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THE IMPACT OF EXTENSIVE READING ON RELUCTANT JAPANESE EFL LEARNERS

Atsuko Takase, Kinki University, Japan

1. INTRODUCTION

A heated discussion has been taking place in Japan concerning how to retain or raise the academic standard of university students. The subject of English taught as a foreign language is no exception, as students' English ability has deteriorated in the last decade. Not only has aural-oral communication ability suffered, but also reading and writing skills as well as grammar. Previously, grammar had been the one skill considered to be the strongest compared to other skills. As a result of such low standards in my department, approximately 5-10% of the students out of 1,600 freshmen and sophomores must repeat English courses every year (Takase & Otsuki, 2012). There are several possible reasons for this unfortunate situation.

First of all, the EFL learners' environment lacks enough English input. Japanese learners have very limited exposure to English outside of the classroom. The use of English is not necessarily required since, for example, movies, TV news and games are quickly translated into Japanese. In addition, the amazingly swift improvements in technology such as translation software on almost all computers, and easy access to translation websites have accelerated this trend.

A change which has taken place in the education system has caused a more serious problem. *Yutori* education is a type of education which was meant to be less stressful. It was established by the Ministry of Education in primary and secondary schools and lasted from 1992 to 2010. As a result, the traditional cramming style of education was abolished, Saturday became a day off and class time for a number of subjects was reduced, with English lessons being reduced from four hours to three hours per week in junior high school. Students who were brought up in the *yutori* education system in the 1990s are entering universities without the adequate preparation needed for studying at colleges or universities.

In Japan, the main goal of secondary school English education is to have students succeed in the entrance examinations to colleges and universities. In order to pursue this goal, the traditional grammar-translation method is employed in mainstream classrooms (Soda & Kazawa, 1994). In most English lessons, translation practice with the analysis of sentence structure using grammar is emphasized, while aural-oral communication practice and fluency development are neglected. Students are required to read difficult English texts while translating word for word, reordering the translated words to fit into Japanese word order (Hino, 1988). Students are encouraged to make good Japanese translations rather than to appreciate the contents of a text. Consequently, comprehension of any text is through Japanese, and exposure to English at secondary school level becomes insufficient (Chujo, Hasegawa & Nishigaki, 2008). There are question sentences in the grammar prac-

tice following every reading text which are often taken out of context. This means that the grammar exercises do not directly serve as a basis for actual reading or writing in the target language. The result is that many students are unmotivated, find it difficult to follow the lessons and become disinterested in studying English. They do not enjoy learning the language and have already become reluctant students before they even enter a college or university (Takase, 2008a).

Another problem is the decrease in the number of children in the country, enabling those with a relatively lower level of ability to enter colleges or universities (Takase & Otsuki, 2012). Some students are admitted on their high school principal's recommendation without having to take any examination at all. Many of those recommended students are likely to stop studying at an earlier period as soon as they are accepted into a university, while their counterparts are still making the final attempts to pass the official entrance examinations. By the time those who were accepted on this type of system start attending university classes, they often find themselves behind their peers and become candidates for a repeater course.

2. IMPLEMENTING EXTENSIVE READING

Students in repeater courses are reluctant, lack motivation and suffer from low self-esteem. In order to motivate these students to read English, the researcher implemented extensive reading (ER).

ER has been gaining popularity across Japan (Takase, 2010a), as well as throughout the world. It is one of the most effective methods for motivating learners to read, thus improving reading fluency and English proficiency. As ER allows learners to choose reading materials which match their ability, ER is supposed to cope with learners of any level. Following the process of first language acquisition, ER aims to provide learners with an opportunity to receive a substantial amount of input in the target language. Such input means exposing the students to a vast amount of English in context. Through ER, learners read a lot of easy materials (Bamford & Day, 2004) "to develop good reading habits, to build up knowledge and structure, and to encourage a liking for reading" (Richards, Platt & Platt, 1992: 133).

To date, numerous studies have been conducted, and the positive effects of ER on learners' motivation to read English and learners' English ability have been reported as gains in: reading proficiency (e.g. Elley & Mangubhai, 1981; Robb & Susser, 1989; Mason & Krashen, 1997; Takase, 2004; Cirocki, 2009), vocabulary (Waring & Takagi, 2003; Horst, 2005; Cirocki, 2009), reading rate and fluency (Taguchi, Takayasu-Maass & Gorsuch, 2004; Iwahori, 2008; Beglar, Hunt & Kite, 2011), positive affect (Elley & Mangubhai, 1981; Mason & Krashen, 1997; Asraf & Ahmad, 2003; Takase, 2004), writing ability (Janopoulos, 1986; Irvine, 2011), spelling (Polak & Krashen, 1988), self-confidence (Nishizawa, Yoshioka & Fukada, 2010b; Takase, 2007, 2008b), TOEIC scores and other proficiency tests (Furukawa, 2010; Nishizawa, Yoshioka & Fukada, 2010a, 2010b), the reading enjoyment experience (Takase, 2008a) and reading proficiency (Takase, 2007; 2009a). From these various studies, it can be said that ER improves many aspects of English proficiency for any level of learners, at all ages. However, concerning the effects of ER on

grammatical competence, reliable studies are rare. One exception is Maruhashi (2011), who investigated the improvement in receptive grammatical competence of 137 Japanese university students after approximately three months (one academic semester) of ER practice. Also, Takase (2008b) found that 42.1% of the participants from repeater courses responded positively when these participants read an abundance of books which matched their proficiency level. On the other hand, only 6.3% of their counterparts in advanced classes who read books beyond their proficiency level felt they had recognized a grammar improvement.

2.1. TWO CRITICAL FACTORS FOR SUCCESSFUL ER PROGRAMMES: SSS & SSR

Most of the students in repeater courses have a poor academic record and dislike studying English (Takase, 2008a). According to Takase (2008a), ER, if implemented effectively, is one of the best strategies to motivate learners to read in English. She has found that two key factors are required to successfully practise ER with high school and university students. These factors are likely to encourage reluctant learners to read and keep them motivated to read during the ER course.

First of all, it is necessary to provide learners with books written in easily comprehensible English, which is the main element of the *Start with Simple Stories* (SSS) method (Furukawa, 2010; Takase, 2010a). By reading many relatively simple stories written in easy English in the early stages of ER, learners gradually learn to read English as it is. These learners then break the habit of translating English into Japanese for comprehension (Takase, 2010a). What is more, being able to finish a whole book in English brings the students a sense of accomplishment and self-confidence.

Secondly, it is crucial to secure a certain amount of time for reading in class. *Sustained Silent Reading* (SSR) refers to any in-school programme where students are provided a short time for reading without any after-reading requirement (Krashen, 2004). The effectiveness of SSR on the development of learners' reading proficiency has been reported by many teachers and practitioners in the students' first language (L1) (e.g. Henry, 1995; Pilgreen, 2000) as well as in the learners' second or foreign language (Sakai & Kanda, 2005; Takase, 2008b, 2009b, 2010a, 2010b; Takase & Nishizawa, 2010). Allocating time not only makes it possible for learners to concentrate on ER (Takase, 2009b), but also enables teachers to observe how learners read books. Teachers are then able to give appropriate advice on the spot, demonstrating the importance of reading (Day & Bamford, 1998; Krashen, 2004).

Considering the effects of ER reported so far, this article is meant to investigate the impact of ER on unmotivated students in repeater courses. This article examines the ability of ER to motivate reluctant learners to read English books and how much students' English proficiency and attitudes towards ER are affected. Thus, the following research questions are investigated:

1. Does the use of SSS and SSR methods in ER motivate reluctant learners of different proficiency levels in repeater courses to read?
2. Do reluctant learners of different proficiency levels in repeater courses make progress on their post-test? This is a test which measures grammar learnt in context as

well as general English proficiency after three months of extensive reading.

3. What are the reluctant learners' impressions and attitudes towards ER, and what is their self-perception of their own English proficiency improvement?

3. METHOD

3.1. PARTICIPANTS

There were 94 participants (77 male and 17 female participants) in this study. The participants were 2nd-4th year EFL university students of law, aged 19-23. They had failed to pass the former compulsory English course and were enrolled in the researcher's class. These students participated in ER for one academic semester, approximately three months, as repeater students. Since they had attended several streamed classes with different teachers over previous years, these students had various levels of English proficiency. Their level of English varied widely from very low beginners to high intermediate. The participants were divided into three groups depending on the results of the pre-test scores for analysis: the Upper Group ($n = 29$; 18 male and 11 female), the Middle Group ($n = 35$; 32 male and 3 female) and the Lower Group ($n = 30$; 27 male and 3 female). Approximately two-thirds of the participating 1st and 2nd year students were enrolled in their compulsory English course as well as the current repeater course. The remaining one-third of the participants, who were in the 3rd-4th years, received only the repeater course.

3.2. INSTRUMENTATION

3.2.1. PRE-QUESTIONNAIRE ON ATTITUDES TOWARDS ENGLISH STUDIES

Based on the author`s previous research and extensive experience with both the repeater class and students from regular classes, a questionnaire survey was constructed. The questionnaire survey pertained to the causes of the participants' failures and their attitudes towards English studies. The survey was administered at the beginning of the class. According to the questionnaire survey, 64 participants (68.1%) stated lack of attendance as one of their major reasons for failure, and 42 participants (44.7%) identified low academic performance as a reason for failing the course. 22 students (23.4%) chose both of these items, many commenting that they had been intimidated by the difficult lessons and had gradually become reluctant to attend class. According to the responses of 56 participants (59.6%) who reported that they were poor learners of English, the most difficult lessons were Grammar ($n = 27$; 48.2%), Listening ($n = 24$; 42.9%), Intensive Reading ($n = 20$; 35.7%), Writing ($n = 15$; 26.8%), Vocabulary ($n = 11$; 19.6%) and Speaking ($n = 9$; 16.1%). The reason that speaking lessons were not chosen as one of the most difficult subjects could be due to the character of the EFL classes in Japan, where speaking English in class is minimal. Students who attributed their failure to a lack of attendance rather than low proficiency admitted that they did not attend classes because they simply did not get up early enough for the 1st period or had busy lifestyles which included part-time jobs and other social activities.

It should also be noted that more than half of the repeaters ($n = 51$) had been suffering

from low performance and poor academic grades in English since junior high school when they were 13 to 15 (34.9%) years old or senior high school when they were 16 to 18 (51.2%) years old. They had not been able to follow the difficult lessons which were targeted at higher education entrance examinations. In other words, those students were already unprepared for the rigors of English education by secondary school where test-taking skills to prepare for entrance examinations were emphasized.

3.2.2. EPER PLACEMENT TEST

The EPER Placement Test is a cloze test developed by the *Edinburgh Project on Extensive Reading*. Among several versions, version A is most commonly used for investigating the effectiveness of ER on learners' general proficiency in English. Although this test is a fixed-ratio cloze, it also contains blanks in every 5th to 7th word for adjustment. It consists of twelve paragraphs (963 words) arranged in an ascending order of difficulty with 141 words removed; the participants are asked to replace the missing words. In order to identify the correct words or type of words that belong in the detected passages of a text, grammatical knowledge in context as well as the ability to understand context and vocabulary is required. Most of the missing words are related to grammar (i.e. what part of speech is necessary to complete the sentence or text).

EPER raw scores are converted into standard scores from 0 to 100, which are classified from X to H (EPER level), with X being the highest and H being the lowest (see Appendix 1). Appropriate levels of graded readers are recommended for each EPER level by the EPER group. However, those levels are too high for Japanese EFL learners due to the students' rigid translation habits and the students' inexperience in reading English as it is. Generally, their comfortable reading levels at the beginning of ER are two or more below the recommended EPER group level.

3.2.3. POST-QUESTIONNAIRE ON ATTITUDES TOWARDS ER

New items on self-perception concerning the effectiveness of ER on the participants' English improvement were included in the questionnaire. Based on the new items and the questionnaire used for the purpose of investigating participants' improvement and attitudes towards ER (Yamazaki, 2008), a five-point Likert scale questionnaire was constructed and administered at the end of the course. The questionnaire items included participants' reaction and attitudes towards ER, self-perceived effects of ER on improvement of English proficiency, factors that motivated them to read extensively and demotivating factors which discouraged them from reading.

3.3. PROCEDURE

At the onset of the course, the EPER Placement Test was administered to diagnose the learners' current level of reading proficiency. Then, the questionnaire pertaining to the participants' attitudes towards and motivation for studying English as well as the students' reasons for failure was administered. After that, ER was introduced in order to raise stu-

dent awareness of the necessity and effectiveness of reading English books extensively. The emphasis was placed on choosing easily comprehensible books for an efficient ER strategy so that students would experience the joy of reading.

All the students participated in ER for one academic semester, which is approximately three months. The classes met once a week for 90 minutes, totalling 14 sessions. A room in the university library was designated for the classes. The first and the last sessions were used for the pre- and the post-EPER tests. The remaining 12 SSR sessions were made up of approximately 80 minutes for reading and 10 minutes for keeping reading logs. The logs were to include date, title, series, level, word count, reading time, interest level and a short comment. The participants, except for some students who were placed in B, C and D EPER levels, were required to read at least 100 easily comprehensible books during the course, following the SSS method, which meant starting with very simple stories. Although they started reading very easy books, they were soon encouraged and chose higher levels of books after some ER practice, surpassing the minimum requirement of 100 books. Students could choose books on their own from among the suggested levels and series from the library shelves. Some examples were Oxford Reading Tree, Oxford Fireflies, Longman Literacy Land, Step Into Reading, and Usborne First Reading. Once the participants became used to reading without translating every phrase, they were encouraged to gradually raise their level and attempt longer books to acquire reading stamina. While the students were engaging in reading, the researcher observed the participants' reading style. The researcher read their reading logs and provided suggestions concerning the choice of books, and read their reading logs.

At the end of the course, the post-EPER test was administered to investigate the participants' improvement. After that, the post-questionnaire was administered to investigate the participants' reaction and attitudes towards ER, self-perception of the effects of ER on different aspects of English proficiency, and motivating and demotivating factors for and against ER.

3. 4. MATERIALS

3.4.1. READING MATERIALS FOR ER

Two kinds of reading materials were used: 1) levelled readers (LR), picture books for L1 children to learn to read published by Oxford (ORT – Oxford Reading Tree), Longman (LLSS – Literacy Land Story Street), Random House, Scholastic, Usborne and other major publishers; and 2) graded readers (GR) containing vocabulary ranging from 200 to 1700 headwords. They were mainly Foundations Reading Library (FRL1-7) by Cengage, Cambridge English Readers (CER0-3) by Cambridge, Macmillan Readers (MMR1-5) by Macmillan, Oxford Bookworms (OBW0-3) by Oxford and Penguin Readers (PGR0-4) by Pearson Longman. All books were from the library bookshelves.

3.4.2. YL (*Yomiyasusa* LEVEL) READABILITY

For levelling, the researcher used YL, which stands for *Yomiyasusa* Level in Japanese, referring to a readability standard measurement for Japanese learners. It was established by Akio Furukawa from the SSS (Start with Simple Stories) Study Group in cooperation with Japan Extensive Reading Association (JERA) members. This way of levelling books is a subjective assessment of readability for both graded and ungraded readers. Such factors as word count, difficulty of words, illustrations, the size of fonts, different text styles, genres, Japanese learners' background knowledge and familiarity with the content were considered. This scale fills the gap of readability differences among graded readers (GR) of various publishers where the publishers use their own readability scale and headwords. All the books are graded into 100 levels from 0.0 to 10.0. The former are picture books with no words except for their titles, whereas the latter are authentic texts, inappropriate for ER. For more details on YL see Takase (2009c).

3.5. DATA ANALYSIS

As the proficiency level of the participants varied significantly, it was important to examine what differences each group of participants would show, if any.

In order to investigate the differences in reading quantity and reading style between the three groups, the reading volume of the participants was calculated in terms of the number of books and words read and the average word count per book which each group of students read during the semester.

The descriptive statistics of the pre- and the post-EPER cloze test scores (Version A) for upper, middle and lower groups were also calculated. Standard scores were also used, and those scores were converted into EPER levels for each group.

Lastly, the effects of ER on general reading proficiency were examined using a one-way repeated-measures ANOVA, which is a statistical test used to compare the means of three or more research groups employing a correlated-groups arrangement (Jackson, 2009).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. PARTICIPANTS' READING PERFORMANCE

Question 1 was: Does ER, using the SSS and SSR methods, motivate reluctant learners of different proficiency levels in repeater courses to read? In order to answer this question, the participants' reading logs were collected and calculated for interpretation. Table 1 shows the amount of reading by the participants in terms of the number of books and the number of words read, as well as the average word count per book.

Table 1. Participants' reading performance

Group	Item	N	M	SD	Min	Max
Upper	Books	29	69.3	44.08	13	197
	Words	29	72962.1	32784.30	18096	132050
	W/B	29	1947.0	2221.00	187	9485
Middle	Books	35	102.4	23.04	46	176
	Words	35	45231.2	26253.29	13017	124901
	W/B	35	471.7	326.2	136	1600
Lower	Books	30	104.7	36.14	52	238
	Words	30	46536.5	33389.36	13122	166010
	W/B	30	458.4	270.19	127	1075

As shown in Table 1, the Upper Group read the largest number of words, on average, and the smallest number of books, resulting in 1947.0 words per book. On the other hand, both the Middle and the Lower Groups read a relatively large number of books (102.4 and 104.7) which had a smaller number of words (45,231.2 and 46,536.5). The Middle and the Lower Groups, thus, had a relatively smaller word count per book. The average number of books in different levels in each group is detailed in Table 2.

Table 2. Average number of books read in different levels

Group	N	L1 (0.0<YL≦0.9)		L2 (1.0<YL≦1.9)		L3-5 (2.0<YL≦4.9)	
		M (SD)	Min–Max (n)*	M (SD)	Min–Max (n)*	M (SD)	Min–Max (n)*
Upper	29	49.0 (47.30)	1–179 (29)	16.6 (14.33)	0–49 (26)	2.6 (3.65)	0–14 (13)
Middle	35	90.8 (24.62)	15–123 (35)	8.7 (12.37)	0–50 (22)	0.2 (0.58)	0–3 (5)
Lower	30	91.7 (37.25)	29–198 (30)	8.9 (9.93)	0–50 (22)	1.3 (5.67)	0–31 (4)

Note: (n)= number of participants who read books of that particular level

As seen in Tables 1 and 2, participants in both the Middle and the Lower Groups read more than the required number (100) of books. Approximately 90% of the books were chosen from Level 1 books, and 8.7 (8.8%) and 8.9 (8.8%) books were read from Level 2 by 22 (62.9%) and 21 (70.0%) participants, respectively. Over 85% of the participants of each group stayed around Levels 1 and 2. Only a small number of the students: 5 (14.3%) and 4 (13.3%) from the Middle and the Lower Groups, respectively, advanced to Level 3. They read English books extensively, which they had never done in their former classes. Completing over 100 books in only three months promoted a great sense of achievement and became a source of higher self-esteem.

On the other hand, although all the participants in the Upper Group read 49.0 books (71.9%) from the lowest level at the beginning of the ER practice, 26 (89.7%) participants chose books from Level 2 at the same time. Then, 13 (44.8%) participants advanced to books at Levels 3, 4 and 5 with a word count of almost 10,000, as their ER practice pro-

ceeded. The quick advancement of these students in such a short period suggests that reading an abundance of easy books at the beginning of ER practice seems to have promoted the efficacy of ER for high level learners in the repeater classes.

In conclusion, reluctant students with both higher and lower level English proficiency in repeater classes were motivated to read books appropriate to their levels and according to their interest. Thus, ER was effective in motivating reluctant learners of repeater courses to read in quantity.

4.2. THE EPER TEST RESULTS

4.2.1. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR THE EPER TESTS

In order to answer research question 2 (Do learners of different proficiency levels in repeater courses make progress in their general English proficiency after three months of extensive reading?), pre- and post-EPER tests scores were calculated. Table 3 illustrates the descriptive statistics of the pre- and the post-EPER tests, which were administered at the beginning and at the end of the course.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for the pre- and the post-EPER tests

Group	N	Mean	SD	SE	Min	Max
Upper pre-test	29	22.14	4.88	.91	18	40
Upper post-test	29	26.14	6.17	1.15	15	43
Middle pre-test	35	14.77	1.52	.26	13	17
Middle post-test	35	19.89	3.64	.62	13	29
Lower pre-test	30	8.07	2.60	.47	3	12
Lower post-test	30	13.33	4.64	.85	3	23

The gains of the mean standard scores on the post-EPER test were, from the Upper Group to the Lower Group: 4.00 (26.14-11.14), 5.12 (19.89-14.77) and 5.26 (13.33-8.07), respectively. There was a significant variance of scores between the three groups. The results illustrate that each group showed significant improvement on the post-test.

4.2.2. DISTRIBUTION OF THE NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS IN THE EPER LEVEL

Table 4 illustrates the distribution of the participants in the groups who were placed in each EPER level based on the pre-EPER test scores (see Appendix 1 & Table 3). As shown in Table 4, the Upper Group consists of EPER levels E and over, while the Middle Group consists of most of the F EPER level, leaving four F participants to the Lower Group. Including these four Fs, G and H were placed in the Lower Group. There were no participants who scored high enough to be placed in A or B.

Table 4. EPER Levels in the pre- and the post-EPER tests

Level	UG pre	UG post	MG pre	MG post	LG pre	LG post
H	0	0	0	0	14	3
G	0	0	0	0	12	7
F	0	2	35	9	4	15
E	23	10	0	23	0	5
D	5	15	0	3	0	0
C	1	2	0	0	0	0
Tot	29	29	35	35	30	30

As seen in Tables 3 and 4, the participants in all three groups gained significantly on the post-test. As a result, all the students moved up to higher EPER levels with the exception of two participants who fell from E to F. In order to examine the statistics in more detail, a repeated-measures ANOVA was conducted on the EPER pre- and the post-test scores.

4.2.3. REPEATED-MEASURES ANOVA ON THE EPER PRE- AND POST-TESTS

The effects of extensive reading on overall reading proficiency were examined using a two-way repeated-measures factorial ANOVA. This test was used for the purpose of investigating the differences among the groups in their improvement differences on the post-test. Table 5 summarizes the repeated-measures ANOVA on the EPER pre- and post-test scores.

Table 5. Repeated-Measures ANOVA on the pre- and the post-EPER tests

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p	η^2	Observed Power
Between Subjects							
Group	5325.55	2	2662.77	98.32	.000**	.684	1.000
Error	2464.44	91	27.08				
Total	7789.99		2689.85				
Within Subjects							
EPER Test	1072.81	1	1072.81	154.79	.000**	.630	1.000
EPER x Group	14.26	2	7.13	1.03	.362	.022	.225
Error	630.71	91	6.93				
Total	1717.78						
TOTAL	9505.77						

**$p < .0001$

As seen in Table 5, the results of the analysis indicated a significant main effect for each group ($F = 98.32$, $df = 2$, $p = .000$), a significant main effect for the EPER test ($F = 154.79$, $df = 1$, $p = .000$) and an insignificant interaction effect between the EPER test x group ($F = 1.03$, $df = 2$, $p < .362$). The results revealed significant changes between the pre- and the post-EPER tests, although the EPER test factor and group factor showed no interaction.

As Tables 3, 4, and 5 illustrate, the results revealed that each group showed a significant improvement in English proficiency, moving into higher EPER levels with the exception of

two participants. The improvements took place after only three months of ER, utilizing the SSS and SSR methods. Students used a designated room in the school library. Such progress took place even though student proficiency levels were quite varied. The participants chose books according to their English ability with the help of the instructor. All levels of the repeaters showed improvement on the post-EPER test, which indicates that ER was effective. The test measured grammar learnt in context as well as the general English proficiency of students using SSR for 80 minutes a week. Thus, research question 2 (Do reluctant learners of different proficiency levels in repeater courses make progress on their posttest, which includes the measurement of grammar learnt in context as well as general proficiency in English after three months of extensive reading?) was answered positively.

4.3. POST-QUESTIONNAIRE

A 5-point Likert scale questionnaire was administered (5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = cannot decide, 2 = do not agree, 1 = strongly disagree). Differences among the three groups were examined in the four categories: (1) attitudes towards ER, (2) self-perceived effects of ER on English proficiency, (3) motivating factors for reading extensively and (4) demotivating factors that discouraged participants from reading extensively. Table 6 illustrates the mean scores of each item for the three groups.

Table 6. Attitudes towards ER

Group		Upper	Middle	Lower
Item		*M (SD)*	*M (SD)*	*M (SD)*
1.	Reading LRs & GRs was good for me.	4.33 (0.49)	4.24 (0.78)	4.80 (0.56)
2.	I have read a lot of books.	4.21 (0.69)	4.04 (0.92)	3.90 (0.83)
3.	I have enjoyed reading English books.	4.00 (1.17)	3.80 (0.80)	4.30 (0.74)
4.	I want to continue reading English books.	3.74 (1.21)	3.32 (0.91)	4.10 (0.99)
5.	I have come to like English through ER.	3.58 (1.28)	3.50 (0.89)	3.70 (1.08)
6.	I have come to enjoy reading English.	3.50 (1.28)	3.24 (1.12)	3.80 (0.78)

As seen in Table 6, all three groups responded favourably on all the items pertaining to attitudes towards ER. In particular, items 1, 2 and 3 received high scores. These participants found ER effective and enjoyable; as a result, they are willing to continue to read extensively. The responses to their attitudes towards ER were mostly very favourable.

Table 7. Self-perceived effects of ER on English proficiency

Group	Upper	Middle	Lower
Item	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)
7. My reading speed has increased.	3.83 (1.06)	3.60 (0.67)	4.10 (0.81)
8. My reading proficiency has improved.	3.46 (1.11)	3.33 (1.08)	4.20 (0.76)
9. My overall English proficiency has improved.	3.33 (1.07)	3.29 (0.69)	3.60 (0.70)
10. My listening proficiency has improved.	3.33 (1.20)	2.70 (0.84)	2.90 (0.76)
11. My writing proficiency has improved.	3.25 (1.07)	2.88 (0.82)	3.40 (0.72)
12. I have learned many new words.	3.17 (1.05)	3.04 (0.85)	3.11 (0.94)
13. My grammar knowledge has increased.	3.08 (1.09)	2.83 (0.66)	3.30 (0.88)
14. My speaking proficiency has improved.	3.08 (1.06)	2.79 (0.79)	3.20 (0.86)

Table 7 shows the students' self-perceived effects of ER on the various aspects of overall English proficiency: reading speed, reading skills, listening skills, writing skills, speaking skills, grammar knowledge and vocabulary acquisition. As seen in Table 7, the items that received the highest scores from all the three groups, were items 7 and 8 related to reading speed and proficiency. All the other values ranged from 2.70 to 3.60. As far as grammar knowledge is concerned, interestingly, the Lower Group reacted more positively than the other two groups.

Table 8. Motivating factors for reading extensively

Group	Upper	Middle	Lower
Item	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)
I read English books, because			
15. I felt a sense of accomplishment.	3.92 (1.42)	3.67 (0.71)	4.30 (1.06)
16. ER was a course requirement.	3.50 (0.87)	3.46 (0.99)	3.30 (0.94
17. I had fun reading English extensively.	3.46 (0.94)	3.17 (1.01)	3.70 (0.75)
18. I enjoyed seeing the increase of the number of words read.	3.38 (1.30)	3.33 (0.91)	3.70 (1.08)
19. I wanted to improve my English proficiency.	3.33 (1.01)	3.25 (1.01)	3.70 (0.79)
20. I like reading.	3.21 (1.00)	3.25 (1.00)	3.60 (0.99)
21. I like English.	3.04 (1.12)	2.92 (0.85)	3.30 (1.05)

Table 8 shows the results of the questionnaire pertaining to motivating factors for reading English books extensively. As seen in Table 8, item 15 was revealed as the strongest factor for motivating participants from all the groups. Item 16 was the second factor for the Upper and Middle groups, whereas it was the lowest for the Lower Group. For the participants from the Lower Group, items 17, 18 and 19 worked better for motivating them to read. Reading itself was perceived as fun. In addition, seeing the reading amount increase in terms of the number of words read also motivated the students to continue reading.

Table 9. Demotivating factors that discouraged students from reading extensively

Group	Upper	Middle	Lower
Item	*M (SD)*	*M (SD)*	*M (SD)*
I could not read much because…			
22. I was busy with courses in my major.	2.92 (1.01)	3.00 (0.86)	2.90 (1.02)
23. I am poor at English.	2.88 (1.18)	2.38 (1.01)	1.60 (1.14)
24. I could not find interesting books.	2.75 (0.99)	2.42.(0.94)	1.60 (1.10)
25. I do not like English.	2.71 (1.01)	2.46 (0.94)	1.40 (1.15)
26. I could not concentrate on reading.	2.50 (1.06)	2.54 (1.09)	1.90 (1.35)
27. I wanted to read books in Japanese.	2.46 (1.28)	2.29 (1.15)	2.20 (1.32)

Table 9 shows demotivating factors that discouraged the students from reading extensively. As the data show, the majority of the participants did not think they were demotivated by any of the factors. It should be noted that, among the three groups, the smallest numbers were received by the Lower Group on all the items. This suggests that the participants in the Lower Group felt least demotivated from reading extensively. They experienced the joy of reading English books extensively, which they admitted had benefited them (see Table 6).

To answer research question 3 (What are the impressions and attitudes towards ER, and learners' self-perception of their English proficiency improvement?), the results of the questionnaire were examined. The participants showed positive attitudes towards ER. As illustrated in Table 6, all the groups responded favourably to reading ER books of over 4.00 by a high percentage and enjoyed reading an abundance of English books. In addition, the lowest group showed a desire to continue reading even after the course was over. Some of them actually did continue reading voluntarily for another year. The participants also perceived the effects of ER to have benefited various aspects of their English proficiency, including reading speed and reading proficiency in particular (see Table 7). It is important to note that an average of over 60% (3.07) of the participants, approximately half (48.2%) of who claimed that grammar was the most difficult, perceived an improvement in their grammar. This point of view was put forward even though they had received no grammar instruction. Among several motivating factors, the strongest factor was a sense of accomplishment. This factor can be attributed to the abundance of books they completed, however easy they were. Only a small percentage responded to each demotivating factor, which suggests that the participants were motivated to read with enjoyment.

5. CONCLUSION

This study focused on the effects of extensive reading on reluctant repeater students' motivation, attitudes and achievements via a post-test. From the results of this study, it can be concluded that a range of students from reluctant repeaters with low English ability to higher level students who had failed their previous classes for reasons other than English

proficiency, benefited from ER, using the SSS and SSR methods. Although the length of the programme was only three months, almost all the participants improved their motivation to read English books. The participants from the Middle and the Lower groups succeeded in reading over 100 English books, and the Upper Group members read approximately 73,000 words, on average, in three months. The effects of reading in quantity on the participants' sentence level grammar as well as their general English proficiency were illustrated as gains on the post-EPER test scores in all the three groups. Each group showed significant gains, which was attributed to the ample time for SSR provided under the guidance of an instructor.

In conclusion, extensive reading appears to be one of the most effective approaches to motivate reluctant learners to read in quantity. This approach proved particularly valid for those enrolled in repeater courses where there were students with various proficiency levels. Motivated by reading materials, the reading method and the environment, the learners enjoyed the experience of reading many easily comprehensible books. They improved their general English proficiency while gaining favourable attitudes towards English. If ER were employed earlier in English education, such as in elementary school or secondary school, there might be a lower number of reluctant repeaters.

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Atsuko Takase, Ed.D, is an assistant professor at Kinki University. She has taught at high school and university for over ten years, employing extensive reading in any of her reading class. Her research interests include extensive reading, extensive listening, motivation, shadowing, vocabulary acquisition, and CALL. She has published a book on Extensive Reading/Listening teaching manual. She is currently serving as President of Japan Extensive Reading Association and a board member of Extensive Reading Foundation.

APPENDIX 1

EPER standard scores and EPER level conversion table, and summarized recommended approximate level of GR

Stand. Score	100-66	69-65	64-55	54-45	44-35	34-25	24-18	17-12	11-8	7-0
EPER Level	*	X	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Rec. Approx. GR level	Unsimplified	PGR6	PGR5	PGR4	PGR3	PGR2	PGR1	PGR1*	PGR0	PYR1
		OBW6	OBW5	OBW4	OBW3	OBR2	OBW1	PYR4	OBW0	PYR2
		CER6	CER5	CER4	CER3	CER2	CER1	PYR3	PYR3*	
			MMR5	MMR4	MMR3	MMR2L	MMR2	MMR1		

Note: Originally, individual books are recommended for each EPER level. Therefore, books in the same series and level appear in different recommended EPER levels. (EPER, 2003)