

Students' Perception Toward Extensive Reading in ESL Contexts

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The aim of the study is to explore possibilities of implementing extensive reading (ER) in English for academic purposes (EAP) settings through investigating student attitudes toward ER, and their perceived usefulness of ER. Forty-four international students at a four-year university in the U.S. participated in the study. For the purpose of the study, ER was integrated into 16-week intermediate writing courses as an in- and out-of-class activity. A retrospective survey and interviews were used for data collection. The findings showed that the students in general had favorable attitudes toward ER after one semester of ER experience. The students particularly appreciated the ease and comfort feeling of the reading, which, in turn, served a positive role in increasing their confidence in reading in English. In addition, the students perceived ER to be useful in many aspects of their English learning, including reading, writing, and vocabulary. These findings may suggest the feasibility of integrating ER into EAP settings as one pedagogical approach to help students improve their general English ability, as well as their perceptions toward learning English.

[extensive reading/second language reading/English for academic purposes/
다독/제2언어 읽기/아카데미 영어]

I. INTRODUCTION

As a pedagogical approach to teaching reading, ER has drawn increasing attention from second and foreign language researchers and practitioners. In particular, since Day and Bamford (2002) put forward ten principles of ER, it has been broadly implemented in

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different educational settings including both ESL (English as a second language) and EFL (English as a foreign language) environments. The main characteristics of ER, which allow students to self-select and read large quantities of materials, particularly have appealed to many educators. Providing reading materials well within students' current linguistic level is another key of this learner-centered approach (Day & Bamford, 1998).

Studies have provided evidence that learners who engage in ER can improve in various aspects of L2 learning, including reading comprehension (e.g., Al-Homoud & Schmitt, 2009), reading rate (e.g., Beglar & Hunt, 2014), vocabulary (Pigada & Schmitt, 2006), and writing (e.g., Tsang, 1996). ER has also been reported to have a positive influence on learner affect such as attitude and motivation (e.g., Judge, 2011; Nishino, 2007). However, most ER research has been conducted in relation to L2 reading development or reading motivation. To my knowledge, no attempt has been made to expand the application of ER beyond reading classroom. Therefore, the present study aims to explore whether ER can be successfully implemented in writing classroom, integrated with writing instructions. Further, how students would perceive the incorporation of ER into their writing course was of key interest to this study.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Benefits of ER on L2 Learning

As briefly mentioned, Day and Bamford's (2002) ten principles provide practical guidelines that can help language teachers implement ER within their specific settings and pedagogical aims. The ten principles are as follows (p. 137-140):

1. The reading material is easy.
2. A variety of material on a wide range of topics must be available.
3. Learners choose what they want to read.
4. Learners read as much as possible.
5. The purpose of reading is usually related to pleasure, information and general understanding.
6. Reading is its own reward.
7. Reading speed is usually faster rather than slower.
8. Reading is individual and silent.
9. Teachers orient and guide students.
10. The teacher is a role model of a reader.

Based on these ten principles, numerous studies have investigated the impact of ER on L2 learning. For example, Beglar, Hunt, and Kite (2012) delved into the effectiveness of ER on the development of reading rate. While their intensive reading group showed an almost negligible reading rate gain, three pleasure reading groups achieved statistically significant gains over two academic semesters. To ensure that their reading rate gain was not achieved at the expense of comprehension, the reading rate tests used four narrative reading passages and were followed by multiple-choice comprehension questions. All groups maintained their high reading comprehension scores, which were above 80%, on the posttest. Similar findings were reported in Beglar and Hunt's (2014) recent study. The amount of reading was generally found to be associated with reading rate gains. In particular, ER was more effective for students at a low reading proficiency level whose reading rate was below 100 wpm.

Regarding vocabulary, Pigada and Schmitt (2006) explored whether ER could lead to increased word knowledge in aspects of spelling, meaning, and grammar. A 27-year old Greek learner of French read a total of four books, spending approximately 60–90 minutes per book. The researchers interviewed the participant before and after the ER treatment to examine the acquisition of the target words in terms of the aforementioned three aspects. Overall, a considerable amount of gain was found; some degree of learning was observed in 87 out of the 133 target words (65.4%). However, only spelling showed relatively strong enhancement, with a lesser extent of learning for meaning and grammar. In terms of writing, Tsang (1996) compared the effectiveness of different writing programs on L2 writing, and she found that the writing program integrated with ER did better on their pre and post writing tests, particularly in content and language use.

Studies have also investigated whether the impact of ER could be extended to other domains such as affect. A good number of studies have attempted to explain how affective factors like motivation and attitude might interact with ER, which has its central tenet as the importance of reading for pleasure. Nishino (2007) closely examined two beginning EFL learners' motivational changes over two and a half years of ER experience, and found a strong relationship between the learners' motivation and interesting reading materials. It is also intriguing to find out that changes in the students' motivation over time were associated with reading materials, external factors (e.g., university entrance exams), and successful experiences of ER. Similar findings emerged from another longitudinal case study (Judge, 2011), which found that student motivation to read is influenced by the interplay of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation without any discernable patterns, changing dynamically over time. In the similar vein, de Burgh-Hirabe and Feryok (2013) qualitatively analyzed learners' motivational change over time, before, during, and after the ER treatment. Nine Japanese learners of English voluntarily participated in the out-of-class ER study. Based on participant interviews and journal entries, the researchers

concluded that the participants' motivation to read was dynamic, and that it changed due to various factors, including individual participants' goals, self-regulation, and the availability of ER materials. Like Judge (2011), the authors found that not only intrinsic values but also external demands, such as exam preparation and time-related concerns, were influential in the participants' decisions to keep reading books.

2. Implementing ER in EAP Settings

Despite these positive empirical findings, ER has been less conducted in higher education settings where their primary purpose is to help students achieve high English ability in a relatively short period time (Macalister, 2008). Moreover, the predetermined curriculum had less flexibility to coordinate ER into their classroom (Grabe, 2001). This time commitment that ER requires has hampered its implication in general, and especially in a higher education. Some researchers argued that this type of relatively easy and light reading can help students perform better, such as in the academic environments, because it not only exposes students to a more input-rich environment but also supports their reading development, which can be a foundation for their academic literacy in the long term. Macalister (2008) attempted to investigate the possibility of introducing ER into higher education settings by integrating ER into a 12-week university preparation EAP reading program. In this study, ER was implemented in the form of 20 minutes of sustained silent reading a day. The students showed students' favorable reactions to ER in general. Not only did their positive attitude toward ER increase but also their amount of reading increased as the semester progressed.

In support of this finding, the primary aims of the present study were implementing ER in higher education settings to expand areas of application and exploring students' perceptions toward ER. With these aims in mind, the study investigates the following research question: What are students' attitude toward and perceived usefulness of extensive reading in EAP settings?

III. METHOD

1. Participants

The participants were 44 ESL students at a four-year university in the United States, and they enrolled in the intermediate writing course at the time of the data collection based on

their placement test¹ results. The majority of the students came from Asia, with the greatest numbers from Korea (n=15, 34%), Japan (n=13, 30%), and China (n=7, 16%). Other nationalities included Taiwan, Indonesia, Finland, and Russia. Sixty-six percent (n=29) were female and 34% (n=15) were male, while 79% (n=34) were undergraduates and 21% (n=10) were graduate students. Students attended this 16-week writing class for one semester, amounting to 32 face-to-face class meetings. Each class lasted for 75 minutes.

2. Instruments

Three different types of data were collected: surveys, interviews, and essay tests. A background information form was first used to obtain students' demographic data. In addition, drawing on previous research findings on students' attitude and motivation in relation to ER (e.g., de Burgh-Hirabe & Feryok, 2013; Judge, 2011; Nishino, 2007), a survey was developed to inquire into the students' perceptions about ER. This retrospective survey focused mainly on two constructs: (1) students' attitudes toward ER: enjoyment, comfortableness, and confidence; and (2) students' evaluation of the usefulness of ER in light of their English learning across different skills: reading, writing, vocabulary, speaking, and listening. Nineteen items to be rated on a 5-point Likert scale were included in the survey.

In addition, this study included interviews with the aim of exploring their reactions to ER in detail. Whether students felt that they had benefited from engaging in ER for one semester in academic settings was of great interest. The main interview questions were 1) what did you like/dislike about ER? and 2) which language skill(s) do you think you benefited most from ER? Some follow-up questions were asked when necessary. When the semester was over, nine students voluntarily participated in the interviews. Each lasted approximately 30 minutes to an hour. Essay tests were collected at the beginning and at the end of the semester to explore students' writing improvement in depth; however, this paper only focuses on students' perception toward ER (see J. Park, 2015, for details about the writing improvement).

3. Procedures

1) In-class ER

The first 20 minutes of each class was assigned to ER in class; 15 minutes of individual

¹ According to the university, international students who do not meet the university's exemption criteria (e.g., a score of 100 or above on the internet-based TOEFL) must take the placement test.

and silent in-class ER was followed by five minutes of pair discussion. Also, a brief workshop was provided to the students on the first day of class to introduce the concept of ER and explain how the course would integrate ER into class activities. Day and Bamford's (2002) ten ER principles, which the present study draws on, were explained to the students using handout material. Following the ten principles, students were allowed to freely choose any book that suited their interest, and more importantly, they were also instructed to read books within their reading ability at their own pace.

2) Out-of-class ER

In addition to in-class ER, students were required to spend an average of one and a half to two hours on homework per week as an extension of their in-class ER. This type of out-of-class reading, according to Day and Bamford (1998), is good for building a reading habit in the long term. The students were required to briefly record their weekly reading progress (e.g., book titles, levels, pages, and time spent on reading) on a book recording form.

The five minutes of pair discussion in class was based the students' writing homework. This writing activity was directly related to the books that the students were reading each week. Writing book reports or summaries has been used in ER studies as a post activity that allows teachers to monitor their students' reading and students to express their feelings about the books (e.g., Takase, 2007; Yamashita, 2008). However, in order to motivate engagement with the books and create diverse writing opportunities, the present study provided a variety of writing topics each week. The sample writing topics are as follows:

- Describe one of the most important events in the story and explain how the main character dealt with or reacted to that specific incident;
- Write new or different endings for the story. If you were the author, how would you end the story?;
- Choose one character in the story. Then, think of one gift that you want to give that character, and explain briefly why you have chosen that particular gift;
- Did the book provide the information that you expected? To what extent is the provided information similar or different from your knowledge about the topic?

3) ER library

The classroom library contained around 250 books. Day and Bamford (1998) argue that *i-1* level, which is slightly below students' current linguistic level, is ideal for reading materials so that students can comprehend texts easily and thus enjoy reading more.

Therefore, the majority of the books in the classroom library were graded readers published by Oxford (i.e., The Oxford Bookworms), Cambridge (i.e., Cambridge English Readers), and Penguin (i.e., Penguin Readers), which were particularly written for L2 learners, adapted from literary classics, biographies, etc. However, books written for 3rd to 6th grade L1 English children were also included to provide students with further learning opportunities and help them gradually expand their “reading comfort zone” (Day, 2011, p. 10). That is, this decision was made based on the assumption that those who could relatively easily finish short and easy texts such as the graded readers might want to challenge themselves with these slightly longer and more difficult books.

A wide range of topics and genres including both fiction (e.g., classic, romance, suspense, science fiction, mystery) and nonfiction (e.g., biography, history) were provided to students. Ten minutes before the class, books were attractively arranged at the front of the classroom, divided into the two categories of fiction and nonfiction, for browsing and checking out.

IV. RESULTS

1. Findings from the ER Survey

For 14 weeks², individual students spent an average of 29.84 hours for ER, which is approximately 2.13 hours per week. This is the sum of 7 hours of in-class reading and 22.84 hours of out-of-class reading. Each student read, on average, 14 books for one semester, or roughly one book per week.

1) Students' attitude toward ER

Table 1 displays means and standard deviations of the ER survey. The column on the far right shows the percentage of students who either agreed (4) or strongly agreed (5) on each item. The survey, consisting of 19 items in total, showed a high reliability according to Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = .898$).

Students' general attitudes toward ER are considered in terms of the degree of enjoyment, comfortableness, and confidence they expressed. First, on the items (1, 2, and 8) asking about their enjoyment of reading, most students responded favorably overall. For example, about 93% of the students responded that they enjoyed reading in the classroom (Item 1), and this was ranked the highest among all the items, with a mean value of 4.41.

² The first and last weeks were excluded, as the students did not engage in ER.

However, the out-of-class ER experience was apparently relatively less pleasurable for students (Item 2, $M = 3.89$, 68.18%).

TABLE 1
Descriptive Statistics of the ER Survey

| Attitude toward ER | | | |
|--|----------|-----------|----------|
| <i>Enjoyment</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>%</i> |
| 1. I enjoyed reading books in class. | 4.41 | 0.62 | 93.18 |
| 2. I enjoyed reading books at home. | 3.89 | 0.89 | 68.18 |
| 7. I enjoyed writing about the stories that I read. | 3.73 | 0.73 | 59.09 |
| 8. I think I enjoy reading books now more than before. | 4.18 | 0.76 | 84.09 |
| 12. I think I will keep reading English books by myself after this course. | 4.02 | 0.93 | 77.27 |
| <i>Comfortableness</i> | | | |
| 5. I think understanding stories got easier as the semester progressed. | 4.30 | 0.67 | 88.64 |
| 6. I felt comfortable while reading books. | 4.23 | 0.68 | 86.36 |
| <i>Confidence</i> | | | |
| 10. I think reading books helped me feel more confident about writing. | 3.82 | 0.79 | 68.18 |
| 19. I have more confidence now about reading English books. | 4.21 | 0.63 | 88.64 |
| Usefulness of ER | | | |
| <i>Reading</i> | | | |
| 3. I think reading books helped me improve my reading comprehension ability. | 4.30 | 0.76 | 86.36 |
| 13. I think reading books was useful for improving my reading speed. | 4.30 | 0.70 | 90.91 |
| <i>Writing</i> | | | |
| 4. I think reading books was useful for me to improve my overall written language. | 4.07 | 0.85 | 77.27 |
| 9. I think writing activities were helpful for me to understand the stories better. | 3.86 | 0.80 | 70.45 |
| 14. I think reading books was useful to learn sentence structures. | 4.02 | 0.76 | 75.00 |
| 15. I think reading books helped me increase my grammar knowledge. | 3.73 | 0.92 | 59.09 |
| 16. I think I learned some useful expressions while reading. | 4.07 | 0.66 | 86.36 |
| <i>Vocabulary</i> | | | |
| 11. I was able to guess the meaning of unknown words using the context in the story. | 4.18 | 0.62 | 88.64 |
| <i>Speaking & Listening</i> | | | |
| 17. I think reading books helped me improve my English speaking ability. | 3.43 | 0.90 | 43.18 |
| 18. I think reading books helped me improve my listening ability. | 3.07 | 1.00 | 29.55 |

Note. $N = 44$. The rightmost column gives the percentages of students who responded "agree" or "strongly agree."

Another finding worth noting is that, thanks to ER, 84.09% of the students claimed to enjoy reading books more than before (Item 8, $M = 4.18$). Item 12 inquired into the

students' desire to continue ER, and 77.27% ($M = 4.02$) of the students showed willingness to carry on by themselves beyond this course. Regarding the items (5 and 6) about the comfortableness, or easiness, of reading books, most students answered that they felt comfortable when reading (Item 6, $M = 4.23$, 86.36%) and that understanding stories became easier as the semester progressed (Item 5, $M = 4.30$, 88.64%). In addition, 88.64% of the students responded that they had gained more confidence about reading English books (Item 19, $M = 4.21$).

2) Perceived usefulness of ER in language learning

The survey revealed different degrees of perceived usefulness of ER in different areas of English skills. In line with their positive attitudes toward reading discussed above, the students' ratings of the reading-related items showed the highest means. For example, many students agreed that reading books was particularly useful for improving their comprehension (Item 3, 86.36%) and reading speed (Item 13, 90.91%); these items' ratings had the same mean value of 4.30. More than three quarters of the students (77.27%) perceived ER to be helpful for improving their overall written language (Item 4, $M = 4.07$), and specifically for learning sentence structures (Item 14, $M = 4.02$, 75%) and new expressions (Item 16, $M = 4.07$, 86.36%). However, students seemed less certain about whether ER helped them to learn English grammatical knowledge (Item 15, $M = 3.73$). On this item, only 59.09% students responded favorably; 31.82% students felt unsure and 9.09% students disagreed. The students also displayed uncertainty about the effectiveness of ER on speaking and listening; these items received much lower mean scores (Item 17, $M = 3.43$ and Item 18, $M = 3.07$) compared to the areas of reading and writing.

2. Findings from the Interviews

The purpose of the interviews was to investigate students' reactions and opinions in depth, while supplementing the extensive reading survey findings. This section reports the interviewees' voices in detail with excerpts taken from the transcripts of individual interviews. The interview findings are closely connected to the survey findings, and they are discussed according to four themes that emerged from both the surveys and the interviews: (a) students' attitudes toward ER, (b) perceived usefulness of ER in language learning, and (c) negative remarks on ER.

1) Students' attitude toward ER

Aligning with the survey findings, the analysis of students' attitudes toward ER

generated the following three subthemes: (a) enjoyment, (b) comfortableness, and (c) confidence.

First, the majority of students responded that ER was an enjoyable experience for them. This pleasurable component seemed particularly related to the freedom to self-select reading materials, the content of the books, and the short length of the books. Even those who claimed to hate reading in the past commented that they started to enjoy it. Students' remarks included:

"I liked it [ER] because I can read what I want to read. I particularly liked crime and horror stories, so I mostly read these books throughout the semester."

"I just hated reading. I was required to read textbooks this semester in other classes and I hated it. I just couldn't concentrate on reading...I started reading biography, like Princess Diana. They were okay and interesting. And then I read *Wonder*. It was really interesting. I really liked it. It just changed my mind about reading."

"If I hadn't read these short books, I would have hated reading in English. Reading books motivated me to enjoy English, and made me keep interested in English."

It is interesting that to some students the length of the book was an important motivating factor, while to others it did not matter as long as they liked the story. Two remarks were:

"I liked it [ER] because I could finish one story quickly and move onto other stories."

"It's not the size of the book. It's about the content. If I like the story, I don't care about the length."

Another aspect that students mentioned many times during the interviews was their comfortable feeling while reading. The easiness of the reading seemed to alleviate their fear of reading in English, while continuously facilitating their reading. Their comments included the following:

"It was enjoyable because it was not stressful reading. I could enjoy the stories because it was easy to understand."

"The books I chose were pretty easy to read. It was not stressful at all. When I read academic textbooks, it's always stressful. It takes a long time to just finish a couple of pages. And I feel frustrated because I can't understand clearly after spending hours and hours."

"I read many academic texts for other classes, so I liked ER because I could read novels like short stories."

The interviews clearly uncovered that reading a book within their language ability relieved their stress about reading, which in turn served as one of the motivating factors for further reading.

In addition, the interview comments revealed that students felt a sense of achievement in the fact that they could finish English books. Most of the students read an English book from cover to cover for the first time in this class. Easily finishing one book increased their confidence level about their reading ability, which encouraged their subsequent reading. In addition, being able to handle a higher level of books as the semester progressed served as a confidence booster. Positive remarks included the following:

“I never tried to read English books before because I thought reading is difficult and boring. But the books in the class library were not difficult to understand. I could finish many books this semester.”

“I felt good when I finished the thick book, *Wonder*. I never thought I would finish this book when I first started it. But actually I forgot about how long this book was once I really enjoyed the story....I am proud of myself.”

It is worth noting that several students showed their desire to continue reading even after the semester was over. Their raised confidence as well as their interest in particular stories led them to purchase English books for their own ER. One student mentioned that:

“I bought Coco Chanel biography. I read *Women in Business* this semester and one of the women in the book was Coco Chanel. So I wanted to know more about her life. I am going to read this during the winter break.”

2) Perceived usefulness of ER in language learning

Individual students indicated their perception that some areas of language learning had benefitted from engaging in ER for one semester. Their interview comments are in line with the survey findings.

First, as students' reading amount increased as the semester progressed, their reading rate seems to have increased naturally. The interview also revealed that improved reading skills, such as getting used to focusing more on general ideas rather than details or words, played a role in increasing reading rate. Some comments were:

“I think it's [reading rate] growing every day, every time I read. I guess I wasn't that fast when I started.”

“I think my speed has been improved. Even though the books were easy, I read kind

of slowly at the beginning of the semester. I didn't want to miss any word and I tried to understand everything. As you said, I tried to understand the general idea about the story and tried not to focus on specific details. And I think it helped improve my reading speed."

In addition, students chose learning new or useful expressions as well as learning sentence structures as one of the benefits of reading books. It is intriguing that some students in fact wrote down new expressions for self-learning and further actually used them in their writing. Several comments were,

"I liked it when I see new interesting expressions in the story. Sometimes I don't know what they exactly meant, but I could usually understand their meaning based on the context. If I learn new expressions, I sometimes wrote them down (in a notebook) so I can use them later."

"In the conversations between characters, I sometimes picked up expressions like idioms."

"Reading was helpful to see how sentences were written. I can write simple sentences but I have difficulties writing complex sentences. I think books showed me how to write complex sentences."

Another area that students brought up often was vocabulary learning. Most students responded that they did not consult a dictionary while reading, as advised. They commented that they were able to deal with unknown words, either skipping or guessing the meaning from the context:

"I think I learned a lot of words because of reading in this class. The books I read were easy but there were some words that I still don't know. I was mostly able to imagine the meaning of the words because the books usually have many descriptions and help my guessing."

"For me, extensive reading was most useful for learning vocabulary. It was interesting to see how the same word can be used in a different situation."

"I did not look up words in a dictionary. At first, it was hard because I wanted to know all the unknown words in the book. But I got used to not checking the meaning of every word that I don't know. And I think I could still follow the story. Sometimes I could guess the meaning."

However, this skipping or guessing skill may not have been successful all the time, or at least not for some students. One student mentioned that she sometimes could not figure out

the meaning of unknown words even after encountering them several times. Similarly, another student reflected that he usually guessed the meaning, but he tended to forget the word when it came up again in the story, which often frustrated him. Their comments were as follows:

“I tried to imagine the words based on the context. Usually I could guess the meaning, but the problem is I can't remember the word. I guess one time is not enough [to learn the meaning of the word].”

“I tried to skip some words that I don't know. They kept appearing in the story, but I still couldn't understand it.”

Several students mentioned that they occasionally used a dictionary when they felt the word seemed important to understand the story or when they wanted to learn the exact meaning. They commented:

“I used a dictionary sometimes when they looked important to follow the story.”

“I often used a dictionary because I wasn't sure whether my guess was right. I think if I check the meaning, and if I see the word again in the story, it was helpful for me to understand the story and I could remember better.”

3) Negative remarks on ER

As reported above, most students expressed positive attitudes about their one-semester experience of ER, although some students made negative comments about its usefulness. Such negative remarks were mostly related to reading materials and time-related issues.

Some students seemed to have trouble finding books that interested them and at the same time were within their reading level. They tended to lose interest or feel frustrated easily when failing to find appropriate books. Lack of enough books in the class library was identified many times as a factor that negatively influenced students' motivation to read further. Some of the comments were as follows:

“I don't know how to find good and interesting books. If I read a super difficult one, I don't want to read. It's not easy to find appropriate books for me.”

“The collection of book is pretty wide but I feel like some of the books I chose were boring. I guess the interesting ones were already taken. There are probably some books I've never seen.”

As anticipated, another common negative thought about ER was about the difficulty of

finding time to read. In particular, those who did not enjoy reading as much as their classmates usually said that it was difficult for them to maintain their reading practice. They felt that reading about 15 – 20 minutes per day was a burden for them as they were busy and had other priorities:

“I think I would read more if I had time. I am too busy with other assignments. It’s hard to find time for reading.”

“Reading was fun but I tended to forget about reading because I was usually busy doing other homework. If I have time, I want to read more.”

In addition to negative perceptions about ER, several students mentioned that the 10-minute writing task was more tiresome than ER itself, which sometimes decreased their motivation to continue ER. Other negative comments were related to the writing topics suggested each week as they sometimes found them difficult to answer.

“I sometimes wished I didn’t have to write but read. I mean, I really enjoyed reading but sometimes I didn’t want to write. It’s kind of boring.”

“Writing activity was okay, not too much burden for me. But sometimes the topic was troublesome, and in that case I just wrote summaries.”

V. DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to examine students’ reactions to ER and their perceptions of its usefulness in EAP settings. Supporting previous findings (e.g., de Burgh-Hirabe & Feryok, 2013; Judge, 2011), the majority of students showed positive attitudes toward ER. In line with Day and Bamford’s (1998, p. 30) bootstrap hypothesis, students’ positive experience of ER seemed to lead to confidence in their reading ability and stimulates favorable attitudes toward reading, which, as a consequence, leads to subsequent reading.

The interview responses also clearly indicated the students’ positive perceptions toward ER. A few students commented that it relieved the stress that heavier reading caused them, and that they actually turned to ER when they were tired of reading academic texts (e.g., textbooks or journal articles). Their pleasurable experience of ER appeared to be augmented by being compared to the experience of academic reading, which they typically found difficult due to its conceptually demanding content and complex linguistic features. In addition, several interviewees who claimed to hate reading said they got hooked on reading once they found the right book. It is remarkable that one book could actually

change these students' perceptions of reading—a finding that is in line with previous studies that have demonstrated the power of a single positive experience of ER (e.g., K. S. Cho & Krashen, 2002).

As also emerged in Nishino's (2007) study, the students' enjoyment in the present study was closely associated with the reading materials. Many interviewees mentioned that the freedom to choose their own books and the content of specific books were the most important factors in their positive attitudes, which in turn stimulated them to read further. For most of them, as long as the story kept them interested, they did not limit the scope of their book selection to a particular topic or genre. There were, however, some students who did show a strong preference for specific topics (e.g., romance, crime) or genres (e.g., fiction, nonfiction).

Another finding worth discussing is that the ease and comfort of the reading were linked to students' positive reactions toward ER to a great extent. Because they were able to easily comprehend the texts and this became even easier as the semester progressed, the students seemed to accept the reading as a stress-free regular routine. Moreover, handling English books without much difficulty boosted their confidence in reading in general. Being able to finish English books and reading without consulting a dictionary often clearly led them to feel a sense of achievement, in contrast to reading challenging academic texts. Students' increased or recovered confidence from reading easy texts seems to have also played a role in triggering a cycle of reading.

As opposed to the many positive reactions to ER, the interviews also revealed some negative attitudes about ER. For example, although the library contained around 250 books, which was thought to be sufficient to accommodate students' diverse topical interests, some students mentioned that they had a hard time finding books that interested them, which often discouraged them from further reading. This suggests that building a well-equipped library involving a wide range of books is clearly necessary.

In other negative comments, a few students recalled that at the beginning of the semester they were unsure about ER's effectiveness for their English learning because of the relative easiness of the reading materials provided. They did not perceive ER as a waste of time, but had doubts of its usefulness due to the lack of feeling a sense of learning. As one student remarked, while appreciating the pleasure side of ER, he or she wished to be learning more from the reading, especially in this type of academic courses. This reaction is understandable considering these students' goals as international students and the ways they have studied English in the past. To them, reading self-selected material for pleasure was not easily accepted as a helpful way to achieve their academic goals. For most students, the ER was apparently a very different approach to reading, and because it did not involve looking up words or word-by-word translation, they seemed to feel they were not learning much. However, most students' initial doubtful thoughts seem to have faded away as they

came to enjoy reading more and to recognize the value of ER themselves.

Corresponding to their favorable reactions to ER overall, the ER survey and the interviews revealed students' positive perceptions of the usefulness of ER for their English learning. Students perceived ER as most useful in increasing their reading comprehension and reading speed. These two benefits of ER have also been reported in a number of other studies (e.g., Al-Homoud & Schmitt, 2009; Beglar et al., 2012; Beglar & Hunt, 2014; Iwahori, 2008). The students thought ER to be useful for writing as well, yet to a lesser degree, especially for learning expressions, sentence structures, or grammatical features. They probably perceived their improvement in reading clearly since they were able to read books faster and with more ease as the semester progressed, but they may not have experienced a similar "sense of learning" in their writing. However, the quantitative analysis of the students' pretest and posttest showed that the students who had the ER experience exhibited greater improvement on their posttest than the students who only received writing instructions following the traditional curriculum. The different degrees of effectiveness of ER on various aspects of writing, from content and organization to mechanics, were revealed (see Park, 2015, for more details).

In contrast to the findings regarding reading and writing, the survey showed that the students perceived ER to be less helpful for increasing their speaking and listening ability. However, it is noteworthy that a good number of students felt that ER did enhance their speaking (43.18%) skills. Some students mentioned during the interview that they learned words or expressions from their books and had actually used them in their daily lives. This finding is relevant to Hedgcock and Ferris's (2009, p. 251) assertion that "whereas reading does not directly address pronunciation, accent, or formal speaking skills, both formal speeches and informal interactions are certainly facilitated by having access to an extensive vocabulary and a grasp of varied syntactic and morphological structures." The natural and authentic conversations in some of the graded readers may have provided a good model for students to learn from.

VI. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

In line with Macalister (2008), the present study has shown the feasibility of bringing ER into EAP contexts. As the survey and interview findings revealed, the students generally welcomed this new approach, and did not display reluctance toward engaging in ER in the academic environment. Rather, they showed favorable attitudes toward the inclusion of ER. They also appreciated ER for its usefulness on diverse aspects of their English learning.

Based on these findings, several suggestions can be further addressed which can help

future teachers who may be interested in implementing ER in similar settings. First, given that challenging books may frustrate L2 readers and negatively affect students' motivation to read further (Lyutana, 2011; Stoller, 2015) and that the present study also provides evidence that easy access to interesting books at a comfortable level or at an acceptable difficulty level is essential for students, the importance of reading materials should not be underestimated. Therefore, a well-equipped class library involving a large quantity of interesting books embracing varying proficiency levels should be ensured, as it is the fundamental condition to constantly provoke students' genuine interest in reading (Hedgcock & Ferris, 2009).

Another important element that can play a great role in keeping students motivated in reading is an inviting reader community. That is, setting a certain amount of time aside for in-class reading was crucial in the present study, not only for encouraging students as members of the whole-class reader community, but also for promoting their interest in reading. Moreover, in-class ER offered an opportunity for students to learn what kinds of books their classmates were reading, which particularly seems to have motivated those who did not have much interest in reading, serving as peer pressure in a positive way in the study. Engaging in pair or group discussion, sharing their stories, and interacting with their classmates further facilitated students' comprehension and sparked their interest in stories read by their classmates (cf. B. A. Ko & Y. R. Joung, 2014).

Finally, the active participation of the teacher turned out to be critical in the study. Demonstrating a role model as a teacher was a fundamental impetus for the successful student participation in ER. The teacher's constant guidance customized to individual students' reading pace and interests seems to play an important role in promoting students' engagement in ER.

Based on the positive results in the present study, future studies can incorporate ER into EFL academic settings where students have much less exposure to a target language. ER can be an effective pedagogical tool that can help students increase their exposure to a target language. Moreover, ER can provide a good opportunity to introduce a less stressful and more enjoyable way to learn English, thereby improving students' general perceptions of learning a foreign language.

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Examples in: English

Applicable Languages: English

Applicable Levels: Tertiary

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