

## The Effects of an Extensive Reading Program for Japanese Junior High School Students

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to identify an effect of an extensive reading program held in two three-week sessions in June and in September for Japanese junior high school students by comparing the students who participated in the program with those who did not.

In the program the students were encouraged to read as many graded readers as possible. They chose a book from the class library, and read books at a suitable level and at their own pace. After reading one book, the students wrote a summary of the book and comments briefly in Japanese. Then they returned the book and submitted the sheet. At the end of each class, they were required to borrow at least one book and read it at home before the next class.

As a pre- and a post-test, a proficiency test called CASEC (Computerized Assessment System for English Communication) was conducted. The result of the tests shows that there is a significant difference in the scores between the students who participated in the program in June and September, and those who did not. However, the effect cannot be seen among the students who participated in the program in either June or September, therefore it is likely that a certain amount of reading is needed for improvement.

### 1. Introduction

In junior high schools in Japan, teachers do a wide variety of listening and speaking activities to foster students' proficiency in English. To acquire a language, a massive amount of input is needed. Krashen (1985) believes that comprehensible input is essential to acquire a language. However, in

Japanese junior high schools, students are not exposed to enough input. Teacher talk, textbooks, and handouts a classroom teacher provides are the main sources of input. Research has shown that the amount of input as a main source textbook is approximately no more than 19 pages of a paperback novel (Mizuno, 2002).

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To supplement the amount of input, extensive reading has been seen as a reasonable source of comprehensible input. (Kanatani, Osada, Kimura and Minai (1990, 1991) Including in this research are, studies with Japanese junior high school students as subjects by Kanatani et al.(1994,1995) and classroom reports by Taniguchi (1989) and Osa (1996).

Kanatani et al.(1994) summarize the effect of an extensive reading program for junior high school students as follows : after the 8<sup>th</sup> month of an extensive reading program, there is a significant difference in the English test scores between students who participated in the program and those who did not. Up to the 14<sup>th</sup> month, the difference continued, after that, the effect is likely to decrease.

However, there is little other research on the effect of extensive reading for Japanese junior high school students.

In this study, referring to Kanatani et al. (1994), we will examine the effect of an extensive reading program for Japanese junior high school students.

## **2. Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to identify the effects of an extensive reading program held in two three-week sessions in June and in September for Japanese junior high school students by comparing the students who participated in the program with a control group who did not.

## **3. Method**

### **3.1 Subjects**

The subjects for this study were 45 Japanese 3<sup>rd</sup> year junior high school students who participated in an extensive reading program as an elective course. They all attended the same national university affiliated school and were taught by the present researchers.

### **3.2 An extensive reading program**

#### **3.2.1 An elective course**

This program was offered for the 160 3<sup>rd</sup> year students as an elective course. The purpose of the elective courses was to improve proficiency in each subject. The following nine elective courses were held: Japanese calligraphy, social studies, math, science, music, physical education, fine arts, homemaking, and English extensive reading. The 1<sup>st</sup> half of the course consisted of daily 90-minute classes held on three days in June. The 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the course was held on an additional three days in September. Students chose one course for the 1<sup>st</sup> half and the 2<sup>nd</sup> half respectively.

#### **3.2.2 Procedure of the extensive reading program**

Each 90-minute class was conducted as follows:(See. Appendix 1)

- Students came to the multi-media room where the class was held, and chose a book from the class library, and read at their own pace. They were allowed to stop reading and change to another book as they liked.
- After reading one book, the students wrote a summary of the book and commented briefly in Japanese. Then they

returned the book and submitted the sheet. (See. Appendix 2)

- At the end of each class, students were required to borrow at least one additional book and read it at home by the next class.

### 3.2.3 Student orientation

In the first class, we instructed them on how to do reading in the class and we handed out a worksheet. The critical points were:

- Choose a book which is at a suitable level. That is, to facilitate reading gain without pain. (Day & Bamford, 1998).  
Read a book that can be read with ease and comfort.

### 3.3 Reading Materials

Graded readers published by foreign publishers were used. The following were readers that were mainly used.

- Bookworm Series (Starters, Stage 1, Stage 2) by Oxford University Press
- Penguin Readers (Easystarts, Beginner, Elementary) by Longman
- Classic tales by Oxford University Press

### 3.4 Analysis procedure

As a pre-and a post-test, the CASEC proficiency test was administrated to all the 3<sup>rd</sup> year students at the end of May. CASEC was developed by The Society for Testing English Proficiency Inc. (*Nippon Eigo Kentei Kyokai*) to assess examinees' proficiency in English. It is based on Item Response Theory. It consists of the following four sections; Section 1 : Fill in blanks in a sentence (Vocabulary), Section 2 : Fill in blanks in a discourse (Reading), Section 3 : Listen & answer a question (Listening), Section 4 : Listen & Fill

in blanks (Dictation).

The pre-test was conducted at the end of May, which was about a week before the start of the program in June and the post-test in early December, which was about three months after the program in September.

The students were divided into three groups as follows:

Experiment Group A ( $N=8$ ), which consisted of students who participated in the program in June and September.

Experiment Group B ( $N=37$ ), which consisted of students who participated in the program in either June or September.

Control group ( $N=45$ ), which consisted of students who did not participate in the program.

In order to match the students of the experimental group A or B with those of the control group, the following procedures were adopted : first students who got the same total scores on the pre-test were paired, then those who got close total scores were paired. Second, in terms of motivation toward learning English, the present researchers carefully chose subjects for the control group who were as well-motivated as those of the experimental groups. We were able to choose subjects as we taught the subjects English for three years and knew them very well. It should be noted that some students who did not choose to participate in the reading program were very motivated to study English. They decided to take extra math classes instead as they needed to improve in that subject more than they needed improvement in English.

**Table 3. 1** Descriptive statistics of pre-test ( $N=8$ )

N=8* 2		Experiment Group A	Control Group
TOTAL	Mean	439.125	439.250
	SD	51.817	52.941

**Table 4. 1** Descriptive statistics of post-test ( $N=8$ )

N=8* 2		Experiment Group A	Control Group
TOTAL	Mean	473.250	463.000
	SD	62.002	36.020
Section1	Mean	107.125	104.875
	SD	13.685	9.804
Section2	Mean	119.375	110.875
	SD	10.596	11.154
Section3	Mean	122.000	118.500
	SD	33.594	9.957
Section4	Mean	124.750	128.750
	SD	14.240	16.369

Eventually the average scores and standard deviation of the experiment group and those of the control group were almost the same. The results are shown in Table 3. 1 and 3. 2.

Finally, in order to measure the effect of the extensive reading program, the total scores and scores of each section of the post-test between the experimental groups, and the control group were compared. To compare the total scores a paired  $t$ -test was conducted. To compare the scores of each section, analysis of covariance (hereafter cited as ANCOVA) was conducted, as the scores of each section were not utilized for matching.

#### 4. Results

**Table 3. 2** Descriptive statistics of pre-test ( $N=37$ )

N=37* 2		Experiment Group B	Control Group
TOTAL	Mean	402.892	402.514
	SD	72.372	72.264

**Table 4. 2** Descriptive statistics of post-test ( $N=37$ )

N=37* 2		Experiment Group B	Control Group
TOTAL	Mean	437.216	447.946
	SD	77.702	62.827
Section1	Mean	100.135	99.757
	SD	21.821	18.643
Section2	Mean	105.459	106.514
	SD	22.348	17.252
Section3	Mean	115.865	123.405
	SD	25.546	21.693
Section4	Mean	115.757	118.270
	SD	25.035	25.620

Table 4. 1 and 4. 2 show the descriptive statistics of the post-test of the total scores and scores of each section of CASEC.

Paired  $t$ -test or ANCOVA was conducted to compare the scores of each section between the experimental group A and the control group, and between the experimental group B and the control group. Table 4. 3 shows the results of paired  $t$ -test and ANCOVA.

As shown in Table 4.3, there is a significant difference in the residual scores controlled for the post-test scores between the experimental group A and the control group ( $N=16$ ,  $F(1, 13)=7.497$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). It should be noted that the error variances between these groups can be statistically considered to be the same and that there is

not a significant interaction effect between pre-test and grouping.

Section 2 of CASEC was made to measure reading ability; too, therefore, the effect of the extensive program might be an improvement in reading ability.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. Summary of the results

As shown in Table 4. 3, there is a significant difference in scores between the experimental group A and the control group. That is, the effect of the extensive reading program resulted in an improvement in reading ability. However, the effect cannot be seen among the experimental group B, therefore it is likely that a certain amount of reading is needed for improvement.

### 5.2. Interpretation of the results

Why can an improvement of reading ability be seen in this study? There might be some reasons for the development in reading.

Firstly, reading extensively itself has an effect on improving reading. However, there was no effect for the students who participated in the program for three weeks in either June or September, so a certain amount of extensive reading might be needed for development.

Secondly, the quality of reading might improve. It is likely that the students who participated in the program for six weeks both in June and September got used to reading extensively. That might lead students to read more effectively. The following are what they wrote in their report cards.

**Table 4. 3** The results of paired t-test and ANCOVA

	Experiment Group A	Experiment Group B
<i>N</i>	8×2	37×2
TOTAL	×	×
Section1	×	×
Section2	○	×
Section3	×	×
Section4	×	×

Note:○:There is a significant difference at the .05 level.

×:There is no significant difference.

“I tried to read easier books fast and accurately.” (Student K)

“I learned to read books faster.” (Student O)

“In June I was able to read books at an easier level, but in September I could read books at the next level. Now that I am used to reading English books, I don’t feel I’m reading English books.” (Student C)

“I read fewer books this time than the last time, but I can read them more deeply. (Student H)

Thirdly, the time during the year when the program was run might be an optimal time for the students to read extensively. As Ota (2002), and Ota, Kanatani, Kosuge, and Hidai.(2003) mention, in June and September of their 3<sup>rd</sup> year of junior high school the students produced utterances at a discourse

level. It could mean that they comprehend sentences at a discourse level more easily.

Lastly, this time of the school year could also be an appropriate time for them to read extensively, as they become more conscious of entrance examinations for high school, in which they are required to read long passages.

### 5.3. Suggestions for future research

It should be noted that this study has examined only one extensive reading program as an elective course for the students, therefore the results of this study might not be taken as evidence for the efficacy of extensive reading programs for all Japanese junior high school students. Suggestions for future research would be as follows:

Firstly, the answers of the questionnaires by the students who participated in this study should be examined. In Kanatani et al (1994, 1995), the subjects' attitude toward reading improved.

Secondly, each student in experimental group A should be interviewed more thoroughly. How much did each read over the six weeks? What books at what levels did they read? How did they react to each book? How did their attitude toward reading change? These results might shed light on the secret of success in an extensive reading program.

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### Notes

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## Appendix 1

オリエンテーション資料

英語選択授業 「英語をたくさん読もう」によるこそ！

この講座の目的:

英語の本をたくさん読むことにより、読むことの楽しさと同時に英語の力をつける

授業のある日は 6月5日、12日、19日

授業の流れ

### 1. 本を選ぶ

たくさん読むことが目的なので、楽しんで読めるレベルから始め、次第にレベルを上げるようにしよう。まずは簡単だと思うレベルの本から読もう。1ページに知らない単語がたくさんあるような本は選ばないこと。

### 2. 本を読む

- ・ 辞書はできるだけ使用せず、知らない単語は前後関係から判断しながらできるだけ早く多く読むようにしよう。
- ・ 日本語へ訳しながら読むのではなく、英語のままに要旨や話の流れを理解するように読もう。つまらないと思うところや難しいところはとばしても速く一冊を読み切るようにしよう。
- ・ リラックスして読もう。
- ・ 面白くない、難しいと思った本は途中で読むのをやめ、新しい本を読んでかまいません。
- ・ わからなくて気になるところ、ここをはずしたら話のポイントがわからなくなるところでは先生に質問に来てかまいません。

### 3. 簡単にあらすじを書く

授業の最後に今日読んだ本について簡単にあらすじを書きましょう。

### 4. 家で読む本を借りる

今度の時間までに家で読む本を借りてください。最低1冊は読むようにしましょう。次の時間までに読み終わった人は英語科研究室に持ってきてください。そしてまた次の本を借りましょう。

とにかくたくさん読みましょう。さてあなたの目標は、、、

## Appendix 2

### Report Card

Class ( ) No ( ) Name ( )

No.	Date:	Hour:
Title		
＜読んだ感想＞（該当するものに○をつけよう）		
おもしろかった	—— —— —— ——	つまらなかった
内容がよくわかった	—— —— —— ——	全然わからなかった
辞書をよく使った	—— —— —— ——	全然使わなかった
Summary (in English or Japanese) *簡単に書こう。10分以上かけないこと。 その時間があつたら次の本を読もう。		