



Japanese Extensive Reading Courses at a U.S. University: Meaning-focused Input and Output Facilitated by a Japanese Instructor-Librarian Team

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This paper introduces a U.S. university's Japanese Extensive Reading Program. A Japanese language instructor and an East Asian Studies Librarian collaborated in developing the program. In the first section, The Japanese Extensive Reading Program at the University of Notre Dame, the Japanese language instructor describes the background and the implementation of the program. In the second, The Support of the Hesburgh Libraries for the Extensive Reading Program, the East Asian Studies Librarian discusses how she took a non-conventional librarian role in supporting the program. The final section introduces some of the creative student projects and discusses the educational impact of the program.

Recently, extensive reading (ER) has been receiving much attention among Japanese language specialists in the United States. The University of Notre Dame started Japanese ER courses in Fall 2014. Notre Dame is a private, Catholic research university with 21 language programs, located in the State of Indiana. In 2014, Notre Dame founded the Keough School of Global Affairs, which is focused on international research, scholarship, and education. The school consists of seven institutes, including the Liu Institute for Asia and Asian Studies, which develops Asia-focused research and teaching programs.

Our main motivation for starting ER was to accommodate student diversity. Compared to 10 years ago, we have students with more varied interests, learning goals, first

languages, and study abroad experiences. These facts made the first author wonder if the traditional, one-size-fits-all style class could ever satisfy their needs. Tanaka and Saito (1993) said that "Individualized learning and education, as well as learners' autonomous learning skills, are essential for addressing the diversity issue" (pp. 11-12).

The first author, a Japanese language instructor, started learning about ER from various teachers in the U.S. and Japan, and at about that time Notre Dame hired the second author, the East Asian Studies Librarian, in a newly established position in Spring 2012. In 2013, the first author created ER activities in collaboration with the second author.

In a recent discussion among Japanese language educators, internal articulation was pointed out as essential for an effective foreign language program. At the college level, there are many internal units and colleagues that language instructors should collaborate with, such as the language center, study abroad office, area studies

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professors, and so forth. However, maintaining good communication between these units is not always easy. Our collaboration, between a Japanese language instructor and the East Asian Studies Librarian, has been extremely successful, which makes our ER courses go very smoothly.

The Japanese Extensive Reading Program at the University of Notre Dame

Overview of the Japanese ER Program

At Notre Dame, there are five colleges and schools, but only the College of Arts and Letters and the College of Science have foreign language requirements. We offer first- through fourth- or fifth-year Japanese language courses, depending on the year, plus stand-alone ER courses. The total enrollment is around 90-100 every semester, including around 40 Japanese majors and minors. All Japanese majors and minors are either double or triple majors with other subjects, and others take Japanese as an elective. Overall, we have students from various areas, such as business, biology, computer science, history, English, and mechanical engineering, to name a few. The university uses the semester system, and both the fall and spring semesters are 16 weeks long.

The instructor and the librarian started collecting books in Summer 2013. We first conducted a biweekly "Reading Club" in the Fall 2013 and Spring 2014 terms. Although this extracurricular activity was optional for students, we consistently had more than 20 attendees. We conducted a student survey, and the results showed that over 85% of attendees would prefer regular standalone ER courses. Consequently, in Fall 2014, we offered our first stand-alone ER class for all levels. Since Fall 2014, the first author has been conducting the stand-alone ER

courses, totalling 8 semesters in a row to date, including two separate levels (beginning and intermediate/advanced). A total of 177 students have enrolled in ER for these semesters, and among them, 40 students repeated the course multiple times.

We consistently enroll around 20 students, depending on the semester. We generally have an even mix of students from each level. Our ER class meets once a week for 50 or 100 minutes, 15 times a semester, and either one or two credit hours are awarded. This class is an elective, and the prerequisite is one semester of the regular Japanese course. The course is repeatable.

The ER class has two important functions. First, it supplements the intensive reading activities done in other classes. Second, ER can be used as a strategy for student retention. ER is a low-pressure course, which is especially attractive to double or triple majors, who have difficulties sparing time to take three- to five-credit regular Japanese language classes.

The main in-class activity is sustained silent reading (SSR). During the first class, the instructor explains the four essential Japanese ER rules by Awano et al. (2012): (1) Start with an easy book, (2) Do not use a dictionary, (3) Skip difficult words, and (4) Choose a different book if you get bored. The instructor tells them to relax and enjoy reading on their own. After reading each book, students are required to fill out individual reading journals, using a Google Form. This becomes an online portfolio, which is useful for their self-evaluations later in the semester.

We often incorporate other activities, such as book chats and writing book reviews, and the instructor spends as much in-class time as possible consulting with individual

students. They are also required to work on creative projects due at the end of the semester.

Sakai and Kanda (2005) claimed that the teacher of an ER course should (1) not teach, (2) not force learning, and (3) not give exams. Therefore, the instructor set up the grading criteria that attendance and class participation make up a large percentage, and the evaluation of other tasks, such as writing reading journals and completing self-evaluations and final projects, is based on whether students complete their work before the deadlines. In other words, the instructor does not grade the content or quality of their work. Pass/fail grading may be more suitable for ER courses.

Students' self-evaluations

Every semester, our students are asked to complete midterm (in week 8, after six ER sessions) and end-of-semester self-evaluations. The evaluations consist of questions about their outcomes and their goal-setting,

and students can write in the responses either in English or Japanese. During the past 5 semesters (Fall 2014 to Fall 2016), all 106 students completed this assignment.

Here, we look at the following question from the midterm evaluation: "Do you enjoy extensive reading activities? If so, why?" In fact, 100% of the students answered "yes." Figure 1 shows their reasons. The significant reasons are "ER class is relaxing," and "there is no pressure." It is also remarkable that many students used the words "one's own," such as in "A learner can choose one's own books," "There are many books for one's own level," and "Reading at one's own pace is good."

Many students also said that they learned about Japanese culture, which is a kind of content learning. Recently, content-based instruction (CBI) has been a frequent topic in foreign language programs, and many teachers are struggling with how to include "content" in beginning-level language classrooms. We think ER can be a solution

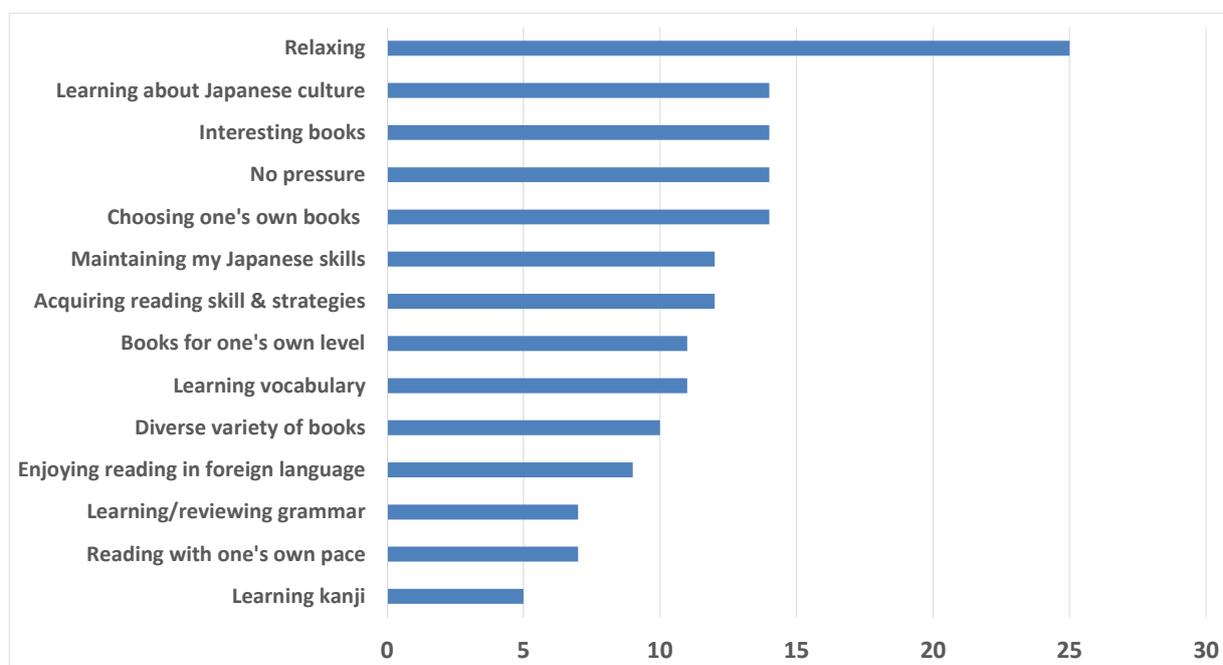


Figure 1. Results of midterm self-evaluations; question: "Do you enjoy extensive reading activities? If so, why?"

for that. Clearly, many students learned not only language, but also about culture, including history, geography, and literature, which should be considered a significant merit of ER.

Next, we look at one of the results from the end-of-semester self-evaluations (Figure 2). All 106 students completed the self-evaluation from Fall 2014 to Fall 2016. They were required to answer questions about their final projects and the overall ER outcomes. In fill-in responses to the question “What outcomes did you see, such as improvement or changes in your language skills?”, 35 students said “Being able to read books faster” and “Gaining vocabulary knowledge.” Besides “General reading skill,” 24 students felt they had improved in kanji skill and grammar. Again, over 20 students said they learned about Japanese culture. Others also said that they “gained confidence in reading Japanese.” In addition to that, some students

reported improvements in other skills, such as writing and speaking. This could be related to the final project presentations, which is a significant opportunity for them to practice writing and speaking.

The Support of the Hesburgh Libraries for the Extensive Reading Program

The Hesburgh Libraries at the University of Notre Dame consist of fifteen branch libraries. The East Asian Studies Collection, like most other subject-specific collections, is embedded in the main Hesburgh Library services system. The Collection includes materials in a wide range of subjects related to East Asia in Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and English. The East Asian Studies Librarian, a member of the Collections Strategy and Subject Services Program, oversees collection development and functions as the Library liaison to faculty researchers, teachers, and students.

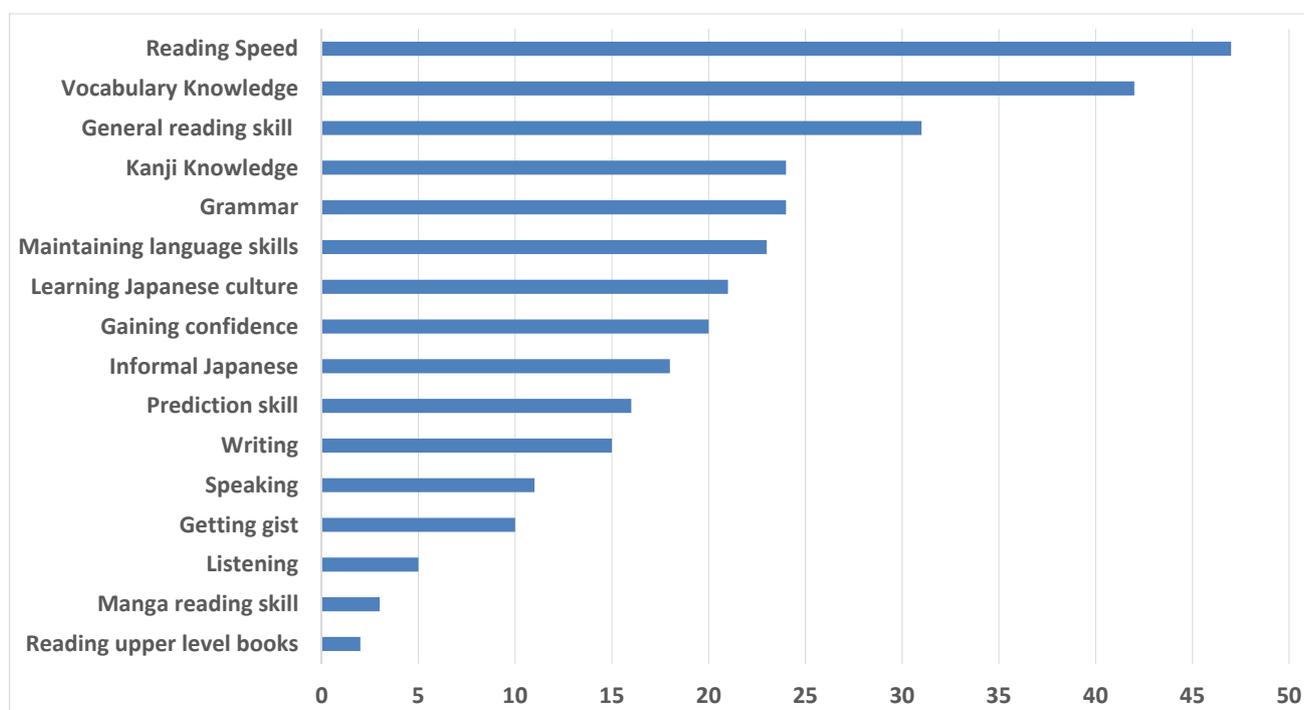


Figure 2. Results of final self-evaluations; question: “What outcomes did you see?”

As Jaguszewski and Williams wrote in their 2013 report, librarians' roles are no longer limited to selecting resources and offering one-shot library instructions. To meet new and emerging user needs, librarians should be flexible and creative in supporting research, teaching, and learning activities; connecting users with appropriate digital and human resources; facilitating collaboration and communication among users; and collaborating with other library experts (functional specialists) who specialize in technologies, copyright, etc.

The second author (the librarian) saw the Japanese ER Program as an opportunity to put these ideas into practice by developing new services, facilitating multilateral communication between the users and different service units of the Hesburgh Libraries.

In 2013, when the first author approached the librarian with the novel idea of starting Japanese ER, the second author could not foresee what would be necessary, other than building a collection of books. It wasn't until the books arrived from Japan and the records were created, that she became aware of the difficulty that the Japanese language students had in finding and using the books, which—as typical of materials at an academic library—were classified and labeled according to their subject matter. The Japanese language students, mostly undergraduates, were unaccustomed to using the library to locate and retrieve books that were shelved on various floors by their call numbers.

In consultation with her Collections Strategy and Subject Services Program supervisor, and through her discussions with the Teaching, Research and User Services Program (which handles stack management and circulation), the librarian was able to secure special shelving space on the

first floor Fishbowl group study area. She developed a new workflow that enabled the acquisitions and cataloging staff to assign a new location and a non-regular (shorter) loan period for the Fishbowl collection in the library catalog system. For the non-Japanese speaking shelvees, the library staff covered the call number labels of the ER books with green transparent tape.

After further discussion with the library members, instead of shelving the books by call number, the librarian reorganized the books into six reading levels (0–5). For non-graded authentic reading materials, the first author assigned the appropriate levels and marked the books with colored star stickers on their spines. The librarian created a blog that enabled the collection to be virtually browsed by levels and keywords (author, theme, series, etc.).

The librarian was initially able to arrange for the biweekly Reading Club to meet in the Fishbowl group study area. As the ER course was offered, it soon became apparent that a classroom within the library was necessary. The librarian was successful in arranging a classroom within the Center for Digital Scholarship.

The librarian felt that the positive results of the first course merited the preservation and sharing of the final student projects. She collected and submitted the projects to the libraries' newly-established Digitization Team to be digitized. She deposited the digital files in CurateND, the institutional repository, which was developed and is maintained by the Center for Digital Scholarship. She also displayed the highlights of the projects in the Honeycomb Digital Exhibits & Collections (DEC), an online exhibition tool, also developed by the libraries.

Aware of the students' need to be digitally literate, the librarian instructed the students about the responsible use of images and ideas created by others and sought assistance, when necessary, from the Copyright First Responder Team of the libraries. She also assisted the students in their project creation by connecting them with the experts and tools of the Center for Digital Scholarship. For example, a group of students used One Button Studio to record their skit, then, with the Emerging Technologies Librarian's help, they added English subtitles to their video, making it accessible to the non-Japanese speaking audience.

Working together, we two authors created a functional Japanese ER program. The services and support of the libraries contributed to the success of the program by enabling students to easily access the reading materials for their input, and to be able to be creative and productive in their output. Furthermore, their projects could be preserved and shared for educational and research purposes.

Final Student Projects

Motivation and Description of the Projects

Paul Nation (2014) pointed out the importance of four strands: meaning-focused input (listening and reading), meaning-focused output (speaking and writing), language-focused learning (vocabulary and grammar), and fluency development. ER can provide meaning-focused input and be used for fluency development. Nation (2015) also claimed that we should link ER to meaning-focused output, such as speaking and writing, by having learners talk and write about what they have read.

From the beginning, when the first author started the ER courses, she felt that we

should give students a chance to share their accomplishments throughout their ER activities. Therefore, the instructor incorporated the final project and oral presentations into the course, which connects the reading activities with meaning-focused output. The objectives of the final project presentations are first, to share the students' varied outcomes, and second, to incorporate output opportunities into ER activities.

In the first semester of the ER course, the instructor planned to limit the project format to a book talk, where the students make posters or ads to present their favorite books. However, when asked about the project, many of the students said that they wanted to write their own stories. Therefore, the topic and the format have been unrestricted since then.

The students give booth-style presentations, which creates a more casual setting. Each student has 20 to 30 minutes, giving the same presentation a couple of times with the different audience groups. We usually have three to four concurrent stations. Overall, we think that these booth-style presentations fit well with ER because they allow multiple and multidirectional interactions with less pressure. However, the presenters cannot attend all of their classmates' presentations, and for the instructor, managing the time needed to view all booth-style presentations often becomes an issue.

The project timeline begins during the mid-semester break, when students start thinking about what they want to present. Then, during the second half of the semester, they submit their proposals, progress reports, first drafts, and final projects. The instructor tries to meet individually with them at least two or three times to give them feedback.

The instructor gives them the following main instructions: (1) Choose something inspired by your reading activities, and (2) Enjoy the preparation process. Students can work individually or with their classmates. The content and format of the projects are completely unrestricted. Students are also told to use “easy Japanese” to write and create their products. Otherwise, some may overuse dictionaries and end up having trouble presenting their own work. This seems to be a very natural process because ER itself is reading easy books. The instructor also emphasizes that the students should consider the audience and try to help them enjoy the presentation, especially because the booth style creates more interactions. Students should prepare their presentations in the target language, but they can mix in English, especially if they are in the beginning-level classes. As long as they meet all necessary deadlines, they receive full points.

Outcomes

Next, we present some outcomes of the projects from the past five semesters, Fall 2014 to Fall 2016. In total, there were 106 students and 92 projects. Figure 3 breaks down the types of projects by their content.

- 24% of the students gave book talks. They chose their favorite books to talk about.
- 15% introduced some element of Japanese culture. They picked their favorite person, place, historical topic, etc.
- 50% produced creative writing. They wrote their own stories and made their own books.

- 11% translated stories from English into Japanese.

All students used visual aids, such as hand-drawn pictures, photos, or videos.

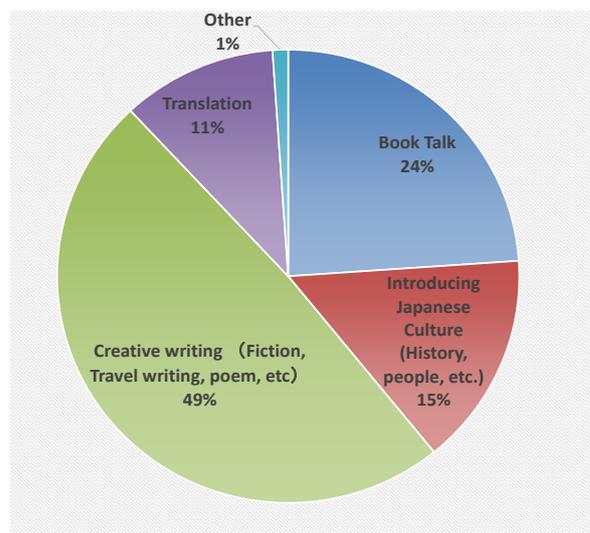


Figure 3. Outcomes: types of projects (Fall 14 to Fall 16, 5 semesters, 106 students, 92 products).

Figure 4 breaks down the projects by their format. In the Fall 2014, students worked on either handwritten books or posters, but since then, they have been producing more diverse projects.

- 50% produced handwritten books, such as hand-drawn picture books and manga.
- 50% produced other formats, such as display ads, board games, card games, videos, music, and online games.

They may be making games or other interactive formats because they want to involve the audience more.

Every semester, students’ projects vary widely, and they have been preserved and shared by the library. They serve as references for the next generation of students and teachers.

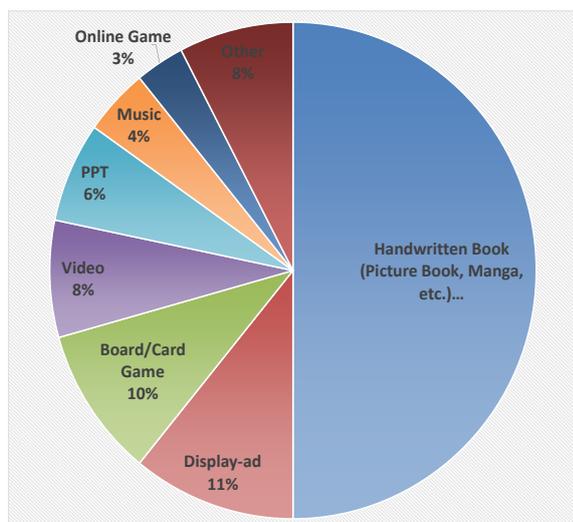


Figure 4. Outcomes: formats (Fall 14 to Fall 16, 5 semesters).

Discussion

The projects had some interesting outcomes. Some students combined their majors with ER, and other students related ER to campus events and events in their own lives.

First, students combined their own academic interests and their ER. One student introduced a history book on Toyotomi Hideyoshi using a PowerPoint presentation. He was a history major at an intermediate level of Japanese and took ER courses for two semesters when he was a junior. He mentioned that after taking a semester of the ER course, he started using Japanese primary sources to write his history papers and senior thesis. He highly evaluated the ER activities and thought that ER tremendously improved his Japanese reading skill, which had an impact on writing his senior thesis. In fact, his thesis on the Japanese invasions of Korea won the best senior honors thesis by a history major in Spring 2017.

Other students, even engineering majors, found ways to connect their academic

interests and talents to Japanese ER. Two students from the first-year Japanese class liked the folktale *Momotaro* [*The Peach Boy*]. They said that the story was suitable for making an online roleplaying game, which they did. Another student, also an engineering major, liked *kanji* (Chinese characters). She made a kanji puzzle using 3D printing, which required special skills from her own major. Another student was a music major who learned a particular composition technique in her music class. She wanted to use that technique for her ER project and decided to make an original melody for the famous Matsuo Basho haiku, *Furuike Ya*.

One project was related to our other collaborative project, *Nuclear Nightmares: Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Historical Context*, which consisted of a poster exhibition at the Hesburgh Library and a lecture series. The program inspired a student to write an original story titled *My Grandfather's Memories of Pearl Harbor*.

Many students chose to write travel guides in Japanese based on their own trips. Some of them wrote about their study-abroad experiences.

As shown in the example projects, the students' creativity is unlimited. Every semester, we are truly amazed to see how creative and passionate the students are. At the same time, we have realized how different all students are regarding their interests and talents. The reason that this great variety of projects was possible is that the instructor did not control them. Language teachers tend to control classes, which may actually prevent students' active, autonomous learning. At the same time, we should emphasize that enough input, which comes from enough extensive reading, is required to lead to these projects. Input is absolutely necessary for meaning-focused output.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we can say that our 4 years of ER courses have been quite successful in promoting students' active learning. This is obvious from their final projects, which they spent so much time and effort producing. The students wanted to work hard, regardless of their grades or credit hours, which, we believe, is based on true autonomous learning. Therefore, in order to have a successful ER course, we should give learners enough freedom to show their individualities and personalities. Based on this, we can say that the instructor's role should be to provide opportunities for the students to demonstrate and share their creativity and initiative. We should not overly control their activities in classes, which means that we should be true facilitators. We believe that this will eventually cultivate students' autonomous learning.

We have a couple of students who have recently been selecting their own reading materials using interlibrary loan. After taking several ER courses, there are also students who started exploring Japanese literature books for researchers. We are pleased to see our students becoming truly independent readers and learners.

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Appendix: University of Notre Dame's Japanese ER Sites

Guides

- Extensive Reading in Japanese: A Course Guide (Library Guide): <http://libguides.library.nd.edu/ealj-er>
- Extensive Reading in Japanese @ Hesburgh Libraries: A Book Guide

(Blog): <https://library-nd-japanese-extensive-reading.blogspot.com/>

Student Projects

- Extensive Reading in Japanese: CurateND (student projects collected by the Archives of the University of Notre Dame): <https://tinyurl.com/jpn-er-curate-nd>
- Extensive Reading in Japanese @ Notre Dame: Honeycomb Online Exhibitions (selected student projects): <https://tinyurl.com/jpn-er-dec-nd>