M-Reader in the Center for English as a Lingua Franca

ELFセンターにおけるM-Readerの使用

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ABSTRACT

M-reader (www.mreader.org) is a free internet site which is helping Center for English as a Lingua Franca (CELF) teachers to manage extensive reading (ER) more effectively in their courses. In short, teachers are using this system to verify whether students have read and understood a graded reader book or not. This is achieved by students taking online quizzes designed to test their understanding of a book's plot and characters, rather than how well they remember the book. Through the M-Reader system, teachers and students can easily track the number of books and the number of words read. In this paper, the authors briefly introduce M-reader, and report on students' and teachers' utilisation of the program in their ELF classes. The authors hope that this article can be a reference for English language teachers and program administrators who are interested in using M-reader as well as provide an insight into how teachers are incorporating extensive reading into their ELF syllabus.

KEYWORDS: M-reader, Extensive Reading, ELF

1. EXTENSIVE READING & M-READER

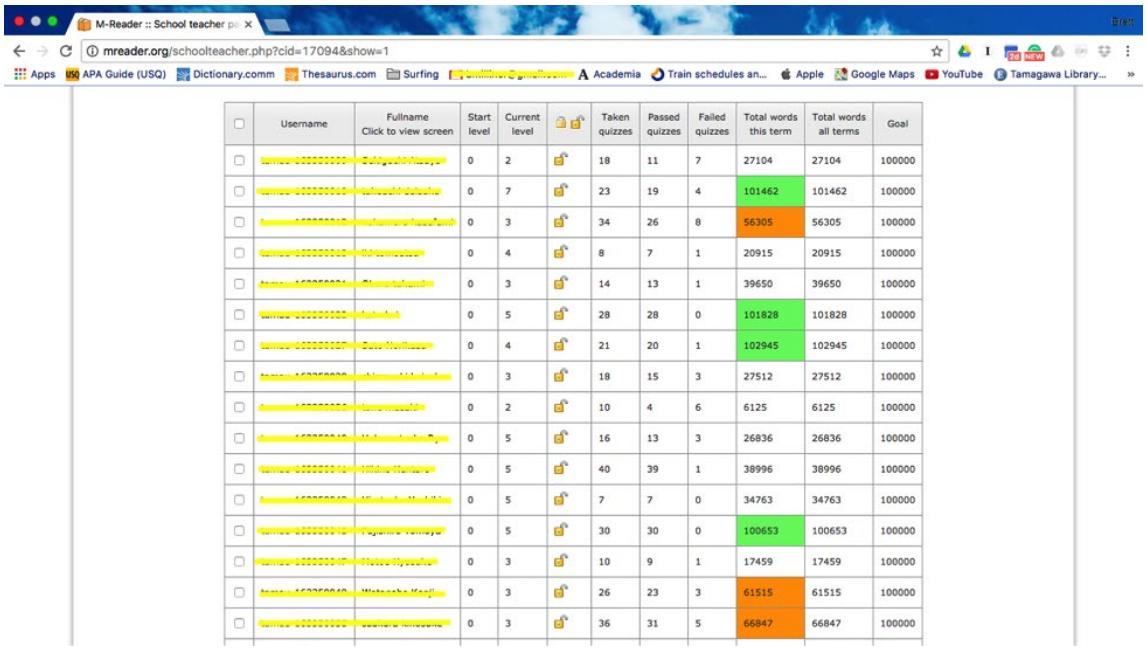
1.1 Extensive Reading

The popularity of extensive reading (ER) components in English language programs throughout Japan are a reflection of the growing body of research advocating the benefits of this approach. Most ER programs share a common purpose: that learners read large quantities of self-selected, simplified texts in an environment which

promotes the enjoyment of reading in a foreign language (Day & Bamford, 1998; Renandya, 2007). Contemporary research (e.g., Beglar Hunt & Kite, 2012; Jeon & Day, 2015) has demonstrated ER's superiority over other approaches (e.g., intensive reading) for reading skill development and claimed that it should be part of all language learning programs (Nakanishi, 2015).

1.2 M-Reader

M-Reader is a free internet site designed to help teachers to verify whether students have read and understood a graded reader book. The site uses online quizzes designed to test reader's understanding of plot and characters. When students pass a quiz, the book and the total number of words in that book are added to the student's M-Reader records (as displayed in Figure 1 below).



Username	Fullname Click to view screen	Start level	Current level	Taken quizzes	Passed quizzes	Failed quizzes	Total words this term	Total words all terms	Goal
[redacted]	[redacted]	0	2	18	11	7	27104	27104	100000
[redacted]	[redacted]	0	7	23	19	4	101462	101462	100000
[redacted]	[redacted]	0	3	34	26	8	56305	56305	100000
[redacted]	[redacted]	0	4	8	7	1	20915	20915	100000
[redacted]	[redacted]	0	3	14	13	1	39650	39650	100000
[redacted]	[redacted]	0	5	28	28	0	101828	101828	100000
[redacted]	[redacted]	0	4	21	20	1	102945	102945	100000
[redacted]	[redacted]	0	3	18	15	3	27512	27512	100000
[redacted]	[redacted]	0	2	10	4	6	6125	6125	100000
[redacted]	[redacted]	0	5	16	13	3	26836	26836	100000
[redacted]	[redacted]	0	5	40	39	1	38996	38996	100000
[redacted]	[redacted]	0	5	7	7	0	34763	34763	100000
[redacted]	[redacted]	0	5	30	30	0	100653	100653	100000
[redacted]	[redacted]	0	3	10	9	1	17459	17459	100000
[redacted]	[redacted]	0	3	26	23	3	61515	61515	100000
[redacted]	[redacted]	0	3	36	31	5	66847	66847	100000

Figure 1. An example of M-Reader's class summary page for teachers.

Both teachers and students can view information on the number of books and the number of words read. This data makes it easier for teachers to monitor reading progress and it provides a standardised system of measurement (words read) which can be used to evaluate and motivate students to read in larger quantities. On the students' side, M-Reader can help them monitor their ER progress, and it promotes greater accountability (Rob & Kano, 2013). For a detailed description of the M-Reader system and how to use it, please visit the website (http://mreader.org/) or read McBride & Milliner (2016).

2. ER IN CELF COURSES

Although it is not a required course component, CELF teachers are recommended to incorporate ER into their syllabus. Should teachers choose to incorporate ER, they are asked to dedicate no more than 10% of total grades to ER; and dedicate only 5% from reading or listening and speaking assessment. In CELF classes, one can observe teachers using a variety of systems to manage and evaluate ER. For example, teachers use book reports, ER logs and book presentations to evaluate student work and make students accountable for their reading. Moreover, how much reading is required of students differs between each class.

In the next sections, the authors report on ten teachers and 359 students' usage of the M-Reader system.

2.1 CELF teachers' incorporation of M-Reader

Following fall semester 2016, the ten CELF teachers using M-Reader completed an online questionnaire asking about their implementation of M-Reader. Table 1 (below) provides a summary of their responses. In this summary, one can observe a large difference between word targets set by each teacher. For example, to achieve 10%, students in one 300-level class were set a target of 45,000 words while in another it was 150,000. There were also variations in how ER effort was rewarded and whether teachers allowed ER during class time. When asked to reflect on using M-Reader, most teachers had very positive remarks. Many appreciated how it helped them manage ER. A couple of teachers noted how this system encouraged students to read more. For example, "In one of my classes students really took to M-Reader and getting very high word counts almost became a competition." In relation to students reading more, another teacher highlighted the need for curriculum leaders to discuss how ER can be more effectively implemented.

> I think ER is great, but I just wish there was more teachers doing ER properly, i.e. reading a lot of words. Many students are getting off too easy with few books (i.e. four or five books that only take minutes to read), or they are getting extensive projects on easy books (effectively turning extensive reading into intensive reading for those students). I want the students to get something out of it, and I generally found the students who did it right were doing well in other aspects of the class as well.

Another concern raised by teachers was students trying to cheat the system. One issue was related to students colluding to answer quiz questions. Even though book discussions and the sharing of interesting titles among classmates ought to be encouraged, it should be considered cheating when one student answers a quiz on behalf of another. To prevent such a case, a setting within M-Reader, which allowed students to take a quiz every 12 hours was implemented to prevent students from

asking others to take multiple quizzes on their behalf (and to promote constant reading). Some teachers also used M-Reader's "check for cheating" function to identify cases where students had (a) taken the same quiz at a similar time, or (b) taken multiple tests in common. Moreover, making this capability known to students seemed effective as a deterrent measure.

A final concern relates to students reading books based on popular movie titles. Although the authors recognise the potential of watching movies to reinforce comprehension of the story when they do read the book before or after watching the movie, the drawback is, however, that students can often pass the quiz without reading the book and earn massive word counts without much effort. One measure a teacher took to appease both sides was setting a rule that movie books would be counted after students reached a specific word target. Teachers concerned about movie quizzes are able to ask M-Reader administrators to close tests relating to popular movie titles or simply establish a verbal rule that no movie books would be counted.

Table 1

How CELF teachers incorporated M-Reader (N=10)

Teacher	Class Level(s)	Word Target (to get maximum points)	ER Points	Reading in class (30 classes)
1	100 300	100=100,000 300=150,000	10% 10%	✓ 28/30
2	300	300=45,000	10% & bonus Reading & Writing points	X
3	100	100=300,000	10%	✓ 7/30
4	100 200	100=15,000 200=20,000	5%	X
5	200	200=80,000	5% Used a bonus to overall grade	✓ 15/30
6	200	200=80,000	10%	X
7	100 200 300	100=40,000 200=60,000 300=100,000	10%	X
8	300 400	300=45,000 400=45,000	10%	✓ 25/30
9	200	200=20,000	6% used as a bonus score	✓ 15/30
10	300	300=5 books	5%	X

Note: *The ELF levels correlate with CEFR levels: 100-A2, 200-A1, 300-B1, 400-B2

2.2 CELF student's utilisation of M-Reader

M-Reader user logs were analysed to uncover how much reading students did. Table 2 (below) presents a summary of reading engagement across the different ELF class levels.

Table 2

Summary of M-Reader log data for ELF students (N=359)

Class level	Number of students	Average word count	Average passed quizzes	Word targets	Average words/ target	Range	Standard Deviation
100	132	31666	13	15000-100000	68%	0-110589	29387.12
200	103	35086	10	20000-60000	126%	0-119250	24659.05
300	105	50077	7	40000-100000	109%	0-165368	39000.59
400	19	45701	3	45000	102%	11376-71796	14500.78
Total	359	38775	9.91	15000-100000	99%	0-165368	31196.62

2.2.1 Overall words read

Most students reached their class' word targets. As illustrated in Table 2, the highest word counts achieved at each of the ELF levels were: 110,589 for 100 levels, 119,250 for 200, 165,368 for 300, and, 71,796 for 400. Although these participants and many others showed an extraordinary amount of effort, many students appeared to have stopped reading once they reached their word targets. Each class also had one or two students who did not participate at all. In some cases, it was due to students withdrawing, while in others it was because students waited until the very end of the semester to do their reading.

2.2.2 Average Passed Quizzes

As the level of the course increased, the average passed quizzes figures decreased. This decrease can be explained by higher-level graded readers having a larger word count. Therefore, one can observe higher-level students taking fewer quizzes to reach their reading target.

4. CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, the authors reported on students' and teachers' utilisation of M-Reader in their ELF classes. Overall, the majority of students displayed legitimate engagement with M-reader, and met their teacher's expectations. The variety of amounts read by students may reflect that some students are more interested in ER than others. As a result, teachers need to be mindful of this issue when setting reading targets and rewarding student work. Teachers also have to carefully train and monitor their students using this system so that access becomes seamless and regular reading becomes pleasurable.

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