the 2018 World CALL conference was on graded reading and in particular the MReader and Xreading systems. Although many traditional methods of graded reading are still utilized in first language as well as other language classes the introduction of the MReader and Xreading systems have offered expanded opportunities. Smartphone's or other computing devices are now moderately affordable and easily accessible to Internet connection. The distance learning can provide new formats compared to traditional teaching strategies (teaching, reading, and listening) (Gogan, Sirbu, & Draghici, 2015). Through the physical reading of books as well as a totally online system, language instructors and students can read books by way of a 24/7 framework. Learners' are encouraged to attain a certain number of words by reading and passing a quiz for each book. Ease of usage via

anytime online access allows students to autonomously take charge of their reading schedule. Language learning and reading have been synonymous with effective outcomes. The difficulty lies though in finding appropriate reading material to match the book reader's level of vocabulary and grammar. Extended reading along with instructor guidance can assist the student with progressively increasing their reading ability.

Two terms often used together are those of 'extensive reading' and 'graded reading'. One is actually more of a subset of the other. In extensive reading a large number of books are read by learners. Most often students are free to choose their own books and it is geared toward being an overall pleasurable experience. In extensive reading, as long as students are able to complete their assigned reading a quiz or test is not usually required. Graded reading (GR) on the other hand while similar to ER (extensive reading) requires the reader upon the completion of a book to partake in some sort of test of understanding to gauge their comprehension. With the use of MReader or Xreading, a roughly 10 question query is applied. If they are able to complete the quiz in a satisfactory manner (attain a completion percentage set by the system administrator) they are then able (in most cases, expected) to advance to a higher level of book ; thus the word 'grade' to signify the various levels or grades of reading. In this way, graded readers are actually 'step books' where hopefully the involved individual can step up to more challenging titles and expand their knowledge of vocabulary while at the same time enhancing their reading speed. Extensive and Graded Reading will help students to process words faster and they will be better able to read intensively (Waring, 1997). This paper will be using the terms 'graded reading' and 'extensive reading' very closely but it should be pointed out that there are fine differences in actual definition and instructional usage. They are easy to confuse and many scholars use them interchangeably without a clear understanding of their precise purpose or goals other

then reading a whole bunch of books in a specified time to become better readers.

2. World CALL Conference

World CALL is made of regional CALL organizations which currently are CALICO (Computer Assisted Language Instruction Consortium), CERCLES (Confédération Européenne des Centres de Langues de l'Enseignement Supérieur), EUROCALL (European Association for Computer-Assisted Language Learning), IALLT (International Association for Language Learning Technology), KAMALL (Korea Association of Multimedia-Assisted Language Learning) and LET (Japan Association for Language Education and Technology). All these groups have been gathered together from similar functioning professional bodies to form what is now known as WorldCALL. As the homepage of the 5th WorldCALL 2018 states ;

WorldCALL aims to enhance computer-assisted language teaching and learning in the global community by bringing together educators from around the world. As an international association, WorldCALL provides a worldwide platform for the promulgation of innovative research, development and practice in education and training ; enhances the opportunities for knowledge and skills transfer to nations currently underserved in the area of CALL ; and serves as a forum for exchanging information and forging professional relationships among educators, researchers and industry leaders from around the world. (worldcall5.org, 2018)

While each of these smaller associations fills a particular need and interest in one separate area and locale, together they have been able to synergize into a truly global body of similarly intellectually minded scholars and specialist with the goal of implementing CALL into learning environments wherever and whenever possible.

WorldCALL has made it a goal to constitute a conference every five years. The initial conference was held in Australia in 1998. Since this time there have been four more gatherings at various places throughout the world with the latest conference being held in Concepcion, Chile, in 2018. While the primary focus of the 2018 conference was on graded reading there were also many other presentations that showcased applications, m-learning devices, open access software and courses, as well as many other topics all related to CALL. Participants attended from a wide variety of learning environments situated in countries with various CALL abilities thusly offering a truly global perspective on CALL in the classrooms of the world. An opportunity to attend one of these conferences should be strongly pursued for any level of educator whenever possible. For those involved in CALL technology the gatherings offer ideas and applications that although seemingly unique to one area of the world may actually be applicable to many other situations on a global scale.

3. Reading for Enjoyment

To be able to read can open new worlds and expand an individual's basic knowledge from mere spoken words. Young children advance from wholly saying and being told things to reading and conceptualizing their own opinions on a broader scale. Reading allows us to depart from our own thoughts and beliefs and to enter into the ideas and opinions of others that we may not normally interact with in our daily lives. Reading allows us to travel through time, past, present and future. We can visit places and discover people from preceding times who may have had great influence on the global society that we partake in today. Readers may also expound on the future, conceptualizing what life may be like. Becoming a fluent reader involves finding connections to one's own life and making

new information part of one's own knowledge (Landry, 2002). Reading can be one of the greatest pleasures we experience throughout our lives (Farrell, 2009). Reading can lead to further educational opportunities especially as learners advance to higher degrees. This may in turn allow them to write books of their own; sharing their knowledge and experiences with future readers. The opportunity to garner expanded knowledge, become exposed to differing opinions and also the cultural concepts of the global community cannot be contested. Consequently, a learner at whatever level or age, who is deficient in this all important skill, is already limited in exploiting available opportunities for a successful academic excellence (Obiegbu, 2018). Sadly, however, as decisive and important as reading is to teaching and learning, researchers have found that underachievement in reading is the bane of effective academic functioning among learners all over the globe (Alika, 2012).

Many Japanese students unfortunately are introduced to reading in English by way of difficult texts at the junior high school level. These one level short stories or exercises while agonizingly difficult for some may be ridiculously simple for others. A bit of a three bears paradox (too simple, too difficult, or just right for a marginal few) is the introduction for Japanese students as they immerse into reading in English. This negativity is engrained into a majority of students from junior high to senior high and without any additional stimulus will remain with them their entire lives. It is also most surely accurate in many other educational settings throughout the globe for second language learners of any language. Students are in the process of not only learning a language but also in a dilemma of learning a language that they may not even like. Proper and effective instruction by the facilitator can change this negative mindset. Japanese English language learners at the university level have already learned to read in Japanese. They have developed reading strategies over the years that can aid them in reading English texts and stories. For

foreign language learners to read, they have to be prepared to use various abilities and strategies they already possess from their reading experiences in their native language (Aeolian, 1987). Additionally, Landry (2002) stresses the importance of first language (L1) influence as a factor in second language (L2) reading. Effective and efficient reading skills that have been hopefully acquired in a student's native language can be inclusive in their other language skills.

4. Graded Reading

Graded reading which is also known to some individuals as extensive reading involves the learner reading numerous short stories to heighten their reading ability and hopefully their overall language ability. Reading is thought to be a crucial skill in the EFL learning process, and Extensive Reading a very useful strategy (de Morgado, 2009). A student's reading skill is essential to learning (Serverino, DeCarlo, Sondergeld, Izzetoglu & Ammar, 2018). Unfortunately, there may be many underlying reasons why a reader is hesitant to progress further and higher in their abilities. Low reading proficiency skills may impede understanding of the reading materials being read and hence affect interest in reading (Ali & Saiden, 2015). Boring, uninteresting and difficult texts forced upon them as stated previously with regards to Japanese students can discontinue learners from being willing to advance. Reading a wide variety of things enable learners to build reading speed and enhance reading confidence (Albay, 2017). Numerous studies (Hafiz & Tudor, 1989; Robb & Susser, 1989; Bell, 2001; Horst, 2005; Pigada & Norbet, 2006) have shown upward trends with graded readers in the areas of comprehension, grammar, and vocabulary in addition to increasing the overall reading speed of the learner. It is very common in elementary school grades such as 1 and 2 to get native speakers reading in their primary language. It has also

been proven to enhance language abilities of those in second languages or more. Krashen (1993) has indicated :

That written language is simply too complex to master solely by direct instruction. The huge amounts of input that can be gained by reading are necessary for L1 and L2 learners to acquire high levels of literacy. Therefore, students learning English as a foreign language need to read.

Nation and Wang (1999) investigated the potential contribution of graded readers to vocabulary learning by examining word frequency. They concluded that graded readers can be an important source of vocabulary learning for second language learners if used appropriately. Mart (2012) contends that :

There is no question that people who develop large reading vocabularies tend to develop large speaking vocabularies. Indeed, reading power relies on continuous improvement in vocabulary knowledge that provides communication. The importance of word knowledge, which facilitates speaking skills, has been a major resource in the development of reading skills. Therefore fostering improvement in word knowledge through wide reading has the potential for fostering improvement in speaking skills.

Readers have an expanded selection of book names to choose from in most cases. Amongst these titles, the books in the MReader system are leveled from 1 (easiest) to 7 (most challenging) for example. In the beginning the instructor may suggest a level from which the class may commence reading at to help gauge a starting point.

As the goal of extensive reading is learning to read fluently, choosing reading materials at the proper level for learners is essential. Graded readers offer teachers an excellent resource for helping students accomplish this goal. They are short stories, popular novels, biographies, travel books, and other non-fiction works, which have been adapted to particular language proficiency levels according to specific guidelines (Kanel, 2006)

Admittedly through, no one instructor can know the exact reading ability of every student under their tutelage. With this thought in mind, after one or two books, students are encouraged to read at the level that they feel most comfortable with. This may require reading at a higher or lower level with total disregard for embarrassment as each reader is allowed to progress at their own pace as long as they procure the needed words to reach the set goal. Individual progress is the goal with graded reading. . . . the use of English graded readers is seen to have reflected on the improvements made whereby students will progress to a higher level from the level they started with (Azmuddin, Ali, Ngah, Tamili, & Ruslim, 2014). Graded Reading has a specific purpose : for readers to read enough material at one level to develop sufficient fluency and other forms of linguistic knowledge to enable them to move to a higher level (Waring, 1997). Depending on grade level, the titles may be extremely varied. This offers the added benefit of not only offering the chance for learners to improve their reading skills but to also have the opportunity to expand their overall knowledge in a variety of areas. Graded reading therefore has much to offer learners of all ages. Both common sense observation and copious research evidence bear out the many benefits which come from ER (Waring 2000, 2006). For this reason it has been implemented in language programs for the very young as well as those at the university level. Hopefully the skills and knowledge they gain from their reading experiences will cross over into their other areas of

communication such as oral and aural skills. Extensive Reading (ER) is a flexible and autonomous activity, which is ideal for setting students up with healthy independent reading habits that will serve them long after their language course is over (Kipling, 2018).

4a. The MReader

Internet technology has allowed for classroom and library reading to become freer in scope. Allowing users to access reading material even when there is no class or the library may be closed. Currently there are two options when it comes to utilizing graded readers. MReader allows for institutions with inventories of physical books to still use them effectively in the Internet age. Although, there is much talk of digital natives and there is much activity centered on social networking many libraries and learning establishments not surprisingly still actually have books to lend out. An effective bridge for graded reading is that of MReader which allows the continued use of books while also engaging digital devices such as a computer or Smartphone for reading assessment. As the main page of the MReader system states :

MReader is designed to be an aid to schools wishing to implement an Extensive Reading program. It allows teachers (and students) to verify that they have read and understood their reading. This is done via a simple 10-item quiz with the items drawn from a larger item bank of 20-30 items so that each student receives a different set of items. Students who pass a quiz receive a cover of their book on their own home page on the site (M-Reader, n. d.).

Additionally, with regards to the number of books and quizzes, the MReader system states that :

The program allows teachers to control how frequently students can take quizzes and what level of book difficulty they may take a quiz on. There are over 6000 quizzes available, comprising virtually all popular graded reader series as well as “youth literature”—books used with native-speaking children and young-adults (M-Reader, n. d.).

With a sufficient resource of a variety of levels and topics, small to large classes can engage in graded reading. Students can see their progress online and through the quizzes can assess themselves if they need to continue on the same level of reader or to go up or down accordingly. In this system, the responsibility to reach a certain reading goal falls upon the learner. It is the student’s responsibility to ensure their own success or lack thereof. Many readers have found a joy and interest for reading that they had never known before through the traditional Japanese style school system.

The only cost of the MReader system is that of the books purchased. This of course may vary widely from library to library. If a school already has the books on the shelf then they can most certainly be put to good use. The system itself is free and easily accessible. It is now in use on a global scale. This allows for a wide body of knowledge should difficulties arise for the instructor. The MReader designers and maintenance staff are always ready to assist.

4b. Xreading

In a total online concept the Xreading system offers complete independence from the confines of a physical library. Xreading represents an excellent digital solution to the implementation of ER (Milliner & Cote, 2014). As close to 100% of Japanese university students now own Smartphone’s (Cote, Milliner, Flowers, & Ferreira, 2014), Xreading is able to capitalize on the mobile capabilities of these

devices (Milliner & Cote, 2014). Added features for instructors include but are not limited to seeing how fast a student is reading each page and the opportunity to institute competition amongst students or classes to instill motivation. Importantly, as an online version, more popular books are never ‘not available’ as could possibly occur with MReader. The major advantage of using the Xreading system over that of the MReader is the degree of internet accessibility and freedom it allows the lecturer and learner.

There are many scholarly works detailing the virtues and attributes of both the MReader and Xreading systems. Due to this, remarks about the inner workings of both structures will be kept to a minimum. For those interested in more detailed information academic sources can be easily accessed by searching the Internet. In many ways, XReading can be contrasted to that of a totally online version of the MReader system. In either capacity, graded reading may be easily accomplished with strong results for the students.

The one drawback is that the Xreading system is a pay system calculated on the number of students that an instructor may have utilizing it. The Xreading developers do offer discounts or sliding scales of payment depending on a number of factors. Personal correspondence with Xreading staff will allow for details to be exchanged and a reasonable fee reached. In overview, an instructor in Cambodia then would not be expected to pay the same amount as someone instructing at a university in Japan. Scales of economics are considered.

5. Other Skills Obtained

Beyond the tools used such as MReader or Xreading, reading offers numerous attributes to students regardless if they are L1 or L2 learners. There is an increasingly high relationship between reading and speaking skills (Mart, 2015).

In addition to this, Hedge (2003) writes the goals of learners' in a reading process as :

- The ability to read a wide range of texts in English.
- Building a knowledge of language which will facilitate reading ability
- Building schematic knowledge
- The ability to adapt the reading style according to reading purpose (skimming, scanning)
- Developing an awareness of the structure of written texts in English
- Taking a critical stance to the contexts of the texts

With regards to reading in a foreign language Williams (1984), remarks that :

- Learners can have further practice in the language that they have learnt,
- Learners can practice language in order to reuse it in other skills such as speaking and writing,
- Learners can learn how to get benefit from the texts to extract the information they need,
- Learners can find enjoyment or interest through reading.

The expansion of vocabulary that may not be found in a regular classroom setting is a major advantage to student involvement with graded reading. “The more reading you will do, the more you will increase your exposure to vocabulary that doesn’t usually make its way into the spoken language” (Cunningham, 1998). Vocabulary is one of the essential and fundamental components of communication (Levelt, 1993). Oya, Emmanuel, and Jackie (2009), suggest that better vocabulary knowledge produces better oral performance.

With regards to the use of the Xreading system, it offers a supplementary benefit. While the entire graded reading system is online this means that learners have the option of listening to the text at the same time that they are reading it. Listening while reading has been found to significantly increase comprehension while at the same time boosting aural skills. This is extremely useful to second language learners.

6. Student Survey

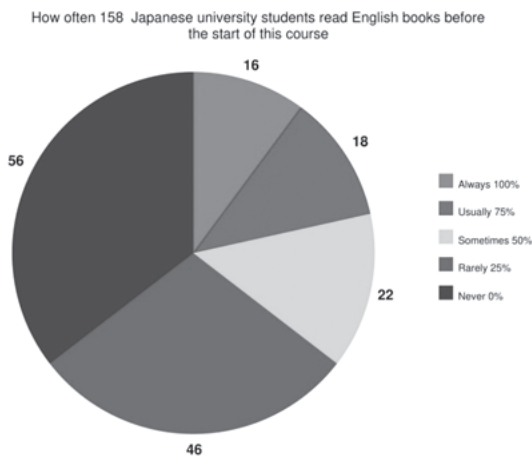
To gauge learner satisfaction and interest with graded readers at the university level a short end of course survey was conducted amongst non-English majors' classes and EIC (English as an Intensive Course) classes. All non-English major participants were 1st and 2nd year's students who became introduced to graded reading through their language course. EIC course members were made up of both 1st and 2nd year students along with a small number of 3rd and 4th year students who were repeating the class. The MReader process was introduced to learners as an out of classroom project. Students were expected to reach the reading goal through their own individual efforts. All course goals were initially set at 30,000 words but after a couple of weeks the instructor was able to see inclusive differences in reading abilities by class. To compensate for this, goals were then adjusted up or down to better complement each class's ability. It should be noted that reading goals can also be adjusted to an individual level but this author felt it unnecessary in some ways even demotivational. The highest goal was 50,000 words while students in a lower level English course that were struggling were reduced down to 10,000 words. This amount of words is considered rather small by most language program standards but from instructor experience this amount was deemed reasonable due to the student's lack of usage with graded reading and just English

reading in general. The total number of students who complied with the survey was 158. There were nine questions with some allowing for multiple responses.

Questions and results

1. Before this class how often did you read books in English ?

- a . Always 100%
- b . Usually 75%
- c . Sometimes 50%
- d . Rarely 25%
- e . Never 0%

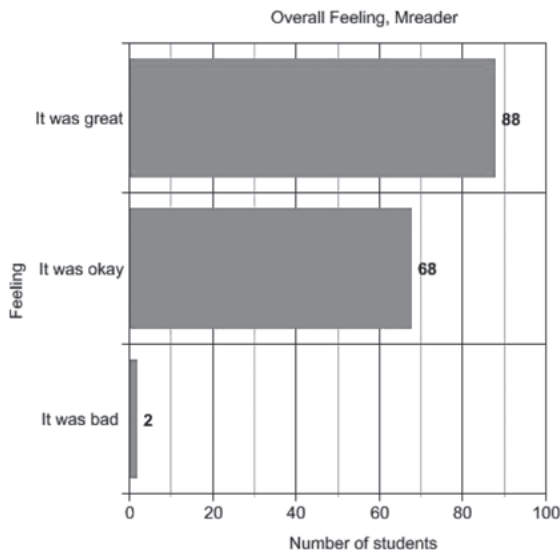


Not surprisingly, a majority of students (102 students) had not read any type of English book (outside of the school environment) before experiencing MReader. A small percentage had sometimes or usually (40) read books. A total of 16 students indicated that they always read books in English. The overall negative

responses may not be attributed to a dislike for reading but could also be rationalized that they may not have had the opportunity due to their busy schedule. This could be especially true for the 1st year university students who had been busy studying and taking entrance examinations for university. Also, it is most likely, that the availability of English reading material can vary from senior high school to senior high limiting opportunity even if students are interested.

2. Overall how did you feel about reading English books using the MReader system ?

- a . It was great
- b . It was okay
- c . It was bad



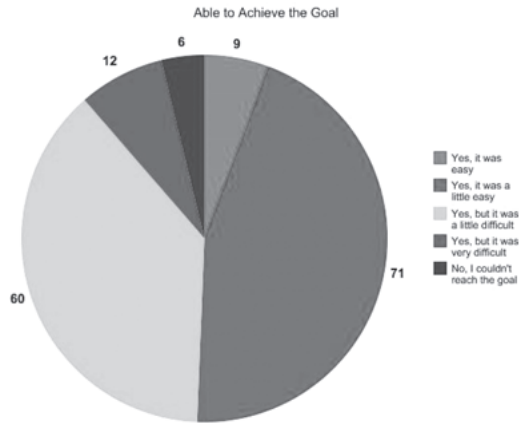
From this response we can see that a very small number (2) of students held negative feelings toward the use of MReader. Similarly we can see that the difference between the students who thought it was ‘okay’ and those that thought it was ‘great’ was not that different; concluding that while overall positive feelings were recorded the mood was general in nature.

3. On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate using the MReader for English class (1 = bad, 10 = very good)

The responses overall resulted in an average 8.5 rating. As students were only asked to assign a numerical figure added written response was not recorded. The rating signified a fairly high attitude toward utilizing MReader as a teaching tool. It would support the further use of graded readers and MReader in particular in subsequent courses. This also coincides with the replies from question #1 regarding feelings toward Mreader.

4. Where you able to reach the MReader goal for this class ?

- a . Yes, it was very easy.
- b . Yes, it was a little easy.
- c . Yes, but it was difficult.
- d . Yes, but it was very difficult.
- e . No, I couldn't reach the goal.

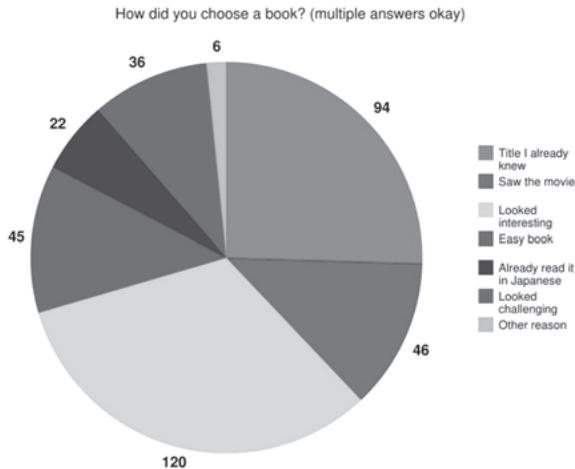


As previously mentioned goals were initially set at 30,000 and adjusted to closer meet reader's abilities. A large percent of the students should have been able to achieve the goal and this is confirmed by the graph above. MReader should not be projected as drudgery but hopefully as a pleasurable experience that also expands their knowledge in other subjects by way of reading selection. Stories of famous people, places to visit, historical events, and others are available reading options for even the lowest level readers.

5. *When selecting a book how did you choose the book? (choose all that apply)*

- a . It was a title I already knew.
- b . I saw the movie.
- c . It looked interesting.
- d . I picked the easiest book I could find.
- e . I had already read the book in Japanese.

- f . It looked challenging.
- g . Other.

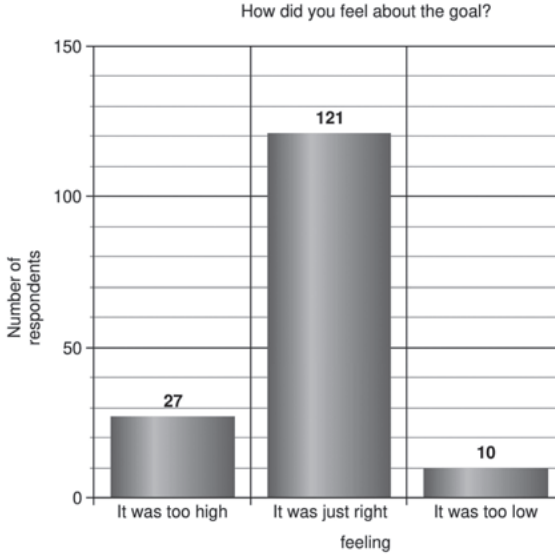


It is only natural that learners at least in their first one or two books choose titles that they are already familiar with. This of course may include movies that they have already seen. As this task was to reach a certain goal the assumption that students would pick titles and books that looked easy or that they had already read in Japanese is again not surprising results. It should be noted that a large number of books (120) may have been chosen because it ‘looked interesting’. A fair number of readers (36) selected that they chose books that ‘looked challenging’. Hopefully the expansion of knowledge and furthering ideas is an underlying success factor of graded reading.

6. How did you feel about the MReader goal ? (Varied among classes)

- a . It was too high.

- b . It was just right.
- c . It was too low.

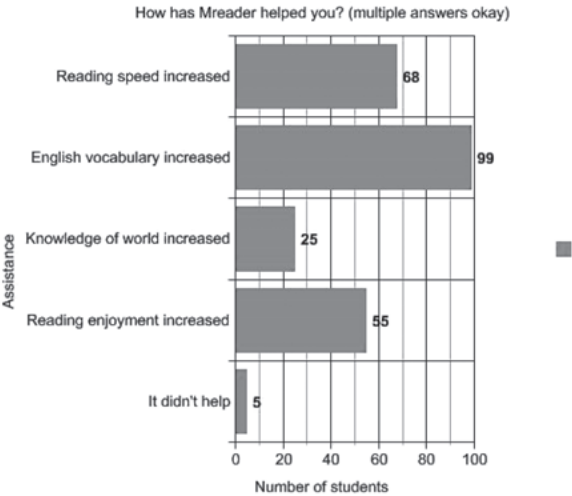


Overall, students expressed responses that showed the goals set were not overly excessive. Those that responded with ‘it was too high’ or ‘it was too low’ may have also been reading books that were too easy or difficult for them. Setting the reading goals can be tricky at times. Many instructors have set reading goals in the hundreds of thousands with students still being able to pass. A lot depends on the abilities of the students, motivation, and desire for a passable grade in the course.

7. *How did the MReader books help you ? (Check all that apply)*

- a . It helped my reading speed increase.
- b . It helped my English vocabulary.

- c . It helped my knowledge of the world increase.
- d . It helped me to like reading.
- e . It didn't help me at all.

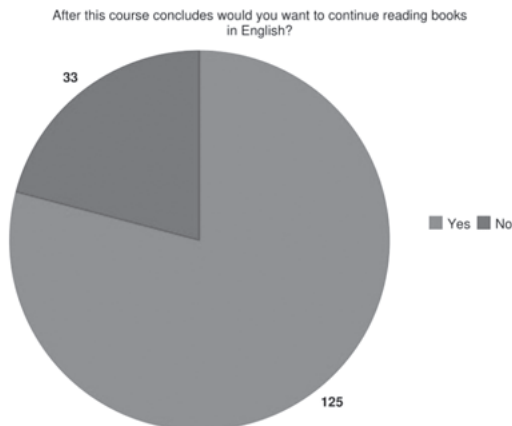


Reflecting on past research data over the previous year’s many scholars have acquiesced that graded reading can indeed assist learners with increased vocabulary and speed. By reading a large number of books in the prescribed language a substantial percentage of students can come away with these positive results. Hopefully, other inherent attributes will become possible such as reading enjoyment and exterior knowledge such as in nature, science, or the world as a whole.

8. *After this class is finished do you think you would want to continue to read books in English ?*

a . Yes.

b . No.



For those who are English majors or even those just interested in studying English the continuation of reading would be highly beneficial. Almost 3/4 of respondents indicated that they would continue reading in English. Whether this is actually the case would require more extensive research to follow learners reading habits after they leave the course. Most Japanese individuals are not necessarily interested in reading in English.

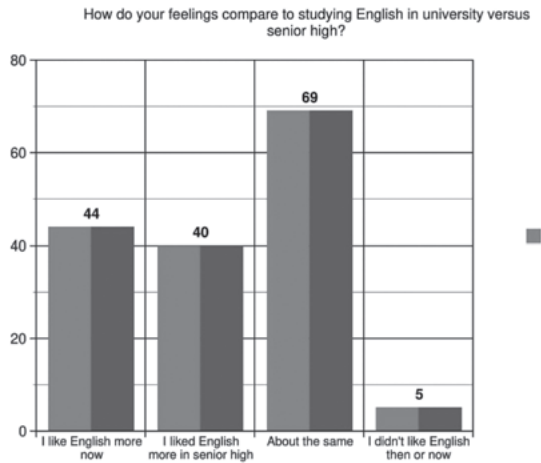
9. Now that you have been studying English in university, how does this compare to your feelings of studying English in senior high school ?

a . I like English more now than my time in senior high school.

b . I liked English more in senior high school.

c . I like English about the same as when I was in senior high school.

d . I didn't like English in senior high or now in university.

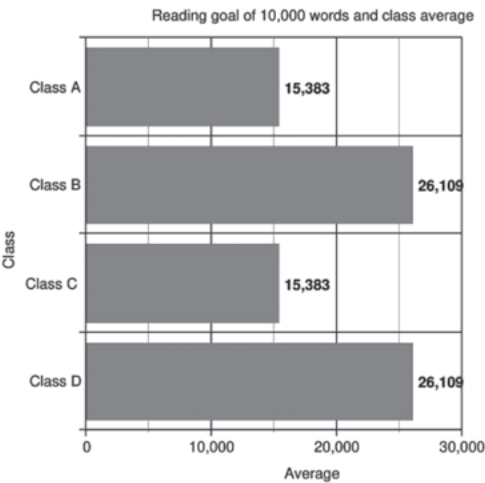


This final question was submitted to gage the difference in sentiments regarding learning English in general from their senior high years to the present. About 1/3rd of students selected that they like English more now than in senior high school. An almost equal number show preference toward their senior high school days. Almost half of the students reflected no difference. While MReader is an effective tool it may or may not have any bearing on the overall desire of students to learn English. For those that do though it can be a supplemental resource that can boost their reading comprehension.

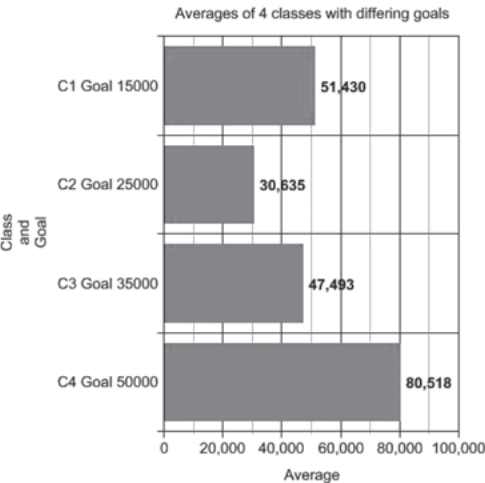
7. Goal Attainment

The following graphs G(goal) 1-G3, show data pertaining to reading goal attainment by various goals (10,000, 30,000, etc) and classes. As mentioned earlier, differing courses had dissimilar goals.

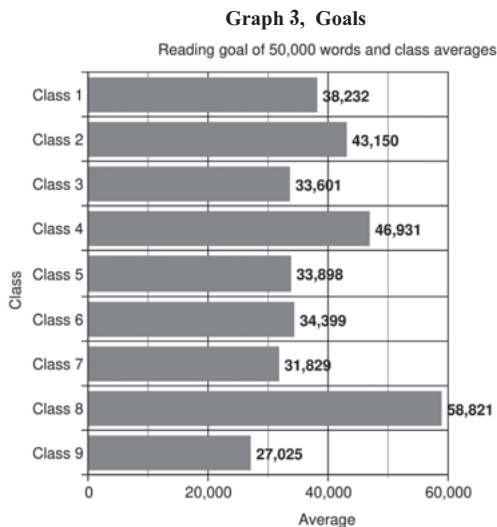
Graph 1, Goals



Graph 2, Goals



Graph 1 & 2 exhibits the difficulty that there can be for instructors in establishing reading goals. Each class obtained their target and in most instances by an easy margin. This shows that the actual goals could have been raised higher to offer more of a challenge to learners. While some classes and individuals struggled significantly to reach the goals others easily cruised past the set number of words with hardly any particular challenge.

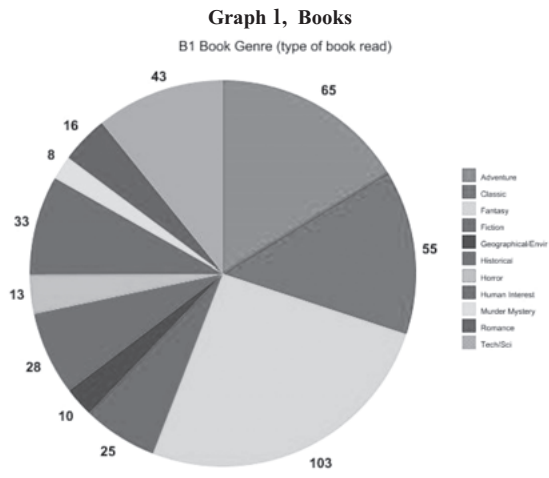


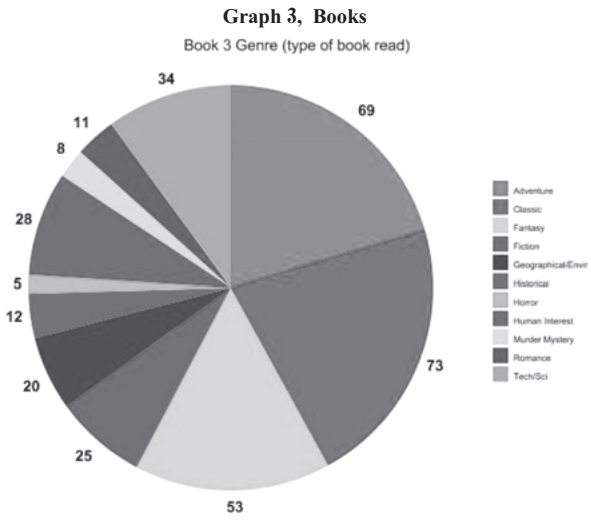
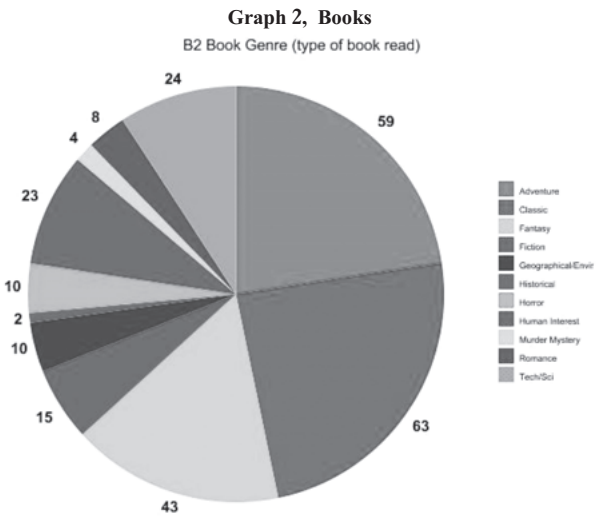
Most students with proper persuasion by the instructor had only minor difficulty in reaching the assigned reading goals for each course. The graph G3 shows numerous courses that did not reach the prescribed goal. This was not entirely the learner's fault but more the lecturer's. In the early stages of using MReader the instructor later learned what a mistake it was to set one lofty goal. Many students became easily discouraged and disinterested. For larger reading goals it is much better to break it down into more doable chunks. An example being possibly at the end of every month readers should have acquired 10,000 or 15,000 words.

In this way, larger reading goals can be acquired bit by bit instead of one large word count that appears seemingly impossible at the beginning of the semester. Later courses, with goals that were finer tuned to each classes reading ability ; higher percentages of students could reach the goal. In many instances numerous learners surpassed the assigned mark by an extensive number of words.

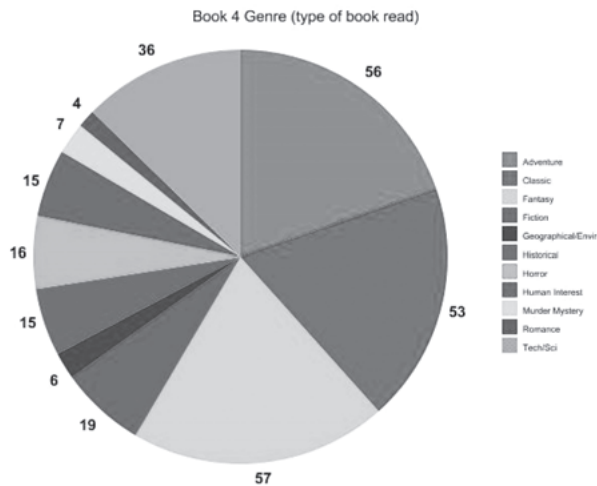
8. Book Genres

Reading genres offer learners a variety of subjects and titles to choose from. It is important for learners to not only be required to read but hopefully obtain some enjoyment and knowledge gained from the process. Graphs B(book) 1-B5 offer glimpses by various classes into the types of books (genres) that readers selected, this data was obtained by going to the MReader site and reviewing what book each student read. After this was noted, each book title was then entered into the MReader site, as some books have many types of genres, such as adventure, classic, fantasy, only the genre listed first was chosen.

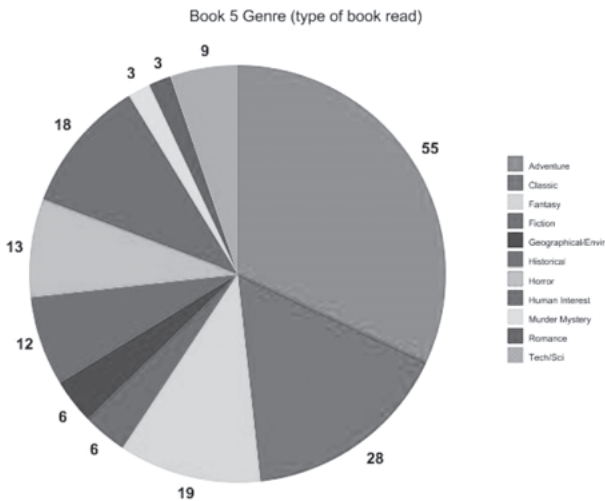




Graph 4, Books



Graph 5, Books



For schools or libraries that wish to start a graded reading section of MReader books in their library the above Graphs B1-B5, show some similarities among Japanese students that use the system. The most popular selections have shown to be that of adventure, closely followed by fantasy books and the classics. Other types of genre can vary from class to class depending on the makeup and personality of the students. Additionally, but not always the number of males to females could be considered ; overall, though it can be seen that the genre from class to class does not alter that significantly. For libraries purchasing books to commence a grading reading system or those with established reading this could offer assistance on which readers to purchase.

9. Difficulties with Graded Reading

While there has been a huge increase in the use of graded readers in part due to the easy accessibility offered by the Internet and mobile devices there are some criticisms in regards to GR. The positive effects of extensive reading have been espoused and trumpeted over the last decade almost to the exclusion of any negatives that such a learning approach might result in (Bowman, 2017). However, many are the difficulties and hindrances that are encountered in order to apply it successfully and consistently (Susser & Robb, 1990 ; Greaney, 1996 ; Lituanas, Jacobs, & Renandya, 1999). Generally speaking so much research has been published, not to mention the hype by graded reader publishers that very little if any negative criticism can be found with regards to the pedagogy of graded readings. Conversely, research on ER strategy and implementation still falls short in providing enough information about either its pedagogical aspects or its effectiveness (Haas & Flower, 1988). This does not mean that none exist. Consequently, the most likely problems which this author through his research has

found at the Japanese university level are :

- ✓ Introducing an initial reader for students at too high of a level. In this manner learners became immediately unmotivated and frustrated. They may have quickly recalled their dislike for reading English from their junior high and senior high school days. Many may simply quit after agonizingly completing their initial book.
- ✓ Occasionally, the system used (MReader) was too confusing if not explained properly by the instructor in the opening lessons. It was found that some students needed the instructions explained to them slowly and possibly more than once over the course of the first two weeks. Again, students may have read their first book and then gave up. This also had to do with the word goal setting and the attentiveness of the instructor to keep learners on task and motivated.
- ✓ If a student was too shy to say anything and it was a large class their suffering could possibly go unnoticed by the instructor. If not closely monitored, a few students waited until the final days of the semester and then tried to cram read numerous books in a short period of time. To stop this, the MReader administrator has the option of setting the time allowed in between taking quizzes. Most often this could be 2 hours, 4, or even longer as seems fit. Some students due to their inactivity using MReader did not realize this until the very end. Again MReader is an autonomous learning system that lets students take charge of their own learning. If students cannot do this by the time they reach university age then they are bound to fail the course.

- ✓ Ultimate goal setting was also crucial with graded readers. It was fine to have a goal of say 50,000 words but at the beginning of a course it may have been seen as an unattainable goal for introductory students. This may have been especially true if the learners were non-English majors. It can only reinforce the idea that they truly are studying a ‘foreign language’. It was much better to set incremental reading goals of 10,000 words every few weeks than one huge objective at the end. In this way, progress could be more easily monitored by the instructor. This could also be equally observed by both learners and lecturers utilizing the MReader and Xreading systems.
- ✓ Additionally, it was also beneficial to ‘jump start’ the students with regards to graded reading by setting an easily obtainable goal within the opening days of the course. Possibly, within the first couple of days after courses have commenced the students could be expected to read a single level 1 or 2 book. Although books at this level are extremely simplistic, it is the process of using the MReader system that is important for everyone to be able to utilize and understand. By doing this the students can familiarize themselves with the system for book check out in the school library as well. Not surprisingly, with all the mobile computing devices there are some present day pupils that are not familiar with physically checking out books from the library.
- ✓ Lastly, it was found that any logistical problems with an out of class reading system are not always the fault of the learners but may actually be inexperience or negligence on the part of the lecturers. While MReader and Xreading offer easy access, it must be just that ‘accessed’ from time to time. Some instructors may have the idea that students merely need to

‘go forth and read’ with total disregard for monitoring until the end of the course. Everyone involved with be more connected and in tuned if the teacher checks reading progress on a weekly basis if not more often. Emails are a quick form of cross-communication that can be easily established if difficulties occur on either end.

These summarizations are what this author found to be areas of contention over the time frame of a scholastic year. By following these simple procedures ease and understanding of what is required by sages and scholars; the utilization of graded readers can be enjoyable and intellectually broadening. One way to encourage its use would be to more deeply understand the multiple factors influencing its successful implementation (de Morgado, 2009).

10. Conclusion

Through attendance at the WorldCALL 2018 conference, dialog with colleagues, and actual classroom and learning experience it has been shown that graded reading can be a most beneficial option for learners of any language especially Japanese university students who are studying English. Internet accessibility is allowing for extreme changes in the entire educational process. The MReader and Xreading systems have helped to fuel this interest. The MReader system, being in that is free of charge upon registering is especially notable. The process allows for learners and lecturers to constantly monitor reading goals. Teachers can assist those lagging behind by suggesting reading easier books. In addition Xreading may be a viable option for those interested in a total online system. Regardless of the system pragmatic, the focus is on developing reading fluency and general comprehension. Allowing for a vast option of reading material can assist learners to obtain a higher

level of reading confidence. Matching learning potential to acquire new vocabulary, while at the same time not overwhelming the student with script that is too difficult, can be secured through the use of graded readers.

Research over the past 30-40 years offers viable support to the use of graded readers. Educators in the age of the Internet should utilize learning tools that can offer assistance to students inside or outside of the physical confines of a classroom. Its continued use can only aid in the further development of student language development. Some students may not wholeheartedly embrace the idea of graded readers. In these rare cases, extra guidance and support by the instructor may offer consolation. The amount of books that some students read compared to those of others shows that a proportion of learners may have a deep seeded distain for reading in any language. Instructor experience and flexibility toward reading goals can be helpful. This seems especially true for Japanese students at the university level. In consideration of the results of a concluding semester survey, the overall attitude of students reflected positively toward usage of MReader. This research has shown that Japanese students are capable of reaching almost any reading goal if so tasked. Most importantly though, within the process, they will most likely read a variety of titles that could stimulate knowledge and curiosity in additional ways beyond the English language teaching arena.

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