Integrating Research Approaches Toward Fluent EFL Literacy

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ABSTRACT

Evidence has been accumulating regarding the specific challenges for reaching fluency in reading L2 English, particularly in EFL settings. Some interventions are showing potential value, according to recent cognitive and classroom research. Among these are incorporating multimedia, especially audio to make use of evidence of phonology's facilitative role in building L2 reading, and also incorporating collaborative reading work in the classroom. This paper briefly reviews relevant research and develops an integrated skills approach to a proposed pedagogical intervention for university learners. Designed to collect qualitative and empirical data, this proposed action research is intended to explore and help clarify if integrating support for phonological awareness in collaborative classroom settings can improve EFL literacy experiences and acquisition for learners.

INTRODUCTION

Issues of EFL Literacy in the Japanese University Context

Many Japanese universities state that their goals include fostering globally-minded students prepared for participation in international business and other cross-border activities. Curricula set for first and second year students often include required English courses. Depending on the university and the department, the English courses may follow two general patterns. One typical instructional context will be general-purpose English courses for non-English majors, intended to offer practice in English for potential travel or future international work-related needs. In this case, usually instructors choose a textbook with some balance of the four traditional skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Syllabi will be prepared with class plans to reduce or minimize students' anxiety or aversion to foreign language practice, and to engage them in English-medium activities which they find meaningful. Semester courses usually run for fifteen weeks in Japan, with these often-large

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classes meeting once weekly. Given this limited time and contact with students, the instructor may also focus on introducing resources which the students might access and make use of after the courses are over, hoping to encourage the students to continue their language learning and practice at their own pace, if and when they wish or need to do so.

In the second instructional context, there are Japanese university departments with a more specific international communications focus, which offer majors in languages, usually starting with English and sometimes offering other languages as well. Often these university departments have a set of required classes in English for undergraduates with courses divided to concentrate on specific skills, such as listening class, reading class, pronunciation class, and beginning academic writing. Naturally this latter university context will allow more time for instructors to help students work on English skills, and students who have chosen these university majors usually do not have as much anxiety to overcome in order to make progress in their learning. In-class time still seems insufficient at best, however, when English is a foreign language. Again in this context, an array of resources introduced in class for EFL learners to make use of later can potentially offer a step toward sustained and sustainable language learning.

Among such resources are multimedia sites online to facilitate language learning outside the classroom which are increasingly affordable or, with an Internet connection, free. Some have multilingual homepages and multi-language interfaces to select for navigating within them (see for example *EnglishCentral.com, Extensive Reading Central.com*, and *Memrise.com*). These are certainly user-friendly for learners, but some comfort with reading in English is still necessary for accessing, choosing, navigating, and using most English resources independently. Even in a multimedia and self-managed learning environment, reading is a foundation skill for building further foreign language skills, and therefore exploring literacy and possibilities for developing more comfortable EFL reading are the focus of this paper.

The teaching context to be discussed, and the target for pedagogical interventions, is both the general English classes, and the English reading classes in the university situations described above. In general courses, students almost unanimously report in initial class writings for this instructor that their experiences with English have thus far been as a subject to study for tests, especially entrance exams. Most single out grammar as a particular source of vexation and dislike, and few indeed mention having used English in travel or other actual communication experiences. Meanwhile, at universities with students majoring in international communications and studying English, only the tiniest percentage will report having read a book in English before beginning university studies. Self-introductions in these university reading classes often conclude baldly with: "I don't like reading." When the point is not made verbally, in person, the present generation of students will frequently make it by email:

> I watched "How Books Can Open Your Mind." As you know, Lisa Bu compared the
> two novels. I was surprised this way of thinking! I agree with her idea, but I don't
> like reading books.... (personal communication, university first year, second
> semester reading course student, October 7, 2015)

Another student:

> I watched Ted talk of Lisa Bu. Actually, I don't like reading book, but I changed my
> mind a little. She read a lot of things from many books and learned a lot of things.
> That is wonderful and smart. Also, I really liked her words that "Books have given
> me a magical portal to connect with people of the past and the present." That
> changed my mind, and if I have a time I want to read books to learn a lot of things.
> (personal communication, university second year, second semester reading course
> student, October 26, 2015)

Proceeding from these introductions to classwork with preliminary diagnostic
reading aloud promptly clarifies that printed English words are being decoded without
accuracy or understanding. Masuhara (2007) reports being struck by the prevalence of
"hesitant and tortuous" (p. 15) L2 reading and Tomlinson writes that for many language
students, "reading is an unsuccessful and unpleasant experience" (Tomlinson, 2000, p. 524).
Given the sincere aversion to reading built up over years of study and expressed as above,
students enrolled in required English classes in their universities or who have intentionally
chosen to major in international communications deserve respect for continuing to attend
classes. As demonstrated in the emails above, in fact, many express earnest, positive attitudes.
The critical missing elements in English education and literacy are not from something
lacking in these tenacious and hopeful students.

Finding the missing elements for these students, and incorporating them into
teaching approaches is essential: "If L1 readers possess attributes in reading which L2 readers
do not, then it is the task of the language teacher to develop ways of encouraging the
development of these attributes" (Paran, 1996, p. 30). A "hesitant and tortuous" (Masuhara,
2007, p. 15) L2 reading process can only function as an impediment to progress in English
coursework, and a disincentive to future, post-course accessing and making use of learning
resources. Recent university graduates report to this instructor that written L2 English
communications are a constant feature of their daily working lives. Globalized industry and
the necessity of using English as a shared second language with which to conduct their work
is not a theory but a reality for them. Email dominates these stories rather than other
communication options – although it has become a meme to characterize younger generations

as visually-oriented digital natives, empowered literacy is an inescapable need for these young workers. A lack of fluent L2 literacy presents a serious risk to their building successful working lives.

What exactly has gone wrong with the process of gaining L2 literacy in English? Considering the hours and years students spend in English classes, and the ramifications, it is a question of urgency. More closely examined, the question is dual in the case of reading: what is happening in the brain of a learner gaining a second literacy, and, what can and should teachers of second or foreign language English reading do in practice to facilitate this acquisition for their students? These questions need to be addressed if effective, practical approaches to improve the experience of reading in English for learners are to be developed. Fortunately, research has been making inroads toward understanding the mental processes of literacy, particularly since the early 2000s. Pedagogical research also, often in teaching English as a foreign language settings, is beginning to deliver insights into some ways these new understandings of the reader's mind can inform and be incorporated into teaching approaches.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE:

The process of reading and interventions promoting literacy

Nuances in descriptions of the neurolinguistic processes vary by researcher, but in broad terms, in the typically developing brain, children gain their L1 languages through what they hear over the course of their first years. When later learning to read, many skills come into play but fundamentally, the young person needs to decode the text their eyes rest upon and transfer it, in audio form, into short term memory (sometimes referred to specifically as the phonological loop) from which they seek a match in their long term memory, also stored in audio form. The match-up or connection needs to be made before the short term memory breaks down – a matter of moments. (Koda, 2005, pp. 254-257; Masuhara, 2007, pp. 27-28; Tomlinson, 2000, p. 526; Walter, 2008, pp. 458-459)

A successful match-up provides the reader with comprehension, while a breakdown requires stopping to reread, skipping over the unknown word or words, questioning a nearby peer or teacher, resorting to a dictionary, or abandonment of the text. Causes and points of this potential breakdown are many. But in the smooth, subconscious, successful process, the reader decodes the printed text into the appropriate smallest segments (phonemes, in English), and inputs that phonological information correctly to the short term memory. If the initial decoding and inputting has been done correctly and the lexical item is already in their long-term memory, the connection can take place and comprehension can be achieved

(Tomlinson, 2000; Walter, 2008). This appears to be a similar process in every researched language:

> All the different strands of studies in L1 and L2 language and reading acquisition seem to point to the same direction.… in solving the challenge of building a neural circuitry for reading, the brain takes a remarkably similar solution regardless of the idiosyncrasies of one or the other written language system.… from the universal demand of rapid access to phonology. (Masuhara, 2007, p. 25)

For L1 readers, the process of learning to read, in circumstances in which they have ample language in their environment, is a matter of learning to match their language's orthography with their phonological awareness, and then matching up what they have seen and decoded with what is already in their long-term memory. For L2 learners beginning to read in their L2, especially in a foreign language context, the situation is far more challenging and complex (Koda, 2005; Masuhara, 2007; Tomlinson, 2000). A number of researchers studying this have become critical of asking students to learn L2 reading at the first stage of their L2 studies (Masuhara, 2007; Paran & Williams, 2007; Tomlinson, 2000) and are concerned about the sometimes incoherent resulting pedagogy:

> Unlike L1, L2 language acquisition and reading acquisition start at the same time. There is no time for the L2 learners to establish the necessary phonological core ability. This is the reason why the reading behaviours of L2 learners are so similar to L1 unsuccessful readers. (Masuhara, 2007, p. 27)

Unsuccessful decoding, and difficulty with comprehension by EFL learners of English in Japan provides ample evidence for these concerns. Along with the above researchers, Paran (1996) suggests for teaching practice, building a middle ground:

> Readers must clearly have decoding skills in order to read at all, but at first, by way of compensation, they will also need a large amount of contextual support, since many of the words they are decoding are either unknown to them or accessed slowly. (p. 29)

Decoding ease in itself varies widely by language and orthography. When the target reading language is English, the inconsistency of the written form of the language presents a high level of challenge and many researchers note that the low grapheme-phoneme correspondence poses difficulties to children learning to read English as an L1, even though there is English in their daily environment (Masuhara, 2007, pp. 21-22; Nation, 2013, pp.

70-71). When English is the target as a foreign language, and great distance between the L1 and L2 languages is involved, it is even more difficult to develop reading-supportive phonological and lexical awareness (Koda, 2005, pp. 25, 271; Masuhara, 2007, pp. 23-25; Nation, 2013, pp. 70-71).

Koda (2005) examines wide research on the factors involved in learning L2 reading, finding that first language reading skills already present, level of L2 proficiency, and the reader's "orthographic processing, phonological decoding, and listening comprehension – contribute significantly, albeit differently …" (p. 202). Meanwhile, working memory available to the individual reader affects every skill being developed and their resulting comprehension ability (pp.202-203). Furthermore, the issues of difference between a reader's first language writing system and their target L2 language's writing system can be pervasive and persistent – for instance, whether both share an alphabet, or if one is logographic: "… L1 – L2 orthographic distance is largely responsible for differences in L2 decoding success … at any given point in … L2 development" (p. 271).

Tantalizing research by Takeuchi (2003) discusses how some of these challenges have been overcome. Takeuchi conducted an analysis of 160 foreign language learners in Japan, analyzing self-reported, published accounts by learners who had reached exceptional competencies in a variety of L2 languages from Arabic to Thai (and including English), written with a corresponding diversity of scripts. In selecting a sample group, Takeuchi focused on foreign language learners who began their language study after elementary school, who had not lived abroad, and who had no particular support for the target language at home. Some shared strategies from this sample group, relevant to their building of fluent reading skills, stand out. Reading aloud, reading a lot, concentrated listening and listening for gist, listening while shadowing, listening for prosody and suprasegmental prosody in pronunciation, and, in focused vocabulary study: "extra attention…paid to pronunciation in their vocabulary build up" (p. 388) by reading the target words aloud as well as writing them, shows that activities building reading fluency were far from silent (pp. 388-389). In contrast, Takeuchi reports that unsuccessful language learners do not do concentrated listening, are less likely to check pronunciation of words or to vocalize while writing them, do not read aloud or a lot, and are less likely to shadow or "pay special attention to sounds/prosody" (p. 390 online) clarifying that sound, so to speak, is a differentiating factor. The poor language learners did, however, and unlike the successful language learners, make word lists and try to memorize them (p. 390, online).

The intriguing patterns noted by Takeuchi, above, are from a large but anecdotal sample. While not detailing pedagogical interventions, Takeuchi's analysis of what high-achieving language learners have done to acquire a foreign language lends weight to the suggestion that integrated skills practice can be helpful; particularly, that proactively connecting oral and listening practice with literacy building can be effective for optimal

acquisition.

The sections below will focus on contemporary strands of theory and practice intended to address the obstacles preventing second language students from reaching comfort and ease with L2 reading, particularly with reading English as a foreign language. One strand relates to Extensive Reading, also known as ER, which is often carried out as sustained silent reading. Another strand follows developments including integration of oral elements or listening with reading, carried out with both graded readers and original literature. These sometimes incorporate collaborative learning and other supportive practice, balancing skills work and deepening the language learning and literacy experience.

Extensive Reading

ER has an active and prolific international interest community among language teachers, with ER-dedicated organizations such as the Extensive Reading Foundation, others based in Japan and Korea, and webpages to be found in English, Japanese, and Korean. Teacher interest groups focused on ER within larger language teaching organizations, such as the Extensive Reading special interest group within the Japan Association for Language Teaching, increase the constituency. Regional events, international conferences, ER-related publications and books, and ER-related studies in general language education journals continue to increase ER's visibility. (Please see Appendix A for example resources and links.)

The goal of extensive reading programs is to build reading fluency, as discussed by Waring in a recent book chapter titled, "Building fluency with extensive reading" (Waring, 2014). Waring notes "extensive reading is often taken to be synonymous with graded reading," but states that this is not the case; rather, whenever students are "reading…fluently and with high levels of comprehension" (p. 218) it can fit into the guidelines and descriptions of ER. Extensive reading programs for fluency have remained somewhat controversial (Huffman, 2014, pp. 17-18) and recently researchers have been carrying out empirical studies with larger numbers of learners and comparison groups, strengthening the case for fluency-focused reading at high levels of comprehension in English reading class work in EFL environments (Beglar & Hunt, 2014; Burrows, 2012; Huffman, 2014). Some studies have examined whether ER experience stimulates gains in motivation, self-efficacy, or positive attitudes toward reading, finding that it does (Burrows, 2012; LeBlanc 2015; Yamashita, 2013). Burrows (2012) additionally found that reading strategies instruction along with reading activities led to the best results, rather than assigning ER work as homework only (Burrows, 2012, p. 334). His findings lend evidence to other researchers' assertions that EFL readers benefit from in-class instructional support, guidance and encouragement, especially with initial experiences in extensive reading (Green, 2005; LeBlanc, 2015; Yamashita, 2013;

Yoshida, 2014). Yoshida (2014) in particular suggests carrying a box of books to each course meeting to enable browsing by the students, and "in-class book hopping" (p. 21) with advising by the instructor based on the instructor's own previous reading and evaluation of those books.

Another form of in-class support, termed variously as book clubs, literature circles or reading circles, has been gaining researchers' attention. LeBlanc (2015) conducted a large study (316 participants) over the course of an academic year with high school students, all of whom were assigned the same graded short story collections. Students were also assigned roles to fulfill in discussions of the stories and coached on doing this effectively. They met in small groups to discuss their stories eight times during the year. According to Likert scale questions and students' feedback, the results were positive: "task repetition and cooperative performance in the circles helped improve students' perceived reading efficacy over the course of an academic year while reading anxiety decreased" (p. 19). Analyzing the results, LeBlanc notes the increased interaction with and time spent with the stories through participants preparing to discuss them, and the "social persuasion" (p. 18) of enjoyable teamwork (LeBlanc, 2015).

Most studies examining ER to date have been with silent reading, and though some have included comparison groups (Beglar & Hunt, 2014; Burrows, 2012; Huffman, 2014), most have not had control groups (excepting Burrows, 2012, which in addition to comparison groups also had a control group.) The length of the reading treatment being researched, the amount of reading, data collection methods, and number of participants have had little in common thus far across the published results (Chang & Millett, 2015). For teachers, it has remained somewhat unclear, therefore, as to amounts of reading to assign and for how long a period of time, to help bring about a positive and lasting difference for their language learners (Chang & Millett, 2015). The research above discussing the value of proactive support, scaffolding, and discussions in class, however, does address the concerns expressed by Green (2005), over students in Hong Kong settled at desks to do ER-style reading in silence, with no support or interaction with peers or teachers: "a particularly monastic detention session" (p. 308). Green calls for improvements in methodology for ER in Hong Kong and elsewhere, making use of the "opportunity for sharing the challenges and joys of reading in a foreign language – in small groups or through oral presentations … To be successful extensive reading needs to integrate as seamlessly as possible with other components of the language curriculum" (p. 308).

Integrated reading projects

The suggestions for incorporating extensive reading more holistically into L2 language and especially EFL programs with interaction, peer support, and practice in a

balance of skills lead to another strand of recent inquiry. Focusing on graded and authentic literature reading integrated with other skills in the classroom, they are termed, sometimes, as combined skills research, multimedia, or multimodal literacy research. As pointed out by Waring (2014) above, reading material that has not been graded or simplified for language learners does not exclude that reading activity from being considered ER if the material is sufficiently comprehensible to the students. However, some researchers reporting on course reading projects do note that selected readings were challenging, and discuss their integration of proactively chosen scaffolding to make their students' experience that of successful L2 literacy.

First, from an ESL setting with younger learners, Zugel (2012) wrote twenty-four short, simple one-page stories for struggling elementary readers in a supplemental curriculum, meeting for short periods after school. A notable aspect of his project was the focused and intensive oral component; each story was listened to and read aloud cumulatively over a dozen times. The stories were initially challenging for the students – though written by the instructor to be manageable for elementary learners, ("Ted could make a toy plane that actually flew") (p. 209), the students could not at first read them unassisted. With scaffolding by the instructor and opportunities for learners to repeat reading and listening in various conditions, such as being read to, and by reading to each other while focusing on different relevant strategies, the students' prosody, reading rates and accuracy improved. The instructor found that the struggling readers were "not simply improving reading skills for specific stories, but are increasing their overall reading rate and accuracy by practicing the word and phonetic combinations …" (p. 204-205) and found also that the "skills learned for each story carry over to other reading" (Zugel, 2012, p. 204).

In a foreign language context with young adults, a similar approach was reported by McNabb (2013), who wrote original short stories for learners, but also incorporated contemporary computer support technology. The short stories were made available to read online, along with a number of uploaded recordings of each story read aloud by the instructor at different target reading speeds. The free software program *Spreeder* was added to help students practice fluent reading speeds. McNabb found that in facilitating student autonomy, "offering students enjoyable, manageable short stories to read and simultaneously hear via new technologies that they can control according to their own schedules, we are moving forward …" (p. 44) and indeed discovered that students even continued to access the short stories well after their semester courses and related assignments were completed (McNabb, 2013).

Also in a foreign language context, Chang and Millett (2015) conducted a year-long research project in Taiwan, dividing student participants into two different conditions to examine the question of silent extensive reading compared to listening-supported reading in building EFL reading fluency. Sixty-four high school students (two classes) participated

through their tenth-grade academic year. After a pre-test measuring both reading speeds and comprehension, the students' reading levels were found and twenty graded readers at the appropriate level were chosen and assigned from popular titles. The audiobooks accompanying the graded readers were approximately an hour long. During the study's research intervention, the time spent on the stories in class was matched carefully between the two groups, in which one class listened while reading and the other class read silently. There was teacher support during reading, and reading-while-listening, as well as time for questions, peer and class discussion, and help with cultural points. After both groups completed twenty books, a post-test measured, as before, words per minute and reading comprehension. Both groups showed improvement, but the class which had listened improved significantly more in both reading speed and comprehension. Of particular interest was that this study included investigation of retention; the students were given a delayed post-test three months later, after a summer vacation with no further extensive reading. Comprehension levels, which had risen significantly by post-test, showed no significant loss three months later, with the group that had listened-and-read again more successful than the group that had read silently. Reading speed, meanwhile, had declined slightly in the silently reading group during the inactive three months, but the reading speed of the listening-while-reading group showed still further improvements on the delayed post-test. The final results of the intervention in students' reading speed were a gain of thirteen words per minute for the silently reading group, and forty-seven for the reading-and-listening group (Chang & Millett, 2015, p. 99). Reasons posited for the strong results of the audio-supported group include the attention called upon from the students by the oral telling of the story, and, as found in other research, the combined input may have added interest, helped speed up slow reading and build stronger links for the learners between the aural stream of speech and the words on the pages (pp. 93, 99-100), suggestions congruent with those in Masuhara (2007) and Prowse (2002) as well.

Two further studies look into using integrated methods to make reading literature that may have been above students' initial reading levels accessible for EFL learners. Shelton-Strong (2012) reports on using literature circles in Vietnam to scaffold classics such as Orwell's *Animal Farm* and *1984*, observing that from activities such as role-preparation, discussion and peer-listening between students in small reading discussion groups, "fluency in both reading and speaking had improved substantially" (p. 218). He points out that repeated interactions with each story in preparation for discussions, and in concentrated listening taking place between students during meetings of literature circles (LCs), likely stimulate "noticing" (p. 220), and concludes that the "powerful degree of scaffolding inherent in LCs allows L2 learners, at higher levels, to read and enjoy authentic, unabridged literature" (Shelton-Strong, 2012, p. 218).

Chen (2012), in Taiwan, also reports on integrated interaction with a story to

promote accessibility of an ungraded novel. Using film, book and discussions about the novel *Charlotte's Web* in successive activity cycles, a course with forty-nine university non-English majors worked through the story by several chapters or movie scenes per week for approximately eight weeks. As found in Prowse's (2002) advice to choose books readers will "engage with and react to" (p. 142) and which the teacher also enjoys (Prowse, 2002), Chen's selection was based on both relative ease of reading and expected pleasure to be found in the project by the students, stating: "*Charlotte's Web ...* was chosen for this study because it is a wonderful mixture of imagination and realism beloved by generations" (Chen, 2012, p. 92). Noting that film is a "source of authentic listening input" (p. 89) and that research shows legitimate reasons students prefer to first watch a film to get a grasp of the plot before reading the corresponding story, Chen opted to "supply background information necessary for comprehension, and pique student interest" (p. 89) by beginning the activity cycles with portions of the film. Reading was done aloud, ensuring comprehension and to create a shared base for targeted group discussions. The students in the course using *Charlotte's Web* were matched with a control-group, and both courses took standardized reading comprehension exams at the beginning and end of the project. The treatment group also responded to Likert-scale opinion questions; the majority of the *Charlotte's Web* participants felt the integrated literature activities were useful for improving English skills. Compared to the control group the *Charlotte's Web* participants' gains on the reading comprehension test were significantly higher as well.

These studies above, finding benefits for EFL literacy in learners by integrating input, particularly combinations of reading, listening and discussion of engaging stories, support the research findings and suggestions from other researchers for fluency-focused and integrated skills work with stories (for congruent research see Onoda, 2012; and Paran, 2008 for reports and discussion of further studies). A point touched upon by some, but still lacking focused studies in the literature, regards carrying out extensive listening and reading separately as well as simultaneously. Parallel fluency-focused research has included suggestions that students "listen … at home or while using public transportation" (Onoda, 2012, p. 177) and some extensive reading literature includes suggestions to try both simultaneous listening and reading, and listening separately (see Prowse, 2002, p. 143-144; Stephens, 2014, p. 2), perhaps in a repeated listening cycle, making use of blocks of time during a typical day when hands may be occupied, but one's ears and mind are available to process what we hear: "e.g. in the car, or out running" (Prowse, 2002, p. 144). In Chen's (2012) use of film for listening input preceding the reading phase of *Charlotte's Web*, the gains found by the students at the end of the project may also help justify research looking into the potential of taking advantage of multimedia listening options in manners such as those suggested above (Chen, 2012; Onoda, 2012; Prowse, 2002; Stephens, 2014).   .

PEDAGOGICAL ACTIONS, CONSTRAINTS, AND PROPOSED INTERVENTION AND EVALUATION

Some Japanese universities have begun Extensive Reading programs for their English curriculums in which students are required to read a certain number of books or reach a target word count in English reading before graduation, and their libraries have built collections of graded readers. In this instructor's context, at both university settings described in section one, the graded reading collections fill some library shelves. The English curriculum for non-English majors requires one Extensive Reading course, and the English curriculum for international communications majors requires a one-million word count before graduation. The collections of graded readers at both universities do not include the matching audiobooks many of the publishers offer in a variety of forms, such as CDs, MP3s, or downloads, due to budgetary concerns.

At both the university settings described in section one, students can be observed applying earnest efforts to reading graded books they have chosen. When given the opportunity to question the instructor on words or passages they do not understand, however, a chronic disconnect between the printed words and their oral versions becomes apparent. Often when a word is questioned, the instructor simply providing the oral version of the word elicits immediate comprehension, as, for example, with the word, "adventure." The final "ture" in the last syllable of the word, from its appearance, is expected by the students to sound like /túə/, though in fact usually it is rendered with a /tʃúə/ pronunciation – impossible to guess without substantial familiarity, which Waring (2014) suggests would involve repetitions in the range of twenty to thirty times, just for recognition (p. 219). Waring's findings on the number of times learners need to meet a word to recognize it may explain part of the gap between the expected ease of reading of graded readers, even at beginner levels, and students' actual experience. The lack of a supportive, robust connection built between the viewed and the heard versions of English words may be another explanation, in that the students have not heard the words often enough to facilitate an effective process of decoding and retrieval from long-term memory (Chang & Millett, 2015; Nation, 2013; Prowse, 2002; Stephens, 2014; Walter, 2008).

According to Takeuchi (2003), reading aloud to oneself from printed text is a learning strategy systematically used by highly effective language learners (p. 388). The question of how to read aloud without knowing how to pronounce what one is reading is immediately presented, however, and Takeuchi reports that successful learners also pay close attention to learning pronunciation (pp. 388-389). The process could be laborious. Though students in this instructor's context select graded readers at very low levels for expected ease

of understanding, students report that they need to look up many words. The problem demonstrated by the questions students share with the teacher, however, suggests that the lack of recognition of words they have likely seen before is due more to missing the prosody of what they are reading rather than not having seen the words enough. Clearly this phenomenon undermines the guidelines for ease of reading in extensive reading from the outset, especially if done alone by the students.

Zugel's approach of intensive attention and repeated opportunities to learn and remember the spoken versions of printed words in oral, choral, and other voiced readings of very short texts had strongly positive results, even though the short stories were reported by the author as being above the students' current reading skills level (Zugel, 2012). Shared class readers for all members of a class with audiobooks to listen to together, also, were shown by Chang and Millett (2015) to be effective for both increasing comprehension and speed of reading, compared to sustained silent reading, as discussed in section two.

Free or low cost technology as an aid for outside classwork on individually chosen stories as in McNabb (2013) could be an effective solution for outside class reading and listening. The benefits of this option include reader choice and autonomy in choosing the order of reading, listening, or both together, and the number of repeats. A limited number of stories and recordings available in this arrangement could also facilitate activating peer support between students. Readers of each story could gather for small group discussion if time was set aside in class, to share and compare understandings and views, and take the opportunity to sort out any confusing points with the instructor. This would seem to fit well with young adults in university, with the increasing expectations of autonomy and independence for this age group. The technology-aided and autonomous options used by McNabb, though nearly ideal, run into some personal resource constraints: most but not all students have computers and smartphones, and approaches might need to be explored to ensure the inclusion of all class members. Also with traditional (printed volume) materials in this instructor's context, the extensive reading materials in the libraries are purchased without multiple copies, under the assumption that students will borrow titles individually. Methods using shared stories would therefore be difficult with the library extensive reader collections.

Proposed semester-length interventions and methods

Given the evidence of benefits for reading by integrating aural and print stories in classwork, and the evident sincere enjoyment of this approach, demonstrated for example by post-semester students continuing to access the website in McNabb (2013), two complementary, comparative action research projects would be designed. These parallel literacy support interventions would be carried out to determine if shared class literature, following a design approach based on the above literature, would show potential benefits

across university EFL settings and conditions in Japan, and if further modifications and more formal research would be justified as being of potential value in EFL reading pedagogy.

First, at the university where the instructor supplies the course syllabi for required general English courses, a graded reader with a CD (and downloading option) could be incorporated into the syllabus. Second, at the international communications department of a university with a set syllabus, supplementing the syllabus with a manageable book and audiobook as partly classwork, partly homework can be done with careful planning. In this latter case, showing a film, asking students to purchase copies of the book, and arranging opportunities to listen to the matching audiobook outside of class would be possible. In both university settings, collaborative discussion work in small groups (book clubs) would be an integral part of the reading projects, as peer-led discussions of reading have been recommended or cited positively as helpful and motivating by many researchers (Green, 2005; Prowse, 2002; Shelton-Strong, 2012; Waring, 2014). Koda (2005) notes further value in peer meetings: "Discussions of both the reading processes and content promote metacognitive dialogues among students" (p. 269). Recent reports of useful scaffolding effects in developing discussion skills by setting up assigned roles for reading discussions (LeBlanc, 2015; Shelton-Strong, 2012) also merit exploration (please see Appendix B).

Because students at both target universities have some familiarity with ER theory and guidelines for practice, brief review explanations of the concept of extensive reading would be sufficient. Before starting the proposed integrated project with this instructor, then, a brief two-question survey focusing on the new element would be conducted: "Have you ever listened to an audiobook before?" and, "What do you think of the idea?" After collecting the survey replies, the instructor would explain bilingually the current understandings in reading research and the pressing gaps as well, particularly that:

- research shows language learners need to encounter words between twenty and thirty times to recognize them (Waring, 2014)
- repeating listening and reading is helpful (Zugel, 2012)
- experiments show combining listening and reading helps students similar to themselves improve their reading fluency (Chang & Millett, 2015)
- the above research findings are new, and timing of activities may still be an open question
- the instructor hopes the students will experiment with listening simultaneously, and listening and reading separately
- feedback from the students on their experiences and preferences at the project's end will be valuable and appreciated.

Following up on this verbal introduction, the instructor would run a task to help make some of the concepts more concrete and accessible. Students would first try opening their books and reading aloud from a page they had not seen before, and then rate their feeling of comfort or difficulty. Next, with books closed, listening only would be tried with

the following paragraphs, again with a rating of comfort or difficulty. Third, students would listen and read simultaneously to the subsequent paragraphs. The instructor would then collect their anonymous replies to the question, "which was best for you?" and share the tallies of the class results with the students. Reasons for these explanations and demonstrations would be first, to activate metacognition: for reading, it has been found that "metacognitive training propagated long-term benefits in continuous progress" (Koda, 2005, p. 221) and "that metacognition – the explicit understanding of one's own cognitive capabilities – plays a central role in … spontaneous use of strategies to regulate … reading behaviors during comprehension" (p. 221). Second, carrying out a semester-length project requires commitment and extended effort from students, and would depend on the students' sense that it could be worthwhile.

With both the non-English majors and the international communications majors, a semester to engage together in cycles of listening, reading and small group discussion (book clubs) would be planned by dividing the classes' shared reading books into sections to listen to and read as target assignments in preparation for book club meetings. Book discussions during the semester would be set for approximately every two weeks; allowing for start-up time and finals, this would allow scheduling for five or six book club meetings as portions of class time.

In the non-English majors' shared graded reader project, the students generally have had little experience with discussions in English. Assignments of roles to prepare for and carry out (roles would be exchanged between students from session to session) may help with scaffolding their developing discussion skills in English, and bilingual guidelines would be given to the members of these classes (see Appendix B). Also with these non-English majors, the instructor would ask students to make use of the ample margin space in their books for memos, points they wish to highlight, drawings related to the story, and vocabulary notes.

In the international communications department context, students are accustomed to participating in student-led group discussions, so guiding discussions with set roles should not be necessary. In this setting, a complementary, parallel research design would be carried out. The instructor would arrange a film viewing of the story, then assign listening to and reading the shared book. Keeping notebooks for memos and drawings would also be assigned; in lieu of set discussion roles to prepare, notebooks could facilitate students' scaffolding each other's grasp of the story with these written/visual aids during their independent discussions. In both universities, however, the instructor would circulate between the small groups during the book club meetings, to be available to answer questions arising about vocabulary or to act as a resource in discussion on culture points.

Assessment and Evaluation

Assessment approaches for reading projects in contemporary EFL literature range widely in form and content, from requiring students to write and submit book reports or plot summaries in L2 English for their extensive reading (Burrows, 2012; Huffman, 2014) to asking for brief comments or short reports in L1 Japanese (Yamashita, 2013; Yoshida, 2014). Debate is brewing about what is effective and meaningful; Green refers to book reports as "policing" (Green, 2005, p. 308). Stephens (2014) protests "inane" (p. 3) quiz-type comprehension questions and searches for a middle ground by developing more thought-provoking questions to elicit short written responses, and Yoshida (2014) suggests streamlined reading logs to help the teacher give students necessary "guidance … advice … [and] feedback" (p. 20) while not burdening or discouraging the learners. Prowse (2002) goes further and advocates discussions, or dispensing with assessment activities entirely in favor of starting a new book.

In this instructor's context, with integrated projects as described above, the goals are to increase students' reading ease and pleasure with English stories. To be consistent and to support these goals, assessment of students' reading work both during and at completion of a project should be based on effort, participation, and evidence of engagement with the story; in other words, assessment to facilitate students' continued efforts and motivation.

There are many methods that could provide meaningful assessment of student work congruent with the above goals, and a combination of such activities could provide firm and fair grounding for accountability and feedback. With a graded readers project for non-English majors, points could be awarded cumulatively for book club participation and active carrying out of assigned roles, short group work assignments related to parts of the story, brief student-created pair work dictation quizzes, and short written responses at the completion of a book to share thoughts and reactions with each other and the instructor. With international communications majors, book club participation and the content of students' individual notebooks could be supplemented with slightly longer writing assignments. Eliciting responses in writing at completion of a book may help these readers consolidate their thoughts and provide a base for deeper discussions to share with each other and the instructor, while still being manageable for these more confident writers.

An essential aspect of action research projects such as the two proposed here would be evaluating the pedagogical effectiveness of the activities in both settings. A first step toward learning directly from the students' experiences could be asking for volunteers in each project for small group interviews, to discuss what they found facilitated their integrated project work and what did not. Discussions of the challenges, surprises they may have encountered during the semester, and their advice to the instructor in developing future projects would inform the instructor's understanding and reflections.

Also to collect qualitative and quantitative data, follow-up surveys in English and L1 Japanese would be distributed to all class members in both settings (please see Appendix C

and Appendix D). To elicit students' frank assessments of their efforts, changes in their skills, motivation and other aspects of their experience, and their advice on how to improve future projects, these surveys would be anonymous. The instructor would explain bilingually to the students that while their identity information would not be known or shared, their opinions would be of considerable value to the instructor for assessing the activities and to fuel reflection, modifications, and improvements.

These action research projects should also be examined for empirical evidence of changes in students' reading abilities. Reading speed tests could be given to participants before and after the reading projects. Standardized test scores, also, generally rest upon general speeds of reading, listening and comprehension, and many universities in Japan require students to sit these exams at the beginning and end of each semester, corresponding with the duration of these proposed pedagogical interventions. The reliability of these scores is variable as the tests are norm-referenced rather than criterion-referenced, but they still may be a source of supplementary data relevant to evaluating the effectiveness of integrated literacy projects such as proposed here.

As with the assessment of the students' work in these action research projects, it is hoped that the cumulative data from the feedback of the students in each setting and the evidence of changes, if found, in students' felt experience with and skills in EFL literacy, will clarify if integrated literacy projects have potential benefits for supporting EFL reading fluency development. If so, further modifications based on this data and more formal research might be justified as being of potential value in EFL reading pedagogy.

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APPENDIX A:
Extensive reading related sites and resources

The Extensive Reading Foundation http://erfoundation.org/wordpress/

日本多読学会 / Japan Extensive Reading Association http://jera-tadoku.jp/

"Starting with Simple Stories" developed by Sakai, has an SSS study group, with an introduction at this link: http://www.seg.co.jp/sss/information/SSSER-2006.htm

"Yomiyasusa" by Furukawa, discussed in Burrows (2012, pp. 121-122), can be found here: http://www.seg.co.jp/sss/word_count/YL-20070621.html

The Korean English Extensive Reading Association http://keera.or.kr/

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The Extensive Reading Special Interest Group within the Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT ER-SIG) http://jalt.org/er/

Video of Dr. W. Renandya at the Extensive Reading World Congress 3, Dubai, from the ER Foundation Channel: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LGcj5x6aAlQ
Published on Oct 7, 2015. Plenary Title: "Willy Renandya: The Power of Extensive Listening." Description from the Internet page: "Dr. Renandya begins his plenary presentation by presenting research on the benefits of extensive listening and how it helps students with second language acquisition (SLA). Then he gives suggestions for classroom activities." Audience members also shared useful resources during the discussion.

Extensive Reading Central is a free practice site for extensive reading, reading-and-listening, and vocabulary building: http://www.er-central.com/

A commercial online source of extensive reading and listening has collected together individual publishers' offerings: http://xreading.com/

APPENDIX B:
Discussion roles (English and Japanese)

Adapted from: Shelton-Strong, S.J. (2012). Literature circles in ELT. *ELT Journal, 66*(2), 214–223

The seven roles Shelton-Strong suggests are: "Discussion leader, Summarizer, Word master, Passage Person, Connector, Cultural collector, [and] Artistic adventurer." (See Shelton-Strong, 2012, p. 216 for his complete descriptions and rationale). Roles change for each meeting in which students hold their book or chapter discussions. Below, roles are adapted and consolidated from Shelton-Strong's model to allow for group discussions with three to five student members:

Discussion leader-summarizer: this member is prepared to help the others of the group confirm the outline of the plot chapter(s) covered in the meeting and to have considered some meaningful, open-ended questions to raise and share with the group.
司会およびまとめ役：この役割の人は、ほかのメンバーが会議のために指定された章の内容を理解できるようにすることとディスカッションを始めるような質問をします。

Word master: this member prepares to help other members with vocabulary and phrases they may have found unfamiliar in the assigned chapter(s).

単語マスター：この役割の人は、会議のために指定された章でほかの人たちがわからないような言葉や表現を説明します。

Points person: this member picks up interesting content, whether a striking passage in the reading to discuss, a culture or lifestyle point, or a point in the story that connects with real events.

ポイント係：この役割の人は、指定された範囲で面白い部分を見つけます。例えば、ディスカッションを招きそうな文章、文化や生活様式に関係するポイント、または、実際の出来事と結び付けられるような本の中のポイントなどです。

These three roles can be further divided if the group has more members. All members are encouraged to also keep small notebooks, making manga-pictures, timelines and memos to keep track of the basic story and content they wish to remember, including their memos of points for confirmation, sharing and discussion. The roles assignments are for primary preparation and responsibility, but all members of the groups should participate and help to the best of their abilities with all aspects of the discussion.

With thanks to Chutatip Yumitani for the manga-pictures idea, Sakae Onoda for translation advice and Kevin Stein for the suggestion to use timelines, found at:
http://liltsig.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/LiLT-3_1-Stein.pdf

APPENDIX C:
Book and audio book listening survey
本とオーディオブックに関するアンケート

*Please answer **every question carefully**. This survey has no relation to your grades. Please do not write your name: this is an anonymous survey. I will not be using your names or identities in any way. Please also feel free to write on the back!*

すべての*質問*に*真剣*に*答*えてください。このアンケートは成績とは関係ありません。あなたの名前を書かないでください：これは無記名のアンケートです。名前など人物を特定できる情報は一切使いません。もしもっと書きたいことがあれば裏にも書いてください。

1. How did you listen to the audiobook – by computer, CD player, or music player?
   オーディオブックを聞くときには何で聞きましたか？　ＰＣ，ＣＤプレーヤー、音楽プレーヤーを使いましたか？

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76-101.

2. Where did you listen, for example in the train, while walking…?
いつもどこで聞きましたか？例えば、電車の中などですか？歩いている時などですか？

How did you do listening, and reading? どのような方法で聞いたり読んだりしましたか？

3. Did you try listening and reading at the same time? 同時に聞いたり読んだりしていましたか？

4. Did you try listening, then reading later? 最初に聞き、その後に読んだりしていましたか？

5. Did you try reading, then listening later? 最初に読み、その後に聞いたりしていましたか？

6. Of the above, which way was best for you? 上の中でどの方法が一番自分に合っていましたか？

7. **Every week**, how many hours did you listen to the story? 毎週何時間物語を聞いたりしましたか？

8. In the project, how many times in total did you **read** your entire book through?
このプロジェクトで、合計で、何回この本を**読み**ましたか？

9. In the project, how many times in total did you **listen** to your entire book through?
このプロジェクトで、合計で、何回この本を**聞き**ましたか？

10. At the end of this project do you feel you can catch the story better, when just listening?
このプロジェクトに参加した後に聞いているだけでこのオーディオブックストーリーをより聞き
取れるようになれましたか？

11. At the end of this project do you feel you understand more vocabulary? Why?
このプロジェクトに参加した後に前より多くの単語をわかるようになった気がしますか？　なぜ
だと思いますか？

12. Has the project helped with any of your other English **listening**?
このプロジェクトを通して一般的に英語がより**聞き**やすくなりましたか？

13. Has the project helped with any of your other English **reading**?
このプロジェクトを通して一般的に英語がより**読み**やすくなりましたか？

14. Were the book club meetings useful? 本に関するミーティング、"ブッククラブ"、は役に立ちました
か？

15. Were the discussion roles useful?

ブッククラブのディスカッションの役割は役に立ちましたか？

16. Did you **like** the story we read and listened to?

    私たちが聞いたり読んだりしていました本の話が**好き**でしたか？

17. From this project, what kind of changes have you noticed in your **feelings** about *listening* in English?

    このプロジェクトを通して、英語を**聞く気持ち**はどのように変わりましたか？

18. From this project, what kind of changes have you noticed in your **feelings** about *reading* in English?

    このプロジェクトを通して、英語を**読む気持ち**はどのように変わりましたか？

19. Do you think you will want to **listen** to another English book in the future?

    いつかまた英語の本を**聞いて**みたいと思いますか？

20. What was the best order for you with book reading and audiobook combining?

    本を読む (A)、オーディオブックを聞く(B) の組み合わせの順番で自分に一番良かったのはどれですか？

    1. Simultaneously A and B　*　(A)-(B) を同時に
    2. Listening, then reading　*　(B), (A) 聞く，そして本を読む
    3. Reading, then listening　*　(A), (B) 本を読む，そして聞く

    Why? それはなぜですか？

Do you have any comments or advice about this project? It will be useful for future students, so please memo here.

このプロジェクトについてコメントまたはアドバイスはありますか？これからこのようなプロジェクトに参加する生徒の役に立つので、できれば記入してください。

Thanks so much for your time, comments and advice!!!
お時間、ご意見とアドバイスをありがとうございました！！

APPENDIX D:

Book, Movie and Audiobook listening survey

本、映画、とオーディオブックに関するアンケート

*Please answer **every question carefully.** This survey has no relation to your grades. Please do not*

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write your name: this is an anonymous survey. I will not be using your names or identities in any way. Please also feel free to write on the back!

すべての*質問*に真剣に答えてください。このアンケートは成績とは関係ありません。あなたの名前を書かないでください：これは無記名のアンケートです。名前など人物を特定できる情報は一切使いません。もしもっと書きたいことがあれば裏にも書いてください。

1. How did you listen to the audiobook – by computer, CD player, or music player?
   オーディオブックを聞くときには何で聞きましたか？　ＰＣ，ＣＤプレーヤー、音楽プレーヤーを使いましたか？

2. Where did you listen, for example in the train, while walking…?
   いつもどこで聞きましたか？例えば、電車の中などですか？歩いている時などですか？

How did you do listening, and reading? どのような方法で聞いたり読んだりしましたか？
3. Did you try listening and reading at the same time? 同時に聞いたり読んだりしていましたか？

4. Did you try listening, then reading later?　最初に聞き、その後に読んだりしていましたか？

5. Did you try reading, then listening later?　最初に読み、その後に聞いたりしていましたか？

6. Of the above, which way was best for you?　上の中でどの方法が一番自分に合っていましたか？

7. **Every week**, how many hours did you listen to the story?　**毎週**何時間物語を聞いたりしましたか？

8. In the project, how many times in total did you **read** your entire book through?
   このプロジェクトで、合計で、何回この本を**読み**ましたか？

9. In the project, how many times in total did you **listen** to your entire book through?
   このプロジェクトで、合計で、何回この本を**聞き**ましたか？

10. At the end of this project do you feel you can catch the story better, when just listening?
    このプロジェクトに参加した後に聞いているだけでこのオーディオブックストーリーをより聞き取れる
    ようになれましたか？

11. At the end of this project do you feel you understand more vocabulary? Why?
    このプロジェクトを参加した後に前より多くの単語をわかるようになった気がしますか？なぜだ

と思いますか?

12. Has the project helped with any of your other English **listening**?
　　このプロジェクトを通して一般的に英語がより**聞き**やすくなりましたか?

13. Has the project helped with any of your other English **reading**?
　　このプロジェクトを通して一般的に英語がより**読み**やすくなりましたか?

14. Were the book club meetings useful? 本に関するミーティング、"ブッククラブ"、は役に立ちましたか?

15. Did you **like** the story we read and listened to?
　　私たちが聞いたり読んだりしていました本の話が**好き**でしたか?

16. From this project, what kind of changes have you noticed in your **feelings** about *listening* in English?
　　このプロジェクトを通して、英語を**聞く気持ち**はどのように変わりましたか?

17. From this project, what kind of changes have you noticed in your **feelings** about *reading* in English?
　　このプロジェクトを通して、英語を**読む気持ち**はどのように変わりましたか?

18. Do you think you will want to **listen** to another English book in the future?
　　いつかまた英語の本を**聞いて**みたいと思いますか?

19. What was the best order for you with book reading and audiobook combining?
　　本を読む (A)、オーディオブックを聞く(B) の組み合わせの順番で自分に一番良かったのはどれですか?
　　　1. Simultaneously A and B　　(A)-(B) を同時に
　　　2. Listening, then reading　　(B), (A) 聞く, そして本を読む
　　　3. Reading, then listening　　(A), (B) 本を読む, そして聞く

　Why? それはなぜですか?

20. Do you prefer to see the movie before listening and reading to the book, or after, or in alternating order?
　　映画を見て(A)、オーディオブックを聞くと本を読む (B) の順番で自分に一番良いのはどれですか?
　　　1. Movie first (A), then listening and reading after (B)　*　(A)、そして (B)
　　　2. Book listening and reading first (B), and movie at the end (A)　*　(B), そして (A)
　　　3. Alternating　*　(A)(B)(A)(B)(A)

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Why? それはなぜですか？

Do you have any comments or advice about this project? It will be useful for future students, so please memo here.

このプロジェクトについてコメントまたはアドバイスはありますか？これからこのようなプロジェクトに参加する生徒の役に立つので、できれば記入してください。

Thanks so much for your time, comments and advice!!!
お時間、ご意見とアドバイスをありがとうございました！！