

Students' Perceptions of the Extensive Reading Process in Terms of Translation Usage and Reading While Listening

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Extensive reading is a useful tool in language study. The authors managed an extensive reading program using the XReading.com platform. The program was delivered in two 16-week supervised semesters with an additional unsupervised summer campaign. A survey was administered in Week 4 of the second semester to 89 students who participated in the program. The survey gauged their reliance on the use of translation and grammar analysis, the use of the audio-assisted reading function, and the correlation between the two. It was hypothesized that students who read while listening (RWL) would be less likely to rely on the use of translation and grammar analysis. Analysis suggests that engagement with extensive reading over time decreased the use of grammar and translation strategies. Evidence on the use of the audio function was insufficient to derive conclusions.

Keywords: extensive reading (ER), XReading.com, grammar translation method, reading while listening (RWL), self-efficacy

INTRODUCTION

Background and Benefits of Extensive Reading

Extensive reading (ER), or reading for pleasure, has recently become a popular method of instruction in Japan and other Asian countries because of the many benefits associated with this form of classroom instruction. In ER, students are expected to read a lot of books (graded

readers) that are at or slightly below their level, and this practice leads to increased reading fluency (Stoller, 2015). To experience significant effects on reading fluency and vocabulary acquisition, researchers posited that students need to read more than 200,000 words in a year (Beglar & Hunt, 2014). There are many interpretations of what ER should consist of and, as such, there are many ways in which instructors have implemented ER programs (Day & Bamford, 1998, p. 37). Waring and McLean (2015) identified four essential core features of ER: fluent comprehension, high reading speeds, reading a large amount of text, and a focus on the meaning of the texts read.

Meta-analyses conducted on ER have revealed gains in reading rates, reading comprehension, and vocabulary acquisition (Jeon & Day, 2016; Nakanishi, 2015). Mermelstein (2015) and Park (2016) have shown that undergraduates studying in EFL programs significantly improved their writing skills with just a few short sessions of ER each week. ER can also have a positive effect on critical thinking skills: Indonesian undergraduate students who participated in an ER program showed higher scores on a critical-thinking test than a control group. The study participants also reported that ER helped with their ability to apply critical thinking in problem-solving (Husna, 2019).

Particularly in terms of reading speed and comprehension, ER has been shown to be superior to intensive reading (IR), which is the traditional, still prevalent form of classroom instruction at most Japanese universities. In IR, students read texts that are more difficult, rely on dictionaries for unfamiliar vocabulary, and engage in translation and grammar analysis. Students practicing ER have been shown to have significantly higher reading rates than students who only practiced IR (Huffman, 2014; Suk, 2014). In Japan, IR is also known as *yakudoku* (the grammar–translation method). A study conducted by McLean and Roualt (2017) has shown that Japanese undergraduates who practiced ER made significantly more gains in reading rates than fellow students who learned via the grammar–translation method. The authors of the study concluded that “ER is not merely more effective but also more efficient at increasing reading rate than grammar–translation” (McLean & Roualt, 2017, p. 103).

The Grammar–Translation Method

Despite the growing number of studies showing the effectiveness of

ER, its implementation has been slow at most Japanese institutions. The preferred method of teaching reading in the Japanese context is the grammar–translation method (Cook, 2012; Tsukamoto & Tsujioka, 2013), and as a result, Japanese students have a long-standing habit of conducting reading in English by engaging in a translation exercise (Sakurai, 2015). The grammar–translation method requires that students use dictionaries and focus on analyzing grammar and translating the texts from L2 into L1 (Lightbown & Spada, 2006, p. 159). This is contradictory to ER practice, which “generally involves rapid reading of large quantities of material or longer readings (e.g., whole books) for general understanding, with the focus generally on the meaning of what is being read than on the language” (Carrell & Carson, 1997, pp. 49–50). Due to previous learning environments and to the way in which most teacher training courses in Japan emphasize *yakudoku*, this is the most commonly utilized form of teaching reading in L2 in this country (Tsukamoto & Tsujioka, 2013). Thus, many K–12 Japanese instructors teach reading in L2 by focusing on short and challenging texts, dissecting the texts at the sentence and word level, then translating them (Nation & Waring, 2011).

The focus on the grammar–translation method in K–12 education is thought to have a detrimental effect on the practice of ER. Students who focus on grammar and translation slow down while losing focus on the content of the reading. ER focuses on content and fluency. Decreasing reliance on *yakudoku* when doing ER was shown to have a positive influence on reading amount, speed, and comprehension. A complete avoidance of grammar–translation was suggested as the best approach to achieve overall performance in ER (Sakurai, 2015).

The Practice of Reading While Listening

The practice of reading while listening (RWL) has long been established as helping L2 learners with reading skills (Antle, 2011; Billy, 2010; Tangakarn & Gampper, 2020; Webb & Chang, 2014). In fact, RWL has shown broad efficacy in improving receptive skills over ER alone (Milliner, 2019). While the focus in this paper is on reading skills, it is important to keep in mind that students need to develop both reading and listening skills. As such, knowing that RWL provides some benefit to reading skills is useful, but the fact that the reading skill gains occur simultaneously with listening skill gains makes the findings even

more pedagogically significant. Another key advantage to implementing ER is in reading fluency. By using audio support, teachers can see an increase in reading fluency gains while also seeing improvements in comprehension (Friedland et al., 2017). RWL provides a strong advantage in comprehension (Woodall, 2010). Field (2008, p. 233) argues that while engaged in RWL activities, students are more likely to focus their attention on the written than on the spoken word. Comparing the reading gains of Taiwanese undergraduate students, it was found that students who conducted extensive reading while listening showed marked improvement in reading speeds and a significant effect on reading comprehension compared to students who only engaged in sustained silent reading, and that the effects were more long lived for the RWL group (Chang & Millett, 2015). The intent of ER is to focus on understanding what is being read and reading a lot. By increasing fluency and comprehension, RWL strengthens the key goals of ER.

Not only does RWL provide improved comprehension; it is also preferable to some learners (Chang, 2009). However, Japanese students tend to be less receptive to RWL, and that ease of use needs to be taken into consideration when implementing an RWL program (Gobel & Kano, 2013). Student level, however, does need to be taken into consideration. Lower-level students, while receiving benefits, may need more time to acclimate to RWL (Chang & Millett, 2016). One issue with RWL is that students' reading rates might not match the listening speed, and this would not be beneficial to learners (Chang, 2009; Gobel, 2011). The Taiwanese students in Chang and Millett's (2015) study did not have the benefit of an adjustable speed audio function, but the XReading.com platform that students used in this study contained an audio function with a manually adjustable speed for most of the graded readers. In addition, the students who participated in the Chang and Millett study read only 85,712 words, which falls well short of Beglar and Hunt's (2014) 200,000-word threshold for achieving gains from ER.

ER and Self-Efficacy

Investigating Japanese students' perceptions of ER, Mikami (2006) found that most study participants had very little prior experience with the practice and found it difficult to maintain positive motivation. Students' perceptions and attitudes are a crucial factor that instructors need to consider in order to successfully implement any learning strategy

(Hwang, 2002; Mendler, 2001; Yamashita, 2004). Self-perception, or the evaluation of one's ability to perform a certain task (also known as "self-efficacy") determines the attitude that the individual will adopt towards a task, such as ER, and can have a significant effect on the outcome. In other words, self-perception will affect the effort that the individual will expend on a given task, the willingness to overcome obstacles, and the expectation of achievement (Bandura & Schunk, 1981). Individuals who experience success in completing a task improve self-perception, and there is a likelihood that this will lead to setting higher goals in the future for the same or similar tasks (Weiner, 1972, 1979; Weiner et al., 1971). Self-perception has a great influence on reading ability in L1, and it has been hypothesized that it would also have a great impact on reading in L2 (Walker, 2015). There is a strong correlation between self-efficacy and the effort that students will make in reading in L2 (Bandura, 1989; Walker, 2015). Therefore, in evaluating the success of an ER program, it is important to not only gather data on reading speeds, reading comprehension, and number of words read but also to survey the students to understand how they perceive their own progress.

The present study focused on the mitigation of grammar-translation strategies in the ER context. In addition, the accessibility to reading while listening support offered by XReading.com provided a secondary purpose for this study. The aim of the survey was twofold: (a) to gauge students' perceptions about their involvement with English-to-Japanese translation during ER and (b) to determine if the audio function in XReading.com helped students to avoid English-to-Japanese translation.

METHOD

Background

The English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program was designed to be as immersive as possible, and one of its main features was a rigorous ER component. For one year, all students had to read 15,000 words per week (240,000 words per semester) and have scores of at least 50% on reading comprehension quizzes on the XReading.com site to receive a passing score for the semester. XReading.com is a digital library of

graded readers that contains a good variety of texts for all levels and allows instructors to track titles, number of words read, and reading speed. Comprehension quizzes are also available for all books as well as an audio function that gives readers the ability to listen as they read.

Participants

The Japanese undergraduate students who participated in this study were enrolled in a faculty department that was established with the purpose of offering programs in education, management, and tourism and hospitality in the English language. To graduate, all students were expected to complete all their course work in English, and to prepare them for this challenge, an intensive three-semester-long EAP program was created for all incoming freshmen. Following the successful completion of the EAP program, students were required to attend a mandatory study abroad program for six months to a year before being able to pursue specialization within their fields of study in the department.

From this program, 103 students were asked to participate in the survey. For inclusion, students had to (a) have received a passing score for their first semester of study and (b) have taken a modified version of the Edinburgh Project on Extensive Reading Progress/Placement Test A (EPER/PPT A) three times. Of the students who met the criteria, there were 89 respondents.

Materials

Students engaged in ER through XReading.com. This allowed for the measurement of student progress. This also gave students access to RWL functionality. In order to address the research questions, a survey instrument was used. The survey instrument was adapted from Nobuko Sakurai's (2015) study and was made available to the participants in both English and Japanese.

Survey Questions

1. Compared to April, I use English–Japanese translation less often when I read.
2. I translate English sentences into Japanese word order less often

- now in ER.
3. I translate English words less often now during ER.
 4. I translate frequently used English words less often now during ER.
 5. I translate English words I know well into Japanese less often now during ER.
 6. I vocalize English words and sentences less often now during ER.
 7. I stop reading less often now during ER when I encounter English words I have never seen before.
 8. I stop reading less often now during ER when I encounter English words I have seen but cannot recall meaning.
 9. I think about English grammar less often now during ER.
 10. I frequently use the audio function when I do XReading.
 11. When I use the audio function, I am less likely to translate English sentences into Japanese.

Likert Scale Response Options

- 1 = Strongly disagree
- 2 = Disagree
- 3 = Somewhat disagree
- 4 = Somewhat agree
- 5 = Agree
- 6 = Strongly agree

Procedure

Students took part in the academic reading program as a part of their regular English study program. In Week 4 of the second semester, students were asked to complete the survey. The data was analyzed through descriptive statistics followed by calculating Pearson correlations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics for Questions 1 through 5 from the survey, which dealt mainly with the frequency and manner of English-to-Japanese translation that the students were engaging in while doing ER. The means for overall translation (Question 1) and for

word-level translation (Question 3) were around 4.3, indicating that the most common answers given by the students were *agree* or *somewhat agree*. This seems to indicate that most students were less likely to engage in overall translation and word-level translation compared to when they were first introduced to the practice of ER. The means for sentence-level translation (Question 2), translation of frequently used English words (Question 4), and translation of familiar vocabulary (Question 5) were higher than 4.6, which seems to suggest that most students chose to answer *agreed* to these questions. The standard deviation values for these questions are within one point, which means that there is not much deviation and most of the answers are close to the mean.

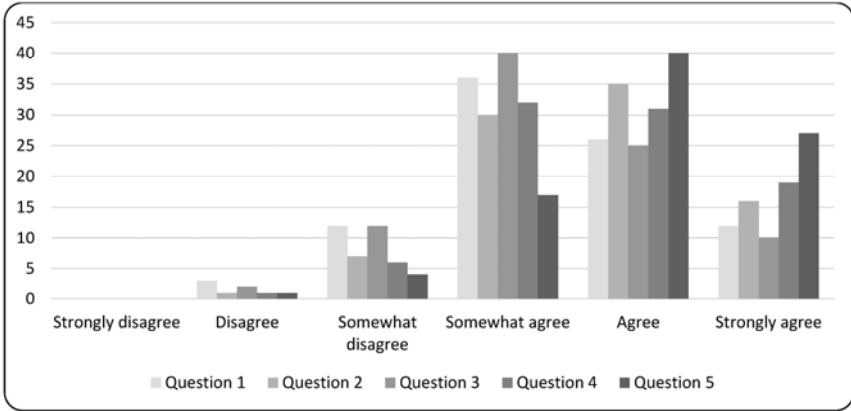
TABLE 1. Translation (Questions 1-5)

	1. Compared to April, Japanese translation appears less often.	2. I translate English sentences into Japanese word order less often now in ER.	3. I translate English words less often now during ER.	4. I translate frequently used English words less often now during ER.	5. I translate English words I know well into Japanese less often now during ER.
Mean	4.36	4.65	4.33	4.69	4.99
Median	4.00	5.00	4.00	5.00	5.00
Mode	4.00	5.00	4.00	4.00	5.00
SD	0.99	0.91	0.93	0.92	0.89
Kurtosis	-0.26	-0.21	-0.14	-0.36	0.59
Skewness	-0.14	-0.28	0.00	-0.21	-0.78

Regarding kurtosis, values for all questions fall within the -2 to +2 range, considered acceptable for a normal distribution (George & Mallery, 2010, p. 77). Similarly, the skewness values for Questions 1 through 5 also show that the data is normal (Bryne, 2010, p. 39).

Figure 1 exhibits the data distribution for Questions 1 through 5. Regarding the level of overall translation (Question 1), most of the answers are clustered in the middle portion of the graph, indicating that a majority of students answered *agree* or *somewhat agree* that overall translation has decreased since the beginning of the academic year.

FIGURE 1. Translation (Questions 1–5)



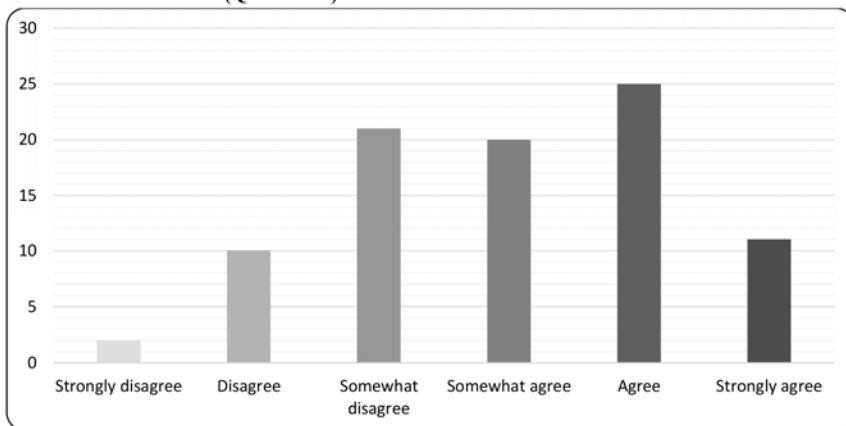
For all questions, the distribution seems to be skewing to the right, suggesting that as students progressed with their ER, they were less likely to engage in any type of translation. As students become exposed to vocabulary through reading, the more likely they are to stop automatically translating, as ER is a good tool for increasing familiarity with vocabulary through actual usage.

Students were being instructed in an environment in which English was the predominant language of instruction, and the way the ER program was setup, the grammar–translation method was not used. Despite this, in the first weeks, most students were still viewing reading as an activity that would help them to learn higher-level academic vocabulary for the TOEIC test (the method of assessment and scholarship for study abroad assignment criteria used by the university). XReading.com was very useful in trying to limit the level of graded readers that were made available to students, thus helping students to stick to the ER principle of reading many easy books. However, in the second semester, students were allowed access to a wider range of levels of graded readers. This was helpful to students in the higher-level homerooms, who were probably limited in the first semester, but it also lead to students trying to read books that were far above their level in order to use the texts as a source for learning new vocabulary. It is naïve to assume that after being taught with the *yakudoku* method for most of their primary and secondary education, students would just naturally move on to practicing ER. Despite this, their responses to Questions 1–5

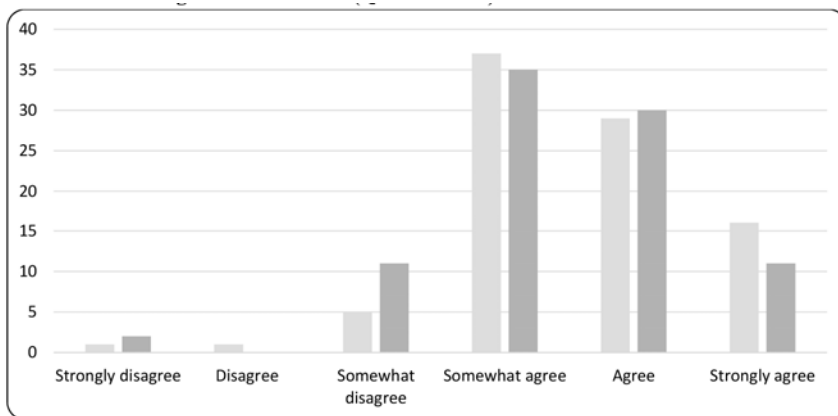
of the survey seem to suggest a movement away from translation as they progressed with their ER practice.

Regarding vocalization, or the practice of reading out loud, is shown in Figure 2. While the distribution suggests a slight skew towards a reduction in vocalization, there are two peaks, suggesting several possible interpretations. One interpretation is that some students found vocalization to be a useful practice in their reading, and these students would likely disagree, explaining the first peak centered at *somewhat disagree*. Another possibility is that another subset of students might perceive vocalization as an obstacle and not something that is helpful, which could explain the second peak in the data centered at *agree*. This phenomenon could be due to the fact that the survey respondents were a mix of levels with TOEIC scores ranging from 150 to 750, which means that it is not a uniform sample of perception on this particular criterion.

FIGURE 2. Vocalization (Question 6)



Questions 7 and 8 gauge whether the students are pausing less during reading or trying to continue reading rather than stopping to look up unknown vocabulary or stopping to verify grammar. For both categories, the distribution is skewed strongly towards the right; in other words, most students selected *somewhat agree*, *agree*, or *strongly agree*. The data seems somewhat centralized compared to translation, so there seems to be a weaker effect than translation on disfluency avoidance.

FIGURE 3. Avoiding Excessive Pauses (Questions 7–8)

The effects of focusing on grammar (Question 9) are more similar to the effects of translation (Questions 1–5), with the majority of the answers clustering around the “agree” options. There seems to be a skew towards a reduction in grammar focus as students are progressing with ER, although the effect seems to be weaker than for the reduction in translation. The overall reduction in focus on grammar as students are reading seems to indicate that they are moving away from reading to practice language and moving towards a focus on ER.

The audio function use (Question 10) showcased in Figure 5, shows a very wide range distribution. This means that some students didn’t use the audio function at all, while other students used this feature more, with the distribution somewhat skewed towards not using it. The reason for this is that there was a lack of consistent messaging: Although the EAP program was supposed to be coordinated, teachers were given a free hand at how they chose to run their classes, and some teachers did not inform the students properly about the full functions available to them on the XReading.com site. In addition, some students may have perceived the use of the audio function as cheating. In other words, it is possible they might have felt that listening is not really reading, and therefore that they were not really doing the assignment correctly. Overall, there seems to be disagreement on the use of the audio function in this group of students, but it is most likely an issue of how the XReading site was introduced to students. For example, post-survey, some students in the lower-level homerooms were asked why they did

not use the audio function, and the most cited reason was that they felt the audio was too fast for them to keep up. When asked the same question, some students in the higher-level homerooms answered that the audio function was slowing them down. Since the speed of the audio on XReading.com is adjustable manually, this was clearly due to a lack of proper communication on how the function can be used.

FIGURE 4. Grammar (Question 9)

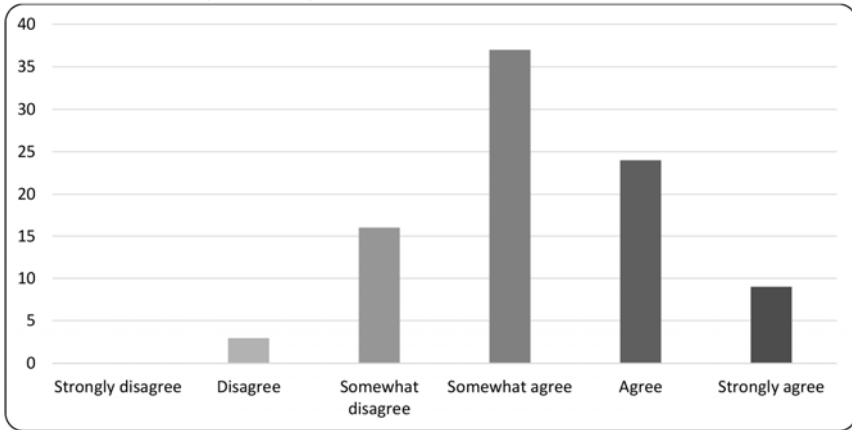
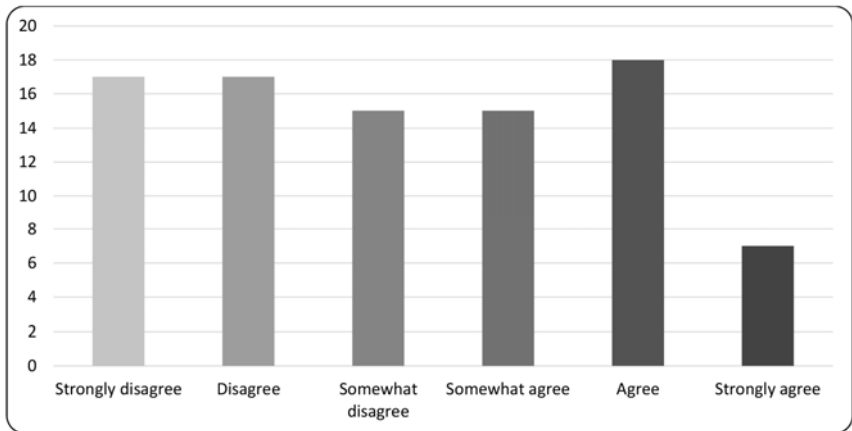


FIGURE 5. Audio Function Use



Regarding the audio function effect on translation (Question 11), the distribution is a lot less random (see Figure 6), with a slight skew

towards those who felt that the audio function helped them decrease use of translation. The lack of clumping or the lack of skewness in the data may be related to inconsistency in use of the audio function, and this question might have to be readdressed in future research. However, there is a Pearson correlation between Questions 10 and 11 (0.697), which means that the students who used the audio function more were more likely to say they decreased their use of translation more. This can be clearly seen by comparing the responses of students who did not use the audio function (i.e., answering *strongly disagree* to *somewhat disagree* on Question 10; see Figure 7), with those who did use the audio function (see Figure 8). It is possible that the students who did not use the audio function could not really answer this survey question, as they could not really experience how the audio function affected their use of translation. On the other hand, the students who used the audio function overwhelmingly skewed towards perceiving benefits.

FIGURE 6. Audio Function Effect on Translation

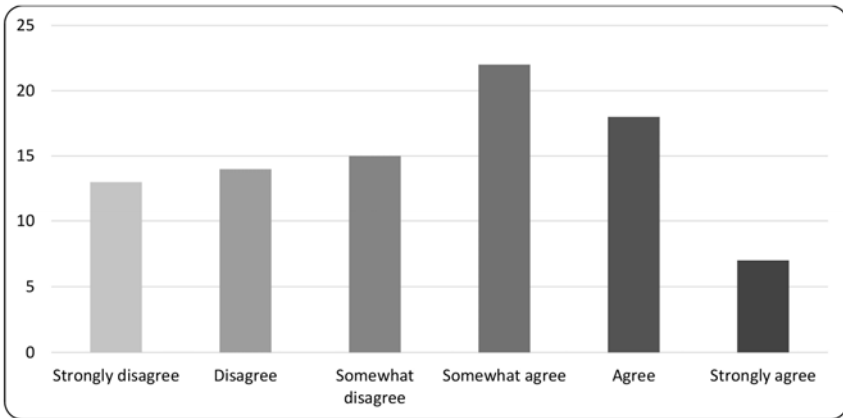


FIGURE 7. Audio Function Use Effect on Translations – Did Not Use Audio Function

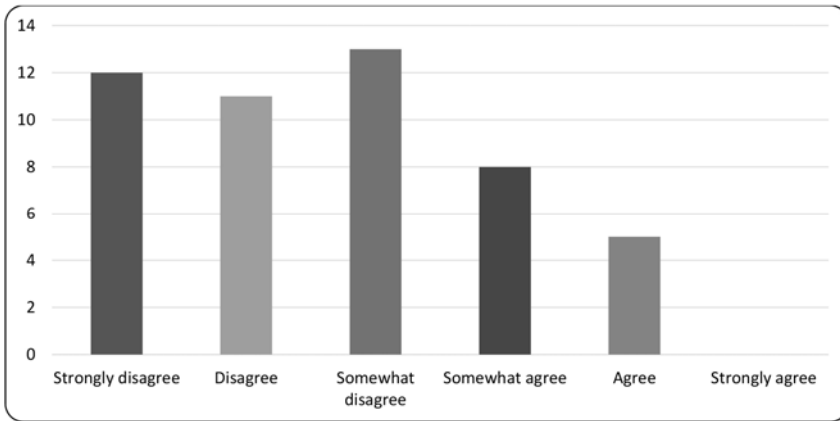
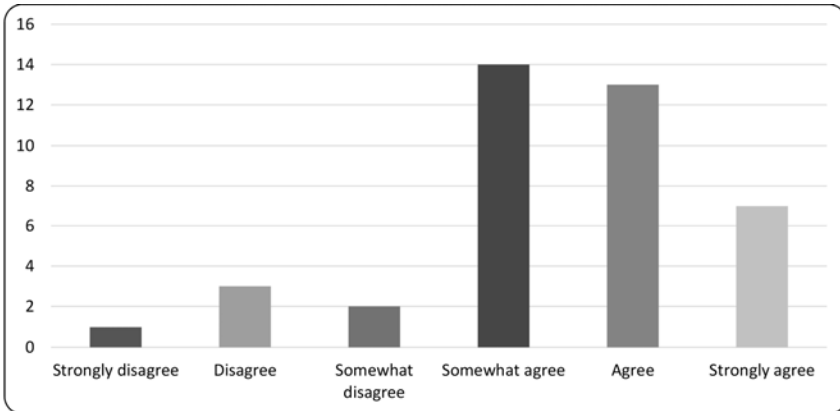


FIGURE 8. Audio Function Effect on Translation – Used Audio Function



CONCLUSIONS

Overall, after participating in this ER program for 20 weeks and in the summer reading campaign, most students reported that they experienced an overall reduction in the rate of English-to-Japanese translation and in their focus on grammar. More research is needed to address the questions on vocalization and the use of the audio function

because there needs to be better coordination among teachers so that students can understand the value and the usage of these functions. While the students who used the audio function felt that it was beneficial, it is important to understand why the students chose not to use the function. To further enhance students' self-efficacy in ER, it is important for instructors to guide and focus their efforts to avoid *yakudoku*. This notion might be surprising to Japanese students who have been trained to read in English with the grammar–translation method for most of their academic life. However, for students to attain benefits from ER, there is a need to scaffold the new approach to them. In particular, reading fluency is difficult to develop using any other methodology, yet it is key to developing in the language and to be productive in a content and language integrated (CLIL) or English as a medium of instruction (EMI) classroom. This is important as many universities are moving language learning towards CLIL or EMI models (Fujimoto-Adamson & Adamson, 2018).

Data on the reading speeds and number of words read also needs to be collected and analyzed to determine if the students' perceptions of their progress with ER correlates with their scores and actual progress as tracked by the XReading.com site. Furthermore, the key finding is that students developed strategies for the negotiation of meaning that were better suited to ER through practice. Moving forward, ER can be seen as a tool for not only the development of reading fluency and vocabulary but also as a tool to improve metacognitive strategy repertoire and usage.

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