



An Exploration of Students' and Teachers' Perceptions of a Two-Year Extensive Reading Program in a Chinese Secondary School

Xiaomei Sun

The University of Edinburgh

ABSTRACT

To date, many studies have shown beneficial influences of extensive reading (ER) on second language or foreign language (L2/FL) acquisition in various aspects. However, limited research has been conducted to explore the implementation of extensive reading in L2/FL in secondary schools. This study focuses on a two-year ER program to investigate five secondary EFL teachers' and eight students' perceptions of ER and its implementation in a Chinese secondary school. Reading materials were original English novels, selected by teachers and students in the first stage and the second stage of the program respectively. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, students' reading journals and various forms of documents related to the ER program. The findings of this study indicate that teachers' guidance, supervision, and encouragement facilitate the implementation of ER in secondary schools. Meanwhile, reading original novels and keeping reading journals are beneficial for advanced and upper-intermediate EFL learners. However, secondary EFL teachers are still lacking in related training for ER implementation.

INTRODUCTION

Extensive reading, according to Kelly (1969), was first applied to foreign language pedagogy by Harold Palmer in the early 20th century. However, the research into ER started gaining popularity as late as the 1980s, partially triggered by Elley and Manghai's (1981) study on ER in primary schools. In the past few decades, this field has seen a remarkable proliferation of studies on the effectiveness of ER, among which many have demonstrated the benefits of extensive reading on L2/FL acquisition (e.g., Irvine, 2006; Park, 2016), and on learners' attitudes and motivation towards language learning (e.g., Arnold, 2009; de Burgh-Hirabe, 2011).

Selection of ER materials has been the subject of much debate. Choosing easy materials is deemed by some scholars (e.g., Day & Bamford, 1998, 2000) as the number one principle for implementing ER. Besides, many scholars (e.g., Krashen, 1993; Susser & Robb, 1990) propose that students choose their own reading materials to make ER a pleasurable activity. Nevertheless, in the context of Chinese secondary schools, materials for ER are commonly selected or recommended by EFL teachers for the purpose of giving in-class instructions and

guidance on the reading (Liu, 2011; Yan, 2016).

Definition of Extensive Reading

Day and Bamford (1998), two leading scholars in the realm of extensive reading in L2/FL, summarized Palmer's (1964, 1968) original conception of ER as “real-world reading but for a pedagogical purpose” (p. 5). Likewise, in *The Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics* (Richards, Platt, & Platt, 1992), extensive reading is defined as a learning activity “intended to develop good reading habits, to build up knowledge of vocabulary and structure, and to encourage a liking for reading” (p. 133). To some extent, the pedagogical purpose of extensive reading contradicts the purpose of *reading for pleasure* or *reading for general understanding* emphasized by some scholars (e.g., Krashen, 1993; Nation, 2001; Susser & Robb, 1990). Despite this discrepancy, there are some widely accepted features of ER, some of which are: reading in quantity (Krashen, 1989; Palmer, 1968), and reading at a rapid speed (Hill, 1992; Palmer, 1964).

Selection of Extensive Reading Materials

For most authorities in this field, extensive reading entails reading for pleasure and therefore giving learners the freedom to choose their favored reading materials is a principle applied to many ER programs (e.g., Green, 2005; Lyutaya, 2011; Renandya & Jacobs, 2002). Authentic reading material, as opposed to simplified reading material, enjoys its popularity for the following reasons: it makes reading purposeful (Wong, 2001); it is more motivating and interesting than simplified material, especially for adolescent learners (Allen, Bernhardt, Berry, & Demel, 1988); it enhances readers' grammatical and lexical knowledge (Gilmore, 2007); it raises readers' cultural awareness (Day & Bamford, 1998). Despite all the advantages, authentic materials could be too linguistically challenging for L2/FL learners to grasp the meaning and develop reading skills (Nuttall, 1996). Moreover, the *cognitive overload* caused by challenging texts might result in learners' frustration and loss of interest in extensive reading (Gilmore, 2007; Lucas, 1991). Some studies (e.g., Baleghizadeh, 2010), however, have discovered that teachers' guidance and assistance contribute to better effects of using authentic materials.

Reading and Writing

As literacy skills, reading and writing are both processes of meaning construction, the combination of which could enhance language learning in various aspects (Grabe, 2001; Shanahan, 2016). As a manner of the combination, writing after reading may improve learners' reading comprehension and writing competence (Grabe & Zhang, 2016). Furthermore, writing after reading could serve as a means of communication between the teacher and students about topics of their own choice (Hedge, 1988). Despite these advantages, some researchers (e.g., Renandya & Jacobs, 2002) suggest that writing should be used cautiously in an ER program because students' dread of writing may hinder their reading.

Empirical Studies of ER Implementation in Chinese Secondary Schools

According to *English Curriculum Standards for Full-time Compulsory Education and Senior High Schools (trial version)* (Chinese Ministry of Education [CME], 2001, hereafter the Curriculum Standards), senior high school students (aged 15-18) are supposed to read approximately 300,000 and 360,000 words (besides those from textbooks) to reach Level Seven and Level Eight of the Curriculum Standards respectively. However, limited empirical studies have been carried out in this context (see Table 1). It is interesting to note that reading materials used for all these four ER programs were selected by teachers. It is also notable that ER-related classroom activities were integrated into these ER programs. As one of the researchers concludes, teacher's *manipulation* is requisite for ER implementation in Chinese secondary schools (Yan, 2016).

Another common feature of these four studies is their focus on students' gains in language acquisition or change of attitude towards EFL learning. The present study adds to the existing body of research by exploring teachers' and students' perceptions of ER and its implementation. This study also extends our understanding of the practicality of using student-selected materials (original novels) for an ER program implemented in Chinese secondary schools.

Table 1. Previous Empirical Studies of ER Programs in Chinese Secondary Schools

Researcher & Year of Research	Type of Reading Materials	Selection of Reading Materials	Participants	Place	Length of the Study	Teaching Activities	Evaluation	Results	Type of Study
Wang (2004)	Simplified English novels (Book Worm)	Teacher-selected	Intact class (student number not mentioned)	Hubei, China	3 years	Teacher-guided discussion in class; writing	Not mentioned	Ss' application of vocabulary from the reading to the writing	Not mentioned
Liu (2011)	English magazines (for experimental group/Group A); reading comprehension exercise books (for control group/Group B)	Teacher-selected	60 students (30 in Group A; 30 in Group B)	Beijing, China	10 weeks	(Group A) Teacher-guided reading activities & writing; (Group B) doing exercises & analyzing mistakes	Pre-experiment test; post-experiment test	(Group A) Improved scores in listening, multiple choice, cloze, reading comprehension, completing and writing sentences; (Group B) improved scores only in reading comprehension	Mixed methods
Yan (2016)	Original English novels	Teacher-selected	100 students (50 in experimental group/Group A; 50 in control group/Group B)	Zhejiang, China	3 months	(T) Giving guidance on reading strategies for Group A; (T) providing word lists & giving background information for Group A & B; (Ss) copying useful expressions & writing summaries	Pre-experiment test; post-experiment test	(Group A) Slightly higher scores in reading & writing; (Group A & B) improved motivation for English learning	Mixed methods
Yin (2016)	English young adult literature	Teacher-selected	55 students	Beijing, China	4 months	(T) Providing background information & reading strategies; organizing discussions, mimic writing & watching movies adapted from the books	Teacher's observation	Enhanced interest and confidence in ER; enlarged vocabulary	Mixed methods

METHODOLOGY

Research Context

As stated above, extensive reading in English is required of Chinese secondary school students by the Curriculum Standards (CME, 2001). Practitioners may not be aware of the exact requirements, but some Model High Schools (also known as Key Schools) in Beijing have been implementing ER in recent years. As a case in point, in the secondary school (a Model High School) where the researcher used to work, reading original English novels has been integrated into EFL teaching for almost 10 years. The present study explores an ER program carried out in this school (coded as “School X”) from 2014 to 2016.

Combining the traditional mode of ER implementation in School X and some innovative ideas, six EFL teachers of Senior One started an ER program in September 2014. This program consisted of two stages. At the first stage (from September 2014 to January 2016), this project involved all the students of Senior One (568 in total, aged 15-16), six Chinese EFL teachers (including the researcher) and an American teacher majoring in English literature. Taking account of the benefits of reading authentic materials as aforementioned and students’ comparatively high level of proficiency in English, the six EFL teachers decided to use original English novels (*Tuesdays with Morrie*, *The Alchemist*, *Animal Farm*, and *To Kill a Mockingbird*) for the reading program. Students were required to read approximately 50 pages per week. The American teacher delivered a lecture twice a week for half of the students each time in the auditorium of School X, covering the background information about the novel and the analysis of themes, characters, motifs, etc. Meanwhile, the Chinese EFL teachers organized classroom activities and checked assignments related to the ER program. To ensure that students paid enough attention to this program, some questions concerning the novels were included in the mid-term and final examinations, accounting for approximately 10% of the total score of the exam paper.

In the second stage of the reading program (from February to June 2016), in view of the heavy academic burden from all subjects for the Senior Two students (students in their fifth year of secondary school), the program continued with only two experimental classes the researcher was teaching. Students in these two classes demonstrated higher learning abilities, including time management ability. Voluntarily, 24 students from these two classes, most of whom were advanced or upper-intermediate English learners, followed this program with the researcher. Considering that students had gained adequate skills and strategies for independent novel reading, students were allowed to select English novels to read. It was suggested that students read approximately 50 pages a week, but they could adjust the reading amount to their schedules. Students were also advised to submit one book report or one entry of their reading journals (written in English) every one or two weeks. They could write anything related to the novels they were reading, with no word limit. As an encouragement policy, these students enjoyed the privilege of being exempt from part of the routine English homework other students had to finish.

Research Questions

As aforementioned, almost no studies have investigated teachers' and/or students' perceptions of ER and its implementation in Chinese secondary schools. To fill the gap, this study aims to explore secondary EFL teachers' and learners' perceptions of ER and its implementation in this specific context by answering the following two research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of EFL learners and teachers concerning extensive reading after they participated in a two-year reading program?
2. How do EFL learners and teachers perceive the implementation of extensive reading in a Chinese secondary school?

Participants

Three sampling parameters were used to select student participants for the present study. First, the researcher tried to find the students whose journals are information-rich (Patton, 2002) and provide diverse insights into the case (Dörnyei, 2007). Second, the researcher attempted to achieve gender balance among the student participants, as suggested by de Burgh-Hirabe (2011) who conducted a comparable study. Third, the researcher tried to identify those students who seemed to achieve success or encounter failure (Newby, 2010); thus, the researcher selected six students who were able to write insightful journal entries and two students who did not write much or often. Ultimately, based on all these principles, the researcher selected eight student participants (5 males, 3 females) for the interviews, all of whom were studying in universities as freshmen when they were interviewed.

With regard to teacher participants, the researcher sent the participant information sheet to all the other five EFL teachers involved in the ER program. One teacher who had retired refused to participate, while the other four teachers agreed to participate in the study. All the teacher participants are female, with working experience of more than 15 years.

Data Collection

To achieve *triangulation*, multiple data-collecting instruments were employed in the research: reading journals, interviews, and documents.

In this study, the reading journals students kept during the second stage of the ER program serve threefold functions: an instrument for selecting student participants for the interviews, a source of data, and providing an outline for the interview schedule design. It is worth mentioning that Student 8 (S8) actually wrote 17 journal entries in total but only 12 were used for this study, because the other five journal entries were episodes of a science fiction serial he created all by himself.

This study employed semi-structured interviews as the main tool for data collection. Since the interviewer was studying in the UK while the interviewees were in China, which made face-to-face interviews virtually impossible. WeChat, currently the most popular communication tool in China, was used to conduct the interviews. The researcher asked the participants to choose between Chinese (their L1) and English (in which most participants are proficient) for the interview. Six students and three teachers chose to use Chinese, while two

students and one teacher chose English. Therefore, the reported results are a combination of the researcher's translation and participants' (S1, S6, and T4) original words.

In addition, various forms of documents related to this two-year ER program (e.g., students' miscellaneous assignments, teaching materials, and evaluation questions) were employed as complementary sources of data.

Data Analysis

Considering that the main purpose of the present study is to investigate participants' perceptions of ER and its implementation, *tidy and grammatical transcripts* which are easy to understand and analyze, serve as the guidance for the transcription (Gibbs, 2007). On account of the relatively big number and length of the interviews in this study, a transcription software was utilized before the manual transcription which was based on, but not confined to, the initial results.

For data analysis, the researcher followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six steps of thematic analysis. Firstly, the researcher transcribed the interviews and then reviewed the transcripts. During the process, the researcher created initial codes by doing *line-by-line coding* to avoid preoccupations with the interpretation. Based on the initial codes, the researcher detected the emergent themes. Then the researcher built a *coding hierarchy* and defined the themes before the final writing up (Gibbs, 2007).

Member checking was employed as an approach to enhance the credibility of the study. Participants were involved in reviewing the transcripts and interpretations of the data, and all the discrepancies were resolved after the negotiation between the participants and the researcher.

FINDINGS

Two thematic maps (Figure 1 and Figure 2) are presented to show the relationship between themes, (subthemes) and codes that emerged in the process of data analysis. Figure 1 and Figure 2 respectively address Research Question 1 and Research Question 2. The source of the quote is presented in the order of the participant's code name, the source of the data, and the line number of the interview transcript or the journal entry number.

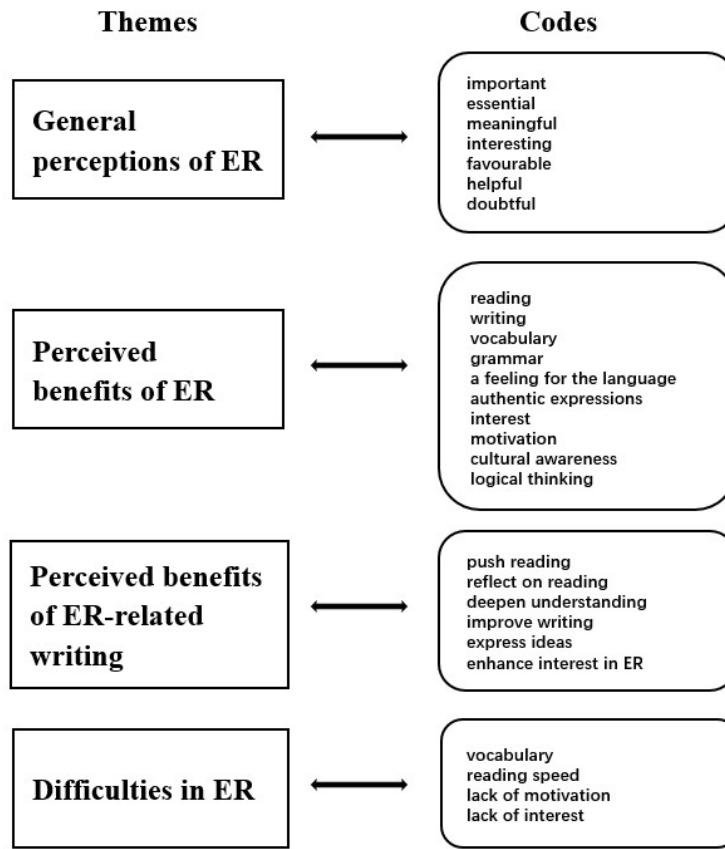


Figure 1. Participants' Perceptions of Extensive Reading in EFL

General Perceptions of ER

All the participants, inclusive of teachers and students, consider extensive reading in English helpful, essential, favorable, or (very) important for EFL learning. Surprisingly, two student participants (one majoring in chemistry, the other in physics) revealed that they were taking optional courses related to English literature and considering taking it as a major or minor in the future. More interestingly, one student attributed to ER the fact that he periodically speaks English in his dreams. Another intriguing discovery is that two student participants claimed that ER occasionally enabled them to express themselves more clearly in English than in Chinese. However, not all the participants hold absolute belief in the value of ER. One student, on the one hand, admitted that ER “is helpful in many ways” (S1, int. 4), but on the other hand, seemed dubious about it:

Due to the limited teaching time and student energy, the most effective method should be taken...maybe extensive reading itself is not very helpful...we need to compare all the methods...proving it is helpful is not enough. Proving it is much more helpful than other methods is more persuasive... (S1, int. 332, 338, 340)

When the researcher asked this participant whether she would hold the same opinion if she was informed of the results of some empirical research concerning the benefits of ER, she

hesitated for a while and then said she might be less doubtful about it.

Perceived Benefits of ER

All the teacher participants consider that ER is conducive to students' improvement in vocabulary and reading abilities, while 75% and 63% student participants believe in these two benefits of ER respectively. Surprisingly, one teacher and five students conjecture that ER fosters *a feeling for the language*, a term commonly used by Chinese learners of English, referring to the intuition about the proper use of the language. Moreover, three teachers and three students expressed their belief in the effect of ER on readers' interest or motivation for EFL learning. Other benefits of ER, e.g., exposing readers to authentic expressions, enhancing logical thinking and cultural awareness, were also mentioned by some of the participants.

Perceived Benefits of ER-Related Writing

ER-related writing here refers to students' writing about anything concerning their extensive reading. In the present study, three student participants perceive ER-related writing as an incentive to keep them reading, and four students believe it deepens their understanding of the reading. Strikingly, no teachers mentioned these two benefits. However, half of the teachers and half of the students share their opinions that writing facilitates the reflection on the reading. The reflection could take the form of comparing characters from different novels. For instance, after reading the novel *The Kite Runner*, S2 compared three fathers in three novels, that is, Baba from *The Kite Runner*, Zhou Puyuan from *Thunderstorm* (a very famous Chinese play), and Atticus from *To Kill a Mockingbird*:

They all choose to lie to their fathers, then bury themselves in their guilt. But Zhou Puyuan and Baba are different because Zhou is a coward, a hypocrite while Baba is apparently a real man. Although Baba doesn't like kids and isn't satisfied with Amir, he teaches him to be a real man... He is honorable, like Atticus. (S2, journal. 4)

Moreover, two teachers, as opposed to one student, deem that ER-related writing enables students to freely express their ideas. This assumption could gain support from one student's journal entry:

I've talked too much, but I don't feel like ending it. Writing this way makes me feel really good. I mean, writing like a mad man and putting anything on your mind on the paper. It actually is an adventure. Like floating in the air or in the water, you never know where it is taking you. But...it always makes you comfortable. (S7, journal. 2)

Compared with students, teachers attach more pedagogical value to ER-related writing. For example, one teacher used the following similes to stress its importance: "Reading itself is like a sieve which cannot help you retain what you've learned from the book...writing after reading is like tying up a sack with knowledge gained from the reading inside" (T3, int. 68).

Three students perceive ER-related writing as an irreplaceable channel of

communication, because it is “heart-to-heart” (S8, int. 96) and “free of time and space limitation” (S7, int. 128). Some teachers deem that it enables them to “get closer to students” (T3, int. 69), and may lead to “face-to-face communication for further discussion about the book” (T1, int. 34).

Difficulties in ER

Unanimously, all the teacher and student participants consider vocabulary as a source of difficulty in ER, which might result in students’ lack of reading motivation or interest in the reading materials. As one student confessed: “The biggest problem was my limited vocabulary... looking up all those new words was painful...fewer new words, more fun...” (S3, int. 36).

However, the difficulty with vocabulary did not hinder most of the student participants from enjoying the reading. In the interviews, some of them mentioned how they dealt with the new words they met in reading, as S6 elaborated:

At the beginning, it was really hard to put up with the new words... sometimes they might affect my understanding of the passage. But as I read on, I tried my best to ignore them and to grab the main idea... gradually I felt that the new words might not matter that much, so I think it’s a skill that I can apply to my future English reading. (S6, int. 6)

Interestingly, the strategy S6 shared in the interview corresponded with one of his journal entries that he wrote more than two years ago:

In the first page, there are more than ten words that I don’t know the meanings... Nevertheless, I forced myself to keep on reading. Gradually, I found it not necessary to understand every word...I found the story more and more interesting. (S6, journal. 1)

For some students, the challenge from vocabulary could even turn into motivation for reading: “I like challenges and it [the novel *Splinter Cell*] is one! You know sometimes people will get more motivation if the difficulties in front of them are harder to get through and that’s what happened to me” (S8, journal. 9).

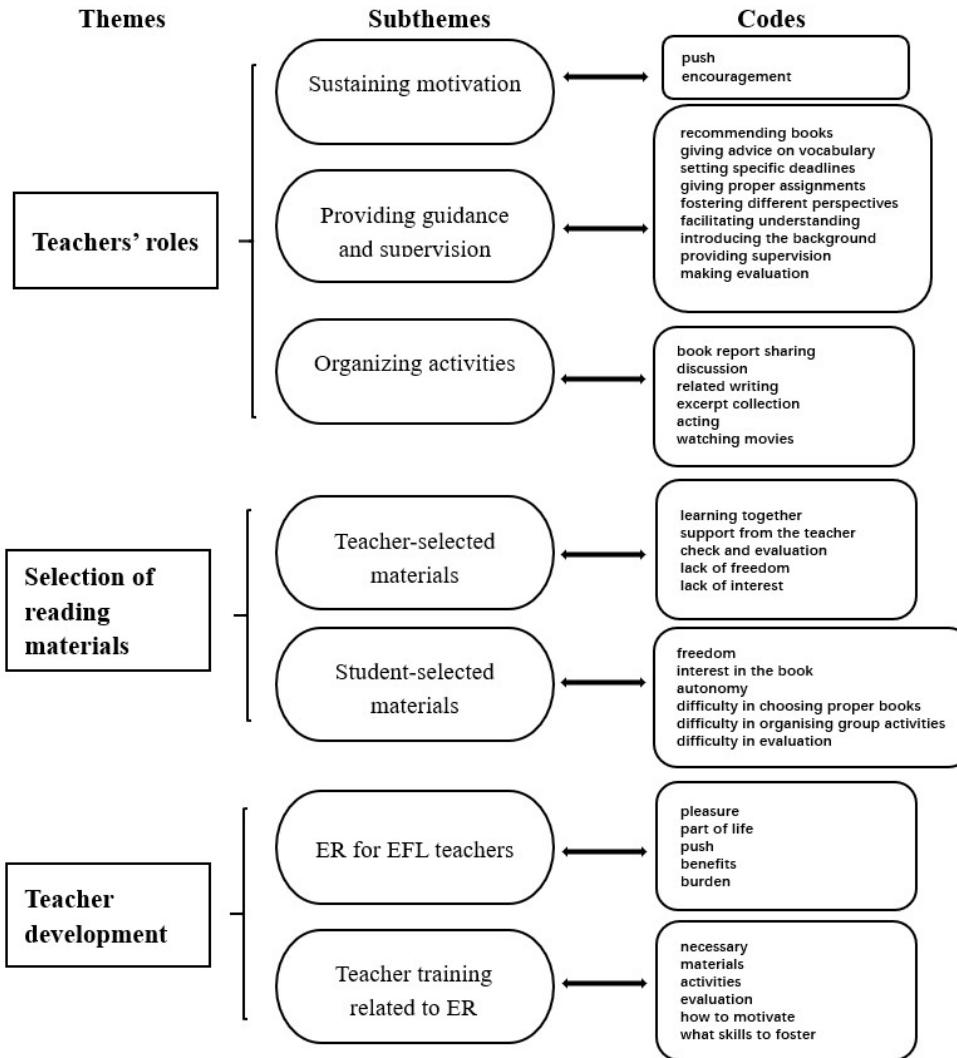


Figure 2. Participants' Perceptions of Implementing Extensive Reading in EFL in Chinese Secondary Schools

Teachers' Roles in ER Implementation

Six out of eight student participants consider the encouragement from teachers as a source of motivation for their ER, and another student used “push” to express a similar idea. One of them put it in this way:

The most important for extensive reading, in my opinion, is the feeling that I was encouraged by the teacher. I remember you once said, a good teacher is inspiring, and can help us read without any fear... this is, in fact, a kind of spiritual encouragement. (S5, int. 26)

His opinion about the significance of teacher's encouragement is also reflected in his reading journal: “You believe in me so much...I've never thought I can be considered as a good

student in English. But you said that to me for many times, so I felt ashamed when I didn't do my best" (S5, journal. 1).

Similarly, another student's journal reveals the same power of teachers' encouragement: "You said that my work was a masterpiece..." (S8, journal. 1), and "I know that you expect me to do better and I promise I will, but maybe not yet..." (S8, journal. 9).

In sharp contrast, no teacher participants mentioned their roles in encouraging students to sustain their motivation for ER. Only one teacher used "push" to indicate something similar.

Six out of eight students and two teachers attach importance to teachers' recommendations on ER materials. Students' need in this respect is also reflected in one student's journal: "After a long time, I still haven't decided which book to read. Maybe it's because I don't know too much about English books...I think I need some advice on it" (S5, journal. 3).

With regard to vocabulary, two teacher participants mentioned providing vocabulary lists to assist with students' reading. When asked whether they gave any guidance on how to deal with new words, one out of four teachers admitted that she did not intentionally do it in class. However, the student who considered it painful to look up all the new words expressed his desire for the relevant help from teachers: "If the teacher had given me some strategy for dealing with new words, I would definitely have tried it, even though I didn't know whether it could work or not" (S3, int. 46).

Selection of ER Materials

All the teacher participants and 75% of the students believe that if the reading materials are selected by teachers, it is easier for students to gain help or support from teachers. It is worth mentioning that for this reading program, it was the native English teacher who delivered lectures on the background of the novels and gave guidance on the understanding of the contents.

Nearly half of the student participants, as opposed to one quarter of the teachers, regard the possibility of learning together as an advantage of teacher-selected materials. Three out of four teachers value the feasibility of evaluating students' reading progress, while from three students' perspectives, this feasibility is achieved at the expense of their freedom of choice or their interest in the reading material.

At the second stage of this reading program, students were allowed to choose reading materials. Some students' interest in the books of their own choice could be identified in their journals: "I often found myself laughing while reading... And it makes me feel quite good..." (S7, journal. 1); "I finally got interested in the book... I don't regard reading as homework any more..." (S5, journal. 5); and S8 expressed his excitement as follows:

It got me... I don't really know why but when I was reading it, I shared every feeling with Edgar. All of these feelings made me suffocated, a kind of feeling I never had before. I guess that is what makes a good book. (S8, journal. 6)

However, not all student participants speculate that self-selected materials are bound to be more interesting than those selected by teachers. For example, S1 stated that the books

chosen by the teacher were actually more attractive than the ones she randomly chose for herself, and she “kind of trusted the teacher’s choice” (S1, int. 79).

Teacher Development in Relation to ER

When asked how they perceive ER for themselves, three out of four teacher participants gave positive answers, regarding ER as a pleasure (T1, T2), or part of life (T2), which could push them to keep learning (T1, T2, T4) and benefit them in many ways (T2, T3, T4). The only teacher who considers ER as a kind of burden explained: “I don’t spontaneously read something. But for the sake of my job, I will do some reading. For the sake of my language proficiency, I will do that” (T4, int. 84).

With regard to ER-related training, all the four teachers consider it necessary, and one teacher elaborated: “We should be trained for it [ER] because sometimes we were just like blind people. We feel our way ahead, but sometimes when we face the obstacles, we have no idea where to go” (T4, int. 38).

Specifically, teachers expect to receive training that enables them to choose proper reading materials (T1), design related activities (T2, T3), carry out relevant evaluation (T1), and motivate students to keep reading (T2). In addition, two teachers expressed their desire to be able to give students sufficient guidance without native English teachers’ assistance (T2, T4).

DISCUSSION

Extensive Reading

In this study, almost all the teacher and student participants demonstrated positive affect towards ER and listed the improvements in various aspects of their (students’) English studies, including reading, writing and vocabulary. This finding is in accord with the results of another three studies exploring teachers’ and/or students’ perceptions of ER in L2/FL (Asraf, 2003; de Burgh-Hirabe, 2011; Smadi & Al-Zawahreh, 2013). Moreover, this study contributes to the understanding of the benefits of ER by showing evidence that ER fosters “a feeling for the language” (S1, S2, S5, S6, S8, T2), i.e. the confidence, accuracy and ease of using the language. The discovery that two student participants are considering taking English literature as their future major or minor as a result of the ER program corroborates the statement that engagement in ER may “facilitate recruitment into upper-division courses” of literature (Arnold, 2009, p. 342). However, as aforementioned, one student participant expressed her doubt about the effect of ER on language learning and admitted that she might be less doubtful if she had been informed of some evidence about it, which reinforces the advocacy of helping students learn about the value and benefits of ER (Ro, 2013), as Asraf (2003), Smadi and Al-Zawahreh (2013) did in their ER programs.

ER-Related Writing

Writing was incorporated into the ER program that the present study investigates. Teacher and student participants listed the benefits of ER-related writing from different perspectives. Some students' journals reflect very complicated, synthesized ideas and thinking about the reading. In addition, two teacher participants reported improvement in their students' writing, especially in applying expressions from the reading to the writing, which might be related to the excerpt collection they asked their students to do as a type of reading activity. These findings correspond to Grabe's (2001) perception of reading and writing as a *collaborate activity* or the *bidirectional relationship* defined by Shanahan (2016). Meanwhile, the enthusiasm for writing that some students demonstrated in their journals seems to contradict Renandya and Jacobs' (2002) suggestion that ER-related writing should be used less because students dread it.

Few previous studies on ER appear to have investigated the effect of ER-related writing on the relationship between the teacher and students, except that Mizokawa and Hansen-Krening (2000) found *dialogue journals* about reading served as a positive and personal conversation between teachers and students. The present study contributes to the existing body of research by showing evidence that ER-related writing could function as a form of constructive communication between teachers and students (Hedge, 1988).

Difficulties in ER

The most common problem relating to ER perceived by the student and teacher participants of this study is vocabulary, which seemingly supports Day and Bamford's (2000) notion that reading materials should be "well within the linguistic competence of the students" (p. 86), or Hsueh-chau and Nation's (2000) suggestion that readers should know approximately 98% of the vocabulary in the reading material. However, the finding of this study indicates that challenging vocabulary could act as a source of motivation for some students (especially advanced language learners). This finding echoes Arnold's (2009) discovery that some students willingly chose challenging reading materials to stimulate their interest, and mirrors de Burgh-Hirabe's (2011) finding that linguistically challenging books could be motivating for L2 learners. However, the "painful" experience of an intermediate English learner in the present study (S3), who looked up all the new words at the beginning, highlights the importance of teachers' guidance on ER strategies.

Teachers' Roles in ER Implementation

Regarding teachers' roles in implementing ER, seven in eight student participants deem that teachers help them sustain motivation for ER by providing encouragement. This finding corroborates Susser and Robb's (1990) notion that teachers' role in implementing ER is to provide encouragement and assistance for students. However, the teacher participants in this study seem not to have realized the importance of their encouragement for their students. Instead, three out of four teachers regard evaluating students' reading progress as their major task, which is in line with Yamashita's (2013) interpretation of teachers' roles as "the manager

of the program and a reading advisor" (p. 251). It is interesting to note that the combination of student and teacher participants' opinions corresponds to Sze's (1999) perception of teachers' roles as a *motivator* and *monitor* in an ER program.

From a different perspective, Day and Bamford (1998) consider teachers' major role in ER implementation to be a role model, i.e. an avid reader participating in the ER program with their students. However, the present study discovers that one of the teachers prefers watching videos in lieu of reading books in her leisure time, and therefore is not and does not want to be an avid reader, which echoes Applegate and Applegate's (2004) findings in their research on the attitude of pre-service teachers. The existence of such reluctant teacher readers, to some extent, questions the practicality of the teacher being a role model in an ER program.

Selection of Reading Materials

Similar to the previous studies carried out in Chinese secondary schools, at the first stage of the ER program the present study investigates, reading materials were selected by EFL teachers. This contradicts the principle of students choosing their own reading materials advocated by some authoritative scholars (e.g., Day & Bamford, 1998; Green, 2005; Renandya & Jacobs, 2002). While this violates a key principle of ER, most of the student participants and all the teacher participants of the present study accept this practice for the reason that students could gain more support from teachers. Moreover, three students mentioned that the books selected or recommended by teachers could be surprisingly more interesting than their own choice. In fact, Arnold (2009) found that teachers' preselection of reading materials was common in many ER programs.

On the other hand, this study did show three students' lack of interest in some books selected by teachers, and discovered five students' enthusiasm for the books of their own choice. In view of the advantages and disadvantages of both methods of choosing reading materials, seven out of eight students and three in four teachers recommended the combination of these two methods, which corresponds to the implementation mode adopted in some comparable studies (Asraf, 2003; de Burgh-Hirabe, 2011; Smadi & Al-Zawahreh, 2013).

Teacher Training in Relation to ER Implementation

As aforementioned, all the teacher participants consider it necessary to receive ER-related training, in such aspects as selecting reading materials, organizing activities, evaluation, and motivating students. This finding is consistent with Wang's (2004) claim that secondary EFL teachers in China lack the requisite training for ER implementation. Beyond the context of Chinese secondary schools, this problem remains an issue to be solved. In a Philippine secondary school, Lituanas, Jacobs and Renandya (1999) found the same need and reported the potential harm of this negligence in teacher training, i.e. teachers' reluctance to initiate ER. All these findings reinforce Green's (2005) statement that "few teachers have received adequate training in implementing extensive reading schemes" (p. 308). It is important to note that Green made this statement almost 15 years ago, and the lack of training for ER implementation is still an unsolved problem at least for Chinese secondary EFL teachers.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study have a number of pedagogical implications. First, the discovery of the effects of keeping reading journals on the teacher-student relationship (as a type of irreplaceable communication) is encouraging in that the improved relationship could further enhance students' motivation for ER. In view of this, it is recommended that ER-related writing, on which teachers give encouraging and constructive comments, should be preferably incorporated in an ER program.

Another finding of this study is that vocabulary is perceived by students and teachers as a difficulty in ER. To assist students in coping with this problem, teachers' guidance on how to deal with new words is of critical importance. Based on students' linguistic proficiency, teachers' recommendations on reading materials are also valued particularly for beginning extensive readers.

Moreover, the result of the research appears to challenge the view that reading materials should be fairly easy (Day & Bamford, 1998). Some student participants indicated in the interviews or their reading journals that linguistically challenging books could be more interesting and motivating than easy books. This finding serves as a reminder that teachers should not rashly discourage students, including intermediate language learners, from trying authentic texts which are generally considered to be more difficult than simplified texts.

With regard to selection of reading materials, the finding of this study suggests that the combination of teachers' preselection and students' choice is advisable. Specifically, teachers could provide a list of book recommendations intended for readers of varied language levels. Students have the freedom to choose from these books or any other books they aspire to read.

In addition, this study lends additional empirical support to the claim that teachers' encouragement, guidance and supervision are essential for the successful implementation of ER at least in the context of Chinese secondary schools. Meanwhile, this study has discovered that teachers still need related training for ER implementation before capably and confidently implementing ER programs.

A limitation of the research is that most of the student participants are advanced or upper-intermediate English learners who claimed to have benefited from reading original novels. It is worth considering the investigation of what reading materials are suitable for intermediate or lower language learners in a similar context.

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Xiaomei Sun is currently a PhD student at the University of Edinburgh, with 16 years of working experience as an EFL teacher in China. Her PhD research addresses the issue of implementing extensive reading in L2/FL in secondary schools.

Email: s1601243@ed.ac.uk