

Introducing an Extensive Reading Program: Theory and Practice

サイモン ビビー

神戸松蔭女子学院大学文学部

Author's E-mail Address: sbibby@shoin.ac.jp

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BIBBY Simon

Faculty of Letters, Kobe Shoin Women's University

Abstract

神戸松蔭女子大学では、2016年度の一年生全員に対し、多読授業が導入された。多読アプローチは、学生自身により選定されたグレーデッド・リーダーズを通して、学習レベルに合った大量の第二言語インプットを指す。本稿では、多読の基礎理論及び多読プログラムの実践的課題を詳細に取り上げ、まず多読の理論的枠組みに焦点を当てながら、その歴史的背景と発展について述べ、提言されている多読アプローチの利点をまとめる。次に、先行研究において提唱されている多読の言語的利点等を踏まえ、多読アプローチが普及していない理由を考察する。さらに、本学における MReader といった多読学習支援ソフトを用いた多読の実践について報告し、新しいプログラムの導入の諸相を示す。最後に、実践を通して明らかとなった MReader のこれまでの問題点について述べ、当該プログラムを改善していく上での課題について著者の見解を提示する。

Extensive Reading (ER) has been introduced at Kobe Shoin for all first year students for the 2016-17 Academic Year. The ER approach is a means of delivering massed second language input at the appropriate level, via graded language texts that are chosen by students. The present paper offers detailed consideration of underpinning theory accompanied by discussion of practical implementation and management issues. The paper firstly situates ER in a detailed theoretical discussion to underpin consideration of the practical, noting the historical origins and growth, and indicates the multiple suggested benefits of ER. Noting the multiple language benefits posited in the available literature, the paper then notes reasons for why this pedagogical approach has not seen

wider adoption. The third part of the paper describes the current implementation, via online reading checking software MReader, noting the multiple aspects of putting the new program in place. In the final section of this paper the author, who is the system administrator, briefly notes early challenges that have arisen, offers responses and thoughts for improving the system, and suggests further research areas.

キーワード：多読アプローチ、グレーデッド・リーダーズ、二言語インプット

Key Words: Extensive Reading program, graded readers, second language input

An extensive reading program has been introduced for all new first-year English students in Academic Year 2015-2016 here at Kobe Shoin. Extensive reading (ER) is a pedagogical approach providing massed language input to students at an appropriate level, via student-chosen texts. The goal of ER is to get students reading, and enjoy reading, *by reading* - an approach which is well-established in both first language and second language education (Day, 2015, p 10). The ER approach has been gaining increasing traction in second language teaching pedagogy (e.g. Day & Bamford, 1998; Grabe & Stoller, 2009; Yamashita; 2013) in recent years, and such has been the volume and focus of research supporting ER, that some are even giving to querying why there has not been wholesale adoption of this pedagogical approach (Renandya, 2007).

The discussion within the present paper is one of *praxis* - of practical undertaking underpinned and informed by the theoretical. The paper offers discussion in four sections. Firstly, the discussion is underpinned by consideration of the origins and growth of the extensive reading approach, placing this paper in full historical context. Secondly, specific note is made of what differs in extensive reading from traditional approaches, with consideration given to possible obstacles to wider adoption. Thirdly, the implementation at Kobe Shoin is detailed. Finally, thoughts on improvements are given, as the first year of implementation nears its end, and staff reflect and look to improve on our existing practice. Noted are areas for subsequent useful research.

1. Theory: A Review of the Extensive Reading Literature

History of Extensive Reading

A historical backdrop of extensive reading reaches back to near the beginning of the twentieth century, although the approach at the time did not bear this monicker. Robb (2010) cites the early work of German and French teachers in the United States (Handschin, 1919; Hagboldt, 1925), who suggested such a levelled volume approach to L2 study, and Bamford & Day (1998) note the early writings of Palmer (1917/1968, 1921/1964), whose advocacy only became more widely noted much later when republished in the 1960s (incidentally reminiscent of Vygotsky, who only became seminal pedagogical fare in translation from the 1960s, some thirty years after original Russian language publication). West's work in this regard (1925/1956) also only came to the fore years later, though he originally advocated

for a massed reading volume approach while working in India in the 1920s. Robb (2010) subsequently cites Bagster-Collins (1933): “We need a number of texts all on the same level, all employing largely the same basic vocabulary” (p. 156).

While such a method of language provision and practice was thus being developed, the continuing fundamental hindrance was the lack of developed and published materials to enable implementation of such an envisaged approach. The idea was there, but the materials were not.

Considering nomenclature, Bamford and Day (1998) trace the term *extensive reading* itself to this early work of Palmer and West, who sought to distinguish between *intensive* reading for foreign language students, and a differing approach that was being newly advocated. Whereas the former focuses on the usage of shorter pieces of text divested of surrounding context as the basis for comprehension questions, the suggested *extensive* approach emphasises provision of an appropriately levelled *volume* of reading material for language learners (Palmer, 1964; Palmer, 1968). Robb (2010) notes the publication of a levelled series around this time, called ‘Longman Structural Readers’, soon followed by Macmillan’s ‘Ranger’ series (p. 124), both published in the 1960s. Despite the earlier theorising and initial practical attempts to provide graded texts, ER spread only relatively slowly, with Day and Bamford (1998) noting likely reasons for this relatively slow growth - difficulties in setting up a program; existing full curricula; the prevalence of the reading skills approach; a belief that reading should follow speaking; confusion as to what constituted extensive reading, and the types of texts to be used within these confused understandings (p. 46).

Moving forward some years, Criper (1986) noted the paucity of volume of classroom language input, and the limited level thereof, instead offering extensive reading as a means to provide appropriately levelled massed L2 input. Yu (1993) cites Nuttall’s (1982) position that extensive reading is the next best thing to a study abroad immersion period in terms of language input. Initial pedagogical claims for the effectiveness of ER have derived from beliefs in the value of language input, notably the work of Stephen Krashen - the ‘input hypothesis’ (Krashen, 1982, 1985, 1989), and the ‘reading hypothesis’ (Krashen, 1993). While debate into reliance on particular aspects of language provision and of practice and usage is ongoing (e.g. 2008; Swain, 1985), the necessity for comprehensible input, at volume, remains a key guiding principle for language course planning, as most notably advised in Nation’s (2007) ‘Four Strands’ article, for a balanced curriculum. While emphases indeed differ between researchers, and between advocates of differing approaches of ER with differing respective focii, the need for language input remains as a widely recognized approach, one that is effective and is now relatively unproblematic to implement (Ellis, 2005; Yamashita, 2013).

Susser and Robb (1990) offered a working definition of ER, suggesting five key characteristics, the relevant section here cited in full:

“a language teaching/learning procedure that is reading (a) of large quantities of material or long-texts; (b) for global or general understanding; (c) with the intention of obtaining pleasure from the

text. Further, because (d) reading is individualized, with students choosing the books they want to read, and (e) the books are not discussed in class” (p. 10).

Day and Bamford's (1998) list of ten principles became something of a go-to set of characteristics (Waring and McLean, 2015). But questions have remained, and this is no universally agreed paradigm (Judge, 2011). In their overview of the field, examining the many efforts to characterise and to define, Waring and McLean (2015) found four commonly noted elements of ER: fluent comprehension, high reading speed, a large volume of text being read, and a high reading speed (p. 162). However, difficulties are noted in this overview in reaching an acceptable definition, as they query multiple aspects within these four characteristic commonalities, for example questioning what speed is required to be 'fluent', and how much text is a 'large enough' supply. Clearly, questions remain here, and without clear agreement on what ER 'is' (and, indeed, is not) there remains concern that different researchers may well be investigating and presenting findings on some very different pedagogical issues, while ostensibly discussing the same. This may result in a certain skewing of research understanding in Extensive Reading.

Suggested benefits of ER

The last three decades has seen a wealth of research into multiple pedagogical aspects of ER. It is not the purpose of the present paper to offer an entirely comprehensive literature review, but an overview of the areas researched is provided below.

It has been asserted that students gain insufficient opportunity to read within regular language courses (Walker, 1997), even with supposedly designated 'reading' classes, and that the limited time they do have proves insufficient to develop any real growth in reading ability (notes: due to the lack of reading that otherwise takes place (Nuttall, 1982; Walker, 1997). Positive effects of ER have been asserted for, in no order of asserted import: writing (Elley & Mangubhai, 1983; Hafiz & Tudor, 1989; Janopolous, 1986; Robb & Susser, 1989); grammar (Elley & Mangubhai, 1983; Yang, 2001), reading attitudes and motivation (Brown, 2009; Cho & Krashen, 1994; Day & Bamford, 1998; Fujita & Noro, 2009; Grabe, 2009; Hayashi, 1999; Judge, 2011; Mason & Krashen, 1997; Poulshock, 2010; Yamashita, 2007, 2013), reading speed (Beglar, Hunt & Kite, 2012; Fujita & Noro, 2009; Iwahori, 2008; Matsui & Noro, 2010), reading comprehension (Elley & Mangubhai, 1983; Hafiz & Tudor, 1989, 1990; Tudor & Hafiz, 1989; Yamashita, 2008), reading processing (Grabe, 1991; Paran, 1996), vocabulary (Grabe & Stoller, 1997; Horst, 2005; Lao & Krashen, 2000; Pigada & Schmitt, 2006; Poulshock, 2010), and general L2 proficiency (Iwahori, 2008; Mason & Krashen, 1997).

As can be seen from the above listing, which is by no mean exhaustive, research into ER is varied. Indeed, such is the variety and wealth of research that Waring and McLean (2015) suggest categorising as entirely distinct research varieties, rather than attempting to manage and evaluate within a single umbrella, suggesting “classical ER...class reading...integrative ER...ER as literature...Easy ER...and ER

as i+1 as possible research categories (p. 161).

2. A differing pedagogical approach – and a possible hindrance

Student-centred, not teacher-fronted

It is firstly necessary to note the differing overall approach of ER as an EFL pedagogy. Extensive reading is not a conventional ‘teaching’ approach, and as Yamashita (2013) notes, it does thus differ to more traditional approaches commonly employed in school and university classrooms in Japan, and elsewhere. Instead, *the focus of ER is on the student*, and the pedagogical focus is on students’ own learning, rather than on the teachers’ own teaching, commonly enacted by assigning translation tasks, choosing respective students to offer their versions, and correcting those efforts. In an ER program, students are encouraged to read in the target language in a greater volume than they may have done before.

Even within purportedly student-centred classrooms, of ER advocates, Day (2015) still notes the observed unhelpful excess of ‘teacher talk’, offering the at once blunt, obvious and helpful comment: “When the teacher is talking, the students are not reading.” (p. 11). Whether this is may be due to discomfort at perceived inactivity (“I am not doing anything”), or to a lingering teaching focus rather than a learning focus, an alternative factor, or to varying combinations of factors is unclear and deserves investigation. But this is something that as teachers and coordinators we need to be aware of, to be wary of, and need to try to anticipate.

Intensive reading, and translation as one aspect thereof, are seen to suffice

A second fundamental difference, as originally provided by Palmer (1921/1964) in offering the ‘extensive’ terminology, is the distinction between the *reasons for reading*. In ER, the reading is not for a narrow comprehension of the text. ER is not a skills-based approach. A suggested major reason for the non-universality of extensive reading may be that intensive reading is widely still seen as sufficient (Bamford & Day, 1998; Renandya, 2009). However, as Renandya (2009) asserts, while a more traditional intensive reading approach may offer some short-term training for students facing short reading passages in school and university examinations, an overemphasis on limited items for detailed meaning from short isolated passages may not be particularly helpful in developing a more general set of reading skills, and in thus assisting the reading of sustained longer passages of second language text.

Similar issues arise from a particular strand of intensive reading, which is widely practiced at school and at university in Japan, that of the ‘*bunpou-yakudoku*’ (Gorsuch, 1998; 2000) approach, rendered as ‘grammar-translation’ in English. Within this approach, students are required to translate entire texts, line by line. A typical implementation, which the present author has seen at several universities in Kansai, is that students will have a class text of multiple themed readings, which they will be assigned to translate, line by line, which will then be checked by the teacher in class. As noted directly above, comprehension questions also appear after the assigned reading piece of text. A

translation approach is one that is easily checked, and in that practical regard is one easily applied, particularly in large classes, but judging the effectiveness again depends on the intended goal - to improve overall reading skills, or to check understanding of disembodied text fragments, and to ensure that readings are completed. Noting the top-down pressure on schools of the university entrance tests, which rely heavily on short texts as a means to assess language ability, this approach is understandable in terms of a skill-based exam preparation, as school and teachers have obligations to aid test preparation, but, in an idealised EFL pedagogical world, this might be underpinned by an ER program across several academic years - a strong foundation, on which such reading skills are then built.

At university level however, teachers do not have such top-down pressure as that posed by external examinations, and have considerable latitude in implementing their own institutional language programs, with in-house goals. Thus, in this regard, there appears more opportunity for flexibility regarding reading approaches for faculty responsible for language programs at tertiary level than at high school level.

With ER, the reading is provided as a text that requires the minimum of non-reading action to be performed. Instead, akin to the reading which learners would engage in more customarily in their L1, the reading is intended to be for pleasure - the third of Bamford and Day's (1998) ten principles. With the autonomy of student choice of reading texts, it is hoped that in choosing what they wish to read, student readers will more enjoy their L2 reading as it is closer to the motivation for L1 reading. Finally, often offered as a tenet by ER purists, but one that I suggest teachers need not adhere to fully, is that students are not required to discuss texts, just as one need not necessarily discuss what one is reading for pleasure on one's sofa at home in one's L1 (albeit one might, and some do - the existence of L1 reading clubs demonstrates such enthusiasm to discuss reading). Teachers can take the tenets more advisedly, with such in-class activities as presentations and reading circles to support and extend the reading, and the present author does not feel the need to be constrained by this - the approach perhaps of a classroom pragmatist, rather than of a theoretical ivory tower zealot.

3. Implementing extensive reading at Shoin

Fitting in an extensive reading program

Noting the strong empirical claims for the benefits of reading appropriately-levelled large volumes of language text, notably of Stokes, Krashen & Kartchner (1998), and the suggested incidental benefit of introducing students to the necessary volume of reading required for success in any higher education institution (Brandt, 2009), Extensive Reading was implemented for all first year students here at Kobe Shoin, for the first time in April 2016. Due to the absence of a reading class for first year students - a discrete reading course exists only for second years - ER was added to a speaking class, which is taught twice a week, by part-time teachers, on Tuesdays and Fridays. Ideally a full-time faculty member would be involved, ideally the present author as the administrator, for closer oversight purposes, and to view and investigate the efficacy from closer hand. From 2017 the schedule has been adjusted, and I will be

one of the teachers.

Provision of graded readers

Implementing extensive reading requires provision of reading materials. This much is obvious, so far, but there are choices to be made of modality, publisher series, and levels. Firstly, there is a choice of graded reader provision, between hard copy and digital copy, or to choose an amalgam of both approaches. In terms of hard copies, or what we would all understand traditionally as simply ‘books’, there are multiple series of hard copy graded readers from all the main language text publishers. At Shoin there are a selection of graded readers already available, both in the library and in the self-study room in the main building. The latter is a concern, as, noting experience at another university, self-checkout books can go missing, likely more due to forgetfulness and being mislaid, than any deliberate malfeasance. If copies are to be retained in the self-study room, a tighter storage and checkout system is hereby suggested, as regularly replacing lost books can be a significant financial drain.

Of the digital strategies available, notable is that of ‘X-Reader’, developed by teachers here in the Kansai area of Japan. This approach may be something for us to consider in the near future at Shoin, noting students’ typically millennial predilection for smartphones (Bibby, 2011; Shiobara, 2015; Ushioda, 2013), the availability of listening and reading to texts, and the additional tracking facilities available for teachers with this software. Alternatively, Oxford University Press offer their own in-house materials online, via their Oxford Owl software, and while this is primarily aimed at L1 children, this might be an option for some English language program leaders to consider, as discussed for example by Shoin teacher Shiobara (2015) in these pages.

Explaining graded readers and levels

Series are *graded*, meaning they are controlled both syntactically and lexically to make them more accessible to differing students of varying language levels. Across a range of genres, these texts are aimed directly at L2 learners, not at native speaker readers (though, being simplified, some are admittedly of likely interest to younger L1 readers, and my own children have enjoyed reading some such texts).

There are two types of texts - those written newly and specifically for the graded reader format, or existing texts which have been graded downwards to enable easier lexical and syntactic access (Bassett, 2015). Texts are levelled by the number of ‘headwords’ per text - the number of newly appearing word items in each book. At the lowest levels, texts may only contain perhaps one to two hundred headwords, and will be very short in length. Conversely, at the highest levels, at the 4000-5000 headword levels, there may appear little at first glance to a lay reader to distinguish the text from a regular ungraded text.

Checking reading via online software ‘MReader’

Ideally, all students could simply have the benefits of ER explained, directed to the texts, and that

would suffice, leading to a volume of reading occurring, massed input, and resulting in target language gains. Alas, students do not all immediately take the high road of effective autonomy, and an ER program requires formalised elements. In the present case, the two coordinating staff introducing this, Prof. Frances Shiobara and myself, opted to use online software MReader to check that students had read books, and assigned some in-class time for students to spend reading.

MReader is free online software created by Japan-based ER advocate Tom Robb. The software is provided free to any institutions who wish to use it, and it works via the website <mreader.org>. Most texts across the multiple major EFL publishers' series are asserted to be covered in this regard, but through this semester we have found the occasional gap. MReader offers a means to track student reading, by asking questions to check whether the texts have been read. These are not overly specific comprehension-style questions (the, "What colour is Lisa's jacket?" type) but are questions that are intended to check completion, by checking key general points that the reader should take away from a text. Robb (2010) notes two key benefits of the online MReader software - firstly, that students can demonstrate their completion of readers, leading to the second benefit which is that this facilitates a relatively straightforward introduction of an ER program into what may already be a crowded language course (p. 124), as is the situation here at Shoin.

Targets

It is helpful for university teachers to recognise that not all students study in the same manner, and that all may not be necessarily wholly directed toward attaining straight Super-A (GPA=4) grades. While some may strive, others may coast, and others still may laze and languish. While teachers motivate and urge all to do their best, we can recognise that different students approach their studies differently, anticipate this, and build this into the grading system. An incremental grading scale was thus created for the first semester, worked out by Prof Shiobara and the present author. There was a single final target set, of 50,000 words, and no interim targets. The software allows for either choice, among many other management options.

For the second semester, the present author opted to change a final single target to three separate interim targets, of 20,000 points, for 10% each, spaced out for five weeks reading time for the respective targets. The targets are incremental, not discrete. As of time of writing (start November 2016) the tentative verdict is that this looks to be an improved approach, as students have done more reading at this stage than in the semester to hit, or get near, the interim target. A closer and more empirical view will be offered in a subsequent paper.

Setting up, and registration for new students

Students' details are input by the administrator (the present author) at the start of semester, as soon as the lists were made available. Prior, the respective classes are set up, ready for student assignment. The teachers for the four respective classes are then entered, provided with logins and passwords, and

assigned to the classes. Teacher users are set up as 'teacher', which is the next step down the hierarchy from 'administrator'. Teacher privileges can be set by the administrator - for what teachers are able to see and how with their own classes, and what they can see of other classes. My advice to administrators is to keep to the minimum set of available functions to start with, then upon teacher users becoming more familiar with basic usage, slowly add further privileges which may be useful, but which cannot cause problems if incorrectly used. It is good practice to not overload any interface for new users to start with.

All the students then need to be entered into the system - first names, family names - and each provided with a login and password. There was a slight delay in obtaining the student list due to the first-week flux of late applications and registrations, which happens every year. There is something of a rush between the full student list coming out and the orientation session - there is only a small scheduling window for the student data entry.

Some advice is helpful for potential database administrators here - passwords need to be set considering two issues, which run counter to each other: firstly, ease of remembering; and secondly the matter of security (the risk of another student maliciously entering - unlikely, but possible and needs to be anticipated). A balance is sought of easy remembering versus security. The present author used the first three letters of student family names, followed by two non-consecutive digits.

Orientation for students

Within the initial student orientation (also attended by most full-time English faculty), the logins and passwords were distributed. The purpose of ER was firstly explained by colleague Prof. Shiobara to all new students. The process of logging on, and using was explained and modelled. Students were then invited to log on and have a look for the first time. Interestingly, although a PC room was used for this explanation, most students chose to register and log on using their smartphones. There were no problems regarding logging on, nor with passwords here. All were able to access.

Overall, the MReader software appears relatively easy to use, intuitive and easily navigable - very few usage problems have been noted in the last few years that the author has been using this software with university students, and here the first year students quickly got logged on within the orientation, and appeared unchallenged. The only significant administrative issue to note was that of repeater students who did not appear on original class lists, but these were soon assigned registration information.

Logins and passwords were given to students in printed form at the orientation, and students were directed to record in some manner - to take a photograph of their details or to write down in a diary, or both. The balance of easy to remember and short while providing resistance on an initial pass by others, and indeed we appeared to have very little trouble this semester with forgotten logins and passwords.

From AY2015, first year English students are now provided with an initial tour and orientation of campus, part of which includes showing students the library and the 'peer salon' where graded reads are

available to be borrowed. To support staff in getting ER underway, coordinators provided each teacher with an initial selection of around 60 books to take to the first class, from the peer salon, from which students could choose their first graded reader. Subsequent to this, we requested teachers to direct students to the library or to the peer salon. Observing this from MReader tests, some students got underway quickly, while some did not.

Orientation for teachers

Sub-optimally, the extensive reading program was introduced in classes taught only by part-time teachers, but with no direct teaching involvement of any full-time faculty. This made the initial orientation additionally challenging, requiring more detail and exceptional clarity, and has provided challenges throughout the year in terms of the ability to note what might *really* be happening with student reading practices, due to the additional distance removed.

The part-time teachers were provided with information via email prior to the semester, including justification of the innovation, quick explanation of ER, a brief run through of using MReader, and the provided grading system to be used, which has been suggested at 30% of the final class grade. A further much more detailed explanation booklet was also created for teachers, providing additional justification for ER, background information, and details of our implementation.

Fortunately, and thankfully, the part-time staff have been supportive of the move, and have offered regular informal feedback, which is being noted and is being incorporated into ongoing changes. Shoin faculty offer our appreciation to the part-time staff members for this cooperation and assistance. More systematic feedback will be collected subsequently.

4. Issues arising and future plans

Within the final section, brief note is made of two early issues that have arisen, those of getting students to actually read, and issues of matching, which are flagged as 'cheating' (perhaps, a little too bluntly) by the software, with suggestions for managing these issues. A subsequent paper will offer a closer consideration of this extensive reading program, once more data is available, and after feedback has been garnered from students and teachers.

Managing reading and managing behaviours: Getting students to read and take tests

Coordinators provided teachers with print-outs of the class scores for the first two weeks, and were encouraged to be more self-reliant thereafter. Teachers and MReader administrators all noted that there was a slow initial take-up, and students were slow to get going with their reading.

Depending on teacher approach, there are different ways to motivate. One approach, which the present author has used mid-semester prior, is to post the printout up on the wall, by the door. Teachers can choose whether to include names or just logins, and certainly at the earlier stages, I suggest only to use logins, to minimise potential embarrassment. There are two reasons behind this as an option - to

remind students of the work to be done, and secondly to encourage them to actually do it. Alternatively, teachers can choose to nudge students along in a more circumspect manner - before or after class, or in a quiet word during class.

Teachers have noted a tendency amongst some students to not bring graded readers to class, particularly in the first semester. How should teachers manage this, when a chunk of class time is set aside for students' own ER activity? The absence of books leaves a blank learning space for a section of the class, and already less cooperative students may disrupt others. Dealing with such issues comes down to differing individual teachers' approaches to class management, and here is to suggest and advise, rather than impose or dictate.

Firstly, the teacher is advised to bring a handful of additional 'emergency' texts, anticipating the forgetting, also allowing students to sign them out and continue reading at home. 'It is in my locker' has reportedly been a typical refrain - telling them to run and fetch is a suggested response. Teachers do have concerns here that more recalcitrant students may see this as an opportunity to 'go missing', as one part-time teacher warned the author - so an approach to be used strictly and sparingly.

One likely more effective approach used by a former colleague to encourage students to be more organised is to build upwards (rewarding success), rather than penalising (moving downwards from an assumed optimal A grade), awarding 3 points for essential behaviours each class: one each respectively for attending on time, bringing materials, having completed appropriate work. To reinforce, the teacher showed this on screen as he checked at the start of each class and entered the points. Students are not penalised as such, rather, they accrue upwards. A full embrace of such an upwards grading approach may lead interested teachers to a partial or wholesale 'gamified' approach to the language classroom, which is applying gaming techniques to a non-gaming environment, herein of language education (Figueroa, 2015).

'Cheating' or simply swapping amongst peers?

The issue of cheating is at once serious, delicate and potentially explosive. The software highlights what is bluntly described within MReader software and administrator notes as 'cheating'. Trusting that students do not read this paper, herein is briefly noted recorded behaviours that are highlighted by the software as 'cheating'. Matches of texts are recorded - students who read the same graded readers, and certainly there were some egregiously large matches. The administrator can adjust settings for this, amending the dates and the minimum number of matches which would yield a 'cheating' hit. Secondly, times of tests taken are recorded and close matches of texts and times are highlighted. Again, some matches were noted in this regard.

Where excessive matches were noted, such students were asked to come and see coordinators. Multiple matches on both were noted, but students asserted that they had been swapping books between friends. As administrator, the judgment was made to focus more on the perceived robustness of the program, rather than to argue with students where highlighted matches were noted. As such, students

were not penalised, but warnings were given with explanation - the software records and highlights everything, thus students should not swap, but should be careful to choose their own books, based on their own preferences. Subsequent checks indicated that the request to desist appeared to have been heeded, and date-match checking revealed no further issues.

This is the first year of the MReader ER system at Shoin, and for next year it will be better for us to check matches earlier, within the first two-three weeks, to be initially clearer and stronger that personal choice of texts is integral, and to be clear with students that swapping the same few books amongst friends is not an acceptable approach.

Final thoughts

The latter discussion of cheating leads to final consideration of how to investigate further. Firstly, the ER system we have introduced needs to be robust, and *seen to be* robust, with no option to 'play' it, bypassing our attempts to help students in their language learning by providing this means for massed language input. An initial casual empiricism may lead teachers and administrators to believe so, and to somewhat trust the approach, but this needs closer investigation. This is intended to be within a broader look into the workings of the approach, investigating multiple aspects of the approach and of the implementation, to get a clearer picture of the extent to which the ER program is working, and how we can seek to optimise this massed, levelled input pedagogical approach with our English language learners. Aspects to investigate will be usage of hardwares and software (which hardware tool used for access to MReader, ease of use and navigation of MReader software) targets, reading behaviours (frequency, where, levels, numbers of texts), and overall impression of the program. Student and teacher opinions will be sought, further to collating the MReader data, in a mixed methods research approach.

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