

Encouraging Enhanced Engagement with Extensive Reading in an Academic English Program.

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Abstract

This article reports on the development of an extensive reading (ER) component of an academic reading and writing (ARW) curriculum. In its first iteration, the curriculum had demonstrated success with improving students' reading fluency, but it suffered from a lack of student engagement and enthusiasm. This led to concerns with student participation in ER in the truest sense, which is to build long-lasting and positive reading habits. Thus, an adjustment was made in its second iteration to add a habit component to the ER assignments to ascertain if it would increase sustained engagement and lessen the apathy felt by the students toward ER. The results of these changes showed more consistent engagement on the part of the students, leading to more positive perceptions of ER and enhanced reading skills. The habit component of ER is an area often ignored by other research studies thus the results of this study may help ER practitioners who have similar concerns.

Introduction

The incorporation of extensive reading (ER) in a reading-focused curriculum benefits students in terms of vocabulary recycling, sight word reading gains, reading speed gains, reading practice, and developing the habit of being a successful reader in a second language (Grabe & Stoller, 2011). At the university where this study was conducted, and after one full year of implementing ER through the online platform, Xreading, doubts were raised about whether students were reading habitually. The university expects students to read consistently through exposure to a variety of texts to build reading skills and proficiency for academic success (see Brooks et al., 2024). However, the instructors of the academic reading and writing classes (ARW) saw decreases in engagement and enthusiasm in ER throughout the academic year. This concern was the impetus to change the ER curriculum as it should, theoretically, encourage continued pleasure reading through individual choice, variety, and pace (Day & Bamford, 1998). As such, this article reports on data of habitual reading in ER assignments and compares it with the previous year's ER implementation where the sole focus was on words read and reading speed. A comparative analysis of data from the Xreading Learning Management System (LMS) and student surveys shows some optimistic results for the ARW classes to build upon and to further refine in subsequent years.

Literature Review

Evolving ER Principles

Day and Bamford (1998, 2002) proposed ten ER core principles to build a basic understanding of ER where:

1. The material is easy;
2. A variety of reading material on a wide range of topics must be available;
3. Learners choose what they want to read;

4. Learners read as much as possible;
5. The purpose of reading is usually related to pleasure, information and general understanding;
6. Reading is its own reward;
7. Reading speed is usually faster rather than slower;
8. Reading is individual and silent;
9. Teachers orient and guide their students; and
10. The teacher is a role model of a reader.

Although open for consideration and interpretation, the ten principles have become influential for subsequent ER research studies even if there have been some adjustments and revisions such as those recommended by Waring and McLean (2015) who claim that there is more than one universal form of ER and suggest the notion of core and variable dimensions of ER. Core dimensions refers to “fast, fluent comprehension sustained over long periods with minimal distractions” to maintain the characteristics of ER (Waring & McLean, 2015, p. 164). Their core definition suggests increasing reading skills by sustaining reading over long periods can build positive reading habits. Additionally, Day (2015) recognized the variability of ER programs and argues for a reexamination of the ER principles. In a meta-analysis of 44 studies implementing the ten ER principles, Day (2015) recognized that learners being able to choose what they want to read, being able to read as much as possible, and reading material on a wide range of topics were the three most implemented principles. He concludes that “there is no widespread agreement on exactly what an ER program is” but “it can be claimed that an ER program uses some of the ten principles” (Day, 2015, p. 298).

At this particular university, the curriculum blends the ten principles but tailors the ER assignment requirements to focus on pleasure reading outside of the classroom while taking into consideration the study workload and time available to invest in ER by the students. Thus, to facilitate this aim, an online platform called Xreading is used.

Xreading and ER

Xreading is an online learning management platform (LMS) that was developed “to make graded readers more accessible for students and extensive reading programs easier for teachers to manage and assess” (Xreading, n.d.). It also accomplishes the three most implemented principles reported by Day (2015) because it has over 1800 graded readers that readers can choose freely, and it offers an automatic reading count for both teachers and users to see their progress. By default, Xreading tracks students’ reading activities based on books added, books read/passed, words read, reading time, reading speed and listening time for books that have an audio feature. Additionally, each book is also accompanied by a comprehension quiz and shows the passing rate and scores. Nation and Waring (2020) advocate Xreading because it “takes away the cost, time, availability, and management issues that might prevent teachers from running an extensive reading program” (p.56). The appeal for instructors is the ability to customize settings to fit the reading requirements of each ER assignment and student reading levels.

One disadvantage is that it is not free, although the entry cost for each reader is affordable. There are two subscription options available: 6 months for ¥1650 or 1 year for ¥2750, which is akin to the price a university student would pay for a course textbook. Another disadvantage is the time required to become familiarized with the user interface. Milliner and Cote (2015) note two technical issues that may emerge because of using Xreading: access issues with the overall website and navigation issues while reading a book. Therefore, increased familiarity on the instructor and student side with Xreading, before full implementation of digital ER, must be consciously taken to address the peculiarities of digital platforms such as Xreading (Milliner & Cote, 2015).

Previous Studies

Previous studies regarding online ER and reading skills have produced varied results. Many studies report increases in reading skills especially reading speed, reading volume, and reading comprehension (see Nakanishi, 2015; Jeon & Day, 2016). Perceptions of ER and online ER have varied depending on individual differences and characteristics of the reader. In Bui and Macalister's (2021) 10-week study of first-year university students using a proprietary online ER website of 20 books, students increased their reading speed by 23%, on average. ER's characteristics using simplified texts within a reader's vocabulary knowledge was seen as the main factor in this increase. However, there were individual differences in reading speed and perceptions of ER. Furthermore, the online ER program was conducted outside of the university classroom where students' regular lives can impede the development of a reading habit (Bui & Macalister, 2021). 71% of students had positive perceptions of ER benefits, but having students read habitually was difficult to control which may bring into question the long-lasting effects of ER once the study ended.

Walker (2020) closely investigated the motivations, reading habits, and academic goals of ten high-achieving students participating in online ER by triangulating interviews, performance data, and questionnaire results. The students were considered successful users because of their high achievement reading related to their future study and career plans. An important contribution of this study was to understand non-measurable ER factors such as motivation to read, opinions on the digital platform, and contextual understanding of their ER performance. Due to the individual nature of ER, Walker found different motivations for participating in ER using online platforms. Walker (2020) highlighted three students who read 160,314 words, 86,823 words, and 371, 735 words with an average reading speed of 97 wpm, 74 wpm, and 122 wpm. Their quiz scores were 93%, 63%, and 82%. Although there were vast differences in their performance, their shared motivations show the possibilities of online ER as these students found it convenient to use due to their busy schedules. However, Walker (2020) further commented that these students are more academically inclined and more intentional in taking active measures toward self-improvement.

A study of international students by Zhou and Day (2021), using Xreading in an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) environment, showed positive attitudes from the students involved where 59% expressed enjoyment, 77% expressed confidence in their reading skills, and 100% felt Xreading was useful. In terms of reading abilities that improved over the period, reading rate, vocabulary and grammar development were reported to be the top three benefits from students (Zhou & Day, 2021). They argued that online ER is beneficial because it provides accurate data on reading rates and number of words read. Additionally, reading in large amounts and completing reading assignments every week may have helped students to form a positive reading habit (Zhou & Day, 2021).

A more recent study evaluating Online ER and Japanese university students' attitudes, perceptions, and outcomes showed similar positive outcomes. Elam et al. (2025) implemented Xreading in their institutions over an academic year and conducted a mixed-methods study using a quantitative Likert-scale attitudinal survey and qualitative open-ended surveys after the ER intervention. They found that students had a slightly negative attitude towards reading after one year in terms of intellectual, practical, and linguistic value because they did not see it useful to their future careers. However, students felt positive about the actual practice of ER online as students felt their reading skills improved and felt less apprehensive about reading.

Due to many studies ignoring the habit-forming importance of ER, Teng (2023) argues, for example, that Zhou and Day's (2021) study ignored the importance of developing reading habits as their study focused on reading rates, vocabulary acquisition, and overall English proficiency. Teng (2023) believes that beyond reading proficiently, students need to develop a desire to read which can be accomplished through nurturing reading habits. A challenge for EAP learners to develop positive reading habits can be due to limited time, lack of motivation, and difficulty in selecting appropriate reading materials (Teng, 2023). Therefore, there are two important goals that should be adhered to when implementing an ER program. The first goal is that students are

guided to read proficiently to enhance their reading skills and the second goal is to instill a desire to read in order nurture a positive reading habit (Teng, 2023). Importantly, Teng (2023) believes previous studies focus on the first goal and assumes the second goal is being developed if the first goal is met.

Context and Rationale

In the second year of a newly-established EAP program at a small private university in Tokyo, the three instructors responsible for the organization and teaching of courses on the program agreed to include an ER component in their 1st and 2nd year Reading & Writing courses. This ER component was to use the previously mentioned Xreading platform as the means by which students would access and read graded readers, and also the means by which the students' reading could be monitored and assessed by the instructors. The students were arranged into three academic Reading & Writing classes (each being taught by a different instructor but following the same syllabi), meeting twice a week for two 13-week semesters. There were around 15 to 20 students in each class in both the 1st year and 2nd year courses. The students were all members of the Global Studies faculty in which all courses are in principle taught in English. As such, notwithstanding one or two exceptions, most of the students could be said to have a reasonable standard of English proficiency (ranging from B1 to C2 on the CEFR).

Nevertheless, by the end of the first year in which all students (1st year and 2nd year) had been completing Xreading assignments on a weekly basis, a significant drop off in students' attitude and engagement with the program became apparent. Instructors were initially alerted to this by observing students' reactions to being informed of upcoming Xreading assignments which tended to consist of above average levels of dismay and frustration. Pertinently, students were making clear their *displeasure* at constantly being required to read *for pleasure*. Furthermore, by analysing students' engagement with the Xreading platform and comparing it to their general performance on the Reading & Writing courses, some worrying trends emerged.

Firstly, students appeared to become more and more unable or unwilling to meet the reading goals which gradually increased throughout the year. In the 1st semester, students on average managed to achieve 88% of the total reading goal for the semester of 146,495 words; however, this achievement decreased significantly to 75.7% in the fall semester when the reading goal was 194,571 words. In many cases, this drop off in the number of words read was extremely pronounced. In fact, among apparently motivated students, one student who achieved 100% of the reading goal in the 1st semester, only managed 48% of the goal in the 2nd semester, and another who had achieved an average of 93% in the first semester dropped a full 72 percentage points to only 21% on the 2nd semester. This trend was also evident among apparently less-motivated students, with several students who had performed poorly in the 1st semester neglecting to engage with Xreading at all in the 2nd semester, even though this would mean losing 20% of their grade for the course as a whole.

Furthermore, it was also interesting to note that the decreasing lack of engagement with Xreading did not particularly correlate with a deterioration in students' performance on the course generally, with otherwise high-performing students doing comparatively less well on Xreading assignments than they did on other assignments. Moreover, many students who were struggling on the course, also did not view Xreading assignments as a means by which they could increase their course grades. For instance, several students who ended up failing the course could probably have achieved a passing grade had they only made an attempt to read more words on their Xreading assignments. That they, along with the higher-performing students, did not do so alerted the instructors to a general sense of irritation among the students with having to complete weekly Xreading assignments; an issue that the instructors would need to address if the extensive reading component of their courses was to have any value.

At the end of this first year, students were asked to complete a survey designed to gauge their thoughts and feelings towards Xreading in more concrete terms. A total of 28 of the approximately 50 students responded to the survey.

In the first section, students were asked to what extent they agreed with the following statements. The statements and the percentage of students who chose each response are shown below:

Table 1

First Year Survey Results: Perceptions of Xreading

	Strongly Agree	Slightly Agree	Neutral	Slightly Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I enjoyed Xreading	0%	43%	39%	18%	0%
Xreading helped me improve my reading skills	21%	39%	36%	4%	0%
Xreading helped me improve my reading speed	43%	36%	14%	7%	0%
Xreading helped me improve my vocabulary	11%	42%	36%	11%	0%
It was easy to use the Xreading website	29%	21%	21%	29%	0%
I would like more help on using Xreading	0%	25%	21%	18%	36%
I enjoyed the variety of books on the website	19%	46%	25%	7%	3%
We should spend more class time on Xreading	3%	25%	39%	18%	15%

A cursory analysis of the above highlights that the students did not particularly hold any strong antipathy towards the Xreading platform itself. 43% of students slightly agreed with the statement “I enjoyed Xreading” while only 18% disagreed with it. Furthermore, more students agreed (either strongly or slightly) than disagreed that it helps to improve their reading skills, their reading speed, and their vocabulary. Also, the majority of students found the website easy to use, enjoyed the variety of books, and did not particularly require more help using Xreading or see the need for more time to be devoted to it during class time. Therefore, it did not seem to be the website itself that was causing students’ engagement with the extensive reading component of the courses to wane.

In the second section, students were asked what best describes their Xreading activity over the previous year. Their responses are as follows:

Table 2

First Year Survey Results: ER Activity

I read about 15-30 minutes per day, 4-5 times a week.	17.9%
I read about 30-60 minutes per day, 2 times a week.	17.9%
I read most of the words right before the deadline.	53.6%
I didn’t complete many of the assignments.	10.7%

As can be seen from the above, the majority of students were completing Xreading assignments “right before” the deadline, and, as such, not particularly engaging with their extensive reading assignments in the spirit to which they were intended - as mentioned before, for the benefits of extensive reading to be fully accrued, students should be reading regularly, and at a level which inculcates a passion for reading. Therefore, if students are reading only “right before” the deadline, it would suggest that they are only reading to complete the assignment and are not necessarily developing a regular reading habit. Furthermore, it is possible that in trying to achieve the word goals for assignments in one sitting, students were making the achievement of this goal more onerous than perhaps it needed to be, with the result being that, over time, students became less and less

enthused with using Xreading. Consequently, encouraging students to develop a reading habit will need to be factored into any decisions about how to improve students' attitude and motivation towards their Xreading assignments.

In the third and final section of the survey, students were invited to share their reasons for their answers above, to provide what they thought were the positives and negatives of using Xreading, and to share suggestions on how Xreading could better be used. A selection of pertinent responses are provided below (unedited):

Table 3

First Year Survey Results: Selected Comments from Students

I read it all together so as not to forget the contents of books.
Because x-reading HW were per week, sometimes, I forgot to read books.
Besically I do Xreading assignment on train. However, I fall to sleep most of the time, except right before deadlines. Therefore, I cannot read until I feel forced to do.
Because my personality is doing a little every day. I don't want to do homework in only one day.
I forget about the Xreading assignment.
Xreading need not only reading skills but also memory skills.It takes too much time.
The negatives of Xreading is that it takes a lot of time and since I have other homework and a part-time job it was hard to find time to do it.
Reduce the reading time on Xreading and, at the same time, include reading in print. Make a balance.
You should do that when you have no assignment and be relax.
Sometimes, I could not pass the quiz although I read books.

The above responses serve to highlight that many of the students, despite being instructed on the principles of ER, still seem to view Xreading assignments as something that they could/should do once a week (inevitably, as close to the deadline as they can manage). Their reasons for this range from having many other assignments that they need to do, and perhaps prioritize over merely “reading for pleasure”, through feeling that they need to read all at once in order not to forget the contents (or to negate the technical issue of the website suddenly closing) so that they can take the end of book quiz and receive credit for the assignment.

The Study

As a result of the survey responses noted above, it became clear that changes needed to be made to the way that extensive reading, using Xreading, is to be implemented. Specifically, the need for students to read regularly, rather than all at once, needs to be foregrounded; furthermore, the experience of extensive reading needs to be less onerous given all the other responsibilities that these students appear to have each week. Therefore, for the following academic year, the following changes were implemented.

Firstly, the grading of Xreading assignments would now incorporate the number of days that a student opened and read a book, as well as the number of words read. In other words, students will be graded on the regularity of their engagement with Xreading, not only on the amount of engagement.

Secondly, the number of words that students need to read per week in order to achieve a passing grade for the assignment would be reduced to 7,000 to 7,500-word per week (91,000 to 97,500 words per semester); and furthermore, this number is not to be increased throughout the semester as was the case in the previous year.

It was hoped that these changes would lead to students becoming comfortable with the weekly reading goal, naturally developing a schedule of reading that they know they can manage, thereby developing a reading

habit that they can more easily fit into their weekly schedules. By grading the regularity of Xreading engagement, it is believed students will likely try a little harder to read less words more often, rather than more words less often, and to not see their extensive reading assignments as something that can just be left to the last minute. Additionally, while there are acknowledged benefits of gradually increasing word counts for students, it was believed that this increase was negatively affecting the students' attitudes to their extensive reading tasks, and therefore inhibiting their ability to complete them in the manner that best allows the benefits of extensive reading to be accrued.

In detail, the following grading criteria was established for each weekly Xreading assignment with students able to achieve a score a maximum of 10 points: 5 points for Word count total (**A**) plus 5 points for the number of days that they read on Xreading (**B**):

Table 4

Second Year Grading Criteria

(A): Word count totals:

Number of words read:	Points scored	Task achievement as a percentage:
7,000 +	5 points	100%
5,600 ~ 6,999	4 points	90%
4,200 ~ 5,599	3 points	80%
2,800 ~ 4,199	2 points	70%
1,400 ~ 2,799	1 point	60%

(B): Number of days:

Number of days in which students read	Points scored	Task achievement as a percentage:
5	5 points	100%
4	4 points	90%
3	3 points	80%
2	2 points	70%
1	1 point	60%

According to the above criteria, if a student reads 7,000 or more words that week, and they read on at least five different days, they will receive the perfect score of 10 points. However, if a student reads all 7,000 words in only one day (as happened all too frequently in the past), then they would only receive 6 points. Therefore, it is hoped that a regular reading habit can be fostered by rewarding students for reading on as many days as possible during the week. A conscious decision was also made to set five days as the aim rather than seven because, as with limiting the word goal to 7,000 words, making the Xreading assignments into less of a chore was deemed to be an important step in impressing upon the students that they are to be reading for pleasure as much as possible. Students were asked to keep a record themselves of the number of words that they read and on which days of the week. This record could also easily be corroborated with the data available on Xreading whenever required.

In order to assess the efficacy of these changes, students' engagement with Xreading was monitored over the following year by tracking students' progress on the Xreading website and also having the students complete a survey similar to that conducted previously. The results of which it is hoped will be able to shed light on the following research questions:

1. How has students' engagement with Xreading changed after the program alterations?
2. How have students' perceptions of Xreading changed after the program alterations?

Results and Discussion

Firstly, in terms of engagement, the changes made to the implementation of the extensive reading component of the courses resulted in much more sustained engagement with Xreading throughout both semesters of the courses. Whereas before the changes were made, there was a drop off from 88% to 75.7% in goal completion from the 1st to the 2nd semesters, after the changes were made, 98% of students achieved the new reading goal of 91,000 to 97,500 words in the 1st semester and 94% achieved the same reading goal in the 2nd semester, representing a drop of only 4 percentage points (before the changes were made this drop off in engagement was three times higher at 12.3 percentage points).

While it may seem obvious that reducing the reading goal would necessarily lead to students being more able to meet the reading goal, it is worth remembering that the benefits of extensive reading are accrued through sustained and regular reading; therefore, challenging reading goals are only of value if the students' reading is sustained over a lengthy period of time. That it was not (prior to the changes being made) rather negated the efficacy of increased reading goals.

The other issue with engagement noted before the changes were made was that students were not actually reading on a regular basis but were, in fact, cramming as much reading in as they possibly could before the deadline before the assignment closed. As mentioned before, in order to address this problem, students were encouraged to encourage on a daily basis by having the regularity of their reading as part of the grading for each Xreading assignment.

Results from the survey about Xreading habits (similar to that taken at the end of the year *before* the changes were made) that students took at the end of the year *after* the changes were made showed a marked improvement in regularity of reading. Whereas before the changes were made 53.6% of students mostly read right before the deadline, in the year after the changes were made this number dropped to only 8.1%. Furthermore, the number of students reading 10-15 minutes per day 4-5 days per week rose from 54.8% from only 17.9% the year before.

When asked to reflect upon the reasons for the extent to which they were able to read regularly, it was also noticeable that the changes in grading and the reduced reading goals had been significant factors. A selection of the students' comments on these points is shown below (unedited):

Table 5

Second Year Survey Results: Student Comments

I read it diligently, a little at a time, almost every day in my free time.
This frequency is suitable for me.
Since the way of grading Xreading changed from last year, I had to read constantly, so this change made me read this span.
I usually finish about 90% of required length in either of the first two days, and do what's left is done within the last two days
I tried my best to read one book each day for 5-7 days a week.
I read about 1000 to 2000 words 5 days per week.
Since my teacher set the goal of days which I need to read, I could continue reading day by day.
The assignment system of Xreading was changed from this year, so I have to read it a little bit every day.
I tried to take Xreading into my daily life as much as possible.
I read 10 to 15 minutes on the train every weekdays

Therefore, in addressing the research question of how students' engagement with Xreading changed after the program alterations, it is clear that a more moderate word goal for assignments and factoring regularity of reading into the grading criteria of the assignments have had a positive effect on students' engagement with the Xreading platform.

Secondly, in order to answer the second research question of how students' perceptions of Xreading changed after the program alterations, students were given a similar set of statements about Xreading to consider to that which they were given at the end of the year before the changes were made. This year 62 students responded to the survey, which was significantly more than 28 students of the previous year. Furthermore, the survey was altered slightly to remove the "neutral" option. However, for ease of comparison, the "neutral" column remains in the table below, while the scores in brackets refer to the year prior to the changes being made.

Table 6
Second Year Survey Results: Student Perceptions

	Strongly Agree	Slightly Agree	Neutral	Slightly Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I enjoyed Xreading	8% (0%)	60% (43%)	(39%)	24% (18%)	8% (0%)
Xreading helped me improve my reading skills	30% (21%)	48% (39%)	(36%)	19% (4%)	3% (0%)
Xreading helped me improve my reading speed	39% (43%)	48% (36%)	(14%)	11% (7%)	2% (0%)
Xreading helped me improve my vocabulary	29% (11%)	34% (42%)	(36%)	32% (1%)	5% (0%)
It was easy to use the Xreading website	42% (29%)	32% (21%)	(21%)	16% (29%)	10% (0%)
I would like more help on using Xreading	6% (0%)	24% (25%)	(21%)	35% (18%)	35% (36%)
I enjoyed the variety of books on the website	29% (19%)	47% (46%)	(25%)	18% (7%)	6% (3%)
We should spend more class time on Xreading	8% (3%)	26% (25%)	(39%)	43% (18%)	23% (15%)

While it is difficult to draw any firm conclusions by comparing these results given the larger number of respondents and the slight alterations to the response format, it is still noticeable that 68% of students, who responded after the changes had been made to the program, said that they either strongly or slightly agreed with the statement "I enjoyed Xreading" compared to only 43% of those who responded before the changes. However, it should also be noted that the number of those who disagreed with this statement (either slightly or strongly) also increased from 18% to 32%, which perhaps can be accounted for by the removal of the "neutral" option. Nevertheless, a general trend of greater enthusiasm for Xreading can be identified when looking at responses to the statements that Xreading helps improve reading skills, reading speed, and vocabulary. 78% of students agree (either slightly or somewhat) that Xreading improves their reading skills (compared to 50% in the previous year); 87% of students agree that Xreading improves their reading speed (compared to 79% in the previous year), and 63% of students agree that Xreading improves their vocabulary (compared to 53% in the previous year).

The problems of directly comparing the percentages for the responses given before and after the changes notwithstanding, it is still possible to notice that these statements elicited agreement rather than disagreement to a much greater extent, suggesting that satisfaction and enjoyment with Xreading had increased after the changes to the program were implemented. Favourable perceptions of Xreading are important for the changes to the program to be considered successful as the theory of extensive reading is based on the premise that reading should be enjoyable. Without enjoyment, the practice of extensive reading ceases to be as efficacious as it might otherwise be, and so it is promising to see the students evaluate their experience with Xreading in the largely positive light as shown above.

A further note of promise to add is that, while not directly attending to either of the two research questions, students' beliefs that Xreading improves their reading speed was actually borne out by the data accessible on the Xreading platform. In the year after the changes were made, students, on average, read at 111.7 words per minute (wpm) in the 1st semester, which then increased slightly to 119 wpm in the 2nd semester, meaning that students still increased their reading speed despite there being no increase in the reading goals. However, it should be noted that, before the changes were made (and the reading goals were increased significantly with each Xreading assignment), students on average read 118 wpm in the 1st semester, which then increased to 136 wpm in the 2nd semester. The gap in reading speed from the first year and second year may seem like a dramatic decrease; however, higher reading speeds do not lead to significantly greater comprehension of materials than reading around 120 wpm within EFL settings (Waring & McLean, 2015). The fact that in both years, students were able to meet around 120 wpm suggest this speed is “sufficiently high to sustain comprehension over longer periods, [and] not just short bursts” (Waring & McLean, 2015, p. 163).

Therefore, the value of these increases in reading speed needs to be considered alongside the futility of reading all at once in order to meet a deadline (as students appeared to do before the changes to the program were made). That students who used Xreading after the changes were made (and in which word goals were not increased and regularity of reading was foregrounded) still managed to increase their reading speed (if only by a little) suggests that the changes to the program have, encouragingly, not meant that increases in reading speed have been sacrificed in order to encourage greater engagement and enjoyment with the Xreading platform. In fact, the changes to the program have led to a “best case scenario” in which students have developed regular reading habits, have noticed the benefits of these reading habits, and have statistically accrued the benefits in terms of reading speed that extensive reading is ostensibly designed to provide.

Limitations

One limitation of this analysis is the lack of a simultaneous control group to provide comparable data. The all-inclusive nature of the ER program where students must participate as part of their final grade made it impossible to analyze a control group. Half of the students were involved in both years of the program, but the other half did not participate in one of the years. Therefore, this article focused on overall group activity and accomplishments in each year as the assignment structure and philosophy were consistent in both years.

Another limitation was the reliance on the Xreading platform to collect ER data. The inability to check the validity of the comprehension quizzes could have affected the actual word count and reading speed of students as they must receive at least 60% in the quizzes to get credit for the words they read. It would have been preferable to also consider if reading without the pressure of passing a comprehension quiz would lead to a dramatic difference in words read; however, time constraints limited the ability to conduct a side-by-side comparison.

Conclusion

The increased engagement and perceptions of ER brought about through the changes in the approach and its execution satisfied the instructors enough to encourage continuation with the same criteria for the ER

assignments in the following academic year. The ER program is always a work in progress with regular discussion and analysis, but the instructors are committed to investing time and effort into ER through Xreading due to the reading and academic benefits students have reaped over the first two years of ER implementation. The reporting of the research hopes to engage other ER practitioners to ponder the status of their own ER program and whether students are building positive reading habits.

In fact, Teng (2023) offers six suggestions to better foster positive reading habits with online ER including embracing a paradigm shift from exam-oriented goals to the value of learning, fostering a supportive reading ecosystem from teachers for their students by diversifying reading materials, broadening the focus on extensive reading in the classroom, leveraging professional resources to help teachers and decision makers, and promoting a reading culture from all parties involved. The instructors aim to implement some of these suggestions in the future to further increase students' engagement and attitudes toward ER that they may truly be able to maintain positive reading habits beyond the ARW class structure.

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