Extensive Reading for Second Language Learners of Japanese in Higher Education: Graded Readers and Beyond

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on the implementation of Japanese extensive reading with international students studying at a Japanese university using graded readers (GRs). GRs chosen for the present study were simplified versions of original Japanese literature and were used to support students in acquiring a top-down reading strategy, a wide range of vocabulary, and Chinese characters. Students were required to read the same GRs, take online quizzes about what they had read, and participate in classroom discussions. Following this, students were introduced to the original texts with glosses and the teacher's support. Results of pre- and post-questionnaires suggested that GRs are useful for leaners at Japanese universities who are still acquiring Chinese characters in the Japanese language, and that reading simplified versions of original Japanese literature allowed learners to understand the original that were too difficult for them to read easily at their Japanese level and learn non-academic vocabulary.

INTRODUCTION

Extensive reading (ER) is one aspect of an approach that is taken in teaching English to speakers of other languages to build vocabulary and develop reading comprehension. Day and Bamford (1998) note that ER encourages students to read and comprehend fluently, without using a dictionary, and that this stands in contrast to intensive reading approaches. Comprehension in ER is conducted using top-down processing in contrast to intensive reading, which relies on a bottom-up approach. Day and Bamford (1998) also emphasize the affective dimension of ER, suggesting that a positive attitude, confidence and motivation to read in the second language may lead to more beneficial results. There are four ways of integrating ER into second language programs. These include implementing (1) a stand-alone course, (2) an ER program as part of an existing reading course, (3) a noncredit addition to an existing reading course, or (4) an extracurricular activity (Day & Bamford, 1998, pp. 41–42). There are many classroom activities and ways to build reading communities associated with ER so that teachers can select the most appropriate methods according to their purpose and context (Day & Bamford, 1998, pp. 126–139).

ER for Japanese Second Language Learners

ER has been adopted as an approach for teaching Japanese to speakers of other languages. However, it is not a common approach in higher education programs focusing on Japanese as a second language (JSL) because it is time consuming and qualitatively different to existing reading courses that are typically offered. To manage time restraints, a blended ER instruction involving e-learning and classroom discussion, was implemented as a noncredit addition to an existing reading course (Nakano, 2013).

Another challenge of ER is that there are few appropriate Japanese graded readers (GRs) that can be integrated into an ER approach. Previous research used small-sized paperbacks (Ikeda, 2008), children's books (Hitosugi & Day, 2004), and other materials such as newspapers, magazines and websites (Wei, 2006). ER lessons in which all learners simultaneously read the original forms of short novels without using a dictionary were also introduced (Fukumoto, 2004; Goda, Iijima, Noda & Yoshida, 2005). There has been a gradual increase in the number of Japanese GRs, and studies have described the use of Japanese GRs (Tabata-Sandom, 2013; Ninomiya & Kawakami, 2012; Kawana, 2013). It remains unclear whether these studies controlled for unknown vocabulary in the GRs used in the ER lessons.

Japanese Graded Readers

GRs are books written for language learners using vocabulary and grammar graded into levels of difficulty. They may either be simplified versions of an original text, often in the public domain, or texts specifically written for the purpose. As the goal of language learning is to read authentic materials written for native speakers, GRs can be considered a bridge between textbooks for language learners and 'real' books for native speakers. For international students in a higher education JSL environment, learning a range of words beyond academic vocabulary, including words associated with Japanese literature through ER can enrich the range and depth of their vocabulary.

Makers of Japanese GRs must decide how Chinese characters, typically used to denote the Japanese language, are treated. As the Japanese language consists of ideograms (namely, Chinese characters, called *kanji*) and phonograms (*kana*), learning *kanji* is a major component of Japanese language learning. The Japanese Graded Readers Project Group (JGRPG) has developed a series of Japanese GRs (*JGR SAKURA*, JGRPG, Tokyo, Japan). JGRPG believes that ER is an efficient way to learn *kanji*, and the same notation of *kanji* commonly used by native Japanese speakers is used in *JGR SAKURA*. All *kanji* are accompanied by *kana*, written above, to show how to pronounce the item. The rationale is that learners who already know the *kanji* will recognize the meaning of the word, and can thus accelerate their reading rate and comprehension. Learners who do not know the *kanji* can guess the meaning of the word, including the *kanji*, from the context in which it is embedded. If learners know how to pronounce the *kanji* from *kana*, they can incidentally acquire the *kanji* through ER (Reynolds, Harada, Yamagata & Miyazaki, 2003).

Japanese ER in JSL Higher Education

In the JSL environment, learners of Japanese come from a range of backgrounds. Learners with a first language that does not use *kanji* (henceforth non-*kanji* users) often have difficulty with *kanji* in reading. Kumada (2013) indicated that non-*kanji* users often believe that they are poor readers because they compare themselves to the *kanji* users in the classroom. However, learners from Chinese character using societies (henceforth *kanji* users) also need to learn Japanese *kanji*

because of the differences in pronunciation between their first languages and Japanese. Even though they are able to access meaning through the *kanji*, they cannot produce them in an appropriate Japanese way or use them in conversation.

Studies of ER in a JSL higher education environment point out the importance of ER for international students (Fukumoto, 2004; Goda et al., 2005). Even though such students may have advanced levels of Japanese proficiency, they may not all have acquired top-down processing strategies because most reading programs for international pre-undergraduate students focus on intensive reading. Matsuoka (1990) indicated that ER where learners read easy reading materials as one of the methods for teaching reading skills with a focus on understanding contents while reading.

For these reasons, GRs are useful reading materials in the JSL higher education environment. At the same time, by using GRs simplified from Japanese literature, it may be expected that learners learn a range of words beyond academic vocabulary, including words associated with Japanese literature. However, while some students welcome the easy vocabulary and syntax in GRs, others found GRs demotivating. Some students don't want to read simplified versions but rather the original version. Tabata-Sandom（2013）investigated L2 Japanese learners' response toward GRs in higher education and mentioned that some advanced learners had an urge to read unmodified Japanese texts even though their level was not enough to read original Japanese literature. Actually, even though very few international students have Japanese proficiency level enough to read the originals, among those who are studying at Japanese universities, there are some students who want to read the originals. Therefore, teachers need to prepare something that motivates advanced learners when they implement ER programs.

Research Subjects

This study implements a program in which international students read the originals after reading GRs using simplified versions of Japanese literature as well as original texts.

Research subjects were as follows:
(1) GRs in which all *kanji* are accompanied by *kana* will be useful for learners of Japanese acquiring *kanji*.
(2) GRs simplified from Japanese literature will be useful for learners of Japanese by introducing Japanese literature and vocabulary including words associated with Japanese literature.

Based on results of a pre- and post-questionnaire given to students, GRs are evaluated and ER lessons discussed in terms of students' Japanese proficiency and use of *kanji* in their first language.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Seventeen international students at a Japanese university participated in the research. There were 13 freshmen (8 Chinese, 4 Korean, 1 Malaysian) and four sophomores (2 Chinese, 1 Korean, 1 Singaporean). Freshmen and sophomores take Japanese as a compulsory course twice a week (90 min ×30 sessions/semester). For freshmen, the goal of the course is to acquire a strategy for

studying at university focusing mainly on academic writing. A goal for sophomores is to be able to construct a convincing argument. As both courses also focus on oral expression and rely on classroom discussions, ER was embedded in them in a blended way. It was the first time that ER had been brought into these courses.

To understand participants' needs and abilities, the Simple Performance-Oriented Test (SPOT), vocabulary assessment, and pre-questionnaire were given to the participants in the first session. In the SPOT test, developed at the University of Tsukuba, an incomplete script appears on the screen. It contains one blank space. An audio file of the sentence is presented and the participant required to choose the correct *kana* character to be placed in the space. A limited amount of time is allowed for each answer. Results of this test correlate with participants' grammar scores and total scores on the placement test from the International Student Center of the university (Kobayashi, 2003). The pre-questionnaire asked about the period of time spent learning Japanese, electronic devices used for reading, and students' opinions about the reading classes. The average period of learning Japanese was 2 years, with the shortest being 1 year, and the longest 5 years. If the period after university entrance is counted, sophomores study Japanese for 1 year longer than freshmen.

Reading Materials

JGR SAKURA is a small library of Japanese GRs divided into eight levels from A to H. The series targets learners from beginner to a higher middle level and was used in this research. The eight titles are as follows: Level A: *Kumo no ito*; level B: *Taro no natsuyasumi*, *Yokohama mystery*; level C: *Ookina boushi no onna*; level D: *Sayonara boku no majo*; level E: *Bocchan*, *Hayashi no oku de*; level F: *Ginda no jikenbo*). The higher the level, the greater the numbers of words (number of morphemes) and the length (number of characters). For example, at level A books contain 390 words and approximately 2000 characters, whereas texts at level H will have 4500 words and more than 30,000 characters. *Kumo no ito* (level A) has 2474 characters, and *Ookina boushi no onna* (level C) has 17,591 characters. The author selected *Kumo no ito* and *Ookina boushi no onna* as assignments for this ER lesson because contents of these two titles suit the discussion topic, although they are at a beginner level which did not fit with the advanced level of many of the students. The eight titles of *JGR SAKURA* were made available as PDF files in the library e-learning system for this ER lesson and in the media center of the university library in paper form.
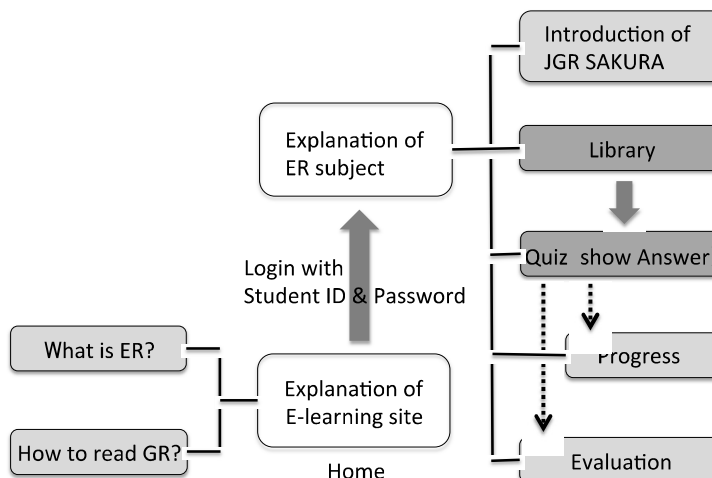
Figure 1. Scheme of the eERlab

e-learning

The author prepared an e-learning system, "eERLab", as shown in Figure 1. Participants read about the e-learning system on the homepage, and could also read relevant information under "What is ER?" and "How to read GRs." The site displayed after participants logged in using their ID numbers and passwords, and provided explanations about the ER assignment and other aspects below:

(1) Introduction to *JGR SAKURA*: shows level and length of each text, and a short introduction to each book. This section aims to support participants when they would like to read beyond their assigned tasks.

(2) Library: Participants can download PDF files of the texts here. After entering their passwords they can read the file, and later delete it from their devices once they finish reading.

(3) Quizzes: Participants were required to answer some questions about the text that they had read. They were asked the following:
  (a) "What medium did you use when reading *JGR SAKURA*?" Participants chose their answers from choices of PC, iPad, iPhone, other electronic device, or paper version.
  (b) Participants evaluated the length, difficulty, contents and illustrations of the story, using a five-point Likert scale. They were asked to indicate the hours spent reading and frequency of dictionary usage from a scale of five.
  (c) Five questions with four choices each were used to identify participants' understanding of the story. Participants were able to use a dictionary if needed because these questions are not tests. Correct answers were displayed after participants submitted their answers.

(4) Progress: Participants' responses to the quizzes were displayed individually alongside their user ID for each story. (Answers to five questions were displayed with an indication of the number of items correct.) This encouraged participants to read more by letting them know how much their classmates had read.

(5) Evaluation: The average score from all participants for each story is displayed. It summarizes information about each text and the evaluation from participants.

ER Lesson

Day and Bamford (1998) pointed out that learners should be able to choose what they read, and thus GRs are developed as autonomous learning materials. However, these authors proposed that all learners read the same book at the same time so that speaking or writing tasks can be used to build a reading community (p. 133). This approach supports the introduction of ER or adding ER to an existing reading course. In this research, the author conducted an ER lesson in which participants read *JGR SAKURA,* wrote reviews, and answered quizzes via e-learning as preparation for class discussion.

The ER lesson took place over two individual sessions. A 2-week interval between the first and second session allowed for preparation time. As a noncredit addition to an existing reading course, the ER lesson was treated as part of the Japanese language course, but the results of quizzes were not included in the course grade, and contents of GRs were not included in the course test. Participants were encouraged to read as many *JGR SAKURA* texts as possible, together with the associated review and quiz tasks.

In the second session of the course, the author explained how to use the e-learning system and undertake the reading assignment steps (1) to (3) below. Using a projector, the author showed how to log in and download files, and explained the purpose of ER, and how it differs from intensive reading. Once their assignments were prepared, participants took part in steps (4) to (6).

(1) Read selected ERs until the ER session day (the eleventh week and the thirteenth week). Participants can chose their preferred medium for reading. Participants who choose electronic books (PDF) read it on their own devices.

(2) The assigned books are *Kumo no ito* for the first session, and *Ookina boushi no onna* for the second. After reading, and writing their reviews (including whether they would recommend the text, interesting points and impressions), participants are given the forms (an A4-sized page) to write reviews. They are then asked to bring the forms to class for each session. The topic of discussion is "If you were the character in the story, what would you have done?"

(3) Answer the quizzes on the e-learning system.

(4) In the ER lesson, form groups of three–four participants and discuss texts according to the review forms. One person from each group will present what they have discussed.

(5) Participants who read beyond the assignment may present their reviews to the classmates.

(6) Half of the ER session time (45 min), was then used for intensive support of reading of the original edition of the texts. Participants had an opportunity to read aloud and teacher explained the story, vocabulary and grammar. *Kumo no ito* was written by Ryunosuke Akutagawa in 1918. Because the original edition of *Ookina boushi no onna* is classical literature, the *JGR SAKURA* version was adapted from a modernized translation of the original.

Questionnaires

An open-ended questionnaire was administered before and after the ER sessions. In the pre-questionnaire, participants were asked about their first language, use of *kanji* in their first language, qualification/level of Japanese proficiency, period and purpose of learning Japanese. They were also asked:

(1) What kind of study did you do in your Japanese reading class?

(2) How would you describe your reading comprehension level? Why do you think so?
(3) Would you like to read GRs?
In the post-questionnaire, participants were asked:
(1) Do you think that GRs will be effective in improving your reading comprehension, if you continue ER? Why do you think so? What other approaches might help you to become better?
(2) Are there any words you memorized through reading GRs? Please give the words if any.
(3) Please give your impressions of this ER lesson.

RESULTS

Participants' Japanese Proficiency and Kanji Use in their First Language

All participants read GRs for the first time, as indicated by their responses to the pre-questionnaire (1). Table 1 shows results of the SPOT and vocabulary tests. The results of the sophomores are higher than the freshmen for both tests, and it is clear that there is a marked difference in Japanese proficiency in the freshmen class indicated by a wide range of scores. The difference in Japanese proficiency linked to use of *kanji* in the first language is shown in the assessment scores. *Kanji* users obtained higher scores in the vocabulary test, and non-*kanji* users performed better on SPOT. To determine the most effective way of presenting an ER lesson, we examined the results of two groups on the vocabulary test: the higher group (8 participants) and the lower group (9 participants), discussed in the following section.

Table 1. Scores for SPOT and Vocabulary Tests Administered to the Study Participants

		Freshmen	Sophomore	*Kanji* user	Non-*kanji* user
SPOT	Average	75	86	75	85
	Variance	219	63	251	20
Vocabulary test	Average	70	80	75	67
	Variance	129	29	101	126

SPOT: Simple Performance-Oriented Test

Participants' Self-Rating of their Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary

Table 2 shows the answer to pre-questionnaire (2). It is suggested that participants' self-rating of their reading comprehension is affected by their vocabulary knowledge because four participants (three freshmen and one sophomore) who answered *bad* or *not good* belong to the lower group. Many of these participants answered that the basis of their choosing these answeres in the pre-questionnaire (2) was the fact that they had many unknown words. Three of the four participants were non-*kanji* users, and two of the three non-*kanji* users belong to the higher group

of SPOT. This result suggests that non-*kanji* users who recognize themselves as lacking vocabulary evaluated their reading comprehension as low. It can be seen that vocabulary test scores of non-*kanji* users tend to be lower than their SPOT scores as shown in Table 1.

Table 2. Self-Rating of Reading Comprehension

Responses to Pre-questionnaire 2	Total	Higher group		Lower group	
		Kanji user	Non-*kanji* user	*Kanji* user	Non-*kanji* user
Very good	2	2	0	0	0
Good	0	0	0	0	0
Fair	11	5	1	5	0
Not good	2	0	0	1	1
Bad	2	0	0	0	2

Participants' Interests in Reading GRs (prior to GR exposure)

Table 3 shows the results of the pre-questionnaire (3) focusing on reading GRs. Of the participants who answered *very much like to read* or *like to read*, three (38%) were in the higher group and five (56%) in the lower group, i.e., a majority (5/8) fell in the lower group on the vocabulary test. This result suggests that participants in the lower group for the vocabulary test have more interest in GRs. Considering *kanji* use in participants' first language, four of twelve *kanji* users indicated that they *like to read*, whereas four of five non-*kanji* users answered *like to read* or *very much like to read*. The number of participants with an interest in GRs is higher in non-*kanji* users than *kanji* users.

Table 3. Participants' Interest in Reading GRs (prior to GR exposure)

Responses to Pre-questionnaire 3	Total	Higher group		Lower group	
		Kanji user	Non-*kanji* user	*Kanji* user	Non-*kanji* user
Very much like to read	1	0	0	0	1
Like to read	7	2	1	2	2
Yes and no	7	4	0	3	0
Have no interest	2	1	0	0	1

Participants' Evaluation of GRs (after reading GRs)

Table 4 shows the relation between participants' evaluation of GRs following exposure, and interest in reading GRs prior to exposure. The result of post-questionnaire (1) is divided into two groups, one that answered (*my reading comprehension will get) better* or *very much better* and another that answered *I don't know* or (*my reading comprehension will have) no change*. The results for pre-questionnaire (3) are also divided into two groups, one that *have interest* in reading GRs (they answered *very much like to read* or *like to read*), and another that has *no interest* (they answered *yes and no* or *have no interest*). We can see a change in participants' recognition from that majority (10 participants) who answered *better* or *very much better*. As eight of nine participants who had *no interest* in reading GRs in the pre-questionnaire (3) answered *better* or *very much better*, the majority of them appeared to have changed their opinion positively after they

were exposed to GRs. In the following section, we discuss this result in further detail by vocabulary level.

Considering the lower group in Table 4, we first look at the participants who answered *have interest* in the pre-questionnaire (3). In the post-questionnaire (1), one participant (a non-*kanji* user) answered *better* giving the reason "because I could read fast." The other four participants answered *do not know/no change* in the post-questionnaire (1). One (a non-*kanji* user) answered, "*Kumo no ito* and *Ookina boushi no onna* were too easy". However, all the participants who answered *no interest* in the pre-questionnaire (3) answered *better* in the post-questionnaire (1). Reasons given were "The more I read, the more I develop my reading comprehension", "I could read without a dictionary", "The more I read, the fewer unknown words I come across." There were other more positive comments such as, "I could read with confidence because all *kanji* have phonetic transcriptions in *kana* written on them", "It was easy to read because there were *Kana* and illustrations", "It was good to read because level and length of the story were not difficult."

Table 4. Change in Participants' Opinion of GRs (after reading GRs)

Responses to Pre-questionnaire 3	Responses to Post-questionnaire 1	Higher group		Lower group	
		Kanji user	Non-*kanji* user	*Kanji* user	Non-*kanji* user
Have interest (Very much like to read / Like to read)	Better / very much better	0	1	0	1
	I do not know / No change	2	0	2	2
No interest (Yes and no /Have no interest)	Better / very much better	4	0	3	1
	I do not know / No change	1	0	0	0

In the higher group in Table 4, we first considered participants who answered *have interest* in the pre-questionnaire (3). In the post-questionnaire (1), one participant (a non-*kanji* user) answered *better* because "there were few unknown words". The other two participants (*kanji* users) answered *do not know/no change* in the post-questionnaire (1). The reasons were "because the books … were too easy" and "the words used in these books were too easy". These two participants evaluated their reading comprehension as *very good* in the pre-questionnaire (2). They made comments such as, "It was boring because of too much repetition" and "Repetition sometimes disturbed the flow of the story". However, four of five participants who answered *no interest* initially (3) answered *better* in the post-questionnaire (1). The reasons were merits of GRs such as, "If I continue to read GRs, I will learn how to read *kanji*" or "If I continue to read GRs, I will have few unknown words". They made comments like, "I could read with an understanding of the contents while having fun", "I usually am not willing to read, but I could read GRs within a short period" and "I could read *kanji* easily". It can be seen how these readers appeared to change their perception of the value of GRs after reading them.

Memorized Words through ER

Table 5. Memorized Words through ER

	Total	Higher group	Lower group

Responses to Post-questionnaire 2			*Kanji* user	Non-*kanji* user	*Kanji* user	Non-*kanji* user
Kumo no ito	Yes	9	5	0	1	3
	No	8	2	1	4	1
Ookina boushi no onna	Yes	5	3	0	1	1
	No	12	4	1	4	3

Table 5 shows the responses to post-questionnaire (2). In *total*, the ratio of participants who answered *yes* (I have memorized some words through ER) in *Kumo no ito* (53%) is greater than that for *Ookina boushi no onna* (29%). It is notable that most participants who answered *yes* were in the higher group. The words participants listed included: *gokuraku* (heaven) – five participants; *Oshakasama* (Buddha) – five participants; *jigoku* (hell) – three participants; *tengoku* (heaven) – one participant in *Kumo no ito*, and *inari* (the fox deity); *yakimochi* (jealousy); *boushi* (hat) – one participant each in *Ookina boushi no onna*. It should be noted that *inari* and *yakimochi* are the words used in the modernized translation of the original texts used in the ER lesson. All six words, besides *boushi,* are words that are not used daily. The reason for a relatively high response for *Kumo no ito* may be because that story is an unrealistic one in contrast to the contents of *Ookina boushi no onna*, which is a story that more closely reflects everyday realities. It is likely that many other words are known because the two texts used in this project are at a beginner level. Looking at the unfamiliar words, it can be seen that these simplified texts contain words that are important to Japanese culture and ways of thinking.

Participants' Evaluation of the ER Lesson in which Original Texts were Introduced

Participants evaluated the two texts using six items graded on a five-point Likert scale, summarized below. These were administered via eERlab. Table 6 shows the average scores for each item. Also, the table shows the accuracy rate of the answers for the five questions on the contents of the stories.

Table 6. Evaluation of GRs on eERlab

Title	Participants	Hours	Dictionary	Length	Difficulty	Contents	Illustration	Questions
Kumo no ito	Freshmen	1.7	1.8	3.0	2.4	3.2	3.6	90.9
	Sophomore	1.0	1.0	3.0	1.3	3.5	3.8	100.0
	Lower	1.7	1.7	3.0	2.3	3.4	3.4	88.6
	Upper	1.4	1.5	3.0	1.9	3.1	3.9	97.5
Ookina boushi no onna	Freshmen	2.3	1.7	3.6	2.4	3.0	3.4	82.0
	Sophomore	2.5	1.0	3.5	1.5	3.5	4.0	100.0
	Lower	2.4	1.7	3.4	2.6	3.6	3.4	88.6
	Upper	2.2	1.4	3.8	1.8	2.4	3.6	80.0

Note:

Hours (1. Below 30 min; 2. Below 1 hr; 3. Below 3 hr; 4. Below 5 hr; 5. 5 hr or more)
Dictionary (1. Did not use; 2. 1~3 times; 3. 4~6 times; 4. 7~9 times; 5. 10 times or more)
Length (1. Very short; 2. Short; 3. Appropriate; 4. Long; 5. Very long)
Difficulty (1. Very easy; 2. Easy; 3. Appropriate; 4. Difficult; 5. Very difficult)
Contents (1. Very boring; 2. Boring; 3. Average; 4. Interesting; 5. Very interesting)
Illustration (1. Not helpful; 2. Not very helpful; 3. Average; 4. Helpful; 5. Very helpful)
Questions (%)

Comparing the two GRs, in *difficulty* evaluation, the average of *Ookina boushi no onna* (level C) was higher. However, the level of difficulty was appropriate because even the highest score of the lower group of 2.6 represents *appropriate*. The scores of *hours* and *length* of *Ookina boushi no onna* were higher in proportion to those of this title. In the scores of *hours*, the average of *Kumo no ito* was 1.45, which represents *below 30 minutes*, and the average of *Ookina boushi no onna* was 2.35, which represents *below 1 hour*. These scores were reflected in the scores of *length*, that is, all the scores of *Kumo no ito* were 3.0, which represents *appropriate*, and the average of *Ookina boushi no onna* was 3.58, which represents *long*. However, the average of *dictionary* of *Ookina boushi no onna* was 1.45, which represents *did not use*. This score was slightly lower than that of *Kumo no ito* even though *Ookina boushi no onna* includes more characters than *Kumo no ito*. It is suggested that participants learned to read without dictionaries in the second GR. In the *contents* evaluation, scores of *Kumo no ito* were higher than *Ookina boushi no onna*. Also, in the *illustration* evaluation, the average of *Kumo no ito* was 3.68, which represents *helpful*, and was slightly higher.

Mean scores for freshmen participants and those in the lower group were higher for *dictionary* and *difficulty* than participants in the sophomore and upper groups.

It shows that participants in the freshmen and lower groups used dictionaries more often than those in the sophomore and upper groups, and participants in the freshmen and lower groups felt more difficulty than participants in the sophomore and upper groups. In other words, participants whose vocabulary scores are higher read GRs easily. In *Kumo no ito* scores for sophomores and the upper group were lower for *hours* and *length*. It shows that participants in the sophomore and upper groups spent fewer hours than those in the freshmen and lower groups, and participants in the sophomore and upper groups evaluated GRs shorter than participants in the freshmen and lower groups. The scores of participants in the sophomore were 100% in accuracy rate of *questions*.

Table 7 shows participants' impressions of the ER lessons in relation to the responses of the post-questionnaire (1). Knowing from the post-questionnaire (3) that lower level participants in the freshmen class enjoyed discussion, this blended type of ER lesson appeared useful in motivating participants who lacked confidence in reading, and in scaffolding participants who needed vocabulary. Similarly, it supported participants with a limited vocabulary by confirming their understanding of the story through e-learning and through the process of writing a review in preparation for the discussion. When exposed to the original texts, participants were given a feeling of satisfaction to know that they could read original works after reading a simplified version. Although the teacher interpreted the meaning of words and stories, the class met the advanced learners' expectation of reading Japanese classical literature. Participants indicated they "could understand the original edition easily because they had already read and understood the same story in the GRs." GRs played a vital role in preparing to read the original texts.

Table 7. Participants' Impressions of the ER Lessons

Responses to Post-questionnaire 1	Upper group	Lower group
Better	· I knew that each person has his or her own opinion. (Non-*kanji* user) · It was my first experience and was very good because I could discuss with all the classmates. (*Kanji*-user) · It's fun. I like it. It was interesting to exchange opinions. (*Kanji*-user) · The original editions of GRs were short, but included philosophy of life. (*Kanji*-user) · I would like to read the original edition. I think that discussion was good. (*Kanji*-user)	· It was fun because I could read together with my classmates. (*Kanji*-user) · It made the lesson interesting. (*Kanji*-user)
No change		· It was good to talk through my opinion and listen to classmates' opinions in discussion. (Non-*kanji* user)

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Hypothesis 1

This study implemented and evaluated an ER lesson for Japanese university students using GRs as a simplified version of Japanese literature in addition to original texts, subsequently introduced. This section discusses student evaluation of the GRs and the ER lesson, considering students' Japanese proficiency and use of *kanji* in their first language based on results of pre and post-questionnaires given to students.

When learning Japanese as a second language, it could be said that learners' Japanese vocabulary is affected by the use of *kanji* in their first language, given the results in Table 1. It was predicted that there would be a difference in reading ability among participants in the classroom because reading ability is related to vocabulary. Acquiring *kanji* is a challenging task for Japanese learners as indicated by their self-rating on reading comprehension (Table 2), in which non-*kanji* users typically answered that they have limited vocabulary. As predicted, participants in the lower vocabulary group relied on the scaffolding effects of GRs, whereas participants in the higher vocabulary group were not positive about GRs (Table 3). However, as is shown in the evaluation of GRs after the ER lesson (Table 4), participants who had little interest in GRs prior to the ER lesson changed their perception afterwards and evaluated GRs positively. It should also be noted that *kanji* users said "it was good … that I could know how to pronounce *kanji* by reading *kana* … written above it in GRs". There is a difference in pronunciation of *kanji* for Japanese and Chinese, although there is almost no difference in meaning. Among the *kanji* users in this study, some read *kanji* used in Japanese by recognizing its meaning without knowing how to pronounce it. These results suggest that GRs in which all *kanji* are accompanied by *kana* remain useful in supporting advanced learners in higher education in acquiring Japanese vocabulary, including *kanji*.

Hypothesis 2

In the ER lesson in this study, all participants read the same GR as a step to introducing the original version of the GR. However, participants placed much value on being able to exchange opinions with classmates through reading the same book. Therefore, the formation of a reading community motivates learners to read. Participants also showed their interest in literature through the questionnaire. Participants in the higher group memorized more words related to the original version than those in the lower group, suggesting that simplified versions of the literature are well suited to teaching those in higher education about Japanese culture and philosophy through reading. Initial reading of simplified versions of Japanese literature helps students to understand the original texts which are too difficult for them to read.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

As the Japanese writing system consists of ideograms of *kanji* in addition to phonographic systems of *kana*, it can be considered that vocabulary learning constitutes a large proportion of Japanese language learning. The effect of GRs as vocabulary learning materials appears to hold greater potential in Japanese language learning compared to other languages. As the current survey has a relatively small sample size, it has limitations. Nevertheless, GRs simplified from Japanese literature will be effective reading materials in higher education when used with the original versions. Further work remains in increasing the number of *JGR SAKURA* titles, and introducing them to learners of Japanese.

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