



The Effect of 20-minute Extensive Reading Activities on TOEIC IP Scores

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to present how university students' Test of English for International Communication Institutional Program (TOEIC IP) scores change after taking a 20-minute English extensive reading class during one semester. The research question was, "Is there a significant difference between the TOEIC IP scores from a 20-minute extensive reading class and those from a control class without extensive reading in a semester?" Extensive reading was conducted with first-year university students. Class A (n = 30) participated in the extensive reading; Class B (n = 32) did not take part in it. As a result, a t-test was conducted, and it showed the following significant difference between the TOEIC IP scores of Class A and those of Class B: $t(60) = -2.46, p < 0.05$. The answer to the research question was that there was in fact a significant difference between the TOEIC IP scores of the 20-minute extensive reading class and those of a control class without extensive reading in a semester. This suggests that extensive reading of easier books for university students can be effective for 20-minute increments in class and outside of class in a short period such as one semester.

INTRODUCTION

The implementation of extensive reading has been on the increase across Japan at educational institutions ranging from elementary school, junior high school, high school, and up to college or university. Recently, the trend has been expanding even to local public libraries—especially in the Aichi and Shizuoka prefectures—where local people have been engaging in extensive reading with enjoyment (Nishizawa & Iinuma, 2017; Goto 2019).

According to the definition of *extensive reading* by Day and Bamford (1998), "it is an approach to the teaching and learning of second language reading in which learners read large quantities of books and other materials that are well within their linguistic competence". Notably, this is widely accepted as its definition.

The learning effects of extensive reading have been reported so far in research articles. It can enhance students' interest in English (Rob & Susser, 1989), reading speed (Bell, 2001), and positive attitudes toward reading in English (Day & Bamford, 2000). It also improves the four language skills of reading, listening, speaking, and writing (Takase, 2010; Day, 2015).

As for the reading volume that makes extensive reading effective, Takase (2010) provided an example involving high school students. In her class, the students began to smoothly read English after reading from 50,000 to 60,000 words. Accordingly, their performances gradually improved as they reached approximately 100,000 words.

Nevertheless, there are different research results about the relation between the Test of English for International Communication Institutional Program (TOEIC IP) scores and reading volume (Nishizawa, Yoshioka, & Ito, 2007; Nishizawa, Yoshioka, & Fukada, 2010). Therefore, this study statistically explores this aspect.

In this regard, a particular research question is the following: “In a semester, is there a significant difference between the TOEIC IP scores from a 20-minute extensive reading class and those from a control class without extensive reading?” Previous research articles will be discussed in the rest of this section.

In the research of Nishizawa, Yoshioka, and Ito (2007), a class was created for technical college students that allowed them to freely select from 6,700 English books for extensive, silent reading at the library. One of the teacher’s tasks was to advise the students on their book selection. Consequently, the extensive reading class was conducted for 2 years. The result showed the median of reading volume was 250,000 words per person, and the average TOEIC score reached 403 points. These authors also investigated the relation between the reading volume and TOEIC scores and found that they could identify the improvement of TOEIC scores after reading 200,000 to 600,000 words. Moreover, they estimated that the threshold of extensive reading effects was 300,000 words according to a questionnaire survey. They insisted that the students could read English books without relying on translations from English to Japanese, which meant they would rather utilize English in their semantic processing.

Nishizawa, Yoshioka, and Fukada (2010) reported that students reached both an average TOEIC score of 507 points and an average reading volume of 600,000 words after in-class extensive readings, which occurred once a week over a 4-year period. TOEIC IP scores were significantly enhanced from the reading volume of 300,000 words; in contrast, the students who read approximately 100,000 words or below experienced no improvement.

O’Neill (2012) compared 213 students who extensively read Level 2 graded readers with 159 students who did not; subsequently, there were no significant differences in TOEIC IP reading section scores of both types of students. Specifically, graded readers are books for English learners, often rewritten in easy English.

Carney (2016) also examined the relation between TOEIC reading scores and reading volume by providing an out-of-class reading assignment, which included a 15-minute extensive reading class during both the second and third class meetings for 7.5 months. The students read the books at an appropriate level for their competence. The result showed there was no clear relationship between the amount of extensive reading done and TOEIC score growth (P. 83).

As can be seen from the above information, there are different research studies concerning TOEIC scores and reading volume.

METHODOLOGY

In the first semester of 2019, extensive reading was conducted with first-year nursing students at *S University*. Each student was placed in one of two classes in Japanese alphabetical order, and not on the basis of English competence. The researcher was in charge of the two classes of nursing students. Class A used extensive reading; the other (Class B) did not use it. Both classes used two textbooks that focused on the grammar and listening skills of TOEIC. At the end of the semester, all the students have to take the TOEIC IP, and the target score at *S University* is more than 400 points. As established earlier in this paper, *IP* means an institutional program in which

applicants take the TOEIC IP at institutions such as a university. The questions are recycled from past TOEIC IP implementations. The TOEIC IP consists of the following two sections: the listening section, which consists of 100 questions with a 45-minute time limit; and the reading section, with 100 questions and a time limit of 75 minutes. The total scores range from 10 to 990 points.

In Class A, the students read books borrowed from university libraries for about 20 minutes during the first part of each class. Notably, S University has two campuses, each of which has its own library: One will be called *O Library* (Figure 1) and the other will be called *K Library* (Figure 2). The nursing students have classes on both campuses and use those two libraries that have graded readers for extensive reading. O Library has 912 titles, and K Library has 627 titles; accordingly, they have different graded readers. In response to English learning, some companies have published a variety of graded readers, ranging from the easy to the difficult level. These particular entities are Penguin Readers, Macmillan Readers, Oxford Bookworms, Cambridge English Readers, and the Ladder Series. Each library has some of these publications.

The researcher also collaborated with both libraries. Day and Bamford (1998) suggests that “students are drawn to materials that are well displayed and accessible” (p. 115). As such, points of purchase (POPs) were displayed in the extensive reading corners at the university libraries (Figures 1 and 2). Created by the previous students who attended the extensive reading classes, the POPs were utilized to attract more students to borrow the books from there. According to Goto (2015), about 52% of the students reported that the POP display at the library was favorable. It was also revealed that “it seemed useful both for the student, and for others, attracting interest in the books on the one hand, and giving the student the pleasure of seeing a POP reflecting student comment, on the other” (pp. 114-115). The students in Class A were told in advance that their extensive reading was evaluated at the end of the class. They were also encouraged to do extensive reading outside of class.

In general, students do extensive reading on the basis of the following three rules by Sakai (2002, 2014): (1) Do not use dictionaries; (2) skip the words and expressions you do not know while reading; and (3) change the book when it is not interesting. These suggestions mean that you should avoid stopping the flow of reading, guess the meaning if you do not know it, and stop reading and change a book if you feel it is hard to read (Furukawa, 2013). This method was adopted by Class A, and the researcher explained those rules to the students. On the other hand, the students read a document explaining the learning effects of extensive reading; moreover, the teacher recommended they should read easier books at first. To record their learning, a reading record sheet was used so that they could visually recognize how much they have read at a glance. It includes space for information such as dates, book titles, book series, word count, comments, and ratings of how much a book is interesting from 1 to 10. Sometime during the middle of the class, all of the reading record sheets were collected; subsequently, they were returned at the next class with the teacher’s comments. Finally, all the sheets were collected again at the end of the class and analyzed for this study.



Figure 1. O Library



Figure 2. K Library

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to the reading record sheets in Class A, the total word count came to a total of 1,126,642 words along with an average of 37,554.7 words per person (rounded-off to the first decimal place). The maximum individual count was 108,242 words and the minimum was 582 words. The word counts were calculated when the students finished reading a book.

With regard to the TOEIC IP scores, the average in Class A was 468.5 points with the maximum at 615 points and the minimum at 325 points. The figure for Class B was 416.6 points (rounded-off to the first decimal place) with the maximum at 595 points and the minimum coming to 265 points. After the confirmation of homoscedasticity by an F-test, a t-test was conducted, which showed the following significant difference between the TOEIC IP scores of Class A and those of Class B: $t(60) = -2.46, p < 0.05$.

The next series of tables illustrate the research results in detail. Figure 3 represents the relation between word count distributions and the number of students. The graph shape is like a mountain; it is the maximum range at 30,000 to 35,000 word count distribution. The next

maximum is 20,000 to 25,000 word count distribution, followed by 40,000 to 45,000, and finally, 45,000 to 50,000 word count distribution. The minimum of 582 words as well as the maximum of 108,242 words appear to be outliers.

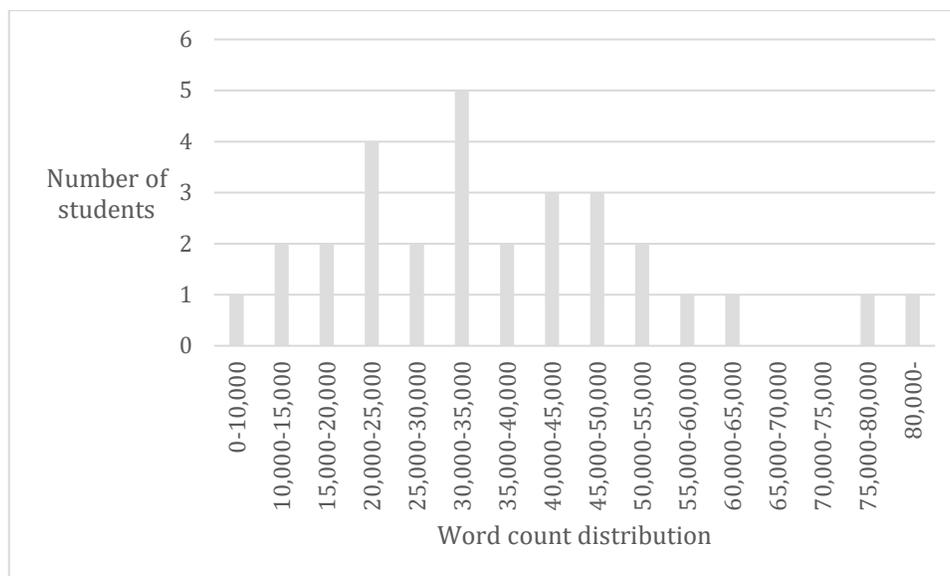


Figure 3. Word Count Distribution in Class A

Figure 4 explains the TOEIC IP score distribution in Class A and Class B, showing that Class A seems to move to the right, toward a better reading volume than Class B. Principally, Class B starts from 250 to 300 points, and it ends just at 550 to 600 points. In contrast, Class A starts from 300 to 350 points and it ends at 600 to 650 points. As a whole, extensive reading Class A thus outperforms Class B in terms of their TOEIC IP scores.

Figure 5, however, is a scattering diagram of TOEIC IP scores and word counts, representing the relation between TOEIC IP scores and word counts. This means that many word counts did not always guarantee high TOEIC IP scores. For instance, the student who read only 582 words obtained 580 points in the TOEIC IP; notably, the student who read 108,242 words obtained just 415 points.

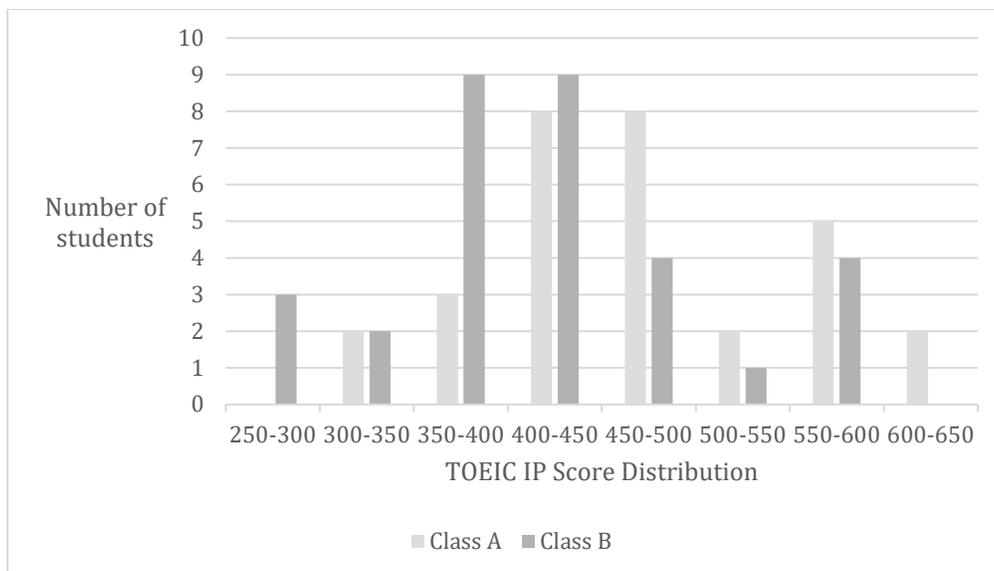


Figure 4. TOEIC IP Score Distribution in Class A and Class B

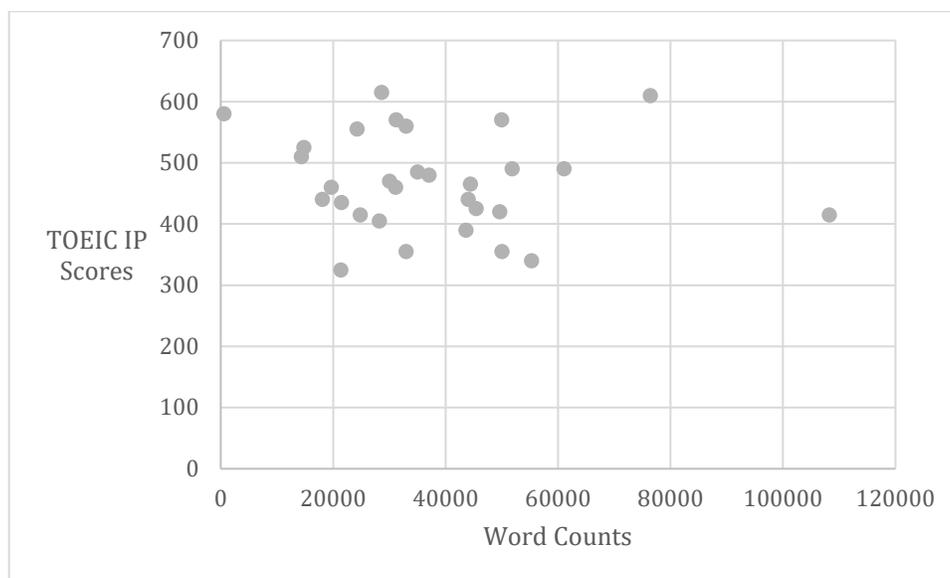


Figure 5. Scattering Diagram of TOEIC IP Scores and Word Counts

As can be seen in the research preview, previous research insists that the threshold of the effects of extensive reading is 300,000 words (Nishizawa, Yoshioka, & Ito, 2007) and that there are no significant differences between reading volume and TOEIC scores (O'Neill, 2012; Carney, 2016). However, this study suggests that a significant difference was observed between the class that utilized extensive reading and the class without it. This is in spite of the fact that the students simply read easy graded readers once a week in the semester. Their reading commitment was not only for the 20 minutes in class, but also as an out-of-class extensive reading assignment, finally reaching an average of approximately 38,000 words. Previous research did not adopt such an approach used in this study. As Takase (2010) points out, it is not university students but high

school students who can smoothly read English from 50,000 to 60,000 words. Accordingly, this study demonstrated that the effects of extensive reading can be realized even without much reading volume.

As for research limitations, either class might not have had students with the same English competency, because they were all placed according to Japanese alphabetical order. The students also might have had another English class that could affect this research. Regarding the research method, the word counts in this study were calculated when the students finished reading a book, which means that their word counts were excluded when they stopped reading a book before finishing it. There is a possibility that they could have read more than the word counts written on their reading record sheets. Although there might be such limitations, this study tried to examine the relation between reading volume and TOEIC IP scores in a different way from previous research, which indicated a possibility of the effects of extensive reading with a relatively lower reading volume.

CONCLUSION

The research question was as follows: Is there a significant difference between TOEIC IP scores of a 20-minute extensive reading class and those of a control class without extensive reading in a semester? The answer to this question was there was a significant difference between the TOEIC IP scores of a 20-minute extensive reading class and those of a control class without extensive reading in the semester. It was also found that the distribution of the TOEIC IP scores of the extensive reading class moved to a higher level than the control class.

All these findings suggest that the extensive reading of easier books for university students can be effective for 20-minute increments in and outside of class for a short period of time (e.g., a semester). Although previous research insists that word counts of 300,000 are necessary for the effects of extensive reading during a longer period, this study proposes another possibility for students to improve their English in a short period of time with lower reading volume, which can cast a different light from previous research. Accordingly, it is suggested that language teachers who teach English can more easily introduce extensive reading to their classes to improve their students' English competency.

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