

論文

Combining Skills-Based Instruction and Extensive Reading: Using Online Resources to Support a Reading Curriculum

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要旨

日本における英語読解の指導は、翻訳と言語分析を中心に行われてきた。最近になって、学生が自分に興味ある文章を選び、そこから読むことを楽しんでもらう多読法に重点が置かれるようになった。その他にも、例えば情報を素早く見つけることや、文章の中で状況に示されたヒントを基に文章を読み込む技能を高めることを目的としたクラスもある。この論文では、大学のカリキュラムの中で、学生自らが読む文章を選んでいく多読法が、技能力アップを主目的とした読書術向上プログラムにどう取り込まれているかの概要を述べる。このプログラムにおいては、学生はクラスの中で読解力とその攻略法を指導された。そして毎週宿題として出される読解がその力を伸ばし、また、オンラインで読むことの出来る様々な文献がこのプログラムを支えた。ここで学生たちは、自分たちのレベルに合った興味ある文章を自由に選ぶことが出来た。このカリキュラムは概して肯定的に受け止められており、毎週の読解の宿題とそれに対する指導法はどちらも役立つものであったと学生は捉えていた。

Keywords: reading (リーディング), reading skills (読書術), Extensive Reading (多読), online resources (オンライン文献)

Abstract

EFL reading instruction in Japan has traditionally been based on translation and language analysis. More recently, attention has been given to the use of extensive reading, which encourages students to enjoy reading by allowing them to choose materials they find engaging. Other reading courses aim to help students develop basic reading skills, such as scanning for information and using context clues. This paper outlines a university curriculum that incorporates extensive reading philosophies into a skills-based reading instruction program. In this program, students were given in-class instruction on reading skills and strategies. Weekly reading assignments allowed students to practice these skills, and the vast amount of authentic reading material available online supported the curriculum. Students were free to choose articles that they found to be interesting and appropriate for their reading level. Students' responses to this reading curriculum were generally positive; they found both the extensive reading and instruction in reading skills useful.

Introduction

English reading classes in Japan have traditionally relied on *yakudoku*, a method of instruction in which individual words are translated and re-ordered to match the Japanese word order so that students can decipher the meaning of a sentence or text; this is very similar to the Western grammar translation method (Hino, 1988). It has been argued that the shortcomings of this method have been a major contributor to many Japanese students' lack of fluency in English (see Furukawa, 2006; Hino, 1988; Robb & Susser, 1989). According to Furukawa, similar methods are still commonly used in Japan.

In the United States, L1 reading instruction is often based on instruction in specific reading skills. For example, students are taught how to find the main idea of a reading, or how to use context to understand the meaning of an unfamiliar word. These methods have also been used in the ESL/EFL context. Mikulecky (1984) argued for the inclusion of these skills in the second language classroom. She defined reading skills as “the

cognitive processes that a reader uses in making sense of a text” (Mikulecky, 2008, p. 3). According to Mikulecky, students should be introduced to one new reading skill at a time to learn how to effectively apply it; eventually, they will be able to apply the skills they have learned without conscious effort.

It is important to note the difference between reading skills and reading strategies. As Afflerback, Pearson, and Paris (2008) explained, a reading strategy is a method that is deliberately employed to improve reading fluency. For example, the SQ3R reading strategy, which is commonly taught in the USA, reminds students to *Survey* material before reading it, *Question* the contents of the article they are about to read, *Read* the article, *Recall* the important information, and *Review* it at a later date. This method will be consciously called to mind whenever the strategy is employed. On the other hand, a reading skill—for example, using context to deduce the meaning of a word—will be automatically implemented by fluent readers, without conscious thought.

In recent years, Extensive Reading (ER) instruction has also become a prominent method of EFL reading education. Figure 1 shows ten basic principles for ER instruction, as proposed by Day and Bamford (2002).

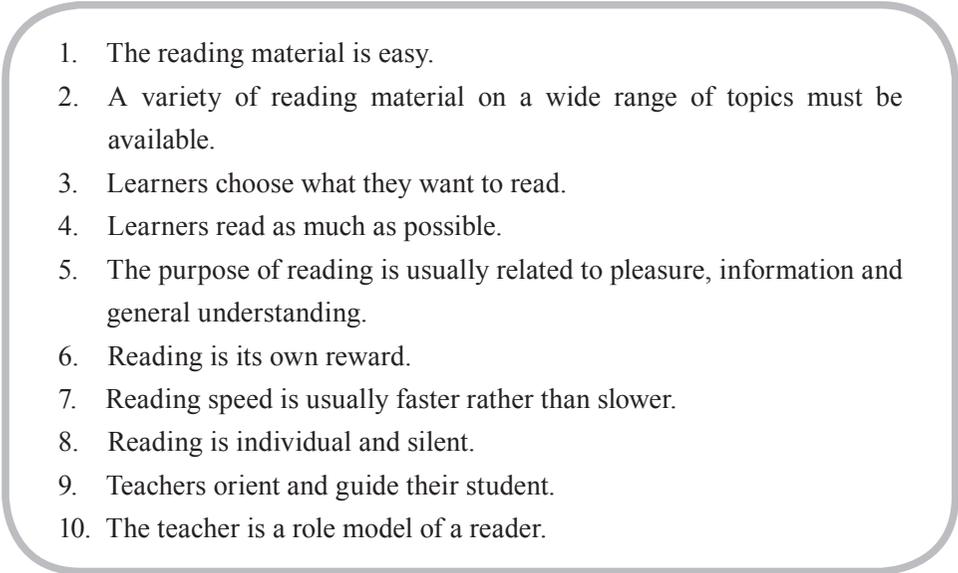
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1. The reading material is easy.
 2. A variety of reading material on a wide range of topics must be available.
 3. Learners choose what they want to read.
 4. Learners read as much as possible.
 5. The purpose of reading is usually related to pleasure, information and general understanding.
 6. Reading is its own reward.
 7. Reading speed is usually faster rather than slower.
 8. Reading is individual and silent.
 9. Teachers orient and guide their student.
 10. The teacher is a role model of a reader.

Figure 1. Principles of extensive reading (Day & Bamford, 2002).

The goal in an ER program is to increase students’ exposure to language—in

other words, to increase the comprehensible input, as described by Krashen (1982). Students select their own reading materials, rather than being assigned readings from a possibly boring textbook. The use of a dictionary is not encouraged, as looking up words breaks the flow of the reading; therefore, the material chosen should be well within the abilities of the student. Mason & Krashen (1997) described extensive reading as “self-selected reading with minimal accountability,” meaning that students only wrote short summaries or comments on their readings, instead of answering more difficult questions or analyzing the contents. Mikulecky (2008) suggested having students talk about the readings in groups or with the teacher, as well.

ER has been shown to have a variety of benefits for students, including increased enjoyment of reading, improved vocabulary, increased confidence, and better writing skills (Bell, 1998). Waring (2009) suggested that ER could be used in combination with a more traditional course, seeing it as a vital part of a reading curriculum. While most teachers prefer to use graded readers for ER, there is some precedent for the use of online materials to support an ER curriculum (see for example Arnold, 2009).

Method

This paper outlines a curriculum in which skills-based instruction is combined with elements of ER. Students were able to learn and practice reading skills and strategies in class, then apply them in a weekly reading assignment. For the weekly readings, students did not use graded readers, but chose articles from among the variety of authentic materials available on the internet.

Students were Chinese Studies Department students at Aichi University. The majority of the students were in their 3rd year; all were taking the same Reading I course. At the end of the term, students were asked to fill out a simple survey about the course, indicating what elements they felt were useful and commenting on the reading assignments. These evaluations were collected and analyzed to give a preliminary assessment of the effectiveness of the course material.

Curriculum

The curriculum was based on a combination of reading skill instruction and ER-

influenced reading. 90-minute classes were held weekly, and the class met 15 times during the term. In order to maximize the limited instruction time, reading skills and strategies were taught and practiced in class. The weekly reading homework was designed to give students chances to practice the skills they learned in class and followed many of the key ER principles.

In class, students learned about reading strategies and how to use the SQ3R method; context clues; finding the main idea and details; scanning for information and speed reading; and inferring meaning. Each lesson topic was followed by an activity week, where students had a chance to practice and refine their skills and check their understanding of the lesson topic. Part of each lesson was also designated for small-group discussion of the reading homework. The skills and strategies that students learned in class could be practiced during these weekly readings.

At the beginning of the term, students learned about the weekly reading assignments. They were to choose an article (of a minimum 200 words) to read each week during the main part of the term, for a total of 10 weeks. This assignment, while not strictly an ER exercise, did follow many of the principles of ER:

- A wide variety of articles, covering many different topics, were available.
- Students were asked to choose articles that were interesting and level-appropriate.
- A major purpose of the reading was for pleasure and general information.
- Students reflected on the readings by answering a few simple questions; they were not required to do in-depth analysis or translation.
- The teacher checked students' readings each week and offered comments and guidance.
- Students were encouraged to try reading without a dictionary.

The minimum article length of 200 words, multiplied by 10 weeks, meant that even the most reluctant reader should have been exposed to at least 2000 words over the course of the term. Many students chose to read longer articles and thus were exposed to even more language input.

The internet was a wonderful resource for this project. Students received a list of online article sources at the beginning of the term (see Appendix 1). These sources covered a range of article topics, styles, and levels. Best of all, they were all authentic

examples of English. Students did not seem to have difficulties finding articles of interest to them, although (echoing the findings of Arnold, 2009) many did choose more difficult articles, perhaps finding them more engaging, or seeking a challenge.

Students recorded their readings in a reading notebook, where they also answered three simple questions about each article. (See Appendix 2 for a sample notebook page.) A portion of the class period was devoted to small group discussions, during which each student introduced the week's article and the group asked a few questions about it. These class discussions allowed the students to share the interesting information they had read; they also helped to ensure that students kept on-track with the weekly readings.

Results and Discussion

On the final day of the term, the students were asked to fill out a short survey about the class. The first question gauged their feelings toward the course as a whole; the second asked which activities they found most interesting or useful; the third asked for comments on the reading homework; and the last question asked for general comments. (See Appendix 3 for the original survey.) Table 1 shows the range of answers for the first question.

Table 1. Student Opinions on the Class

Was this class...	Yes	Yes, a bit	Somewhat	No, not really	No
Interesting?	42	10	2	0	0
Difficult?	2	13	24	10	4
Useful?	26	21	7	0	0
Enjoyable?	39	12	3	0	0
Educational?	27	23	4	0	0

Note. 54 surveys were collected; one student did not respond in the second section (“Difficult”). To fit the table, the phrasing has been altered slightly from the original question, but the meaning is unchanged.

The responses were generally positive; the only section with answers in the negative categories deals with the course difficulty, where over a quarter of the students said it was not difficult or not very difficult. One of the characteristics of ER is the ability for students to choose easier reading material, so this response was not unexpected, nor was it unwelcome. On the other hand, over 96% of students answered “Yes” or “Yes,

a bit” when asked if the class was interesting; about 87% found it useful; 94% found it enjoyable; and almost 93% found it educational.

The students were also asked to indicate which activities they found to be the most interesting and/or useful. The results are shown in Figure 2.

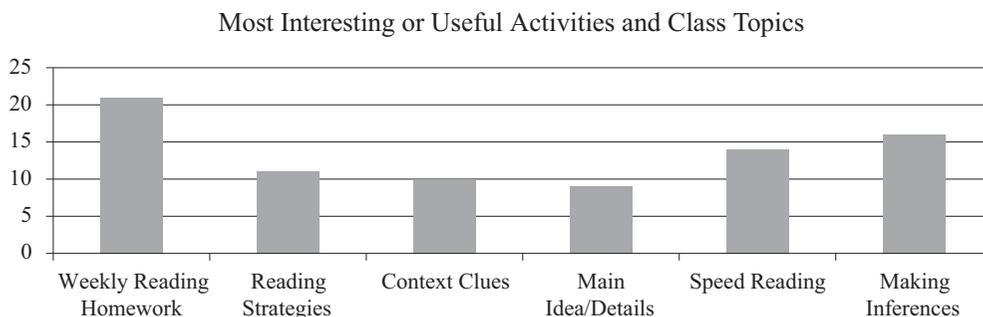


Figure 2. Student evaluation of class activities.

The weekly readings were the most useful, followed by making inferences, speed reading, reading strategies, context clues, and main idea/details. In total, 21 students chose the reading homework; 11 chose reading strategies; and a total of 49 chose various reading skills (some students made more than one selection). It is important to note that, despite some researchers’ dismissal of reading skills in favor of ER (see, for example, Susser & Robb, 1990), from the students’ point of view, both activities were valuable. Furthermore, practicing these kinds of skills should also help students become better equipped to tackle ER projects. For example, learning to guess a word’s meaning from context can reduce students’ reliance on a dictionary, which in turn should allow them to read more quickly and smoothly.

Student Comments

The most common comments repeated the theme that the weekly readings were difficult, but interesting. A majority of the comments were very positive in tone. Just ten comments were slightly negative; of these, eight were remarks about the difficulty of the assignment. This seems to indicate that some students were selecting articles above their comprehension level, a problem which could possibly be solved by a better explanation of how to choose articles and where to find easier reading material. The other two negative

comments were complaints about having to do homework. Also, a few were left blank. Still, 40 comments were positive, indicating that almost 75% of the students found the work interesting, useful, or otherwise valuable. Figure 3 shows a selection of the positive student comments (with some small grammatical corrections and clarifications made, in brackets.)

- “It [the reading homework] was good for me.”
- “It is important practice for me to study English.”
- “It’s a little difficult but useful.”
- “Reading English is difficult, but I can understand [...] world news.”
- “I think that reading article[s is] really fun.”
- “I think [it is] great to survey my favorite things.”
- “I enjoy[ed] every week!”
- “I think the reading notebook homework is good, because opportunities to read English increase.”
- “Choos[ing] article[s] is interesting.”

Figure 3. Student comments on the weekly reading assignments.

Limitations

It is important to note that these results are based solely on students’ impressions of the class. While the initial results are positive, it would be helpful to have an objective measurement of student improvement. Opportunities for future research would include administration of a reading comprehension or reading speed test at the beginning and end of the term, to see if the positive attitudes are supported by tangible improvements in reading skills and fluency.

Conclusion

The goal of this course was to combine ER philosophies and reading skills instruction into a single university-level reading curriculum. Given a limited amount of class time, this seemed best accomplished by teaching reading skills in class and having students

select weekly readings to complete at home. The large amount of authentic reading material online allowed students to choose interesting, level-appropriate readings each week.

This study was an initial step in evaluating the effectiveness of the combined program. So far, the results seem promising. Students enjoyed the curriculum and found both the reading skills instruction and the ER-based reading homework useful. Further study is needed to determine whether or not these affective results translate into measurable improvements in fluency.

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Appendix 1: List of Online Resources for Students

Where can you find articles online?

Anime News Network

<http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/>

News about Japanese animation, games, and culture in English.

BBC News

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/language/wordsinthenews/index.shtml>

Videos and news articles for English language learners.

ESPN

<http://espn.go.com/>

Sports news from the USA and around the world.

The Japan Times

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/>

News and articles about Japan, in English.

Newseum's Top Pages

<http://www.newseum.org/todaysfrontpages/topten.asp>

Front pages of papers from around the world (not all English).

NHK World in English

<http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/index.html>

NHK World News in English.

Scholastic News Online

<http://magazines.scholastic.com/>

A news site written for and by students in the USA.

PBS News Hour Extra

<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/>

Short news stories with videos.

Time For Kids

<http://www.timeforkids.com/>

A news site for students in the USA, made by Time Magazine.

Wikipedia—Simple English Edition

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http://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page

An online encyclopedia with information about many different subjects.

Yahoo!

www.yahoo.com

Articles about all kinds of subjects, including news, sports, and health.

Appendix 2: Reading Notebook Example

Date: 4/17/14

Title: “Beckham to help Chinese football”

Author: Damian Grammaticas

Article Date: March 4, 2013

From: http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/language/wordsinthenews/2013/03/130304_witn_bekham_china.shtml

[Print/copy/cut out the article and paste it in your notebook or put it in your file]

The former England football captain, David Beckham, has been hired by China’s football authorities to do a very special job. They want Beckham to promote their domestic Super League. He will perform his new role while still playing for Paris St. Germain.

David Beckham says he’s ‘honoured’ and ‘excited’ by this new role, as part-time global ambassador for Chinese football. It could be one of his toughest yet.

In the world’s most populous country, football has struggled for popularity. Corruption and match-fixing have tainted Chinese football. And recent attempts by Chinese clubs to hire star players from abroad, including Didier Drogba and Nicolas Anelka, have foundered. The big foreign names have left after just a few months, disappointed by their new clubs or the standard of the game in China.

In the same way he was an ambassador for the London Olympics, David Beckham’s role will be to promote China’s Super League inside and outside the country. In particular he’ll try to encourage Chinese children to get interested in the game.

It’s not clear how much he’ll be paid by China’s League to be its ambassador, but he’ll continue to play football for his new French club Paris St. Germain.

[200 words]

1. Write down any words you learned. What do they mean? *(Write the meaning in English.)*

honoured—proud and happy

ambassador—person who represents something (like a country or a sport)

corruption—illegal activity, usually by people with power or by the government

tainted—spoiled, made bad

2. What does the article talk about? *(Please write about the article in your own words.)*

This is an article about soccer player David Beckham. He will be representing and promoting soccer in China. There have been problems in China’s Super League, and they hope he will help.

3. What did you think about the article? *(Please explain your opinions.)*

I thought this was very interesting, because I am a fan of David Beckham. I was surprised to read that he will be a representative for soccer in China. He must be popular in China, too.

(X “It was good.” → O “It was interesting/funny/frightening/ _____ because _____.”)

Appendix 3: End-of-Term Class Survey

1. Do you think this class was...	Yes		Somewhat		No
Interesting?	1	2	3	4	5
Difficult?	1	2	3	4	5
Useful for you?	1	2	3	4	5
Enjoyable?	1	2	3	4	5
Teaching you new things?	1	2	3	4	5

2. Which of these did you find interesting or useful? Circle as many as you want:

Reading Notebooks Reading Strategies Context Clues
 Main Idea/Details Speed Reading Making Inferences

3. What did you think about the reading notebook homework?

4. Do you have any comments about the class in general?