# EXTENSIVE READING IN PACE CLASSES:
# PILOT SEMESTER ANALYSIS

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## Abstract

At the beginning of the 2014 academic year, the author initiated a pilot extensive reading (ER) program within PACE classes at Hitotsubashi University.  Details of the initial motivation and procedures for setting up the program are provided in Hunt (2014), and briefly summarized here.  The pilot program ran successfully for 12 weeks during the spring semester, with positive feedback.  Assessment of the ER program, discussion of student feedback, and a description of program modifications are detailed in these research notes.

*Key words:* extensive reading (ER), graded readers, PACE, PACE ER

## I.  *Introduction to Extensive Reading*

Extensive reading (ER) utilizes graded readers, which are novels that have been made easier to read so a learner can understand almost the entire text. The difference between ER and the more familiar IR (intensive reading) is that the former focusses on building fluency, enthusiasm and internalization/automatization of L2 skills, whereas the latter is for learning new grammar, vocabulary and reading skills, utilizing texts that are above the learners' current level.

Graded readers include vocabulary and grammar at or slightly below the learners' current level and are written within a limited range of words.  When words are counted, they are counted as word families.  The word family for *help* includes *helps, helpless, helplessness, unhelpful, helped,* and *helping* (Waring and Takahashi, 2000).  These word families are termed Headwords, so a book written within a vocabulary range of the 400 most frequent and useful words in English is said to contain 400 Headwords.

There are 10 principles of ER defined by Bamford & Day (2004) which are: the reading material is easy; a variety of reading material on a wide range of topics is available; learners choose what they want to read; learners read as much as possible; reading speed is usually faster rather than slower; the purpose of reading is usually related to pleasure, information, and general understanding; reading is individual and silent; reading is its own reward; the teacher orients and guides the students; and the teacher is a role model of a reader.

By encouraging learners to read large numbers of relatively easy texts, proponents claim that ER can improve literacy (Constantino, 1994; Elley, 1991; Elley and Mangubhai, 1993; Hafiz and Tudor, 1989; Tudor and Hafiz, 1989; Waring, 2009), increase reading rates (Beglar and Hunt, 2014; Beglar, Hunt and Kite, 2012; Carver and Lieber, 1995), aid vocabulary acquisition (Coady, 1997; Pigada and Schmitt, 2006; Waring and Nation, 2004), improve

comprehension scores (Bell, 2001), and positively influence attitudes towards second language learning (Al-Homoud and Schmitt, 2009). A primary motivation in initiating this program was to test some of these claims.

## II.  *Rationale for ER in PACE Classes*

Since the start of the 2013 academic year, all first-year students in the Faculty of Commerce and Management at Hitotsubashi University are required to take PACE (Practical Applications in Communicative English) classes. The primary focus of PACE classes is to increase student enthusiasm for English through the development of communicative English skills. There is little emphasis on reading specified in the PACE objectives, but the author believes that ER may be of particular benefit to the lower-level PACE students participating in this pilot program.

Results from student questionnaires completed at the end of the 2013 academic year highlighted a number of second language (L2) problems common to students in PACE classes 14, 15 and 16 which may be addressed through the introduction of an ER component to the curriculum (Table 1).

TABLE 1.   COMMON L2 PROBLEMS SEEN IN STUDENTS FROM PACE CLASSES 14-16, AND HOW THEY CAN BE ADDRESSED THROUGH ER (Total 54 respondents)

| L2 problem: | How ER will address the problem: |
|---|---|
| Persistent simple grammar errors | Frequent exposure to correct grammar may build familiarity, and extensive engagement with grammatically accurate, meaningful and communicative texts may help to internalize the correct use of these grammatical forms. |
| Lack of confidence | Completing a book in a second language has a measurably positive impact on confidence, and each additional book read in the target language will further boost confidence. |
| Low motivation | Reading targets which must be regularly met should help to extrinsically motivate subjects, and self-selected reading material should increase student interest and improve intrinsic motivation through a desire to find out how the novel ends. |
| Little exposure to L2 language outside of the classroom | Massive amounts of reading is to be completed throughout the semester resulting in a massive amount of L2 exposure outside of classroom. |
| Lack of interest in reading | This may be a result of fear, frustration or boredom from an intensive reading background which is addressed by reading graded readers at an appropriate level. |
| Some students are misplaced in the lower classes | Different proficiency levels are not as much of an issue as each student can be learning at their own level and at their own pace through correctly selected graded readers |

## III.  *PACE ER Pilot Program Methodology*

A small pilot ER program was initiated, at the beginning of the 2014 academic year, involving 54 participants from first-year PACE classes 14-16. Students in PACE classes 14-16 obtained TOEFL (paper) scores between 433 and 473. This correlates with the Early to High Intermediate reading levels defined by the Extensive Reading Foundation (Table 2).

A selection of 236 graded readers with between 400 and 1500 Headwords were purchased to form a library of graded readers for the students in the pilot program, and an additional 78 with Headwords 1500 and above were purchased to accommodate stronger readers and in anticipation of increases in reading competency throughout the year. The total number of books purchased for the pilot program was 314. These were divided into four levels, indicated with a piece of coloured tape on the book spine. From lower to higher the PACE ER graded reader levels are Yellow, Blue, Green and White, with corresponding Headword counts indicated in Table 3.

Students were expected to read at least one book a week and to keep a record of the number of pages read. At the end of the 12 week program they would receive a grade based on the total number of pages read: more than 700 pages earned a C grade, more than 800 pages earned a B grade, and more than 900 pages earned an A grade (Table 4). There are an average of 60 pages to a book.

PACE classes 14, 15 and 16 met on Wednesday afternoons and during these "Book Club Wednesday" sessions students would engage in short 20 minute periods of sustained-silent-reading, talk in small groups about books they had read, and do other reading-related activities. Wednesday lunch break was the designated book-swap time, during which all students could return books and peruse the PACE ER library to select new titles. A free library management system called "Booksource Classroom Organizer", which has a web-based interface as well as

TABLE 2.   COMPARISON OF HEADWORD COUNT AND TOEFL (PAPER) TEST SCORES

| | Elementary | | | Intermediate | | | Upper Intermediate | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Early | Mid | High | Early | Mid | High | Early | Mid | High |
| Headword Count | 301-400 | 401-600 | 601-800 | 801-1000 | 1001-1250 | 1251-1500 | 1501-1800 | 1801-2100 | 2101-2400 |
| TOEFL (Paper) | | | 350 | 400 | | 450 | 480 | 530 | |

*Note*: Data extracted from the Extensive Reading Foundation website (http://erfoundation.org).

TABLE 3.   PACE ER GRADED READER LEVELS, WITH HEADWORD COUNT RANGES, APPROXIMATE TOEFL (PAPER) EQUIVALENCY SCORES, AND NUMBER OF BOOKS PURCHASED

| PACE Level | Headword Count | TOEFL (paper) | Number of books |
|---|---|---|---|
| Yellow | 300-800 | ~400 | 80 |
| Blue | 800-1500 | 400-480 | 156 |
| Green | 1500-2400 | 480-550 | 65 |
| White | 2400~ | 550~ | 13 |
| | | Total number of books | 314 |

mobile applications for iOS and Android, was used for keeping track of the graded readers and to collect usage metrics. Further information about the PACE ER program and details of how it was set-up and operated can be found in Hunt (2014).

TABLE 4. TOTAL PAGES READ AND CORRESPONDING GRADES (Total percentages are not 100 due to rounding)

| Total pages read | Grade | Class 14 (%) | Class 15 (%) | Class 16 (%) | All Data (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| <699 | D | 6 | 6 | 11 | 7 |
| >700 | C | 11 | | 17 | 9 |
| >800 | B | 6 | 11 | 6 | 7 |
| >900 | A | 78 | 83 | 67 | 76 |

## IV. *Results of the PACE ER Pilot Program*

Questionnaires were administered to participants of the ER program at the end of the pilot semester. Feedback from these questionnaires shows an overwhelmingly positive attitude toward ER, and a high level of support and enthusiasm for the program from the students. An incredible 96% of participants (52 out of 54 respondents) believe that their English ability increased over the 12 weeks as a direct result of ER.

This enthusiasm for ER is reflected in the grades obtained. 76% of participants read more than 900 pages and earned an A grade for the ER component of the course, and only 7% failed to read the 700 pages required to earn a C grade (Table 4).

### 1. Amount of Reading

In order to read more than 900 pages over the 12 weeks, a student needed to average at least 75 pages a week, equivalent to 1.25 graded readers. The amount of time spent reading varied greatly, from less than 1 hour to more than 6 hours per week, and averaging around 3 hours per week (Table 5).

Most reading was completed out-of-class. Reading at home, often before bed, after taking a bath, or at the weekend was common. The second most popular location for reading was on the train during commutes to and from school. Additionally, some students read on campus, between classes and in the library (Table 6).

Considering most participants were never reading in English for pleasure prior to the beginning of the program, these results are outstanding. After 12 weeks participants had

TABLE 5. HOURS SPENT READING PER WEEK (numbers of students)

| | <1 hour | 1-2 hours | 2-3 hours | 3-4 hours | 4-5 hours | 5-6 hours | >6 hours |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Class 14 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 6 | 2 | 3 | 1 |
| Class 15 | 1 | 1 | 10 | 2 | 3 | 1 | |
| Class 16 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 6 | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| All Data | 5 | 5 | 16 | 18 | 7 | 5 | 2 |

*Note*: 2-4 hours a week was common, suggesting a comfortable 20-30 minutes of reading per day.

TABLE 6.    WHERE STUDENTS ENGAGED IN OUT-OF-CLASS ER (numbers of students)

|          | On the Train | At Home | At School | Other |
|----------|--------------|---------|-----------|-------|
| Class 14 | 9            | 12      | 4         | 1     |
| Class 15 | 10           | 13      | 2         | 2     |
| Class 16 | 10           | 12      | 4         |       |
| All Data | 29           | 37      | 10        | 3     |

*Note*: Class totals are more than 18, and total data is more than 54, as some students read at multiple locations.

enjoyed an average of 19.61 books (Table 8).  As a student in Class 16 said:

> "When I look on recording sheets, *I'm proud of me* because I succeeded in reading many English books." (italics added for emphasis).

## 2.   Attitudes Towards ER

65% of students agreed that ER was hard work, and only 4% felt it was easy.  Despite how hard many students found this exercise, only 13% thought that ER was not enjoyable.  In contrast, 57% found it enjoyable to some degree (Table 7).  It may be that being able to understand almost all of the text enabled participants to derive enjoyment from the novel and to experience the act of reading for pleasure in English. When considering whether ER is a valuable and effective addition to their studies, nobody disagreed with the statement, 2% slightly disagreed, and 85% endorsed ER (49% somewhat agreed, 36% agreed).  These results are reflected in the following statement from a student in Class 16:

> "I'm very satisfied with ER because I feel English is more interesting than before".

## 3.   Increases in English Ability

The development of confidence in English ability, improvements in English vocabulary, and increased reading speeds were the main justifications for the introduction of ER into PACE classes (Hunt, 2014).  Only 9% of participants said that ER produced little or no improvement in English ability, compared to 64% that said there was.  Significantly, 81% believed that there had been an improvement in their reading speed.  Vocabulary acquisition was variable, with 30% stating little to no change, 31% unsure, and 39% indicating improvements.  These results

TABLE 7.    FIVE-POINT LIKERT-STYLE ASSESSMENT OF ER

|                                                  | Agree | Somewhat Agree | Not Sure | Somewhat Disagree | Disagree |
|--------------------------------------------------|-------|----------------|----------|-------------------|----------|
| ER has improved my vocabulary                    | 3     | 18             | 17       | 13                | 3        |
| ER has made me more confident about my English   | 11    | 24             | 14       | 4                 | 1        |
| ER has been hard work                            | 25    | 10             | 13       | 4                 | 2        |
| ER is enjoyable                                  | 6     | 25             | 16       | 4                 | 3        |
| ER has increased my reading speed                | 18    | 26             | 9        | 1                 |          |
| ER is valuable and effective                     | 19    | 26             | 7        | 1                 |          |

*Note*: Total responses from all classes (54 students).  Results are colour-coded: darker cells have a higher number of responses, lighter cells have lower number.

are extremely encouraging and fully justify continuation and expansion of the ER program.


# V.   *Discussion*

ER has proven popular among the majority of students in PACE Classes 14-16.  Many participants report increased confidence in English, improvements in vocabulary, and higher reading speeds.  For these reasons, the ER program is seen as a valuable addition to the curriculum, and will be further developed.  Student feedback, instructor observations throughout the semester, and further literature review have been considered, and the following modifications will be made to the ER program for the second semester.


## 1.   PACE ER Graded Reader Collection

The PACE ER library currently contains 314 graded readers with Headword counts 400 and above.  Most students have been reading at the PACE ER Blue level, within which there are currently 156 graded readers (Table 3).  The average number of Blue-level books read by each student so far is 17.33, or about 11% of the titles available (Table 8).

A common request in the comments and suggestions section of the questionnaire was for a greater selection of graded readers.  However, with the average student still having 89% of the Blue level books to choose from, and the additional availability of 65 Green level books in the fall semester, there is still an adequate minimum selection for the remainder of the year.  As the ER program expands, additional books will be required, and it will be interesting to trial materials from a more varied source of publishers.


## 2.   Library Management

The aspect of the ER program which caused the most stress and dissatisfaction for both the students and the instructor was library management.  As already explained, students were required to return and check-out books between 11:45am and 12:45pm on Wednesdays, and a free library management tool called "Booksource Classroom Organizer" was used to catalogue this process.  In practice, this arrangement has not been satisfactory for several reasons.  First, it was not practical to process 54 students in the time set aside, largely because the majority would eat lunch before exchanging books, meaning there was a rush from 12:30pm making it impossible to process everyone in the time remaining.  Second, several students failed to attend due to other priorities at that time of day, which was not anticipated.  Third, returning and checking-out books at the same time was inefficient and confusing, because the library

TABLE 8.   TOTAL NUMBERS AND AVERAGE NUMBERS OF BOOKS READ BY THE 54 PARTICIPATING STUDENTS

| PACE ER Level | Number of Books Read | Average Number Read |
|---|---|---|
| Yellow | 121 | 2.24 |
| Blue | 936 | 17.33 |
| Green | 2 | 0.04 |
| Total (All PACE ER Levels) | 1059 | 19.61 |

management tool has a poor interface design. Finally, "Booksource Classroom Organizer" proved to be a less-than-robust solution to library management and frequently crashed.

To address these issues, in future students will no longer exchange books on Wednesday lunchtimes, but will do so in class. This will avoid the issue of students being unable to attend book-swaps, and solve the time constraint issue. The questionnaire indicates that 87% of students believe they can check-out books unsupervised, so a greater amount of autonomy will be given in this area. Students will do this using the iOS or Android applications for "Booksource Classroom Organizer" which they can download for free onto their mobile devices. It is hoped that this software will prove to be more stable when processing single transactions, and that it will not crash as often. However, should this software continue to be unreliable an alternative library management system will need to be decided upon.

## 3.  Reading Targets

As seen in Tables 4 and 5, the reading targets assigned during the spring semester were ambitious. 76% of students managed to read more than 900 pages, for an average time investment of 3 hours per week. This equates to 20-30 minutes per day of English contact outside the classroom. Students read an average of 19.61 books during the 12 week program (Table 8), equal to 1.63 books per week, which again is a satisfactory amount. Table 9 lists the lowest, highest, mean and median total points earned in each class and for the participants as a whole. As might be expected, mean and median scores increase from Class 16 (lower TOEFL scores) to Class 14 (higher TOEFL scores). Looking at the 54 students as a whole, the mean score was 900.28 and the median score was 918, above the 900 threshold for an A grade.

The low grades in all three classes are outliers; students that did not fully participate in the program this semester, either because they have a strong aversion to reading, or because they were unable or unwilling to attend the Wednesday lunchtime book-swap meetings regularly and thus could not borrow enough books. These students belong to a very small group comprising the 7% of students that failed to achieve a C grade for the ER component of the course (Table 4). Effort will be made to motivate these students more, and it is expected that modification to the book-swap scheduling will deal with the majority of issues in this area.

There seems to be no need to radically alter the reading requirements, except for adjusting the targets to fit the longer duration of the ER program in the fall semester, from 12 weeks to 14 weeks (in the spring semester the first two weeks were devoted to introducing ER theory and explaining the running of the program, a procedure that will not be required in the fall).

In regards to sustained silent reading in class, 76% of students indicated that once a week was sufficient for this. However, in an effort to encourage even more interaction with the graded readers, in-class reading time will become a small component of most classes in the fall

TABLE 9.  LOWEST, HIGHEST, MEAN AND MEDIAN FINAL POINTS PER PAGE SCORES
EARNED IN EACH CLASS AND FOR THE ENTIRE DATA SET (54 students)

|          | Low   | High   | Mean   | Median |
|----------|-------|--------|--------|--------|
| Class 14 | 519.5 | **1428** | 933.68 | 951.38 |
| Class 15 | 649   | 1123   | 910.36 | 913.75 |
| Class 16 | **514** | 953    | 856.79 | 910.25 |
| All Data | 514   | 1428   | **900.28** | **918** |

semester. During these times students will also be able to silently peruse the library of graded readers and exchange books if they need to, thus increasing opportunities to access the books, and further ameliorating the primary complaint from the first semester regarding library management.

## VI.  *Conclusion*

The first semester of the PACE ER pilot program has been a great success. Student engagement has been high, and notable increases in confidence and reading speeds, together with greater exposure and interaction with the English language outside the classroom, reinforce the authors' belief that ER could be a beneficial addition to the PACE curriculum. A faculty-wide questionnaire administered to all first-year students at the beginning of the semester highlighted a lack of reading in most PACE classes as an area of possible concern (pers. comm. with Dean Misumi). This is further justification for the continuation and expansion of this ER program.

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