



Two Steps Forward, One Step Back: Exploring Attitudes towards Reading

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Current research clearly shows the positive and long-term effects of extensive reading (ER) in a second language classroom (Nakanishi, 2015). Recently, we have seen an increase in ER programs being established in secondary schools in Japan and Korea. However, what does one do when an established ER program is suddenly dropped from an English curriculum? This paper reflects on the reasons why an ER program that expanded over six grades lost the support of its faculty members. The results of reading surveys administered to both students and teachers that explored perceptions of and attitudes towards reading in both English and Japanese are discussed, along with some of the obstacles teachers have faced in overseeing an ER program in a junior and senior high school.

Day and Bamford (1998) suggested the first definition of ER was provided by Harold Palmer in 1921. They noted that he said that unlike intensive reading, where dictionary use and metalinguistic knowledge is actively used to examine texts on a line by line basis, often accompanied by translation into a learner's L1, ER involves rapidly reading books one after another. The focus of ER is firmly on the meaning of the text, not the language used to create that meaning. Day and Bamford credited Palmer's definition with giving ER the interpretation of being "real-world reading but for pedagogical purposes" (p. 5).

The benefits of this type of reading have been widely reported. ER can help learners acquire new vocabulary (e.g. Nation, 2009), strengthen previously learned vocabulary (e.g. Waring & Takaki, 2003; Brown, 2009), and improve reading fluency (e.g. Nation,

2009; Beglar, Hunt, & Kite, 2012). It is an activity that gives learners the opportunity to learn through meaning-focused input and to read without instructor support. Nakanishi (2015) concluded in his meta-analysis of ER research that it improves reading proficiency, and that it should be included in a language curriculum.

Building motivation for reading and foreign language learning is also cited as a reason for encouraging ER activities. Day and Bamford (1998) suggested that ER encourages learners to enjoy what they read. This increases their desire to read, the amount read, and results in benefits to language acquisition. Takase (2007) found that high school students' motivation to continue with an ER program was related to "a great sense of joy and accomplishment after finishing an entire English book" (p.12). ER can provide students with mastery experiences that increase self-confidence in their language abilities.

Custance, I., & Flanagan, A. (2018). Two steps forward, one step back: Exploring attitudes towards reading. *Extensive Reading World Congress Proceedings, 4*, 253-265.

The ER program at the junior and senior high school where this study took place was started as another tool to help students learn English. As more demands were being placed on students institutionally to achieve a higher proficiency of English, the second author believed an ER program would be beneficial for students to acquire not only vocabulary, but also increase their reading speed and perhaps become lifelong readers of English. Krashen (2004) stated that "Readers have better reading ability, know more vocabulary, write better, spell better and have better control of complex grammatical constructions" (p.149). It was believed that institutional encouragement of English reading could have wide-ranging benefits.

History of the Program

Table 1 shows how the ER Program grew consistently over the years. In JHS, the program was self-contained in the classroom. Students read for 50 minutes once a week, with more time devoted to reading when teachers were conducting oral speaking tests.

In the early years of ER in the SHS, the teacher chose a range of titles for students to buy. For class, they wrote book reports and exchanged books with their friends during Oral Communication class. However, as the program expanded, the author and library staff started to catalogue and display books in the library using the yomiyasusa, or 'reading ease level', coding system (Furukawa, 2007).

From 2013, despite more student responsibility and ownership of the program, problems appeared with a failure in responsibility to find and return books to the library. In early 2014, with book return issues, untidy shelves, and book loss causing

problems for library staff, the ER program was nearly ejected from the library. It was suggested that books be placed in another part of the school with little to no supervision. Fortunately, the school moved to a new campus with a larger library in September 2014. More space was provided for English books and a new system put in place for their management. These rules seemed effective, with fewer complaints from librarians, students, and faculty.

Despite this and other changes made to the program based on students' feedback from surveys, the decision to remove ER from the school curriculum was taken in March 2016. The reasons given were students' reported lack of enjoyment in reading, no observed improvements in reading skills, and the need to use time for other types of instruction. The authors felt that student complaints about reading should be explored further, as well as whether students' general attitudes towards reading might change during their time at the school. The potential influence of staff reading experiences on student attitudes towards reading was also thought to be worthy of investigation.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated:

1. Do students' attitudes towards reading differ between grades?
2. What are teachers' experiences of and attitudes towards reading?

Method

Participants

The participants in this study were the students and teachers at the school. Students in grades seven to twelve answered survey

Table 1. History of the ER Program at Ritsumeikan Junior and Senior High School

From	Information	G7	G8	G9	G10	G12		
12/2005	Author attended workshops and conferences to learn more about ER.							
04/2007	Proposal to introduce ER accepted with a limited number of books bought and used during class. Books taken to class in baskets. Simple journals used to record books read.							
04/2008	More books bought, including those with CDs to help develop listening skills. Book carts used to accommodate the larger number of books and listening equipment. Online program (Raz-kids) used to supplement books during vacation time. Journal layout changed.							
04/2009	The whole junior high school began doing ER. Number stickers correlating to book bags and journals placed on books to make checking returns easier. G10 Oral Communication (OC) started ER. Each student bought a book, and these were exchanged between students during the year. Most students donated their books to the library at the end of the year.						OC only	
04/2010	G10 OC continued ER on and off through the year. More books added to the library, including higher level books.							
04/2011	Books added to library.							
04/2012	Books added to library.							
04/2013	GJ (Global Junior) students started regular ER, keeping journals to record what they read. Students were responsible for finding, borrowing, and returning books to the library.						GJ only	
04/2014	MReader was introduced as an alternate form of evaluation. "M" stickers put on books that have MReader quizzes. Moved to new campus with larger library (Sept.). More space was provided for English books. Issues with students' treatment of library books, particularly before end-of-term deadlines. Survey administered to get feedback on MReader and ER (Feb.)							
04/2015	Information about ER, library use, and MReader given in orientation to new students. SHS students used MReader with weekly targets set to reduce the "end-of-term rush." Students returned books to bins in the library that corresponded to reading level (colour-coded). ER/MReader survey administered (Dec.). Decision taken to remove ER from school curriculum in the coming academic year (Mar.).						Not MSC	SS & SSG
04/2016	ER continued with G10 students (except MSC) with permission of grade teachers and head of English.							
07/2017	Author continued ER with eight students after parents express interest.							

Note. G = grade, e.g. G7 = 7th grade students, G12 = 12th grade students. Arrows indicate when grades were engaged in ER. ER was not done with G11 students. MSC = Medical Science Course; SS(G) = Super Science (Global) Course.

questions in order to gain a cross-sectional representation of attitudes towards reading across the years. Table 2 lists the number of students in each grade who completed the survey. Also, one-hundred sixty-two full-time and part-time teaching staff were asked to complete an online survey indicating their current and past attitudes towards reading.

Student Survey

Student data were collected using a survey containing 27 items (see Appendix). The first four items asked students to complete a sentence with a frequency adverb. Eleven items used a five-point Likert scale asking students to describe the extent to which they agreed with a statement. The final twelve items asked students to indicate when they expected to need to read English in the future. One of these items was “Other” with students given space to provide more detail. Surveys were anonymous, though students were asked to indicate their course, age, and sex.

It was decided to give the survey in Japanese to reduce administration time, and to ensure greater understanding of what questions were asking. The survey was translated by the researchers, and checked by native Japanese speakers at the school. The survey was paper-based and

administered between May and July 2017. Students were given around 10 minutes to answer the questions.

Teacher Survey

Data about teacher attitudes towards reading were gathered using a survey on Google Forms. The survey contained 21 items about reading habits, and a reading speed check. The link to the survey was emailed to teachers in the English Department in February/March. It was later expanded to the whole school in June/July, with respondents requested to indicate their department. Surveys were anonymous.

The first six items used a 4-point Likert scale asking teachers to describe the extent to which they agreed with a statement. Seven items asked teachers to complete a sentence with a frequency adverb, and two items asked for specific information about how often teachers read emails and online articles in English. Five items were short-answer questions, with the final two items being multiple choice.

The reading speed check used *Body Language*, adapted from *Reading for Speed and Fluency 2* (Nation & Malarcher, 2007). Subjects were asked to time how long it took them to read the text, how easy they

Table 2. Number of Students Who Took the Survey

Grade	Male	Female	Unlisted	Total
7	104	136	4	244
8	103	125	4	232
9	96	118	3	217
10	156	160	7	323
11	146	175	4	325
12	113	158	9	280
Total	718	872	31	1622

felt it was to understand the text, and comprehension questions.

Results

Student Responses

Student responses were input to Excel and mean Likert and frequency scores calculated for each grade. Table 3 lists the results, ranked in order of lowest to highest average rating. A lower score means a higher frequency or a stronger level of agreement with a statement.

Students in 7th grade indicated the strongest desire to increase their English reading skills (Item 14), though across all grades students generally agreed with this statement strongly. Students across all grades

also generally believe that they should be reading more in English (Item 13). Despite this, most students suggest that they do not read English unless it is in their textbooks or given to them by teachers (Item 10).

Responses to item three suggest that students usually find reading English difficult, with a general trend towards it being more consistently difficult as students move through the grades, though with a slight decrease in grade 12.

Items one and five asked about students' attitudes towards reading, while two and seven asked about attitudes towards reading in English. Responses were generally consistent. Students were more likely to like reading Japanese, and find it enjoyable more frequently, than reading

Table 3. Average Scores for Responses

Item	7 th Grade	8 th Grade	9 th Grade	10 th Grade	11 th Grade	12 th Grade
14	1.49	1.82	1.77	1.61	1.61	1.60
3	2.59	2.41	2.21	2.23	2.04	2.14
10	2.87	2.49	2.46	2.46	2.34	2.50
13	2.47	2.82	2.66	2.43	2.43	2.34
5	2.33	2.61	2.45	2.60	2.68	2.80
1	2.28	2.69	2.52	2.66	2.74	2.89
11	3.21	2.91	2.56	2.72	2.35	2.44
4	2.69	3.03	3.00	2.73	2.70	2.69
6	3.33	3.09	3.21	3.20	3.10	2.99
7	2.82	3.28	3.40	3.30	3.45	3.42
2	2.78	3.37	3.42	3.34	3.47	3.50
9	3.34	3.62	3.59	3.57	3.74	3.79
15	3.45	3.70	3.63	3.64	3.82	3.71
8	4.03	3.66	3.71	3.85	3.88	3.73
12	3.53	3.86	3.89	3.89	3.89	3.95

Note. Items 1-4 used frequency adverbs (1 = Very frequent; 5 = Very infrequent); 5-15 used a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly agree; 5 = Strongly disagree).

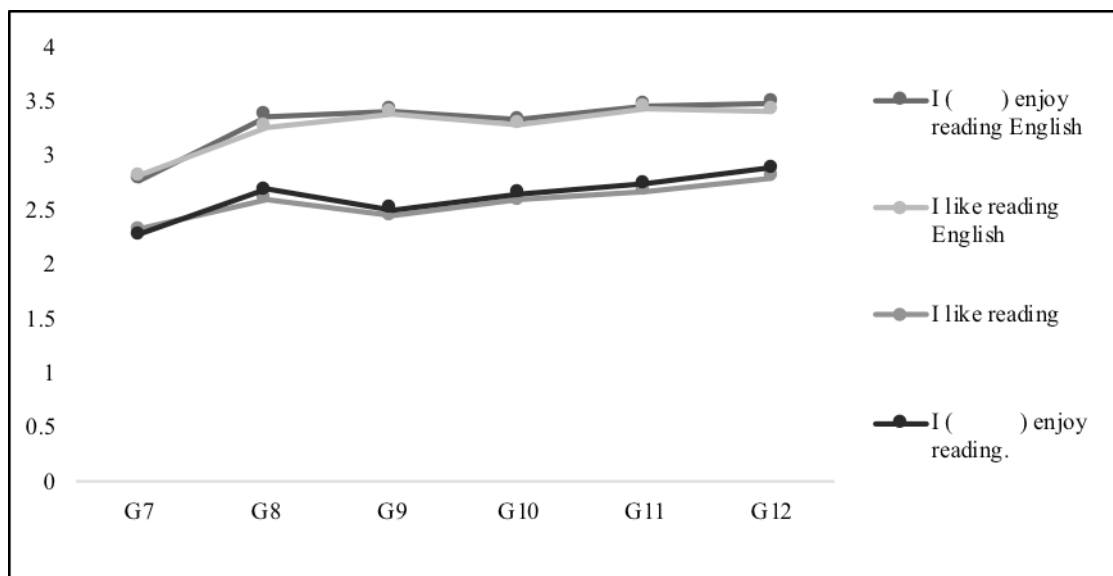


Figure 1. Student attitudes towards reading and reading in English across grades.

in English. There was a decrease in the number of students who like and regularly enjoy reading in English and Japanese in grade eight. Students in higher grades like reading in general less than those in lower grades.

Figure 2 shows the extent to which students across the grades find borrowing books from the library inconvenient. There is a general trend towards students finding the library more inconvenient to use as they move through the school.

The percentage of students who believe they would need to use English for particular activities in the future was also calculated for each grade (Table 4). ‘For work’ (Item 1) was predicted to be a situation in which English reading would be necessary for most of the students across all grades, followed by ‘overseas travel’ (Item 5) and ‘at university’ (Item 4). A low percentage of students believe that reading English will be unnecessary in the future (Item 11), though more students in junior high school

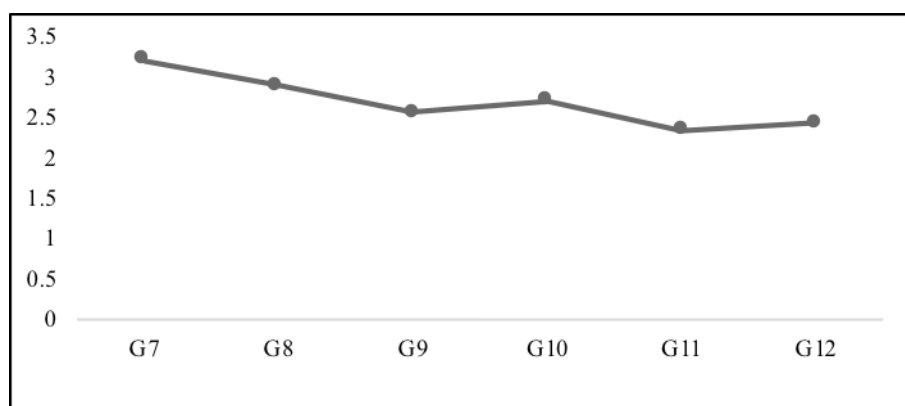


Figure 2. Changing agreement with the statement “Borrowing books from the library is inconvenient.” Lower numbers indicate stronger agreement.

Table 4. Student Beliefs about Future Use of English

Item	G7	G8	G9	G10	G11	G12
1	88.93	81.03	85.71	84.83	79.01	81.79
5	83.61	77.59	76.50	65.63	69.14	64.64
4	73.36	65.52	66.82	62.85	64.81	72.50
9	61.07	52.29	47.93	34.06	25.93	27.86
3	36.07	36.64	35.02	34.37	31.17	39.29
2	35.66	29.74	30.41	35.91	30.56	40.00
6	39.75	31.03	29.49	24.46	22.22	22.14
10	36.07	27.16	23.50	19.81	16.67	17.86
7	28.28	22.84	24.42	20.12	19.44	21.43
8	25.00	23.38	17.97	13.62	11.11	12.14
11	5.33	5.60	5.99	3.72	1.85	3.57
12	6.15	1.29	2.30	2.17	1.85	0.36

Note. Figures are % of grade choosing that item.

(G7-9) believe it will be unnecessary than in senior high school (G10-12).

Teacher Responses

Unfortunately, only 20 teachers responded before the deadline for completing the survey passed. Of these, 14 were English teachers, one belonged to each of the following departments: P.E., Biology, Japanese, and three did not list a department. Table 5 lists the results, ranked in order of lowest to highest average rating. A lower score means a higher degree of frequency or a stronger level of agreement with a statement.

Responses suggest that teachers both feel that they should (Item 3) and want to (Item 5) read more in English. Of the 20 responses, 17 strongly agreed or agreed that they did background reading in English about the subjects that they were teaching (Item 4). Most teachers also said that they enjoyed reading English books (Item 1) and/or internet content (Item 2). Five teachers agreed with the statement that reading English is not something that they enjoy (Item 6), but most disagreed.

With regard to reading habits, Figure 3 shows how frequently teachers read for pleasure in the past and read now, for both English and general reading (presumed to

Table 5. Teacher Survey Responses

Item	3	5	4	1	2	10	13	11	12	7	6	9	8
Average Response	1.75	1.75	2.05	2.10	2.10	2.30	2.35	2.40	2.40	2.75	2.85	3.15	3.55

Note. Items 1-6 used a 4-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly agree; 4 = Strongly disagree); Items 7-13 used frequency adverbs (1 = Very frequent; 5 = Never).

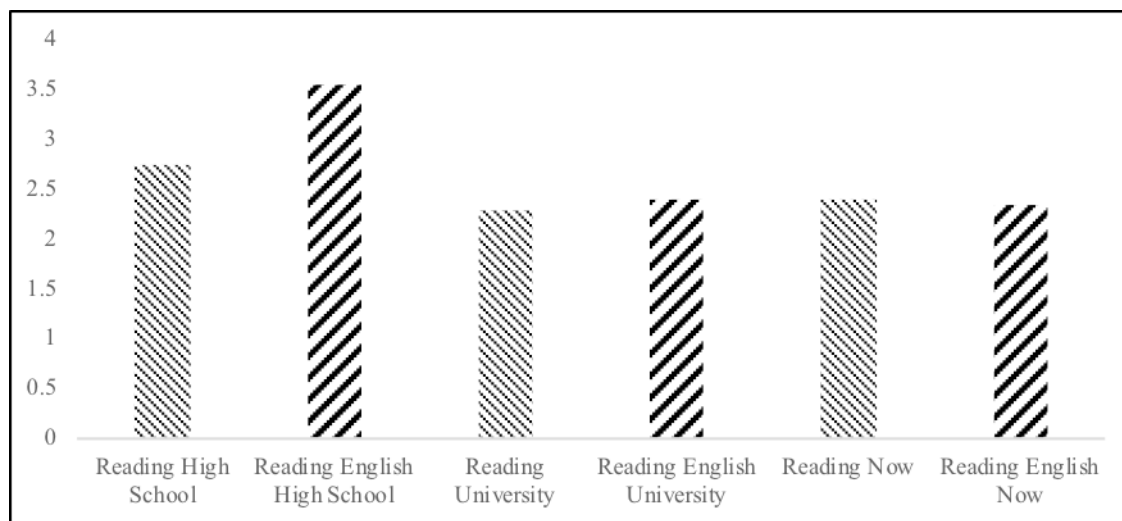


Figure 3. Frequency of pleasure reading amongst teachers. Lower figures indicate greater frequency.

be Japanese). Lower figures indicate more frequent reading for pleasure, with a 2 equating to “sometimes” and 3 “occasionally.” There is a clear difference between the frequency of pleasure reading whilst at high school, at university and now. Fourteen teachers said that they “rarely” or “never” read English for pleasure whilst at high school, but only seven teachers said they “rarely” read English at university, dropping to four now. No teachers said that they “never” read English for pleasure now, or “never” read English at university.

The high average for item 10 indicates that generally teachers only occasionally found English reading materials for themselves whilst at high school. However, six teachers said they found their own materials, all of whom belong to the English department.

Although administered at the same time, due to space constraints, the results of other items are not examined here.

Discussion

The results show that there are many differences in student attitudes towards reading, depending on their grade. Students in grade seven appear to have the most positive attitude towards reading, both in general, and English. However, there seems to be a trend towards students becoming more apathetic towards reading as they get older. However, students in all grades suggested that they want to improve their English reading skills, and on average, students think that they should be reading more in English.

Though these results are unsurprising, the reasons for the lack of enjoyment in reading and the trend towards what appears to be less interest in reading need examining. From the data, these attitudes might be partly explained by how students are accessing books, and what they are reading. Students in grade seven mildly disagreed that the library was inconvenient to use, but in later grades, all students somewhat agreed that using the library was inconvenient. Possibly this is a “chicken and egg” situation, with a general lack of interest in

reading resulting in the need to go to the library and look for things being perceived as troublesome, rather than not finding good books to read easily resulting in less interest in reading. In either case, changing the library environment could have a beneficial effect at the school. The fact that students do not find their own English reading materials, despite the large collection of graded readers available, might also partly result from frustrations with the library.

What students are reading is also an important consideration. Most students indicated that the majority of their English reading materials came from teachers. This, too, could be a factor relating to a decrease in student enjoyment of reading English in particular. If the readings they are provided with are not engaging, students will be hard-pressed to associate reading with enjoyment. That reading is more frequently difficult for students in the higher grades is also unlikely to help students find enjoyment in reading.

Yet, perhaps, there is some hope to be inferred from looking at the teachers' responses to the questions of how frequently they enjoyed reading whilst at school, compared to at university and now. The figures for frequency of enjoying reading, and reading English whilst at high school are very similar for both teachers, and the students now (Figure 4). However, teachers enjoy reading more frequently now, and also enjoyed it more frequently at university. When individuals move out of secondary education, and particularly after leaving university, the choice of what and when to read becomes much more liberal. This means it is easier to stop reading an unenjoyable book and move on to something more engaging. Overall, this could lead to more positive attitudes towards reading.

It is also interesting that both teachers and students want to improve their English reading skills. Whilst this is somewhat expected of students, that teachers also want to improve is something that might

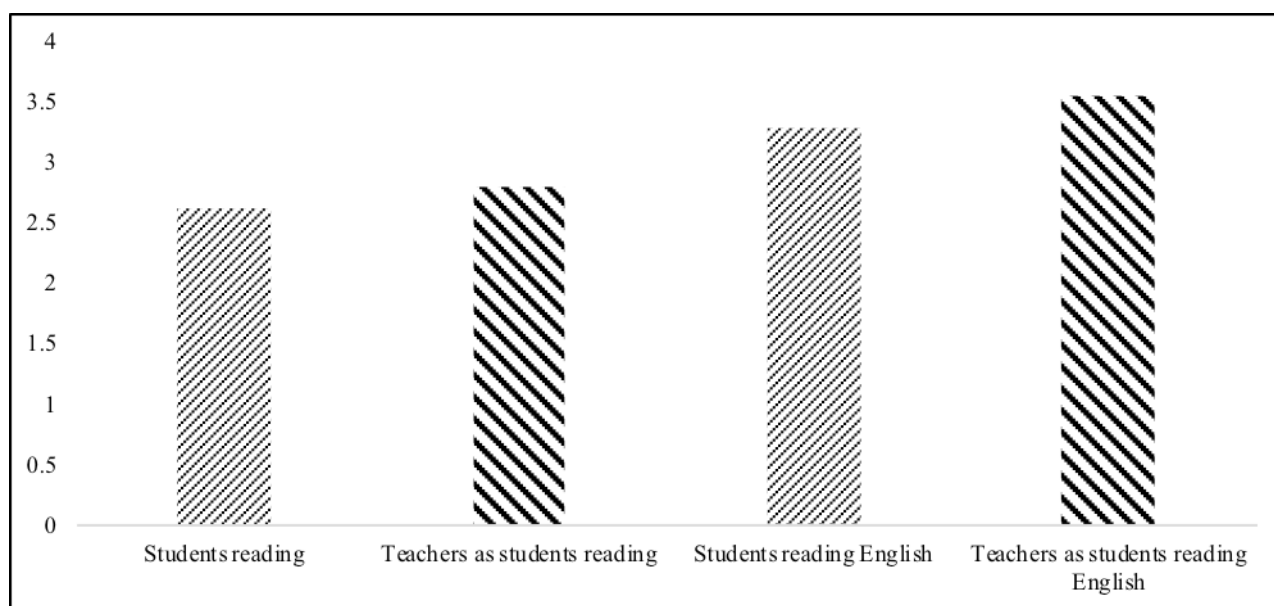


Figure 4. The frequency of reading enjoyment amongst teachers when they were at school, and students now, are relatively similar.

be influenced by the international outlook of the school. Both teachers and students also think that they should read more in English, though teachers agreed with this more strongly, possibly because for many of them the only English reading they do is voluntary. It is possible that mutual support to increase time for reading could help teachers and students alike.

The change in the percentage of students expecting to need to read English while on holiday is interesting. Between JH and SHS, the percentage drops by over 10%, rises in G11, and falls again in G12. These figures might be explained by school trips. In G9, all students visit Australia. Having had this experience, students might revise how necessary they perceive reading to be. Towards the end of G11, many of the students go on school trips overseas. It is possible that the immediacy of the coming trips make students reconsider the need to read English while abroad. A similar effect, with the immediacy of a situation in which students can imagine needing to read English affecting results, could also explain the increase in the number of students in G12 who expect to use English at university.

Conclusion

Given the points noted above, further analysis is needed to confirm the perceptions of and attitudes toward reading in L1 and L2 for students and teachers. Even though a paper questionnaire was administered, a longitudinal study following a group of students from intake to graduation would provide the authors with more in-depth knowledge of how, when, and why students' perceptions and attitudes change. In addition, having face-to-face interviews with both teachers and students

about their feelings towards reading would provide better support for the results found in the questionnaire.

More information examining other aspects of student life, for example, time spent on studying and at club activities would also be beneficial. This could help provide more support for including ER in the classroom. Moreover, collecting real-time data could enable the authors to better understand how the students use the library, and lead to improvements to provide a better learning experience for them.

Over the years, Japan has seen an increase in ER programs in tertiary education, but there has been a slower trend in the starting and continuing of existing programs at the secondary level. As the authors have found, a positive school environment, support from teachers and students, and an ongoing commitment to better an existing program are all crucial for secondary schools who wish to successfully expand ER across a six-year English curriculum in Japan. It is the authors' wish that this paper provide a platform for secondary educators to have a heartfelt discussion how ER can be integrated into an English curriculum while carefully examining the obstacles they face and providing solutions to build stronger programs in the future.

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Appendix

Table 6. Student Survey Questions

Item	Response Options
1. Reading is [] enjoyable.	always
2. Reading English is [] enjoyable.	sometimes
3. Reading English is [] difficult.	occasionally
4. When I don't understand a word when I'm reading, I [] check it straight away.	rarely never
5. I like reading.	Strongly agree
6. I only read for study.	Agree
7. I like reading English.	Neither agree nor disagree
8. I don't think that I will need to read English in the future.	Disagree
9. I read to relax.	Strongly disagree
10. I only read the English in my textbook or given to me by a teacher.	
11. Borrowing books from the library is inconvenient.	
12. I find English materials to read.	
13. I should read more in English.	
14. I want to improve my English reading skills.	
15. When I'm reading, I make a list of words that I don't know and study them.	
16. In the future, when do you think it will be necessary to read English?	All those that apply.
1. For work (e.g. email, reports)	
2. With friends online (e.g. email, Facebook)	
3. SNS	
4. At university (e.g. books, research)	
5. Travel (e.g. restaurant menus, timetables)	
6. Newspapers; magazines	
7. Online news	
8. Online blogs and comments	
9. Instruction manuals	
10. At museums (e.g. exhibit information)	
11. I do not think I will need to read English in the future.	
12. Other (Please write below)	

Table 7. Teacher Survey Questions

Item	Response Options
1. I enjoy reading English books. 2. I enjoy reading Internet content in English. 3. I think that I should read more in English. 4. I do background reading in English about the topics I will teach in class. 5. I want to spend more time reading English. 6. Reading English is not something I enjoy.	Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree
7. When I was a high school student, I [] read for pleasure. 8. When I was a high school student, I [] read English materials that I found myself. 9. When I was a high school student, I [] read English materials for pleasure (e.g. books, magazines, websites). 10. When I was a university student, I [] read for pleasure. 11. When I was a university student, I [] read English materials for pleasure (e.g. books, magazines, websites). 12. Now, I [] read for pleasure. 13. Now, I [] read English materials for pleasure(e.g. books, magazines, websites.)	often sometimes occasionally rarely never
14. How often do you read emails in English?	Many times every day; 7-14 times a week; 1-6 times a week; Less than 4 times a month; Less than 5 times a year
15. How often do you read online news articles/other online articles in English?	7+ times a week; 4-6 times a week; 1-10 times a week; 1-8 times a year; never
16. Apart from textbooks and student work, what other types of English reading do you do??	n/a
17. Approximately how much time do you spend reading in total each day?	
18. Approximately how much time do you spend reading outside of work each day?	
19. Approximately how much time do you spend reading English materials (including textbook materials) each week?	
20. Approximately how much time do you spend reading students' English writing (length 50+ words) each week?	
21. Outside of work, where do read the most?	On the train/bus; at cafes; at home; I don't read outside of work; other
22. Do you tend to read in different places when you are reading English?	Yes; No; Not sure