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Disruption and Remediation in Online Extensive Reading— An Account of True Reading Proficiency

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Abstract

Stemming from observed reading deficiencies, this paper presents the results of two *Eiken*-like¹ trials that were designed to measure the reading competencies of a cross-section of 236 second-year engineering and computer science students at a four-year university in central Japan with a view to better understanding what curriculum changes might be required. For example, should time and resources be reallocated to build students' knowledge of vocabulary and sentence structure found in assigned readings by changing the emphasis on extensive reading (ER) to having more explicit instruction, or can the existing weighting between ER and attending to assigned readings remain unaltered? If changes to the curriculum are recommended, could they be additive? At the end, a small-scale, Moodle-based remedial reading plan is introduced.

Key words: extensive reading, MReader, 英検 (*Eiken*), reading proficiency, cheating

1. Introduction

Advocates of extensive reading (ER) acknowledge its benefits in improving reading fluency because it aids in permanently internalizing language patterns. As a result, ER has become a mainstream component of many EFL curricula worldwide and Japan is no exception. Generally speaking, most courses for Japanese university students are 15 weeks long and meet once a week for 90 minutes. Faced with time constraints and perhaps competing views as to how each of the four skills should be prioritized, it may be difficult to allocate adequate time (if any) for in-class extensive reading. As a result and as one might expect, many students read graded readers and sometimes other short readings on their own outside the classroom. These circumstances have direct relevance to this study, which may be applicable at other universities in Japan and indeed around the world.

MReader was created by Professor Thomas Robb and is often used with Moodle, although not exclusively. It was designed as a means for instructors and (many) students to monitor ER effort and progress in a reliable, fair and efficient way. There are 7,000+ timed quizzes, each consisting of 10 randomized comprehension questions, that students must take and pass in order to demonstrate that they have successfully read their selected graded reader. Once students have been enrolled in the institution's Moodle system, it is quite easy for the system administrator to grant them MReader access. Hence, none to very little work is required of teachers and it affords students many opportunities to read about a wide array of topics at their own reading level.

To enhance motivation, at our university the reporting of student progress has been further "gamified"

with a colorful progress bar and book cover "stickers" for each successfully read book. There are tens of thousands students in many countries who are using MReader, including at our university. MReader is also used with Moodle. For example, data at <https://mreader.org/mreaderadmin/s/> showed that when the page was viewed, students at 28 universities in Japan were actively using MReader, in addition to students in China, Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines and South Africa. In fact, overall actual usage in Japan and abroad is far more extensive than reported. More general usage data can be found at https://mreader.org/mreaderadmin/s/html/access_stats.html. Despite being significantly less than current usage for which there is no single source and thus not reported herein, Robb stated (2015, p. 146) that there were 80,000 users in 25 countries. In a word, there is an enormous number of MReader users domestically and worldwide with no evidence of decrement.

Challenges of instituting extensive reading for credit

2. Background

At this university, while teaching students enrolled in basic level classes, on a number of occasions from 2016 to 2018, after asking multiple students to read some sentences aloud, I was astonished to discover that some of them were unable to read somewhat elementary, short, linear sentences without subordination, and that a number of others could only read very haltingly, even though the readings had been judged level-appropriate and had been carefully selected by a committee of well-qualified Japanese

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1. *Eiken* (*eigo kentei*, literally an "inspection" or "verification" of English), is a standardized, made in Japan, proficiency test valued by many employers now, taken by hundreds of thousands of Japanese youth, especially, and which may become an accepted part of university admission criteria in the near future. See <https://www.eiken.or.jp> for detailed information.

and native-speaker educators. After learning that a number of these students were illiterate in English and others well below the necessary standard to pass any English course, I began to consider whether allocating time for reviewing English fundamentals online (via Moodle) would be more beneficial than striving for a sometimes unreachable ER target, described hereafter. Based on these and subsequent in-class observations and concerns, whenever it seemed unattainable, I reduced the established ER target in some classes that had many weak readers. In the context of these concerns, some merits and (localized) drawbacks of ER using MReader are identified below.

3. The current extensive reading situation

Coincident with regular in-class work and various homework assignments, it was decided to include ER for credit as part of the course requirements in all first- and second-year English courses. Using MReader, students were required to read 30,000 words or more in the ER programme for 15% of their total grade each semester. Later, ER data was unexpectedly selected for administrative purposes as a KPI, thereby making ER a possible criterion of teacher evaluation. Despite some debate over the suitability of the reading target (30,000 words), as students could earn 1% for every 2,000 words read, it was mostly accepted that 15% would be neither too high-stakes nor too easy. It was conceded that not all students would reach the target. Ultimately, it was decided that some extensive reading, even if imperfect, was, and still is, much better than none whatsoever.

In his defense of MReader, Thomas Robb (2015) has defended the use of quizzes in ER and others have noted that there are functions in MReader to detect and prevent “cheating” when taking quizzes (Al Damen, T.M., 2018; Kipling, L, 2018; Walker, R. 2018). At this institution, too, when end of semester anomalies were detected, the following semester students were limited to attempting two quizzes in a 24-hour period. Even with pre-emptive settings configured, if ER is to be for credit, there is no escaping that students have to be assessed in some way and as a result students trying to find “workarounds” will be one consequence of it. While MReader is not optimal (reading multiple self-selected books for pleasure during leisure time is), it is well designed and currently the least expensive (free) and best scalable option. However, the establishment of the ER programme produced two unintended consequences that educators who are planning to use MReader and possibly Xreading may need to take into consideration.

4. Repercussions from ER

From 2018, instructors at this university have been witness to new, unfortunate practices, the first one not altogether unexpected given the somewhat high stakes (15%) associated with ER for credit. Aware of their inability to read very well, such as the at risk students described above, or due to meta-cognitive

beliefs about their own ability, when suddenly faced with the daunting prospect of having to read more than ever before, many students (over 100 per semester over two years) resigned themselves to getting a lower grade by foregoing the 15%, but at the same time redoubled their efforts to get at least a passing grade of 60% (70.59 out of the remaining 85). Most have been successful. Although they attempted no extensive reading, many must have paid attention to the course readings, grammar, and vocabulary.

In the second case, clusters of students downloaded ocr scanning apps to quickly scan page after page of their graded readers which were then automatically converted into text. These could be saved into various text files including pdfs. Next, using the Google Translate app, they translated entire books into Japanese and retained the files on their phone or computer. DeepL, a new machine translation app, is significantly better than Google Translate. As this goes to print, there have been improvements in the form of new, integrated apps. As of February 2020, several scan-and-translate apps claim to make the process *virtually* seamless. “...Just snap a photo of some text with your mobile, tap on your screen and get the translated text in a second!” (from Translate Photo+Scan). From an educator’s perspective, regrettably, technology has enabled savvy students to *successfully* do away with ER, because at the same time they are almost certainly receiving enough ER credit. As substantiation, twice, before a specific class began, I looked on as students at the back of the room were *diligently* sharing their files with one another in the same serious way they do homework together in the library. Strong criticism is unwarranted (and we have expressed none) since from their perspective they are merely doing their best to succeed in their ecosystem. In at least one other instance, a particularly resourceful and competent student has even managed to monetize ER by completing the scanning and translation processes described above, using MReader to handily pass many quizzes, all the while saving the results in order to finally sell his/her product, purportedly for not insignificant financial gain. This is analogous to excellent students in the past selling their (biology) notes. Since some students have been able to transform ER into an efficient series of automated tasks, it is not difficult to extrapolate that the same technologies could be exploited with their textbooks, although to date there has been no evidence suggesting a need to investigate this.

While the preceding descriptions are definitely problematic and need to be addressed, especially the significant number of students who opt out of the ER programme altogether, reliable internal data and anecdotal observations (students reading graded readers before class) suggest that the majority of students still seem to be doing ER properly and have applied significant time and effort to reach their respective reading targets. Consider that in the first semester of 2017 the students who chose to read

(n=346) read 7,473,638 words or a simple average 21,600 words per student. In fact, 1231 books were read and the average word-count per book was 6071. In the latter semester (n=341), 1468 books were read with an average word-count of 6107 — in total 8,965,704 words or a simple average of 26,292 words per student. Fast forward to the latter semester of 2019, when “assistive technologies” were most readily available and known: 17,190,087 words were read (nearly double the 2017 latter semester total) by 686 students (also almost double). 2687 books were read with an average word-count of 6398. The extent to which books were “assistively read” is unknown, but it seems that technology may have played a role in this impressive total.

5. Reading Survey

Before asking students to read *Eiken*-like passages (see next section), initially, in order to have a general sense of students’ reading habits, I prepared a straightforward survey which asked students eight questions about how often, how many, and what kinds of materials they read (see Appendix 1). 243 replies from 7 classes of second-year students (n=236 in this first phase) were received, of which 7 were discarded. The discards included four randomly and hastily completed surveys (finished in 10 seconds). Three others were discarded when it became apparent that only each first choice had been circled, which produced impossible results. Not all students answered each question and multiple responses were possible for question 3. Had the survey results indicated a noticeably strong bias against reading, I decided that I would abandon the next phase of this research, measuring performance on *Eiken*-like reading passages, since students likely would have harboured strong feelings against being evaluated on their English proficiency.

To the initial question “Do you like to read?”, 153 responded Yes, 50 Not really, and 38 No. With a 1.7 to 1 positive to negative ratio, I decided to proceed with the next phase (*Eiken*-like reading).

Based on the results, many students seemed to have mostly answered honestly, although some seem to have exaggerated their reading habits, since it was implausible that 0-2 total hours spent reading could match up with their claims (reading novels — 113). In total, 211 indicated that they read *manga* (143) and online *manga* (68), which seems to generally align with those who claim to have read for 0-2 hours (131) or 2-3.5 hours a week (63). There would have been enough time to read them. However, regarding the 113 students who reported that they read novels, presumably they would have needed more time during the week than 0-2 hours or 2-3.5 hours. If not, then they would have needed to have been reading at a very high wpm rate or have read the novel(s) over several months, both of which seem very unlikely. Moreover, quite a number of respondents (42) specified that they read all three types and, overall, 83 reported reading novels and *manga* or online *manga* in spite of many of them only having claimed to read for 0-2 hours per week.

I wanted to find out whether students had read specific popular literature because as they are well written, it would tend to suggest that readers would likely be reasonably capable, accustomed to reading more complicated compositions, unlike *manga*, which are comprised of short, mostly uncomplicated patterns. Had there been a lot of popular literature readers, it might suggest they could be better at decoding English at the *Eiken* (英検) 2 grade level, which is examined in the latter part of this paper. On the other hand, it was assumed that if there had been a very strong preponderance of *manga* readers, they could be less familiar with and possibly less competent at reading more involved compositions consisting of longer sentences with subordination. *Manga*, online *manga* and graphic novels are strongly visual, arguably at the expense of, but definitely instead of, more involved structure. Results seem to suggest that not so many students have read popular literature and that by a very large margin of 6:1 they had very little interest in Haruki Murakami, Japan’s most popular author. It is possible that my choices of authors and titles were flawed.

Researchers remind us that we should not overly rely on self-reported data. Taking this into account, for books read in 2018 that were not *manga* or for homework or ER, the responses (231) still seemed to correlate with general reading habits (except for novels read), notably hours per week spent reading. About one-third (79) read no other books (in Japanese), but 26% (62) read at least 1-3 books, and over 38% (90) read from 3-12+ books. It was beyond the scope of this survey to ascertain the length and types of books read.

I asked whether they had read any famous books and about their physical activity level to have a better sense as to whether they might be active (generally people who are energetic tend to be motivated to try more of everything) and reasonably well-read. Slightly more than half (54.66%) had read one or more famous books (not necessarily novels) and 62.5% were either not very active or not active.

Summarizing the data, a little over half (131) of respondents indicated that they did not spend very much time reading for pleasure, but when they did, they often read *manga* (supported by in-class observations), however close to 40% claim to be reading novels and other books (one even wrote that he only reads motorcycle guides). The responses tended to mesh well with the student intake profiles: a little over half have verifiably weak skills (in multiple subjects) and are admitted without taking rigorous exams, while the remaining approximately 40%-45% (30%-35% and 10%) who tend to have moderate or strong skills, respectively, are admitted based on their scores on conventional entrance exams. Based on these responses, I decided to survey students with moderate proficiency in English.

6. Rationale for and administration of *Eiken*-like reading passages

Incoming students take an 80-item grammar and idiom-based placement test which, for years, has accurately predicted their overall understanding of English. Part IV (a somewhat dense 500-word reading passage) of the university's entrance exams has also accurately predicted students' general reading comprehension (based on 18 years of results), but not to what extent they can actually read (see detailed definition of reading below). In addition, comprehensive standardized testing across multiple sections, a follow-up bi-modal proficiency assessment after completion of final mandatory English studies in second year, plus instructors' anecdotal accounts, allow for an accurate characterization and assessment of students' performance and abilities. In spite of diligently tracking students' performance, to date there hasn't been an attempt to confirm their physiological reading ability. Against this backdrop, and because of the discovery of illiterate and extremely weak readers (*ubi supra*), I determined that it would be valuable to also try to physically gauge mainstream students' reading ability in order to refine existing data with a view to possibly creating online remedial exercises.

For the purposes of this article, proficient reading is the relatively rapid, correct association of the meanings of previously learned sets of sounds (speech patterns) with sets or clauses of written words. Reading is recursive and directly dependent on working memory. According to electromyographic and other research, when there is no interference, there is minute subvocalization even in extremely capable readers. There is also a case to be made for phonological coding. For a detailed explanation of reading and inner speech, interested readers may wish to read *Psychology of Reading: 2nd Edition*, pp.187-214 by Rayner, Pollatsek, Ashby, and Clifton.

Eiken grade 2 was chosen as the benchmark because it is the target MEXT has set for high school students to reach (<https://www.eiken.or.jp/eiken/en/research/>). Therefore it is reasonable to expect that university-educated students should be able to achieve at least this proficiency level. Having administered hundreds of *Eiken* tests for well over a decade, I agree with MEXT's determination that *Eiken* grade 2 is an attainable target for the majority of high school students. Moreover, I am very familiar with how it is constructed and what it tests.

I administered two *Eiken*-like reading passages to second-year, almost exclusively male engineering students who were enrolled in general English, but not to students in the Fundamental English stream or the more advanced stream. Because the levels of these other two streams are already broadly known via testing and anecdotal accounts (above), assessing the very weakest students might have been too stressful and even demoralizing. As for the approximately 70 students in the advanced stream,

because they are already required to read much longer and considerably more difficult passages (CEF-B1, TOEFL 503-540 — <https://www.cengageasia.com/Catalogs/ELT/2020/catalog1/>) in class, it was likely that their reading proficiency would be adequate. Also, by a show of hands, most years, about one-third of students already have *Eiken* grade 2. Through this process I hoped to ascertain the general English reading level (if generalizable) of the majority of students (280 +/-) by assessing a cross-section of putatively medium-proficiency students. Many of these students had been participating in the ER program described above.

When volunteers were being sought, it was explicitly delineated in class and later when they came to read, that there was no need to achieve a specific score and trial results would have no bearing whatsoever on their grade. They were told that the trials would take no more than three to five minutes of their time. Possibly because it was perceived as a low-stakes, no skin in the game situation, relatively few students elected to participate (n=46).

In fact, the first reading passage was not "*Eiken*-like" as it was taken directly from the *Eiken* website where it was (and is) posted as a sample of the grade 2 level. The choice of the second reading was carefully considered according to its length and complexity. It was deliberately chosen because it was the final paragraph of the last unit that all students had ostensibly studied at the end of the first semester. Presumably they would have needed to have studied it attentively in June and July 2019 in order to score well on two online quizzes and a 25% test at the end of that semester (i.e., they ought to have had familiarity with it). In the course of normal in-class instruction, it was read to them 1-3 times before they encountered it again in this assessment between July 12, 2019 and January 22, 2020.

7. Procedure

Each student was welcomed and invited to sit down, then asked whether s/he was familiar with *Eiken* testing. Significantly under half (16) were. Three had taken the *Eiken* pre-2 test and two had already passed the *Eiken* grade 2 test. The remaining students (11) knew about *Eiken* procedures but hadn't taken a test yet. When several were obviously nervous (e.g., "I am so nervous."), they were given time to relax through general conversation in Japanese. To ensure full comprehension, the reading procedure was explained to each student in Japanese. However, as this article is in English, English instructions follow: "Read the first passage silently for 20 seconds. Then please read it aloud to me. For the second passage, it's exactly the same procedure." I timed each student with a phone stopwatch and then asked them to "Please read it aloud." The procedure was repeated for the second passage. This is a slightly modified version of actual *Eiken* instructions, which are given in English. While students were reading, I listened carefully, rarely making notes so as not to cause distraction or nervousness. Immediately after the

student had finished, I made various notes when applicable. In some cases, errors were so frequent that only the ones that most seriously impeded communication were recorded. So as to forestall any research bias such as wanting to believe a student was better (or worse) than actual performance indicated, no identifying information was retained. There were no difficulties encountered in the course of administering these trials. Upon finishing, students were able to make comments, but none was solicited, then cookies or sweets were offered as a token of appreciation and they were thanked for their time. As a side note, due to their trials, several students expressed an interest in studying for the actual grade 2 test because they were unsatisfied (and possibly embarrassed) with their performance, which they had self-reported as being “really bad.”

8. The reading passages

Because the formatting of this article is in columns, each slash corresponds to a line break in the original reading passages. The first passage was from the *Eiken* website (<https://www.eiken.or.jp/eiken/en/downloads/files/Sample-2ji-2kyu.pdf>) and the second one was from the students' textbook. Refer to Appendix 2 for the actual layout, but note that the original font size was Times New Roman 12.

(1) Practical Skills

Today, practical skills such as using computers and speaking foreign languages are regarded as important. As a result, many schools are offering classes for these skills, and learning them gives students more opportunities to find jobs. However, some teachers say that students are losing interest in traditional subjects like math and history. Practical skills are useful, but studying traditional subjects is also important.

(2) Positive attitude

In addition to exercise and balanced nutrition, a positive attitude can help you to live a long, healthy life. Research shows that optimistic people are both healthier and happier than those who have a negative attitude. Keeping a positive outlook during stressful times can help your emotional well-being and physical health. Just as your body needs physical exercise, your mind also needs to practice positive thoughts to stay healthy.

Reading passage 1 is comprised of 63 words in 4 sentences (15, 21, 16, 11). The second and fourth sentences have pauses marked by a comma (3,18) (4, 7). Reading passage 2 is comprised of 70 words also in 4 sentences (19, 17, 16, 18) and the first and fourth sentences have pauses marked by a comma (7,12) (7, 11). Reading passage 2 has referents that make it slightly more difficult to understand than reading passage 1 (*both* healthier and happier than *those* who; Just as...also). However, as described, ostensibly, students had already read/examined it multiple times. Sentence 2 of reading passage 1 is the longest (21) and has two pronouns (these, them), which makes it cognitively more taxing than other sentences. Simi-

larly, in reading passage 2, sentence 4 has the highest cognitive load and 18 words.

It is possible to account for some reading difficulties due to the way words are arranged on the page. When trying to create or remember meaning units, in spite of the commas inserted to assist with understanding and reduce cognitive load, where sentences continue for 2 lines (reading passage 1, lines 2-3 and reading passage 2, lines 1-2), they may prove more difficult to understand since reading is recursive and directly dependent on working memory. In the initial design, this was taken into consideration and viewed as one aspect of reading at the *Eiken* grade 2 level.

9. Results

All 46 participants were evaluated exactly as is done for the *Eiken* test, according to their reading fluency, pronunciation and intonation, and sense (comprehension of meaning units) on a five-point scale. One is very weak (almost a nonreader), two is weak (errors hinder understanding), three is satisfactory (understandable with some errors that do not hinder understanding) and therefore a passing mark, four is very good and 5 is excellent. For reading passage 1, 17 participants clearly failed, 6 were borderline and 23 clearly passed. For reading passage 2, 21 participants clearly failed, 5-7 were borderline and 18 clearly passed. For these trials, I evaluated exactly as I have for actual *Eiken* tests: if it was not a clear pass, then it was a fail. Based on these results, as judged, reading passage 2 was more difficult even though everyone had had opportunities to study/understand its meaning. Whether the pass-fail ratio was satisfactory or not is an internal matter, but for regular, mainstream students at this university it was not. As a result, both the way ER is conducted needs to be improved upon and probably remedial reading practice needs to be made an integral part of some courses, and for credit to encourage diligence. This will be taken up in the Discussion section which follows.

Due to space restraints and so as not to further overload the reader with data, only the main reading difficulties experienced are presented below, but many more errors were observed. A number means instances. H means hesitation/stumbling but understood, Mp means quite strongly mispronounced including due to L1 interference, and Ua means unable to articulate. Refer to Appendix 3 for scoring and a truncated record of difficulties.

Reading passage 1

practical (4, Mp), foreign (5, H, Mp, Ua), languages (6, Mp), dropped s and [læŋgerdʒ] for [læŋgwidʒ/læŋgwədʒ], regarded (4, H, Mp), offering (9, H, Mp), opportunities (8, H, Mp, Ua) and losing (5, Mp).

I did not expect that students would have trouble with *offering* and *opportunities* given their position in the sentence even though it was the longest at 21 words. The dropped s and mispronunciation of *languages* was expected as was the lack of familiarity with

foreign and *losing* [lu:zɪŋ], which was pronounced [lɒsɪŋ].

Reading passage 2

nutrition (16, Mp, Ua), optimistic (7, H, Mp) healthier (11, H, Mp), optimistic (7, H) and physical (5, H).

Given that students had supposedly studied this passage several times and had heard it as well, I was not anticipating any significant difficulties. Therefore I was concerned when 35% of students had a lot of trouble with *nutrition*. A number could not say it. Some were similarly confounded by *healthier* and *optimistic*, which I imagined would be easy words when I was considering whether to select the passage. Regarding sense (below), students were conspicuously weak when it came to parsing meaning and therefore were mostly unable to read smoothly. Short of asking each student directly why they were having trouble, it is impossible to know their exact reasons for being unable to read relatively smoothly. However, it is minimally apparent that they had either forgotten the passage and/or they hadn't spent enough time and effort to internalize meaning. If accurate, this may be beyond the control of individual instructors.

For both reading passages, I tallied the total scores and divided by the number of participants (46) to get an approximate average score out of 5 for each of reading fluency, pronunciation and intonation, and sense. 1-2, 2-3, 3-2 and 3-4 are numerically inexact, but more accurately reflect actual proficiency.

Reading passage 1

reading fluency - 2.96

pronunciation and intonation - 3.03

sense - 2.84

Reading passage 2

reading fluency - 2.64

pronunciation and intonation - 2.76

sense - 2.59

On every measure, reading passage 1 was noticeably easier and both passages followed the same pattern in terms of relative difficulty. As a cohort, their scores were unsatisfactory, particularly for the passage that they had studied.

10. Discussion

Individual scores tell a different story (a few were excellent and one-third were very weak), but as a group students were unable to pass either trial (reading passage 1: $8.83 \div 3 = 2.94$ and reading passage 2: $7.99 \div 3 = 2.63$). This means some form of action is required. Since we are satisfied with the ease of use and scalability of MReader and do not want to switch over to Xreading because it costs money that we do not have and normally is not used in conjunction with paper graded readers, it seems that either ways need to be found to require under-performing students to read a book(s) with an accompanying sound file (i.e.,

bi-modally) or require mandatory remedial reading with sound files, as a part of some courses.

It is not my intention in this paper to detail the significant body of research advocating a multi-pronged, and somewhat apparent, approach to teaching reading. All the same, it should be noted that for decades there has been a chorus of empirical support for bi-modal or multi-modal input in order to maximize the complex process of reading in L1 and foreign language settings, ranging from the neurological, to research in reading while listening (Husson Isozaki 2016, 2018 and especially Cheetham, 2017), to storytelling and reading aloud (Stephens, 2018). At our university, students who might otherwise be unmotivated to read might well enjoy some multi-modal YouTube stories and unwittingly and unconsciously learn to read better.

While reading books with sound files is optimal, since there are hundreds of students taking part in ER, it would be very difficult for instructors to confirm whether students had bi-modally completed one book and subsequently determine how much extra credit to award. Moreover, there would both be the matter having enough of such books in the library and the fact that a substantial number of them still come bundled with CDs (students do not have CD players). Although there are readings online as noted above (Xreading), to the extent possible, we want to encourage reading with books.

The foregoing notwithstanding, there are some stories of appropriate length and difficulty online, for example at <https://eslyes.com> and some moderate length, mostly low-intermediate stories for native speaker children that some students may have heard of at <https://www.storiestogrowby.org/stories-for-kids>. There are also numerous, wonderful YouTube audio stories with subtitles at every reading level, including "How the Tiger Got Its Stripes," "Rumplestiltskin," and "The Black Cat." Instructors would have to form a team, however, in order to compile a suitable list of titles and making many quizzes for stories such as these would be possible (and would be necessary if for credit), but would require Herculean effort unless there were many teachers contributing to a database much like MReader.

To implement remedial reading on a large scale, there is really no way to get around using online media, as the process must unfold in carefully controlled stages from sentences to paragraphs, with ample review and constant aural input over two or more semesters. While MReader has its limitations, Moodle itself is being continually updated. Its Quiz module seems to be particularly well-suited to assisting weak readers and even advanced readers like medical students who need to learn how to pronounce difficult, specialist technical terms such as rhinitis or anaphylaxis.

Within the Quiz module, there is a Word Select 3rd party plugin. It is also possible to add sound files, images and even videos.



Fig. 1 Moodle options

After choosing Quiz and entering some basic information, questions can be made. By choosing Word Select, you can “highlight” a single syllable, word, chunk, or clause. Using rhinitis, pronounced *rai·nai·tis*, in Word Select it would be represented as *rhi[nai]tis*. In an entire sentence, identifying medical terms, it could be represented as: *Rhi[ni]tis involves [chro]nic sneezing or a con[ges]ted, drippy nose with no apparent cause*. It would be equally possible to ask students to try to identify (click on) stressed words in the sentence (word prominence). The illustrations below show the unaltered text, a student’s choices and Moodle’s auto-correction.

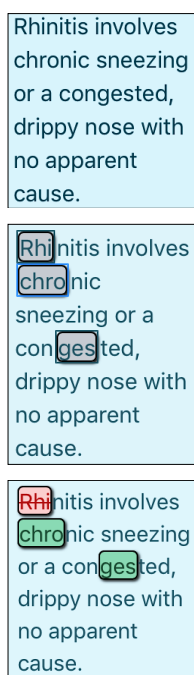


Fig. 2 Word Select plugin

It is evident that the Quiz module and accompanying sound files could be used to offer remedial reading practice, whether in standalone exercises or as excerpts from a course textbook (ideally one that bundles audio online, which would simplify and expedite quiz-making). Even by making the most of available technologies, it will still be important to periodically check their effectiveness by confirming students’ reading ability through reading aloud practice in class.

11. Conclusion

The preceding episodes have proved to be a revealing cautionary tale describing the rapid pace at which technology can “successfully” disrupt ELT. With

weak, unmotivated readers, especially, we may need to reappraise how we approach university-wide extensive reading and perhaps whether our students are using their coursebooks as intended. In spite of self-reported claims of mostly liking reading in Japanese, at this university most tended to read sparsely for pleasure (0-3.5 hours per week), mostly read simplified content (*manga* and online *manga*) and tended to over-report reading of more complex content (novels), suggesting that there may be embarrassment regarding L1 reading. Even though I had hoped to investigate the reading proficiency of more than 46 mainstream English students and the study is therefore limited to a degree, the sample size was large enough to show that there was considerable variation within the cohort, appreciably more than expected, even after taking into account the differences in proficiency that are known from the students’ English Placement Test scores. Specifically, a substantial number of students were demonstrably unable to satisfactorily read an *Eiken* grade 2 passage, the recommended national standard for high school students. Based on these results, changes, including remedial bi-modal and multi-modal reading coursework, will need to be implemented.

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Appendix 1

A Reading Survey アンケート

Do you like to read?

Yes - 146 Not really - 40 No - 41

About how many hours in a week do you read for pleasure?

0-2	2-3.5	3.5-5	5-7	7+
131	63	21	8	10

What do you read?

Nothing	Novels	<i>Manga</i>	Online <i>manga</i> , etc.	Magazines	Nonfiction	Other
14	113	143	68	33	13	5

About how many books did you read in 2018 (not *manga* and not graded readers for extensive reading)?

0	1-3	3-5	5-8	8-10	10-12	12+
79	62	29	24	11	5	21

Have you ever read Harry Potter books? Lord of the Rings?

Yes - 86 No - 150

Have you ever read any books by Haruki Murakami?

Yes - 32 No - 193

Have you ever read any famous books?

Yes - 129 No - 107

Are you an active person?

Yes - 84 Not really - 68 No - 72

Appendix 2 *Eiken*- like reading passages

①

Practical Skills

Today, practical skills such as using computers and speaking foreign languages are regarded as important. As a result, many schools are offering classes for these skills, and learning them gives students more opportunities to find jobs. However, some teachers say that students are losing interest in traditional subjects like math and history. Practical skills are useful, but studying traditional subjects is also important.

②

Positive attitude

In addition to exercise and balanced nutrition, a positive attitude can help you to live a long, healthy life. Research shows that optimistic people are both healthier and happier than those who have a negative attitude. Keeping a positive outlook during stressful times can help your emotional well-being and physical health. Just as your body needs physical exercise, your mind also needs to practice positive thoughts to stay healthy.

Appendix 3 Scoring of Eiken-like Reading Passages

Scoring of Eiken-like Reading Passages

Student	Reading Passage 1			Reading Passage 2			Remarks*
	Reading Fluency	Pronunc & Intonation	Sense	Reading Fluency	Pronunc & Intonation	Sense	
1	3	2	3	2-3	2	2	dropped s, healthier, sense in 2
2	2-3	2	3	2-3	2	2	dropped s, offering, nutrition
3	2-3	3	3	2-3	2-3	2	weak pron., nutrition, sense in 2
4	3-4	4	3	3	4	3	good pron. good sense
5	2	2-3	2	1-2	2	1	opportunities physical, weak!
6	1	2	1	1	2	1	foreign nutrition exercise NR*
7	2	2	1	1	1	1	foreign healthier nutrition NR*
8	2-3	3	3	3	4	3	losing, dropped s
9	1-2	2-3	2	1	2-3	1	
10	3	2-3	3	3	3	3	
11	4	4	4	3	3	3-4	nutrition
12	5	5	5	4	5	4	nutrition
13	3	2-3	3	2	2-3	2	offering, dropped s nutrition
14	3	2-3	3	3	4	3-4	
15	3	2-3	4	2	3	3	drop s losing, healthier, nutrition
16	4	4	5	3-	3-	3-	attitude healthier optimistic
17	3	2-3	3	2	2-3	2	opportunities nutrition, lives
18	3	3	2-3	2-3	2-3	2-3	
19	2-3	2-3	2	2	2-3	2	
20	4	5	3	4	3-4	3	
21	5	5	4-5	5	5	4-5	Above Eiken 2
22	2	2	1-2	1	1	1	NR*
23	3	3	3	3	3	3	nutrition, mild hesitations
24	2	2	2	2	2	2	passage 2 esp. difficult many "new" words
25	4	4	4	4	3	5	physical

Scoring of Eiken-like Reading Passages

Reading Passage 1		Reading Passage 2					
26	1	1	1	1	1	1	NR*
27	2-3	2-3	3	3	3	3	foreign offering nutrition
28	3	3-4	2-3	2-3	2	2	physical nutrition
29	2	2	2	2-3	3	2	practical regarded offering
30	1-2	2	1	2	2	1-2	foreign practical nutrition, etc.
31	1-2	3	1	2	2-3	1-2	foreign, opportunities, physical, nutrition
32	2-3	4	3	3	3	3	no serious difficulties
33	3-4	4	3	2-3	2-3	2-3	healthier physical
34	3-2	3-2	3	3	3-2	3	losing physical opportunities
35	3-2	3	3	2-3	2	2	losing healthier nutrition physical
36	3	3	3	2-3	3	2	slowly read but acceptable
37	3	4	3	3	3	3	no serious difficulties, good
38	3	2-3	2-3	2-3	3	3	foreign losing healthier nutrition
39	5	5	5	5	5	5	Almost perfect, but hesitation - nutrition
40	3	3	2	2	3	2	opportunities healthier happier
41	2	2	2	2	2	2	losing practical exercise nutrition
42	3-4	4	3	3	4	3	physical thoughts
43	4	4	3	3	3	3-2	slight hesitation thoughts healthier
44	4	4	3	3-4	3	4	many dropped s
45	5	5	5	5	5	5	Perfect. Above <i>Eiken 2</i>
46	4	4	3	3	3-2	2-3	dropped s during balanced nutrition

Scale: 5 - excellent 4 - very good 3 - acceptable (pass) 2 - weak 1 - very weak (non reader)

*Remarks: many notes were made. Not all can fit into this table, therefore only some of the common difficulties have been recorded.

*NR: basically a non reader