

## EXTENSIVE READING IN ENGLISH IN HITOTSUBASHI UNIVERSITY PACE CLASSES: JUSTIFICATION, ESTABLISHMENT AND OBJECTIVES

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### *Abstract*

Extensive reading has been shown to improve literacy, increase reading rates, aid vocabulary acquisition, and improve attitudes towards second language learning. The students in the lower-level PACE (Practical Applications in Communicative English) English classes at Hitotsubashi University often lack confidence in their English abilities, have lower motivation, may not have much exposure to English outside the classroom, are less automatic with vocabulary recall, and often make elementary grammar errors in their writing. At the same time, the majority of these students rate reading as their strongest English ability. To address their weaknesses while utilizing their strengths, it was decided to introduce an extensive reading program to the lower-level PACE English classes. These research notes will outline the steps involved in setting up the program, and may be of use to other educators interested in adopting a similar approach.

*Key words:* extensive reading (ER), pleasure reading, graded readers, fluency, motivation

### I. *Extensive Reading*

Extensive reading (ER) involves the utilization of “graded readers”; simplified texts specially tailored to the language abilities of learners at different levels (i.e. grades) of second language (L2) competency. Students read graded readers that are a little easier than their ability, as the primary aim of ER is to build reading speed, fluency, motivation and confidence. To do this, students read a huge amount of material throughout the year, that is well within their language ability level, at their own pace, on their own time outside of class, and selected by themselves from a library of graded readers. The theory is that self-chosen material will be more intrinsically interesting and therefore motivating to the learner, and the easy level of the material will enable the student to finish books rapidly with very high comprehension rates, thus boosting confidence. Finally, repeated exposure to vocabulary and grammar forms should aid internalization of these structures, resulting in more rapid recall with greater rates of accuracy and improved overall literacy.

Bamford & Day (2004) list 10 principles of extensive reading: 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.

Numerous research supports the use of ER for acquiring literacy in a second language (Constantino, 1994; Elley, 1991; Elley and Mangubhai, 1993; Hafiz and Tudor, 1989; Tudor and Hafiz, 1989; Waring, 2009). Reading large numbers of highly comprehensible simplified graded readers have also been shown to result in significant reading rate gains (Beglar and Hunt, 2014; Beglar, Hunt and Kite, 2012; Carver and Lieber, 1995). In addition to significantly faster reading rates, ER has also been shown to improve comprehension scores (Bell, 2001), as well as aid vocabulary acquisition (Coady, 1997; Pigada and Schmitt, 2006; Waring and Nation, 2004). Participants in ER programs often report more favorable attitudes “toward reading, their class, and their learning” (Al-Homoud and Schmitt, 2009). These and other studies indicate that ER can be beneficial both linguistically and motivationally for many second language learners.

In contrast to extensive reading, intensive reading is primarily for learning new grammar, vocabulary and reading skills. In intensive reading, students read texts that are more difficult than their level, and often spend a lot of time translating words in order to get an understanding of the text. Most students have experienced intensive reading, and often find it less than stimulating. Intensive reading is frequently a frustrating experience, which can lead to a belief that “reading in English is too hard”. This is not to say that intensive reading does not have a place in the classroom. An ideal reading program will combine all forms of reading instruction for students to become better readers. Intensive reading, however, does not address the areas of fluency, motivation and confidence that extensive reading does.

## II. *Justification for Extensive Reading (in the PACE program)*

All first-year students in the Faculty of Commerce and Management are required to take PACE (Practical Applications in Communicative English) classes. Following a TOEFL test at the start of the academic year, they are streamed into 16 classes of 18 students, which meet twice a week for the entire academic year. The primary aim of first-year PACE classes is to boost student enthusiasm for English, as many lack confidence in their abilities to communicate in the language, and this skill is seen as essential for their future careers in an increasingly English-speaking business world.

For this pilot study into extensive reading, the lower-level students from classes 14-16 will participate. In orientation surveys in the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 academic years, students from these classes were asked to self-assess themselves by considering their strengths and weaknesses regarding English. The results are summarized in Table 1.

Many students state reading in English as a strength, so regular ER homework could be expected to be preferable for those students, and should be relatively easy. This should enhance their confidence in using English, since they are being asked to do something that they already consider to be a strength. The majority of students consider listening and speaking to be their weakness, and while these areas will not be targeted directly via ER, there are ER-related classroom activities which will work on these skills. Additionally, ER is expected to improve overall confidence in English ability, which should improve feelings regarding speaking and listening skills.

For these PACE classes, graded readers have interesting potential, as ER is an approach to

TABLE 1. SELF-ASSESSMENT OF STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES IN ENGLISH ABILITY AMONG CLASSES 14-16

	Class 14		Class 15		Class 16		Total	
	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-
Reading	13 (16)	1 (1)	8 (4)	2 (2)	8 (7)	0 (3)	29 (27)	3 (6)
Writing	0 (3)	2 (3)	2 (7)	1 (2)	3 (2)	1 (2)	5 (12)	4 (7)
Speaking	0 (0)	12 (7)	2 (3)	6 (4)	1 (2)	7 (5)	3 (5)	25 (16)
Listening	5 (0)	4 (7)	3 (3)	3 (9)	2 (2)	4 (6)	10 (5)	11 (22)
Grammar			2 (1)	3 (2)	1 (3)	2 (1)	3 (4)	5 (3)
Other		2	1 (1)	3 (2)	3 (2)	6 (2)	3	4

*Notes:* Figures not in parentheses are from the 2013-2014 academic year, those in parentheses are from the 2014-2015 academic year. "Other" includes: enthusiasm: +1 (+1); memory: (+1); ability to study: (+1); vocabulary: +5 (-2); intonation: (-1); small voice: (-1); not shy: +1; pronunciation: -1; use Japanese: -1; everything: -3; nothing: +2 & -1.

language teaching that exposes the learner to "huge amounts of very simple text .... well-within her (sic) current reading ability .... (to) build reading speed, reading confidence and fluency" (Waring and Takahashi, 2000). Students choose which books to read, are exposed to a wide variety of genres that interest them, and most reading is done out-of-class thereby extending the time students are exposed to the language. The pedagogical value of this approach is that, provided the student selects books at the correct level, they will revisit vocabulary and grammar repeatedly, aiding reinforcement and internalization. Additionally, extensive reading can help the learner recognize and process words faster by developing the automatic recognition of words (Waring and Takahashi, 2000). It is also hoped that this program will enable students to successfully guess the meanings of new words from context, better recognize how pronouns and synonyms refer to other parts of a text, and learn to infer non-literal messages in a text.

Students from classes 14-16 in the 2013-2014 academic year exhibited a number of L2

TABLE 2. COMMON L2 PROBLEMS SEEN IN STUDENTS FROM PACE CLASSES 14-16, AND HOW THEY CAN BE ADDRESSED THROUGH ER.

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

problems which may be addressed by ER. Those problems and explanations of how each of them may be addressed through the addition of an ER component to the curriculum are summarized in Table 2.

### III. *Setting up an Extensive Reading Program*

Waring & Takahashi (2000) give a thorough overview of the steps required to set up a Graded Reader Library and the best way to integrate ER into a curriculum. Additional ideas can be found in “The Tohoku University Extensive Reading Manual” (Eichhorst and Shearon, 2013), and from the ERF (Extensive Reading Foundation) website (<http://erfoundation.org>). Once the number of students and their reading level has been determined, appropriate graded readers can be ordered from publishers. In order to ensure that books are accounted for throughout the year, a library system should be developed. It is, according to multiple sources, preferable to have the school library involved in the cataloguing and checking-out process, but that proved to be difficult to set up at Hitotsubashi University, so a system has been developed to ensure students have regular opportunity to exchange books, and that those books are easily trackable.

#### 1. **Choosing Appropriate Books**

Graded readers are created by carefully limiting vocabulary and grammar forms to specific grades of difficulty. They are written for adults, but have been made easier to read so that a learner, reading at their appropriate grade, can understand almost the entire text. A book may be written within a limited range of the 400 most frequent and useful words in English. When words are counted, they are counted as word families. The word family for *help* includes *helps*, *helpless*, *helplessness*, *unhelpful*, *helped*, *helping* and so on (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. However, not every publisher of graded readers indicates the number of Headwords, and those that do often assign boundaries between the levels differently. It can thus be difficult to group books from different publishers into selections of comparable grades. An ongoing project of the ERF is to compile a comparison table of the grades of competing publishers’ books. The table can be accessed from the ERF website.

Determining how many Headwords are appropriate for the students is another problem being addressed by the ERF. Again, via their website, it is possible to compare Headword counts with an extensive list of ESL/EFL assessment metrics, including TOEIC, TOEFL, IELTS and many others. All PACE students take the TOEFL test and the pertinent Headword

TABLE 3. 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 ERF website.

TABLE 4. AVERAGE TOEFL SCORES OF STUDENTS FROM CLASSES 14, 15 AND 16 PARTICIPATING IN THIS EXTENSIVE READING PROGRAM

	Class 14	Class 15	Class 16
Av. TOEFL score	470.67	460.5	446

to TOEFL score comparisons are summarized in Table 3. TOEFL scores in the participating classes range from 433 to 473, with average scores indicated in Table 4.

Most students fall in the Intermediate range, as it is defined by the ERF. The majority of graded readers ordered contain 800 - 1500 Headwords. However, students that are weaker readers and those that are less enthusiastic need to be provided for so a selection from the Mid-to High-Elementary (400 - 800 Headwords) category were also selected. Several teachers of higher-level PACE classes indicated an interest in using graded readers sporadically throughout the year, so a limited number of books were selected from the Advanced level (Headword Count 2401 - 3000), which could also be used for more intensive reading with the lower level classes. All advanced-level books were business-related. Effort was made to order a good selection of books covering a broad range of literary genres, in the hope of appealing to the broadest range of literary tastes.

## 2. Creating a Library

A lot of thought was put into where to locate the PACE library since it could not be housed in the university library. The first idea was to locate it in the PACE Writing Center room, and operate it as a walk-in space open throughout the day, so that students could exchange books at any time convenient to them. Unfortunately, it was felt that some students may not be conscientious or mature enough to operate the program this way, and that there was risk of losing books through user-error. Housing the bookshelves in the teacher office space was also an option, but that would have caused disruption to every PACE instructor, and there are certain times when no teachers are present in the office and the doors are locked which could inconvenience students.

Eventually, a mobile cart was chosen to house the books so that they could be stored in the PACE office and wheeled into the Writing Center during designated book-swap hours, from 11:45am - 12:45pm on Wednesdays.

The graded readers from the various publishers were divided into four levels using the comparison chart created by the ERF and simplified in Table 3. The four levels of books were housed in separate trays on the mobile cart. A small piece of color tape was attached to the spine of each book. From lowest to highest level the colors were yellow (Headwords 300-

TABLE 5. PACE ER GRADED READER LEVELS, WITH HEADWORD COUNT RANGES, AND APPROXIMATE TOEFL (PAPER), TOEIC AND IELTS LEVELS FOR COMPARISON

PACE Level	Headword Count	TOEFL (paper)	TOEIC	IELTS Level
Yellow	300-800	~400	~300	~3
Blue	800-1500	400-480	300-500	4
Green	1500-2400	480-550	500-700	4.5-5.5
White	2400~	550~	700~	6-7

800), blue (Headwords 800-1500), green (1500-2400), and white (Headwords more than 2400). The yellow and blue level trays were placed on the table during book-swap hours for students to place their returned books in, and from which to select new books. In the fall semester the green level books will also be made available. Table 5 compares the book levels with their corresponding Headword counts, TOEFL (paper), TOEIC and IELTS scores.

### 3. Number of Books

The 54 students participating in this pilot scheme are all of a similar English competency level as measured by their TOEFL (paper) scores, but in terms of reading speed, reading confidence, familiarity with reading novels, and general reading skill they are more varied. It is important that there are enough books of various genres and levels to provide the variety necessary so that students get to choose what they read. If the selection is too small, students may not find anything they are interested in reading in a particular week, pick a random book out of necessity, become bored with it and may then lose motivation to participate.

Studies suggest a minimum of 4 books per student for a pilot program. With 54 students participating, 216 books are required at their current reading level. As student reading ability improves they will want to try options from the next level up, and this also needs to be provided for. Table 6 indicates the number of books acquired at each level, given the budget available.

It is expected that most students in class 16 will, at least initially, be reading at the lowest

TABLE 6. NUMBER OF BOOKS ACQUIRED FOR THE PACE ER START-UP LIBRARY, ASSUMING 54 STUDENTS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE PROGRAM

Level	Number of books
Headwords 300-800 (Yellow)	80
Headwords 800-1500 (Blue)	156
Headwords 1500-2400 (Green)	65
Headwords 2400~(White)	13
Total number of books	314

(Yellow) level, and those in class 14 may already be comfortable at the Blue level. It is unlikely that any students will be comfortable beginning at the Green level, but by the second semester of the program they may be ready and the books are there should they be needed. The crucial levels are Yellow and Blue, for which there are a total of 236 books, a little over the recommended minimum for a program of this size. It is expected that additional books will be purchased during the summer break, following analysis of the pilot semester.

### 4. Library Management

There are a number of options when it comes to library management. The simplest is to have a notebook in which students sign in and sign out the books each week. Slightly more complex is to make a wall chart with each book title and student name arranged in a grid, on which books can be checked in and out. Alternatively, each student could have a record sheet on which they write down the names of the books they borrow and the dates on which they

check them out and return them. Each of these systems is effective, but they all fall short when it comes to ease of metrics analysis, such as total number of books borrowed, time borrowed, number of times each particular book has been borrowed, exactly which books are checked out on a particular day, and who was the last person to borrow a particular book (should it be discovered to be damaged or missing).

To easily track metrics, a digital library management system may be preferable. A free library management system called “Booksource Classroom Organizer” will be used as it includes a database for tracking books, and can provide metrics for individual students. “Booksource Classroom Organizer” is a library management tool that has a web-based interface as well as mobile applications for iOS and Android that can be downloaded for free. An attractive feature of the mobile applications is that they enable barcode scanning using the devices camera as a way of entering books into the database as well as for checking books out.

#### IV. *Initiating and Running the Extensive Reading program*

The success of an ER program depends on ensuring that students understand the purpose of the activity. An orientation period will be used to explain how the ER program will be run.

##### 1. **Student Orientation**

In order that students fully understand the purpose of the ER program, it is essential that the procedure and objectives are carefully explained. The first two classes will be used to explain what ER is, how to choose an appropriate level book (no more than 2 unknown words per page, something you are interested in reading, something you have not read before), orientation of the book-swap procedure, and record-keeping requirements. It will be stressed that reading should be pleasurable, but that there is an expected minimum amount that should be read per week. Once the orientation period is complete, the remaining ER classes will be devoted to reading and reading-related activities, until the final class in which all books will be returned and final reading records will be tabulated.

##### 2. **Reading Requirements**

During orientation, students will be informed of the required amount of reading to be completed. The literature often states that students should read at least one book a week, at their grade, for ER to be beneficial. The total number of pages per book does vary, but on average there are around 60 pages of text per book. A book a week over 12 weeks, with an average page count of 60 pages totals approximately 720 pages read. With this in mind, target page counts have been established and are indicated in Table 7.

TABLE 7. PROPOSED READING REQUIREMENTS AND CORRESPONDING GRADES

Total pages read	Grade
700	C
800	B
900	A



### 3. Book Swaps and Borrowing System

The PACE Writing Center room will be the location for the book-swaps, accessible between 11:45am and 12:45pm on Wednesdays. During this period, students will be able to return and borrow books. Lunch-time on Wednesdays was chosen as no students have classes scheduled then, and all classes in the PACE program meet in the afternoon of that day. This means, provided students come to the book-swap, they will all have fresh books for the Wednesday Book-Club lessons.

### 4. Book-Club Wednesdays

As all classes meet on Wednesday afternoons, these classes will be designated “Book-Club Wednesdays”, during which students will read, talk about books and do other reading-related activities.

#### (1) In-class reading

A key aspect of extensive reading is that students should be reading extensively: both content-wise and time-wise. The majority of time spent reading will be outside of the classroom, increasing student contact with the second language, but there will be some class time devoted to sustained silent reading. Around 30 minutes is enough time for the students to get interested in their newly selected book so that they will be able to talk or write about it in the following class activity. Sustained silent reading is also a time for the teacher to act as a model reader for the students, by also engaging with a novel and reading along at the same time, showing that the act of reading is not merely to be done because an instructor says so, but because reading is in itself its own reward and an activity undertaken for pleasure. It is hoped that students may be curious about the book selections of the instructor and that they can then engage in verbal communication about reading choices.

In-class reading may be used at the beginning of the Book-Club classes, as a time-filler should students complete other activities early, or as a change of pace. During sustained silent reading the instructor has the opportunity to monitor student reading habits: are they using the dictionary often, do they look comfortable or confused, is the chosen book at an appropriate level? Should any issues become apparent they can be addressed quickly so that the students get the most out of the program.

#### (2) Reading-related activities

Bamford & Day (2004) catalogue various extensive-reading activities that can be used to develop other, non-reading, language skills. A number of these will be attempted during the trial period and are summarized in Table 8.

## V. *Assessing the Program*

To measure the effectiveness of ER on the PACE students' English abilities, data will be collected for analysis at the end of the trial: specifically, measurements of engagement, progress in reading rates, and changes in general language proficiency for comparison with results of



TABLE 8. POSSIBLE EXTENSIVE READING-RELATED ACTIVITIES THAT MAY BE USED IN CLASS TO DEVELOP NON-READING LANGUAGE SKILLS

Language Skill	Example Activities
Speaking	Summarize the most recent book read. Can be done in groups or as a presentation in front of the class to practice public speaking.
Writing	Paragraph, essay, or letter writing. Example themes: compare two books; discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the book or a chosen character; write an interior monologue for a character; imagine you are one of the characters and write a letter or diary entry.
Listening	Dictate a paragraph. The teacher can read aloud, or students can dictate a paragraph to their peers, thereby also practicing pronunciation.
Grammar & vocabulary	Outwit the teacher by choosing a sentence from a book and then adding extra words to it. Students earn bonus points if the teacher cannot correctly identify the additional words (forbid adjectives, proper nouns and proper names to make this more challenging).

*Note:* Summarized from Bamford & Day (2004).

previous studies cited in the literature.

## 1. Quantifying Student Engagement

In order to track the engagement of each student, they will be required to keep a running log of the books that they have read, the dates they checked them in and out, the number of pages, and a running total number of pages read. During the book-swap they will present their reading record sheet, and any issues can be flagged and followed up on. Reading metrics will be tabulated and analyzed.

Engagement will also be measured via questionnaires, verbal book reports, and through one-on-one interviews.

## 2. Quantifying Student Progress

In order to quantify student gains in reading speed and general language proficiency, they will be given pre-tests and post-tests consisting of a timed reading exercise to determine their reading speed, and a C-test to determine general language proficiency. As a control, the same tests will be administered to classes 11 and 13, which have similar but slightly higher TOEFL scores than classes 14-16, and which will not be participating in this ER trial program.

### (1) Tracking reading rates with timed readings

An identical text will be used for the pre-test and the post-test, and students will be given 1 minute to read as much as they can at a natural pace, without skimming. In the set-up they will be told to read the text carefully as there will be a quiz on the contents. No mention of a time limit will be made, but after the one minute has expired they will be told to stop reading and to mark the last word that they have read. This will give an indication of their wpm (word per minute) reading speed. A deliberately easy to understand text will be used for this activity so that students will not have trouble with unfamiliar vocabulary, and the test should provide a good indication of their natural English reading speed. For this test, a native English Grade 3 level text with a Lexile reading score of 510L will be used.

## (2) Tracking language proficiency with C-tests

The C-test has been shown to provide an accurate indication of general language proficiency (Dornyei & Katona, 1992; Eckes & Grotjahn, 2006). It is based on the cloze test and has been claimed to be superior in a number of ways (Jafapur, 1995). Norris (2006) explains that the C-test includes several short texts of around 75 to 100 words. After the first sentence, which is left unaltered to aid in subjects comprehension, the second half of every second word is deleted, and each deleted letter is replaced with a dash. If a word has an odd number of letters, the larger half is deleted. Single letter words and proper nouns are skipped.

In this study, three texts will be used in the C-test. They are all simplified newspaper reports, each on a different topic, to avoid possible bias in results due to a student having above-average knowledge of the subject matter of one of the texts. This avoids the main weakness of the cloze test, which relies on a single, lengthy text on one subject, which may turn out to be the special interest or hobby of the test-taker, thereby giving them an unfair advantage over their peers in terms of vocabulary and content knowledge.

An increase in C-test scores at the end of the semester would indicate an increase in general language proficiency.

## VI. *Anticipated Results*

At the end of the extensive reading trial period, the pre- and post-test scores will be compared with each other, and then with results from previous studies reported in the literature. Feedback will be obtained through student questionnaires.

The anticipated results of this trial are: increases in reading speeds indicative of greater comfort and familiarity with reading; improvements in C-test scores due to greater general language proficiency; an increased interest in reading in English due to greater exposure to novels written in the language; and a significant boost in subjects' confidence in their English ability, together with a sense of achievement upon reaching their reading goals.

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