

Establishing an Extensive Reading Program in a Chinese as a Foreign Language Context

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Abstract

Extensive reading (ER) has been widely practiced in teaching English as a foreign or second language contexts. However, reports on how ER was practiced in Chinese as a foreign or second language (L2) contexts are not commonly seen. This study reports how an ER program was established in a liberal arts college in the U.S.A, and how ER affected L2 Chinese readers' reading attitudes. The study also examined L2 Chinese learners' perceptions of language abilities improved through ER, and their enjoyment of ER activities. Data were collected over thirteen weeks through pre- and post-reading attitude surveys, weekly ER activities, and the end of the semester reflections. The findings suggest ER significantly improved L2 Chinese readers' confidence in reading Chinese and devotion to learning Chinese. Some students also perceived that ER improved their reading fluency, reading comprehension, vocabulary, grammar, character recognition, writing, speaking, and listening skills.

Keywords: extensive reading, learning Chinese as a foreign language, reading attitude, self-reflection, extensive reading activities

Extensive reading (ER) is an approach of second language (L2) teaching and learning where second or foreign language learners read a large amount of easy and interesting materials (Day & Bamford, 1998). Day and Bamford (2002) proposed a set of top 10 principles of ER to guide researchers and language practitioners to implement ER. After the top 10 principles were proposed, they were adopted as guidelines for many ER programs (e.g., Waring & McLean, 2015). Macalister (2015) nicely categorized the 10 principles into four types: the nature of reading, the nature of reading material, what the teachers do and what the students do. After two decades of implementing and researching ER, many researchers began to reexamine the significance and practicality of the top 10 principles of ER (e.g., Macalister, 2015; Waring, 2015).

Considering the educational contexts of implementing ER and difficulty of obtaining ER materials, Macalister (2015) proposed a set of seven top principles of ER. Macalister (2015) contended that it was not possible for learners in some contexts to have access to a large variety of materials on different topics, thus making choosing what they wanted to read hard to achieve. Researchers have also ranked the importance of the top 10 ER principles (Day, 2015; Park & Ro, 2015). After surveying the practice of ER since 1998, Day (2015) ranked top six ER principles used in 44 ER programs, among which the top three were: 1.) learners read as much as possible; 2.) learners choose what they want to read; and 3.) a variety of reading materials on a wide range of topics must be available. Park and Ro (2015) argued that five ER principles, instead of 10, were crucial in implementing ER in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) writing classes. Besides a discussion of core or key ER principles, researchers in the field have also statistically tested the extent to which ER programs with core ER principles have influenced reading proficiency in various ESL and EFL settings (Jeon & Day, 2015; 2016). For example, Jeon and Day (2015) reported that ER programs with five core ER principles resulted in greater reading proficiency than intensive or traditional reading approaches. Although it seemed that the discussion on ER principles have been and will be going on, ER programs differ themselves from other traditional reading approaches in significant ways. Waring and McLean (2015) proposed four core elements of ER: 1.) fluent, sustained comprehension of text as meaning-focus input; 2.) a large volume of material; 3.) reading over extended periods of time; and 4.) texts that are longer, requiring comprehension at discourse level (p. 165).

Research has shown that ER has benefited L2 readers in different ways. ER has improved Japanese English as a foreign language (EFL) readers' intrinsic motivation and self-confidence (e.g., Matsui & Noro, 2010). Another affective factor that has been shown to be improved was reading attitude (e.g., Zhou & Day, 2021). The positive effects of ER on affective factors also extended from L2 English readers to readers of other foreign languages (e.g., L2 Japanese in de Burgh-Hirabe, 2011; L2 German readers in Arnold, 2009). Besides affective factors, ER has been shown to enhance L2 readers' reading fluency (e.g., by 90% in Bui & Macalister, 2021), vocabulary knowledge (e.g., Aka, 2019; Beglar et al., 2012; Guo, 2012), grammar knowledge (e.g., Aka, 2019; Guo, 2012), writing ability (e.g., Kim & Ro, 2023; Park, 2016), reading comprehension (e.g., Matsui & Noro, 2010; Hidayah & Trisusana, 2021), and language proficiency in general.

Although a large amount of ER research has been conducted, most of the research was conducted in L2 English contexts. Little is known about the effects of ER on less-commonly taught languages such as Chinese. This study examined the effects of ER on L2 Chinese readers' reading attitude through pre-and post- reading attitude surveys, their enjoyment of ER program, and their perceptions of improvement of language abilities and views of ER activities. The study is the first study that systematically examined the effects of ER in learning Chinese as a foreign language (CFL) context. The findings of this study provided significant pedagogical implications for language practitioners and students in CFL contexts.

Literature Review

ER and Reading Attitudes

Attitude is a complex and hypothetical construct, whose general definition may include some notion of evaluation (Day & Bamford, 1998). Reading attitudes might be defined as “a system of feelings related to reading which causes the learner to approach or avoid a reading situation” (Alexander & Filler, 1976, p. 1). A distinctive feature of reading attitudes is that they are subject to change (Day & Bamford, 1998). Thus, poor or negative reading attitudes can be changed. It also needs to be noted that many variables are associated with changes in reading attitudes. Day and Bamford listed four factors that might play a role in reading attitudes’ change: 1.) attitude toward first language reading, 2.) previous second language reading experiences, 3.) attitudes toward second language, culture, and people, and 4.) the second language classroom environment (e.g., teacher, classmates, approach to and support for L2 reading, ongoing experiences in L2 reading).

Studies in L2 reading attitudes have investigated components or internal structures of reading attitudes. For example, Mathewson’s model (1994) proposed three components: (a) prevailing feelings about reading, (b) action readiness for reading, and (c) evaluative beliefs about reading. Similarly, Reeves (2002) stated that reading researchers in general agree that reading attitude is defined by three components: cognitive (represented by personal, evaluative beliefs); affective (represented by feelings or emotions); and conative (represented by action readiness and behavior intentions) (see Yamashita, 2007 for a detailed discussion).

Using factor analysis, Yamashita (2007) extracted a five-factor structure of reading attitudes. The five factors were comfort (i.e., negative or positive feelings toward reading); intellectual value (e.g., beliefs about the intellectual benefits of reading); practical value (i.e., practical values that reading may bring); anxiety; and linguistic value (i.e., linguistic benefits that could be gained from reading). This study drew on this component-view of reading attitudes and explored the internal structure of the reading attitudes questionnaire adapted from Zhou and Day (2021), with an aim of providing extra evidence to components of reading attitudes in CFL contexts.

Research has shown that ER, as a reading approach, has a positive effect on reading attitudes (e.g., Ateek, 2021; Hidayah & Trisusana, 2021; Howarth & Bollen, 2019; Lee et al, 2015; Ro & Chen, 2014; Yamashita, 2013; Zhou & Day, 2021). Adopting a mixed-method approach, Zhou and Day (2021) investigated the reading attitudes of 57 English for Academic Purposes (EAP) university students after 10 to 12 weeks of ER treatment. The study showed that the participants had significant more positive reading attitudes after ER treatment. The participants reported that they enjoyed ER and that ER made them more confident in reading. Bui and Macalister (2021) also adopted a mixed method approach to examine the role of a 10-week ER online program in enhancing 17 first-year Vietnamese EFL university students’ reading attitudes. Questionnaire and interview data showed that there were positive changes in participants’ attitudes towards reading in English.

The Effects of ER on Language Ability

Reading fluency and proficiency. The contribution of ER to various aspects of language abilities has been confirmed by a number of research studies and meta-analysis (e.g., Jeon & Day, 2016; Kim, 2012; Krashen, 2007; Nakahashi, 2015; Wang & Kim, 2021). Nakahashi (2015) reported a moderate effect ($d = .46$) of ER on L2 reading proficiency (reading speed, reading comprehension, vocabulary knowledge etc., combined). Similarly, Jeon and Day (2016) also reported moderate effect sizes of ER on L2 reading proficiency ($d = .57$ for an experimental group vs. control group comparison and $.79$ for pre-post comparisons).

ER researchers have also investigated specific aspects of reading proficiency that have been affected by ER. The first benefit of ER was that it enhanced reading fluency. Ateek (2021) investigated the reading speed change among 10 Jordanian Arabic EFL learners with low to intermediate language proficiency in a 12-week ER program. A paired t-test showed significant differences between pre-and post-reading fluency tests. The average reading fluency increase was 18.2 wpm ($SD = 4.76$). Bui and Macalister (2021) reported a mean change of 36.37 wpm over a 10-week online ER program among a group of Vietnamese EFL university students. Bell (2001) investigated the effects of ER on reading rate and reading comprehension among elementary proficiency EFL learners in Yemen. The control group (i.e., intensive reading) participants ($n = 12$) read short passages and then completed tasks focused on vocabulary, grammar, and rhetorical patterns, whereas those in the treatment group (i.e., ER group) took part in a two-semester ER program. The study showed that the intensive reading group's reading rate increased from 78.45 wpm to 92.54 wpm, while the ER group mean reading rate increased from 68.10 wpm to 127.53 wpm. In summary, this line of research has shown that ER improved L2 readers' reading speed, with a moderate to large effect size (e.g., $d = .61$ in Nakahashi, 2015; $d = 1.19$ and 2.09 in Beglar et al., 2012; and $d = .83$ in Jeon & Day, 2016).

Vocabulary knowledge. Another aspect of language abilities that have been revealed to increase was vocabulary knowledge. Previous research seemed to show that consistent exposure to graded readers over time plays a significant role in facilitating L2 readers' incidental vocabulary learning (e.g., Ateek, 2021; Chang, 2013; Horst, 2005; Suk, 2017; Webb & Chang, 2015; Zhou & Day, 2021). Ateek (2021) found that a 12-week ER program led to a significant increase in the participants' vocabulary knowledge. The participants' mean growth of vocabulary amounted to 7.7 newly gained words per month ($SD = 1.3$). Adopting a quasi-experimental research design, Suk (2017) examined the impact of a 15-week ER program on Korean university L2 English readers' reading comprehension, vocabulary knowledge, and reading rate. Four intact classes participated in the study. The intensive reading classes ($n = 88$) received 100-minute intensive reading instruction per week whereas the ER groups ($n = 83$) received 70 minutes of intensive reading instruction and 30 minutes of ER instruction. The results showed that the ER groups gained more words ($M = 64.7$) than the intensive reading classes ($M = 57.63$) and the difference was statistically significant. Besides learning new words, L2 learners also reported the acquisition of new meanings of known words through ER. In Zhou and Day (2021), EAP L2 readers in an English Language Institute in a public university reported that they learned new meanings and usages of words through Xreading.com. To conclude, convincing evidence has been accumulated that ER plays a crucial role in L2 vocabulary learning, with a large effect size (e.g., $d = 1.25$ in Nakahashi, 2015).

Besides reading fluency and vocabulary knowledge, ER has been shown to play a crucial role in grammar knowledge (e.g., Aka, 2019), writing skills (e.g., Aida & Widiyati, 2020; Park, 2016), listening and speaking skills (e.g., Zhou & Day, 2021).

ER Activities

Although ER advocates reading as its own reward (e.g., one of ten ER principles in Day & Bamford, 2002), ER researchers also encourage the incorporation of ER activities into ER programs. Day and Bamford (2002) suggested that teachers engage students in follow-up activities. The main benefits included finding out what students experienced while reading, making reading a shared experience, and linking ER to other aspects of the curriculum (Day & Bamford, 2002). As for ER activities, Bamford and Day (2004) compiled a variety of activities such as Instant Book Reports, the Story and Me, Grammar Detectives, and so on. Although ER researchers have advocated the incorporation of ER activities in ER programs, little research has been conducted on L2 readers' perceptions of such ER activities, which calls for more research on the role of ER activities in ER programs.

The Purpose of the Present Project

Taken together, previous research has revealed the following gaps in ER research. First, ER studies have been mainly conducted in both EFL and ESL contexts (e.g., Jeon & Day, 2016; Kim, 2012; Krashen, 2007; Nakahashi, 2015; Wang & Kim, 2021), little is known about implementing ER in other contexts and the effect of ER to different language abilities in Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL) contexts. Second, reading attitudes have been mainly treated as one construct in previous research. However, following Yamashita (2007), this study calls for adopting a component-skill approach to identify the internal components of reading attitudes. Lastly, although ER theories encouraged the incorporating of ER activities into ER programs, little research has been conducted to investigate L2 readers' perceptions of ER activities. Therefore, to fill the gaps in these areas, the following research questions were addressed in the present study:

1. What differences are observed in reading attitudes before and after the ER program?
2. Which aspects of Chinese language abilities were perceived to have been improved by one semester's ER program?
3. What were L2 Chinese readers' perceptions of the ER activities?

Method

Participants

The participants were 41 CFL learners in an American college. Their mean length of learning Chinese was 4.08 years ($SD = 2.78$). The participants were all enrolled in intermediate level Chinese classes. The participants were either placed into intermediate level Chinese classes based on placement test results or were taking the class after successfully completing two semesters of beginning-level Chinese courses. The estimated proficiency was B1 according to Common European Framework of Reference for Languages and intermediate-low according to American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages.

Context

The ER program was implemented in all three sections of intermediate Chinese classes. The intermediate Chinese course aimed to help students develop communicative skills and knowledge of Chinese by engaging them in a variety of topics from everyday life to contemporary Chinese social issues. Students were expected to develop accuracy, fluency, and appropriateness in the use of Chinese in four language subskills (e.g., listening, speaking, reading, and writing). Upon successful completion of the course, students were expected to acquire approximately 200 new characters and 400 new words in both simplified and traditional forms. The textbook used in the course was *Integrated Chinese Level 2 Part 1* Third Edition (Liu et al., 2009). See Table 1 for the topics covered in the course.

Table 1
Course Textbook Topics Covered by Participants

Lesson 1 开学 (The semester starts)
Lesson 2 宿舍 (Dormitories)
Lesson 3 在饭馆儿 (In restaurants)
Lesson 4 买东西 (Shopping)
Lesson 5 选课 (Selecting courses)
Lesson 6 男朋友女朋友 (Boyfriends and girlfriends)
Lesson 7 电脑和网络 (Computers and internet)
Lesson 8 打工 (Part time jobs)
Lesson 9 教育 (Education)
Lesson 10 中国地理 (China's geography)

The Intermediate Chinese classes met four times a week. There was a fixed weekly rhythm. Monday was a unit test day, probing learners' grasp of already learned content. Tuesday started a new lesson where new words were usually taught. Wednesday was a day where new grammar was introduced. Thursday was a day to learn reading passages. There was no regular Friday class meeting. ER reading had to fit in to this rhythm. See Table 2 for details.

Table 2
ER Schedule

Week	Activities			
	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Fri/Sat./Sun.
1	10 mins in class	5 mins in class	ER Orientation/ W2 Books checking out	After class reading
2	reading 10 mins in class	reading 5 mins in class	W2 ER activity/ W3 Books checking out	After class reading
3	reading 10 mins in class	reading 5 mins in class	W3 ER activity/ W4 Books checking out	After class reading
4	reading 10 mins in class	reading 5 mins in class	W4 ER activity/ W5 Books checking out	After class reading
5	reading 10 mins in class	reading 5 mins in class	W5 ER activity/ W6 Books checking out	After class reading
6	reading 10 mins in class	reading 5 mins in class	W6 ER activity/ W9 Books checking out	After class reading
9	reading 10 mins in class	reading 5 mins in class	W9 ER activity/ W10 Books checking out	After class reading
10	reading 10 mins in class	reading 5 mins in class	W10 ER activity/ W11 Books checking out	After class reading
11	reading 10 mins in class	reading 5 mins in class	W11 ER activity/ W12 Books checking out	After class reading
12	reading 10 mins in class	reading 5 mins in class	W12 ER activity/ W13 Books checking out	After class reading
13	reading		W13 ER activity	After class reading

The ER requirement was a component of the course, with a total of 5% of the final grade assigned to ER. Five percent was discussed among the instructors and approved by the lead teacher of the Chinese program. The participants were required to read one book per week (10 books in total). They had to complete 10 reading activities. Reading one book each week besides completing all their other homework (vocabulary quiz, unit test, workbook) for each lesson was a daunting task. As a result, not many students read ER materials beyond the required amount (i.e.,

one book). However, they were encouraged to go to the ER library to read during their leisure time. The first researcher (also their instructor) brought the ER books to the class on Thursday where students would skim and scan the books and check out one book to each student. Thus an ER “cycle” would begin on a Thursday and continue on until the following Thursday.

ER Library

An important step in establishing an ER program was to build an ER library. This study decided to include graded readers (also called language learner literature) in the ER library because they were specifically written for learners of foreign languages (<https://erfoundation.org/wordpress/graded-readers/>). Most of the books in the ER library were from Chinese Breeze graded readers series (Liu & Chu, 2008). There were three copies of each title in the Chinese Breeze series plus some additional readers from other sources totaling approximately 200 books in all. The books were labeled into three levels according to the number of headwords of each book: level S (150 headword), level 1 (300 headword), and level 2 (500 headword and above). Based on the weekly reading records, which showed the basic information of the book read in a certain week (e.g., the book title, the level of the book, the length of reading and so on), Level S books were the most popular among the students. Since the easiest books are at Level S, it seemed that most students started reading from the lowest level.

ER Activities

The participants were required to complete 10 activities. The activities were designed based on Bamford and Day (2004). The main goals of the activities were to motivate the participants to finish each week’s books, to interact with their classmates, and to build a reading community. Table 3 lists the ER activity of each week.

Table 3
Ten ER Activities Done by Participants

Week	ER Activity	Description
2	Instant Book Report	Students were asked to complete a book report where they reported the title of the book, the main characters, a summary, and whether they like the book or not and why.
3	Gifts	Students were asked to choose three characters from the book they read and thought about what gifts to give to them. They were asked to write a short paragraph in Chinese about what gifts to give and the reasons.
4	Grammar Detective	Students were asked to select three sentences from the book, made them grammatically wrong. They could add one word, delete one word, or replace one word with another. Their classmates were asked to detect the grammatical errors in each other’s sentences.
5	I am a Vocabulary Teacher	Students were asked to teach their classmates 10 new words they had learned from the book.
6	A Different Ending	Students were asked to summarize the book they read that week. Instead of writing the actual ending, they should write a different ending. They were divided into groups and shared their summaries and different endings. They were told that the new endings would be attached to the books.
9	Listening While Reading	Students were asked to download the audio files of the book they read and read while listening.
10	The Story and Me	Students were asked to write about the settings of the story, the characters, the plots, their impressions of the story, their feelings, and expressions, and what they learned from the story.
11	The Story and Drawing	Students were asked to draw a picture based on the book and wrote briefly about what the picture shows, about what happened in the story before and after the picture, and about their opinion of the book.

12	My Story	Students were asked to write a personal experience story in Chinese. They brought their stories to the class and their classmates read each other's stories.
13	My Reflections	Students were asked to reflect on their reading experience of the whole semester. The reflection covered six broad questions (e.g., Did you enjoy this semester's ER? Why or why not).

Instruments

Reading Attitude Questionnaire. The reading attitude questionnaire was adapted from Zhou and Day (2021). The questionnaire was consisted of 20 Likert-scale items and can be found in Table 4 below. The word "English" was replaced with "Chinese" in all the items. As can be seen, it was administered in English, the participants' L1. The questionnaire had sound internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of .851 for the pre-survey and .871 for the post-survey.

Table 4
Chinese Reading Attitude Survey

-
1. Intermediate Chinese class Section _____
 2. Name _____
 3. Nationality _____
 4. How many years have you studied Chinese? _____ Years

Indicate your agreement or disagreement with each of the statements by using the letter from this scale:

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree
A B C D

1. _____ I have confidence in reading Chinese books.
 2. _____ I find reading in Chinese personally rewarding.
 3. _____ I find reading in Chinese fun.
 4. _____ I find reading in Chinese useful.
 5. _____ It is easy for me to read Chinese.
 6. _____ I read Chinese books, comics, newspaper, etc., outside of class.
 7. _____ When I read Chinese, I need to look up many words in the dictionary.
 8. _____ When I read Chinese, I am very interested in what I read.
 9. _____ I find reading Chinese boring.
 10. _____ After reading Chinese, I am very interested in what I read.
 11. _____ I would like to read more Chinese.
 12. _____ I do not enjoy reading Chinese.
 13. _____ I am a slow reader when I read Chinese.
 14. _____ When I read Chinese, I don't understand very much.
 15. _____ I think reading books for pleasure in Chinese is important.
 16. _____ So far, I am enjoying Intermediate Chinese class.
 17. _____ I work hard in Intermediate Chinese class.
 18. _____ I would like to do well in Intermediate Chinese class.
 19. _____ I look forward to coming to Intermediate Chinese class.
 20. _____ I want to continue studying Chinese after taking Intermediate Chinese class.
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Final ER Reflection. The final reflection was also Week 13's ER activity. Participants were asked to answer six questions. The first question was whether they enjoyed reading in their native language and their reasons for it. The second question asked the students to describe their reading experience in Chinese before taking intermediate Chinese. The third question asked

whether the students enjoyed reading extensively during the semester of this study, and why (Responses to this question were used to answer RQ #1). The fourth question asked the participants which aspects of their Chinese language abilities they thought had been improved through ER (Responses to this question were used to answer RQ #2). Question 5 asked the participants whether they enjoyed the ER activities, and why (Responses to this question was used to answer RQ #3). The sixth and final question invited the students to give suggestions for implementing ER in future semesters.

Procedure

The pre- and post-reading attitude questionnaires were administered in class. The weekly ER activities were completed and submitted each Thursday at the “end” of a given ER cycle prior to the beginning of a new ER cycle. The instructor gave feedback to learners on the ER activities. At the end of the semester final written ER reflections from learners were collected in Week 13. The participants were asked for their consent to use the data collected over the semester for research purposes. All students signed the consent form.

Data Analyses

The questionnaire data were first submitted to an exploratory factor analysis to extract underlying factors. The exploratory factorial analysis was used to extract the factors with eigenvalues higher than one, followed by varimax rotation. Following Yamashita (2007) and Wang and Wang (2019), an item was viewed as loaded on one factor when the absolute value of factor loading was at .40 and above. Item 15 was deleted in this process because it was loaded on two factors. The factor analysis revealed a five-factor structure of reading attitudes (Table 5).

The first factor was interpreted as **Confidence**, because items loaded on this factor were concerned with feeling confident or not confident while reading in Chinese (e.g., “I have confidence in reading Chinese books,” “I am a slow reader when I read Chinese”). The second factor was named **Enjoyment**, because items on this factor seemed to reflect students’ positive or negative feelings toward reading in Chinese (e.g., “I find reading in Chinese fun”). The third factor was interpreted as **Interest** because items on this factor indicated whether students found reading in Chinese interesting or boring (“When I read Chinese, I am very interested in what I read,” “I find reading in Chinese boring”). The fourth factor was named **Practical value** because items on this factor indicated students’ beliefs about practical values reading in Chinese might bring to them (e.g., “I find reading in Chinese is useful”). The last factor was called **Devotion** because items loaded on this factor represented whether the students were willing to work hard or do well in their Chinese class (e.g., “I work hard in Intermediate Chinese class,” “I would like to do well in Intermediate Chinese class”).

Construct reliability refers to the reliability of a construct or latent variable. A popular method to measure construct reliability in social sciences is Cronbach’s alpha coefficient (Wang & Wang, 2019). This study adopted Cronbach’s alpha to estimate the reliability of each construct. The reliability of each factor (Cronbach’s α) ranged from .757-.824 (*Confidence* = .817; *Enjoyment* = .824; *Interest* = .799; *Practical value* = .813; *Devotion* = .757). These figures were considered satisfactory given the relatively small number of items.

Table 5
Exploratory Factor Loadings for the Five Components of Reading Attitude

Item		Confidence	Enjoyment	Interest	Practical value	Devotion	Communality
13	I am a slow reader when I read Chinese.	0.848					0.765
1	I have confidence in reading Chinese books.	0.831					0.829
14	When I read Chinese, I don't understand very much.	0.794					0.808
5	It is easy for me to read Chinese.	0.737					0.735
7	When I read Chinese, I need to look up many words in the dictionary.	0.581					0.593
11	I would like to read more Chinese.		0.80				0.722
16	So far, I am enjoying Intermediate Chinese class.		0.63				0.731
3	I find reading in Chinese fun.		0.62				0.679
2	I find reading in Chinese personally rewarding.		0.61				0.596
8	When I read Chinese, I am very interested in what I read.			0.856			0.793
9	I find reading Chinese boring.			0.833			0.803
10	After reading Chinese, I am very interested in what I read.			0.633			0.723
4	I find reading in Chinese useful.				0.80		0.743
19	I look forward to coming to Intermediate Chinese class.				0.60		0.777
20	I want to continue studying Chinese after taking Intermediate Chinese class.				0.60		0.748
17	I work hard in Intermediate Chinese class.					0.84	0.821
18	I would like to do well in Intermediate Chinese class.					0.83	0.813

Note. *Percentage variance explained: Confidence 17.702%; Enjoyment 16.852%; Interest 14.823%; Practical value 14.518%; Devotion 10.733%.*

The following data analysis methods were adopted to answer each RQ.

RQ #1. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were calculated for each questionnaire item and for the five reading attitude variables (*Confidence, Enjoyment, Interest, Practical Value, Devotion*) for both pre- and post-test administrations. A MANOVA was then run to compare whether there were significant differences between the pre- and post- reading

attitude variables. The responses to the open-ended Q3 “Do you enjoy reading extensively this semester? Why or why not?” in the final reflections were analyzed.

RQ #2. The responses to the open-ended Q4 “Which aspects of your Chinese language abilities do you think have been improved through doing extensive reading?” in the final reflection activity were analyzed.

RQ #3. The responses to the open-ended Q5 “Do you enjoy doing ER activities? Why or why not?” in the final reflection activity was thematically coded.

A research assistant trained in qualitative data coding and one of the authors coded one third of the responses separately. Then the research assistant and one of the authors of this paper discussed the coding schemes until 100% agreement was reached. After that, the research assistant completed the coding of the remaining responses.

Results

RQ1. What differences are observed in reading attitudes before and after the ER program?

The results indicated that 41 L2 Chinese learners differed in their reading attitudes before and after reading extensively for one semester. Table 6 reported the descriptive statistics for each item in the reading attitude questionnaire. There were slight increases in most reading attitudes items when comparing pre-with post- item means.

When the data were examined in terms of the five variables that were uncovered by the exploratory factor analysis described above in the Data Analysis section, some patterns emerged. The variables were, once again: *Confidence*, *Enjoyment*, *Interest*, *Practical Value*, and *Devotion*. (See Table 7 for descriptive statistics for pre- and post-reading attitude variables.)

Repeated measures MANOVA analysis on the five variables showed that there were significant multivariate effects for time ($V = .135$, $F = 249.20$, $p = .000$, partial eta squared = .865), reading attitude variables ($V = .071$, $F = 117.331$, $p = .000$, partial eta squared = .929), and the interaction between time and reading attitude variables ($V = .126$, $F = .62.60$, $p = .000$, partial eta squared = .874).

Post-hoc paired samples t-tests showed that the participants had significantly more *Confidence* after reading extensively for one semester ($t = -5.336$, $p = .000$, $d = 0.66$). The results also showed that the participants had significantly more *Devotion* to learning Chinese ($t = -.508$, $p = 0.016$, $d = 0.35$). The effect sizes were small to medium according to Plonsky and Oswald's (2014) more conservative criteria (small $d = .40$; medium $d = .70$; large $d = 1.00$).

Table 6
Pre-and Post-Means and SDs of Each Questionnaire Item

Items	Pre-Mean (SD)	Post-Mean (SD)
1. I have confidence in reading Chinese books.	2.18 (.67)	2.87 (.56)
2. I find reading in Chinese personally rewarding	3.24 (.62)	3.49 (.60)
3. I find reading in Chinese fun	3.05 (.67)	3.20 (.64)
4. I find reading in Chinese useful	3.54 (.60)	3.56 (.55)
5. It is easy for me to read Chinese	2.16 (.69)	2.38 (.61)
6. I read Chinese books, comics, newspaper, etc., outside of class	1.73 (.74)	1.98 (.79)
7. When I read Chinese, I need to look up many words in the dictionary	1.89 (.65)	2.15 (.79)
8. When I read Chinese, I am very interested in what I read	2.90 (.53)	3.00 (.55)
9. I find reading Chinese boring	3.15 (.72)	3.20 (.60)
10. After reading Chinese, I am very interested in what I read	2.89 (.63)	2.88 (.60)
11. I would like to read more Chinese	3.46 (.67)	3.39 (.67)
12. I do not enjoy reading Chinese	3.35 (.63)	3.27 (.59)
13. I am a slow reader when I read Chinese	1.68 (.72)	1.83 (.70)
14. When I read Chinese, I don't understand very much	2.34 (.75)	2.71 (.63)
15. I think reading books for pleasure in Chinese is important	3.51 (.64)	3.32 (.61)
16. So far, I am enjoying Intermediate Chinese class	3.59 (.59)	3.51 (.60)
17. I work hard in Intermediate Chinese class	3.58 (.55)	3.80 (.46)
18. I would like to do well in Intermediate Chinese class	3.90 (.30)	3.93 (.26)
19. I look forward to coming to Intermediate Chinese class	3.63 (.58)	3.41 (.67)
20. I want to continue studying Chinese after taking Intermediate Chinese class	3.49 (.75)	3.39 (.77)

Table 7
Differences Between Pre- and Post- Reading Attitude Variables

	Pre-Mean (SD)	Post-Mean (SD)	Mean Difference	99% CI		T	P
				Lower	Upper		
<i>Confidence</i>	10.26(2.50)	11.93(2.52)	-1.67	-0.252	-0.824	-5.336	0
<i>Enjoyment</i>	13.34(2.01)	13.58(2.02)	-0.24	-1.02	0.53	-0.855	0.398
<i>Interest</i>	8.94(1.55)	9.07 (1.40)	-0.13	-0.78	0.51	-0.56	0.578
<i>Practical</i>							
<i>Value</i>	10.66(1.54)	10.37(1.71)	0.29	-0.31	0.89	1.321	0.194
<i>Devotion</i>	7.48(.75)	7.73(.68)	0.25	-0.52	0.02	-2.508	0.016

The responses to Q3 in the final reflection were also analyzed to delve into the reasons behind the reading attitude change. Table 8 shows that 86% of the students enjoyed ER, 6% kind of enjoyed ER, and 3% did not enjoy ER (see Table 8).

Table 8
Attitudes Toward Extensive Reading Experience

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Enjoy	31	86%
Kind of	2	6%
No	3	8%
Total	36	100%

Among the participants who stated they enjoyed ER, a number of reasons were mentioned. The first reason was related to reading materials. For example, the participants in Excerpts 1 and 2 mentioned that ER stories were “interesting” and “fun and out of the ordinary”.

Excerpt 1

I enjoy reading extensively in Chinese this semester because the stories are very funny and out of the ordinary. I can see that reading them help my fluency and it is nice to see that I can recognize words from lessons in the books. I also like that we get to engage with the readings through ER activities. It can be enjoyable to listen to other people’s stories and learn about Chinese culture and practice my speaking skills.

Excerpt 2

I did enjoy the extensive reading. The stories were interesting and I feel like I learned a lot about Chinese culture and my vocabulary expanded. It was difficult because it was very time intensive but I enjoyed being able to better comprehend Chinese paragraphs.

The second reason was related to confidence. Participants mentioned that reading extensively made them more confident in reading. For example, the participant in Excerpt 3 stated that ER “expanded my comfort and confidence” with reading in Chinese. The participant in Excerpt 4 stated that reading extensively improved his/her confidence to “follow a plotline in Chinese”.

Excerpt 3

Although it sometimes takes a long time, I definitely have enjoyed reading extensively in Chinese this semester. I think it’s helped expand my comfort and confidence with reading Chinese, and helped develop my ability to learn new words from the context of the words and story around it.

Excerpt 4

I did enjoy reading in Chinese this semester because I think I grew more confident in my ability to follow a plotline in Chinese. In addition, it was also a very helpful way to refresh my mind on certain vocabulary words or sentence structures I had used previously, but had forgotten.

Besides the reading materials being interesting and ER improving confidence, the participant in Excerpt 5 also mentioned that they enjoyed ER so much and would be willing to continue ER in future Chinese classes.

Excerpt 5

I actually really enjoyed reading extensively in Chinese this semester. At the beginning I wasn't expecting to enjoy it and thought that it was just going to be an extra load of homework that I was going to have to complete. But by the first two weeks of getting assigned an ER book it was really satisfying to be able to know that I could read all of these different kinds of books. It is also such a great way to track my progress in my general understanding but also my ability to retain new words and grammar patterns. I really enjoyed reading extensively this semester and hope that I will continue to do so next semester! I think it's really smart to assign it to the class as I am so busy that otherwise I might not have been able to read as many books as I have.

The last important reason mentioned was related to Chinese culture. A few participants stated that they learned about Chinese culture through reading, which were “important” (Excerpt 6) and “interesting” (Excerpt 7).

Excerpt 6

I enjoyed reading extensively in Chinese this semester. It allowed me to practice my reading skills and get better at reading faster and learning new words faster. I also got to read some classic Chinese folktales and stories that I feel were important in helping me learn more about Chinese culture.

Excerpt 7

I actually did enjoy reading extensively in Chinese this semester. I think that it greatly improved my translation and I even learned new vocabulary terms that I would not have learned in class and/or from the textbook lessons. I also enjoyed learning traditional Chinese stories that are popular in their culture. A lot of the books I read explained why a certain holiday was established, so it was interesting to learn the background of different Chinese traditions.

To conclude, a five-component structure (i.e., *Confidence, Enjoyment, Interest, Practical Value, and Devotion*) of reading attitudes were identified among the L2 Chinese readers in this study. The participants' confidence in reading in Chinese and devotion to reading were significantly improved after reading extensively for one semester. The questionnaire responses supplemented this finding, which confirmed that students found ER books and stories interesting, ER made them more confident in reading, and they learned about Chinese culture through reading.

RQ #2. Which aspects of Chinese language abilities were perceived to have been improved by one semester's ER program?

The responses to Q4 in the final reflection were analyzed to answer this research question. Table 9 presents the frequency of each language ability improved through ER perceived by the participants. Reading speed was mentioned 23 times (21%). In an EAP context, reading rate (21 times, 35%) was also the most frequently mentioned language ability improved by ER (Zhou & Day, 2021). Reading comprehension (21 times) and vocabulary (20 times) were the second and third most frequently mentioned language abilities improved by ER, followed by grammar (18 times). The participant in Excerpt 8 stated that his/her reading comprehension in general was improved.

Table 9
Students' Perceptions of Chinese Language Abilities Improved through ER

Category	Number*	Percentage
Reading speed	23	21%
Reading comprehension	21	19%
Vocabulary	20	19%
Grammar	18	17%
Writing	9	8%
Character and word inferencing	7	6%
Character recognition	4	4%
Listening	3	3%
Speaking	3	3%
Total	108	100%

*Note. Number indicates the frequency of a specific language ability mentioned by the participants.

Excerpt 8

I think extensive reading has increased my reading speed and comprehension the most. I think I am more able to understand larger paragraphs and individual sentences, and overall my ability to read larger blocks of text in Chinese has improved.

Besides reading rate, reading comprehension, vocabulary, and grammar, writing ability improvement through ER was mentioned nine times (8%). The participant in Excerpt 9 explained that ER improved different language abilities.

Excerpt 9

I think the ER activities have allowed me to improve my reading speed and vocabulary. Each of the new books I pick up have an assortment of new words that I tend to write down and repeat to myself as if they were vocab words we are expected to learn in class. I realize that I have improved my listening skills, a skill set that I believe everyone struggles the most with given that many words in Chinese are phonetically similar. I also believe I have improved my writing ability given that now I write with more confidence. I think that simply being exposed to literature will ultimately condition your brain to get used to certain sentence structures. I think this shows in how my writing abilities have improved alongside my reading abilities.

Two language abilities unique to reading in Chinese were perceived to be improved through ER: character and word inferencing (7, 6%) and character recognition (4, 4%). Chinese has a logographic writing system (Sun, 2006) and reading in Chinese may cause anxiety (e.g., Zhou, 2017). The first step in reading Chinese is to recognize Chinese characters. Previous research has shown that character recognition plays a significant direct effect on L2 Chinese reading comprehension (Zhou, 2018). The participant in Excerpt 10 mentioned that ER enabled the

ability of “inferring character meanings much easier”, which resulted in a natural acquisition of the nuances of the language.

Excerpt 10

I could read faster, comprehensively inferring character meanings much easier, and even speak Chinese faster. Slowly but surely, I began to naturally adapt to the subtle nuances of speaking and reading mandarin.

In summary, RQ2 indicated that participants in this study perceived different aspects of their Chinese language abilities were improved through one semester’s ER.

RQ3. What were L2 Chinese readers’ perceptions of the ER activities?

RQ3 asked the participants’ perceptions of the ER activities. Table 10 presents that 70% of the participants agreed that they enjoyed ER activities, 15% of them said they enjoyed some of the activities but not the others or sometimes they enjoyed but sometimes they did not. 15% of them said they did not enjoy the ER activities.

Table 10

Students’ Perceptions of Enjoyment of ER Activities

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Enjoy	29	70%
Sometimes	6	15%
Not enjoy	6	15%
Total	41	100%

As for the reasons why they enjoyed ER activities, the participants mentioned five reasons: *providing opportunities to interact with classmates, solidifying comprehension, types of activities, different from normal class activities and forcing them to read.* First, ER activities were a way to make sure students did the reading. For example, one activity was to write a different ending and another one was to give gifts to the main characters. In order to complete those activities, students first needed to finish reading the books. The participant in Excerpt 11 explained that ER activities forced the completion of weekly readings.

Excerpt 11

The ER activities are very helpful because it forces you to actually do the readings. College students are very busy and it can be easy to sometimes forget to read the book at times. Also, ER activity is a nice change of pace from normal classroom activities and is a more fun alternative to just learning material on a PowerPoint.

Allocating class time to share ER activities also enabled students to interact with each other in the target language. In this study, students were given 15-20 minutes every Thursday to share their ER activities. Sharing ER activities not only practiced students’ listening and speaking skills and providing them opportunities to use the vocabulary and grammar in the books, but also giving time for students to interact with each other. The participant in Excerpt 12 appreciated

the creativity of his/her classmates in some ER activities such as alternative endings. The participant in Excerpt 13 believed that ER activities improved his/her speaking and listening skills.

Excerpt 12

Yes, I enjoyed most of the ER activities. The one activity that I didn't like were usually the ones where we had to change or describe the characters. I liked the activities where we wrote different endings or had to draw a picture describing a scene in the story. Those were more interactive because in the group we could look at the picture or read the changed ending and appreciate the creativity of the presenters. I also really liked the activity where we had to choose words and teach the class the words because I was able to learn more words that day by just remembering the funny sentences the "teachers" made up to teach the class the new words.

Excerpt 13

I did enjoy the ER activities. They weren't too stressful and allowed us to effectively show what we had learned. Earlier, I said that the extensive reading itself didn't aid my listening or speaking skills. However, I'd say that the activities definitely did. I found facilitating and understanding conversation to be much easier towards the end of the semester. I also appreciate the fact that the activities were different every week as well.

One of the key ER principles was to provide students with books on a variety of topics (Day & Bamford, 1998). Similarly, the ER activities in this study were different each week. Some participants appreciated that ER activities were different each week (e.g., Excerpt 13). It seems that some participants also enjoyed some activities more than others.

Some participants did not enjoy the ER activities in this study. The reasons they listed included *unable to use dictionary, lack of enough time, time consuming, and some activities not closely related to the books*. The participant in Excerpt 14 felt that sometimes the activities were rushed so he/she did not learn much. Although most of the books had a glossary, the participant in Excerpt 15 mentioned that the books were still difficult for him. As a result, the reading experience was not enjoyable for the two participants.

Excerpt 14

I do enjoy doing ER activities for the most part. I like interacting with my peers and having more practice to speak aloud in Chinese. However, sometimes I think it was rushed and disorganized / people weren't very engaged. We didn't have enough time to correct each other on things we said, so I didn't get to learn as much from my peers as I would have liked / knew I could have.

Excerpt 15

I do not enjoy doing ER activities because of our inability to look up words while we are reading our books. Thus, the vast majority of the ER books I read are very difficult to understand, even if I infer the meaning of a word from the context of the sentence. Also, it is impossible to know how to pronounce unknown characters without looking up the pronunciation, so I feel like a lot of the ER reading I am doing is in vain.

Discussion

The results of the current study contribute to an understanding of the effectiveness of ER to reading attitudes and language abilities among CFL learners, as well as the perceptions of the ER activities.

Components of Reading Attitudes

RQ #1 revolved around the effect of one-semester's ER treatment on reading attitudes. First, following a component approach, this study conducted a factorial analysis of reading attitudes, revealing a five-factor structure of reading attitudes (*Confidence, Enjoyment, Interest, Practical Value, and Devotion*). The five factors could be categorized into Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) and Reeves's (2002) three reading attitude components in Reasoned Action Theory: cognitive (interest and practical value); affective (confident, enjoyment); and conative (devotion) components. Since the cognitive component is related to evaluative beliefs, this study revealed that L2 Chinese readers in an American institution of higher education found reading in Chinese more interesting after reading extensively for one semester. Similarly, this study revealed that L2 Chinese readers felt more confident in reading in Chinese and enjoyed more while reading in Chinese after one semester's ER treatment. Positive evaluations of reading might also lead to a (an intentional) change of behaviors if Reasoned Action Theory holds true. The participants in this study were more willing to devote time and effort in their Chinese classes.

The possible explanations for the positive change in reading attitudes (particularly *Confidence* and *Devotion*) might be related to the easy and interesting reading materials. One of the top ten ER principles is that students read a large amount of interesting and level-appropriate materials (Day & Bamford, 2002). Nuttall's (1996) "Virtuous circle of the good reader" could also be used to explain the change in the reading attitudes and behaviors in this study. Good readers read more, as a result they understand better, which leads to an improvement in reading fluency. When they read faster, it is more likely for them to have flow experience and enjoy reading, which in turn motivates them to read more (see Bui & Macalister, 2021, for the vicious circle of the weak reader and the virtuous circle of the good reader). One significant implication of this finding is that a positive change of reading attitudes might lead to a change of behavior intentions. This study revealed that the participants stated they were more devoted to their Chinese classes after ER than before. This cognitive component of reading attitudes has been identified by other researchers (e.g., Lee & Schallert, 2014). However, previous research mainly focused on a comparison of first language and L2 reading attitudes (e.g., Lee & Schallert, 2014; Yamashita, 2004; 2007). Thus, the findings of this study extended this line of research to the effect of ER to the conative component of reading attitudes. Future ER research could be undertaken to further investigate how ER could possibly change L2 learners' behaviors of reading or even learning a foreign language.

Improvement of Language Abilities Through ER

Regarding RQ #2, this study found that some L2 Chinese learners perceived different aspects of their language abilities had been improved through ER: reading rate, reading comprehension,

vocabulary, grammar; writing and so on. These findings were consistent with previous ER studies (e.g., Jeon & Day, 2016; Nakahashi, 2015; Wang & Kim, 2021; Zhou & Day, 2021). ER has been found to improve reading fluency (e.g., Beglar et al, 2012; Zhou & Day, 2021). This could be explained by the fact that the participants read a large amount of reading materials. The participants in this study read one book per week and completed ER activities, which further solidified their reading comprehension. Besides reading rate, this study revealed that lower-level linguistic skills such as vocabulary, grammar, and character recognition were all perceived to be improved by ER. Lower-level linguistic skills such as efficient word recognition and automatic Chinese character recognition could enable limited cognitive resources to be allocated to higher level comprehension processing (e.g., Zhou, 2018). Moreover, the participants of this study deemed that ER not only improved their reading comprehension, but other language skills such as writing, speaking, and listening. This finding agrees with other ER studies (e.g., see Kim & Ro, 2023; Park, 2016; Ro & Kim, 2022, for effects of ER on writing abilities).

A possible explanation for this might be that the participants completed ER activities every week. Most of the activities require them to write in Chinese (e.g., different endings, gifts to the main characters, and own stories). They also shared their books and activities with classmates, which provided them opportunities to practice listening and speaking. What needs to be noted is that the benefits were perceived by the participants, further research should be undertaken to investigate the benefits of ER based on more objective data such as tests. Despite this limitation, the findings, while preliminary, suggest that ER may be beneficial for improving different language abilities among L2 learners of Chinese.

Perceptions of ER Activities

RQ #3 aimed to explore the perceptions of ER activities in ER programs. In reviewing the ER literature, limited data were found on the perceptions of ER activities. Considering that some scholars in the field have reported that ‘reading supplemented with activities’ leads to better linguistic gains and retention than ‘reading only’ approach (e.g., Laufer, 2003; Min, 2008; see Ro, 2019 for a detailed discussion), it was necessary to investigate the role of ER activities in ER programs. The participants in this study completed one ER activity each week for 10 weeks. Since most of the participants read different books each week, they had to take extra steps to establish mutual understanding about the books with co-participants first (e.g., briefly summarize the stories) and then complete ER activities (e.g., sharing gifts for the main characters or alternative endings with co-participants). The current study found that 70% of the participants enjoyed ER activities. Reading with ER activities reported in this study was similar to “enhanced ER” (i.e., ER with communicative output activities) in Song and Sardegna’s (2014) study, which found that ‘reading with ER activities’ led to more incidental learning of both productive and receptive knowledge.

The participants in this study reported five reasons why they enjoyed ER activities: *providing opportunities to interact with classmates, solidifying comprehension, types of activities, different from normal class activities and forcing them to read*. The findings confirmed that ER activities were momentums for L2 readers to complete reading (e.g., Day & Bamford, 2002). More importantly, ER activities provided opportunities for purposeful and collaborative discussions (similar to ‘literature circles’ in Shelton-Strong, 2012). ER activities such as talking about books

can change reading from a solitary activity to a communicative practice and “pushed L2 output and expanded their relationships with classmates” (Kirchhoff, 2015, p. 62). Thus, in view of the perceived benefits of ER activities, this study argues that ER needs to be supplemented with ER activities. Furthermore, more research on the perceptions and effectiveness of ER activities are called for to provide a better understanding of how and to what degree ER activities can benefit students’ learning.

Conclusion

This study was designed to look into the construct of reading attitudes as experienced by a group of L2 Chinese readers. The findings revealed (1) a five-factor structure of reading attitudes (*Confidence, Enjoyment, Interest, Practical Value, and Devotion*) were extracted and reading attitudes (*Confidence* and *Devotion*) were significantly improved after one semester’s ER treatment; (2) the participants perceived that reading fluency, reading comprehension, vocabulary, grammar, character inferencing, character recognition, writing, listening, and speaking skills were improved through ER; (3) ER activities were enjoyed by 70% of the participants.

It is hoped that the findings of the study, and the pedagogical implications they enabled, can help teachers and students have a better understanding of the components of reading attitudes, the perceived benefits of ER, and the significance of ER activities while implementing ER in CFL contexts. What could be considered as a limitation, however, is that the study only provided a description of the perceptions of the benefits of ER. Another limitation is the small sample size. Further research should go a step further by investigating the effects of ER based on testing data and run factorial analysis based on larger sample sizes.

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