

## Substantial Gains in Listening and Reading Ability in English as a Second Language from Voluntary Listening and Reading in a 75 Year Old Student

***Beniko Mason***

*Beniko Mason's Extensive Reading (ER) program is based on the Comprehension Hypothesis.*

*Her first studies showed that students who did substantial amounts of reading outperformed students in intensive reading programs. Subsequent studies showed that aural comprehensible input (story-listening) was more effective and efficient than eclectic methodology on vocabulary acquisition. More recent work includes case studies of those who did mostly or only self-selected reading; these readers made outstanding progress on standardized tests, gaining far more rapidly than those who did traditional study.*

*Dr. Mason has also reported on how to start and set up an extensive reading program, and what factors contribute to creating a successful reading program. Her publications are found at: [www.benikomason.net](http://www.benikomason.net)*

A previous report (Mason, 2011) described the case of a 42 year old Japanese man who gained 15 points per month on a standardized test of English reading and listening, the TOEIC, by engaging primarily in an input-alone approach.

This paper reports on another case, an older Japanese man who also followed comprehension-based methodology derived from the Comprehension Hypothesis (Krashen, 2003). He read and listened to English voluntarily, with little time dedicated to study, and gained 17 points per month on the TOEIC.

### **The case of Mr. Nakano**

Mr. Nakano was born in 1936. He had worked at a large company after graduating from National Osaka university and retired at age 65. He took English classes at Berlitz for three years between the ages of 66 and 68, and also took a correspondence English listening course for two years between ages 67 and 69. After that he was away from English until he was 74 years old, when he began to take a conversation class taught by a native speaker of English at an adult education program offered by a university in Osaka.

After taking the conversation course for two semesters, his instructor recommended that he take a reading and listening class, which was also offered at the same adult education program.

The comprehension-based course met once a week and focused on listening to interesting folk tales from around the world, told by the instructor. Students in the class read graded readers as homework, beginning at the 200-word level. At the end of the second semester, Mr. Nakano was reading books at stages 4 and 5 from the Oxford Bookworms series (stage 6 is the highest level), books at levels 4, 5 and 6 from the Cambridge English Readers series (level 6 = advanced), as well as books written for reluctant readers for native high school students written by Anne Schläff. Students in the class were told that they did not have to look up unknown words in the dictionary when reading, but were allowed to do so.

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Mr. Nakano was asked to keep a log of what he read as part of the course requirement. He reported that he read a total 6344 pages in two semesters. Soon after completing the course, on June 26, 2011, he took the TOEIC test. His total score was 495 (listening, 175; Reading, 320).

Mr. Nakano then began an independent reading and listening program, not attending any English classes, but still keeping a log of what he read as well as the time he invested in reading. There was, however, no “accountability”: Mr. Nakano was not tested on what he read in any way nor did he write book reports or summaries.

For five months between June 26, 2011 and November 27, 2011, he reported that he spent 253 hours in reading and listening: 158 hours were dedicated to self-selected reading of graded readers, a total of 2624 pages, and the rest to listening: He listened to “Drippy” and “The Adventure of Quarter” by Academy Publishing company (30 hours), “Listening-no-Tatsujin” (15 hours), and the NHK Radio 5-minute listening program, which he listened to several times a day (50 hours). The NHK program had a vocabulary study component, and Mr. Nakano said that he did the exercises for a total of four hours.

He also reported that he spent about 18 hours doing listening exercises from a TOEIC preparation textbook. Combining the four hours on NHK vocabulary and 18 hours of test prep, Mr. Nakano dedicated about 22 hours to direct study, about 8% of the total time he invested in English.

Mr. Nakano took the TOEIC again on November 27, 2011, with a total score of 580 (Listening, 230; Reading, 350), a gain of 85 points since June 26. Table 1 summarizes his results.

Table 1. Summary of Mr. Nakano’s test results

TOEIC	June 26	Nov. 27	Gain	Time Spent
Listening	175	230	55	95 hours
Reading	320	350	30	158 hours
Total	495	580	85	253 hours

Note: The average total score of all TOEIC test takers in Japan is 591, with 323 in listening and 267 in reading. [http://www.toEIC.or.jp/toEIC/data/data\\_ave01.html?score\\_id=0000000104](http://www.toEIC.or.jp/toEIC/data/data_ave01.html?score_id=0000000104)

Table 2 compares Mr. Nakano with the subject of the previous study, Mr. Tanaka (Mason, 2011). There is remarkable similarity in their results: Each gained nearly the same amount per month, and exactly the same per page read. (It needs to be pointed out, however, that Mr. Tanaka also did about 70 hours of vocabulary study in addition to 217 hours spent reading and 30 hours spent in a listening class, amounting to 22% of his total time spent with English.)

Table 2. Mr. Nakano and Mr. Tanaka Comparison

	Mr. Tanaka	Mr. Nakano
Age	42	75
Length of the study	12 months (Jan. 2009 ~ Jan. 2010)	5 months (June, 2011 ~ Nov. 2011)
Pages read	5456	2624
TOEIC score gain	475-655 = 180	495-580 = 85
Points/month	15	17
Points/page	0.03	0.03

## Discussion and conclusion

Mr. Nakano, like Mr. Tanaka, easily exceeded the gains on TOEIC by junior college students in Japan majoring in English (Pendergast, 2010). After four semesters of classroom instruction, which included over 500 hours of classroom instruction, the junior college students gained 135 points, a rate of 7 points per month and about one-fourth of a point per hour (500 hours/135 points = .27 points/hour), not counting homework. (The method used in Pendergast’s study included some extensive reading of graded readers as homework and hearing stories, with students choosing between extensive reading and hearing stories during the third and fourth semesters. The core of the method was “self-accessed pair work,” which focused on interaction and production, the aim being to “discover” certain grammatical principles of English.)

These results not only demonstrate that language acquisition can occur from comprehensible input with very little time dedicated to direct study, but also suggest that acquisition of listening and reading competence from comprehensible input is more efficient than traditional approaches.

## References

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Beniko Mason, Ed. D. at Shitennoji University in Osaka, Japan first began her Extensive Reading (ER) program in 1984 in Japan. Her first question was whether ER was more effective than the traditional reading method, then whether it alone was better than the eclectic method, and finally whether reading alone was more efficient. She has also reported on how to start and set up an ER program, and what factors contribute to creating a successful ER program.

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