Assessing Student Attitudes Toward Graded Readers, MReader and the MReader Challenge

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a pilot study conducted with English as a foreign language (EFL) students at a private university in Japan who used graded readers and the MReader website in class or independently to enhance their English reading skills. Each semester students who read 100,000 words with MReader quizzes passed enter into the 'MReader Challenge,' a reading contest that recognizes students for their achievement. The study focused specifically on the attitudes of thirty-six EFL students who successfully completed the Challenge in the 2015 spring semester using graded readers and MReader, and their motivation to continue using English in the future. The attitudes of these students were measured using their responses to statements on a Likert scaled survey. Follow-up semi-structured interviews were conducted with eleven students to gain additional insight into their opinions. The results from this study suggest that reading graded readers in general promoted intrinsic motivation among a majority of the participants. This study is preliminary and needs to be expanded and continued to assess the lasting impact of the extensive reading program. Limitations and future directions of the study are also summarized and discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Classroom-based research focusing on teaching methodologies and how they promote positive attitudes and improved motivation among second language (L2) learners has been a focus of L2 motivation research since the early 1990's. This paper contributes to past L2 motivation research by examining outcomes of extensive reading activities and an online management system for English as a foreign language (EFL) learners at a private Japanese university.

Extensive reading (ER) is an approach that has been characterized as quantitative pleasure reading in L2 over an extended period of time (Day & Bamford, 1998). It is a means for learners to improve their overall language abilities by reading simplified texts, generally in the form of graded readers that contain a high frequency headword count. ER approaches have

been shown to be beneficial although they rely on learners to be highly motivated, resulting in disparities in learning outcomes (Kirchhoff, 2013). Like many other post-secondary institutions, the university's Foreign Language Center's (FLC) extensive reading program has not only sought to make L2 reading accessible, but also to promote it as a positive attribute that enhances language skills and generates learner consistency. The FLC graded reader library started in 2003 with a goal to encourage and facilitate reading fluency through ER. Since that time, the number of students using graded readers has increased exponentially. In 2014, over 4,000 students used the FLC's graded readers (about 2,000 students in the spring and fall semesters), an increase of approximately 500 students from 2013. The FLC boasts an ER library of over 12,000 graded readers streamed into 10 levels based on publisher headword counts, with each mobile library tailored to the specifications of the class's language abilities.

Graded reader content alone may not be sufficient to entice or maintain a student's interest long enough for them to become self-actuated readers; therefore, other positive incentives are needed. The Extensive Reading Foundation's MReader was introduced in 2014 as an online management system that enables both teachers and learners to track reading progress. Learner achievements are also officially recognized through the FLC's MReader Challenge, a contest that promotes ER by helping and rewarding students who reach an elevated reading target. This preliminary study assessed the attitudes of the MReader Challenge finalists (n=36) towards reading graded readers, the Challenge, and the perceived impact on their English skills and future English studies. The main question posed in this study is, to what extent do these variables influence EFL learner motivation to read and how may EFL readers benefit in the future?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Extensive Reading and Motivation

Motivation within language learning education is regarded as a combination of influences that include mental processes, emotions, social context and the learner's L2 language identity (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). Defining motivation is complex since many of the key concepts overlap, especially in regards to ER. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation both play an important role in reading. Intrinsic motivation manages to engage the learner through curiosity, involvement and preferences, while extrinsic motivation is characterized by recognition, grades, social motives, competition and compliance (Grabe, 2009). To understand motivation in the context of reading, Eccles' *expectancy-value theory* is widely cited (Wigfield, 1994; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). According to this theory, expectancy for success relates to the level of confidence an individual has in accomplishing a given task, whereas the value refers to perceived importance, usefulness or enjoyment of the task. A learner's core preferences and basic approach to activities are largely determined by these values. The assumption of the *expectancy-value theory* is that an individual is motivated to act if he or she expects to succeed. Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) also suggest that the most comprehensive means of motivating learners is by promoting positive language-related values and attitudes.

A learners' motivation to read will undoubtedly change over time as motivational influences are constantly fluctuating with each reading experience, learning outcome, classroom context, or belief (Dörnyei, 2001; de Burgh-Hirabe, 2011; Judge, 2011). Regardless of what initially motivates a learner, "their success and failures, and in part due to outside factors" will affect their ER habits (Judge, 2011, p. 165). The impact of positive and negative influences on motivation among participants was noted by de Burgh-Hirabe (2011) in her study:

> …it seems that when the student's motivational intensity increased, the positive influences were operating and/or the negative influences were absent. When the students' motivational intensity declined, the negative influences were operating strongly and cancelled out the positive influences. Therefore, it is suggested that the positive influences are fragile and easily overshadowed by the negative influences. (p. 186)

In other words, negative influences such as class demands will definitely take priority over reading.

Importance of *Flow*

Kirchhoff (2013) suggests that initially learners are keen to read in the introductory stage of an ER program, but as motivation wears thin and negative influences take hold, the discrepancies between participants in terms of volume read is apparent. However, Yamashita (2013) states that the underlying hope is that positive feelings will enhance a learner's decision to read and ultimately establish a continuous cycle of reading. Most researchers and educators would agree with Grabe (2009) when he suggests that, "students only become skilled readers when they read a lot, and motivation for reading is critical for addressing this challenge" (p. 192).

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) developed the theory of *flow*, which is regarded as the mental state at which a person is fully immersed in an activity such as reading (Grabe, 2009; Kirchoff, 2013). Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) apply this concept of *flow* to language learning as a means to motivate language learners. They describe it as "a heightened level of motivated task engagement" (p. 94) with cognitive elements, such as the ability to evaluate challenge, set clear goals, and attain elements of success and autonomy (Judge, 2011). An individual becomes not only involved, but also completely focused while procuring enjoyment in the process of the activity; therefore, *flow* can essentially be characterized as complete absorption. In order to reach a state of *flow*, the learner's skill level and the scale of the challenge need to match. As an essential condition of *flow*, a challenge should not only engage the learner but also thwart boredom. On the other hand, when the challenge is far greater than the learner's ability, anxiety exceeds the engagement. As Kirchoff (2013) suggests, the right balance between skill and challenge can motivate a learner to repeat the task and aspire to the next challenge. Thus, the ultimate goal of any ER program would be to motivate students in order to create a *flow* experience, which in all likelihood would perpetuate lifelong readers (Day & Bamford, 1998; Grabe, 2009).

ER Principles vs. Assessment Needs

Characterized as the ideal ER approach and based on the *expectancy-value theory* of motivation, Day and Bamford's (1998; 2002) "Ten Principles of ER" are widely accepted within ER communities. The principles state that reading materials should be enjoyable, easy and include a variety of topics that can be quickly read to accomplish a large amount of reading. Since the purpose of ER is for pleasure and general understanding, students should be able to choose the books they want to read. Teachers are to simply facilitate and model the silent reading in the classroom. At the center of the experience, reading is regarded as its own reward and therefore does not necessarily require assessment. The general assumption of Day and Bamford's ER approach is that learners will be motivated to read and develop positive reading attitudes and habits if materials are of interest, meet their linguistic abilities and are anxiety-

free.

In reality, however, institutional requirements for assessment in the form of reading accomplishments often outweigh the principle of reading for pleasure (Kirchhoff, 2013). Robb (2015) concurs, "a lack of follow-up activities would be tantamount to no reading at all" (p. 150). To complicate matters, there is insufficient class time to accomplish the large amounts of reading that ER programs typically seek, nor is it likely that all students are equally motivated to read outside the classroom on their own volition. In many ways, the Extensive Reading Foundation's MReader is an indispensable tracking tool that manages the students' completion of their course ER requirements. MReader has over 4,500 graded reader quizzes with a current user base of 80,000 students in about 25 countries (Robb, 2015, p. 146). The system asks the reader simple comprehension questions to assess whether the book was read or not. MReader also provides learners with instant feedback with game-like features that include a public leaderboard, student progress bar, level promotion and stamp collection applications that show students their progress. Overall, adhering to institutional requirements may require Day and Bamford's ER approach to adopt a more realistic slant that incorporates pleasurable follow-up activities.

Although ER experts such as Day and Bamford (1988), Krashen (2004) and Ro (2013) infer that teacher evaluation of ER can negatively affect students' L2 reading attitudes and progress to becoming independent, self-motivated readers, this interpretation could be misleading. According to Stoeckel, Reagan, & Hann (2012), for example, external incentives can promote reading behavior that is autonomous and personally rewarding in the long term. Stoeckel, *et al.* (2012) found no difference between the reading attitudes of Japanese university students who took weekly ER quizzes as compared to students who did not. Their results suggest quizzes were appropriate for students requiring external motivation for ER beyond mere encouragement or supplementary activities. Robb (2015) concedes that highly motivated students would most likely be less compelled to use software such as MReader; however, students generally appreciate confirmation that they have understood the reading.

RESEARCH METHOD AND DESIGN

MReader Challenge

The objective of the MReader Challenge has been to support, encourage and recognize students' ER accomplishments. The Challenge is held twice a year over the course of 15-weeks in both the spring and fall semesters. The Challenge is announced by FLC teachers in their classrooms and through campus posters and flyers at the start of each semester. It is open to all students who meet the contest requirements of reading 40 books or 100,000 words with MReader quizzes passed. Students who complete the Challenge requirements are rewarded with a certificate of achievement, prizes and a celebratory lunch hosted by the Director of the FLC.

In past years, the contest had only required students to read 40 books and maintain a paper-based reading log. However, after an initial trial period of MReader at the university in 2014, the contest was changed to incorporate the online quizzes and to take into account student's varying abilities by including word count as an option to ensure fairness. A basic student would find it nearly impossible to read 100,000 words with a reading level of less than 300 headwords, while an advanced student would struggle to read 40 books at over 1,000 headwords. It should be stated that the MReader Challenge is not necessarily a competition between students but a personal challenge.

Extensive Reading in the Classroom

ER usage and reading goals set by individual teachers in the pilot study varied somewhat. With the exception of one teacher whose students relied solely on the graded readers in the campus's main library, all other teachers brought the books to class once or twice a week using their mobile library. Each mobile library consists of graded reader titles from various publishers, such as *Cambridge*, *Cengage*, *Compass*, *Oxford*, *Penguin*, and *Scholastic*, which are specific to learner reading abilities. For basic, there are 3 book levels ranging from 75 to 300 headwords. For intermediate, there are 4 book levels ranging from 300 to 800 headwords, and for advanced, there are 5 book levels from 700 to 2,200 headwords, with each book being color-coded to assist students in finding a level-appropriate book. In the case of the LS1 (aviation) students, the mobile library selection for their classroom contained only content-based non-fiction titles, thought to be more useful for preparing for the TOEFL test. Reportedly, 15 to 20 minutes of class time once or twice a week was generally allotted for book selection and in-class reading over the 15-week session. Additionally, students were encouraged to take books home and seek out other graded reader titles through the main library.

The largest discrepancy between teachers appears to be with the overall grade percentage allocated to ER and the number of books/words required to achieve that optimum percentage. According to the teacher's own discretion, ER accounted for anywhere between 5% and 15% of the students' overall grade. Basic and Lower Intermediate level classes generally set the reading goal at 10,000 words or 30 books with quizzes passed. Advanced level classes tended to set the bar slightly higher, requiring between 75,000 and 80,000 words with quizzes passed. Intermediate level classes required between 40,000 and 60,000 words with quizzes passed. In addition to class goals, students were informed of the Challenge's target goals of 40 books or 100,000 words with quizzes passed. However, all classroom requirements were set below the Challenge levels and were not a class goal. Meeting the Challenge requirements was a goal of the student's individual choosing.

Participants

The courses in which study participants were enrolled included both required and elective English courses at the university in the 2015 spring semester (Table 1). Due to the limited participant sample available, we found it more feasible to group students by course rather than by proficiency for this preliminary study. The one participating elective class was Vocabulary Building for Beginners (VB). This class met once a week over 15 weeks with 16 mixed level students enrolled. Required courses included Reading and Writing 1 (RW1), Reading and Writing 2 (RW2), Listening and Speaking 1 (LS1), Listening and Speaking 2 (LS2) and Academic English (AE) class. These classes met twice a week over 15 weeks with an average of 25 students per class.

Table 1. English Courses with Participants who fulfilled the Challenge Requirements

Class Name	Required / Elective	Mix	B	I	A	Native	Non-Native	Total Number of Classes	Number of Students (average per class)
VB	Elective	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	16 (16)
RW1	Required	0	0	2	3	3	2	5	94 (19)
RW2	Required	0	0	2	1	3	0	3	85 (28)
LS1 (Aviation)	Required	0	0	1	1	2	0	2	22 (11)
LS2	Required	0	1	3	1	4	1	5	143 (29)
AE3	Required	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	25 (25)
Total		1	1	9	6	14	3	17	385 (24)

(Number of Classes Based on Proficiency Level: Mix, B, I, A; Number of Teachers: Native, Non-Native)

Students in required courses were streamed into three proficiency levels: basic (B), intermediate (I) and advanced (A) based on results from the universities freshman placement test and English test scores from their freshman year. It should be noted that the LS1 participants were all Aviation Department students. The aviation LS1 course, unlike regular LS1 classes, was an intensive TOEFL speaking class for students who are required to attain a TOEFL iBT score of 71 in order to continue their studies abroad.

Besides the FLC's ER program offered in required and elective courses, E-Navi, the university's English language learning support center is another avenue for students to enter the MReader Challenge. Those students who wish to use or continue to use MReader or graded readers but who no longer have access to the resources in the classroom can work independently through E-Navi. The books and quizzes that these students complete have no bearing on any class or grade they receive at the university; they work completely unsupervised, borrowing graded readers from E-Navi or the main library.

Table 2. Participants Grouped by MReader Registration and Language Proficiency Level

Group	Class	Number of Participants	Male B	Male I	Male A	Female B	Female I	Female A
A	LS1 (Aviation)	4	0	2	2	0	0	0
B	RW1	10	0	1	5	0	1	3
C	LS2 & VB	9	1	3	1	0	1	3
D	RW2 & AE3	8	0	1	1	0	1	5
E	E-Navi	5	0	3	0	0	2	0
Total		36	20			16		

The subjects who participated anonymously in this study were all Japanese with the exception of one international student. The participants consisted of 16 females and 20 males. The language proficiency levels in each group ranged from basic (B), intermediate (I) and advanced (A). A total of 42 required and elective FLC classes took part in the ER/MReader program with students (n=920) having registered MReader accounts in the 2015 spring semester. A smaller number of MReader users (n=36) completed the MReader Challenge. Of those entrants, 5 had used MReader in the previous year in other classes at the university (Table 2).

Data Collection

We conducted data collection using a mixed methods approach. A survey was used to collect quantitative data, with a comment section (qualitative data). To supplement the survey, a semi-structured interview was conducted.

Survey

At the end of the 2015 spring semester, a 12-item, five-point, bilingual (English/Japanese) Likert scale survey with space for student comments was administered in class by the teacher as a means of investigating students' attitudes towards reading graded readers and the MReader Challenge (Appendix A). The survey statements attempt to measure attitudes towards reading graded readers and the MReader Challenge in terms of learners' perceived English ability and future usage, and were rooted in the assumption that motivation is multi-faceted. The statements were organized in sections as follows: 1.1−1.3 participant's attitudes towards graded readers, 1.4−1.6 participant's perceived English skill improvement, 1.7−1.9 ER and MReader quizzes as motivational factors, and 1.10−1.12 the MReader Challenge as a motivational factor. By identifying the key factors that contributed to the participants' success in reaching the Challenge's target reading goals, the preliminary study hopes to better understand how to promote positive attitudes and motivate L2 language learners both inside and outside the classroom.

Follow-up Interviews

We conducted one-on-one follow-up interviews with volunteer students (n=11) outside of class time. Nine interviews were conducted primarily in English with occasional Japanese usage, while an additional two interviews were entirely in Japanese (Appendix B). The average interview length was 9 min 44 sec. The interviews took place between July 21 and July 28, 2015. These interviews were recorded, transcribed and translated by the authors into English if the interview was done in Japanese.

Data Analysis

Survey results (quantitative data) were analyzed by first organizing student survey responses in a Microsoft Excel file. We then determined the average response for each survey statement to obtain a general view of responses for each participant group. We categorized responses to semi-structured interviews in an Excel file and examined them for general patterns pertaining to the focus of this study.

RESULTS

Over the 15-week period of the Challenge, participants took MReader quizzes on average every 3.7 days. Although the contest required 100,000 words, many students read beyond that with an average word count of 104,929 based on quizzes passed. This average was offset by the 11 students who read lower level books and entered the Challenge based on the 40 book option, reading on average 69,996 words with quizzes passed. Taking into account only those students who entered the contest solely based on word count, the average was slightly higher at 120,301 words with quizzes passed.

Responses to survey sections 1.1−1.3 regarding participants' attitudes towards graded readers were generally favorable, particularly in terms of their perception of improved English skills (Figure 1). Within this section, there was only slight differences, for instance Group C's enjoyment of graded readers was 3% below the group average of 17%. In addition, Group A (Aviation) expressed sentiment that reading graded readers tended to feel "like studying" at 4% below the 17% average, implying that it was less pleasurable compared to the other groups who felt that reading graded readers were less like studying.
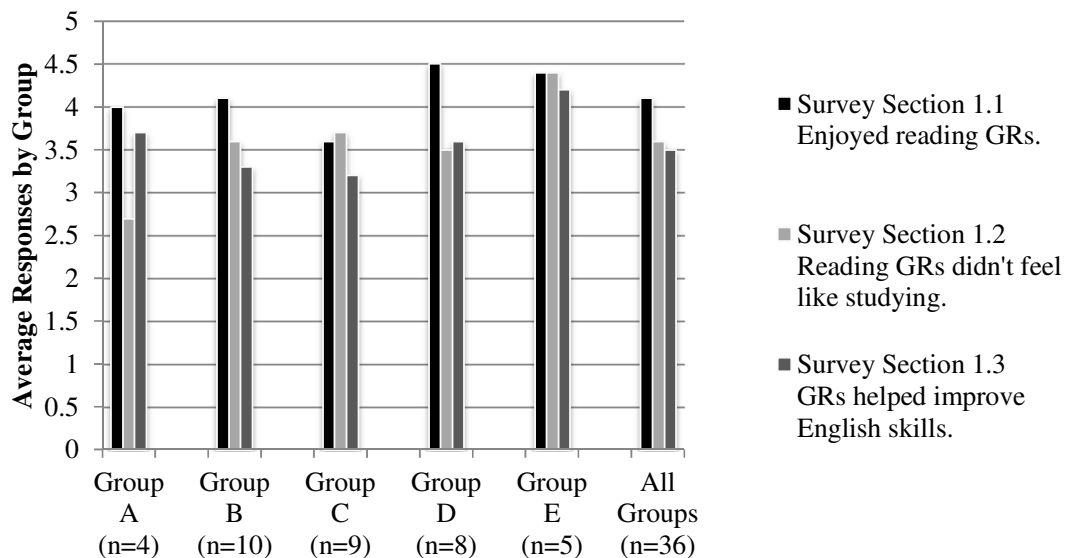

Figure 1. Participants' Attitudes towards Graded Readers

All groups, noted that reading graded readers had improved their reading speed (Figure 2). This was most evident with Group A, who require a strong command of English to fulfill their career ambitions as pilots with responses 2% above the group average of 16%. Since the aviation students took the TOEFL several times during the semester, they could more readily notice incremental changes in their reading speed. Most groups concurred with their responses that their vocabulary had increased, with groups A 1%, D 2% and E 3% above the group average of 16%. Only Group B, differed at 2% below the average with their perception of a measureable increase in vocabulary. In terms of understanding of English grammar, Group B was chiefly was less favorable at 2% below the group average of 16% while groups A, C and D were in consensus at 17%, only Group E maintained its consistency above the average at 20%.
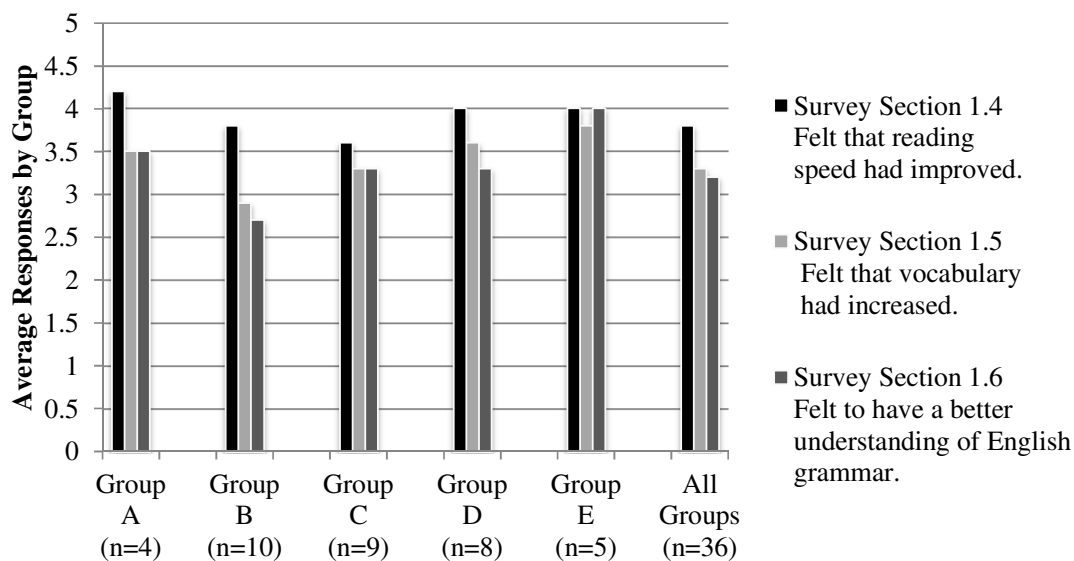
Figure 2. Participants' Perceived English Skill Improvement

Groups A and E, particularly perceived reading in English as important in their daily lives as both groups were clearly above the average of 16%. Survey results indicated participants found that the quizzes were challenging to a certain extent and relatively helpful in achieving their reading goals with the exception of Group B whose responses were 1% below the participant average of 16%. Additionally, Group C although found the quizzes challenging did not necessarily perceive that their reading goals had been met when an MReader quiz was passed. Group C's results fell 2% below the group average of 16% which was in contrast to groups A, D and E with responses 2% above the average (Figure 3).
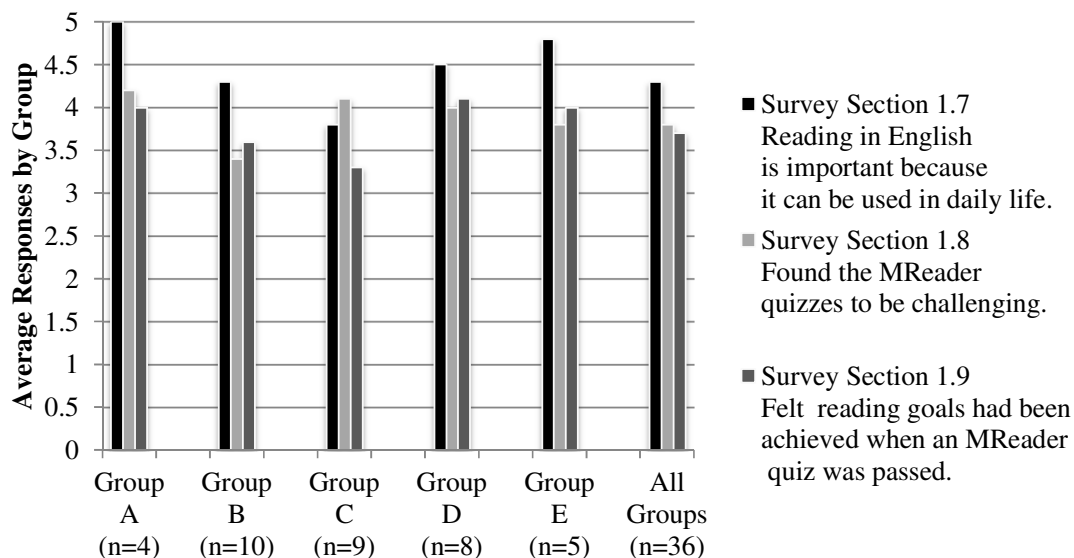

Figure 3. ER and MReader Quizzes as Motivational Factors

Responses to survey sections 1.10–1.12 regarding motivation indicated both interest in reading more graded readers and reading in general in groups A, B, D and E (Figure 4). Additionally, responses to statements concerning the motivational variables of the Challenge reflected a desire for continued English use in the future. Contrastingly, participants in Group C, showed a less positive response below the whole participant 16% average of reading graded readers at 14% and reading in general due to the Challenge at 15%. They did not feel that the Challenge would be an incentive for them to use English in the future with 3% below the 16% average. Although Group E, showed a strong will to continue reading in the future at 20% and maintained their conviction that the Challenge made and encouraged them to read 3% above the average of 16%.
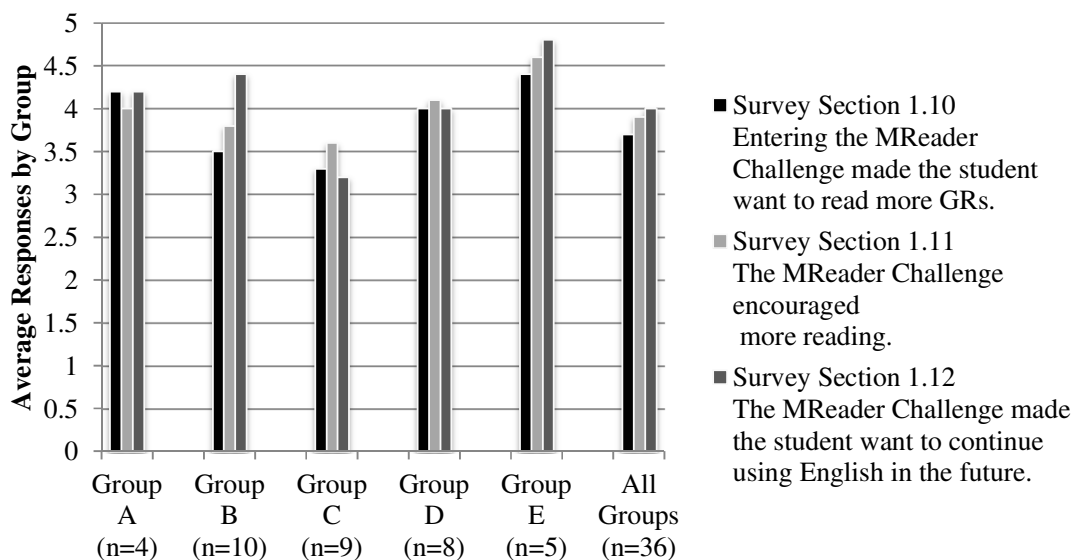

■ Survey Section 1.10 Entering the MReader Challenge made the student want to read more GRs.

■ Survey Section 1.11 The MReader Challenge encouraged more reading.

■ Survey Section 1.12 The MReader Challenge made the student want to continue using English in the future.

Figure 4. The MReader Challenge as a Motivational Factor

Survey results indicated a generally favorable response to reading graded readers, MReader and the MReader Challenge and perceived improvement of English skills. Group E consistently exhibited the most positive attitudes towards all the variables in the survey. It should be noted that Group E was comprised of students who chose to self-register for MReader and visit the main library on their own accord. They did this without any direction or guidance from a classroom teacher, knowing that their reading and involvement in the MReader Challenge would have no direct bearing on their grade. Furthermore, the variables presented in Group A differed because the aviation study abroad program gave the students another motivational goal. One of the follow-up interview participants linked the content of the non-fiction books he read to TOEFL topics and measured his progress in terms of his TOEFL test results.

> A2: I think I want to study uh about TOEFL, so I often similar to the…ah book which is biology or uh geography…it relate to the TOEFL…. I think my reading…TOEFL reading score is improved because ah I get the many kind of books …
> Interviewer (INT): How much did your reading score improve?
> A2: Ah. First time I took the 10; however, my TOEFL score is improved to 60…16.

[….]
INT: OK. So you went from a 10 in the reading section to 16?
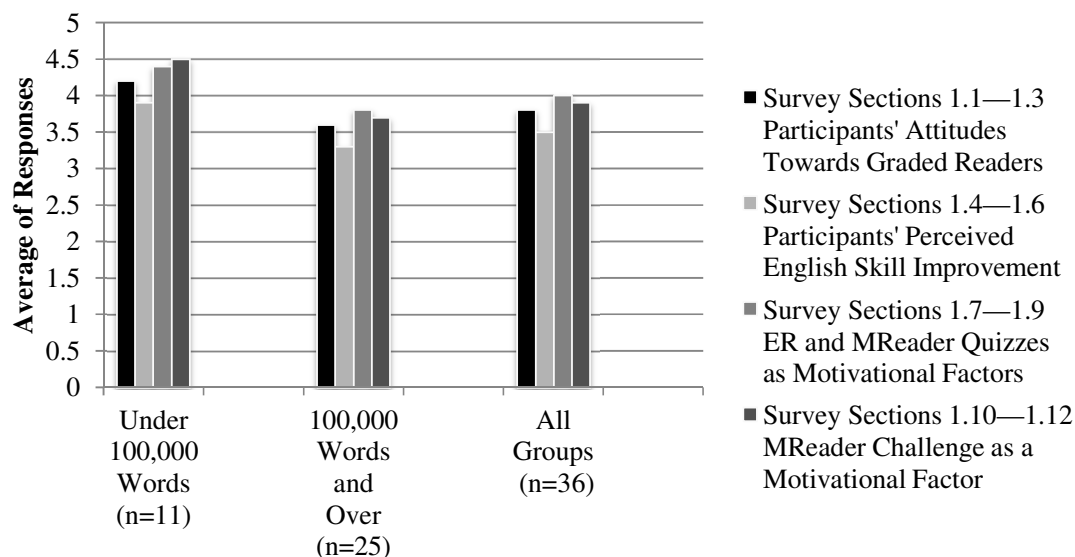A2: Yes. (Participant A2 Interview Response)

Figure 5. Participants' Attitudes Under and Over 100,000 Words

Participants who read under 100,000 words had more favorable responses overall in every section of the survey. The group was comprised of 10 participants, 4 of whom came from E-Navi. In particular, their responses to survey sections 1.10−1.12 indicated that the MReader Challenge was a stronger motivational factor for students who read under 100,000 words compared to students who read over 100,000 words (Figure 5).

DISCUSSION

Choice and Familiarity

Most groups displayed a positive response to the MReader Challenge which can be attributed to graded readers. Graded readers are designed to be both easy and pleasurable to read if the appropriate level is selected. An important aspect of any ER program is that students choose what they want to read, and fairy tales and movie titles were popular choices for many learners, due to a sense of familiarity with the story.

"Even though I read a lot of books whose contents I already knew through films, it was fun to understand how certain things were expressed in English. It made me want to read *Toy Story* in English."
(translated from Japanese) (Participant C8 Survey Comment)

"*Anne of Green Gables* and *The Nutcracker* etc. were stories I used to read in my childhood and I am glad that I was able to read these in English. It was so much fun." (translated from Japanese) (Participant D4 Survey Comment)

These books were appealing to the reader because they could easily understand the content and focus more on their language skills. Similarly, when choice was constrained, as in the case of Group A (Aviation) whose graded reader selection was limited to non-fiction titles, participants found reading to be less pleasurable. Participants' attitudes toward graded readers show evidence of intrinsic motivation and seem to support Eccles' *expectancy value theory* (Wigfield, 1994; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000), as well as elements of Day and Bamford's "Ten Principles of ER."

English Skills

The research also uncovered another motive for reading particular to those readers who sought out challenging books, such as non-fiction books from the *Oxford Discovery* series: these students tended to read books solely to increase their English vocabulary.

> "I got interested in the [*Oxford*] *Discovery* series, because this has a lot of information about medicine, so like medicine or food…so I'm not familiar with […] I looked up on the word, […] so my vocabulary increased significantly." (Participant C4 Interview Response)

In the survey questionnaire, students rated their English language skill gains less favorably in terms of vocabulary, grammar and reading speed. The comments do suggest that many students did see some gain in their English skills particularly in regards to reading speed.

> "I was really bad at English. I couldn't speak, read nor write it. To be honest, I wasn't interested in it at all. However, thanks to [my teacher] I decided to seriously give the MReader Challenge a shot. Because of that I noticed how I was able to read at a faster rate. At first I needed 30~40 minutes [to read a book], but eventually I finished reading within 15~20 minutes." (translated from Japanese) (Participant C9 Survey Comment)
> "I could read long sentences faster and I got faster at reading things like newspapers, too, and I enjoyed it." (Participant B6 Interview Response)
>
> "I'm glad that I read the books, because I was able to remember more vocabulary and more sentence structures." (translated from Japanese) (Participant C6 Survey Comment)

It is possible that some students may have been assessing their language abilities rather than their learning progress in their Likert scale responses since open-ended comments show a slightly different perspective. Understandably, it is not easy for a learner to assess his/her own abilities; of the three skills, reading speed is probably more tangible for students to measure.

MReader Reassurance

The perception of a lack of advancement in terms of grammar, vocabulary or reading speed could be detrimental to a learner's continuance with the program. Although a lack of immediate gratification generally has a negative impact on the learner, the completion of an MReader quiz and the recognition that the site provided students, seemed to counteract and provide the necessary fulfillment that the participants sought.

> E3: Well, MReader quizzes make a big difference.

INT: Really? How different?
E3: There is time that I cannot be sure of my reading practices without
    taking the MReader quizzes.
INT: Ha, is that right?
E3: If I take quizzes.
INT: Yes.
E3: I can confirm that I've read the book (if I take the quiz).
INT: You can feel that you've read the book.
E3: Yes.
INT: Oh.
E3: Or rather, without the MReader, I feel like I could not understand.
    (translated from Japanese) (Participant E3 Interview Response)

Overall, MReader quizzes provided reassurance and proof that the students had indeed successfully read. It also supplied them with encouragement since students were able to visually see their progress with each successfully passed quiz in the form of a book "badge" and accumulation to their word count. The MReader quiz and the MReader Challenge variables seem to confirm Robb's (2015) contention that any reading activity should be accompanied by follow-up activities to prove a substantial motivational incentive.

However, not all participants were full of praise for MReader. One participant found the quizzes interfered with his "just wanting to read books," (translated from Japanese) (Participant C7 Survey Comment) due to computer problems he experienced and the 24-hour restriction imposed by MReader that prohibits students from cram reading. Other students thought that although the quizzes were time consuming and challenging, they were still beneficial.

Goal Setting

The MReader Challenge is a unique way of maintaining reading consistency and helping the learner to acquire a certain degree of *flow*. Many students stated that the MReader Challenge gave them a clear target goal. The Challenge was not a requirement of any class and all classroom goals were set at least 20,000 words or more below the Challenge criteria. For some students, the Challenge was simply that extra push that was needed for them to read a few extra books after they surpassed their classroom goal. For other students, it became a personal goal to reach the Challenge criteria from the outset. An extrinsic incentive was provided by the certificate of achievement, prizes and celebratory lunch upon completion of the Challenge. The survey results point to the fact that once students became engaged with the task and realized the target was attainable, they adjusted or set their own reading goals to that of the Challenge.

"While I was reading the books and while I was heading towards the goal…
 I…well… thought that: "Oh, this book's fun. Let's read the next one."
(Participant E2 Interview Response)

"I'm not really good at English, so it was good to have this goal. It was easy
to clear the first ten thousand words." (translated from Japanese)
(Participant C9 Interview Response)

"At first, I only read as many words and books as was decided because I was
forced to. However, while I was reading I could feel how much fun it is to read

books in English and then I set up the goal that I wanted to reach for myself."
(translated from Japanese) (Participant D1 Interview Response)

Goal mechanisms can be key to the level of student performance. As Dörnyei (2001) states, goals direct the learners' attention and effort towards the activity while dispensing negative distractors, allowing the learner to alter the amount of effort required and encouraging persistence until the goal is accomplished. In many respects, goal-setting dramatically increases productivity; however, it is important in the case of the Challenge that it remains as an individual goal. Motivation generated by a challenge can be engaging, but overemphasis on competition can create undesirable anxieties and a negative social image.

As most motivational strategies aim at increasing learner satisfaction by encouraging a sense of pride upon accomplishment, students could measure their own general progress by celebrating their success with a "motivationally appropriate reward." According to Dörnyei & Ushioda (2011), however, motivationally appropriate rewards are difficult to achieve due to the overarching importance of grades that focus on performance outcomes. Unlike grades, the Challenge distinguishes itself by allowing students to focus on the process of learning.

> "This time, I was glad to have been able to read more than 100,000 words and to participate in the award ceremony. It took me more time than I thought it would to finish reading 100,000 words, but I felt like as if I really achieved something." (translated from Japanese) (Participant C3 Survey Response)

A strong feeling of "accomplishment" and "worth it" was echoed by many of the participants who evaluated their own performance and progress by reaching the Challenge goal. The added incentive that the MReader Challenge provides is the springboard to lifelong reading. If the eventual goal for many learners is to read ungraded texts without strain, reaching that point must indeed be rewarding, but getting to that point takes time (Uden & Schmitt, 2014).

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Findings indicate that ER approaches were generally beneficial for EFL students in the participant groups, although they greatly relied on learner autonomy, particularly reading outside the classroom. Maintaining motivation over an extended period is difficult as many factors can influence the learning process; therefore, multiple stimulants, such as MReader and the MReader Challenge, are necessary to promote and maintain motivation to counter any negative influences learners may encounter. The results from this pilot study suggest that reading graded readers promoted intrinsic motivation among a majority of the participants. Furthermore, the MReader quizzes provided a counterbalance to many participants' perception that their English vocabulary and grammar skills were mostly unimproved over the course of the semester. MReader quizzes gave many participants tangible reassurance that what they were reading in the graded readers was at least being understood, as well as the feeling that their reading goals were being met. The MReader Challenge also provided realistic goals for reading as well as the incentive for most participants to continue using English in the future. In order for the language learner to experience *flow*, the learner must become initially engaged in the activity and take on a challenge that is suitable and attainable to their language abilities. Results from this study suggest that a certain amount of *flow* was achieved for a majority of participants by using graded readers, completing MReader quizzes and taking part in the MReader Challenge.

Study Limitations and Additional Research

One of the limitations of the study that needs to be addressed is obscurity in the follow-up interview questions—some participants did not clearly understand the questions and therefore had difficulty forming responses. Also, this study was limited to 15 weeks and does not provide sufficient evidence as to what extent the participants would continue with ER.

The preliminary study should be continued and expanded to include more participants to see if the outcome remains consistent. With an increased pool of participants, grouping students according to their proficiency level rather than course may yield more insight into reader motivation. The follow-up semi-structured interview questions should be clarified and made bilingual, and interview procedures should be standardized.

Continued research focusing more on long-term case studies will yield more insight. In the case of aviation students, perhaps an expansion of the non-fiction titles in the graded reader library would be beneficial, and research needs to be conducted to solidify the link between reading content and TOEFL proficiency. Subsequent research needs to address whether any of the participants in this study were successfully able to continue with the ER program in the absence of the classroom teacher as facilitator. With the use of MReader in the university graded reader program being in its infancy, it remains to be seen what lasting impact it will have on the GR program.

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APPENDIX A

MReader Challenge Student Survey
Congratulations on entering the MReader Challenge!
Please take a few minutes to fill out this survey. Your submission is anonymous.

Section 1
次のＭ・リーダー・チャレンジに関する記述を読んであなたの考えに近いものをチェックしてください（→番号１−5 を○で囲んでください）。
Please indicate your opinion, by checking the appropriate response (→by circling the number 1-5) to the following statements:

1 – 全くそう思わない not at all　2 – あまりそう思わない very little
3 – そう思う a little　4 – かなりそう思う quite a lot　5 – 非常にそう思う very much

1. グレイディッドリーダーを読むのは楽しかった。
　　I enjoyed reading Graded Readers.

1	2	3	4	5

2. グレイディッドリーダーを読むときは勉強しているという感じはしなかった。
　　Reading Graded Readers didn't feel like studying.

1	2	3	4	5

3. グレイディッドリーダーのおかげで英語力が向上した。
　　Graded Readers helped me improve my English skills.

1	2	3	4	5

4. 英語を読むスピードが速くなったと思う。
　　I feel that my reading speed has improved.

1	2	3	4	5

5. 英語の語彙が増えたと思う。
　　I feel that my vocabulary has increased.

1	2	3	4	5

6. 英文法がより理解できるようになったと思う。
　　I feel that I have a better understanding of English grammar.

1	2	3	4	5

7.日常生活においても役に立つので、英語で読むことは大切だと思う。
　　I think reading in English is important because I can use it in my daily life.

1	2	3	4	5

8.Ｍ・リーダーの問題（MReader quiz）は難しいがやりがいあると感じた。
　　I found the MReader quizzes to be challenging.

1	2	3	4	5

9. Ｍ・リーダーの問題に答えることで、読解の目標が達成できたと思う。
I feel my reading goal has been achieved when I pass an MReader quiz.

1	2	3	4	5

10. Ｍ・リーダーチャレンジに参加し，もっとグレイディッドリーダーを読みたいと思うように
なった。
Entering the MReader Challenge made me want to read more graded readers.

1	2	3	4	5

11. Ｍ・リーダーチャレンジによって，もっと英語を読んでみたいと思うようになった。
The MReader Challenge encouraged me to read more.

1	2	3	4	5

12. Ｍ・リーダーチャレンジによって，これからも英語を使い続けたいと思うように
なった。
The MReader Challenge has made me want to continue using English in the future.

1	2	3	4	5

Section 2
グレイディッド・リーダーとＭ・リーダー・チャレンジへの参加について、あなたの感想を 簡潔に書いてください。
Write a short statement about your thoughts on Graded Readers and entering the MReader Challenge.

_____

_____

_____

_____

今後，本調査に関する任意のインタビューを実施する場合，引き続き協力いただけますか。

Are you willing to participate in a follow-up interview later?　　　☐Yes　　　☐No

「はい」と答えた人は，名前とメールアドレスを記入してください。
If yes, please provide your name and contact email address.

Name: _____ Email: _____

Thank you for your cooperation!
ご協力ありがとうございました！

APPENDIX B

Follow-up Interview Questions

1. What aspect of graded readers did you enjoy the most?
2. In what ways did reading graded readers improve your English skills?
3. In what ways did the MReader quizzes encourage you to read graded readers?
4. In what ways were the MReader quizzes challenging?
5. Did entering the MReader Challenge encourage you to continue using English in the future? How?
6. Did entering the MReader Challenge help you focus on your reading goals? How?
7. For you what was the best part of reading graded readers and the MReader Challenge?