Beyond a transaction: Independent Vocabulary Study Approaches for English Conversation School Students in Japan

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ABSTRACT

Despite vocabulary size being widely recognized as a key predictor of L2 reading and listening proficiency, it could be argued that many students within English conversation schools in Japan (*eikaiwa*) are not given sufficient opportunities for theoretically principled vocabulary study. This paper analyzes existing research on independent study approaches as well as complementary classroom-based pedagogical practices that foster both incidental and deliberate vocabulary learning. Through the utilization of both mobile assisted language learning (MALL) and extensive reading (ER) programs, measured changes to a language course are suggested that could be feasibly implementable within the specific constraints of an *eikaiwa* setting. Furthermore, potential institutional, technical and affective obstacles that could hamper such a program's effectiveness are identified and discussed. This paper hopes to provide approaches to vocabulary instruction based on empirical data, while also remaining accessible to teachers in a context often overlooked in academic and pedagogical literature.

VOCABULARY LEARNING IN AN ENGLISH CONVERSATION SCHOOL IN JAPAN

English conversation schools (known as *eikaiwa gakkou* or simply *eikaiwa*) form a substantial segment of the private English language education industry in Japan. For many Japanese, these schools provide perhaps one of the only post-university points of contact with the English language. Especially outside of the major urban centers, for those wishing to learn

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English in later life or those aiming to develop existing communicative ability further, *eikaiwa* exists as one of the only available options.

Despite *eikaiwa* schools being widely accessible across the entirety of Japan, there are several obstacles that potentially limit frequent and sustained student attendance. Lessons are usually expensive and, due to most adult students being in full-time employment, attendance is usually restricted to one hour-long lesson per week. Within an EFL context like Japan, this extremely limited access to L2 input and lack of opportunities to interact in the target language are grave concerns for teachers aiming to foster communicative competence in their students. Furthermore, within *eikaiwa* lessons, students are generally taught from set textbooks, often prescribed or even published by the *eikaiwa* schools themselves, as a method of bypassing the fact that instructors in these institutions often lack even fundamental teaching qualifications or basic classroom experience. Many lessons in this context are carried out with leisure, rather than language acquisition in mind (Kubota, 2011). Student assessment within a large number of *eikaiwa* schools is often administered by instructors with limited experience with best practices in language assessment. The hiring practices in eikaiwa schools are at times criticized as it is claimed that instructors may be hired for aesthetic reasons (young, attractive, Caucasian) while often being pedagogically inexperienced and lacking adequate training (Bossaer, 2003; Kubota, 2011; Lummis, 1976; Sapinaru Tamas & Tamas, 2012). This means that, in some cases, students could conceivably float from class to class for years on end without any real signs of improvement while, at the same time, lacking a experienced educator to advise them on what they could potentially do to remedy any developmental issues they might have. Independent study is not normally prioritized in the *eikaiwa* industry, as this undermines the economic model whereby schools are paid for the time students attend classes. Providing independent strategies could result in students finding less value in the face-to-face model, thus threatening their revenue source.

It could certainly be argued, then, that if an instructor in this context is to stand a reasonable chance of encouraging long-term linguistic development in their students, they will need to provide students with training and opportunities to learn effectively in, but without the need of, *eikaiwa* schools. Students will need to be exposed to both the tools and language necessary to open themselves up to the wealth of linguistic input provided by books, movies, and the Internet. However, another issue that teachers must consider is that many adult students are full-time salaried workers in a country famous for its demanding work schedules. Therefore, teachers need to provide students with training in independent study that will be efficient in terms of returns for their effort, afford flexibility of time requirements, and include features that sustain continued motivation.

Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) and Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) potentially offer a number of resources that have the potential to fill (with proper instruction on their use) most, if not all, of these criteria. If an adequate amount of initial learner training is provided and learner consultation and feedback is monitored continuously by the teacher, CALL and MALL can go some way to addressing the shortcomings that *eikaiwa* students face in terms of insufficient L2 exposure. Furthermore, these approaches to vocabulary study, with materials informed by SLA and TESOL research findings, can act as a bridge for students that will eventually allow them access to a world of manageable native or near-native level input. To date, *eikaiwa* schools have utilized CALL and Internet access as a substitute for, rather than a supplement to, standard face-to-face lessons. Most of the major *eikaiwa* chains offer some kind of CALL-based option for allowing students to take video lessons online, accessing

their in-house texts via mobile device, or providing supplementary quizzes for home study. An extensive review of these online offerings revealed only one company to offer a focus specifically on vocabulary.

Vocabulary size is one of the most reliable predictors for L2 reading ability (Cobb, 2008; Nation, 2006) and, despite this fact, an explicit focus on vocabulary is often overlooked or under-emphasized in a large number of teaching materials and instructional contexts (Folse, 2004; Folse, 2010). In particular, a concentration on the first five thousand highest frequency words in English has been claimed to offer students substantial returns on their effort in terms of understanding a wide range of spoken and written language (Nation, 2006). Helping students increase their vocabulary size to the point where they are able to achieve 95% (minimal) or 98% (optimal) coverage of written and spoken English is arguably a desirable goal as it has been found in a number of studies (Laufer & Ravenhorst-Kalovski, 2010) to be sufficient for student comprehension without the aid of a teacher or dictionary. After considering these findings it becomes evident that spending time both inside and outside of class building students' vocabulary size based on high frequency word lists could be an effective approach towards gaining access to a wealth of comprehensible input in the future.

As for how to best approach vocabulary study, this is a continuing debate. Opinion is largely split between those who believe vocabulary can be effectively learnt through an implicit focus, through the use of extensive reading and ample opportunities for analysing words in context (Oxford and Crookall, 1990), and those who feel that the explicit study of decontextualized words via word cards or word lists has great value to learners (Nation, 2013; Webb, 2009). Both camps present convincing arguments and one could certainly say that there is clear value in both positions. One way of addressing these two opposing positions is through the integration of both within a balanced curriculum such as Nation's "Four Strands" (Nation, 2013). In this model, incidental vocabulary learning, through activities like extensive reading, is covered within a "meaning-focused input strand" whereas explicit vocabulary study forms part of a "language-focused strand." These strands each make up 25% of a language course (with the remaining 50% focused on 'meaning-focused output" and "fluency development") and work in a way where each strand complements the other.

Within a context where students have limited time and often limited motivation to study outside of class, a teacher needs approaches that will offer the best chance of giving learners at least a basic understanding of high frequency words quickly, whilst also exposing them to contextualised language outside of the classroom. The extremely high percentage of smart phone ownership currently among Japanese university students (White & Mills, 2015) is one untapped resource that can be potentially exploited to achieve this goal. Furthermore, explicit and implicit vocabulary study via CALL or MALL can be done at a low cost and, in many cases, has a strong theoretical foundation in terms of increased efficiency of vocabulary retention as well as techniques for sustaining student motivation (Abrams & Walsh, 2014; Imrie, 2014; Spiri, 2008; Yip & Kwan, 2006; Zhang, Song, & Burston, 2011). Most importantly though, it undermines certain arguably negative elements of the *eikaiwa* business model by exposing learners to the idea that their development is not reliant on a company or an instructor. Language learning becomes something that exists beyond the walls of an institution, something that can occur anywhere and at any time in their daily lives and something that becomes personal and rewarding as they are handed the responsibility for their own linguistic development.

The specific setting acting as a basis for this particular pedagogical investigation and intervention is a mid-sized private English conversation school, located approximately 100

kilometres north-west of Tokyo. Students range in age from pre-school children to retirees. At present, the school teaches around 1,000 students in total. The school employs 22 foreign native-speaker and Japanese teaching staff, with solely the foreign staff teaching adult classes. The primary focus of this study is the school's 150 currently enrolled adult students. Adult classes are divided between private classes and group classes. Private classes are more expensive, can be arranged at the students' discretion, can be one-on-one or small groups, and can last up to 2 hours. Group classes typically meet once a week for an hour, contain 2 to 6 students, and feature an institutional requirement of 50% of the lesson content being based on a set textbook. Especially in the case of group lessons, students have an extremely limited amount of L2 contact time and often do not incorporate home study as part of the course. Furthermore, instructors in the school, with four exceptions, have received no formal training in TESOL principles and practices and, of these four instructors, only one has received training associated with adult or university-age students. If one also takes into account the fact that most instructors teach on average 25 classes per week, not including travelling time between several school branches, it becomes clear that practical viability needs to be at the forefront of any pedagogical approach being proposed.

   Considering these specific contextual considerations, it could be argued that an effective and sustainable vocabulary program would need to greatly increase opportunities for student L2 contact outside of the school. Additionally, the pedagogical intervention needs to be well organized and simple enough that teachers lacking even fundamental training would be able to easily implement it in class despite a demanding teaching schedule.

SELECTIVE REVIEW OF LITERATURE: PROMOTING AUTONOMOUS AND SUSTAINED VOCABULARY STUDY

A need for vocabulary

   An essential but often overlooked issue in vocabulary teaching involves which words students should study to stand the best chance of fulfilling their language goals. Nation (2013) claims that learners need to focus on high frequency vocabulary as (a) it covers such a high proportion of spoken and written texts that it is necessary in order to make these sources of input accessible to learners, (b) fluent access to high frequency words is necessary for text comprehension, and (c) students will be unable to produce spoken or written language without a basic knowledge of it. Frequency word lists therefore act as a valuable resource to both researchers and teachers as they give insight into which words are the most useful for students to focus on (Spiri, 2008).

   A key reason for teachers to devote time to ensuring students have a comfortable grasp of high frequency vocabulary is the concept of text coverage. Coverage refers to what percentage of a text will be made up of words known by the reader according to their current vocabulary size. It was found by Laufer (1989) that a vocabulary size of 5,000 words was sufficient to provide a

reader with 95% coverage of authentic academic material at an undergraduate level. Laufer also reported that this 95% coverage figure marked the point where the participants were able to function as "readers" as they succeeded in achieving a score of 55% or more in a reading comprehension test. Word coverage was also examined by Hirsch and Nation (1992), who found that in order to allow learners to read unsimplified texts for pleasure they would require 97-98% coverage which, in turn, is provided by a 5,000-word vocabulary.

In order to address the challenge of providing learners with the guidance and tools necessary to reach the goal of a 5,000-word vocabulary while also having a solid working knowledge of the words they encounter, a balanced approach is necessary. There is no one single effective way in which to study vocabulary (Folse, 2004) and providing students with direct guidance supported by empirical research as well exposing them to a range of resources allowing them to work autonomously is perhaps ambitious enough for educators. Nation proposes a "four strands" approach where 25% of a language course is spent on each of the following areas: meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning, and fluency development (Nation, 2013). It is the meaning-focused input strand through extensive reading and the language-focused strand via deliberate word card study that this paper will direct its attention to.

Incidental vocabulary learning through extensive reading

Extensive reading (ER) programs are based around students reading large amounts of material that is comprehensible at their current level (less than 5% of unknown running words) while being focused on meaning rather than language and reading as a pleasurable activity (Nation, 2013). Furthermore, most extensive reading programs seek to create a comfortable and supportive environment that nurtures "a lifelong reading habit." (Renandya & Jacobs, 2002, p. 296). Teachers can increase the likelihood of ER programs being successful by creating a 'reading culture' where students are reading in large amounts and by providing students with material such as graded readers featuring a wide range of topics and genres in order to appeal to diverse student interests. Active involvement in the reading process can also be stimulated through teacher participation in ER, continued monitoring of student progress, and the inclusion of post-reading activities like role plays and discussions into class time (Renandya & Jacobs, 2002).

In regard to vocabulary learning through extensive reading, Nation (2013) presents estimates of how much reading would be necessary in order to learn (meeting each word in a text around ten times) the words in each 1,000 high frequency band. It was calculated that over a 40 week period, a learner would have to read for 4 hours and 24 minutes a week at a rate of 100 words a minute in order to learn the 5,000 most frequent words. While this is, of course, a substantial time commitment over 40 weeks, over a two- or three-year program this becomes a much more manageable figure and highlights the potential benefit an ER program offers to learners. Particularly in an EFL context like Japan, Nation claims that ER is all the more valuable as it addresses the fundamental issue of a lack of available comprehensible input with the added benefit of learners being able to access it outside of the classroom.

The benefits of extensive, pleasurable reading were also supported in a study by Cho and

Krashen (1994) that was conducted in an ESL setting. Four adult subjects living in the U.S. participated in a free reading program for an unspecified period of time (participation varied from between one week to around two months) using texts aimed at younger native-level readers. The four participants were given very little instruction regarding how much they should read, were not expecting to be tested, and were encouraged to focus on reading for pleasure rather than for language learning. The results later showed that several of the subjects had exposed themselves to large amounts of material, including one who had read 126,000 words in around two months. This was explained in part through positive feedback from the participants regarding how reading comprehensible and interesting material drew them into sustained L2 reading. One participant stated that:

> "When I finished reading one volume of Sweet Valley Kids, I was looking forward to reading the next one. This was the first experience in which I wanted to read a book in English continuously…" [translated from Korean]. (Cho & Krashen, 1994, p. 4)

In addition to the positive interview responses, the researchers found that when tested via oral translation on unknown words in the reading texts, the four participants displayed vocabulary acquisition rates of between 7.1 and 37.4 new words learned per volume read. Additional qualitative data suggested that the pleasure of reading had beneficial effects for not only the participants' reading skills, but also their speaking and listening ability.

In a study more specifically focused on vocabulary learning, Brown, Waring, and Donkaewbua (2008) compared three input modes designed to promote incidental vocabulary acquisition: reading, reading-while-listening, and listening to stories. This investigation, which took place with Japanese university students and utilized a between-group design, found that in tests of previously unknown vocabulary items, the reading-while-listening and reading modes performed significantly better in immediate and delayed multiple choice and translation tests than the listening only mode. This difference in performance between the modes was also mirrored in student questionnaire responses where most students were found to prefer the reading-while-listening and reading approaches over the listening-only mode. Of the two testing methods (multiple choice and translation), the researchers claimed that the translation test was "the one that most closely indicates whether a subject actually knew the meaning of the word while reading and listening" (Brown, Waring, & Donkaewbua, 2008, p. 147). However, despite the superior performance of the reading-while-listening and reading modes in both testing conditions, the results of the translation test showed that only a limited number of the target words were learned in either mode. In terms of three-month retention, it was found that participants were able to learn roughly one new word from listening-while-reading or simply reading one graded reader. This study highlights the fact that sustained effort and the reading of a large amount of text is essential if an ER program is to provide substantial vocabulary acquisition.

In an article arguing the need for extensive reading, Waring (2006) asserts that much of the true benefit derived from students engaging ER lies not simply in learning new words, but in deepening learners' knowledge of all the underlying elements of vocabulary items as well as the grammar structures that dictate their use. Waring claimed thatin order for students to have a workable grasp of how words work by learning their collocations, colligations, and levels of formality, it will require students meeting the word in a text a huge number of times. This demand requires more time than teachers can hope to provide in class, and further emphasizes

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the need for ER programs to be based upon autonomous, out-of-class learning. Waring (2006) maintains the importance of this reality:

> It is impossible for us to teach a sense of language. We do not have time, and it is not our job. It is the learners' job to get that sense for themselves. This depth of knowledge of language must, and can only, be acquired through consistent exposure. (p. 47)

The study also clearly locates extensive reading within a balanced curriculum as it is claimed that exposure to texts through ER acts as an opportunity for learners to consolidate language that they have encountered in language-focused activities like studying from textbooks or decontextualized words. The aim of this type of contextualized study is not so much focused on learning basic word meanings as it is focused upon how the words fit together and how the language works as a whole. While extensive reading inhabits an essential role in enriching basic form-meaning connections and giving learners a fuller sense of how words fit into the language, building learners' basic understanding of meaning for large numbers of words can arguably be more efficiently achieved through deliberate vocabulary study via word cards (Nation, 2013).

Deliberate vocabulary learning through word cards and CALL/MALL

This section aims to highlight the potential benefits of the deliberate learning of vocabulary via word cards. Firstly research focusing on word card study, scheduling systems, spaced repetition, and the retrieval hypothesis will be presented as a theoretical foundation to the approach. From here, results from several studies that have investigated the effects of spaced learning and CALL/MALL-based approaches on retention of lexis will be presented. Quantitative data related to word retention performance as well as qualitative attitudinal data from both students and teachers will be included in the review. Subsequently, research into gamification and its role in CALL/MALL vocabulary software will be examined due to its potential value in sustaining student motivation in independent study. Finally, potential pedagogical pitfalls and considerations related to the implementation of CALL-based word card study that were raised in a study from a Japanese university setting are analyzed before a proposed pedagogical intervention is put forward in the final section of this paper.

There is some debate over the role of deliberate vocabulary learning in contemporary language learning with a number of strong and weak positions on whether or not strategies such as dictionary use, word lists or word cards cause students to effectively understand and use L2 vocabulary (Folse, 2011; Hulsijn et al., 1996; Knight, 1994; Nation & Waring, 1997). However, the existing literature on vocabulary acquisition strongly supports the value of learning decontextualized words for the promotion of both productive and receptive vocabulary knowledge. In research examining the deliberate study of word pairs, Webb (2009) found that students, through productive study of bilingual word lists, exhibited improvements in their productive knowledge of orthography, meaning, syntax, and grammar. Additionally, deliberate study focusing on receptive knowledge produced gains in receptive vocabulary understanding in the areas of meaning, form, word association, syntax, and grammatical functions. Webb concludes that the findings of this study strongly suggest the value of these deliberate study methods to learners aiming to quickly and efficiently increase their receptive and productive

learning of vocabulary.

It has been argued that the study of word cards within a spaced scheduling system can offer even greater benefits for the long-term retention of lexis. Mondria and Mondria-de Vries (1994) proposed the utilization of a scheduling method for word card study called "Hand Computer." The researchers claimed that the use of simple word cards featuring the L2 word and an L1 translation on the other side in conjunction with this scheduled repetition system created opportunities for efficient long-term acquisition of new words. In this system, correctly answered words are shifted into boxes where they are reviewed again in gradually increasing intervals, whereas incorrectly answered items are shifted back to the start for short-term review. The "Hand Computer" system contributes to learning as it (a) avoids 'overlearning' by moving easy or already learned cards out of the review deck and focusing learners' time on difficult items, (b) allows vocabulary sets to be adapted depending on the individual learner's strengths and weaknesses, (c) avoids learners gaining help from focusing on words in list sequences by constantly changing the order in which words are encountered, and (d) prevents forgetting of learned words over time via repeated "reactivation" via retrieval practice. The researchers also highlight the potential of synthesizing the "Hand Computer" with CALL citing heightened convenience and motivational effects as possible benefits.

The automated spaced repetition scheduling found in many current CALL and MALL software applications is based on the same concepts as "Hand Computer". This involves initially learned words being reviewed on an expanded review schedule where learners are presented with review questions in gradually increasing intervals of time. The focus of this approach is on the construction of long-term memory, rather than the short-term retention bolstered through cramming, and means that learned words will be retained for a long time (Nation, 2013). Furthermore, the practice of regular testing and review alone has been claimed to have a positive effect on the retention of information and has a slowing effect on the rate at which remembered information decays and is forgotten (Roediger, Putnam, & Smith, 2011).

The fact that the long-term retrieval of vocabulary knowledge through spacing will be, in general, more challenging than short-term testing can also be regarded as a positive factor in promoting vocabulary learning. The retrieval hypothesis (Pyc & Rawson, 2009) states that successful retrievals of difficult questions will be more beneficial to improving memory than succeeding in answering easier questions. This hypothesis was tested in a study that compared subjects who were given shorter intervals between retrieval attempts with another group with significantly longer intervals between questions, thus increasing their retrieval effort. The results found that although the short-term retrieval group were able to respond more quickly to questions, the long-term group exhibited better performance in a final test.

Bury (2016) confirmed the value of spaced repetition for learning in a recent study of Japanese university students where three classes of students each participated in six different review schedules in order to test to what degree key vocabulary from class content was retained. Two schedules were based on expanding retrieval, two on uniform retrieval where the periods between spaced review were fixed, and two were based on a massed retrieval model where students would 'cram' directly before the final test. Results showed that expanded retrieval produced the highest retention of vocabulary, narrowly outperforming the uniform retrieval groups on average. However, despite the data failing to consistently confirm the advantages of expanding over uniform retrieval scheduling, this study was able to demonstrate the clear benefit of spaced retrieval over massed retrieval as both expanded and uniform retrieval led to higher improvement rates in test results (massed retrieval - 10.9%, uniform retrieval - 18.1%, and

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expanding retrieval - 20.8%). Nakata (2015) also found that expanded repetition produced a "limited, but statistically significant" (p. 36) improvement over equal, or uniform spacing in the memorization of L2 vocabulary. Again, however, as in Bury's study, Nakata found that the most noticeable differences in immediate and delayed test performance were seen between the massed learning group and the experimental groups (short, medium, and long spacing), suggesting the benefits of spaced vocabulary learning, regardless of spacing schedule.

Imrie (2014) compared three different groups of Japanese university students studying textbook vocabulary using paper word cards, digital flash cards through the Quizlet website (www.quizlet.com) and Quizlet smart phone app, and a control group who were given a vocabulary list with no explicit instruction on how to study the words. Pre-tests were done using a vocabulary size test. The researcher found that in the pre-test all three groups performed very similarly in terms of average score: Group 1 (Quizlet) - 70.1%, Group 2 (paper cards) - 70.9%, and Group 3(control) - 71%. This pre-test determined that each group had a statistically equivalent English vocabulary size. In post-tests, conducted via an end of semester vocabulary test, it was found that the Quizlet group had achieved an average score of 97%, 28% higher than the paper flash cards group average (69%) and 41% higher than the average of the control group (56%). Qualitative interview data from the study suggested that the Quizlet group studied more frequently than the other two groups, with several students utilizing the smart phone app to study on the train as they commuted to and from university. The researcher claimed that students, from questionnaire and interview data, demonstrated positive attitudes regarding the ease of use and convenience of smart phone digital word card technology and suggested a valuable role for this approach to vocabulary learning in the future.

Another Japan-based study by Spiri (2008) investigated how the degree to which first and second year university students were able to learn words taken from the Academic Word List (AWL) using WordChamp (www.wordchamp.com - shut down in 2013), a website focusing on vocabulary learning via word lists and flash cards. This initial study found that several of the participants were able to significantly improve on pre-test quiz scores as a result of using WordChamp. Furthermore, around 93% of respondents to an attitudinal survey on how easy or enjoyable WordChamp was to use stated that the website was either "a little enjoyable" or "very enjoyable" to use (pp. 29-30). A follow up study, also based on learning items from the AWL, aimed to compare two groups using either a paper-based (word lists or paper flash cards) or an online (WordChamp) approach. The results of this study were mixed in that although the online group narrowly outperformed the paper-based group in post-test results (on average 19.8/20 compared to 17.7/20) (p. 33), the attitudinal data showed a different picture. It was found that participants believed that, although the online approach was rated as more enjoyable, the paper-based approach was a more effective study method. Of course, this data was purely based on the individual students' impressions of each method and the researcher hypothesised that these findings could have been explained by a learning curve that existed when first using WordChamp that was not present in the traditional paper-based methods.

An earlier study that examined the specific potential of MALL relating to vocabulary was carried out by Zhang, Song, and Burston (2011), where Chinese undergraduate students using SMS via mobile phones were compared with a control group using paper-based methods while studying TOEFL vocabulary. The results of the study found that despite exhibiting lower pre-test scores, the experimental (SMS) group outperformed the control (paper) group on both immediate and delayed post-tests. The researchers claimed that the SMS learning promoted the retention of vocabulary in students' long-term memory. Participant interview data also highlighted the

potential convenience and effectiveness of a MALL-based approach to vocabulary study as students frequently referred to the idea that they could study during any free period they had in their daily lives and that the frequent reviewing schedule the software utilized helped them to retain words more effectively. One participant stated:

> I think it is a good way because I bring my mobile phone almost everywhere and at any time. Sometimes I don't have things to do, such as when travelling in the subway, I can read the vocabulary many times and remember them. In a word, it can help me to make use of leisure time to learn vocabulary. (Zhang et al., 2011, pp. 208-209)

CALL can also offer assistance in sustaining continued student engagement and motivation in the often demanding and often repetitive task of deliberate vocabulary study. Various online vocabulary sites and apps, such as Quizlet (www.quizlet.com), Memrise (www.memrise.com) and Duolingo (www.duolingo.com), incorporate gamified features that aim to boost student intrinsic motivation and ensure continued use. Gamified features within vocabulary software include points earned through use, leaderboards, statuses, and trophies or rewards that can be earned (Kapp, 2012). Abrams and Walsh (2014) carried out a study of eleventh grade students and young adults studying SAT vocabulary through the use of The Challenge (www.vocabulary.com/play/), an online vocabulary study tool that featured a number of game-like elements. The researchers reported that the website offered several affective benefits to students such as providing instant feedback through point scores, records of words learned, public rewards, and statuses. It was found that many of the students felt a sense of friendly competition with each other as they compared the rewards and statuses they had attained and it was reported that some participants stated an intention to continue their progress on the site after the study had concluded. Although not all students were as enthusiastic about the gamified features of The Challenge, the researchers concluded that this approach "afforded students opportunities to become motivated, self-directed learners" (p. 57).

The potential benefits of gamified vocabulary learning were also addressed in a study by Yip and Kwan (2006) of both teachers and students in a Hong Kong university that investigated the usefulness of online vocabulary games. Both quantitative data, in the form of results of pre- and post-tests of course vocabulary, and qualitative attitudinal questionnaire and interview data were collected and analysed in the study. It was found that the experimental group (utilizing online games) achieved a significantly higher mean score on the post-test than the control group (studying via activity-based learning). Furthermore, the questionnaire responses regarding the vocabulary game software were positive with around 70% of respondents stating that the software was effective for assisting them in learning vocabulary.

As smart phone ownership continues to increase globally, the role of MALL is set to grow in the coming years. White and Mills (2015) carried out surveys of Japanese university students studying EFL regarding their attitudes towards smart phone technology and its use in language learning. This research found that in 2012, although 85% of students surveyed owned a smart phone, only 7% of students used their phone for educational purposes. Despite this low figure, however, it was also reported that 78% of students believed smart phones would be "helpful" or "very helpful" in their language study (pp. 9-10). Based on these results, the researchers hypothesised that student access to smart phone technology would soon reach 100% and that, as useful educational technology develops and students' familiarity with smart phones in general increases, the amount of educational smart phone use will increase.

Despite the apparent benefits of online flash cards supplementing regular class content,

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Taylor (2009) carried out a study using the software iKnow! (www.iknow.jp) with first and second year Japanese university students which highlighted several obstacles that greatly limited the effectiveness of a CALL/MALL-based component to vocabulary study. The researcher found that due to practical issues, such as students being unfamiliar with the log-in or registration process on PC's and smart phones, compatibility problems with certain cell phones, as well as the teacher being unable to track individual students' progress, a large number of students failed to complete the study. Student motivation was also marked as a major contributing factor to the underwhelming performance data as even though students participated constantly throughout the testing period, the actual amount of time spent using the software was very low. In the final results of the study it was found that only six out of twenty six subjects successfully completed a set of two hundred words in two months. Taylor claimed that this study highlights the importance of both technical support in terms of helping students to access and become familiar with the software and also close, sustained monitoring and consultation by teachers regarding student progress throughout a course.

PEDAGOGICAL ACTION AND EVALUATION

Assigning homework or autonomous study goals is generally not a common feature of *eikaiwa* classes, due to practical reasons, such as a flexible schedule where the student takes lessons from a number of different teachers, or due to a lack of confidence on the part of instructors that homework will ever be completed by students with busy schedules or low motivation. This was partly supported in an informal survey of teaching practice involving seven instructors from the same teaching setting as the researcher (Appendix 2). Of the instructors asked the question, "Do you usually set homework for your adult students?", only one instructor stated that they gave homework regularly, usually consisting of asking students to prepare some ideas for discussion in the following lesson or to write a short journal entry. This one instructor did, however, maintain that a number of students did not display any interest in out-of-class study:

> "Yes, but it was mostly to be prepared to add something for discussion. Most students write things down, like a journal entry. Some could care less and never bothered." (Participant K)

This potential resistance to autonomous study from students, and subsequently instructors, was mirrored in comments from other respondents:

> "Depends on the class and students in them. But yes, I do give homework. Not regularly though. My expectations are too low for regular homework." (Participant W)

> "Usually not. I would ask classes their preference… usually got overwhelming no votes. Mentioned people could ask privately for their own hw, very few takers." (Participant G)

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As a result of many adult students studying English primarily in their free time and having full time jobs in the notoriously demanding Japanese workforce, it can be argued that students lack the time and inclination to extend their language learning beyond the *eikaiwa* classroom. This, however, is not the sole obstacle facing an *eikaiwa* instructor aiming to foster autonomous learning and sustained motivation for study.

In an investigation into the *eikaiwa* industry and its ideological basis, Kubota (2011) claimed that English conversation schools in Japan were based largely on "leisure and consumption" more than any real concern on the part of the school owners or students for second language acquisition. Kubota states that a focus on leisure and the consumption and exploitation of (usually Caucasian) native speakers of English to attract students stands at odds with creating conditions for effective foreign language learning. Qualitative findings from Kubota's study confirm a lack of enthusiasm on the part of students towards serious attempts from the instructor in fostering linguistic development or the assignment of homework. Attendance in these classes was instead viewed as a casual leisure activity where students could come and go as they pleased and could get a sense of escapism from their everyday lives while socialising. One participant in the study stated:

> "Even if you skip one lesson, it's not a burden at all. I like the relaxed aspect… The teacher says, "You may do your homework," and no one does it. It's that casual. We go out to have lunch after class and it's fun. That's what keeps me going." (Kubota, 2011, p. 479)

Upon reflection of the similar findings in both Kubota's research and the informal survey, it suggests a serious need to consider the *eikaiwa* context in a different manner to formal educational institutions such as high schools or universities. Furthermore, it becomes clear that sustaining intrinsic student motivation and making English learning as enjoyable as possible is one of the primary concerns for an educator in this context as they lack a 'captive audience' in that the instructor is arguably in a subservient role with no power to induce student participation extrinsically. Despite the potential challenges facing instructors promoting out-of-class vocabulary learning in an *eikaiwa* context, the need for it in terms of the pedagogical benefits is compelling. Textbooks play a central role in conversation classes, with instructors often contractually obliged to use a set text for a high percentage or the entirety of class time. Textbooks often dedicate a significant amount of time to practicing grammatical structures but also display a lack of adequate attention to vocabulary instruction, often lacking fundamental concepts such as the recycling of newly learned words (Folse, 2004). Considering these institutional and pedagogical constraints, it becomes clear that affording sufficient vocabulary exposure to students needs to be done, at least in part, outside of the classroom.

Proposed interventions and methods

Prior to analysing how to best handle any concerns stemming from student motivation, there are also a number of practical issues that may need to be addressed before an ER or MALL-based approach can be implemented. Firstly, unlike a university setting, *eikaiwa* schools are unlikely to have a library of graded readers available for students to use. Indeed, it is

probable that some *eikaiwa* owners are not aware of the practice of extensive reading. Therefore, a certain amount of negotiation is likely to be necessary on the part of the instructor in order to acquire funding for an ER program. Luckily, a wide range of second-hand graded readers can be found on online shopping sites like Amazon for as little as 300 yen (approximately $3.00), allowing institutions with even a very modest budget to acquire enough texts to introduce an ER component to their courses. In terms of encouraging the use of MALL or CALL resources, the high degree of smart phone and computer ownership in Japan (White & Mills, 2015) means that access to vocabulary flash card apps or websites is not likely to be a major issue for learners. Furthermore, although sites and apps such as Memrise and Quizlet have the option for paid membership, the core features of each program can be accessed by users completely free of charge.

Studies like that of Cho and Krashen (1994) show that if reading material is both comprehensible and interesting to students, then they can become intrinsically motivated and read large amounts of material over sustained periods of time. The key point here is that students read at a level that is manageable for them whilst not having to read books that are boring or seem childish as most students in these schools are adults. In order to appeal to a wide range of different students, a successful ER program also requires reading material encompassing a variety of genres, including both fiction and non-fiction material. Varied material not only increases the odds of appealing to different individuals, it also familiarizes students with different types of discourse and promotes the use of different reading skills such as skimming or scanning (Day & Bamford, 2002).

However, simply providing students with appropriate reading material does not go nearly far enough to ensure students' long-term engagement in ER. In order to encourage students to participate actively and be available for support if necessary, silent reading of graded readers should initially be carried out during class time for the first one or two months. Due to the short duration of many *eikaiwa* classes, this may have to be for as short a period as ten to fifteen minutes per lesson, but this orientation period is essential as it "forces learners to read and have a chance of experiencing success" (Nation, 2013, p. 256). Support and opportunities for consultation with the instructor need to be available for students throughout the duration of an ER program as the unrestricted nature of independent reading can sometimes lead to issues that require teacher intervention. Students can feel unsure about what level of text they should be reading or perhaps lose sight of the original purpose of ER; reading for pleasure. This supportive role can even be taken a step further as the instructor actively participates in reading along with their students. Instructors therefore act as role models, sharing the enjoyment of reading with students rather than appearing as an authoritarian figure forcing homework upon them. This positive attitude by the instructor can create a community of readers in which everyone in class shares reflections on books they have read and recommendations for future reading material (Day & Bamford, 2002). This could arguably have a powerful motivational effect as teachers are demonstrating 'do what I do' rather than 'do what I say' and could create a warm collegial atmosphere that deepens the social bonds of the class in every facet of classroom life. Furthermore, these oral book reports offer students additional opportunities to practice speaking skills, thus maintaining congruence with the primary *raison d'être* of an *eikaiwa* program.

The management of a MALL-based approach to deliberate vocabulary study presents perhaps even more potential pitfalls than an ER program due to technical problems that can occur and also due to the fact that studying word cards, be it in paper or digital form, can often be a laborious and repetitive process (Yip & Kwan, 2006). Instructors can mitigate many of these

pitfalls through thorough pre-training of both the technological and educational aspects of MALL. In a similar fashion to a fledgling ER course, assigning ten to fifteen minutes per lesson for the first month would be extremely valuable in familiarizing students, some of whom will not be tech-savvy, with a MALL-based approach. In this time, students can set up, explore, and practice using the functions of word card apps with teacher and peer support available. Such guidance could feasibly have a significant contribution to the likelihood of sustained student use. White and Mills' (2015) study concludes that some students are still uncertain over how smart phones can be used for language learning and, if they are to become integrated into the classroom in the future, teachers need to spend more time educating students on their use. Teachers may even need to consider providing analogue options such as paper word cards for students who lack access to technology or struggle with its use. Instructors also need to be mindful of the dangers of perceiving technology as something that will guarantee student motivation. As was found in Taylor's (2009) study, even with engaging software, without adequate support and monitoring from teachers, long-term student motivation and participation is by no means a foregone conclusion.

One method of monitoring students' progress is built into a number of major flash card programs, such as Memrise, in the form of an online leader board. Online leader boards both give teachers a rough indication of how much time students are spending on a flash card set and additionally have the potential to fulfil a motivational role. Kapp (2012) states that leader boards add a social component to individual achievement, can stimulate players to interact with each other about scores, and can act as a powerful motivational factor as players strive to reach the top of the board for "bragging rights and social capital" (Kapp, 2012, p. 34). Memrise users can also achieve certain statuses and badges by studying enough to reach certain point totals. These awards can also extrinsically motivate students into continued participation in activities, like word card practice, that are perhaps inherently not particularly entertaining.

Another important component of any vocabulary course is selecting words that will offer the most benefit in terms of students' development. High-frequency words lists are naturally an essential component of a basic vocabulary course as they offer students the best returns in terms of text coverage (Nation, 2013). In terms of useful word frequency lists available to instructors setting up a MALL-based program, the New General Service List (Browne, Culligan, & Phillips, 2013) offers teachers and students a high frequency word list based on modern corpora that also gives a high degree of coverage (90.34% in the Cambridge Educational Corpus) from 2,818 words. The New General Service List can also be accessed via a number of online flash card programs such as Memrise and Quizlet. The use of high frequency word lists also has the added benefit of avoiding interference caused by the study of vocabulary in semantic sets (e.g., grouping words by topic like 'clothes' or fruit'). It has been shown that this common practice in many teaching materials actually has a negative effect on the efficient memorization of these items and should be avoided as much as possible by educators (Nation, 2013). Grouping words by frequency, while primarily highlighting the most important words to learners, also has the added benefit of sidestepping this practice of semantic grouping.

As in the case of training students in using technology, some class time should be set aside at the start of a course to have a discussion, be it in English or in the students' L1, about the necessity for vocabulary learning. An open and honest dialogue about the contextual constraints, such as time, that both instructor and student face, a simplified presentation of important findings from L2 vocabulary research, and an explanation of the benefits of studying high-frequency words allows students 'behind the curtain', making them partners, rather than subjects, in an

endeavour. This greater sense of involvement in the course, it is hoped, will translate into a heightened sense of purpose, and a higher likelihood of sustained active participation.

Assessment and evaluation

In many ways the fundamental tenets of extensive reading, such as allowing independent, minimally regulated reading for pleasure, defy the notion of formal testing. Day and Bamford (2002) state that ER differs greatly from standard classroom practice and this includes informing students that there will be no test on what they have read. Additionally, a formal testing approach runs counter to standard practice in this instructor's context, where no assessment structure is in place, as students often attend *eikaiwa* for a casual, hobby-like experience (Kubota, 2011). There are, however, approaches that teachers can adopt that serve to indirectly monitor student progress whilst simultaneously deepening understanding of texts and stimulating group members' interest in ER. Post-reading class exercises can include a short book review, a book report, or students can prepare a short talk on a broad theme they encountered in the book such as travel, fear, or dating. These differ in essence from formal testing as, rather than seeking to measure or grade student comprehension like a standardized test item, they act as an opportunity to share their feelings and opinions about what they have read freely, be it in English or, in a monolingual classroom, the students' L1. To address more practical needs, a simple digital spreadsheet (Appendix 3) can be used to monitor which books are being borrowed by whom, as well as individual students' reading totals over the course of the year. Students' book ratings (A-E) can also be recorded on this sheet and from this information quarterly book leader boards could be presented in class in order to inform readers of the most popular books among their peers.

Assessing student progress, and therefore the effectiveness of the course itself, with MALL software has thankfully developed substantially since Taylor's (2009) study, where lack of student monitoring was suggested to be a major contributory factor for lacklustre student participation. Modern flash card sites like Memrise and Quizlet feature some method by which teachers can check on each student's progress in a course via either point scores on a leader board, running counts of numbers of words learned, or by highlighting class performance history on each lexical item encountered. These records can be accessed at any time by the instructor as long as an internet connection is available. Furthermore, Memrise includes a forum function where students can ask questions and flag technical problems online for the instructor, thus opening up another avenue for support to students who are studying outside of class hours. For a more traditional approach to assessment and monitoring of student progress, Quizlet features a Test feature that allows students to test themselves on word set content online and record their score, or teachers can create a printable test sheet that can be printed out and given to students periodically in class.

Whether the approach to autonomous vocabulary study in *eikaiwa* is centred on extensive reading, decontextualized word card study, or both, two conditions must be satisfied in order to stand any real chance of sustained participation. The first essential element is adequate student preparation or training. In many senses, the idea of pleasure reading for language learning arguably deviates from some beliefs held in the Japanese public school system that students were previously a part of. Also, despite adults using smart phones on a daily basis for communication

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and leisure, many are unfamiliar with the use of such technology for an educational purpose. Therefore, an instructor looking to implement these components into a language course needs to provide a guided period of learner training where students can become comfortable with what could be considered new and alien concepts.

   The second condition that must be fulfilled is the provision of continuous dialogue with students over the duration of a course. Although both ER and MALL include a number of features that go some way to cultivating and maintaining positive student affect, this alone is insufficient for ensuring long-term participation. Instructors should encourage student feedback via periodic surveys, utilize activities that promote a cooperative team-like atmosphere, like sharing book reviews and online forum posts, and act as learner role models via active participation in these study methods themselves. Through a simultaneously shared and autonomous learning experience, it is hoped that an out-of-class vocabulary course component will be hardy enough to weather inevitable dips in motivation and encourage students to take control over and responsibility for their own learning in a context where institutional support or advice may be sparse.

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APPENDIX 1

Student questionnaire sheet

How important are these things for your own English study?
(5 - most important, 1 - least important)

下記の項目はあなたの英語学習にとってどのくらい重要ですか?
（５-とても重要、１-全然重要ではない）

Improving grammar　文法の強化

1	2	3	4	5

Increasing my vocabulary　語彙を増やす

1	2	3	4	5

Having more chances to practice listening　リスニングを練習する機会を増やす

1	2	3	4	5

Having more chances to practice speaking　スピーキングを練習する機会を増やす

1	2	3	4	5

Having more chances to practice reading　リーディングを練習する機会を増やす

1	2	3	4	5

Having more chances to practice writing　ライティングを練習する機会を増やす

1	2	3	4	5

Having more time for textbook exercises　教科書で勉強する時間を増やす

1	2	3	4	5

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APPENDIX 2

Eikaiwa instructor homework question responses

Hey H, do you usually set homework for your adult classes?

depends
some are okay w it some not

Hey M, do you usually set homework for your adult classes?

hey man, no i dont

K, do you usually set homework for your adult classes?

Yes, but it was mostly to be prepared to add something for discussion. Most students write things down, like a journal entry. Some could care less and never bothered. I did often ask them to read the text reading before the next lesson so they could ask questions.

W, do you usually set homework for your adult classes?

Depends on the class and students in them. But yes, I do give homework. Not regularly though. My expectations are too low for regular homework. If it's a private or company class I will give more, however. Most of the time it's reading. But I have assigned small presentations or journal writing.

B, do you usually set homework for your adult classes?

Not company classes
Usually with my private classes
What kind of thing do you set?

I send them home with reading exercises mostly short stories

G, when you were in (school name), did you usually set homework for your adult classes?

Usually not. I would ask classes their preference.. usually got overwhelming no votes. Mentioned people could ask privately for their own hw, very few takers.

APPENDIX 3

Extensive reading record sheet

Extensive Reading Record Sheet

Name	

Date YYYY/MM/DD	Time		Hours: Minutes	Title	Level	Words	Recom-menda-tion	Comments
	Start	End						
			0:00					
			0:00					
			0:00					
			0:00					
			0:00					
			0:00					
			0:00					
			0:00					
			0:00					
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			0:00					