



Out-of-Class Extensive Reading in Japanese as a Second Language: Enhancing Learner Autonomy Beyond the Classroom

Wataru Takahashi

(takahashi-w@kanda.kuis.ac.jp)

Kanda University of International Studies, Japan

Tae Umino

(uminotae@tufs.ac.jp)

Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, Japan

Abstract

With the rising popularity of extensive reading (ER) in Japanese language teaching, three types of ER have been identified: classroom-based ER (instigated by the teacher), out-of-class ER (optionally organized by the teacher/facilitator out of class), and autonomous out-of-class ER (instigated by the learner). Although ER encourages learners to extensively read in the L2 both in and out of class, it is unknown whether engagement in out-of-class ER leads learners to become more autonomous in their ER. In this study, the authors investigated the effectiveness of out-of-class Japanese ER sessions with international students at a Japanese university. A group of around ten students gathered voluntarily for weekly sessions led by a facilitator to read selected books. After eight months, six participants, who were leaving the sessions, were interviewed. Seven months later, three of these six were interviewed again on whether they had continued practicing out-of-class ER autonomously. Based on the analysis, the authors discuss whether out-of-class ER may encourage autonomous ER and, if so, what aspects of it may contribute to the process. The pedagogical implications of this are discussed, including suggestions for enhancing learner autonomy beyond the classroom, as well as issues relevant for future research.

1 Introduction

Extensive reading (ER) has increasingly been recognized as an effective activity in the field of L2 teaching, including Japanese (Awano, Kawamoto, & Matsuda, 2012; Day & Bamford, 1998). Day and Bamford (1998) reviewed empirical research examining the effectiveness of ER in L2 learning, noting that it enhanced reading ability, motivation, vocabulary, language competence, writing ability, and spelling. Moreover, there have recently been studies in the field of Japanese language teaching on incidental vocabulary learning (Mikami & Harada, 2011) and intrinsic motivation (Ninomiya, 2013, 2014) in ER, in addition to practical reports in various contexts (Awano et al., 2012; Kumada & Suzuki, 2015; Okada & Takahashi, 2012). Takahashi (2016) identified three types of ER: 1) classroom-based ER; 2) out-of-class ER; and 3) autonomous out-of-class ER. Classroom-based ER is instigated by the teacher in the classroom, so the number of participants is gen-

erally stable. When evaluating, the teacher has to consider the learners' attendance rates, assignments, and performance in examinations. Autonomous out-of-class ER, on the other hand, is instigated by the learner outside of class, without evaluations from a teacher/facilitator¹, so the learner has many opportunities to read books individually and at his or her own pace. Because of this, the learner also needs to establish autonomy in managing his or her reading environment and schedule. Out-of-class ER, which is the focus of this research, lies conceptually between the other two types, with the teacher/facilitator organizing optional out-of-class sessions that participants can attend depending on their schedules and preferences. As such, the teacher/facilitator does not have to consider learners' attendance rate, assignments, and examinations; however, the number of participants usually fluctuates because of learners' other commitments, such as preparation of examinations and other private matters. Takahashi also pointed out that most studies have focused on classroom-based ER, with few studies on out-of-class ER and autonomous out-of-class ER, particularly in Japanese language teaching. The three types of ER activities mentioned above are closely related to learner autonomy, which will be discussed in more detail in Section 2.2.

As the environment surrounding L2 learning is constantly changing, it may be helpful to examine and categorize the diverse learning opportunities that exist beyond the classroom in order to help learners make use of them (Benson, 2011). In this context, out-of-class ER is expected to serve as a bridge between classroom-based ER, which is teacher-initiated, and autonomous out-of-class ER, which is learner-initiated.

The aims of the study reported in this article were twofold. The first aim was to understand learners' perceptions of out-of-class ER and their autonomous out-of-class ER activities during ER sessions. The second was to investigate whether or not learners continued engaging in autonomous out-of-class ER after leaving the ER program.

We first review the definition of ER, categorizing it into three types depending on learner autonomy. Next, we describe our out-of-class ER project, and report on two longitudinal interviews with participants of the ER sessions. Based on the analysis of these two stages, we discuss whether out-of-class ER may encourage autonomous out-of-class ER and, if so, what aspects of it may contribute to the process. The pedagogical implications of this are discussed, including suggestions for enhancing learner autonomy beyond the classroom, as well as issues relevant for future research.

2 Literature review

2.1 Extensive reading

The definition of ER as an educational or learning activity varies depending on the purpose of specific ER sessions and the way in which they are conducted (Takahashi, 2016). In this article, based on Awano et al. (2012), ER is defined as reading extensively and with enjoyment, choosing books according to their language abilities, and not referring to dictionaries as much as possible.

ER for learners of Japanese has been based on insights from research into ER in English (e.g. Day & Bamford, 1998; Krashen, 2004; Sakai & Kanda, 2005). Extending the three rules of ER in English suggested by Sakai & Kanda (2005), Awano et al. (2012) proposed four fundamental rules for ER in Japanese: 1) start with easy books; 2) read without a dictionary; 3) skip over the words you don't understand; and 4) get a different book if you feel the current one is too hard or boring to read. These rules, which are also used in the ER sessions at TUFS, were established on the assumption that learners will naturally read a lot of books if they find the process enjoyable (rules 1 and 4) and not too difficult or troublesome (rules 1, 2 and 3). There are some controversies over whether or not to allow the use of dictionaries whilst reading. While admitting that the appropriate use of a dictionary may be effective at times, they point out the risk that the excessive use or dependence on it may have in making the reading a troublesome and/or a time-consuming process. In order to avoid this risk, these practitioners would rather encourage learners to infer the meaning of words and focus more on getting the gist of the whole text rather than focusing on every details. Thus, these four

rules are based on educational considerations with the goal of enabling learners to be autonomous readers.

2.2 *Learner autonomy and three types of ER*

We described the characteristics of the three types of ER in Section 1. In this section, we will discuss them from the perspective of learner autonomy. As mentioned before, ER is deeply related to learner autonomy, because it inherently fulfills the purpose of having learners read extensively in and out of the classroom. Several recent studies have dealt with fostering learner autonomy through ER programs. Imrie (2007) reported on a successful ER program at an university in Japan, which used a delivery system library to foster learner autonomy across the English curriculum. Channuan & Wasanasomsithi (2012) explored the ER instruction integrated within a framework of learner autonomy training strategy in Thailand. As a result, they concluded that ER not only enhanced reading ability but also promotes learner autonomy, enabling learners to become more autonomous readers. Mede, İnceçay and İnceçay (2013) described learners' and teachers' perceptions regarding oral book report to promote learner autonomy in ER courses at an English-medium private university in Turkey. The results showed that this activity fostered learner autonomy in terms of awareness-raising and taking on more responsibilities of learning, improved reading and speaking skills, and enhanced motivation. Learner autonomy is basically defined as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning" (Holec, 1981, p. 3). Benson (2011) further characterizes learner autonomy as comprising three dimensions: learning management², cognitive processes³, and learning content⁴. This categorization may be paraphrased in the context of ER as follows. Learning management consists of participation in the ER sessions, setting learning goals, evaluation, and ongoing ER; cognitive processes include carrying out reading activities in ER sessions; and learning content is instantiated in learners' selections of books. In this article, an autonomous learner is defined as one who can take charge of his/her own learning in all of these three dimensions.

The extent to which learners can exercise autonomy in ER is also dependent on the type of ER. As Table 1 shows and as has been mentioned previously, the three types of ER activities (Takahashi, 2016) allow learners to exercise autonomy to varying degrees (Benson, 2011; Dickinson, 1987; Holec, 2009; Umino, 2005). A "TF/P" entry means that decision-making responsibility changes from TF (teacher/facilitator) to P (participant/learner) with time. Different character sizes in the table represents the different extents to which the TF and the P have control over decision-making in the relevant areas. In classroom-based ER, the teacher/facilitator basically decides on the learning objectives, participation in the ER activity, environmental arrangement, evaluation, and management. Although learners sometimes make decisions about the way they read and select books for the ER sessions, the teacher/facilitator often prepares books for the learners. As such, learners in the classroom have a low level of autonomy in their choice of reading. In autonomous out-of-class ER, on the other hand, the learner essentially decides all the items, while the teacher/facilitator may occasionally recommend books for them to select. As a high level of autonomy is required of the learners, those with little autonomy might not be able to read on their own. Out-of-class ER, which is the focus of this article, is conceptually located between these two types. The teacher/facilitator mainly plans and manages the activities, preparing and providing books for the participants. Because this activity is implemented outside of class, learners can voluntarily participate in the sessions and define their own learning objectives. The teacher/facilitator decides how the books should be read and provides learners with appropriate advice. However, the learners are still free to choose to read in a different way to some extent, if they do not want to observe the rules of ER. In addition, the teacher/facilitator basically respects the learners' choice of books and reading pace. As described above, a higher level of autonomy is required in out-of-class ER than in classroom-based ER, so less independent learners might drop out of out-of-class ER sessions. Based on the above considerations, we regard out-of-class ER as a form of out-of-class learning (Benson, 2007, 2011) that can possibly lead learners to become more autonomous extensive readers.

Table 1. Three types of ER activity in terms of learner autonomy

Items/activities	Dimensions	Decision-maker	1) Classroom-based ER	2) Out-of-class ER	3) Autonomous out-of-class ER
Definition and selection of learning objectives		TF/P	TF	TF/P	P
Flexibility in participation		TF/P	TF	P	P
Environmental arrangement	Learning management	TF/P	TF	TF	P
Evaluation		TF/P	TF	P	P
Management		TF/P	TF	TF/P	P
How to read books	Cognitive processes	TF/P	TF/P	TF/P	TF/P
Book selection	Learning content	TF/P	TF/P	TF/P	TF/P

※TF: teacher/facilitator P: participant/learner

3 Method

3.1 Out-of-class “Extensive Reading Sessions in Japanese”

“Extensive Reading Sessions in Japanese” (ERSJ) began as educational support for international students learning at the Japanese Language Center for International Students at TUFS in November 2014. The sessions took place once a week as an optional out-of-class activity⁵. Each session lasted for 90 minutes.

The purposes of these sessions were: 1) to develop reading skills, such as reading speed and guessing strategies; 2) to allow participants the opportunity to interact with each other; and 3) to support participants in the transition to autonomous out-of-class ER. The students got together in a classroom at a time arranged by the facilitator, and selected books they wanted to read from books provided by the facilitator.

Over 250 books were provided for each session, consisting of Japanese graded readers, picture books, magazines, manga, novels, and so on. In each session, the participants chose a book and started to read while observing ER rules as much as possible. After reading the book, they filled in a book record asking them to write down details about the book (e.g. title, number of pages, level of difficulty) and their impressions of it. Book talk sessions were also held for about 30 minutes at the end, with participants introducing the books they had read to each other. The first author was present in the classrooms as the facilitator for each session, preparing the books, helping learners to select the appropriate books and to continue reading, and facilitating the book talk sessions.

Even though the ER sessions were conducted as an optional activity (that is, students earned no credits by attending), about 10 students ranging from beginner to expert level came regularly to the weekly sessions. They continued to join the sessions for 4 to 15 months.

3.2 Research method

This study consisted of two longitudinal interviews at different stages. In Stage I, we conducted interviews with ERSJ participants at the end of the second period in July 2015. The interviewees

were six participants (A, B, C, D, E, and F) who attended the ERSJ from April to July 2015. Interviewees D, E, and F continued to participate in the sessions after this first term. Stage II interviews were conducted seven months after Stage I with four of the six participants from Stage I, specifically, those who had participated most regularly (A, B, D, and E). However, interviewee D was still participating in the ERSJ when the Stage II interviews were conducted. Therefore, we will focus only on the three participants who had stopped attending the ERSJ at the time (A, B, E) to see whether or not they had continued engaging in out-of-class ER after leaving the ERSJ and whether their perceptions of ER in general had changed.

Table 2 presents the background of the interviewees. Interviewees A and B belonged to other domestic universities and were preparing for their graduate school examination at the time of the second interview. Interviewee E had already finished his study abroad in Japan and had returned to his country, where he was attending university and doing several part-time jobs. His second interview was, therefore, conducted in his home country.

The two rounds of interviews were conducted in a semi-structured fashion. Semi-structured interview is an exploratory method in which, as Dörnyei (2007) notes, “although there is a set of pre-prepared guiding questions and prompts, the format is open-ended and the interviewee is encouraged to elaborate on the issues raised in an exploratory manner” (p. 136). Interviewees A and B, whose Japanese was at the beginner level, responded in their L1 (Spanish) through an interpreter, and E, whose Japanese was at the expert level, responded in Japanese.

The interview items were prepared based on Benson’s (2011) three dimensions of autonomy with the aim of exploring the interviewees’ perceptions in these three domains. The items on learning management covered the following areas: reasons for participating in the ERSJ; what they learned from participating (Stage I); whether they continued autonomous out-of-class ER; whether there were changes in the amount of books they read; and their reading environment (such as whether they read alone or with other people after leaving the ERSJ) (Stage II). The items on cognitive processes covered the following areas: learners’ perceptions of the four rules employed in ER (Stage I); whether they still employed these rules in out-of-class ER; and any difficulties they found with autonomous out-of-class ER after leaving the sessions (Stage II). Finally, the items on learning content covered how they selected books to read (Stage I), whether they had access to enough reading resources, and whether there were any changes in the ways they selected books in autonomous out-of-class ER (Stage II). The interviews were recorded and transcribed. We analyzed the learners’ responses and grouped them according to the three dimensions of learning management, cognitive processes, and learning content. Depending on the interview question, we developed further categories and populated them. We also aimed to determine how each learner’s response changed between Stage I and Stage II qualitatively (e.g. learners’ perceptions of the four rules of ER) and quantitatively (e.g. whether they continued engaging in autonomous out-of-class ER).

Table 2. Background of the interviewees

	<i>A</i>	<i>B</i>	C	D	<i>E</i>	F
Gender	<i>Female</i>	<i>Female</i>	Male	Female	<i>Male</i>	Female
Age	<i>20's</i>	<i>20's</i>	20's	30's	<i>20's</i>	20's
First language	<i>Spanish</i>	<i>Spanish</i>	Spanish	Indonesian	<i>Serbian</i>	Russian
Japanese proficiency at Stage I	<i>Beginner</i>	<i>Beginner</i>	Beginner	Expert	<i>Expert</i>	Expert
Total participation time	<i>4 months</i>	<i>4 months</i>	1 month	15 months	<i>5 months</i>	8 months
Affiliation at Stage II	<i>Research student in Japan</i>	<i>Research student in Japan</i>	Research student in Japan	Research student at TUFS	<i>Student in home country</i>	Student in home country

※*Italics* designate participants who were interviewed at both Stage I and Stage II

4 Results

The analysis of the data demonstrates that two of the three former ERSJ participants (B and E) continued autonomous out-of-class ER after leaving the ERSJ (see Fig. 1). What aspects of out-of-class ER may have contributed to their continuing to engage in ER autonomously? In this section, we report on the analysis of the two relevant longitudinal interviews, focusing on the learners' perceptions on learning management, cognitive processes, and learning content. By describing and comparing the analysis in Stages I and II, we aim to understand learners' perceptions in these domains and their longitudinal changes, discussing what aspects of out-of-class ER may be taken to contribute to autonomous out-of-class ER.

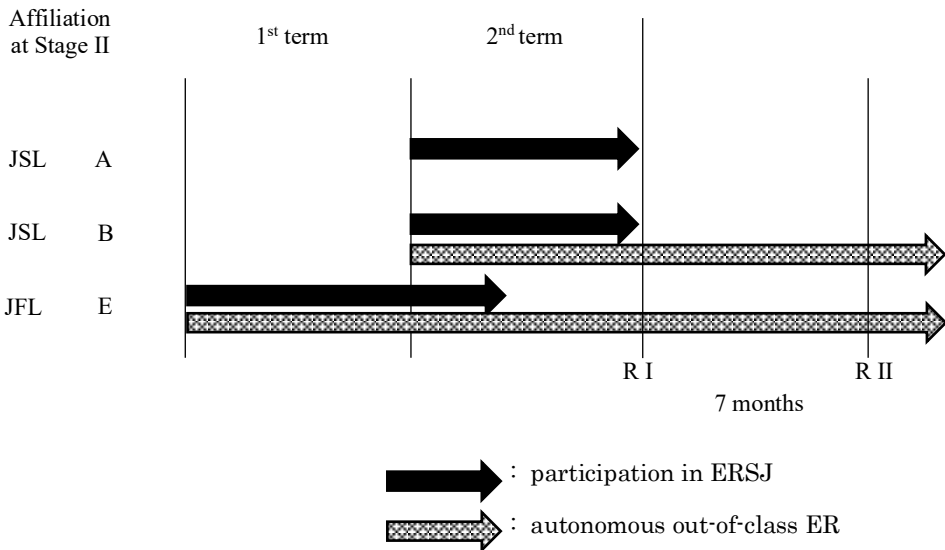


Fig. 1. Continuation of autonomous out-of-class ER

4.1 Learning management

4.1.1 Stage I

4.1.1.1 Participants' objectives in the sessions

At Stage I, the six interviewees were first asked why they participated in the ERSJ. Their responses were grouped into four categories.

The first group of reasons consisted of specific purposes such as preparation for graduate school, development of vocabulary, or gaining knowledge about Japanese culture. As mentioned earlier in Section 3, the ERSJ were basically designed to develop learners' reading skills and autonomy. It seems, however, that the participants in the ERSJ defined their own objectives depending on their individual needs.

The second group of reasons relates to the ease of learning management. For example, one interviewee aimed to participate in the ERSJ every week, while another came to the sessions in order to have an opportunity to read books in Japanese. In other words, it would have been difficult for them to read books continuously, for one reason or another, without participating in the ERSJ. Coming to the sessions made it easier for them to select books and to find time to read. It appears therefore that out-of-class ER promotes long-term reading more than fully autonomous out-of-class reading does, because ER sessions allow participants to more easily manage their learning.

The third group of reasons relates to benefits in affective domains, namely, enjoying the content of books and relaxing in the sessions. Because the learners could easily select the appropriate books for their current linguistic level, they could enjoy the content. Therefore, the role of the facilitator, who helps participants select books, seems to be very important. In addition, it seems that ER sessions' high degree of freedom and the presence of peers allows learners to relax.

The fourth group of reasons highlighted the importance of the socio-interactive aspects of the ERSJ. Meeting with the facilitator and other participants each week, the learners were able to share their impressions of the books they had read. This also encouraged them to continue coming to the sessions. This is not something that is available in autonomous out-of-class ER, where learners basically read alone. Though some previous research has touched on the socio-interactive effects of ER activity (Awano et al., 2012; Sakai & Nishizawa, 2014), there has been little effort to investigate this aspect in any depth. As this socio-interactive aspect is also related to ease of learning management and affective benefits, this is clearly an important factor in promoting continuous ER.

4.1.1.2 Participants' learning in the ER sessions in Japanese

Participants were next asked to self-evaluate their learning during the ERSJ. Three interviewees with elementary-level Japanese answered that ER had a positive effect on their grammar and vocabulary, saying, for instance, "Having exposure to natural Japanese, I could understand how to use grammar I have learnt," and "I could talk with friends using the vocabulary in the books I have already read." In the Japanese language, difficulties with *kanji* (Chinese characters) can be a barrier for learners from non-*kanji*-using regions. In this vein, one interviewee replied, "ERSJ helped me to lose my fear of learning *kanji*". It seems therefore that the ER had the effect of decreasing learners' resistance to learning Japanese. In this ER session, the facilitator had selected only books with *kana* superscript, a practice that is effective in decreasing learners' fear of or resistance towards *kanji* and the Japanese language overall. Based on the above responses, rules 1), "start with easy books," and 4) "get a different book if you feel the current one is too hard or boring to read," seem to be most important for elementary-level participants.

On the other hand, the expert-level interviewees answered that they had developed their abilities of inferring from context, identifying the keywords in the book, and reading faster. For them, therefore, the other two rules ("read without a dictionary" and "skip over the words you don't understand") seemed to be most important.

These results suggest that not only did the participants feel certain benefits from the ER sessions, but they also started reading books using the rules of ER.

4.1.1.3 Autonomous out-of-class ER during the ER sessions

Finally, we asked the interviewees whether they read books autonomously outside of the ER sessions. They all answered in the positive. Apart from borrowing books from the Japanese Graded Readers series provided in the ERSJ, they also acquired manga (B, C, and F) and novels (D and E) by themselves. Additionally, we asked them about their general reading experiences in their L1 and L2. All the interviewees enjoyed reading books in their L1, and this reading habit may have influenced their autonomous reading out of class. However, in light of the fact that they had borrowed books from the ERSJ to engage in autonomous ER, we can assume that their participation in out-of-class ER had some influence on fostering their simultaneous autonomous out-of-class ER.

4.1.2 Stage II

4.1.2.1 Continuation of autonomous out-of-class ER

In this section, we report on the analysis of Stage II from the perspective of learning management. Interviews were conducted seven months after Stage I, which took place at the end of the ER sessions. We first asked three former participants whether they continued to read books autonomously after their participation in the ER sessions, with two (B and E) answering in the positive. We could describe their case as one in which the transfer from out-of-class ER to autonomous out-of-class ER was successful.

Interviewee A, who did not continue with out-of-class ER, was mainly focusing on her field of specialty as a research student, though she still took Japanese lessons. She told us that she had her hands full with her current research at the new university and that she communicated mainly in English in class, so the opportunities for her to use Japanese had decreased dramatically. It was for these reasons that she did not continue with out-of-class ER autonomously. Interviewee B was also at a new university as a research student. Like interviewee A, she was very busy with her research, but she continued to read extensively outside of class, saying that she read manga on the train on the way to her part-time job. Interviewee E also continued to read extensively after going back to his country. He read young-adult fiction and novels on the way to his university and the company where he worked, as well as before going to sleep at night.

4.1.2.2 Change in the amount of reading

We next asked the three participants how the amount they read had changed since Stage I. All the interviewees replied that they read more books than before.

B said that her reading amount had increased because she had gotten used to reading and could therefore read more easily. She also told us that her Japanese had improved over the intervening seven months, allowing her to read more. E answered that he continued to read books in order to improve his Japanese and to make good use of his free time.

As mentioned above, it seems that various factors contributed to the learners' continuing autonomous out-of-class ER. Habituation of reading was helped by the improvement of their Japanese skills and positive attitudes toward reading in Japanese, despite the fact that their Japanese learning environment had changed and they had become busier than before.

4.2 Cognitive processes: perceptions of the rules of ER

4.2.1 Stage I

We now turn to the second dimension of learner autonomy, the cognitive processes. In particular, we were particularly interested in how the learners perceived the four fundamental rules of ER.

At Stage I, most interviewees showed a positive attitude towards rule 1), “start with easy books,” and rule 4), “get a different book if you feel the current one is too hard or boring to read.” However, there were controversies over rule 2), “read without a dictionary,” and rule 3), “skip over the words you don’t understand.” There were some positive opinions about rule 2), such as “It is good for me not to use a dictionary because I cannot concentrate on the content of the book with it.” There were also several negative opinions, such as “There are really important words among those I don’t understand.” Regarding rule 3), a positive response was “I often understand the words when I read the next page.” A negative opinion was “There are important parts to really understand the context.”

In their autonomous out-of-class ER while participating in the ERSJ, the participants mostly observed rules 1), 3), and 4). Thus, by following these rules, they acquired a new way of reading when reading extensively. However, they showed more resistance to rule 2), with five out of the six participants reporting that they did not observe it. Interviewee A reported that she did not use a dictionary while reading her book, but that she did refer to it afterwards.

In summary, the interviewees maintained the ER rules to some extent during both in-class and out-of-class ER and in autonomous out-of-class ER, although they resisted using some rules (rules 2 and 3) partially.

4.2.2 Stage II

Table 3 summarizes the learners’ perceptions⁶ of the four rules at Stages I and II. Compared with Stage I, the participants had not changed their opinions in general and continued following the rules of the ERSJ in their autonomous ER.

Nevertheless, interviewee B made an interesting point that these rules may be contradictory at times. As B was a great fan of manga, she did not mind the linguistic difficulty of the books when reading them. She could also generally infer the meanings of the unknown words from the pictures and could easily skip them (following rule 3). For these reasons, she did not feel the need to follow rule 1) (“Start from easy books”).

As with Research I, attitudes towards rule 2 were still negative overall. However, both B and E reported that they found it troublesome to use the dictionary especially on public transportation and so tended to use it after having finished reading the whole or some part of a book, inferring from context or illustrations.

We next asked them whether they had any difficulties when reading extensively out of class on their own. Interviewee B answered that she found difficulties in reading and understanding *kanji*, but she could guess the meaning because of *kana* annotations beside the *kanji*. However, she did use the dictionary to confirm them after reading the whole book when she had the keywords she really wanted to look up. On the other hand, interviewee E said that it was difficult to understand the specific expressions such as idioms in Japanese. When he found these idioms, he made it a rule to confirm how to read *kanji* and the meanings with his electronic dictionary or smartphone after reading some paragraphs. The interesting point is that they both avoided looking up every unknown word while reading and used the dictionary only after having finished reading the book. Consequently, they followed rule 2, a recommended way of reading in the ERSJ.

Nonetheless, all the interviewees pointed out that these rules of ER could not be applied in all learning situations. For example, B said that her supervisor always suggests reading textbooks in her specific field above her level of Japanese which she cannot refuse. She added that she could not skip over the content or stop reading the textbooks, or avoid using a dictionary in this context.

Table 3. Perceptions of the four rules of ER

ER rule (Stage I→Stage II)	A	B	C	D	E	F
1) Start with easy books	5	5→5	5	5	3→3	4
2) Read without a dictionary	5	5→4	2	4	4→4	2
3) Skip over the words you don't understand	4	5→5	4	4	4→3	2
4) Get a different book if you feel the current one is too hard or boring to read	5	5→5	5	5	5→5	5

1: very much disagree; 2: disagree; 3: neither; 4: agree; 5: very much agree

4.3 Learning content: Selection of books

4.3.1 Stage I

All the interviewees were participating in the ERSJ when the authors conducted Stage I of this study. Therefore, they always chose their books from the books prepared by the facilitator. Further, they all reported that they also read autonomously outside of the ERSJ, borrowing books from the set prepared by the facilitator or acquiring books from bookstores or second-hand booksellers. As they were in a Japanese as a Second Language (JSL) environment, they had no difficulty getting access to reading resources.

4.3.2 Stage II

At Stage II, we asked three interviewees about their access to reading resources after leaving the ERSJ. Despite the changes in their learning environments, they all managed to access reading materials in one way or another. Interviewee B, for example, found some low-cost second-hand bookstores near her house. However, interviewee E, who had gone back to his country, a Japanese as a Foreign Language (JFL) environment, had difficulties finding appropriate books to read. While he had bought over 100 books in Japan to send back home, they had not arrived yet. He found it very hard to buy books on the Internet in his current situation or to find attractive books in Japanese in the library. He had been making do with some novels that he had received from a friend as a present.

Interviewee A, who did not continue engaging in autonomous ER, replied that she also had difficulties finding appropriate books, even though she was still in a JSL environment. She attempted to read some manga for children but struggled to do so, eventually stopping autonomous ER.

In the next section, we discuss what support may be provided for such learners.

5 Discussion and pedagogical implications

We described the results of two interviews in the previous sections. Four of the six participants in Stage I participated in the ERSJ continuously despite the fact that the sessions were voluntary and thus did not award any credits. Furthermore, they all read books extensively and autonomously outside of the framework of out-of-class ER. At Stage II, seven months later, two-thirds of the interviewees said that they continued with autonomous out-of-class ER after leaving the ERSJ. Previous studies have often discussed the difficulty of continuing learning in the case of out-of-class learning and self-instruction (Jones, 1998; Umino, 2005). In spite of these indications, two of the participants at Stage II participated in out-of-class ER for 11–15 months, and said that they continued to read books extensively on their own for seven months after the conclusion of the sessions.

Based on the above analysis, we discuss whether out-of-class ER may encourage autonomous ER, in particular in relation to the three dimensions of learning management, cognitive processes, and learning content. Moreover, if this is the case, we consider what aspects of out-of-class ER may contribute to the process, and the roles that the out-of-class ER and the facilitator may play.

5.1 The dimension of learning management

Out-of-class ER is a voluntary activity, with fewer constraints than classroom-based ER. This is advantageous in the following respects. Firstly, participants can easily set their own objectives in the sessions. For example, they might be advised as to the appropriate books, if the participants tell the facilitator that they have some specific purpose for attending the sessions, such as preparation for graduate school or learning about Japanese culture. In addition, out-of-class ER causes less stress than classroom-based ER, allowing participants to read in a more relaxed atmosphere. As there are plenty of books available in the room for the purposes of ER, there is a higher possibility that participants will find books that meet their interests. In this sense, out-of-class ER is a “learner-friendly” framework, providing each learner with a customized way to read extensively.

At the same time, out-of-class ER is more structured than completely autonomous out-of-class ER. This is also helpful in the domain of learning management. In the ERSJ, the facilitator of the sessions arranged the time and place to read, and prepared books for the participants. This made it easier for the participants to read regularly at a fixed time and place, manage the pace of reading, and to select books of an appropriate level. In fact, after leaving the ERSJ, interviewee A did not manage to find time for reading. On the other hand, interviewees B and E managed to do so by setting aside a fixed time for reading in their daily routines, such as on their way to the work/university or before going to bed. Therefore, learners need to be aware of the schemes provided in out-of-class ER so that they can apply them to their autonomous ER activities in their own daily lives.

From the perspective of fostering learner autonomy, then, it would be helpful if the facilitator devised some ways to encourage the participants to reflect more on their own ways of managing their learning. In other words, if the facilitator, who is responsible for creating and maintaining the learning environment and operationalizing the learning structure, not only facilitates the sessions, but also partly plays the role of a “language advisor” (Murray, 2009), it seems that learners will be more likely to reflect on their learning in terms of all three dimensions. Murray (2009) noted that language learning professionals take on the dual roles of facilitator of learning and language adviser. He argued that whilst the role of facilitator is limited to organizing and facilitating the ER sessions, the role of language advisors is to help learners to learn, including providing support, guidance and feedback at all phases of the language learning process from goal setting to evaluation (Kelly, 1996; Mozzon-McPherson, 2000). We would additionally like to point out that the extent to which the role of facilitator/language advisor is involved might change depending on the type of ER.

5.2 The dimension of cognitive processes

Next, we discuss what aspects of out-of-class ER may contribute to autonomous ER in relation to cognitive processes, in particular, the role of the facilitator. First, applying ER rules in learners’ own reading activities is one way of helping them continue engaging in autonomous ER. Most of the interviewees had positive attitudes towards the ER rules, applying them in their own ways even after leaving the ERSJ.

The rule to which the learners showed the most resistance was the one pertaining to the use of dictionaries. Although there was the rule “read without a dictionary”, the facilitator did not strictly control the participants’ use of dictionary in order to respect their way to read books in the activities. As a result, some of them could not help looking for the meaning they did not know. In the context of ER sessions, the overuse of dictionaries is thought to prevent readers from reading extensively, so the facilitator recommends that they refrain from using dictionaries as much as possible. Re-

cently, however, due to the development of various dictionary tools, such as web dictionaries, electronic dictionaries, and smartphones, it has become much easier to use dictionaries. Therefore, some learners initially had negative opinions of this ER rule. Day and Bamford (1998) indicated that prior experience of second language reading, in which it was necessary for learners to understand every word of a text, might predispose learners against ER rules. Whether learners use a dictionary or not when they face unknown words is also closely related to personality factors, such as learners' beliefs about language learning (Horwitz, 1987) and their tolerance for ambiguity (Naiman, Frölich, Stern, & Todesco, 1978). Due to such personality factors, learners may not be able to change their reading practices easily.

However, having experienced reading without a dictionary, some participants who took part in the ER sessions for a prolonged period observed that they realized it is not always necessary to look up every unknown word (commenting, for example, "I often understood unknown vocabulary if I read the next page," and "I tried to understand what the keyword of the book was"). By experiencing reading by ER rules, learners may gradually learn to apply this new way of reading in their own reading in the long term.

Furthermore, the facilitator may provide participants with assistance⁷ when they face words they do not understand. As learners who have just started ER may have a greater resistance to ER rules, the facilitator may provide assistance in the following ways: (1) by explaining concretely how to read based on the four rules of ER; (2) by observing carefully how the participants are reading; and (3) by adjusting the rules in order to fit the participants' beliefs (such as by allowing them to refer to the dictionary after finishing a section or a chapter). Thus, the role of the facilitator as a mediator is highly important for out-of-class ER to serve as a bridge to autonomous out-of-class ER.

5.3 The dimension of learning content

Finally, we discuss the dimension of learning content. The two interviewees who continued autonomous out-of-class ER after leaving the ERSJ, B and E, had realized by Stage II what kind of reading was suited for them, with B choosing manga and E choosing young-adult fiction and novels. By being able to select appropriate books for themselves, they also had more control over the learning content.

In the ERSJ, as the facilitator prepared a selection of books for learners to choose from, they could easily enjoy a wide range of books by simply coming to the sessions. Being exposed to and trying out books of different genres, they eventually came to find their favorite genres. Thus, providing access to and introducing a wide range of books is one role the facilitator can play in fostering autonomous out-of-class ER.

On the other hand, some learners may not come to find their favorite genres through simply attending the sessions, such as in interviewee A's case. A had difficulty finding the appropriate books after leaving the ERSJ, eventually stopping autonomous out-of-class ER.

If we consider such cases, simply providing a wide range of books during the sessions may not be sufficient for all learners to foster their autonomous out-of-class ER. One way of providing support in this area may be creating an online system for participants and ex-participants of ERSJ—that provides a range of reading resources on the web. The first author has been running a trial website for extensive readers on SNS, posting easy news articles, reading materials, and information about useful websites for autonomous ER readers. This site also has a bulletin board, where extensive readers can post their impressions of the Graded Readers. Encouraging learners to use such a website during the ERSJ may help them make use of such a website and continue autonomous ER in the long term.

6 Conclusion

This study is subject to the usual caveats on the limitations of case studies, in particular the difficulty of knowing whether these learners' experiences are typical of students who share the same

broad experience of out-of-class ER in a second language. Therefore, we would like to collect further longitudinal data from a wider range of cases in both JSL and JFL environments. Furthermore, even though the ER sessions were held collectively, we did not investigate their socio-interactive aspects, such as whether and to what extent participants benefited from interactions with the facilitator or other peers. Investigating such issues would contribute to our understanding of the socio-interactive benefits of ER for learner autonomy. Some of our participants continue to engage in autonomous out-of-class ER; it would be worthwhile to continue our investigation of such long-term autonomous extensive readers longitudinally in order to fully understand people's out-of-class ER and out-of-class learning more generally.

We would argue, however, that this case study has value in highlighting some of the factors that may enhance autonomous ER. Based on the analysis, we discussed how out-of-class ER may serve as a step towards autonomous ER. We would like to summarize some pedagogical implications of the study's findings for both learners and teachers/facilitators. For learners, out-of-class ER may contribute to the development of their learner autonomy, because it is a "learner-friendly" framework, providing each learner with a customized way to read extensively. For teachers/facilitators, it may be easier for a facilitator to conduct ER sessions outside of class than in a classroom, because such an arrangement would have fewer constraints, such as time and curriculum. When conducting the sessions, it is recommended that the facilitators consider their roles in the three dimensions (namely, learning management, cognitive processes, and learning content) to help learners make the transition to autonomous out-of-class ER.

Notes

¹ "Facilitators create and maintain the learning environment and operationalize the learning structure. [...] In short, the facilitator's responsibility is to ensure that all aspects of the learning environment are conducive to learning." (Murray, 2009, p. 132)

² Activities related to metacognitive aspects such as deciding the objectives of a task on one's own, selecting the way to complete the task, monitoring pace and time spent working on the task, and evaluating one's performance after completing the task.

³ Activities related to mechanisms of the information processing system, such as learning strategies (e.g. analyzing and integrating language materials and guessing at the rules).

⁴ Activities related to the control of the learning content through selecting learning materials and so on.

⁵ The ERSJ were held in the following terms: November 2014 – February 2015 (11 times), April – July 2015 (12 times), July – September 2015 (6 times), October 2015 – January 2016 (13 times), and February – March 2016 (3 times).

⁶ Note that only B and E, who continued engaging in out-of-class ER autonomously, responded to this question at Stage II.

⁷ For example, the facilitator can instruct learners on how to infer from context or pictures, how to identify keywords, how to read without a dictionary, and how to select easy books.

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