

Paper-Based and Online Extensive Reading in a Japanese University EFL Course: Learner Perceptions and Engagement

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Abstract

This study explores student preferences regarding paper and digital book formats in an Extensive Reading (ER) programme at a Japanese university, as well as how these choices relate to reading volume and attitudes towards ER over time. Three cohorts (n = 26) were given access to paper graded readers through a classroom book cart and the university library, as well as to digital graded readers via Xreading. Reading log data were used to identify students' primary format use, while survey responses (n = 24) and two follow-up interviews provided insight into students' reasoning and experiences. Paper books were preferred by the majority of students across all three cohorts, with 73% classified as primarily paper readers. Across all students, nearly four-fifths of completed books were paper-based. Nevertheless, students described online access as a convenient supplementary option. The preference for paper books was attributed to familiarity, a sense of deeper engagement, and ease of concentration. Overall reading volume was broadly similar across primarily paper and mixed readers, though only one participant was classified as primarily digital. In the 2025 cohort (n = 10), all students reported a more positive attitude towards ER by the end of the semester. The findings suggest that when both formats are available, paper books are preferred, but digital access is viewed as a useful supplementary option.

Keywords: extensive reading; graded reader; reading format; digital reading; learner preference; university EFL

1. Introduction

Extensive Reading (ER) has become a well-established practice in EFL teaching (Nakanishi, 2015). It typically follows the principles of reading large amounts of easy texts, which are selected by learners and read primarily for meaning and enjoyment (Day & Bamford, 1998, 2002). ER has been shown to lead to gains in reading fluency and proficiency, as well as vocabulary development (Beglar et al., 2012; Day & Bamford, 1998; Nakanishi, 2015; Nation, 2007). Improvements in listening ability, grammatical development, and learners' attitudes towards reading have also been reported (Elley, 1991; Takase, 2007; Yamashita, 2013). These benefits have led to the inclusion of ER in many university reading curricula, particularly in Japan (McLean & Rouault, 2017; Robb & Ewert, 2024; Sangers et al., 2025).

1.1 ER in the Japanese University Context

Japan's prominent role in ER extends beyond its adoption in university curricula. Many of the early Board members of the Extensive Reading Foundation (ERF) were professionally based there and actively advocated its use, helping to establish Japan as a key centre for ER research and practice. In the Japanese context, ER has also been positioned as a counterweight to prevailing educational practices that have traditionally emphasised grammar-translation, intensive reading, and test-preparation practices, which have often resulted in students having limited experience with sustained, long-form English reading (Takase, 2007; Yamashita, 2013).

Extensive reading programmes at Japanese universities typically make use of graded readers, word targets, and comprehension quizzes (McLean & Rouault, 2017; Robb & Kano, 2013). Moodle Reader, now known as MReader, an online reading management and tracking system for graded readers, was developed in Japan and launched in 2008 (Robb, 2011). This development made ER programmes easier to manage and responded to institutional concerns about

accountability, since quizzes could be used to confirm that students had completed the assigned readings (Robb & Ewert, 2024).

1.2 Digital ER Systems and Programme Management

How ER programmes are implemented and managed plays an important role in their long-term success. Online tracking of ER began with Moodle Reader and became more common following the launch of its successor, MReader, after 2013 (Robb, 2011). MReader enabled digital tracking of reading progress, but it continued to rely primarily on paper graded readers, requiring institutions to maintain sufficiently large physical libraries to ensure student choice and level appropriateness. A variety of online reading materials have also been used for ER, including publishers' own digital libraries; however, these often vary in catalogue size and in their suitability for sustained extensive reading. Xreading, launched in April 2014, provides a multi-publisher digital graded reader library and offers over 2,000 titles. The platform brings together reading access, progress tracking, and quiz verification in one system. This reduces administrative demands on teachers and makes it easier to scale ER programmes (Robb & Ewert, 2024). Additional features include audio versions of readers and supplementary learning materials, such as speed reading courses. Through its integration with MReader quizzes, students who choose to read paper graded readers can complete quizzes within the same tracking environment, allowing programmes to offer both paper-based and digital reading options. Although early reports noted occasional technical limitations (Milliner & Cote, 2014), more recent research suggests that such concerns have diminished as the platform has matured (Fuisting, 2023; Zhou & Day, 2021).

1.3 Reading Format and Learner Choice

Beyond questions of programme management, the reading format itself has also become a topic of research interest. Digital reading has developed considerably in recent decades, and meta-analysis studies suggest that for shorter texts it may offer certain advantages over paper-based reading (Delgado et al., 2018). However, paper-based reading has often been associated with stronger comprehension outcomes, particularly for longer texts and deeper processing (Singer & Alexander, 2017). The advantage of paper appears less pronounced for narrative texts (Delgado et al., 2018; Singer & Alexander, 2017). Both formats have been shown to be effective within ER programmes (Robb & Ewert, 2024). In ER classes, learner choice is central (Day & Bamford, 2002).

1.4 Research Gap

While students are typically offered a wide range of reading materials, the question of format choice between paper and digital formats has received less attention. Existing studies have compared preferences across consecutive cohorts, where students used paper books in one semester or year and digital books in the following period (Cheetham et al., 2022; Collett, 2018; Sowter, 2023). There remains limited research examining student format preferences when both paper and digital graded readers are available simultaneously within the same ER programme.

1.5 Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to address the gap identified above by examining students' format use and preferences within a mixed-format extensive reading programme. It also extends earlier research conducted in the same context (Fuisting, 2023) by including a larger group of participants and by examining in more detail the reasons students give for their format choices. To achieve this, a multi-cohort, mixed-method design was used in which students had simultaneous access to paper graded readers through a classroom book cart and the institutional library, as well as digital graded readers via Xreading. The study was guided by the following research questions:

RQ1 What patterns of paper and digital format use emerge when students are given simultaneous access to both options within the same extensive reading programme?

RQ2 What reasons do students report for their choice of reading format?

RQ3 How does total reading volume vary across primary format groups?

RQ4 How do students describe changes in their attitudes towards extensive reading and reading format over the semester?

2. Methodology

2.1 Context and Participants

This study was conducted at a large private university in western Japan in three intact academic reading elective classes taught by the researcher. The classes were taught in spring 2022, autumn 2022, and autumn 2025. The participants were a mixture of 2nd-, 3rd-, and 4th-year students, with approximately 50% being second-year students. Of the 29

enrolled students (11 in spring 2022, 8 in autumn 2022, and 10 in autumn 2025), three withdrew before completing the course. Reading data were therefore available for 26 students, and survey responses were obtained from 24 of these students (92.3%). Data were analysed after course completion and grade submission to minimise any potential influence on students' participation.

2.2 ER Programme Design

The academic reading class focused on improving students' reading ability, including intensive reading skills, reading fluency, and vocabulary. The course ran for 15 weeks in 2022 but for only 14 weeks in 2025 due to a change in the academic calendar. However, the ER component remained the same length in all three classes, as the 2022 ER programme began one week later in the semester. Students were required to read a minimum of 5,000 words per week, with 10,000 words per week needed to receive full credit for the ER component. This resulted in a total semester range of 70,000–140,000 words. The semester target was divided into three incremental goals, each aligned with a course grading threshold. Students could earn up to 30% of their final grade for completing the ER targets.

The ER reading material consisted of graded readers, either in paper form or as digital editions. The researcher provided a classroom book cart with 200–220 graded readers appropriate for the students' level, based on the course requirement of a minimum TOEIC score of 550 and the researcher's prior experience teaching the course. In addition, the university library held around 1,000 paper graded readers that students could borrow.

Students were also instructed to purchase an access card for Xreading (all but one student in the spring 2022 cohort completed the purchase), which provided access to approximately 2,000 graded readers, around 700 of which were at the levels from which students made the majority of their selections. Students' reading was tracked by requiring them to complete a quiz after finishing each book. The passing mark was set at 60%, but in cases where there were technical problems or other legitimate reasons for failing a test, the teacher could allow the student to retake the quiz. The quizzes were administered via MReader for paper books and Xreading for digital books in 2022. However, in 2025, all quizzes were administered through Xreading using the MReader quizzes, as this functionality had been developed.

2.3 Instruments

2.3.1 Survey

At the end of the course, students were asked to complete an anonymous survey about their reasons for taking the course, how many books of each type they had read, their book selection practices, their attitudes towards ER, and their recommendations for how the course could be improved in the future. In 2025, the researcher added two additional questions asking how students' attitudes towards ER might have changed during the course. The survey consisted of both closed-ended and open-ended items and was administered online using Google Forms. The survey was provided in a bilingual format, in both English and Japanese (the English section is provided in Appendix A). Participants were asked to self-report how many books they had completed and where they had borrowed them from (the teacher's book cart, the university library, or Xreading). Although the data were self-reported and anonymous, overall patterns were broadly consistent with reading data collected from MReader and Xreading. Participation in the survey was voluntary, anonymous, and in accordance with institutional ethics guidelines. Of the 26 students who completed the course, 24 responded to the survey, giving a 92.3% completion rate.

2.3.2 Reading Data

Data on total word counts from the 26 students who completed the course were collected separately from MReader and Xreading in 2022, but in 2025, all reading data were collected solely through Xreading. Xreading provides detailed reading analytics, whereas MReader primarily records the number of books read and total word counts. The reading data included in this study consist of books completed (i.e., those for which the quiz was passed) and total words read.

2.3.3 Interviews

To better understand the reasoning behind students' book choices and their attitudes towards ER, the researcher invited the 2025 cohort to take part in a follow-up interview. Of the ten students in the 2025 cohort, one agreed, and four responded 'maybe'. These five students were invited via university email to participate in an interview, either in person or via Zoom. However, only two students ultimately replied, despite two reminder emails from the researcher. The semi-structured interviews consisted of ten main questions (see Appendix B). The interviews lasted approximately 34 and 29 minutes respectively, for a total of 63 minutes. All interviews were conducted in English in the researcher's office on campus, electronically recorded, and later transcribed.

2.4 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed descriptively. Patterns of format use were examined by calculating the proportion of books read in paper and digital formats across the three cohorts. Primary reading format was determined using reading log data rather than self-reported survey responses. In the 2022 cohorts, reading records from MReader (paper books) and Xreading (digital books) were combined, allowing format to be identified based on platform. In the 2025 cohort, all reading activity was recorded within Xreading. The system distinguishes between digital titles and physical books for which quizzes are taken within the platform. Format classification was therefore based on the system's format label and, where necessary, cross-checked against the researcher's inventory of classroom book cart titles. Although a small number of graded reader titles were available in both physical and digital formats, the format of each completed book could be identified with confidence. For analytical purposes, students were classified as primarily paper or primarily digital readers if at least two-thirds of the books they completed were in one format. Students who did not meet this threshold were classified as mixed readers.

Reading volume was calculated using total word counts recorded in MReader and Xreading. Because precise word counts by format could not be allocated without compromising survey anonymity, comparisons of reading volume were conducted using total words read among students grouped by primary format. As a result, individual responses could not always be matched directly to reading logs, so comparisons were therefore conducted at the group level.

Survey responses were analysed using descriptive statistics and inductive qualitative coding. Closed-ended responses were summarised using frequencies and percentages. Responses to open-ended questions were read multiple times to identify recurring themes relating to format choice, perceived advantages and disadvantages, and attitudes towards ER. Codes were refined through iterative comparison, and broader thematic categories were developed to capture common patterns within the data.

Interview transcripts were analysed using the same inductive approach. The interviews were used primarily to provide illustrative examples and add depth to themes identified in the survey rather than to generate generalisable findings. Selected excerpts are presented in the Results section to clarify and contextualise the quantitative and qualitative patterns that emerged.

3. Results

This section presents the findings in relation to the four research questions. First, patterns of paper and digital format use are described based on reading log data. Second, students' reported reasons for their format choices are presented. Third, differences in total reading volume are examined. Finally, changes in students' attitudes towards extensive reading and reading format over the semester are reported.

3.1 Patterns of Format Use

RQ1: What patterns of paper and digital format use emerge when students are given simultaneous access to both options within the same extensive reading programme?

3.1.1 Classification of Primary Format

Participants were classified based on their reading log data. Paper books were defined as books borrowed from the teacher's book cart or from the university library, while digital books were defined as books read through the Xreading platform. In the 2022 cohorts, paper books were tracked using MReader and digital books through Xreading, keeping the two formats separate. In the 2025 cohort, both formats were tracked within Xreading, which includes a format label for physical books, allowing the two formats to be distinguished. Although some titles were available both in the teacher's book cart and in the university library, this overlap did not affect format classification, as both sources were categorised as paper books. Students were classified as primarily paper or primarily digital readers if at least two-thirds of the books they completed were in one format. Students who did not meet this threshold were classified as mixed readers.

3.1.2 Distribution of Primary Format by Cohort

Table 1 presents the distribution of primary format use across the three cohorts ($n = 26$). In the spring 2022 cohort, five students were primarily paper readers, one was primarily digital, and three were mixed. In autumn 2022, five students were primarily paper readers and two were mixed. In autumn 2025, nine students were primarily paper readers, and one was mixed. Overall, 19 students (73.1%) were classified as primarily paper readers, one student (3.8%) as primarily digital, and six students (23.1%) as mixed readers. While paper-based reading clearly predominated across all cohorts, a minority of students engaged in a more balanced use of both formats.

Table 1. Distribution of Primary Format Use by Cohort

Class	Primarily Paper	Primarily Digital	Mixed Use
2022 spring	5	1	3
2022 autumn	5	0	2
2025 autumn	9	0	1

3.1.3 Aggregate Books Read by Format

Across the three cohorts, 312 of the 396 completed books (78.8%) were paper-based, compared with 84 books (21.2%) read digitally (Table 2). These quantitative patterns of format use provide context for understanding students' reported reasons for their preferences, which are presented in the following section.

Table 2. Total Books Read by Format (All Cohorts Combined)

Format	Total Books Read
Paper	312
Digital	84
Total	396

3.2 Reported Reasons for Format Choice

RQ2: What reasons do students report for their choice of reading format?

Analysis of 24 open-ended survey responses revealed four recurring themes relating to students' format preferences: convenience and accessibility, concentration and reduced distraction, habit and familiarity, and perceived learning effectiveness. The interview data supported and elaborated on the patterns identified in the survey responses.

3.2.1 Convenience and Accessibility

Convenience and accessibility were the most commonly mentioned reasons for choosing digital books. Eight of the 24 respondents referred to ease of access, portability, or the possibility of reading in different situations. Several students mentioned being able to read 'anywhere,' including on the train, or accessing books when they were absent from class or had forgotten to bring a paper book. One student described digital formats as 'more convenient,' while another commented that it was 'very convenient to read on smartphone.'

Similar points emerged in the interviews. One participant noted that digital books were easier to use 'on trains or crowded spaces,' and another explained that they relied on digital access when they forgot a paper book. In both interviews, digital reading was framed as practically useful rather than as a preferred primary format.

3.2.2 Concentration and Reduced Distraction

Some students raised concerns about concentration when reading on screens. Four survey responses referred to difficulty focusing or discomfort when reading digitally. Comments included statements such as 'hard to read long content on smartphone,' 'I don't like reading online books,' and 'paper is easier to understand.' These remarks focused more on attention and comfort than on convenience.

The interviews provided additional detail. One student described being distracted by smartphone notifications, explaining that 'every time the notification comes, I get distracted.' Another mentioned eye strain and said that paper books felt easier to engage with over longer periods. Digital reading was occasionally described as rushed, whereas paper reading was associated with sustained attention.

3.2.3 Habit and Familiarity

A smaller group of students expressed a general preference for paper books without referring specifically to convenience or concentration. A total of three responses contained statements such as 'I prefer paper' and 'I tried digital but I prefer paper'. This suggests that familiarity played a role in format choice.

Interview comments reflected a similar pattern. One participant stated, 'I'm not used to reading digital books,' while another described themselves as 'old school.' Both referred to the physical experience of reading, including turning

pages and visually tracking progress, as meaningful aspects of the activity. These preferences appeared to be habitual rather than purely functional.

3.2.4 Perceived Learning Effectiveness

A few students explicitly linked format choice to learning and comprehension. Three survey responses suggested that paper books supported understanding more effectively. One student indicated that digital books were helpful when weekly word counts were insufficient, implying that online reading was sometimes used strategically to meet course targets.

The interviews expanded on this theme. One participant remarked, ‘I feel like I’m learning through reading,’ while another described a stronger sense of achievement when finishing a physical book. Although digital books were seen as useful for specific purposes, such as speed-reading practice, paper reading was more often associated with immersion and depth of engagement.

3.2.5 Summary of RQ2 Findings

Table 3 summarises the distribution of themes identified in the survey data. Overall, convenience and accessibility were most frequently associated with digital reading. In contrast, concentration, familiarity, and perceived learning effectiveness were more often linked to paper books. The interview data did not introduce additional themes but helped clarify how students experienced these differences in practice.

Table 3. Frequency of Themes in Open-Ended Survey Responses (n = 24)

Theme	Number of responses	Percentage (%)
Convenience and accessibility	8	33.3
Concentration and reduced distraction	4	16.7
Habit and familiarity	3	12.5
Perceived learning effectiveness	3	12.5
Other / unclear	6	25.0

Note. Responses were coded according to the primary reason expressed in each comment. Percentages are based on 24 usable open-ended responses.

Six responses were coded as ‘Other/unclear’. They were typically brief or described incidental factors that did not reflect a clear format preference. Because these responses did not address the reasons for format choice in a way that allowed meaningful categorisation, they were retained in the table for transparency but excluded from the thematic analysis.

3.3 Reading Volume Patterns

RQ3: How does total reading volume vary across primary format groups?

While the previous section examined students’ reported reasons for their format choices, RQ3 considers whether preferred reading format was associated with differences in overall reading volume.

3.3.1 Reading Volume by Primary Format

Across all 26 students, the average number of words read during the semester was 120,808. Reading volume by format group is presented in Table 4. When grouped by primary format, mixed readers recorded an average of 125,785 words, primarily paper readers averaged 120,581 words, and the single primarily digital reader read 95,251 words. The mixed group recorded a slightly higher mean. However, the difference compared with primarily paper readers was modest. Given the small sample sizes and the single student in the digital category, these findings should be interpreted descriptively rather than inferentially. Overall, reading volume was similar across the primarily paper and mixed groups.

Table 4. Reading Volume by Primary Format Group

Primary Format	N	Mean Words	Median Words	SD	Total Words
Mixed	6	125,785	127,142	20,692	754,712
Primarily Digital	1	95,251	95,251	-	95,251
Primarily Paper	19	120,581	124,375	26,655	2,291,033

3.4 Changes in Attitudes Towards Extensive Reading (RQ4)

RQ4: How do students describe changes in their attitudes towards extensive reading and reading format over the semester?

RQ4 was included in the survey for the 2025 cohort only ($n = 10$). All ten students reported a positive shift in their attitudes towards ER: six indicated that their attitude had become ‘slightly more positive,’ and four reported that it had become ‘much more positive.’ No students reported either a negative change or no change.

Only one participant provided a written explanation in the optional follow-up item. Therefore, responses to the final open-ended survey question (‘Please add any comments you have about the Extensive Reading?’) were also analysed to provide a broader understanding of perceived attitudinal changes. Several recurring themes emerged across the responses. A common pattern, evident in five of the ten responses, was an initial perception of difficulty followed by increased ease. For example, one student wrote, ‘I thought English books would be difficult, but I was surprised to find that I could read them and found them interesting.’ Another commented, ‘At first, reading was a little tough, but gradually I became more positive about reading.’ Similarly, one student noted, ‘It wasn’t as difficult as I expected.’ These responses indicate a shift from initial apprehension to greater comfort with reading in English.

A second theme, explicitly mentioned by three students, concerned the development of reading habits. One participant reflected, ‘I hated reading but once you make it a habit, it is not boring and actually interesting.’ Another student described becoming interested in reading despite not previously having a reading habit. These reflections suggest that consistent engagement throughout the semester contributed to the formation of a reading routine.

Five students also referred to increased enjoyment or interest. One described coming to enjoy reading ‘as a new hobby,’ while another expressed a desire to ‘read more in my private time.’ A further response highlighted the range of available titles, noting that ‘There were lots of options so it was interesting to choose books.’ Although several responses overlapped across themes, they collectively reflect increasing enjoyment and motivation to read. Taken together, the 2025 responses point to a generally positive shift in attitudes over the semester. Students described becoming more comfortable with reading, forming reading habits, and finding greater enjoyment as the course progressed.

4. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore how students used paper and digital formats within a mixed ER programme and how they explained those choices. The results show that most participants read primarily in paper format. At the same time, digital access was valued for practical reasons, and a minority of students used both formats in combination. Reading volume did not differ substantially between primarily paper and mixed readers. Over the course of the semester, attitudes towards ER became more positive. Together, these findings provide insight into how students navigate format choice when both options are readily available.

4.1 Format Preference in a Mixed ER Environment

When students had easy access to both formats, most chose to read on paper. Seventy-three per cent were classified as primarily paper readers, and nearly four-fifths of all completed books were paper-based. Students associated paper reading with concentration, immersion, and a clearer sense of progress. Several also referred to familiarity and the satisfaction of finishing a physical book. These patterns are broadly consistent with earlier research suggesting that paper reading is often linked to perceptions of deeper engagement, particularly with longer texts (Delgado et al., 2018; Singer & Alexander, 2017). However, because this study focused on graded readers rather than academic texts, the preference for paper appears to reflect reading experience more than measurable performance differences.

4.1.1 Digital as Strategic Convenience Rather Than Preferred Format

Although paper dominated, digital reading clearly played a role. Rather than replacing paper, it appears to have

functioned as a practical alternative in specific situations. Students described using digital books while commuting, in crowded spaces, or when they had forgotten a paper book. Some also mentioned using digital titles to reach weekly reading targets more efficiently. Despite concerns about eye strain or distraction, most students did not oppose retaining Xreading. Only one of the 24 surveyed students expressed a negative view regarding its future use, while half recommended it and the remainder were uncertain. This suggests that digital platforms may be appreciated less for the reading experience itself and more for the flexibility they provide, a finding that echoes earlier work on online ER systems (Zhou & Day, 2021).

4.1.2 Format Choice as an Extension of ER Principles

Day and Bamford (2002) emphasise the importance of learner choice with regard to students choosing texts that match their interests and reading level in ER programmes. In this study, learner choice has been extended to include format choice. While most participants preferred paper books, having access to digital books via Xreading allowed students to adapt to practical circumstances. Providing access to both formats may therefore support students' autonomy, not only in what they read but also in how they choose to read.

4.2 Reading Volume and Format

Reading volume was broadly similar across primary format groups. However, a closer look at the data suggests a minor pattern within the primarily paper group. Students who used some digital reading tended to record slightly higher totals. Because the numbers are small and descriptive only, this observation should be interpreted cautiously. One possible explanation is that digital access provided additional opportunities to read when paper books were less accessible. Only one participant was classified as primarily digital, so comparisons involving that category remain limited. From an ER perspective, the quantity of reading is central (Day & Bamford, 2002). In this study, offering digital readers did not appear to reduce overall reading volume among students who preferred paper. Instead, digital access may have supported continuity in meeting weekly targets. At the same time, programme structure remains important. As Robb and Ewert (2024) argue, sustained ER requires systems that support accountability. In this context, combining paper and digital formats appears to have provided flexibility without diminishing overall engagement.

4.3 Attitude Development and Engagement

In the 2025 cohort, all students reported a more positive attitude towards ER by the end of the semester. Their comments described becoming more comfortable with reading, forming habits, and finding greater enjoyment over time. For some, reading initially seemed demanding, which reflects earlier findings about limited experience with sustained English reading among Japanese learners (Takase, 2007; Yamashita, 2013). As students accumulated reading experience, reluctance appeared to decrease.

Several students described a similar trajectory: initial difficulty giving way to growing interest and confidence. One participant noted, 'At first it felt difficult, but as I continued reading, I became interested and was able to read even though I do not usually have a reading habit.' This pattern is consistent with Tabata-Sandom (2023), who highlights how 'soft encouragements', such as sharing reading achievements and recommending titles, can support sustained engagement. In this course, weekly word-count updates and informal book recommendations from both the teacher and other students may have served a similar function. Students who found a genre they enjoyed, or who experienced the satisfaction of finishing a book in English, appeared to become more motivated over time, echoing Yamashita's (2013) finding that positive reading experiences are linked to continued reading behaviour.

4.4 Implications for ER Programme Design

Although the present study was conducted with a relatively small sample, the findings relating to format preference, reading volume, and attitudinal development suggest several considerations for the design of ER programmes in similar university EFL contexts.

4.4.1 Maintaining Paper Access in Mixed Programmes

There was an overall preference for paper books, both in the formats students actually read and in their stated preference for a future ER course. Easy access and the simplicity of borrowing books from a classroom book cart were mentioned as advantages when compared with borrowing paper books from the university library. At the same time, the few students who used the university library appreciated the wider variety of titles available. In this context, the library's graded reader collection appears to be underutilised. While maintaining access to a classroom book cart appears to support engagement, such an approach is not feasible in all settings, particularly in larger ER programmes. Students reported that borrowing books from the library could feel troublesome or time consuming. Reducing practical barriers to access may therefore encourage greater use of existing library resources. For example, locating classes in

closer proximity to the library and organising guided visits to explain the grading system and layout of materials may help students make fuller use of the available collection. Maintaining access to paper books, while also facilitating library use, aligns with the principle of learner choice central to ER (Day & Bamford, 2002).

4.4.2 Enhancing Digital Functionality

While paper books were the preferred option for most students, there was still considerable support for retaining Xreading. Twelve students responded positively, and eleven expressed uncertainty. Even students who mainly read paper books acknowledged the convenience of being able to access titles at any time and from any location. Digital access may therefore function as a supplementary option that supports flexibility rather than as a replacement for paper reading.

Students also suggested specific improvements to their experience of the digital platform. In the interviews, one participant noted the absence of a search function to filter books by length, explaining that this would have made it easier to choose a title to match their weekly reading target. Another mentioned that the display of reading time and words-per-minute data was counterproductive, describing how it caused digital reading to feel like speed reading rather than enjoyment: '*it becomes more like speed reading*'. Both participants also indicated that clearer guidance on how to navigate and search Xreading's catalogue at the start of the course would have been helpful. Providing such guidance may enhance students' ability to make more informed choices about both content and format, and supports a broader interpretation of learner choice within ER programmes (Day & Bamford, 2002). The perceived value of accessibility and flexibility is also consistent with previous research highlighting advantages of online ER platforms (Zhou & Day, 2021).

4.5 Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study was conducted within a single university context and involved a relatively small sample ($n = 26$), with the attitudinal findings based on one cohort only ($n = 10$). The results should therefore be interpreted as context-specific rather than broadly generalisable. Second, only one participant was classified as a primarily digital reader. As a result, comparisons across primary format groups are descriptive in nature and should be interpreted cautiously. No inferential statistical analyses were conducted. Third, although format classification was based on reading log data, precise allocation of word counts by format was not possible without compromising the anonymity of survey responses. Reading volume comparisons were therefore conducted at the group level. In addition, survey data were self-reported, and open-ended responses were relatively brief. Finally, only two out of ten students in the 2025 cohort agreed to take part in the interviews despite follow-up emails sent to other students who had indicated that they might be willing to take part. Future research could build on the present study by examining mixed-format ER programmes across larger and more diverse cohorts and by incorporating more detailed tracking of reading behaviour over time.

5. Conclusion

This study explored how students used paper and digital formats within a mixed-format extensive reading programme at a Japanese university. When both options were available, most participants chose to read primarily on paper. At the same time, digital access was widely viewed as convenient and flexible, and many students supported retaining it as part of the programme. Reading volume did not differ substantially between primarily paper-format readers and mixed-format readers, and access to digital books did not appear to reduce engagement with paper reading. In the 2025 cohort, students also reported a shift towards more positive attitudes over the semester. Several described moving from initial hesitation to greater ease and enjoyment, and some referred to developing regular reading habits. These patterns are consistent with previous research emphasising the importance of sustained, comprehensible input and learner choice within ER programmes. In this context, offering both paper and digital formats appears to have supported flexibility without undermining overall reading engagement. The interviews also revealed several practical considerations for programme design, including the value of explicitly introducing students to the search functions of the digital platform, providing clearer genre descriptions to support book selection, and where possible, situating classes in proximity to the institutional library to lower barriers to paper book access. Understanding how learners navigate format choice, and what practical conditions support engagement, is increasingly relevant for ER programme design, whether programmes rely on paper books, digital graded readers, or a combination of both.

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Appendix A

End-of-Semester Extensive Reading Survey

Section 1. Background Information

1. Year of study
 - 2nd year
 - 3rd year
 - 4th year or higher
2. Gender
 - Female
 - Male
 - Other
 - Prefer not to say

Section 2. Course Motivation

3. Why did you choose this course? (Select all that apply)
 - Interest in the course content
 - Class time was convenient
 - Interest in the teacher
 - Other
4. What did you want to learn from this course? (Select all that apply)
 - Improve English reading skills
 - Improve English reading fluency
 - Improve English vocabulary
 - Improve English speaking skills
 - Improve general English skills
 - Other
5. What was the main reason for the above choice? (Select one)
 - Improve English reading skills
 - Improve English reading fluency
 - Improve English vocabulary
 - Improve English speaking skills
 - Improve general English skills
 - Other

Section 3. Extensive Reading Behaviour

6. How many books did you read during the semester?
7. How many of those books were paper books?
8. How many of the paper books were borrowed from the teacher's book cart?
9. How many of the paper books were borrowed from the university library?
10. How many books were read online using Xreading?

Section 4. Reasons for Format Choice

Teacher's Book Cart:

11. Why did you choose paper books from the teacher's book cart? (Select all that apply)
- I prefer paper books
 - It is easier to pick books in the classroom
 - My teacher can give advice about book choice
 - My classmates can give advice about book choice
 - I did not want to use Xreading
 - Other
12. What was the main reason you chose paper books from the teacher's book cart? (Select one)
13. Please explain your answer (optional).

University Library:

14. Why did you choose paper books from the university library? (Select all that apply)
- I did not choose any books from the library
 - I prefer paper books
 - It is easier to pick books in the library
 - There is a better variety of books
 - I had read all the books I wanted from the teacher's book cart
 - I did not want to use Xreading
 - Other
15. What was the main reason you chose paper books from the library? (Select one)
16. Please explain your answer (optional).

Xreading (Online Books):

17. Why did you choose to read online books? (Select all that apply)
- I did not choose any books from Xreading
 - I prefer online books
 - It is easier to pick books on Xreading
 - There is a better variety of books on Xreading
 - I can access books at any time
 - I paid for Xreading and wanted to use it
 - Other
18. What was the main reason you chose to read online books? (Select one)
19. Please explain your answer (optional).

Section 5. Evaluation of Extensive Reading

20. How useful was the Extensive Reading component?
Scale: 1 (Not useful at all) to 5 (Very useful)
21. How enjoyable was the Extensive Reading component?
Scale: 1 (Not enjoyable at all) to 5 (Very enjoyable)
22. How difficult was the Extensive Reading component?

Scale: 1 (Very difficult) to 5 (Very easy)

23. What do you think about the Extensive Reading component? (Open-ended)

Section 6. Attitude Change (2025 Cohort Only)

24. Compared to the beginning of the semester, how has your attitude towards extensive reading changed?

- Much more positive
- Slightly more positive
- No change
- Slightly more negative
- Much more negative

25. Please explain your answer (optional).

Section 7. Future Preference

26. Would you recommend using Xreading in future courses?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

27. If you took a similar course again, which format would you prefer?

- Online (Xreading)
- Borrow paper books from the teacher's book cart
- Borrow paper books from the university library
- A mixture of online and paper formats
- Other

28. What could be done to improve the Extensive Reading component of the course? (Open-ended)

Section 8. Follow-Up Interview

29. Would you be willing to take part in a follow-up interview about your attitudes and preferences?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

Appendix B

Interview Questions

Section 1: Reading Context and Experience

1. Can you describe how you usually read English books in this course?
(e.g., paper books, online books, where and when you read)

Section 2: Paper vs Digital Reading Preferences

2. Many students preferred paper books. Why do you think paper reading worked better for you personally?
Possible prompts:
 - Concentration
 - Comfort or eye strain

- Motivation
 - Habit or familiarity
3. Were there any situations where reading online books felt easier or more convenient for you? Why?
 4. If you had to choose only one format, what would you miss most about the other format?

Section 3: Experiences with Online Reading (Xreading)

5. You indicated that you were [not sure / willing / unwilling] to recommend Xreading. What factors influenced that response?
6. What changes to Xreading or to how it was used in the course would make you more likely to recommend it to future students?

Section 4: Change Over Time

7. Compared to the beginning of the semester, how did your attitude towards extensive reading change, and what do you think caused that change?
8. Did your preference for paper or digital reading change during the semester? If so, why? If not, why do you think it stayed the same?

Section 5: Pedagogical Reflection

9. If you were the teacher designing this course next year, how would you organize the extensive reading component?
(*e.g., paper only, digital only, choice, combination*)
10. What advice would you give to students who are starting extensive reading for the first time?

Closing Question

11. Is there anything about your reading experience in this course that the survey did not ask about, but that you think is important?

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