

# Implementing the MoodleReader Module

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Created to support Extensive Reading programs, MoodleReader gives teachers an easy way to assess the reading activity of their students outside the classroom. The article details one teacher's experience in trying to implement MoodleReader into the curriculum of a foreign language faculty at a small, private university in Japan. In addition to detailing the steps taken to introduce MoodleReader to students and faculty, this article will also explain the rationale behind decisions made and actions taken. Finally, this article will share survey results from both students and faculty members, showing how those results influenced further evolution of the program into its present form. One of the key issues to emerge in this study was the importance of the role of the teacher in determining whether or not students successfully participated and achieved word count targets.

In the fall of 2010, I began teaching in the Department of British and American Studies at a small, private university in Kyoto. At the time, I was introduced the head librarian (also a professor in the above mentioned faculty), who had already created an Extensive Reading room with an impressive collection of graded readers and was trying to get teachers and students to use it, with little success. When I showed him MoodleReader and how it could be used to facilitate Extensive Reading on a larger scale, he quickly took a liking and became very supportive of an effort to create a faculty-wide Extensive Reading program as an official part of the curriculum. What follows is a detailed explanation of the steps taken from that initial meeting toward developing a MoodleReader-based Extensive Reading program in our faculty.

## Getting Started – Fall 2010 Semester

It was agreed that I would use MoodleReader to support Extensive Reading in two of my English communication classes for first-year students in our Junior College during the fall of 2010; one lower-level, one higher-level, for a total of 38 students. At the beginning of the semester, I gave students a handout explaining the details of the program, as well as an in-class demonstration on how to access the MoodleReader site and take quizzes. I also gave

students what I thought were “achievable” word count goals of 40,000 and 50,000 words respectively, recommended MoodleReader starting levels, and explained that their successful completion of these goals would account for 20% of their final grade for the semester. All of these were based on calculations I made from studying the practices at Kyoto Sangyo University (Robb & Kano, 2010; and Robb, Healy, and Claflin, 2010). Throughout the term I monitored their weekly progress and gave help and advice when needed. Students were surveyed at the end of the term, using both quantitative and qualitative items, on what they thought of their experience.

## Fall 2010 Results

As can be seen from Table 1, participation rates (the percentage of students having taken at least one quiz) hovered around 70%, while word count averages and completion rates (the percentage of students actually having completed the word count goal for the semester) varied.

Being new to Extensive Reading and being a first-time user of MoodleReader, I didn't quite know what to expect. However, I was disappointed in the completion rates, especially after reading that Pennington (2011) reported 79% and 67% completion rates for his first-run of MoodleReader. Encouragingly, however, 83% of participating students (n=26)

Table 1. Fall 2010 Data from MoodleReader

	AVG. WORD COUNT	PARTICIPATION RATES	AVG. # OF QUIZZES	COMPLETION RATE
LOWER CLASS	15,128	75%	4.3	20%
HIGHER CLASS	43,104	67%	5.0	44%

reported their experience as being both enjoyable and beneficial, while 89% answered ‘yes’ to the question, “Should all first year students be required to participate in the Extensive Reading program?” The most common complaints from students were issues with the website freezing or slowing down, finding books that actually had quizzes available on MoodleReader, a confusing graded reader level chart, and not being able to take more than one quiz per day.

### Faculty Acceptance and Official Pilot - Spring 2011 Semester

Equipped with the results and data from the fall, as well as with support from the head librarian and other key faculty members, giving MoodleReader introductory presentations in March of 2011 to both the curriculum committee and the faculty at large proved fruitful, yielding essentially unanimous support. From that point an official pilot was planned for the spring semester, with the ultimate goal being full curriculum integration in the spring of 2012.

### Spring 2011 Pilot Set-up

Before embarking on the pilot, a number of issues had to be addressed, the first being the number of books in the library. An initial book count showed just over 1,800 copies of around 950 titles. However, TOEIC scores for the bulk of our incoming 1st year students indicated that the majority might be reading at MoodleReader levels 5-7, suggesting a need for more copies in that range. We determined that we had around 900 copies of 450 titles in that range as of April 1st, 2011, meaning that we could easily support somewhere in the neighborhood of 150 students, giving each student plenty of titles to choose from at any given time.

We also decided to make a MoodleReader chart specific to our own collection to be hung on the wall in the library, as we had previously been borrowing the one from Kyoto Sangyo University. In addition, a

list of books with quizzes was printed out and placed in the Extensive Reading room for students to check. Furthermore, we added a feedback form to the website using the questionnaire module for students to use who needed help with a variety of issues. Finally, a team of English teachers was put together to begin writing quizzes for titles lacking quizzes in our library.

Together with the curriculum committee, it was decided that six English classes with six different teachers would participate in the 10-week spring pilot, for a total of 139 students. One of the classes was a lower level class, four were intermediate, while one was high; with target word goal counts of 30,000; 35,000; and 40,000 respectively. Instructional handouts were prepared in Japanese to be passed out to the students, explaining the purpose and procedures of the program. An initial training session was held before the pilot started for the four teachers who were new to MoodleReader, during which it was suggested that teachers make the Extensive Reading portion 20% of the final grade. However, teachers were free to alter that percentage as they saw fit.

### Spring 2011 Pilot Results

At the end of the pilot, both teachers and students were surveyed and the results were compared with data from MoodleReader. As before, survey questions for students were both quantitative and qualitative and were administered on the last day of class. Teacher surveys were conducted via email with entirely qualitative items. As with the two classes in the fall, participation and completion rates varied considerably (see Table 2). This time, however, feedback from teachers gave us some insight into possible cause/effect relationships between practice and results.

It quickly became clear that classes 4 and 6 not only had almost perfect participation rates, but that completion rates were high and average word

Table 2. Spring 2011 Data from MoodleReader

	AVG. WORD COUNT	PARTICIPATION RATES	AVG. # OF QUIZZES	COMPLETION RATE
CLASS 1	1	13.6%	0.1	0%
CLASS 2	10	31.8%	1.3	23%
CLASS 3	17	86.4%	2.7	14%
CLASS 4	48	95.7%	5.9	91%
CLASS 5	4	78.3%	1.7	0%
CLASS 6	41	100%	4.8	86%

counts were well above target goals for those classes (35,000). Based on teacher feedback, we noticed some differences between practices and policies in classes 4 and 6, and what we might call the ‘underperforming’ classes (if we define performance in terms of these numbers).

#### Performing vs. Underperforming Classes

In the performing classes (4 and 6), teachers made it very clear to their students that participation was mandatory and that failure to do so would mean the loss of 10%-20% of the final grade for the semester. Also, these teachers made a consistent effort to remind their students in class each week of their progress toward their final goal, keeping the Extensive Reading program in the field of student awareness. In class 6, the teacher requested that students bring their books to class on at least one occasion, and gave them some time in class to share and discuss. In class 4, the teacher gave a 10% bonus of extra credit to any student who achieved double the recommended word count target of 35,000 words. Three students did so.

In contrast, we saw some different practices and policies in the underperforming class. In class 1 (the high level class), the teacher told the students that their participation would be good for them, but that it had no real effect on their final grade for the course. In class 2, the teacher told his students that they would “get some points” if they read books and took quizzes, reminding them “four times” during the semester. It is noteworthy that there is no record of this teacher logging into the MoodleReader site during the pilot to check on student progress. In class 3, participation rates were relatively high, however, it is difficult to isolate any particular policy or action that led to a low completion rate (14%). The teacher told his students that participation was worth 30% of their grade, and offered extra-credit incentive if students read three books in the last few weeks of the pilot. The teacher in class 5 did not respond to the survey questions.

#### Student Feedback

The quantitative data from 6-point Likert scale items showed a 20% mean increase in students’ like of reading English and a 10% mean increase in their perception of their own English reading ability before and after the pilot (n=113). Students also found the MoodleReader-supported Extensive Reading program to be beneficial ( $\mu=2.55$ ) and somewhat enjoyable ( $\mu=2.91$ ). However, they found using the MoodleReader

site to be somewhat difficult ( $\mu=3.14$ ) and the book quizzes themselves to be somewhat difficult as well ( $\mu=3.63$ ).

According to the qualitative responses, students were happy to have the freedom to choose their own titles and felt that reading the books helped them increase their vocabulary and overall general English ability. They also were happy that the program gave them an opportunity to start reading books in English, which many of them had never done before.

Common complaints centered on the books and quizzes being too difficult, and on not being able to take more than one quiz in a single day. In theory, both books and quizzes should be easy, not difficult, and students should be reading consistently, not cramming quizzes into a single day. This indicates, in part, a failure on behalf of our program to better explain to students what Extensive Reading exactly is and to ensure that they are all reading consistently at the appropriate level. The fact that students report books and quizzes as being too difficult suggests that students are reading at a level that is too high for them.

#### Moving Forward – Final Thoughts

In preparation for the fall 2011 pilot in which we planned to expand the number of participating classes to 18, the librarian continued to stock the shelves in the reading room with more titles and copies (over 3,000), while separating all books with quizzes from those without. He also colored-coded books with stickers and added labels for MoodleReader levels to make book selection easier for students. In addition, links to instructional videos on how to view books, take quizzes, and get help were added to the site, and a separate Moodle course was created for participating teachers to serve as a place to discuss issues and get help, as well as a repository for Extensive Reading resources.

Reflecting on the spring 2011 pilot, it is clear that sharing with teachers what works and what doesn’t will be helpful in improving future participation and completion rates, as well as word count goals. Also, teachers need to better scaffold the book selection, reading, and quiz taking process more carefully at the beginning of the semester, and monitor them more consistently throughout the semester. And as Rosszell (2007) suggests, better integration of reading with communicative activities may enhance the quality of

student experience. A community of practice needs to be developed if our faculty is to continue to increase the scale and depth of the program.

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