

【資料】

Development of a Reading Course for Mixed-ability Learners

Arthur Rutson-Griffiths

様々な習熟度の学習者を対象としたリーディング授業の開発について

アーサー・ラットソングリフィス

1 Introduction

Reading Strategies I (RS1) and Reading Strategies II (RS2) are two courses held in the first and second semester respectively for first-year students in the Education department at Hiroshima Bunkyo University. The courses aim to develop students' general reading comprehension skills to improve their English ability and contribute to their capacity to become successful English teachers in the future. The course was first offered in April 2019 when the Education department opened. In this paper I will describe how the course has evolved over four cohorts, the reason for making various changes and how successful they have been. A summary of changes is provided in Appendix 1, though not all will be covered in this paper.

2 First cohort (2019)

In its first year, the course used the same structure and textbook as the Global Communication department course of the same name upon which it was based. A summary of the course is shown below (Table 1).

Table 1: Grade structure for Reading Strategies I and II in 2019

Category	Weight	Description and purpose
Graded reader quizzes	30%	<p><u>Description</u> Students are required to read graded readers outside class and take a quiz on the website <i>mreader</i> to prove they have read and comprehended the book. Students must read at least 10,000 words and receive points up to 50,000 words.</p> <p><u>Purpose</u> To provide, through extensive reading, repeated exposure to common vocabulary, increase reading fluency and build a regular reading habit¹.</p>
Independent reading	10%	<p><u>Description</u> Students receive one point for each class week in which they pass at least one <i>mreader</i> quiz.</p>

1 For more information see The Extensive Reading Foundation (N.D.), *What is ER?* Accessed from https://erfoundation.org/wordpress/what_is/

		<u>Purpose</u> To encourage students to read regularly.
In-class vocabulary and reading quizzes	25%	<u>Description</u> Five short tests, administered every three weeks, to test students' mastery of the reading skills and vocabulary covered in the previous textbook chapter. 1 test = 5 points. <u>Purpose</u> To provide teacher and students information on mastery of the content of the chapter covered and to encourage students to review.
Book reports	15%	<u>Description</u> Students give a short presentation on their opinion of a graded reader three times throughout the semester. <u>Purpose</u> To share information about popular books amongst students and encourage students to read regularly.
Homework	10%	<u>Description</u> Students receive points for completing assigned homework. <u>Purpose</u> To review skills covered in class.
Participation	10%	<u>Description</u> Students receive points for actively participating in class time, such as by asking questions, volunteering answers or opinions, and speaking English. <u>Purpose</u> To create a positive class atmosphere.

The textbook used in 2019, *Reading Explorer Foundations*, is a CEFR A2-level book that focuses on academic reading skills. The textbook had worked well in the streamed classes for Global Communication students, but it quickly became apparent that it was not a good fit for the single mixed-ability class for Education students. The main problem was that higher-level students were not sufficiently challenged by the reading passages and spent a lot of time waiting for other students to finish. Conversely, lower-level students were almost constantly rushing through texts and failing to fully comprehend them.

Upon reflection, I decided that a class that can be adjusted to the pace of each student was likely to be more beneficial to the students. I selected a new textbook series for the following year and made other necessary adjustments to the course structure.

3 Second cohort (2020)

3.1 Summary of planned changes from previous year

3.1.1 New textbook series

I selected the textbook series *Reading for Speed and Fluency* for this year. Book 1 was used in RS1 and book 2 in RS2 (both books are CEFR A2+). The focus of the textbook series is developing students' reading speed by reading relatively easy texts, written using a limited number of words.

The post-reading comprehension questions are easier than a comparable academic English textbook and are answered without looking back at the passage meaning there is less benefit in asking students to compare answers as may be done with more difficult questions. Overall, I judged that the four readings per themed chapter would provide more reading time compared to the previous year and that the structure of the textbook would be suitable for students to proceed through at their own pace in class time. It can also easily be completed after class as the structure for each chapter and reading passage is identical meaning no additional explanation is required from the teacher.

3.1.2 Vocabulary: quizzes removed

The vocabulary and reading quizzes, being linked to the old textbook, were removed and not replaced. The justification for not creating new vocabulary quizzes was that the vocabulary in the textbook is deliberately quite easy. I decided that encouraging the students to study the vocabulary through quizzes may not be beneficial – they would probably get very high scores on each quiz, and it would not be very informative. However, having the 40 keywords for each chapter fresh in the students' minds aids reading speed and fluency, so vocabulary decks for each chapter were made in the online flashcard software *Quizlet* and students were given points for studying before class.

3.2 Unplanned changes from previous year

3.2.1 Online classes

RS1 for 2020 was conducted entirely online due to the COVID-19 pandemic, necessitating many changes. Fortunately, the self-paced structure of the textbook was well-suited to online learning. As students were unable to access campus to borrow physical graded readers, extensive reading was conducted online through the *Oxford Learner's Bookshelf* app, generously made available for free by Oxford University Press. Students made videos for their book reports and were able to study vocabulary using the *Quizlet* app as planned.

Most classes for RS2 were conducted face-to-face and the assessments carried out mostly as planned.

3.2.2 Extra reading activities: Newsela

An additional component added during RS2 was asking students to read one article per week on the *Newsela* website. This website produces news articles rewritten at various proficiency levels and allows teachers to provide some multiple-choice and short written answer comprehension questions. Successful completion of activities was incorporated into the participation grade. I introduced this because there were some students in the course who already had a particularly high level of English and I wanted to provide them with more challenging reading material in addition to the easy, fluency-based reading provided in the textbook.

3.3 Reflection

An unanticipated benefit of making the course student-paced was that it allowed time for short

teacher-student meetings each week when the class met face-to-face. This was particularly beneficial for lower-level students who were struggling with the mreader component of the course. In previous years, such students were hesitant to speak up and their slow progress was sometimes only noticed by the teacher late in the semester. Checking progress regularly allowed students to ask questions and ensure they were on target to at least pass the course.

RS2 was the first time the new course format was carried out face-to-face. I noticed that a downside to the predictable structure of the textbook was that there was not much variety in the course. This was another reason for introducing Newsela. It was successful in introducing variety to the class, but some students experienced technical problems with answering or submitting the comprehension questions. Students submitted screenshots of their answers, but the process was not as smooth as I was hoping.

4 Third cohort (2021)

4.1 Summary of planned changes from previous year

4.1.1 Extensive reading: Reading A-Z

The main change to the course this year was to the extensive reading portion of the course, substituting mreader for an online service, *Reading A-Z*. This service provides online books at a variety of levels and tracks student progress². This change was motivated by the possibility of having to change from face-to-face to online classes due to the ongoing pandemic. Other aspects of the course were maintained in RS1.

4.2 Unplanned changes from previous year

4.2.1 Change of grading method for Reading A-Z in RS2

In RS1, students received a grade for both the time spent in Reading A-Z and the number of activities completed, measured by the number of stars they had collected. Some students struggled to read consistently, and I was concerned that the single deadline at the end of the semester and the possible lack of clarity over how they were being assessed was hindering some students. In RS2, the extensive reading component was split into five 3–4-week blocks to cover the semester and students were updated each week on how many points they had accumulated towards their grade.

4.2.2 Extra reading activities: Teams Reading Progress

Another change in RS2 was to reduce the weight of the vocabulary study and participation components from 15% to 10% each and include a reading aloud section. There were two reasons for this change. Firstly, some students had not developed a regular habit of studying vocabulary in RS1 and lost many points from their grade. Reducing this possibility and including a different activity which could be easy to do, graded on completion and different from activities they may

2 For more information see Rose, K. E. (2022), *RAZ for all! Exploring the effects of a digital reading app in an EFL class*. Accessed from <http://dx.doi.org/10.51095/kyoshoku.10.02>

be doing in their other classes (providing novelty) was intended to help students' grades.

In addition, the *Reading Progress* app in *Microsoft Teams* allows the teacher to submit the assignment due date to students' calendars which was intended to help with time management. The reading progress app was chosen because it was built into Teams, an app students were already using extensively, and through reading a familiar text aloud the students could reinforce their vocabulary knowledge.

4.3 Reflection

The use of Reading A-Z was justified by changing from face-to-face to online delivery several times throughout the year. As students were able to freely read books in the app or on the website they were not hindered by being unable to access campus. A disadvantage of the app from the teacher's perspective is that it was initially difficult to decide how to award points to students – unlike in mreader, word counts for books were not readily available. A combination of time spent reading, number of books read and bonus points for reading all available books at a level were used to determine students' grades but as explained above it was not very tangible to students and the change in grading method introduced in RS2 did not have the desired effect.

5 Fourth cohort (2022)

5.1 Summary of planned changes from previous year

5.1.1 Extensive reading: Return to mreader

RS1 in 2022 was similar to the previous year besides substituting mreader for Reading A-Z. The main reason was to encourage students to use the Self-Access Learning Centre through borrowing physical graded readers, of which there are more than 1,000 available. I was also more familiar with mreader and found it easier to explain to students. The independent reading grade was also reintroduced.

5.1.2 Vocabulary: New quizzes

One change that was made in response to the low vocabulary study scores in 2021 was the introduction of short vocabulary quizzes. Although, as stated previously, the vocabulary should be easy for students, the addition of quizzes was intended to motivate students to complete the pre-class Quizlet study. The possibility of students getting high quiz scores was an acceptable compromise. The vocabulary quiz component meant the reading aloud activities were dropped from RS2.

5.2 Unplanned changes from previous year

5.2.1 Extra reading activities: Speed reading stories

A mid-semester addition was additional speed-reading practice using exercises from Victoria University of Wellington³. I noticed that some students were not increasing their reading speed

3 Millet, S. (2017), *Speed Readings for ESL Learners 500 BNC*. Accessed from https://www.wgtn.ac.nz/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/1068077/SRs-for-ESL-Learners-500-BNC-April-2017.pdf

by the mid-point of the course, so the readings were introduced to demonstrate to students how fast they were capable of reading. Instead of reading a text and timing themselves, students had to finish reading the passage within 75 seconds (a pace of 250 words per minute) before answering questions on the other side of the paper. One passage per class was completed for the rest of RS1 and continued into RS2.

5.3 Reflection

A final change that was made for RS2 was the introduction of more interactive activities. These were intended to introduce some variety to the class. One small change was to ask students to discuss the ‘expansion question’ sections of the previous textbook chapter together. A variety of interactive reading activities were also introduced to the students, for variety and to demonstrate activities that the students could use in their future teaching careers. The activities often reviewed texts from the previous chapter, a function that the removed reading aloud activities had been performing. Activities included clozed passages, dictogloss, sentence reordering and guessing vocabulary from context. The students reacted positively in class.

6 Conclusion

After several revisions, the course content for the following academic year is not expected to change much. The combination of self-paced speed reading, independent extensive reading, graded vocabulary study and a variety of in-class reading activities appears to be a good mix for students. The main lesson I have learned is that it is important to have a predictable ‘core’ to the course (the textbook in this case), but it is not enough on its own. For students to stay engaged with the class and practice a variety of reading skills, additional activities are essential. A combination of the predictable and novel is the best balance.

7 Appendix: Summary of RS1 and RS2 changes

Year	2019		2020		2021		2022	
Course	RS1	RS2	RS1	RS2	RS1	RS2	RS1	RS2
Delivery	Face-to-face		Online	Mixed	Mixed		Face-to-face	
Textbook	Reading Explorer Foundations		Reading for Speed and Fluency 1 & 2		Reading for Speed and Fluency 1 & 2		Reading for Speed and Fluency 1 & 2	
Extensive reading	30% mreader		40% Oxford	40% mreader	50% Reading A-Z		40% mreader	
Independent reading	10%		40%	10%	None		10%	
Book reports	15% 3 reports		20% 3 reports		20% 3 reports	20% 4 reports	15% 3 reports	
Vocabulary quizzes	25% 5 quizzes		None		None		10% 10 quizzes	

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Vocabulary study	None	10% Quizlet	10% Quizlet	10% Quizlet
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Some grading categories are not included for brevity. Percentages do not add up to 100%.

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