Participation Process and Challenges in English Extensive Reading Programs

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to identify the process and challenges of participation in English extensive reading program (hereafter, EERP) for university students who participated in it as an activity in regular class. To explore how the participants learn in the program, the present study conducted semi-structured interviews with 15 students. The analysis generated three superordinate concepts: (1) *acquisition of learning strategies*, (2) *challenges of operational system*, and (3) *changes in attitude towards learning English through the program*. In addition, the participating students acquired strategies related to [selection of materials for EERP] with the aim of making their learning experience more efficient. Furthermore, four subcategories i.e., codes were identified for the strategy to select books: the participants tend to choose the book (1) by browsing the beginning part, (2) by checking difficulty, (3) based on genre, and regarding the (4) confirmation test that they are supposed to take after reading a book.

INTRODUCTION

This article aims to explore the process and challenges related to participation in an English Extensive Reading Program (hereafter, EERP) for university students who are involved in it as regular in-class activity.

English extensive reading is a learning method in which learners select books that match their own English proficiencies as well as their interests, read many books for pleasure, and develop a positive attitude toward English learning while at the same time improving their English ability (Fukaya, 2018). Ideally in EERP, learners are encouraged to read books without using a dictionary, and gradually increase their reading speed and the level of the books to improve their reading comprehension. In recent years, English extensive reading has been introduced in higher education institutions, and several previous studies have reported its effectiveness (see the next section).

Literature Review

Many of the previous studies on EERP studies have investigated how university students' attitudes and proficiency levels change when the program is incorporated into regular courses.

Matsui and Matsui (2018) introduced EERP in regular English courses at a junior college and conducted a questionnaire survey for the students who participated in the program, focusing mainly on affective aspects. The results based on a comparison of the high and low reading groups showed that there was a change in the students' attitudes toward English learning, such as a reduction in anxiety while using English, in both groups. In addition, the group of students who read more showed increased confidence and motivation to learn English. On the other hand, these changes were not observed in the low-reading group. Their study concluded that the introduction of EERP contributes to the change in learners' attitudes toward English and has a positive impact on the affective aspects of learning English, regardless of the amount of reading. However, the study defined the amount of reading as "the number of books read by the students," but this definition is not sufficient considering the wide range of difficulty levels of the EERP materials. We believe that a comparison of the two groups in terms of the difficulty level of the books selected by the learners would have allowed us to clarify the effects of learning through extensive

reading more closely.

Unlike the above study, Yoshida (2017) is a case study of one college freshman who received nine months of EERP. The participating student started reading books with a total word count of approximately 50 in the Oxford Reading Tree, a language textbook usually used in primary education in the U.K, which was lower than his own proficiency level. After completing approximately 100 books, the participant gradually increased the difficulty level, and finally completed 390 books which included 357,317 words in nine months. In addition to the reading records of the target student, interviews were conducted to examine what kind of changes in his attitudes in learning English occurred after his participation in EERP. As a result, the participant considered that the EERP was useful for improving his English proficiency and was a factor in his success in obtaining a high score on the TOEIC.

In recent years, software has also been used in many cases for EERP. Hattori (2021) introduced a learning management system (LMS) for EERP and investigated the relationship with the "development of learner autonomy." In this study, to clarify the relationship between learners' participation in EERP and learner autonomy, eight students were selected from four groups: (1) those who wrote many comments after reading and (2) those who wrote few comments, and (3) those who scored high and (4) low in the most recent GTEC scores. The interview was conducted mainly on the following four topics: (1) how to pursuit EERP, (2) how to engage in EERP outside of regular courses, (3) the effects of reading records, and (4) motivation for EERP, to identify the characteristics of learner autonomy. The results showed that (1) five of the eight students did not engage in EERP outside of class, (2) Writing "post-reading comments" with the reader in mind influenced their book selection and facilitated the development of learner autonomy in which the students learned from each other, and (3) appropriate teacher intervention using external incentives such as grading based on the percentage of target words which students achieved or announcement of the students who read the most words in the form of a "ranking" is effective. The study also states that the use of ICT tools such as an LMS for EERP has explicit benefits for both learners and teachers. The use of an LMS makes it possible to visualize the progress of EERP

and allows students to monitor their own learning progress. The LMS also allows the teacher to monitor the students' reading records and to grasp the progress of their learning, thus it can improve the quality of learning through EERP.

Kano (2020), a study on the difficulty level of EERP materials, used Graded Readers (GR), which have vocabulary and grammar for non-native English speakers, and Youth Readers (YR), which are children's books for native English speakers, attempted to shed light on the linguistic features that determine "difficulties" for each learner. The first step is to construct a corpus of 300,000 words based on 79 GR books and 143 YR books, respectively, and to analyze it using a concordancer such as AntConc. One significant difference between GR and YR is that the number of different words in YR is twice as large as that in GR. The number was found to be twice as many as that of GR. The number of different words in YR was found to be 4,000 at level 2, while that of GR was in the range of 2,000 words at levels 2 to 4. The vocabulary difficulty was also calculated based on the vocabulary levels of BNC/COCA and JACET8000. The results revealed that the percentage of "basic vocabulary 1000 words" was high in GR. Furthermore, for YR, there is a clear tendency toward lexical difficulty, with a higher percentage of passive voice use and more complex phrase/sentence structure. The basic vocabulary used in YR are also characterized by using a single word with multiple meanings and many descriptive expressions. These characteristics may cause some learners to feel that the book is difficult to understand.

Like GR, YR have been used as a teaching material for EERP, but their overall linguistic characteristics have not been fully analyzed. A corpus-linguistic comparison of YR with GR reveals differences and suggests that YR are not appropriate as EERP material. The "elements that learners find difficult" pointed out by Kano (2020) were used to create the interview protocol herein.

Research Approach

In this study, we use the EERP at a private university in the central Japan as a case study to clarify (1) how students participate in EERP activities and (2) what challenges they face in the program. The EERP at the target university is called SERP, and its

purpose is to promote students' autonomous English learning.

Overview of the EERP in this study

The SERP at the target university is run by several English faculty members. The program started in 2015 with the aim of creating an environment in which many students engage in autonomous English study. Participation in the program became mandatory in April 2017, and at the beginning of the program, 695 books for SERP were held in the university library. Since then, the number of books has increased, reaching 722 in March 2020 and 939 in June 2021. In addition, 43 e-books were purchased in March 2020.

Students have a brief orientation session in their first class on how to engage in SERP when they enter the university, and then, based on their own interests, use paper-based materials in the library or e-books that can be accessed from outside the university. After reading a book, students take a confirmation test designed solely to check whether the books have been read on the e-learning platform. The test can be taken only once, and no feedback is provided. Upon passing the test, the number of words in the book is counted as a part of the target words. The EERP is considered a learning activity required in a regular class, and students who read 30,000 words in one semester will receive 15% of the total grade.

Students participating in SERP receive periodic guidance lectures by faculty members on how to proceed in the project, as well as support through individual meetings. In addition, the faculty members in charge of the program regularly monitor the progress of the students and give advice as necessary. The reading materials are mainly graded readers of various levels, and students are free to select their own and engage in their own activities. The reading materials used in the target university are described in detail in the next section.

Data collection and analysis methods

The learning process and challenges in EERP vary from learner to learner. Therefore, in this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 representative students who had participated in the program (see Table 1) from February to March 2020 to explore how they were engaged in EERP. In

selecting the participants, we considered the following two points: (1) the students have participated in the program continuously for two years, and (2) not only those who were actively engaged in the program but also those who only partially participated in the program are involved in the present study.

Table 1: Participants

Pseudonym	Year	Duration of Participation
Sun (IS)	4th	2017～2018
Lan (IS)	4th	2017～2018
Dai	4th	2015～2016
Tomo	4th	2017～2018
Waka	3rd	2018～2010
Ko	4th	2017～2018
Towa	2nd	2019～2020
Nao	4th	2017～2018
Kazu	M1	2016～2017
Take	2nd	2019～2000
Kei	2nd	2019~2020
Riki	4th	2017～2018
Chu (IS)	4th	2019～2020
Taka	M1	2017～2018
Aki	M1	2016～2017

The interviews were conducted as focus group interviews following Flick's (2002) procedure as they do not place an undue burden on participants. Focus group interviews also have the advantages of efficient collection of speech data and of allowing the participants to share their past experiences while comparing with the those of other participants.

Of course, in focus group interviews, the possibility arises that participants may follow the opinions of other participants or that they may not have equal opportunities to speak. Therefore, in the interviews, the authors attempted to adjust the speaking turns of the participants to allow them to express their experiences and thoughts equally. The interview with Waka was one-on-one due to the schedule of the research. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes in order not to burden the students.

The interviews and analysis were conducted jointly by the first and second author, and a faculty member of the target university who runs EERP. The first author teaches English classes at the university and has been in close communication with the participants. She also has a good rapport with the students. The first author had no authority over the students' grades at the time of the interviews, and their utterances were not subject to evaluation in any ways,

thus, it is unlikely that the contents of the participants utterances were intentionally altered. The interviews were analyzed primarily by the first author who is familiar with the students' learning environment and their engagement in EERP and worked with the second author to reach consensus on the analysis. The interviews were conducted in a free exchange with the participants, including questions such as (1) whether they were involved in EERP before entering university, (2) their participation in EERP, (3) how they selected EERP materials, and (4) challenges that they experienced in pursuing EERP. With the permission of the participants, the contents of the interviews were recorded using an IC recorder, and all the transcriptions were used as the data for the analysis.

The data were analyzed based on the qualitative text analysis method (Kuchartz, 2014). The reason for adopting this method was to present the detailed processes and challenges in participating in EERP from the sub-concepts to the higher level, which differ from one learner to another. In this study, we used four processes of analysis:

(1) coding
(2) category parsing,
(3) superordinate concept parsing
(4) diagrammatic parsing

Coding in (1) means the process of dividing the contents of the utterance data into semantic parts. In the process, coding was conducted for each individual student's utterance since each student's participation in EERP is different. In the analysis of (2) categories, we examined the meaning of each code that emerged from (1), and attempted to generate categories by grouping together codes that have a common meaning after considering the relationship between the codes. In the analysis of (3) superordinate concepts, we attempted to identify relationships among categories to further increase the level of abstraction of the extracted categories, and generated superordinate concepts. In the (4) diagrammatic representation, we visualized the results of the interpretation by (3) in the form of a figure.

In addition, the following information was used as supplemental information in interpreting the above data.
(1) Interview with one faculty member who runs EERP

(2) Data on lending of EERP materials provided by the library of the target university

(1) was conducted in September 2021 and took about 60 minutes. The interviewee mainly asked the following questions: (a) how the EERP was introduced to the university, (b) what problems existed from the start of the program to the present and how they were solved, (c) what achievements were obtained through the implementation of the program, (d) how EERP materials in the library were selected, (5) how the comprehension tests were conducted, (e) the background leading to the introduction of the e-learning platform, and (f) the future policy of the EERP. With the permission of the participant, the interviews were recorded on an IC recorder, and all the interviews were transcribed and used as analysis data.

As for (2), the library of the target university provided us with the data on EERP materials, including e-books, used from April 2018 to October 2021, excluding personal information.

Results

To identify the process of participation in EERP, we analyzed interviews conducted with 15 students and generated the following three superordinate concepts: (1) *acquisition of learning strategies*, (2) *challenges of operational system*, and (3) *changes in attitude towards learning English through the program*. The details are described below. In the text and figures, 【 】 indicates the categories included in the subordinate concepts. The double quotation mark indicates examples of utterances of students and teachers in the interviews, the three-digit numbers following the names indicate the utterance codes, ... indicates the abbreviations in the utterances, and [ ] indicates the author's supplementation.

Acquisition of learning strategies

The superordinate concept (1) *acquisition of learning strategies* encompasses four categories (see Table 2). They are broadly classified into two categories: (1) those directly related to learning (2) those indirectly supporting learning (Oxford, 1990). In the following, we will give an interpretation of learning strategies that the participating learners acquire. In the present study, learning strategies are

defined as "mental operations or activities that are intentionally performed with the aim of enhancing the effectiveness of learning (Tatsuno, 1997).

Improving the efficiency of learning in EERP

The students have explored effective learning strategies and acquired appropriate ones through their participation in a two-year EERP experiences. Through the experience of participating in the program, the students consider 【learning to improve the efficiency of learning EERP】 and aim to complete the program in the least amount of time and effort as possible. For example, Sun stated, "Well, there was a book that included like thirty thousand words, so I just read that one book."

In addition, the participants tended to use paper-based reading materials rather than e-books, because it was more efficient for them to answer the comprehension test on the computer in a shorter time when they had the paper-based books. As mentioned above, the target university requires students to read 30,000 words per semester. Therefore, the students have learned strategies to efficiently complete EERP in a limited time.

Selection of EERP materials

The students acquired strategies related to 【selection of EERP materials】 with the aim of making their EERP experience more efficient. The selection strategies are discussed based on the subcategory codes.

First, as can be seen from the utterances: "I choose by the first page of the book (Lan, 001)" or "I look at the first part of the book, look at the number of words, look at the contents, and then decide whether I would choose it or not (Take, 012)," some adopted (1) the method of choosing books after reading the beginning of EERP materials. This is also related to the selection method described below, whereby they make a prediction about the contents and level of the material based on the description at the beginning or the cover or the title of the book, and then select the material that they can effectively engage in.

Next, (2) the method of choosing books by the difficulty level or word count of EERP materials is discussed. As can be seen from the statement: "I was not very good at English and did not understand it

very well, so I started with easy, low-level materials and worked my way up (Kei, 002)," through their participation in the program, the learners acquired the strategy of selecting reading materials appropriate for their proficiency level. In adopting this method, they also referred to the level and word count attached to the reading materials and made judgments based on the vocabulary used in the book.

In addition, (3) the strategy of selecting reading materials according to their genres was also described. For example, one of the participants said, "If it is too hard, I don't think I can make it. I prefer simple novels (Take, 004). It can be said that the genre and content of the materials are important factors in the selection of the book. The following statements also show that the individual's reading tendency and preference, as well as background knowledge, influence the selection of reading materials.

"I do not prefer horror. If the book is about a particular region of the world, I don't know much about it, and I don't know anything about it. If it's about Japan, I can read it and think, "Oh, I know, I know," but if it is about Brazil or something, I'm like, "I really don't know, I really don't know. So I read more story-type books, the kind that anyone can read (Waka, 011)."

Next, (4) the strategy of selecting EERP materials by types of comprehension tests is discussed. As stated earlier, students are required to take a comprehension test in EERP. In addition, if the students do not obtain a certain score on the test, the word count of the reading material is not accumulated. Therefore, as shown in the following speech, this method is used to select the reading materials with questions that are easier to reach a passing score in the test.

"It's a genre of game book where the pages are all numbered and if you read this one, you move on to the next one. Usually, we have a question at the end of the rest that requires us to rearrange the sentences to complete the synopsis of the story. This type of question is not for a game book, it has just a standard multiple-choice question (Tomo, 001-002)."

Table 2: List of categories that comprise the superordinate concept (1)

Category	Students	Excerpts
【 Improving the efficiency of learning in EERP】	Sun, Tomo, Nao, Take, Kei, Riki, Aki	"I used to choose books of very low level at the beginning, like 1,000 or 2,000. But I couldn't keep doing that, so I tried around 10,000...I kept doing around 10,000 (Tomo, 003)." "To access e-books is troublesome [login required] (Aki, 002)."
【selection of EERP materials】	Lan, Dai, Tomo , Waka, Ko, Towa, Nao, Kazu , Take, Kei, Riki, Chu, Aki	"I also feel that only easy books, or fictions, come into my mind if it's in English. That's why I read mainly stories (Dai, 001)." "If the book has a cover or a title or a story that I know, I can probably answer [the comprehension test questions] within my background knowledge (Towa, 003)." "First, I think it should be the genre that I like, and also, as I read more and more, I can find the certain genre that is easy to read for me. I also usually find it easy to read stories that I can easily imagine in my mind while reading, so that's why I tend to choose this type of books (Kazu, 003)."
【Use of Machine Translation】	Waka , Towa, Ko, Take	"I had a lot of words to read, and, I didn't have enough time to read them, and I had already read the short ones in the first semester, so I didn't have many options left. I had to read the longer ones, so I used machine translation a lot when I could not understand the meaning (Waka, 006)." "There are many difficult phrases [in EERP books], and I used [machine translation] for those difficult words and the words that I don't understand (Towa, 004)."
【Dictionary Use】	Nao, Kazu, Take, Chu, Aki	"I use it [a dictionary] when I have two or three words in a sentence that I really don't understand, so I use it in those cases, but not when I can judge [the meaning] from the context (Take, 007)." "I looked up words I couldn't understand (Aki, 008)."

In addition, some participants did not acquire the strategies related to 【selection of EERP materials】. In many cases, the students were like, "I just pick a book at random, like, pick it up, and read it (Nao, 005-006)" and there are cases in which no specific criteria are used in the selection of EERP materials.

Use of Machine Translation

The third category encompassed by the concept (1) *acquisition of learning strategies* was generated as 【use of machine translation】 as can be seen from the excerpts in Table 2. Some of the participants indicated that they sometimes used machine translation when they had to read a specified number of words in a limited period. The methods of use varied from scanning the English text with a smartphone and applying machine translation to the entire page to extracting vocabularies or sentences that were difficult to understand and typing them into a machine translation site, as in the following utterance.

"I only type the vocabularies into the machine translation site, but sometimes the vocabulary just appears in *katakana*, or if I don't understand something, I try to type a sentence (waka, 007)."

Also, some participants mentioned that they did not use machine translation as the translated Japanese is unnatural, as shown below.

"I'm so stressed out because it's so unnatural. When I look at sites such as programming sites, the machine translation into Japanese is done by itself, and I ended up thinking that I'm fine with English. I don't really like machine translation. It's so unnatural that I feel like if it's in English, it should read as it is (Kazu, 021)."

Dictionary Use

【Dictionary use】 was generated as the fourth subordinate category. As mentioned above, learners are recommended to select books that match their own interests and read them "for pleasure." This allows students to engage in English language learning spontaneously and independently. However, this effect cannot be achieved with difficult books that include mostly unknown vocabulary, even if the content matches the learner's interests. In other words, learners should select books that they can read without frequently using a dictionary. It is difficult for teachers to give advice to students on the selection of books, since there are great individual differences in the vocabulary acquired by learners depending on their previous learning environment, interests, and so on. For example, learners of science and engineering may have a good knowledge of words in physics and chemistry, which are generally considered to be difficult in high school.

As shown in the excerpts in Table 2, students

stated that they use dictionaries when they cannot understand the meaning in the context. According to previous studies, students need to know 95% to 98% of the total number of words in a text to fully understand the text, regardless of the genre of the text (Grabe & Stoller, 2019; Nakata, 2019). Therefore, if a learner needs a dictionary to comprehend the content of the material, the vocabulary level of the selected book is probably not suitable.

As an example, a more effective framework for individualized learning can be proposed by utilizing a system that uses AI to recommend reading materials that match the proficiency level and interests of individual learners.

For example, Ehara (2019) proposes a novel algorithm that uses machine learning to predict the probability that a learner knows each word in the EERP materials based solely on the results of a short word test, allowing individual learners to search for books that they can read from all genres. Such a proactive learning system using information technology communication networks will enable learners to develop an educational environment in which they can effectively learn to read more in English without being restricted by time or place. It may be necessary to establish a system that allows learners to access books at appropriate levels using such technology.

Challenges of Operational System

In this section, we examine the superordinate concept (2) in the operational system. This encompasses two subcategories (see Table 3).

As mentioned above, in EERP at the target university, students are required to take an online confirmation test after completing the reading material. The test can be taken only once, and if the student fails the test, he/she does not receive any feedback as to which question was incorrect or what the correct answer was. This is a system to prevent cheating, but as shown in the following speech, there were several comments calling for improvement.

"I was like, "...Which question did I get wrong? I was not sure what was going on. If I take the test and fail, I think it can't be helped, but I have had many cases where I thought I understood the book, but I failed, and I wondered what went wrong. I'd like to know which one I got wrong. (Waka, 014)."

Table 3: List of categories that comprise the superordinate concept (2)

Category	Students	Excerpts
【Improvements to EERP System,】	Dai, Tomo, Waka	"I think it's to prevent [cheating], but not knowing the answer is the worst. Which question did I get wrong (Tomo, 004)?" "But we can only take the test once. I think we should change that (Dai, 003)."
【Difficulty Level of Confirmation Tests】	Sun, Lan, Towa	"Yeah. 〔The reading confirmation test〕 is easy if I just read the whole book (Lan, 002)." "[The test] is too difficult and not enough time (Towa, 002)."

The participating international students mentioned that the tests were easy, however, some Japanese students said the opposite. This is related to the above-mentioned 【Difficulty Level of Confirmation Tests】, but there is a time limit set for tests. Therefore, strategies such as rereading the material, checking dictionaries, or using machine translation cannot be used during the test. Although these systems were designed to prevent cheating, it was suggested that the time limit set for tests itself became a barrier to learning.

Changes in Attitude towards Learning English through the Program

The superordinate concept (3), *changes in attitude towards learning English through the program* can be divided into two subcategories: 【experience of EERP】 and 【attitude toward English learning】 (see Table 4).

All the 15 participants in this study, including the international students, mentioned that they did not have any experiences in EERP before entering university. Ten of them (see 【Experiences of EERP】 in Table 4) talked about their diverse experiences gained through their continuous participation in a ERRP.

I read a lot, sometimes failed, and other times passed the confirmation test (Nao, 003).

" 〔ERRP〕 was difficult, but the more I got involved in the program, the more interesting it became (Chu, 012)."

Table 4: List of categories that comprise the superordinate concept (3)

Category	Students	Excerpts
【Experience of EERP】	Waka, Towa, Kazu, Nao, Take, Riki, Yuki, Chu, Kei	"[In high school] I read some long passages for entrance exams but did not read stories and alike. (Waka, 001)." "Sometimes I just couldn't read 15,000 or 30,000 words, and other times I read a lot, and then I took the confirmation test and failed it, and I lost a little bit of motivation, and then there were times when I felt like things didn't go well this semester (Nao, 001)."
【Attitude toward English Learning】	Waka, Ko, Nao, Take	The fact that the books are written entirely in English with no Japanese is, from my point of view, like an unknown world (Koh, 001)." "In the second semester of the first year, I learned quite a few words, so, well, when I know the word, I kind of know what it means. In that sense, I feel like I had a little bit of leeway (Koh, 003). "

In addition, some students stated that they became more motivated to learn English because of the free reading activities without any restrictions, but others did not feel any significant change as shown below.

"I did EERP, but I don't know. I don't really feel that my English has improved my since I entered university (Take, 006)."

The interview data revealed that students do not participate in the program because of their individual initiative and spontaneity, but because of "external inducements," e.g., to receive a grade according to their achievement of the target number of words (30,000 words). Figure 1 below shows the number of students who checked out multiple reading materials during their first (FY 2018) and second (FY 2019) year of study.

As mentioned above, in the university's EERP, students are graded according to the percentage of target words achieved. Since the words read by the end of July are reflected in the grades for the first semester and those read by the end of January are reflected in the grades for the second semester, the total number of total number of books checked out for EERP at the library in July and January is larger than in other months of the year. In addition, the first semester of the first year, when the students are

engaged in the program for the first time, the total number of materials checked out is the largest, but there is no significant change from the second semester of the first year to the second semester of the second year. This indicates that students aim to achieve the target word count by "reading many materials with low word counts (i.e., materials with low YL[1])" at the beginning of their participation in the program, but gradually switch to "reading a small number of materials with high word counts.

Figure 1: Total number of materials loaned by 2018 enrollees
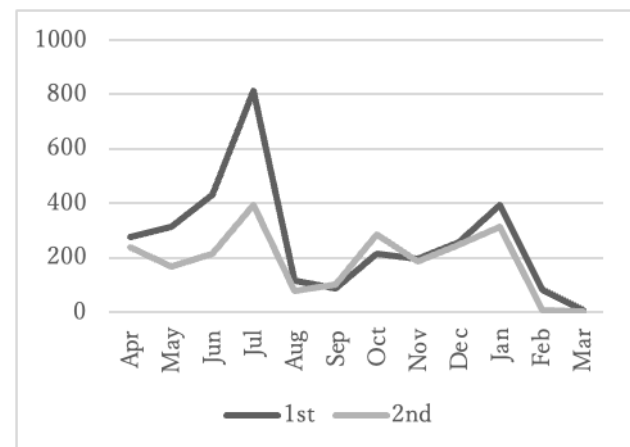
The participating students attach importance on completing EERP efficiently. They also use various strategies to save their time and effort. These results suggest that learners who have acquired strategies to efficiently complete EERP in the first semester of their first year are attempting to complete the program with less effort by gradually increasing the YL level.

Figure 2: Total number of materials loaned by students in 2019
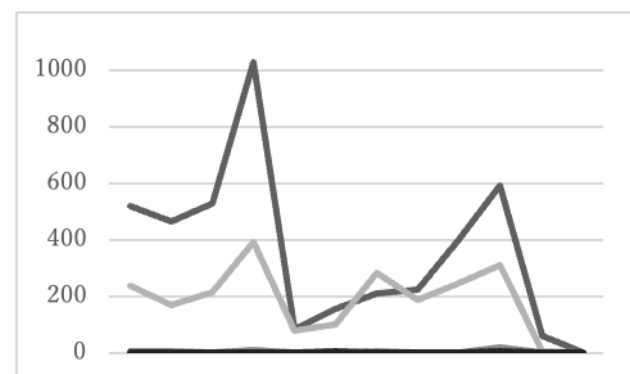
[1] YL stands for *Yomiyasusa Level*. It is an indicator to measure the reading level of English books established in Japan. Various elements such as the size of fonts and illustrations also affects the YL of the books.

Figure 2 shows the total number of EERP materials loaned to students in years one through four for the 2019 school year. As can be seen from this figure, third- and fourth-year students showed little use of the materials, e.g., less than 10 books were checked out each month. This indicates that only a small number of students continue to engage in extensive reading after the completion of the program in their regular English courses.

On the other hand, as shown in the following statements, some talked about how their【Attitude toward English Learning】had changed through their participation in the program.

"After about two or three months, I found it a little easier to read. I felt like I could read faster than before (Nao, 011)."

"[As the amount of the library's EERP books] were quite small, and the contents themselves were quite short, from the third year onward, I wanted to read advanced books, and I actually read rather thick books in English (Kazu, 008)."

Kazu, the participant, continued to read spontaneously in English after the program was completed, but he said that he found the reading materials insufficient and started to read English books for native speakers instead of reading books for EERP. Kazu also describes his change in attitude toward English as follows.

"I'm not saying that now my English has improved a little because I've been involved in EERP, but rather that by reading the English books, I'm incorporating English into my daily life. I think that my fear and resistance to English is disappearing (Kazu, 017)."

In addition, the following statements were made in the interviews with the teacher running EERP.

"People who got really good scores on TOEIC and things like that also say that [participating in the program] has helped them a lot, especially with vocabulary (Teacher, 009)."

"The best part is that after two years of the program, we have third- and fourth-year students who are still reading, and even after they graduate, they continue to read in English. I think the best part is that they have developed that reading habit (Teacher, 011)."

Some of the students also mentioned that the program was useful for them to read academic articles written in English, suggesting that EERP is one of the educational methods to develop each learner's syntactical organization and to support autonomous learning.

EERP at the university accounts for 15% of the grade for certain required English courses, and the target word count is set at 30,000 words per semester. Therefore, learners acquire various strategies to efficiently pass the test. In other words, (2) *challenges of operational system* affect (1) *the acquisition of the learning strategy*. The concept of "extensive reading in English" is that learners select books based on their own interests or proficiency level and read many books written in English without using a dictionary, but for operational system reasons, this philosophy has not always been achieved. The learning strategies acquired by the participants can be broadly classified into those directly related to learning and those indirectly supporting learning. (1) *The acquisition of learning strategies* affects the learners' experience of participating in EERP from which the superordinate concept (3) *changes in attitude towards learning English through the program* generated.

Conclusion

In the present study, we summarized the English education practices using EERP in Japan and interviewed 15 students about EERP introduced in the regular English classes at university. The process of students' participation in the program was then analyzed qualitatively. In interpreting the above data, we also used (1) an interview with an educator who runs EERP and (2) data on the EERP materials checked out for the program provided by the libraries as supplementary data.

The results from this small study showed that the learners were attempting to acquire strategies for efficient learning by considering the operational system of the program, and each of them accumulated their experiences in participating in EERP through their own ingenuity.

Extensive reading has proven to be an effective way to develop foreign language skills and cross-cultural understanding, and to provide a large amount of high-quality foreign language input. Unlike other teaching methods that impose knowledge from

teachers, EERP has the great advantage of allowing students to read what they want to read and what interests them. It is known that if learners are provided with books that they are interested in and can read without having to frequently look up a dictionary, they become more motivated to learn the language, and this is known to be highly effective for learning (Krashen, 1993). This study revealed that there is an urgent need to construct a system for selecting reading materials that match learners' proficiency levels and interests. In the future, it will be necessary to consider how to develop learners' English proficiency through "free reading" and "extensive reading" from the viewpoint of selecting extensive reading materials.

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