

Exploring the Impact of Extensive Reading Activities on Student Engagement

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This action research explores how classroom-based extensive reading (ER) activities influenced Japanese university students' engagement with ER in a compulsory EFL context. 80 first-year students participated in ER using an online English ER learning system across 2 semesters. After low levels of reading volume and engagement were observed in the spring semester, 4 ER activities (word count checks, reading records, news summaries, and instant book reports) were introduced in the fall semester. Using a mixed-methods design, the study analyzed reading volume and reading time data together with questionnaire responses. Results showed significant increases in reading volume and reading time, while questionnaire findings indicated improvements in behavioral and cognitive engagement, particularly through goal awareness and reflection. Students also reported generally positive perceptions of the activities, although gains in emotional engagement, particularly in reading enjoyment, were limited. The findings suggest that structured pedagogical support can promote multiple dimensions of engagement in classroom-based ER.

本アクション・リサーチは、授業内で実施した多読活動が、日本の大学生における英語多読へのエンゲージメントにどのような影響を与えるかを検証した。対象は大学1年生80名で、2学期にわたりオンラインの英語多読学習システムを用いた多読を実施した。春学期に読書量およびエンゲージメントの低さが見られたため、秋学期には語数チェック、読書記録、ニュース要約、即席ブックレポートの4つの多読活動を導入した。読書データからは読書量および読書時間の有意な増加が確認された。アンケート結果からは、目標意識や振り返りを通して行動的・認知的エンゲージメントの向上が示され、活動に対して概ね肯定的な評価が得られた。一方で、読書の楽しさに関する変化は限定的であり、情意的エンゲージメントの向上には課題が残った。以上の結果から、授業内多読においては、構造化された教育的支援が多面的なエンゲージメントの促進に重要であることが示唆された。

Extensive reading (ER) is widely recognized as beneficial for English learners (Bamford & Day, 2004). However, integrating ER into university curricula remains challenging (Takase, 2010). One contributing factor is that many students today have grown up in media-rich environments and are more accustomed to short-form visual content and social networking services than to long-form reading. Research suggests that constant exposure to digital information environments may encourage fragmented attention and reduce sustained concentration (Firth et al., 2019). This tendency has also been observed in studies of reading behavior in Japan (Kurata et al., 2017). Consequently, many learners find reading a large amount of text in English to be overwhelming, often leading to low engagement.

Where this author works, a mid-sized national university in Eastern Japan, ER is a standard component of the curriculum and has been integrated into the syllabus for all first-year compulsory English reading and writing courses since 2021. The ER program is supported by an online reading platform that allows students to freely select graded readers and track their reading progress. However, despite its formal inclusion in the curriculum, a practical and effective method for implementing ER in the classroom has not yet been fully established. Prior to this action research, the author observed that a considerable number of students accumulated zero words on the online ER platform by the end of the semester, suggesting limited engagement with ER despite curricular requirements.

In response to this practical challenge, the present study reports on a practice-based action research project that examines changes in university students' behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement with ER following the introduction of new classroom-based ER activities. After students demonstrated low levels of engagement during the spring semester, four new ER activities were introduced in the fall semester to address common challenges faced by language teachers, such as codifying students' reading habits and supporting autonomous reading outside the classroom. Using a mixed-methods action research design, the study drew on reading data from an online

ER platform and questionnaire responses (Likert-scale items and open-ended questions) to examine changes in students' engagement with ER. As a teacher-researcher, the author designed these activities to provide goal-oriented, reflective, and interactive support for students' ER.

Literature Review

ER is defined as “an approach to language teaching in which learners read a lot of easy material in the new language” (Bamford & Day, 2004, p. 1). In addition to this emphasis on reading large amounts of accessible texts, Day and Bamford (1998, 2002) highlighted that ER is fundamentally a pleasure reading approach, in which enjoyment plays a central role in sustaining voluntary reading. Their pleasure reading principle suggests that affective engagement, reading because learners want to read, is essential for affirming long-term reading habits.

ER is theorized to contribute to second language development by promoting exposure to meaningful, context-rich language that supports growth across multiple linguistic domains. For instance, ER has been shown to improve reading speed (Bell, 2001), reading comprehension (Robb & Kano, 2013), vocabulary acquisition (Pigada & Schmitt, 2006), learners' reading attitudes and motivation (Hagley, 2017), and standardized English test scores (Fujii, 2022).

Despite these well-documented benefits, ER has long been characterized as “an approach less taken” (Day & Bamford, 1998, p. 3) and continues to pose challenges for integration into curricula (Takase, 2010). Previous studies have identified common constraints faced by teachers, including limited class time, heavy workloads, and insufficient institutional support. For example, ER implementation is often constrained by fixed curricula and difficulties in monitoring student progress (Chang & Renandya, 2017), and large-scale programs tend to succeed only when supported by institutional policies, resources, and digital accountability systems (Robb & Kano, 2013).

In addition to these structural challenges, student engagement has been identified as a major obstacle to successful ER implementation. Although ER is often assumed to foster motivation through enjoyment and learner choice, motivation alone does not necessarily result in sustained engagement in learning activities. Recent second language research suggests that even learners who report high levels of motivation may struggle to translate their intentions into consistent learning behaviors, such as regular participation or persistence over time (Teravainen-Goff, 2022). This distinction highlights the importance

of examining engagement both as an attitudinal construct and a process through which motivation is reflected in action.

Engagement is commonly conceptualized as a multidimensional construct comprising behavioral, emotional, and cognitive components (Fredricks et al., 2016). Behavioral engagement refers to learners' observable participation, effort, and persistence in learning activities (Fredricks et al., 2016; Finn & Zimmer, 2012). Recent perspectives have emphasized the quality of participation and active involvement, rather than mere attendance or task completion (Philp & Duchesne, 2016). In the context of ER, behavioral engagement can be reflected in learners' regular participation in reading, the time devoted to reading, and the amount of reading completed. Emotional engagement refers to learners' affective responses, including interest, enjoyment, and the value they attach to learning (Fredricks et al., 2016). In the context of ER, emotional engagement can be reflected in learners' enjoyment of reading, satisfaction with reading activities, and positive attitudes toward reading. Cognitive engagement refers to learners' mental investment in learning through self-regulation, goal setting, and strategic effort (Fredricks et al., 2016). In the context of ER, cognitive engagement can be reflected in learners' reflection on reading, progress monitoring, and the use of strategies to construct meaning from texts.

From this viewpoint, difficulties in implementing ER can be understood as challenges in sustaining student engagement over time, rather than a question of motivation. Robb and Ewert (2024) similarly caution against assuming motivation will naturally develop or be maintained through ER alone, especially in compulsory EFL contexts. They argue that many learners do not initially have sufficient intrinsic motivation to continue reading voluntarily; thus, classroom-based ER requires intentional pedagogical support. Crucially, they note that external supports, such as assessment, progress monitoring, and structured follow-up activities, are not necessarily inconsistent with ER principles. Instead, these supports may serve as transitional tools that help learners develop self-regulated reading habits and more autonomous motivation.

Taken together, existing research suggests that the effectiveness of ER in classroom contexts depends on both the availability of reading materials and how learners' motivation is translated into sustained engagement through pedagogical practice. Though engagement has been recognized as an important factor in successful ER, relatively few studies have examined how specific classroom-based ER activities influence learners' behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement. Consequently, little is known about how different ER activities contribute to unique dimensions of engagement in compulsory university EFL contexts.

Therefore, the present study examines the effects of newly introduced classroom-based ER activities on university EFL students' behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement in a compulsory ER course.

The present study investigates the following research questions:

- RQ1. To what extent do the newly introduced classroom-based ER activities influence students' behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement?
- RQ2. How do Japanese university students perceive these newly introduced ER activities?

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a practice-based action research design. An intragroup pre/post comparison was conducted across two academic semesters to examine changes in students' engagement following the introduction of new classroom-based ER activities. Action research offers a suitable framework for addressing such practice-based questions, as it enables teachers to systematically examine and refine their own instructional practices within authentic educational settings (Burns, 2010). By focusing on classroom-based ER activities and their effects on student engagement, action research can provide contextually grounded insights into how ER may be more effectively implemented in compulsory university EFL contexts.

Participants

Participants were 80 first-year Japanese EFL students taught by the author at a mid-sized national university in eastern Japan. The students were enrolled in two compulsory courses during the spring and fall semesters. These courses were required for all freshmen and were designed to develop students' English reading and writing skills. Students were assigned to each class based on their department and English proficiency.

The participants' average TOEIC score was 330, indicating a low-intermediate level of English proficiency. Of the 84 students who began the year, four did not complete the spring semester and were excluded from the dataset, resulting in a final sample of 80 students.

All participants provided informed consent prior to data collection, and participation in surveys was voluntary. The study followed the ethical guidelines of the author's institution and received approval from the university's research ethics committee.

Materials

Xreading is an online platform designed to support ER in second language learning. It offers a wide range of leveled digital texts, including fiction, non-fiction, and news articles, allowing learners to select materials that match their interests and reading proficiency levels. In the context of the author's institution, all first-year students paid for unlimited access, enabling them to read any book on a PC or mobile device at any time. Instructors can monitor students' reading progress, including the number of words read, reading time, and book levels.

Procedure

In the first class of the spring semester, students received a detailed introduction to Xreading, instructing how to access the platform, select appropriate books, and track their reading progress. Students were required to read books on the platform outside of class, with these ER tasks accounting for 5% of the overall grade in both semesters. The methods and activities used to assess students' engagement and reading processes were determined individually by each instructor, resulting in variation in how ER was monitored and evaluated.

For 3 months (May - July) in the spring semester, students in the author's class were required to read books on Xreading and complete multiple-choice quizzes on the platform, with a minimum score of 60% necessary for their words to be recorded. In addition, students completed two online book reports and gave oral presentations of the reports in face-to-face classes. Each report contributed 2.5% to the ER component of the overall grade, for a total of 5%. At the end of the semester, 50% of the students had recorded 0 words on the platform, resulting in an average of 538.8 words read per month. This suggested that many students had engaged very little with ER despite its inclusion as a required course component.

To address the low engagement observed in the spring semester, four new classroom-based ER activities were introduced during the fall semester (October - January), adopting the approach proposed by Bamford and Day (2004). These four activities were designed to provide structured, goal-oriented, interactive support for students' ER: word count checks, reading records, news summaries, and instant book reports

For the word count checks, five checkpoints with target word counts were established across the semester to monitor students' reading progress. Students who exceeded the target at each checkpoint received one point; this activity accounted for 5% of the overall course grade. As this was the students' first experience with target-based word counts,

the targets were deliberately set at a modest level, presuming that reading approximately 500 words per week would be an attainable starting point for learners with limited prior reading habits.

For reading records, students used the university's online platform to document the books they read, including a screenshot of the book and a short comment for each entry. Students were able to view each other's records and leave reactions, including brief comments.

News summaries were introduced five times during the fall semester as in-class activities to encourage shared reading and discussion. Students would read the same Xreading article chosen by the author within approximately 10 minutes, then work in pairs to discuss their notes and write a one-sentence summary in Japanese.

Instant book report activities were conducted twice during the semester: students would select a book they had read and completed a report using a provided template in class. Then, they practiced and shared their reports orally with peers three times using the 4/3/2 technique: a fluency-focused activity in which learners repeat the same speech under decreasing time limits to promote oral fluency (Nation, 1989). Lastly, students submitted a voice recording of their final report. Reading records, news summaries, and instant book reports were assessed as classwork or homework assignments, separate from the Xreading component.

Data Collection

Two primary data sources were used: reading data from Xreading and an online questionnaire. Behavioral engagement was examined using reading volume and reading time recorded in Xreading. Reading volume was calculated based on the number of words successfully recorded on the platform, while reading time was included as a complementary indicator of students' effort and persistence in ER activities. Monthly averages for both measures were compared across the spring and fall semesters.

An online questionnaire was administered at the end of the fall semester to examine students' perceptions of the ER activities. Emotional engagement was examined using students' satisfaction with each ER activity (six-point Likert scale) and perceived changes in reading enjoyment (five-point Likert scale). Behavioral engagement was further explored through students' perceptions of changes in reading frequency (five-point Likert scale). Open-ended questions followed each Likert-scale section, allowing students to explain their responses. The full questionnaire is provided in the Appendix.

Data Analysis

Reading volume and reading time data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and paired-samples t-tests to examine changes in students' behavioral engagement between the spring and fall semesters. Cohen's d was calculated to estimate effect sizes. Responses to the Likert-scale questionnaire items were summarized using percentages to examine students' perceptions of changes in reading frequency (behavioral engagement), satisfaction with the ER activities and changes in reading enjoyment (emotional engagement), and the perceived effectiveness of the ER activities (cognitive engagement).

Open-ended responses were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. Kindred responses were grouped into categories, with the frequency of each category counted; representative comments were then selected. The resulting categories were then interpreted in relation to the three dimensions of engagement (behavioral, emotional, and cognitive) to explain and complement the quantitative findings.

Results

Behavioral Engagement

Reading Volume

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for students' average words read per month in the spring and fall semesters. In the spring semester, students read an average of 538.8 words per month ($SD = 921.6$). This increased to 1,801.3 words per month in the fall semester ($SD = 827.8$). Table 2 reports the results of the paired-samples t-test comparing reading volume between the two semesters. The increase was statistically significant, $t(79) = -10.75, p < .001$, with a large effect size (Cohen's $d = 1.20$), suggesting a substantial increase in reading volume between the two semesters. In addition to the increase in mean reading volume, variability across students decreased substantially. The coefficient of variation declined from 1.711 in the spring semester to 0.460 in the fall semester, indicating more consistent reading volumes across the class.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for Monthly Reading Volume in the Spring and Fall Semesters

	<i>N</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	<i>SE</i>	Coefficient of variation
Spring	80	538.8	921.6	103.04	1.711
Fall	80	1,801.3	827.8	92.55	0.460

Table 2
*Paired-Samples *t*-Test Results for Monthly Reading Volume*

Measure 1	Measure 2	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
Spring	Fall	-10.75	79	< .001	1.20

Reading Time

Table 3 shows descriptive statistics for students' average monthly reading time in the spring and fall semesters. Students spent an average of 14.43 minutes per month reading in the spring semester ($SD = 22.30$), compared with 28.36 minutes in the fall semester ($SD = 15.39$). Table 4 reports the results of the paired-samples *t*-test comparing reading time between the two semesters. The increase was statistically significant, $t(79) = -5.96$, $p < .001$, with a medium effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.67$). The coefficient of variation also declined from 1.545 to 0.543, suggesting more consistent reading time across students in the fall semester.

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics for Monthly Reading Time in the Spring and Fall Semesters

	<i>N</i>	Mean (minutes)	<i>SD</i>	<i>SE</i>	Coefficient of variation
Spring	80	14.43	22.30	2.493	1.545
Fall	80	28.36	15.39	1.721	0.543

Table 4
*Paired-Samples *t*-Test Results for Monthly Reading Time*

Measure 1	Measure 2	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
Spring	Fall	-5.96	79	< .001	0.67

Perceived Changes in Reading Frequency

To further examine behavioral engagement, students were asked whether each ER activity had increased their reading frequency (Table 5). Across all four activities, more than 70% of students reported an increase in their reading frequency. The highest proportion was observed for word count checks (77.4%), followed by reading records (75.8%), news summaries (75.8%), and instant book reports (71.0%). Thus, these findings suggest that students generally perceived the four ER activities as contributing to increased behavioral engagement by encouraging more frequent reading.

Table 5
*Students' Perceptions of Change in Reading Frequency Compared to the Spring Semester (% , *n* = 62)*

	Decreased a lot (1)	Decreased a little (2)	No change (3)	Increased a little (4)	Increased a lot (5)
With word count checks, my reading frequency...	0.0	4.8	17.7	51.6	25.8
With reading records, my reading frequency...	0.0	0.0	24.2	64.5	11.3
With news summaries, my reading frequency...	0.0	1.6	22.6	66.1	9.7
With instant book reports, my reading frequency...	0.0	1.6	27.4	59.7	11.3

Note. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Together, these quantitative findings indicate that students demonstrated greater behavioral engagement during the fall semester, evident in increased reading volume, reading time, and reading frequency.

Qualitative Findings

Additionally, qualitative findings supported the quantitative results by illustrating how the ER activities influenced students' reading behavior (Table 6). Many students reported that the word-count checks helped them establish regular reading habits (for instance, "Regular checks helped me keep reading"), suggesting that the activity promoted continued participation in ER. Other students commented that they read because it was a course requirement, indicating that external expectations also contributed to behavioral engagement. Furthermore, several students noted that the required reading volume was manageable, suggesting that the activity was perceived as achievable and, therefore, easier to maintain.

Table 6
Qualitative Findings Related to Behavioral Engagement

Activity	Theme	Mentions	Representative Comment
Word-count checks	External Pressure / Requirement	8	"I read because it's part of the course policy."
Word-count checks	Habit Formation / Continuity	6	"Regular checks helped me keep reading."
Word-count checks	Reasonable Level and Quantity	8	"The required number of words was easy to manage."

Emotional Engagement

Satisfaction

Overall, students reported high levels of satisfaction with the newly introduced ER activities (Table 7). The overall agreement rate was 74.2% for word count checks, 62.9% for reading records, 88.7% for news summaries, and 77.4% for instant book reports. News summaries received the highest level of agreement, whereas reading records received comparatively lower ratings, with over one-third of students indicating some level of disagreement.

Table 7
Students' Satisfaction of Newly Introduced ER Activities (% , n = 62)

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am satisfied with the word count checks.	1.6	8.1	16.1	33.9	24.2	16.1
I am satisfied with the reading records.	3.2	11.3	22.6	37.1	17.7	8.1
I am satisfied with the news summaries.	0	1.6	9.7	38.7	33.9	16.1
I am satisfied with the instant book reports.	1.6	4.8	16.1	50	22.6	4.8

Reading Enjoyment

Table 8 shows students' perceptions of whether the new ER activities made reading in English more enjoyable than in the previous semester. Overall, responses were relatively neutral. Approximately half of the students selected "neither agree nor disagree" for each activity. The combined agreement rates were 33.9% for word count checks, 35.5% for reading records, 38.7% for news summaries, and 35.5% for instant book reports. These findings suggest that, although students were generally satisfied with the ER activities, the activities had a more limited influence on students' enjoyment of reading in English.

Table 8

Students' Perceptions of Changes in Reading Enjoyment Compared to the Spring Semester (% , n = 62)

Activity	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
Word count checks made reading more enjoyable.	1.6	14.5	50.0	22.6	11.3
Reading records made reading more enjoyable.	3.2	8.1	53.2	24.2	11.3
News summaries made reading more enjoyable.	0.0	12.9	48.4	27.4	11.3
Instant book reports made reading more enjoyable.	3.2	12.9	48.4	24.2	11.3

Together, these quantitative findings suggest that students generally responded positively to the newly introduced ER activities, although their influence on reading enjoyment was more limited.

Qualitative Findings

Qualitative comments reflected both positive and negative emotional responses (Table 9). Students frequently reported a sense of achievement after completing the ER activities and expressed enjoyment of sharing what they found interesting in the books they read during the instant book reports. At the same time, some students described posting reading records as burdensome, while a few students reported a lack of enjoyment or confidence in the activities.

Table 9

Qualitative Findings Related to Emotional Engagement

Activity	Theme	Mentions	Representative Comment
Word-count checks	Sense of Achievement	12	"Seeing the numbers gave me a sense of achievement."
Word-count checks	Lack of Enjoyment / Intrinsic Interest	2	"I like reading for myself, but not for assignments."
Reading records	Record-Keeping Burden	12	"It was a bit troublesome to post."
Reading records	Sense of Achievement	3	"I can feel a sense of achievement from reading."
Instant book reports	Fun and Enjoyment	4	"I really enjoyed it."
Instant book reports	Enjoyment of Sharing Reading Experiences	3	"I enjoy sharing what I found interesting in the books I read."
Instant book reports	Overall Satisfaction	3	"It was good."
Instant book reports	Not Confident	2	"I'm not good at it."

Cognitive Engagement

Perceived Effectiveness

Table 10 presents students' perceptions of which ER activity was most effective in increasing their reading amount. Word count checks were selected most frequently (45.2%), followed by news summaries (29.0%), instant book reports (16.1%), and reading records (9.7%). Thus, these findings suggest that students perceived word count checks as the most effective activity for increasing their reading amount.

Table 10

*Students' Selection of the Most Effective ER Activity for Increasing Their Reading Amount
(%, n = 62)*

Activity	% Selected
Word count checks	45.2
Reading records	9.7
News summaries	29.0
Instant book reports	16.1

Qualitative Findings

Qualitative findings provided further insight into students' cognitive engagement (Table 11). Students frequently reported that the ER activities helped them develop summarizing skills, improve reading comprehension, and reflect on what they had read. Several students also reported that sharing their thoughts with classmates provided opportunities to express and clarify their understanding of what they had read. Many students also commented that the activities provided clear learning goals, encouraged reflection on their reading, and offered opportunities to express their ideas about the books they had read. Conversely, a small number of students reported that they focused primarily on increasing their word count or found it difficult to summarize and discuss the reading, suggesting that some activities presented cognitive challenges.

Table 11

Qualitative Findings Related to Cognitive Engagement

Activity	Theme	Mentions	Representative Comment
Word-count checks	Clear Goals / Progress Visibility	9	"It was easy to work on because the goals were clear."
Word-count checks	Goal Shift to Word Count	2	"Counting words became the purpose."
Reading records	Sharing with Classmates	11	"I can share my thoughts about what I read."

Activity	Theme	Mentions	Representative Comment
Reading records	Reflection on Reading	9	"I think it's good to be able to reflect on what I read."
Reading records	Low Purpose	7	"I don't feel it's very necessary."
Reading records	Opportunities to Use English	2	"I had more opportunities to use English."
News summaries	Better Summary Skills	17	"I learned how to summarize English passages."
News summaries	Faster Reading / Better Reading Comprehension	12	"My reading speed improved."
News summaries	Learning Through Authentic Content	11	"I could learn about different things happening around the world."
News summaries	Useful for Learning	8	"It was informative and useful."
News summaries	Difficult to Read Fast or Summarize	8	"It was hard to summarize in one sentence."
Instant book reports	Good Speaking Practice	8	"It helps me practice speaking."
Instant book reports	Reflection on Reading	7	"I can reflect on the books I read."
Instant book reports	Better Self-Expression	5	"I can organize my thoughts about the books I read."
Instant book reports	Better Summary Skills	4	"It helps me develop my summarizing skills."
Instant book reports	Better Understanding of Books	3	"By summarizing, I could see how well I understood the content."

Activity	Theme	Mentions	Representative Comment
Instant book reports	Difficult to Summarize and Speak	3	"It was simply difficult to summarize and talk about it in English."
Instant book reports	Better English Skills	3	"It helped improve my English."

Discussion

Overall, the findings indicate that the ER activities had a positive impact on students' engagement, particularly in behavioral and cognitive dimensions. Students demonstrated increased reading volume, longer reading time, more consistent reading habits, and a greater awareness of goals and their progress. However, gains in emotional engagement, especially reading for pleasure, were more limited.

Behavioral and Cognitive Engagement Through Goal Setting

The introduction of word count checks played a central role in supporting students' behavioral and cognitive engagement with ER. By providing clear and attainable reading targets, the activity encouraged students to read more regularly and to monitor their own progress. The significant increases in reading volume and reading time, together with the reduction in variability across students, suggest that word count checks helped establish more consistent reading routines, particularly among students who had previously engaged minimally in ER.

These findings align with previous research indicating that short-term, achievable goals can enhance learners' motivation and confidence in ER (Mikami, 2020). From an engagement perspective, word count checks supported behavioral and cognitive engagement through sustained reading and goal awareness. Simultaneously, qualitative comments revealed that some students viewed the activity as externally driven, focusing on meeting numerical targets rather than on the content of reading itself. These findings suggest that goal setting primarily supported behavioral engagement by encouraging sustained reading habits, while also fostering cognitive engagement through greater goal awareness, rather than emotional engagement through reading enjoyment.

Cognitive and Emotional Engagement Through Reflection and Interaction

The reading records and instant book report activities were designed to promote reflection and interaction, and the findings suggest that these activities supported cognitive and emotional engagement in different ways. By recording what they read and sharing comments with peers, students became more aware of their reading experiences and were encouraged to reflect on content and comprehension. Similarly, instant oral book reports provided opportunities for students to organize their thoughts, summarize texts, and communicate their ideas.

These results are consistent with Chen's (2018) argument that reflective and interactive tasks can transform reading from a solitary activity into a socially supported learning process. Students' qualitative comments indicated that peer sharing and reflection helped deepen understanding; for some learners, it can increase interest and confidence. From an engagement framework, these activities supported cognitive engagement through reflection and meaning-making, and emotional engagement through interaction and shared experiences. However, perceptions of burden and uncertainty about task purpose suggest that clearer guidance and streamlined procedures may be necessary to maximize their effectiveness.

Limited Emotional Engagement and Reading Pleasure

Despite gains in behavioral and cognitive engagement, emotional engagement, particularly reading for enjoyment, remained limited for many students. Survey responses showed that a substantial proportion of students were neutral regarding whether the new ER activities made reading more enjoyable than in the previous semester. This finding suggests that, while structured ER tasks can successfully support engagement and routine formation, they do not automatically foster intrinsic enjoyment.

This result reflects a tension long discussed in ER literature. Day and Bamford's (1998, 2002) pleasure reading principle emphasizes that ER is most effective when learners read extensively for enjoyment and general understanding; Krashen (2004) similarly argues that language development is most powerful when reading is voluntary and driven by interest. In the present study, the structured nature of the ER activities appeared to support externally regulated engagement but did not fully translate into emotional engagement for all learners. Furthermore, these findings support the distinction between motivation and engagement discussed earlier. Although improvements in reading enjoyment were limited, students nevertheless demonstrated increased behavioral and cognitive engagement. This suggests that engagement provides a more

comprehensive framework than motivation alone for understanding participation in compulsory EFL ER.

Implications for Classroom-Based ER

Overall, the findings highlight the importance of designing ER activities that support multiple dimensions of engagement. In compulsory EFL contexts, where intrinsic motivation cannot be assumed, structured support appears essential for helping learners initiate and maintain reading behaviors. The results support the view proposed by Robb and Ewert (2024) that external supports such as monitoring, reflection, and follow-up activities are not inherently incompatible with ER principles. However, they can function as transitional tools that help learners move toward more autonomous reading practices.

The present study suggests that classroom-based ER may benefit from a staged approach, in which goal setting and accountability first support behavioral engagement, followed by reflective and interactive activities that foster cognitive and emotional engagement. Over time, such scaffolding may help learners gradually shift from reading as a requirement to reading as a meaningful, self-directed activity.

Conclusion

This study examined how a set of structured ER activities incorporating goalsetting, reflection, and interaction influenced students' engagement with ER in a compulsory university EFL classroom. The findings indicate that these activities supported students' behavioral engagement by promoting consistent reading routines greater reading volume, and longer reading time, in addition to cognitive engagement by enhancing students' awareness of goals, progress, and accountability. However, many learners continued to perceive reading primarily as a course requirement rather than as an intrinsically enjoyable activity, suggesting that gains in emotional engagement were more limited. This highlights the ongoing challenge of helping students move from externally guided participation toward personally meaningful reading engagement.

While these results provide useful insights, the study has several limitations. First, behavioral engagement was assessed using reading volume and reading time recorded by the Xreading system. As these measures may not have captured all reading activity (e.g., books that were read but not successfully recorded because the accompanying quizzes were not passed), the findings related to behavioral engagement should be interpreted with some caution. As all four ER activities were introduced simultaneously, it was not possible to determine the unique contribution of each activity to changes in students'

engagement with ER. Moreover, the qualitative data were limited to survey responses, which offered only general insights into learners' experiences. Future research could examine individual ER activities separately, incorporate interviews or focus groups to capture deeper perspectives, and investigate longer-term outcomes across multiple semesters or instructional contexts.

In summary, the findings suggest that the effectiveness of classroom-based ER lies in both increasing reading volume and creating learning conditions that support multiple dimensions of engagement. By combining structured pedagogical support with opportunities for reflection, interaction, and personal interest, teachers may help learners gradually transform reading from an externally required task into a more meaningful, self-directed practice.

Bio Data

Miyako Fujii worked as a high school English teacher before completing her Master of Education (TESOL) at University of Wollongong. She has been an Assistant Professor at Utsunomiya University since 2021. Her research interests include extensive reading and interaction in second language acquisition, particularly in classroom-based EFL contexts. She is actively engaged in classroom-based research aimed at improving language teaching practices.

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Appendix

Questionnaire Items

Emotional Engagement: Satisfaction with ER Activities

(6-point Likert scale: 1 = Strongly disagree, 6 = Strongly agree)

1. I am satisfied with the new activity of word count checks.
2. I am satisfied with the new activity of reading records.
3. I am satisfied with the new activity of news summaries.
4. I am satisfied with the new activity of instant book reports.

Open-Ended Follow-Up Questions

The following questions asked students to explain their responses to Items 1–4. Responses were analyzed qualitatively and interpreted in relation to behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement.

5. Why did you answer that way for Item 1 (word count checks)?
6. Why did you answer that way for Item 2 (reading records)?
7. Why did you answer that way for Item 3 (news summaries)?
8. Why did you answer that way for Item 4 (instant book reports)?

Behavioral Engagement: Perceived Changes in Reading Frequency

(5-point scale: 1 = Decreased a lot, 5 = Increased a lot)

9. Because of word count checks, compared to the last semester, the frequency of reading in English...
10. Because of reading records, compared to the last semester, the frequency of reading in English...

11. Because of news summaries, compared to the last semester, the frequency of reading in English...
12. Because of instant book reports, compared to the last semester, the frequency of reading in English...

Emotional Engagement: Perceived Changes in Reading Enjoyment

(5-point Likert scale: 1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree)

13. Word count checks made reading in English more enjoyable than last semester.
14. Reading records made reading in English more enjoyable than last semester.
15. News summaries made reading in English more enjoyable than last semester.
16. Instant book reports made reading in English more enjoyable than last semester.

Cognitive Engagement: Perceived Effectiveness of ER Activities

17. Choose the activity that you think was the most effective in increasing your amount of reading in English.