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USING INDIVIDUAL AND INTERACTIVE ACTIVITIES TO INITIALLY SCAFFOLD EXTENSIVE READING AT A JAPANESE UNIVERSITY[1]

ABSTRACT. This paper provides a glimpse into a Japanese university's English language classroom. It explores a challenge that many language instructors there face – how to help non-language majors begin extensive reading. It questions the usual expectation that students are able to read graded readers proficiently and independently from the beginning. Rather, it proposes an alternative approach, scaffolding students through their initial extensive reading experiences using individual reading and writing tasks and interactive speaking activities. These activities help students meet five challenges that many less-experienced readers face when beginning to read fiction, particularly narrative: how to understand tenses, discourse markers, new vocabulary, reported speech, and pronouns. Using a questionnaire, teacher diaries and student writing, Japanese university non-English major students' perceptions of this scaffolded approach were investigated in this pilot study. Students (n=41) felt that this alternative approach helped them address the five reading challenges. The paper concludes with some suggestions for further ways to improve this approach.

Keywords: Extensive reading, Japan, Scaffolding, University.

Introduction

Extensive reading has become increasingly popular around the world in recent years, and is now offered in many university English programs in Japan and even in Japanese public libraries (Nishizawa, 2015). Consistent with an underlying philosophy that emphasizes a reader-centered, inductive and natural process, most students start extensive reading with simplified fiction books that are so easy to understand that even novice readers can read them individually

and independently, and relatively quickly (Waring, 2000). This approach appears to be reasonably effective for many students, and in fact the shock of freedom and independence this approach offers students who are more used to traditional approaches can be truly motivating.

However, the 'deep end approach' does not appear to work for some, especially less-proficient students, who seem to start lost and often stay lost. These students find the features of narrative bewildering, with an array of tenses and discourse markers, enigmatic pronouns, and plots developed through conversations in which readers find it difficult to know who is speaking. Even some reasonably competent students experience an initial period of frustration because of these challenges.

As relatively experienced English language instructors teaching a variety of first-year non-language majors in Japanese universities, these challenges have confronted us in our classrooms. With the goal of helping every student begin extensive reading as smoothly as possible, a variety of approaches to beginning extensive readers were developed and trialed over a number of semesters. Some of these were more successful than others. One of the more successful has been a series of individual reading and writing activities and interactive speaking activities that seem to help transition less-experienced students into becoming more proficient readers. This paper shares the results of a pilot study that sought feedback from two groups of engineering students.

After defining extensive reading and explaining how extensive reading is conducted in Japanese universities, the next section explains how students in many programs begin extensive reading and then describes five challenges that many of these students face. In the following section, the individual reading and writing and interactive speaking activities are described in some detail, along with how the study was conducted. The section after that presents the results of the study, and the paper concludes with a discussion of the implications of these findings and how this alternative approach could be further improved.

Extensive Reading

Defining extensive reading

According to Bamford and Day (2004), extensive reading is "an approach to language teaching in which learners read a lot of easy material in the new language. They choose their own reading material and read it independently of the teacher. They read for general, overall meaning, and they read for information and enjoyment" (p. 1). Extensive reading is often contrasted with intensive reading, which involves a close and detailed reading of relatively difficult texts. The main purpose of intensive reading is not to practice the skill of reading but rather to learn new vocabulary and grammar. The pace of reading is slow. As many words are unknown, the reader must stop regularly to check the meaning of these words, and the grammar may be quite difficult to

understand, requiring time for the student to achieve comprehension. In summary, there is little actual opportunity for practice of the skill of reading in intensive reading because not enough text is read (Waring, 2000). By contrast, a lot of text is read in extensive reading, with the main goal of increasing students' reading fluency.

The most common types of materials that are used in extensive reading are simplified fiction and non-fiction books called graded readers. These books are divided into a number of difficulty levels, ranging from very simple texts to texts that are almost native level. Easier books are short and use very simple grammar and limited vocabulary. Higher-level books use progressively more complex grammar and a wider range of vocabulary.

The process of extensive reading

How exactly does extensive reading increase students' reading fluency? Cognitive processing models provide an explanation. They assume that human beings have limited information-handling capabilities. When first learning to read, readers have to devote considerable effort to decode letters to understand individual words. As learners meet a word a number of times, they develop automatic recognition of individual words, so processing ability is freed up and able to be applied to other lower-level processing subtasks, such as attending to form (syntax) and meaning (semantics) (Grabe, 2009). This automaticity also

releases cognitive resources for "higher-level processing (e.g. identifying main ideas and connecting them with supporting ideas, drawing inferences, and evaluating information in relation to background knowledge)" (Gillis-Furutaka, 2015, p. 2). The more cognitive resources that are available for this higher-level processing, the faster that students are able to read. Thus, learners should be encouraged to read as many graded readers as possible, choosing books that are slightly too easy for them, so as to slowly build up their automatic recognition of ever more difficult individual words and grammar patterns.

Extensive reading programs in Japanese universities

In Japanese universities, graded readers are either brought to the classroom by the teacher or are more commonly kept in a book room or the school library for students to borrow independently. Most teachers expect students to read primarily outside the classroom, but many teachers also provide periods of silent sustained reading time during class time. Some teachers also use reading circles to help students explore the text together.

In principle, students' comprehension of graded readers is not tested (Bamford & Day, 2004). However, extensive reading in Japanese universities is usually conducted within programs that require some form of assessment, so students are often required to do tasks such as keeping a reading log, writing short book reports, or explaining the book story to a partner. Recently, many

teachers at Japanese universities have begun to use online programs such as MReader (http://mreader.org) to both track how many words students have read and also to ensure that students have actually read their graded readers (Bieri, 2015).

Research in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context in Japan by Nishizawa, Yoshioka and Itoh (2010) found that university students who engaged in extensive reading increased their reading speed, developed more positive attitudes toward English, and also achieved higher TOEIC (Test Of English for International Communication) scores. TOEIC is a commonly used test in Japan for assessing English proficiency. Beglar and Hunt (2014) also found that lower-intermediate Japanese university EFL students who read an average of 200,000 'standard words' per year experienced significant gains in English reading ability.

How students at many Japanese universities begin extensive reading

Little research has been conducted in Japan on how teachers introduce extensive reading to students and how they get students to begin reading the graded readers, apart from Croker and Yamanaka (2012). However, both main sources of teaching ideas for extensive reading commonly used in Japan (Bamford & Day, 2004; Waring, 2000) advise teachers to begin in the following fashion (the following is abridged from Waring, 2000, pp. 18-19):

1. Explain to learners the differences between extensive reading and intensive reading, for example by using Waring's (2000) *The Oxford University Press Guide on the 'why' and 'how' of using graded readers*, available in both English and Japanese.

2. Explain to learners the aims, goals and objectives of the reading program.

3. Show some graded readers and point out their main features (e.g. the difficulty levels, the glossary and so forth).

4. Assign reading page goals (i.e. the number of pages learners are expected to read each week and/or semester).

5. Explain the procedures for borrowing graded readers (e.g. from the library).

6. Explain the assessment procedures (e.g. keeping a reading log and doing MReader).

7. Advise the learners about the guidelines they should use for selecting a book.

8. At home, learners read their books, and complete the assessment procedures.

9. In subsequent classes, learners can discuss their reading, or use it as a base for their writing classes if time permits.

This approach provides important information to help students understand the principles and practice of extensive reading. This is essential, given that extensive reading is very different to the intensive, grammar translation reading experiences that most first-year Japanese university students had in high school. This approach to introducing extensive reading is based on the assumption that

students will naturally be able to understand a graded reader if they begin with a book that is appropriate for their level: "The only necessity is that the students already have a basic knowledge of, and are literate in, the foreign or second language" (Bamford & Day, 2004, p. 1). For students who are reasonably proficient in English, or who have experience reading literature in Japanese, this assumption might well be correct.

The challenges some students have with this approach

However, "despite its benefits, not all students immediately take to an extensive reading program" (Bamford & Day, 2004, p. 4). One reason for this may be that at least some students, even relatively proficient students, do not initially have the reading skills and experience to independently read and understand a fiction book written in a foreign language. To help such students, teachers could scaffold their students into beginning extensive reading, helping them face the following five reading challenges:

> (i) Not being aware of tenses. This is less of a problem in easier graded readers, but can become a problem in more difficult readers. Tense is often used not just to show changes in narrative. It is also used in indirect reported speech and for indicating probability.

> (ii) Not recognizing discourse features such as time markers, especially relative time markers (for example, 'the next day', 'two weeks later',

'the following month', and so on). Time markers are often crucial to properly understand a story, particularly mysteries and even romance stories and dramas, so if students do not understand or do not think about time markers they are often a bit mystified as they read through a book.

(iii) Not understanding key vocabulary terms that are crucial to understand the story (Simensen, 1987). Students also seem to forget that many graded readers have a glossary at the back of the book, or do not develop the habit of using it when reading.

(iv) Not knowing which character is talking in a conversation in direct reported speech, or understanding what is being said in indirect reported speech. This can be rather frustrating for students, as much of the story development in graded readers is provided through dialogue between characters.

(v) Not knowing what or which character is being referred to by pronouns (e.g. he, she, they). This is less of a problem when the main characters are different genders, but it can be quite problematic when they are of the same gender. Sometimes, this can significantly interfere with students' understanding of the story (Gillis-Furutaka, 2015; Simensen, 1987).

It is tempting to ignore these challenges, and hope that students will either not have them or be able to work through them and find their own solutions to them, as many do. However, there are at least three arguments for adopting a more active, supportive approach to helping Japanese university students begin extensive reading. The first argument is that there are some students who truly

do find it difficult to 'take to' extensive reading, and who really do need help to overcome the basic challenges of understanding a narrative fiction book written in a foreign language. If these students do not overcome these basic challenges, the risk is that they will not take to extensive reading at all. This is a real risk for the very students who might benefit the most from extensive reading. The second argument is that many students will probably, over time, find their own ways of overcoming the personal challenges they face in reading graded readers. However, a more active, supportive approach will help them to move through these challenges quickly and with less frustration, making their initial extensive reading experiences more pleasant and positive, motivating them to read more and with greater frequency. Finally, the third argument is that as this alternative approach to beginning extensive reading is largely interactive, with students working together to seek solutions to the individual challenges each faces, a classroom community of readers can be built that is based upon problem sharing and problem solving, offering an immediate resource for students as they read ever more difficult texts. Together, these three arguments provide powerful reasons to consider alternative ways of beginning extensive reading to those outlined in Bamford and Day (2004) and Waring (2000).

The Study: An Alternative Way to Begin Extensive Reading

This pilot study reports on one alternative approach to introducing extensive reading. It was conducted at Nanzan University in the 2015 fall semester, in two of Robert's compulsory first-year English communication classes for engineering majors. Robert is Australian and the coordinator of the communication program. He has been doing extensive reading with his students for over a decade, trialing different ways to introduce extensive reading. The students in this study were in the most proficient class of engineering majors, with an average TOEIC score of between 450 and 500 (of a possible 990 total). There were 30 students in each class and 45 out of the 60 students were male. All of the students were between 18 and 20 years old. The English communication class met twice a week for two fifteen-week semesters, and extensive reading was introduced in the second half of the second semester.

To evaluate how students felt about this alternative approach to beginning extensive reading, at the end of the semester students were asked to complete an anonymous, 35-item questionnaire, with both open- and closed-response items. The questionnaire was in simple English, and students could write their answers to the open-response items in either English or Japanese. The questionnaire was first checked by two Japanese students of a similar level to the participants of the study, and two items were simplified that were felt to be too difficult. A total of 41 out of 60 students' responses were included in the analysis. Ten were

female and 31 male. Five students were absent from class the day the questionnaire was administered. Responses from eight incomplete questionnaires were excluded, as were questionnaire responses from six students who had lived overseas and used English in their schooling there, as they had read a lot of stories and so were familiar with the discourse conventions of narratives. A copy of the questionnaire is included in the Appendix.

The first stage

This alternative approach was organized into three stages. The first stage was completed in one 90-minute class. To begin with, students were given a Japanese summary of Waring's (2000) explanation of extensive reading, and after reading it they discussed the idea of extensive reading in pairs. Then, the students in pairs read the same short, starter-level graded reader in class, and then talked about it with each other, describing the plot and the characters. This was to give students an immediate sense of what extensive reading is, and also to begin to build a collaborative classroom community of readers. Each student then wrote a 150-word summary of the story. These summaries helped identify language problems that students had writing about a graded-reader story, and on the whole reflected the challenges outlined above, although problems that arose when producing language may not necessarily have been indicative of problems with language comprehension:

(i) Many students mixed their tenses inappropriately.

(ii) Most students were unsure how to use discourse markers, particularly relative time markers.

(iii) Some students ignored or misunderstood key vocabulary items.

(iv) Many students had not understood the plot that was carried in the conversations.

(v) Some students were not sure which people personal pronouns referred to.

This summary served to help identify challenges that students faced, and confirmed the need to address them in the second stage.

The second stage

The second, main stage of the activities to introduce extensive reading is the principal focus of this study. Over three 90-minute classes, all of the students read the same, level-one graded reader, *Goodbye Mr Hollywood* (Escott, 2000), and did the following six class activities:

(i) Individual reading: The students read the chapter silently by themselves. This helped familiarize them with the story, and gave them the opportunity to experience reading fluently.

(ii) Pair reading: The students then read the chapter together out loud in pairs, reading one sentence each in turn and then asking each other if they did not understand something in the text. Students asked each other many questions, particularly about some of the anticipated language challenges. Although reading the text aloud might seem a rather mechanical activity, it forced students to attend to the language closely, and gave them the opportunity to talk about and ask questions to each other about the language in the text that they did not understand, so on the whole it was done carefully and thoughtfully.

(iii) Reading the conversations in the text together: The students then went through the chapter again, picking out and reading together only the conversations. Each partner read a different character's lines. This was challenging for students, as they had to work out who was speaking.

(iv) Explaining the story to each other: The students went through and took turns summarizing the story in English, paragraph by paragraph. This required them to focus closely on the story, and to take note of tenses, discourse features, vocabulary, and pronouns. It also gave students the opportunity to check their understanding with their partner in a stress-free environment, and a chance to intensively use the language in the text.

(v) Asking questions: The students changed partners and took turns to think of questions and ask them to each other in English. This was also quite challenging. It required them to step back from the text. The process of asking questions meant that the students had to understand the story more deeply. It also gave the students a chance to check the

meaning of particular words and parts of the story that they did not understand.

(vi) Writing a summary of the story: The students wrote a minimum 150-word summary in English of the chapter(s) that they had read in that 90-minute class. Many students wrote a much longer summary, up to 400 words, choosing to complete it for homework. Writing the summary was the ultimate goal of these three classes, and concentrated the minds of the students throughout the first five activities. Students began writing the summary in class, and faster writers could finish it in the class. The students who preferred to write more slowly finished writing their summary for homework.

(vii) Optional activities: If a pair finished any activities earlier than the rest of the class, students were invited to do additional activities, such as:
- describing the pictures in the book
- testing each other on the new words in the English-English glossary – partner one reading out the definition and partner two trying to guess the word
- describing their favorite character and why they like them
- explaining whether they like the chapter or not, and why.

The third stage

In the third and final stage, conducted over the following three weeks, students read three of their own, different graded readers outside class, and during class they explained the story to a partner. Each student then wrote a minimum 150-word report to summarize their own story.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the results of the study, based upon data from the questionnaire. It seeks to understand how students felt about the alternative approach to beginning extensive reading. There are three parts to this section: students' opinions about using *Goodbye Mr Hollywood* as the class reader, students' perspectives about the six class activities done using *Goodbye Mr Hollywood*; and students' thoughts on which individual language skills they developed using the class activities. Quantitative results are presented in tables and explained in the text; a four-point Likert scale was used for all of the closed-response questions. Students' written answers to open-response items are used to elaborate on the quantitative data, along with notes from Robert's teacher diary and a simple error analysis of the language in students' written summaries.

The class book, Goodbye Mr Hollywood

Deciding which book to use as the class book was a very important decision to make, as it was decided that the class book had to meet four criteria:

> (i) Sufficient examples of language that would help students meet the five challenges outlined above:
> - a variety of tenses (e.g. the present tenses and the past tenses)
> - a variety of discourse markers

- a glossary at the back of the book listing vocabulary that could be challenging for students

- a lot of direct reported speech that carried crucial parts of the plot

- characters of the same gender appearing in the same scenes, so readers would have to think carefully about which character(s) each pronoun was referring to.

(ii) An interesting story with likeable characters that Japanese university students could relate to, able to keep students motivated and engaged for the entire book. In other words, the book had to be a good read.

(iii) Grammar and vocabulary that were not difficult for students, but also not too easy.

(iv) Short enough to be able to be read and explored in three 90-minute class periods.

Fulfilling these four criteria was rather difficult, particularly as every person seems to have their own preferences for what makes a good book. There are many good graded readers available, and different level-one graded readers had been trialed in the past, all of which had met the first criteria. However, *Goodbye Mr Hollywood* (Escott, 2000) was the only book that seemed to meet the second, rather subjective criteria, and also the last two, rather more objective ones.

The first section of the questionnaire asked about students' biodata; the second section sought to verify our hunch that *Goodbye Mr Hollywood* was an

appropriate class reader (see Table 1). The results indicate that, on the whole, students liked the book very much (3.12 on a scale of 4: question B1) and would recommend it as an appropriate class book (3.10: question B4). Students who liked the book felt that the story was interesting and well orchestrated, thrilling, and exciting; one student wrote that she "couldn't put the book down." Fourteen students liked the fact that *Goodbye Mr Hollywood* was a mystery, as they liked how the story developed and "imagining what would happen next." Three students became very curious to know who one of the main characters, the mysterious man with white hair, was. Moreover, seven students were satisfied with the ending. One student wrote, "I felt a sense of completion when I finished reading it." On the other hand, three students found the end of the book difficult to understand, as suddenly there were many new characters. Seven students also did not like some of the characters because they felt that they had behaved badly. Overall, however, *Goodbye Mr Hollywood* met the second criteria of being a good read.

The students would also recommend *Goodbye Mr Hollywood* as an appropriate class book for future first-year English for engineering classes. Students noted that "the level was just right" because it was "not too difficult, not too easy." They found that "it is easy to understand each part of the story," for a number of reasons, including that "it's easy to read," "the sentences are nice," and "the vocabulary isn't hard." They also noted that "it's just about the

right length." So, *Goodbye Mr Hollywood* also met the difficulty and length criteria. Overall, then, the book seemed to be a good choice. Confirming our hunch, and reflecting the general class consensus, one student concluded that "it's useful to study English" with *Goodbye Mr Hollywood*.

Table 1: Questionnaire results – opinions about *Goodbye Mr Hollywood*

Questions	Mean (4-point scale)	SD
B1. How much did you enjoy reading *Goodbye Mr Hollywood*?	3.12	0.51
B4. Would you recommend using *Goodbye Mr Hollywood* as the class book next year?	3.10	0.66

Source: Questionnaire, Part B

Class activities:

Another section of the questionnaire explored how students felt about each class activity done with *Goodbye Mr Hollywood* (see Table 2):

(i) Individual reading: This was not directly evaluated in the questionnaire. However, in an open-response question, one student wrote that if students had not done this, it would have been difficult to do the next activity, which was pair reading. In fact, in one class we did skip this step due to time constraints, and students complained during pair reading that they were finding it difficult to read and understand the text, so it seems that starting with individual reading in some form is essential.

(ii) Pair reading: In the first collaborative activity, students read the book out loud together in pairs, taking turns to read each sentence. As noted above, this also gave students the opportunity to ask each other questions about the text. Possibly because of that, students found pair reading to be quite useful (3.16 on a scale of 4: question E1) and also interesting (2.98) but not difficult (2.00). In fact, one student wrote that he would like to read aloud and talk through other graded readers as well. Thus, pair reading seemed to have helped students process the language more carefully and deeply. Perhaps reflecting a preference for a clear understanding of the text, a few students also wanted to check their understanding against a Japanese translation of the book.

(iii) Reading the conversations together: The next activity was to go through and say the conversations together in pairs. Students again found it to be a useful (3.00 on a scale of 4: question E2) and interesting (3.00) activity, and not so difficult (2.27), and students were usually very focused as they worked out who was speaking and trying to understand what the character they were reading was saying.

(iv) Explaining the story: Not surprisingly, the most difficult collaborative activity (3.32 on a scale of 4: question E3) was the students going through and explaining the chapter together with the same partner. One reason this was a challenging task was because "it was difficult to summarize the parts that were just conversation," as one student noted. The students found this activity to be moderately interesting (2.73), and certainly the most useful one (3.43). One student also wanted to go through each chapter as a whole class to make sure that all of the students completely understood it.

(v) Asking questions about the story: This was not directly evaluated in the questionnaire. However, many students wrote about this activity in an open-response question. One student wanted more discussion of the book, whereas another student wanted to have the discussions in Japanese. Different students found discussing the book useful for different reasons. One student noted that "to a certain degree, it was good that we were made to think about what the scenes meant in the story because it helped us to more easily understand the flow of the story," whereas another student really enjoyed talking about the characters. Thus, beyond just explaining the story, the students found it useful to discuss the book as well.

(vi) Writing a summary of the story: The students felt that writing a summary of the chapter was also very useful (3.35 on a scale of 4: question E4), as it gave them the opportunity to check their understanding of the book and practice using the language from the text. Not surprisingly, the students found writing a summary reasonably difficult (3.03) yet quite interesting (2.73). An analysis of the students' writing also indicated that most of the students had overcome the problems evident in their first writing: they had better mastered tense, had understood and could use discourse markers, and had understood the plot of the story even when it was carried in the dialogue.

(vii) Optional activities: The final collaborative activity, for those students who had extra time, was testing a partner on the new words in the glossary. The students found this to be a little difficult (2.46 on a scale of 4: question E5), but still useful (2.89) if less interesting than the other activities (2.59).

Table 2: Questionnaire results – class activities

Questions	Useful (4-point scale)	Interesting (4-point scale)	Difficult (4-point scale)
E1. Saying the chapter together in pairs.	3.16	2.98	2.00
E2. Saying the conversations together in pairs (or small groups).	3.00	3.00	2.27
E3. Explaining the chapter together in pairs.	3.43	2.73	3.32
E4. Writing a summary of the story.	3.35	2.73	3.03
E5. Testing your partner on the new words in the glossary (on pages 41-42).	2.89	2.59	2.46

Source: Questionnaire, Part E

Overall, the students found the class activities to be quite useful, particularly explaining the chapter together in pairs and writing a summary of the story. They also found them to be relatively interesting, particularly reading the text and the conversations (on the surface the more mechanical activities), but also explaining the story to each other and writing a summary. Finally, some activities were more challenging, such as explaining the chapter together in pairs, than other activities, such as simply saying the chapter together in pairs, and talking about the language in the text.

Learning outcomes

Beyond wanting to know how the students felt about the classroom activities, we were also interested to understand the extent to which these activities had helped the students addressed the five reading challenges – tenses,

time markers, key vocabulary, reported speech, and pronouns – and which language skills the students felt that they had improved from reading, talking and writing about *Goodbye Mr Hollywood* (see Table 3).

As would be expected from extensive reading, the students did not feel that they had learned new grammar (2.27 on a scale of 4: question D2) but they did feel that they could understand English grammar better (2.88: question D4). In particular, the students felt that they could use different English tenses better now when speaking (2.88: question D6) and when writing (2.98: question D8). As mentioned above, in their written summaries most of the students had no problems with their tense and pronoun usage. Students concluding that they could better use different tenses when speaking and writing is significant, as it points to the effectiveness of the focused and recursive manner of the class activities – being able to ask questions to a partner when doing pair reading, having to think carefully about the tenses when explaining the story and then asking questions about it, and again when writing a summary of the story. Through the class activities, then, the first challenge of improving tense usage seems to have been addressed.

The students also did not strongly feel that they had learned new words (2.29: question D1) but they did feel that they could better understand how words are used in English (3.05: question D3). They also felt that they could use the words better when speaking (2.83: question D5) and when writing (3.07:

question D7). As mentioned above, in their written summaries most of the students had no problems with their use of discourse markers and key vocabulary. Therefore, getting the students to do reading, speaking and writing were all helpful in developing their lexical knowledge. Naturally, the students found it easiest to understand words when reading and when writing because they had time to go back and check how they were used in the book. Using the new vocabulary in real time when speaking was more challenging, but again the recursive nature of the activities gave the students ample opportunities to practice and explore language. Through the class activities, then, the second and third challenges of better understanding time markers and key vocabulary were also addressed.

From reading the conversations together, the students felt that they had learned how people speak in English (2.98: question D9). Thus, reading the conversations together seems to have addressed the fourth challenge of better understanding dialogue in graded readers. As dialogue plays a more important role in simpler graded readers and often makes up a greater proportion of the text, it is important for the students to be able to know who is speaking when they first start reading graded readers.

In the questionnaires, no data was specifically collected about the fifth challenge, a better understanding of pronoun use, as it was difficult to write a question that was easy enough for the students to understand. However, the

students in their written summaries of *Goodbye Mr Hollywood* had resolved their earlier problems with pronoun usage, suggesting that the activities had helped the students address that fifth challenge. Overall, then, the class activities do appear to have helped the students with all five challenges.

Developing global skills

Finally, we were also interested in looking at the development of global skills. The students felt that they could read more quickly (2.78: question D11), and that their global reading skills had improved (2.85: question C1). Given the purpose and nature of extensive reading, this is to be expected. However, the students also felt that the class activities had helped improve their speaking (2.73: question C2) and particularly their writing (3.02: question C3), which is when their understanding of the text and the language in the text became evident, providing further opportunities to overcome the challenges they face in understanding graded readers. At this relatively low level of reader, this is not so much in meeting new grammar and vocabulary but in being given the chance to review and understand grammar and vocabulary that they already know, both through reading (2.98: question D13) and talking (2.90: question D14) about the book.

Table 3. Questionnaire results – learning outcomes

Questions	Mean (4-point scale)	SD
C1. Did reading *Goodbye Mr Hollywood* help improve your English reading?	2.85	0.57
C2. Did talking about *Goodbye Mr Hollywood* help improve your English speaking?	2.73	0.59
C3. Did writing about *Goodbye Mr Hollywood* help improve your English writing?	3.02	0.52
D1. I learned new words.	2.29	0.81
D2. I learned new grammar.	2.27	0.71
D3. I could better understand how words are used in English.	3.05	0.77
D4. I could better understand English grammar.	2.88	0.64
D5. I could use the English words I read in the book when I told the story with my partner.	2.83	0.63
D6. I could use different English tenses (過去形, 現在進行形) when I told the story with my partner.	2.88	0.56
D7. I could use the English words I read in the book when I wrote about the story.	3.07	0.65
D8. I could use different English tenses (過去形, 現在進行形) when I wrote about the story.	2.98	0.61
D9. From the conversations, I learned how people speak in English.	2.98	0.61
D10. I learned about the culture of other countries.	2.49	0.71
D11. I could read faster in English.	2.78	0.69
D12. I could speak better in English.	2.68	0.57
D13. Reading *Goodbye Mr Hollywood* helped me review the English I already knew.	2.98	0.61
D14. Talking about *Goodbye Mr Hollywood* helped me review the English I already knew.	2.90	0.58

Source: Questionnaire, Parts C and D

Conclusion

This paper provided a glimpse into a Japanese university's English language classroom, exploring how one language instructor faced the problem of helping two groups of non-language majors begin extensive reading. Rather than the usual method of expecting the students to read proficiently from the beginning, an alternative approach that scaffolded the students through their initial extensive reading experiences using individual reading and writing and interactive speaking activities was investigated. The results of the study indicate that these activities helped the students meet five main challenges they face when reading fiction, particularly narrative: how to understand tenses, discourse markers, new vocabulary, reported speech, and pronouns.

This was a pilot study, and data were only gathered from 41 first-year engineering majors, so the results of this study may not be generalizable beyond first-year non-English major university students with average TOEIC scores of 450 to 500. Moreover, the focus of this pilot study was on student opinions rather than on language acquisition. In the 2016 academic year, extensive reading will be introduced from the beginning of the first semester. At that point, a further activity will be added. In the first class, in addition to providing the students with a Japanese version of Waring's (2000) explanation of extensive reading, a written explanation of the five challenges students often face will also be provided. One page of a graded reader will be photocopied onto

the center of a large, A3-size piece of paper. Around this page will be explanations of tense, discourse features, key vocabulary listed in the glossary, which characters were speaking in a conversation, and to whom each pronoun was referring, with arrows pointing to the relevant parts of the text. This will be to provide the students with some tools they can use to talk about the five challenges during their interactive speaking activities.

A further, more extensive study will be conducted in the 2016 spring semester. For that study, an experimental research design will be adopted. One class will begin extensive reading with the interactive speaking activities outlined here, including the new activity. This class will be compared with another class beginning extensive reading following Waring's (2000) suggested approach. Data on the students' interaction during the speaking activities (from recording and transcribing their interaction), feelings of efficacy (using learning diaries and classroom reflections as well as a questionnaire with closed- and open-response items), the students' comprehension of the text (using items from MReader), and writing proficiency (evaluated using written summaries) will be gathered, and the two groups compared. It might well be that for some of the students a 'hands-off approach' is more appropriate, but that for other students a more scaffolded approach works better.

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Appendix: The Questionnaire

What do you think about reading "Goodbye Mr Hollywood"?

This year, we started using "Goodbye Mr Hollywood" in the first-year program. We would like to know what you think about this, so you can help us plan the first-year classes for 2016. Please think carefully about each question. Do not write your name on this sheet.

Section A. About you
A1. What is your gender?   male   female   other

A2. Have you lived in another country?
No.   (Go to **Section B**: **About "Goodbye Mr Hollywood"**.) Yes. (Go to the next question.)

A3. In total, how long did you live outside Japan?   _____ years, _____ months

A4. Which country (or countries) did you live in?

A5. When you lived there, did you use English **at your school**?
       Yes, only English.   Yes, mostly English.
       Yes, but only a little English.   No, I only used Japanese.
       OR I didn't go to school then.

Section B. About "Goodbye Mr Hollywood"
This section asks your opinion about the book, "Goodbye Mr Hollywood."

B1. How much did you enjoy reading "Goodbye Mr Hollywood"?

Very much.   Somewhat.   Not very much.   Not at all.

B2. What **did you enjoy** about the book? (You can write in Japanese)

B3. What **didn't** you enjoy about the book? (You can write in Japanese)

B4. Would you recommend using "Goodbye Mr Hollywood" as the class book next year?
 Yes, very much.   Yes, somewhat.   No, not very much.   No, not at all.

B5. Why is that? (You can write in Japanese)

Section C. How reading "Goodbye Mr Hollywood" helped improve English skills
In this section, think about how reading "Goodbye Mr Hollywood" improved your English skills.

C1. Did **reading** "Goodbye Mr Hollywood" help improve your English **reading**?
Yes, very much.   Yes, somewhat.   No, not very much.   No, not at all.

C2. Did **talking about** "Goodbye Mr Hollywood" help improve your English **speaking**?
Yes, very much.　　　Yes, somewhat.　　　No, not very much.　　No, not at all.

C3. Did **writing about** "Goodbye Mr Hollywood" help improve your English **writing**?
Yes, very much.　　　Yes, somewhat.　　　No, not very much.　　No, not at all.

Section D. How reading "Goodbye Mr Hollywood" helped improve your English generally
How did reading "Goodbye Mr Hollywood" <u>improve your English</u>?

D1. I learned **new words**.
Yes, very much.　　　Yes, somewhat.　　　No, not very much.　　No, not at all.

D2. I learned **new grammar**.
Yes, very much.　　　Yes, somewhat.　　　No, not very much.　　No, not at all.

D3. I could better understand how **words** are used in English.
Yes, very much.　　　Yes, somewhat.　　　No, not very much.　　No, not at all.

D4. I could better understand English **grammar**.
Yes, very much.　　　Yes, somewhat.　　　No, not very much.　　No, not at all.

D5. I could use the English **words** I read in the book when I **told** the story with my partner.
Yes, very much.　　　Yes, somewhat.　　　No, not very much.　　No, not at all.

D6. I could use different English **tenses** (過去形, 現在進行形) when I **told** the story with my partner.
Yes, very much.　　　Yes, somewhat.　　　No, not very much.　　No, not at all.

D7. I could use the English **words** I read in the book when I **wrote** about the story.
Yes, very much.　　　Yes, somewhat.　　　No, not very much.　　No, not at all.

D8. I could use different English **tenses** (過去形, 現在進行形) when I **wrote** about the story.
Yes, very much.　　　Yes, somewhat.　　　No, not very much.　　No, not at all.

D9. From the conversations, I learned how people **speak in English**.
Yes, very much.　　　Yes, somewhat.　　　No, not very much.　　No, not at all.

D10. I learned about the **culture** of other countries.
Yes, very much.　　　Yes, somewhat.　　　No, not very much.　　No, not at all.

D11. I could **read faster** in English.
Yes, very much.　　　Yes, somewhat.　　　No, not very much.　　No, not at all.

D12. I could **speak better** in English.
Yes, very much.　　　Yes, somewhat.　　　No, not very much.　　No, not at all.

D13. **Reading** "Goodbye Mr Hollywood" helped me **review** the English **I already knew**.
Yes, very much.   Yes, somewhat.   No, not very much.   No, not at all.

D14. **Talking about** "Goodbye Mr Hollywood" helped me **review** the English **I already knew**.
Yes, very much.   Yes, somewhat.   No, not very much.   No, not at all.

Section E. About "Goodbye Mr Hollywood" class activities
This section asks you about the activities in class we did with "Goodbye Mr Hollywood."

How useful (to help you learn English), interesting, and difficult were the following activities? Please write the score next to each sentence.
4 = very ___   3 = somewhat ___   2 = not very ___   1 = not _____ at all

	Useful	Interesting	Difficult
E1. Saying the chapter together in pairs.	____	_____	_____
E2. Saying the conversations together in pairs (or small groups).	____	_____	_____
E3. Explaining the chapter together in pairs.	____	_____	_____
E4. Writing a summary of the story.	____	_____	_____
E5. Testing your partner on the new words in the glossary (on pages 41-42).	____	_____	_____