



The Effects of a Two-Year-Long Extensive Reading Program on TOEIC Bridge IP Scores

Kazuma Fujii

Nagaoka University of Technology

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine whether a difference exists in TOEIC Bridge[®] Institutional Program scores between Japanese English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students at a technical college who did extensive reading (ER) for one year and those who did ER for two years. Furthermore, by dividing the students who experienced ER for two years into two subgroups according to their level of English achievement at the end of ER, their reading tendencies were statistically analyzed in terms of the number of words and books they had read. The results suggested that two-year-long ER may be more effective in improving TOEIC Bridge reading scores than a year-long ER program, and that students may be able to reach a high level of English proficiency without reading too many books as long as they are suited to the students' English levels. Additionally, students with high English proficiency made greater progress through ER. These results highlighted the significance of incorporating ER into the reading course to develop balanced reading skills; the need for careful consideration in setting goals for ER in the number of books read; and the need for teachers' support and guidance, particularly for beginners.

INTRODUCTION

In the field of second language acquisition, many researchers agree that a large amount of language input is indispensable for foreign language acquisition (Day & Bamford, 1998; Krashen, 1985; Nation & Waring, 2019). Extensive Reading (ER), which is defined as an independent and silent reading that exposes learners to large quantities of material within their linguistic competence (Grabe & Stoller, 2002), is a promising way to facilitate widespread exposure even in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) environment, where English is usually not used outside the classroom (Kadota, 2014).

Day and Bamford (2002) presented 10 basic principles that have served as ER guidelines for many English teachers in the world. In Japan, where our study was conducted, Sakai (2002) paved the way for ER for Japanese EFL learners by proposing three simpler principles: (1) Read what you can enjoy without a dictionary, (2) skip unknown words, and (3) stop reading if it is boring or too difficult. These simple learner-friendly principles have increased the feasibility of ER for teachers and lowered the affective filter for reading a foreign language for learners, contributing to the implementation of ER in many educational institutions (Takase, 2010).

Previous studies, which have accumulated as ER spreads, have revealed the effectiveness of ER in various aspects of foreign language learning. For example, ER has been reported to be effective in improving reading speed (Bell, 2001; Fujii, 2019; Fujita & Noro, 2009; Iwahori, 2008; Mason & Krashen, 1997; Tanaka & Stapleton, 2007), reading comprehension (Bell, 2001; Elley & Mangubhai, 1981; Hafiz & Tudor, 1989; Lao & Krashen, 2000; Mason & Krashen, 1997; Tanaka & Stapleton, 2007), vocabulary (Cho & Krashen, 1994; Day, Omura, & Hiramatsu, 1991; Lao & Krashen, 2000; Pitts, White, & Krashen, 1989; Ponniah, 2011; Rodrigo, Krashen, & Gribbons, 2004; Wang, 2013; Webb, 2007), grammar (Rodrigo, Krashen, & Gribbons, 2004; Stokes, Krashen, & Kartchner, 1998), spelling (Polak & Krashen, 1988), writing (Elley & Mangubhai, 1981; Hafiz & Tudor, 1989; Mason & Krashen, 1997), motivation for reading or learning English (Mason & Krashen, 1997; Mohd Asraf & Ahmad, 2003; Powell, 2005; Takase, 2012), and for improving standardized proficiency test scores such as the TOEIC[®] test (hereinafter, TOEIC; Goto, 2021; Nishizawa, Yoshioka, & Fukada, 2010; Rutson-Griffiths & Rutson-Griffiths, 2018).

Lying behind these benefits of ER, Waring (2006) suggested its potential to consolidate language that has been learned discretely, which leads to fluent language processing and learning. Kadota (2019) argued for its potential for quasi-repetition priming, or repetition practice involving meaning processing. It has been argued that it is important to maximize these benefits, and that ER has great potential if conducted continuously for a long time because it makes a massive amount of comprehensible input possible (Nishizawa, et al., 2010). In other words, without sufficient exposure to English, fluent language processing or incidental learning of vocabulary, grammar, or spelling is unlikely to occur. However, particularly for beginners in the EFL context, reaching a threshold of “sufficient exposure,” for instance, of 100,000 words (Takase, 2010), 300,000 words (Nishizawa et al., 2010), or one million words (Sakai, 2002), requires a long time since beginners are generally slow readers, at least at first, due to a lack of reading experience in English. As such, they are encouraged to start with very easy books that they can read fluently without a dictionary to get them on the track of ER for pleasure and fluency (Furukawa, 2010).

Long-term ER, however, is not easily achieved in a school setting; teachers may change; they may not have time or resources to continue ER; they may need to deal with the same teaching content with other teachers based on a single syllabus; or the school or other teachers may not understand the effectiveness of ER (Day & Bamford, 1998; Takase, 2010). From the perspective of feasibility, there is a huge gap between year-long ER, which can probably be achieved at the discretion of a single teacher, and longer-term ER, which can only be achieved when various other conditions are met. This challenging situation of long-term ER in a school setting may explain the paucity of studies that have examined the effectiveness of ER for more than one year; therefore, whether long-term ER really contributes to English improvement over year-long ER, as Nishizawa et al. (2010) argue, needs to be verified with more and different learners.

This study explored the effectiveness of long-term ER by examining whether there was a difference in TOEIC Bridge[®] Institutional Program (hereinafter, TOEIC Bridge) scores between Japanese EFL students at a technical college who engaged in ER for one year and those who did ER for two years. Students who engaged in ER for two years were further divided into two groups according to their achievement level in English at the end of the two-year-long ER program. This helped clarify their engagement in ER in terms of the number of words and books read for the determination of the factors that may lead to successful ER. The results could serve as valuable evidence of the effectiveness of long-term ER for teachers considering adopting it in their classrooms.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies have explored the effects of ER on EFL learners' standardized English proficiency test scores (Goto, 2021; Nishizawa et al, 2010; O'Neill, 2012; Rutson-Griffiths & Rutson-Griffiths, 2018; Storey, Gibson, & Williamson, 2006), but a view on the impact of ER on TOEIC score improvement is not unanimous.

Nishizawa et al. (2010) showed the most significant impact of ER on improving TOEIC scores. They implemented an ER program for second-year Japanese EFL students at a technical college that lasted for four years. The students who received ER for four years were divided into three groups according to the amount of reading they had undertaken, and their average TOEIC scores were examined. The results showed that the median TOEIC total scores of the students who read 310,000, 660,000, and 1,800,000 words were 435, 498, and 604, respectively. Based on this, they argued for the effectiveness of ER in improving TOEIC scores. To bring about TOEIC score improvement through ER, they suggested that the threshold was reading 300,000 words for at least two to three consecutive years.

Rutson-Griffiths and Rutson-Griffiths (2018) adopted an ER program for 10 months for Japanese university students. The learners were encouraged to read English books outside of class and read approximately 63,000 words during this period. A small but significant correlation was found between the total words read by the students and their reading gains on TOEIC.

Goto (2021) implemented ER in two classes at a university in Japan. One class received a 20-minute ER session per week for a semester, whereas the other class did not. The results showed that the total score of the students in the ER class, who read an average of 38,000 words in a semester, was significantly higher than that of the control class on the TOEIC test conducted at the end of the semester.

On the other hand, Storey et al. (2006) conducted ER in which Japanese university students were assigned to read one book per week from a list of books prepared by the researchers that suited their interests and English proficiency level. The program lasted for eight weeks. This study compared students' TOEIC scores with those who did not have the reading assignment. However, the addition of ER did not lead to a statistically significant difference, but the increase in scores for students who engaged in more than 30 minutes of reading per week was 30% greater than for those who spent less time. The study concluded that the positive effects of ER on TOEIC scores would require more reading over a longer period.

Similarly, O'Neill (2012), who adopted ER for Japanese university students for two years, examined its effects using the reading part of TOEIC. The result indicated that students in the group who engaged in ER had a greater increase in scores than those who did not, but the difference was not significant.

Despite the threshold suggested by Nishizawa et al. (2010), there are cases wherein a 10-month ER demonstrated a correlation between the numbers of words read and TOEIC score improvement (Rutson-Griffiths & Rutson-Griffiths, 2018), or when semester-long ER with a reading of 38,000 words was effective in TOEIC scores improvement (Goto, 2021). However, there is also a case where a two-year-long ER program did not lead to a significant improvement in TOEIC scores (O'Neill, 2012). These inconsistent results in previous research suggest at least three research directions:

First, the impact of ER on standardized English proficiency tests should be studied and examined with more learners. Many studies in this area have targeted university students and used TOEIC to assess students' progress or achievement of English learning. Further research is needed to obtain reliable insights from various other perspectives. Second, future research should explore the factors behind changes in scores. These mixed results would suggest the existence of various possible causes in addition to the amount of reading and duration of ER suggested by Nishizawa et al. (2010). More factors need to be examined to determine what may bring about better outcomes in ER (Fujii, 2019; Yoshizawa, Takase, & Otsuki, 2013). For instance, factors such as students' age, English learning experience, motivation for English learning, English proficiency, book selection, reading method, and teachers' guidance may influence the effects of ER. Identifying the key factors could lead to meaningful pedagogical implications. Third, the impact of ER duration on standardized English proficiency tests must be examined from a different perspective. Many studies have compared learners who did ER with those who did not. However, few studies have examined the effects of ER duration, for instance, by comparing learners who did ER for two years with those who did ER for one year and received different instruction in the following year.

The novelty of this study is the exploration of these areas of need. That is, the effects of ER duration on TOEIC Bridge test scores were examined by comparing students who experienced ER for two consecutive years with those who did so for one year and then received traditional instruction with a focus on intensive reading in the following year. The participants were first- and second-year technical college students in Japan, which are younger beginner EFL learners than those in the studies discussed above. Furthermore, the key factors that led students to achieve high English proficiency levels were explored by analyzing their reading tendencies. This study, therefore, fills a gap in earlier research.

The following two research questions (RQs) were explored in this study:

RQ1: Is there a significant difference in the TOEIC Bridge scores of Japanese EFL learners between students who read extensively for two consecutive years and those who read extensively for one year?

RQ2: Is there a difference in reading tendencies between students who reached A2 level and those who stayed at A1 level at the end of the two-year-long ER program?

METHOD

Participants

The participants of this study were 121 technical college students, of whom 75 had enrolled in 2013 and received ER instructions only in their first year (hereinafter, the contrast group), and 46 had enrolled in 2014 and received ER instructions continuously in their first and second years (hereinafter, the treatment group). The number of participants in the treatment group was smaller because students changed classes when they advanced from the first to the second year at this college, which reduced the number of students who did ER for two years in a row by approximately half. Since the students were selected to enroll in this technical college through entrance examinations in four subjects, including English, the academic achievements of the two groups were similar.

The participants in both groups were Japanese EFL learners aged 15 to 17 years. They had received at least three years of formal English education in junior high school, and none of

them had previous experience with ER at the beginning of the study. They were beginner English learners, most of whom were at the A1 to A2 levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), based on the results of the TOEIC Bridge test conducted in November in their first and second years (Educational Testing Service, n.d.a). Students who did not undergo the TOIEC Bridge test twice were excluded from the study. For both groups, the reading amount was counted as 10% of their final grade, which was communicated to them at the start of the ER program.

Materials

According to the Educational Testing Service (n.d.b), the TOEIC Bridge test is an accurate measure of proficiency in beginner to intermediate English. It examines comprehensive listening and reading skills in English, and the test results were indicated as scores, with 90 as the highest score each for listening and reading, that is, the highest score in both sections combined is 180. The test lasts approximately an hour (25 minutes for listening and 35 minutes for reading), covers everyday and familiar topics, and has a slower listening speed than the TOEIC test, which takes 45 minutes for reading and 75 minutes for listening, with 495 points for each section for a total of 990 points. In Japan, TOEIC is widely used in the job market to demonstrate English language proficiency, and TOEIC Bridge is positioned as a bridge to TOEIC. Thus, TOEIC is often taken by university students, whereas TOEIC Bridge is taken by high school or technical college students. In June 2019, the format of the TOEIC Bridge was changed so that a maximum of 50 points for each section (for a total of 100 points) could be achieved, with scores calculated in one-point increments. The TOEIC Bridge in this study was conducted from 2013 to 2015; therefore, the former version, with a maximum score of 180 points, was used.

Study Period and Procedure

The contrast group had a total of 15 sessions of 30 to 40 minutes of in-class ER, held in the college library during the first year (April 2013 to February 2014). The treatment group performed a total of about 15 sessions of 30 to 40 minutes of in-class ER in the college library during the first year (April 2014 to February 2015), and continued the same ER program in the second year (April 2015 to February 2016). The difference in the ER program was that the duration of in-class ER in the treatment group was twice as long as that in the contrast group.

Guidance concerning how to choose English books, how to read English extensively, or how much the students were encouraged to read during the program was the same in both groups. Specifically, they were guided to choose books that they did not need a dictionary to understand so they could read fluently for pleasure. They were advised to stop reading and choose a different book if a given was boring or too difficult. They were instructed to maintain a reading log, and were encouraged to read at least 40,000 words a year autonomously in and outside of class. ER was not assigned as homework except during the long vacations in summer and winter. Approximately a quarter of the total English class time in the first year for the contrast group and the first and second years for the treatment group was devoted to ER. The remainder of the class time was spent primarily on intensive reading using a textbook approved by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) in Japan, which sometimes also involved vocabulary and grammar practice.

The students in both the contrast and treatment groups were taught by the author for the duration of their respective ER program. Different MEXT-approved textbooks were used for each group, but the difficulty of the textbooks was roughly the same since the vocabulary level and grammar complexity are well-controlled in MEXT-approved textbooks based on the Japanese Course of Study. English class times were identical between the two groups. Although there were some differences in English input due to the difference in textbooks, the main instructional difference between the two groups was the presence or absence of the ER program in their second year. Therefore, TOEIC Bridge scores for the second year were used to examine the effects of this main instructional difference (Table 1).

The goal of 40,000 words per year may seem insufficient for ER programs. However, the participants were beginners with no prior ER experience and the time provided for in-class ER was limited. Based on the author's prior teaching experience of ER, 40,000 words seemed appropriate for the students to engage without too much burden and to enjoy reading for pleasure. For the same reason, their reading was limited to 10% of their final grade to avoid excessive pressure.

Table 1. Yearly Instruction in the Two Groups

	<i>n</i>	First year	Second year
Contrast Group	75	ER TOEIC Bridge in November	ER TOEIC Bridge in November
Treatment Group	46	No-ER TOEIC Bridge in November	ER TOEIC Bridge in November

Analysis

To explore RQ1, whether there was a significant difference in TOEIC Bridge scores in the first and second years between the two groups was analyzed using two-tailed *t*-tests. To explore RQ2, participants in the treatment group ($n = 46$) were divided into an upper A2 group ($n = 24$) and a lower A1 group ($n = 22$) based on the TOEIC Bridge scores of the second year. According to the Educational Testing Service (n.d.a), a total score of 134 was set as the boundary between A2 and A1 level scores; therefore, this score was used to divide the treatment group into two subgroups according to English achievement at the end of the ER program. Two-tailed *t*-tests were then applied to examine whether there were differences in the number of words and books read. In both analyses, Welch's *t*-test was used when the mother variances were different.

Furthermore, using the first-year TOEIC Bridge scores of the treatment group, the relationship between reading tendencies and the growth of English proficiency was analyzed to identify any possible factors leading to higher achievement. The ER program lasted until February for either year; however, since the analyses used TOEIC Bridge scores, the students' reading data at the time of the TOEIC Bridge test in November was used. For the use of the data, the purpose of the research was explained to the participants and verbal consent was obtained.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Number of words and books read

Table 2 shows the reading status of the two groups. At the end of the first year, the treatment group had read approximately 7,500 words and 14 books more than the contrast group on average. However, the maximum value of words and books was greater and the minimum value was lower in the contrast group, indicating that the gap between students who actively read and those who did not was large. The median number of words read was 31,351 in the contrast and 40,470 in the treatment group. There was no difference in the content of ER instructions between the two groups, but overall, there may have been a slight difference in the level of enthusiasm for ER.

Table 2. Participants' ER Status

Group	Year	Number of Words			Number of Books		
		<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>Min</i>
Contrast Group	1	34,686.4 (18,460.1)	100,624	7,957	63.3 (30.1)	230	18
Treatment Group	1	42,140.6 (10,533.6)	77,762	23,290	77.3 (32.0)	168	27
	2	90,637.1 (23,818.3)	174,602	41,423	126.3 (50.6)	289	43

TOEIC Bridge score

Table 3 shows the average listening, reading, and total TOEIC Bridge scores of the groups over two years, with the *t*-test results (*p*) and effect size (Cohen's *d*). In the first year, there was no significant difference in the scores for any of the sections between the two groups. However, in the second year, the reading and total scores of the treatment group were significantly higher than those of the contrast group (reading: $t(113.3) = 3.30, p = .001$; total: $t(119) = 2.49, p = .014$). While the average reading scores in the second year of the treatment group significantly increased, that of the contrast group stagnated, leading to a statistical difference between groups. For the listening section, the increase was greater in the treatment group than in the contrast group, but the difference was not statistically significant ($t(119) = 1.39, p = .166$). The effect size of every section in the second year was larger than that in the first year, suggesting that the presence or absence of ER in the second year may have influenced the results, particularly the reading scores.

Table 3. TOEIC Bridge Test Results

	TOEIC Bridge (first year)			TOEIC Bridge (second year)		
	Listening	Reading	Total	Listening	Reading	Total
	<i>M (SD)</i>			<i>M (SD)</i>		
Contrast Group	64.0 (5.9)	63.6 (8.1)	127.6 (12.7)	63.0 (8.7)	62.6 (10.2)	125.6 (17.3)

Treatment Group	63.6 (6.9)	62.9 (8.8)	126.5 (14.0)	65.1 (7.4)	68.0 (7.8)	133.1 (14.1)
<i>p</i>	.697	.662	.643	.166	.001**	.014*
<i>d</i>	.07	.08	.09	.26	.58	.47

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

These results suggest that conducting ER for two consecutive years may be more effective in improving reading scores on the TOEIC Bridge than a year-long ER. More specifically, instead of stopping ER after a year and spending that time on intensive reading the following year, continuing ER for two years may play a greater role in TOEIC Bridge score improvement. A possible explanation for this is that intensive reading instructions, in which students often translate English into Japanese and pay close attention to vocabulary and grammar or consult a dictionary, may have helped students acquire the ability to read small amounts of English accurately by understating sentence structure and vocabulary usage, but may not have helped them acquire the ability to read fluently or grasp the outline of a long passage. The reading part of the TOEIC Bridge requires examinees to read a certain amount of English, grasp the gist of the text, and find important information; however, translation is not required. It can be considered that keeping a practice of reading large amounts of comprehensible English enhanced students' reading skills, which may have also helped the students understand English with its natural word order without translating it into Japanese (Furukawa, 2010; Takase, 2010). This may explain why the treatment group also showed increased listening scores. Listening requires the ability to process and understand English in the order in which the words are heard. Intensive reading instruction did not improve these skills, and the scores stagnated.

However, the results should not be interpreted as a denial of intensive reading to improve English because the TOEIC Bridge does not measure all aspects of English language abilities. As with any test, the results highlight some of these abilities. An implication here is that long-term ER is likely to develop reading fluency and some reading skills, such as understanding the gist of a long passage, which may be helpful in improving TOEIC Bridge reading scores. Another implication concerns the proportion of English instructions. As Nation's (2013) four strands suggest, a well-balanced language course must be provided. Instead of conducting language-focused teaching only through intensive reading, incorporating ER into a language course could be a quick way to improve the English language teaching balance. While intensive reading is important in developing certain reading skills, it may not be sufficient on its own.

Analysis of ER Status Between the Subgroups

The treatment group was divided into two subgroups: the A2 group ($n = 24$) and the A1 group ($n = 22$), with a total score of 134 on the TOEIC Bridge as the baseline (Educational Testing Service, n.d.a), as shown in Table 4. Their reading tendencies were analyzed in terms of how many words and books had been read in the two years. The reading data in Table 5 are from the time of the TOEIC Bridge in the second year to see if there was a difference in reading tendencies between students who reached a relatively high proficiency level (A2) and those who did not (A1) at the end of the two-year ER program.

Table 4. Basic Data of A2 and A1 Groups (Treatment Group)

Subgroup	TOEIC Bridge scores in the second year			Score range
	Listening	Reading	Total	
	<i>M (SD)</i>			
A2 (<i>n</i> = 24)	69.9 (6.2)	73.5 (5.3)	143.4 (9.9)	166–134
A1 (<i>n</i> = 22)	59.9 (4.5)	62.0 (5.2)	121.9 (8.2)	132–96

In both the first and second years, the A2 group read more words in English than the A1 group, but the difference was not significant (first year: $t(36.3) = 0.33$, $p = .747$; second year: $t(34.5) = 0.92$, $p = .362$). In contrast, the A1 group read more books than the A2 group each year. This difference in reading tendency was not significant (first year: $t(36) = 1.70$, $p = .097$; second year: $t(31.7) = 1.82$, $p = .078$). These results showed that A2 students read English books with more words per book than A1 students. More specifically, a simple calculation suggests that A2 students chose a book with approximately 828 words, while A1 learners read a book with approximately 620 words. Considering that text length is a major factor that affects the readability level for Japanese learners of English (Fujii, 2022), this difference may seem natural since the A2 group had higher English proficiency, at least at the end of the ER program.

Table 5. Number of Words and Books Read by A2 and A1 Groups (Treatment Group)

Subgroup	First year		Second year	
	Words read	Books read	Words read	Books read
	<i>M (SD)</i>			
A2 (<i>n</i> = 24)	42,637.7 (8,473.0)	69.6 (24.7)	93,808.9 (17,972.3)	113.3 (33.5)
A1 (<i>n</i> = 22)	41,598.4 (12,591.5)	85.6 (37.2)	87,176.9 (28,945.7)	140.5 (62.0)
<i>p</i>	.75	.097 [†]	.36	.08 [†]
<i>d</i>	.10	.51	.28	.55

[†] $p < .1$

TOIEC Bridge scores of A1 and A2 groups in the first year and the score changes from the first to second year were examined (Table 6). This was done to understand whether A2 learners had a higher English proficiency level starting from the first year, or if they improved due to their choice of longer books.

Table 6. TOEIC Bridge Scores in the First Year (Treatment Group)

Subgroup	TOEIC Bridge scores in the first year			
	Listening	Reading	Total	Range
	<i>M (SD)</i>			
A2 (<i>n</i> = 24)	66.5 (5.9)	67.7 (7.1)	134.2 (11.7)	164–110
A1 (<i>n</i> = 22)	60.4 (6.7)	57.7 (7.4)	118.1 (11.3)	136–92
A2 (2nd – 1st)	3.4 (0.3)	5.8 (–1.8)	9.2 (–1.8)	
A1 (2nd – 1st)	–0.5 (–2.2)	4.3 (–2.2)	3.8 (–3.1)	

An important finding is that A2 learners had higher average scores in both listening and reading sections than A1 learners from the first year, and the A2 students' scores improved from

the first year for both sections more than the A1 students. Another point to be noted is that although the effect of ER may be higher for A2 learners, Table 3 and Table 6 indicate that implementing ER for two years is more effective in improving English than doing ER for one year even for A1 learners, because the score of the A1 learners increased more significantly than that of the contrast group in every section.

These results suggest that learners with higher English proficiency may be able to improve it to a greater extent through ER. This is in line with Fujii (2019), who showed that such learners increased their reading rate at an earlier stage, with a smaller reading amount than those with lower proficiency. In other words, learners' English proficiency may influence the outcome of ER, which has meaningful pedagogical implications. A possible explanation for this is that learners with higher English proficiency generally have more language knowledge, and ER may function to consolidate the discrete pieces more dynamically than learners with fewer pieces of language knowledge (Waring, 2006). Furthermore, the results support the effectiveness of long-term ER, as Nishizawa et al. (2010) argue, since even learners with low English proficiency who continued ER for two years showed greater improvement in TOEIC Bridge scores than those who stopped ER after one year.

The following pedagogical implications were obtained from these results: The first concerns instructions on the number of books to read in ER programs since it is recommended to begin with easy books to give students a smooth start (Furukawa, 2010). To promote this reading method, teachers often guide students to read as many easy books as possible, particularly in the early stages of ER, and there are some initiatives that set the number of books read as a goal (e.g., Takase, 2012). The results here, however, suggest that if the level of the book is appropriate for students, the number may not be a major factor in improving the score on a standardized English proficiency test. For example, if a goal and grade had been given based on the number of books read rather than the number of words read in this study, the TOEIC Bridge scores might not have increased as much as they did. Books with a small word count may have bored students with high English proficiency. The reading tendencies of the A2 group, which showed a large increase in the TOEIC Bridge score with fewer books read, indicate the need for careful consideration in setting ER goals. The role of the number of books read in ER programs requires further exploration in future research.

The second concerns the role of teachers. This study suggests that even if students receive the same ER instructions, the effects may differ depending on their English proficiency levels, and the gap among students may increase as ER progresses. This implies a need for support from teachers, especially for beginners, as Yoshizawa et al. (2013) and Sun (2020) suggested. Specifically, teachers may be able to support students' ER by understanding their problems through communication and reading logs. In-class ER will be helpful because teachers can see whether students are reading fluently for pleasure. Giving advice on book selection, or encouraging students who are not good at English are examples of support the students can receive from teachers.

CONCLUSION

This study explored whether a difference existed in TOEIC Bridge scores between Japanese EFL students who did ER for one year and those who did so for two years.

The findings suggested that a two-year-long ER may be more effective in increasing TOEIC Bridge reading scores than a year-long ER. Instead of conducting language-focused

teaching only with intensive reading, incorporating ER into the course as well would develop balanced reading skills, which may lead to an increase in TOEIC Bridge scores. Learners may be able to reach high English proficiency levels through ER by reading books that suit their level, even if the number of books read is relatively low. Learners with higher English proficiency may be able to make greater progress in their skills through ER. These findings highlight the need for careful consideration in setting goals for ER in the number of books read and the need for teachers' support and guidance, particularly for beginners, to make the outcome of ER significant.

Limitations of this study should also be addressed. First, the time spent on ER was approximately one quarter of the total English class time. In other words, three quarters of the time was spent in traditional intensive reading instructions with a textbook, whose effect may have influenced the TOEIC Bridge results to some extent. As Nation and Waring (2019) pointed out as a difficulty in a long-term ER study to create ideal experimental conditions, it must be acknowledged that the influence of teaching and learning factors other than ER intervened in this study. Second, the progress of the TOEIC scores from the beginning of ER to the first-year TOEIC Bridge was not examined due to the lack of a baseline proficiency test opportunity. This made it impossible to chronologically examine changes in students' English proficiency from the time of admission, which limited the analysis to only the score changes between the two TOEIC Bridge tests.

Despite this, the study sheds light on the field of ER and language acquisition, provides some pedagogical implications, and suggests several factors that may influence the outcome of ER.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This research was supported by JSPS KAKENHI (grant number 17K13518).

REFERENCES

- Bell, T. (2001). Extensive reading: Speed and comprehension. *The Reading Matrix*, 1(1), 1–13.
- Cho, K., Krashen, S. D. (1994). Acquisition of vocabulary from the Sweet Valley Kids series: Adult ESL acquisition. *Journal of Reading*, 37(8), 662–667.
- Day, R., & Bamford, J. (1998). *Extensive reading in the second language classroom*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Day, R. & Bamford, J. (2002). Top ten principles for teaching extensive reading. *Reading in a Foreign Language*, 14(2), 135–141.
- Day, R. R., Omura, C., & Hiramatsu, M. (1991). Incidental EFL vocabulary learning and reading. *Reading in a Foreign Language*, 7(2), 541–551.
- Educational Testing Service. (n.d.a). Mapping the TOEIC Bridge® Test on the Common European Framework of Reference for Language. Retrieved January 27, 2022 from https://www.ets.org/s/toEIC/pdf/toEIC_bridge_cefr_flyer.pdf
- Educational Testing Service. (n.d.b). About the TOEIC Bridge® Test. Retrieved January 27, 2022 from <https://www.ets.org/toEIC/test-takers/bridge/about>
- Elley, W. B., & Mangubhai, F. (1981). *The impact of a Book Flood in Fiji primary schools*. Wellington, [N.Z.]: New Zealand Council for Educational Research.

- Fujii, K. (2019). Eibun dokkai sokudo no shincho to eigo no yomikata no kankei ni kansuru kenkyu [A study of the relationship between the development of reading rates and the quality of learners' English reading]. *JERA Bulletin*, 12, 15–34.
- Fujii, K. (2022). A correlation survey between YL and Lexile scores in books for extensive reading: A proposal for a revised conversion table. *Journal of Extensive Reading*, 9, 10–32.
- Fujita, K., & Noro, T. (2009). The effects of 10-minute extensive reading on the reading speed, comprehension and motivation of Japanese high school EFL learners. *Annual Review of English Language Education in Japan*, 20, 21–30.
- Furukawa, A. (2010). *Eigo tadoku hou* [The English extensive reading method]. Tokyo: Shogakukan Inc.
- Goto, T. (2021). The effect of 20-minute extensive reading activities on TOEIC IP scores. *The Reading Matrix*, 21(2), 145–152.
- Grabe, W., & Stoller, F. L. (2002). *Teaching and researching reading*. London: Pearson Education Longman.
- Hafiz, F. M., & Tudor, I. (1989). Extensive reading and the development of language skills. *ELT Journal*, 43(1), 4–13.
- Iwahori, Y. (2008). Developing reading fluency: A study of extensive reading in EFL. *Reading in a Foreign Language*, 20(1), 70–91.
- Kadota, S. (2014). *Eigo jotatsu 12 no pointo* [12 points to improve English]. Tokyo: Cosmo Pier.
- Kadota, S. (2019). *Shadowing as a practice in second language acquisition: Connecting inputs and outputs*. London: Routledge.
- Krashen, S. (1985). *The input hypothesis: Issues and implications*. New York: Longman.
- Lao, C. Y., & Krashen, S. (2000). The impact of popular literature study on literacy development in EFL: More evidence for the power of reading. *System*, 28(2), 261–270.
- Mason, B., & Krashen, S. (1997). Extensive reading in English as a foreign language. *System*, 25(1), 91–102.
- Mohd Asraf, R., & Ahmad, I. S. (2003). Promoting English language development and the reading habit among students in rural schools through the Guided Extensive Reading program. *Reading in a Foreign Language*, 15(2), 83–102.
- Nation, P. (2013). *What should every EFL teacher know?* Seoul: Compass Publishing.
- Nation, I. S. P., & Waring, R. (2019). *Teaching extensive reading in another language*. New York: Routledge.
- Nishizawa, H., Yoshioka, T., & Fukada, M. (2010). The impact of a 4-year extensive reading program. In A. M. Stoke (Ed.), *JALT2009 Conference Proceedings*, pp. 632–640. Tokyo: JALT.
- O'Neill, B. (2012). Investigating the effects of Extensive Reading on TOEIC® reading section scores. *Extensive Reading World Congress Proceedings*, 1, 30–33.
- Pitts, M., White, H., & Krashen, S. (1989). Acquiring second language through reading: A replication of the Clockwork Orange study using second language acquires. *Reading in a Foreign Language*, 5(2), 271–275.
- Polak, J., & Krashen, S. (1988). Do we need to teach spelling? The relationship between spelling and voluntary reading among community college ESL students. *TESOL Quarterly*, 22, 141–146.
- Ponniah, R. J. (2011). Incidental acquisition of vocabulary by reading. *The Reading Matrix*, 11(2), 135–139.

- Powell, S. (2005). Extensive reading and its role in Japanese high schools. *The Reading Matrix*, 5(2), 28–42.
- Rodrigo, V., Krashen, S., & Gribbons, B. (2004). The effectiveness of two comprehensible-input approaches to foreign language instruction at the intermediate level. *System*, 32, 53–60.
- Rutson-Griffiths, A., & Rutson-Griffiths, Y. (2018). The relationship between extensive reading and TOEIC score gains. *Hiroshima Bunkyo Jyoshi Daigaku Koutou Kenkyu*, 4, 41–50.
- Sakai, K. (2002). *Kaidoku 100mango! Pepabakku heno michi* [Reading one million words: A road to paperback books]. Tokyo: Chikuma Library.
- Stokes, J., Krashen, S., & Kartchner, J. (1998). Factors in the acquisition of the present subjunctive in Spanish: The role of reading and study. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 121-122, 19-25.
- Storey, C., Gibson, K., & Williamson, R. (2006). Can extensive reading boost TOEIC scores? In K. Bradford-Watts, C. Ikeguchi, & M. Swanson (Eds.), *JALT2005 Conference Proceedings*, pp. 1004–1018. Tokyo: JALT.
- Sun, X. (2020). An exploration of students' and teachers' perceptions of a two-year extensive reading program in a Chinese secondary school. *The Reading Matrix*, 20(1), 201–219.
- Takase, A. (2010). *Eigo tadoku tacho shido manyuaru* [Instruction manual for English extensive reading and extensive listening]. Tokyo: Taishukan Publishing.
- Takase, A. (2012). The impact of extensive reading on reluctant Japanese EFL learners. *The European Journal of Applied Linguistics and TEFL*, 1(1), 97–113.
- Tanaka, H., & Stapleton, P. (2007). Increasing reading input in Japanese high school EFL classrooms: An empirical study exploring the efficacy of extensive reading. *The Reading Matrix*, 7(1), 115–131.
- Wang, Y-H. (2013). Incidental vocabulary learning through extensive reading: A case of lower-level EFL Taiwanese learners. *The Journal of Asia TEFL*, 10(3), 59-80.
- Waring, R. (2006). Why extensive reading should be an indispensable part of all language programmes. *The Language Teacher*, 30(7), 44–47.
- Webb, S. (2007). The effects of repetition on vocabulary knowledge. *Applied Linguistics*, 28(1), 46-65.
- Yoshizawa, K., Takase, A., & Otsuki, K. (2013). The effect of a teacher's guidance on Japanese university EFL learners' voluntary reading outside class. *Journal of Foreign Language Studies*, 8, 133–150.

Kazuma Fujii is an associate professor at Nagaoka University of Technology in Japan. His research interests include applied cognitive linguistics, corpus linguistics, and extensive reading. His current research project involves incidental vocabulary learning through extensive reading.

Email: fujii@vos.nagaokaut.ac.jp