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## **Developing the NITech Extensive Reading Program**

Kelly Quinn

Center for General Engineering Education, Nagoya Institute of Technology  
Showa-ku, Gokiso-cho, Nagoya Japan

### **Abstract**

The benefits of extensive reading are well documented and extend beyond the skill of reading. Nunan (2003) describes reading as comprehension where readers combine their own background knowledge with information from a text to construct meaning. The skills learners develop from reading will improve their total language competence. This paper will detail the progress that Nagoya Institute of technology has achieved in developing its extensive reading program. Research concludes that participation in an extensive reading program was the most effective predictor of oral communicative ability (Huang & Van Naerssen, 1987). On tests that incorporate writing, the benefits of extensive reading are also clear. According to Hafiz & Tudor (1990), extensive reading “led to significant improvement in writing ability.” According to Gradman & Hanania (1991), extensive reading “was the most important direct contributor to TOEFL test score performance.” In fact, several studies including Green & Oxford (1997) concluded that extensive reading “was the most highly correlated with proficiency.” Because of the clear benefits, NITech in 2005 began its extensive reading program. This paper describes the progress of the program since that time, including explanation of the problems overcome, such as book selection, evaluation and quantifying the gains in language ability.

*Keywords:* Extensive reading, English education, TESOL

### **Introduction**

Extensive reading, sometimes referred to as Free Reading or Book Flood is a system of language instruction where students are encouraged to read a large volume of level appropriate material. According to Wodinsky & Nation (1998) extensive reading should focus on comprehension of the material and enjoyment. Students choose what they want to read and are not compelled to read or finish books that they find uninteresting. One of the founding principles of the original proponents of extensive reading is that the pleasure of reading “is its own reward,” Day & Bamford (1998) and so assessment should be minimized or eliminated entirely. The benefits of extensive reading are well documented and extend beyond the skill of reading. Research concludes that participation in an extensive reading program was the most effective predictor of oral communicative ability (Huang & Van Naerssen, 1987). On tests that incorporate writing, the benefits of extensive reading are also clear. According to Hafiz & Tudor (1990), extensive reading “led to significant improvement in writing ability.” According to Gradman & Hanania (1991), extensive reading “was the most important direct contributor to TOEFL test score performance.” In fact, several studies including Green & Oxford (1997) concluded that extensive reading “was the most highly correlated with proficiency.” Because of the clear benefits, NITech in 2005 began its extensive reading program. This presentation will describe the progress of the program since that time, including explanation of the problems overcome, such as book selection, evaluation and quantifying the gains in language ability.

**Building the Initial Library**

In 2005, the Center for General Engineering Education received a grant to improve English education at Nagoya Institute of Technology. It was decided to initiate an extensive reading program. Much of the research at the time dealt with the benefits of extensive reading using unaltered texts that was appropriate to the level of the students. Using the grant money, a small library of juvenile literature was purchased. A complete list of the books is available in Appendix 1. Titles included well-known children’s literature authors such as Roald Dahl, Jacqueline Wilson, and Louis Sachar. Several classics were also included such as Sherlock Holmes and the Ann of Green Gables series. Some non-fiction titles were also included, primarily self-help of human psychology texts such as Why Men don't Listen and Women Can't read Maps and Tuesdays with Morrie.

In total fewer than 70 titles were purchased, but multiple copies of several books were also made. It was hoped that the university library would administer the library, but if the books were to be administered by the library, they would have to be sorted within the normal population of library books, organized by author, subject, and title. This would have made it difficult for students to find books or browse books suitable to their reading level. It was thus decided to keep the books in a self-access collection maintained by the English teachers.

Initially, the library was not a great success. The number of titles were too few and many of the topics were not of interest to the student population – 80% male engineering students. Also, the level and difficulty of the unadapted texts was too high for many of the students, leading to frustration, complaints, and disuse. The average level of the students is around TOEIC 500, so more interesting, easier and a greater selection of texts would need to be provided if the extensive reading program was going to succeed.

**Expanding the Library to Include Adapted Readers**

Beginning in 2010, it was decided to expand the extensive reading library to include adapted readers. In each of the years since, a portion of the general education budget has been allocated to the purchase of adapted readers. The current contents of the library are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

*Adapted Readers by Publisher*

Publisher	No. of books
Oxford (levels 0 – 6)	1,276
Cambridge (levels 1 – 6)	236
Dominoes (levels starter – 3)	102
Penguin (levels (1 – 6)	435
Fast Forward	30
Heinle & Heinle	21
Macmillan	14
National Geographic	195
Total	2,309

There are currently over two thousand titles in the adapted reader collection and multiple copies of the most popular titles. This allows for a significantly improved selection of texts for the student population, approximately one thousand students per year. The popularity of levels is summarized in Table 2.

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Table 2  
*Borrowing by Level*

Level	Number of times borrowed by Level in the 2017 Academic Year
0	58
1	2532
2	4980
3	5200
4	2047
5	645
6	276
NG	56
S	178
Total	15972

Initially purchases focused on higher levels of adapted readers, 4 – 6, but it was soon discovered that students were not able to grasp the content of texts at these levels so subsequent purchases focused on providing lower level material to the students. As can be seen in Table 2, levels 2 – 3 are the most popular.

Similarly, the initial purchases focused on adaptations of classics and original fiction books, but students requested a greater selection of non-fiction material so recent purchases have increased the number of non-fiction texts, for example the National Geographic (NG) and Fast Forward. Although students requested more non-fiction, Table 2 indicates that the National Geographic material is some of the least borrowed. This could possibly be due to the fact that the texts, while simplified, are not available in different levels and students may find, even the simplified texts challenging. A list of the most popular titles is included in Appendix 2.

Commensurate with the decision to expand the use of adapted readers, two fortunate events occurred. First, the university library agreed to administer the adapted readers in the extensive reading library. The adapted readers were not considered to be “books” and then did not have to be organized within the general library population, but could be organized onto a few dedicated shelves, allowing students to browse and select with ease.

Second, several teachers began to use the mreader website. The website [mreader.org](http://mreader.org) was started at Kyoto Sangyo University. The website allows registered teachers to create accounts for their students. The site allows teachers to set reading goals for individual students and the website tracks students’ progress toward reaching that goal. The website contains a database of quiz questions for the most popular adapted readers from major publishers such as Oxford, Longman, Cambridge, etc. Currently 10 of the 14 sections of each reading period are using mreader. Since the introduction of mreader, adapted reader purchases have been synchronized with the quizzes in the mreader database.

Interestingly, although one of the foundational principles of extensive reading is that it should not be evaluated, students using mreader read more than students who monitored their own reading. In one study (Quinn, 2018), 15 of 23 students in a class read over 100 thousand words using mreader. When reading without evaluation, only eight students of 23 read over 100 thousand words.

### Expanding the Library to Match Students' Interests

In 2017, as part of a reorganization of the faculty, space became available to build a library of Japanese *manga*. This decision was based on the students' reading habits in their native language. The titles purchased are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3.

#### *Manga Titles*

Attack on Titan: Volumes 1-4  
Fullmetal Alchemist: Volumes 1-27  
Naruto: Volumes 1-27  
Bleach: Volumes 1-27  
Amulet: Volumes 1-7  
Orange: The complete collection  
One Piece: Volumes 1-23  
Death Note: Volumes 1-13  
Tokyo Ghoul: Volumes 1-14

Although the number of titles is limited, there are a number of volumes in each series. In total almost 150 books were purchased. This collection is not administered by the library but is maintained by the English teaching staff.

This collection has proved more popular with the staff of office workers and International students. Currently we are seeking budget to expand the number of titles to include Western comic titles, from Marvel and DC as well as a number of popular graphic novels such *Maus* and *Persepolis*.

### Conclusion

In conclusion building a successful extensive reading program is a long term goal that requires constant and consistent maintenance. Areas that require further improvements are the selection of books. It is necessary to have as broad and deep a collection of books as possible. Students, especially non-English majors, need to be convinced of the value of extensive reading. While several students commented that reading complete books in English gave them confidence, without a direct correlation to their career goals, extensive reading can be a hard sell. So further studies that link extensive reading to overall proficiency are necessary.

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**Appendix 1: Juvenile Literature List**

1. About a Boy
2. Alice's Adventures in Wonderland
3. All American Girl
4. And Then There were None
5. Anne of Green Gables
6. Boy Detective
7. Breakfast at Tiffany's
8. Bridget Jones' Diary
9. Catch me if you can
10. Charlie and the Chocolate Factory
11. Charlotte's Web
12. Darren Shan CirqueDu Freak
13. Encyclopedia Brown
14. Farewell to Arms
15. Flowers for Algernon
16. Forrest Gump
17. From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler
18. Girls in Love
19. Good-bye, Mr.Chips
20. Gossip Girl
21. Harry Potter and The Philosophers Stone
22. Holes
23. Howl's Moving Castle
24. Interpreter of Maladies
25. Jonathan Livingston Seagull
26. Legally Blonde
27. lord of the flies
28. Mary Poppins
29. Master of the game
30. Matilda
31. Momo
32. Murder on the Orient Express
33. Norwegian wood
34. Sex and the city
35. Shanghai baby
36. Sylvia Plath The Bell jar
37. The Alchemist
38. The Bridges of Madison County
39. The Catcher in the rye
40. The Curious Incident
41. The five people you meet in heaven
42. The God father
43. The Great Gatsby
44. The Great Blue Yonder
45. The Illustrated Man
46. The Joy Luck CLUB
47. The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe

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48. The Little Prince
49. The Neverending story
50. The Old Man and the Sea
51. The Phantom of the Opera
52. The Princess Diary
53. The Secret Dream world of a Shopoholic
54. The Sherlock Holmes Mysteries
55. The sisterhood of the traveling pant
56. The Sky is Falling
57. The Street Lawyer
58. The Sun Also Rises
59. The Third Man and the fallen Idol
60. To Kill a Mockingbird
61. Tuesdays with Morrie
62. Vicky Angel
63. Wenny has Wings
64. Who Moved My Cheese
65. Why men don't listen and women can't read maps
66. Lord of the Flies

**Appendix 2: Most Popular Adapted Readers List**

Title	Number of Times Borrowed
1. A Christmas Carol / Charles Dickens	246
2. The secret garden / Frances Hodgson Burnett	204
3. Skyjack! / Tim Vicary	191
4. Justice / Tim Vicary	177
5. Frankenstein / Mary Shelley	171
6. The star zoo / Harry Gilbert	169
7. Chemical secret / Tim Vicary	168
8. Goldfish / Raymond Chandler	161
9. The last Sherlock Holmes story / Michael Dibdin	156
10. The wind in the Willows / Kenneth Grahame	143
11. On the edge / Gillian Cross	130
12. Treasure island / Robert Louis Stevenson	129
13. The call of the wild / Jack London	123
14. The railway children / Edith Nesbit	121
15. Love story / Erich Segal	118
16. Black beauty / Anna Sewell	117
17. Wyatt's hurricane / Desmond Bagley	115
18. The prisoner of Zenda / Anthony Hope	111
19. The card / Arnold Bennett	109

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20. White fang / Jack London	109
21. Gulliver's travels / Jonathan Swift	108
22. The hound of the Baskervilles / Sir Arthur Conan Doyle	105
23. The strange case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde / Robert Louis Stevenson	105
24. Through the looking-glass : and what Alice found there / Lewis Carroll	105
25. Three men in a boat / Jerome K. Jerome	104
26. The jungle book / Rudyard Kipling	101