

THE INFLUENCE OF FIRST LANGUAGE READING PRACTICES AND ATTITUDES ON  
READING IN A SECOND LANGUAGE

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **THE INFLUENCE OF FIRST LANGUAGE READING PRACTICES AND ATTITUDES ON READING IN A SECOND LANGUAGE**

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The current study investigates the influence of learners' attitudes toward reading in their native language (L1) on reading in their second language (L2). Since attitude is one of the factors contributing to positive learning outcomes, an understanding of learners' attitudes to reading can be instrumental in encouraging L2 learners' engagement in extensive reading. The study aims to identify the relationship between L1 and L2 reading attitudes and how L2 attitudes change over time as the participants are enrolled in an extensive reading course. The study draws on the three-component view of reading attitude represented by cognitive, affective and conative attitudes. Participants are three university-level ESL learners from Angola, Saudi Arabia, and China. The data collected from a questionnaire, interviews, journals and classroom observations are analyzed thematically. The findings indicate that there is a direct relation between L1 and L2 reading attitudes and that family literacy practices have a bigger influence on learners' attitude to reading than their cultural background.

*To my dad who always believed in me and supported me in a way that only he could, whose love and encouragement led me to become the person that I am. I will forever cherish the memories of you...*

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## INTRODUCTION

This study aimed to investigate the influence of attitudes to reading and literacy practices in the first language on attitudes towards extensive reading in English. Attitude to language learning is considered to be one of the predictors of success. Gass et al. (2013) identify age, aptitude, motivation and attitude as some of the factors that come into play when individual differences of learners are considered. Attitude and motivation are part of affect, which is defined as “feelings and emotions that individuals have about something” (p. 459). More specifically to language learning, affect refers to “feelings or emotional reactions about the language, about the people who speak that language, about the culture where that language is spoken, or about the language-learning environment” (ibid.). Students may experience a wide range of feelings and emotions when they engage in reading authentic texts in L2, hence reading is a good venue for examining learners’ attitudes.

The three categories of attitudes correspond to cognition, affect, and behavior. The present study focused primarily on conative attitudes. Conation, along with cognition and affect, is an element of mind that directs behavior and action. The term is mostly used in psychology; in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) conative attitudes have received less attention. With the ‘recent agentive turn’ (Duff & Doherty, 2014, p. 55) the body of research exploring agency and its role for learning outcomes is rapidly growing. Extensive reading (Day & Bamford, 2002) courses are a favorable avenue for exploring student agency as in such contexts students have a number of opportunities to exercise their agency. Such students, for example, make decisions as to what book to read (even though instructors guide students in their choices, they may choose not to comply); it is up to the students when and how much to read; in



classroom discussions, which are a regular occurrence in reading courses, students assume certain roles and adopt specific behaviors that can provide useful insights into their agentive selves. The present study aims to investigate how much room for student agency there is in a structured extensive reading course and what factors influence students' decisions.

It is important to understand why some students are highly agentive and seek learning opportunities (beyond individual differences), while others choose not to engage in, or even resist, reading in a second language. Examining student attitudes and taking their perspectives into account will help design future ESL reading courses in such a way that they foster student agency and create an environment in which learners have the tools and the ability to take control over their learning experiences so that they can become more successful in their academic pursuits.

## CHAPTER 1 LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Extensive reading and learner attitudes**

In their recent textbook on teaching reading in English, Hedgcock and Ferris (2009) provide a detailed discussion of how the understanding of extensive reading in a foreign language and its benefits has evolved over several decades. In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Harold Palmer, who presumably was the first to use the term “extensive reading” in L2 pedagogy, described it as “rapidly reading book after book” as opposed to studying a text “line by line” (p. 206). Other important elements of extensive reading, according to Hedgcock and Ferris, are related to “*student choice and pleasure in reading*” (ibid.). Krashen too sees choice as one of the key characteristic features of extensive reading; he calls it Free Voluntary Reading, meaning “reading because you want to” (Krashen, 2004, p. x, as cited in Hedgcock & Ferris, 2009, p. 206). Drawing on these definitions, extensive reading is seen as an approach to teaching reading where students are the agents who choose the materials and engage in the process of reading.

In their seminal work, Day and Bamford (1998) defined and formulated ten principles of extensive reading. Some of them are: 1) Students read as much as possible, perhaps in and definitely out of the classroom; 2) A variety of materials on a wide range of topics is available so as to encourage reading for different reasons and in different ways; and 3) Students select what they want to read and have the freedom to stop reading material that fails to interest them (p.7). They further articulate four sources of positive or negative attitudes to reading in a second language: 1) attitudes toward first language reading; 2) previous second language reading experiences; 3) attitudes toward the second language, culture, and people; and 4) the second

language classroom environment (as cited in Alshamrani, 2003, pp.41-42). Reading attitude has multiple definitions in the literature. Yamashita (2007) provides a number of examples of how it has been defined: “a system of feelings related to reading which causes the learner to approach or avoid a reading situation” (Alexander & Filler, 1976, p. 1); and “a state of mind, accompanied by feelings and emotions, that make reading more or less probable” (Smith, 1990, p. 215).

According to Reeves (2002), even though there are a lot of definitions of attitude in the literature, researchers agree that reading attitudes can be defined by three components: *cognitive* (represented by personal, evaluative beliefs), *affective* (feelings or emotions), and *conative* (action readiness and behavioral intentions) (as cited in Yamashita, 2007, p. 84). In other words, beliefs, shaped as a result of acquisition of knowledge and understanding through thought, experience, and senses, paired with feelings drive how a person acts. It is assumed that if students have a positive attitude to reading in their native language, they will transfer this attitude to reading in a second language. A number of studies have been conducted to find out whether this assumption holds true, and they have yielded controversial results.

Camiciottoli (2001) conducted a study with 182 Italian EFL learners majoring in business to examine their attitudes to extensive reading in English and to identify factors that may influence frequency and attitudes. The descriptive data collected from a 22-item questionnaire indicated that the three main reasons students did not read in English were lack of time, difficulty to understand, and no desire to read in English. Among the reasons the participants thought reading in English was important included: acquisition of new vocabulary, enhancement of general literacy, and usefulness for future career. In spite of the importance the students attributed to reading, most of them did not develop a habit of reading in English; their attitude, however, was positive. According to Camiciottoli, such a positive attitude was due to the

participants' positive attitude to reading in Italian. She also points out that reading frequency in the native language was also relatively low. Interestingly, a descriptive analysis of one of the items revealed that 11% of the participants never read books in Italian for pleasure. She argues that low reading frequency in L1, as well as attitudes to reading, may carry over into L2.

Another study of attitudes to extensive reading was conducted by Alshamrani (2003). The participants were 9 ESL students who had taken a three-month long summer extensive reading course, the Reading Club. By the time of the study, the participants had already finished their ESL program and were enrolled in regular university classes in different majors. In the first group ('advanced'), students were placed in the highest level of the ESL program and were required to take courses for only one semester. This group consisted of two students from Taiwan, a student from Japan, Korea and Saudi Arabia. The second group ('high intermediate') consisted of four continuing students in the ESL program; there were two students from Korea, one from Japan and one from Taiwan. Data were collected through one-on-one semi-structured and unstructured interviews that were conducted twice, email follow-ups and document analysis of reading materials, course syllabus and the program website. The results indicated that despite various reading difficulties the participants had encountered, such as lack of background knowledge in certain topics they were reading about and small vocabulary, they had positive attitudes toward extensive reading of authentic texts and were motivated to read after the course they were enrolled in had finished. Interestingly, one of the main findings, as indicated by Alshamrani, was that both groups had positive attitudes towards extensive reading of authentic texts and they liked the materials, especially the ones they had selected themselves. This finding again demonstrates that choice is not only one of the vital components of extensive reading, but also a strong motivator for students to read as it fosters positive attitudes to reading.

Additionally, similar to Camiciottoli's findings, the students in this study believed that extensive reading is an effective means of vocabulary development.

In Yamashita's (2007) study of the relationship of reading attitudes between L1 and L2, she investigated the transfer of reading attitudes of 291 Japanese EFL university students. The underlying assumption of this study was the universal character of reading, i.e. "regardless of language differences, successful construction of meaning from a written text is the ultimate goal of reading, and smooth integration of text meaning and reader's knowledge is one of the requirements for successful reading" (pp. 81-82), and if readers show the same reading proficiency in their L2 as in their L1, it is taken as evidence of L1 transfer. In the previous studies, the focus of investigation was reading proficiency which was measured by reading comprehension tests in each language; Yamashita expanded the scope of investigation to the affective domain of reading. She found that although the participants attached a higher practical value to reading in L2 than in L1, they had more positive feelings toward reading in their native language. Yamashita suggested that one of the possible causes of a more positive attitude to reading in L1 than in L2 could be pedagogically induced, i.e. L2 reading was largely restricted to class work. But the participants still thought that L2 reading was more useful for their future careers and for high achievement in classes.

In another study, Yamashita (2013) investigated the effects of extensive reading on learner attitudes to reading in a foreign language. The underlying assumption was that attitude, as a complex construct, is comprised of multiple components and that extensive reading may influence those components in different ways. A Likert scale questionnaire was administered to 61 second-year undergraduate students enrolled in a 15-week extensive reading course at a Japanese university. She found that "extensive reading increased students' feelings of comfort

and reduced anxiety towards EFL reading, and also had a positive effect on the intellectual value that the students attached to reading” (p. 256). Yamashita acknowledged that 15 weeks may not be a long enough time span for extensive reading to produce significant benefits; however, the results of the study show that “extensive reading’s effects on reading attitudes can manifest in a relatively short period of time” (ibid). She also found that extensive reading had a greater positive influence on feelings and emotions, the affective components of reading attitude, than on thinking or perceived benefits of reading. Drawing on previously conducted reading attitude research, she concluded that “the most potent driving force determining actual involvement in reading is positive feelings” (p. 257); therefore, the best way to ensure that students engage in extensive reading is to provide them with opportunities to experience reading in a positive way.

Along with evidence of positive transfer of attitudes toward reading in L1 to reading in L2, research shows that a positive attitude to L1 reading may not always result in students’ having a positive attitude to reading in L2. In her study of 219 Japanese high school students’ motivation for reading in English, Tasake (2007) found that good reading habits in L1 do not necessarily transfer to L2 reading. Some of the participants explained during the interviews that they could not enjoy reading in English as much as they did in Japanese due to the gaps between their abilities to read in each language. They reported that “they could not abandon the enjoyment that they experienced when reading in Japanese and shift to the effortful and less enjoyable experience of reading in English” (p.12).

Overall, review of the research on extensive reading shows that there is a correlation between learner attitudes toward reading in their native language and in a second language. However, the studies that have been done mostly focused on the affective and cognitive

components of the attitude. The present study primarily focuses on the conative attitudes as they pertain to student agency, in order to fill the gap in conative aspects of reading attitude research.

### **Agency**

Most broadly, agency is defined as “the socioculturally mediated capacity to act” (Ahern, 2001, p. 112). According to Duff (2012), agency has become a very important construct in SLA, which reflects the view that “learners are not simply passive or complicit participants in language learning and use, but can also make informed choices, exert influence, resist (e.g. remain silent, quit courses)” (p. 413). She maintains that a sense of agency makes it possible for people to imagine, take up and enact various roles and to take necessary actions as they pursue their goals. Conversely, individuals can enact their agency by resisting certain behaviors and practices. Gkonou (2015) also acknowledges that learners may exercise their agency in both positive and negative ways. She views agency as being composed of two inseparable dimensions: a ‘learner’s sense of agency, which concerns how agentic an individual feels both generally and in respect to particular contexts; and a learner’s agentic behavior in which an individual chooses to exercise their agency through participation and action, or indeed through deliberate non-participation and non-action’ (Gkonou, 2015, p. 196). Such acts of resistance may be perceived by the instructor as lack of agency which may lead to students’ becoming passive and not engaging in active pursuit of their academic goals.

Duff (2012) further argues that agency is linked to power and social context as people that feel control over lives, choices they make and circumstances in which they find themselves, also have the power they need to succeed. Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000, pp. 169-170) see agency as the one most important factor contributing to successful learning of a foreign language:

ultimate attainment in second language learning relies on one's agency.... While the first language and subjectivities are an indisputable given, the new ones are arrived at by choice. Agency is crucial at the point where the individuals must not just start memorizing a dozen new words and expressions but have to decide on whether to initiate a long, painful, inexhaustive and, for some, never-ending process of self-translation.

(as cited in Duff, 2012, p. 417)

It is important, though, to remember that agency is always socially embedded and may not manifest in the same way in every context. Miller (2014) warns against assuming that individuals are already agentive and that it is a constant quality of theirs. She emphasizes that agency is “thoroughly social, dynamic and co-constructed” (p. 7), hence researchers instead of investigating agency as a given for each individual, should rather be focusing on “who has it and who lacks it in what context” (p. 8). Context is one of the key concepts for understanding agency since it may either foster or impede students' exercise of agency. Duff (2012) provides an example of a student who felt a lack of agency in her foreign language classes “because of the inflexible rules for classroom interactions and lockstep teaching methods” (p. 414). The current study aimed to investigate whether students see themselves as agents in their learning process and whether an ESL reading course is a favorable environment for them to enact it. According to Muller (2015), students' oral and written reflections (like interviews and journals in this study) offer insight into their agency as enacted in a course, extensive reading course in particular.

Van Lier (2008) put forward three central characteristics of agency in a second language classroom: “the learner's ability to self-regulate, the socially mediated nature of sociocultural context and an awareness of one's responsibility for one's own acts” (as cited in Deters et al., 2015, p. 5). As underscored by van Lier, it is important to investigate whether students are aware that they are the ones responsible for the learning outcomes; if they are not, one of the objectives of such courses as extensive reading should focus on bringing them to such a realization. In



short, examining student attitudes and actions regarding extensive reading taps into their agentive selves and may potentially have implications for classroom practices.

### **Literature circles**

Extensive reading courses can be set up in different ways. One of the forms they may take is a 'literature circle'. Daniels (2002) provides an eleven-point definition of a literature circle. He points out that "some of the defining ingredients of literature circles may be intentionally omitted when students are first learning the activity, <...> authentic and mature literature circles will manifest most of these key features:

- 1) Students *choose* their own materials.
- 2) *Small temporary groups* are formed, based on book choice.
- 3) Different groups read *different books*.
- 4) Groups meet on a *regular, predictable schedule* to discuss their reading.
- 5) Kids use written or drawn *notes* to guide both their reading and discussion.
- 6) Discussion *topics come from the students*.
- 7) Group meetings aim to be *open, natural conversations about books*, so personal connections, digressions, and open-ended questions are welcome.
- 8) The teacher serves as a *facilitator*, not a group member or instructor.
- 9) Evaluation is by *teacher observation and student self-evaluation*.
- 10) A spirit of *playfulness and fun* pervades the room.
- 11) When books are finished, *readers share with their classmates*, and then *new groups form* around new reading choices." (p. 18).

Literature circles with the above characteristics have been widely used both for literacy development in L1 and second language classrooms. There are a number of studies which have

investigated literacy development in children and adults in their L1 as they participate in literature circles (e.g. Moller, 2002; Peralta-Nash & Dutch, 2000). However, there is a paucity of research on the use of literature circles in ESL/EFL classrooms. The studies that have been conducted in this field show that participation in discussions in literature circles has a positive effect of students' attitude to reading and motivates them to further engage in reading on their own. In her 10-week study of adult ESL learners, Tse (1996) found that students not only showed a dramatic change in their attitude to reading in English, but also gained confidence about their reading ability. The participants also found, "to the surprise of many, that they liked reading in English" (p. 16). Similarly, Lao and Krashen (2002) found that the students in the literature class in a Hong Kong university developed an interest in reading for pleasure. Their findings also showed that the participants viewed it as a means of improving their English and felt that the literature class would be helpful in their future study.

Literature circles, along with other benefits, have also been found to have a positive impact on students' cultural awareness. In the study conducted by Li (2005) with adult ESL learners, the participants reported gaining a better understanding of what they read through sharing their opinions and feelings during the discussion. Li claimed that "in the literature circles discussions students appropriate their "cultural capital", which serves as a source of motivation and self-esteem for those students whose cultural stories and worlds are unknown to others" (p. 132). As noted by Li, this approach to teaching involves the participants in reading and helps them make connections with their own cultures and experiences and those of other group members, thus motivating them to "willingly develop their literacy skills in the target language through reading, discussing and appropriating their prior knowledge" (ibid.). This study has

shown that literature circles have a great potential in the reading classrooms and the effects they have on students' language development should be further examined.

As illustrated in the studies mentioned above, literature circles have an overall positive impact on students' reading skills and attitudes. Reading courses set up as a literature circle seem to be a favorable environment for the change in attitude to extensive reading to occur. Another important factor to consider for such a change to occur is genres of literature that are used.

**Genres of literature circles.** One of the examples of what genres of literature are appropriate to use in the reading classrooms can be found in the study conducted by Ivey and Johnston (2013). They explored the potential of young adult literature for supporting reading among adolescents. The body of this type of literature is rapidly growing and it is gaining popularity among people of different ages. 'Young adult' is a broad term, and the age of the audience for this type of literary work ranges from twelve to about twenty four. Ivey and Johnston justified their choice of this genre saying that this type of literature is inherently relevant for young people, since it invites dialogic relationship with the characters whose narratives have relevance for readers' lives. The participants of this study were 71 eighth grade students in an American school. The researchers observed that young adult literature sparked discussions about the books, both within and outside of school. This is ideal for the purposes of literature circles, since they are designed to generate discussion.

Another literary genre that is gaining popularity with teachers of English both as a first and a second language is graphic novels. The term "graphic novel", as defined on the Columbia University Libraries website ([http://library.columbia.edu/subject-guides/graphic\\_novels.html](http://library.columbia.edu/subject-guides/graphic_novels.html)), is used to describe narratives that tell a story through sequential art with or without text. A lot of graphic novels are adaptations of popular literary works, such as *Romeo and Juliet* and *Pride and*

*Prejudice*, which are presented in a more accessible manner, i.e. with modified language and accompanied by a large number of visual illustrations. Graphic novels to a person unfamiliar with the genre may resemble a comic book with the only difference that graphic novels are usually significantly longer because a lot of the time they are adaptations of popular literary works or original novels with a large number of illustrations.

Graphic novels are widely used by middle school teachers as a tool to motivate young learners, especially boys, to read. Senn (2012), drawing on past research in the field, points out that “boys enjoy texts that have visual interest (graphic novels, websites), are succinct (newspaper or magazine articles), relate to their own lives, and are funny or rebellious (comics)” (p. 217). She encourages the use of such genres as a means to motivate students to read and make literacy relevant.

Farris et al. (2009) investigated to what kinds of literature boys are drawn to and why. They collected data from fifth-grade students who were required to send one email a week to the teacher education candidates describing the literature they were reading and their reactions to it. The researchers also conducted interviews with the project director and took field notes during classroom observations. One of the findings indicated that lower ability struggling readers would be drawn to books with wide margins and easy to read fonts. A lot of the participants mentioned that they enjoyed books with enticing pictures and drawings.

From personal interactions with the instructors at the English Language Center at Michigan State University, where this study is sited, I learned that graphic novels are favored by teachers of English as a second language too. A lot of the instructors encourage their students to look into graphic novels as potential books for their extensive reading. The participants of this

study, all males, seemed to have a very positive attitude to graphic novels corroborating the findings of the above reviewed studies that boys prefer books with rich visual support. And even though the age of the participants in literacy studies in the first language is usually different from the ESL learners in intensive English programs, the language proficiency may be at a similar level which makes graphic novels level appropriate literature for second language students. Another advantage of using graphic novels with ESL learners is that they cover a variety of topics using accessible vocabulary.

Using appropriate literature and giving students the opportunity to choose what they read has shown to have a positive influence on their attitudes to reading in a second language. In the next section, I provide an overview of literature on the role of sociocultural background and family literacy practices as factors impacting learner attitudes to reading in their native language and, as a result, in their L2.

### **Language socialization and family influence**

Language socialization theory (LS) and research, according to Duff and Doherty (2015), examines “the processes by which newcomers to a culture learn the linguistic and cultural norms and practices required to demonstrate or attain greater participation and competence in the community” (pp. 54-55). Conventional LS theory claims that novices are socially, culturally, cognitively and linguistically apprenticed into core communicative practices by more proficient members, or mentors. Duff voices her concern with the fact that the passive voice is usually used to describe this process, leaving the novices’ agency out of the picture, while the only agent in each particular situation is a teacher, parent, or peer. Relatedly, Duff and Talmy (2011) point out that now researchers acknowledge that “learners are agents who may contest or transform as well

as accommodate practices others attempt to induct them into (p. 97). Summarizing previous research in the field of language socialization, Duff states that interactions with more proficient members of a certain community mediate a newcomer's communicative competence and knowledge of values and practices accepted in that community.

For the purposes of the present study, the use of language socialization theory as a theoretical framework seems to be fit for a number of reasons. Firstly, the study aims to investigate the influence of first language literacy practices on attitudes to reading in a second language. From the LS standpoint, first language literacy practices form as a result of the new members of the community being exposed to those practices and subsequently adopting or, on the contrary, resisting adopting them. One of the goals for this study was to elicit the participants' accounts of their experiences with reading since they were children to see how the culture they grew up in affected them as readers. Secondly, the study sought to explore cultural differences in terms of attitudes to reading and literacy practices. LS theory was adopted because it taps into the role of culture in the process of shaping its new members' perceptions of certain practices.

However, assumptions that culture plays a major role in forming attitudes to certain practices and can be informative in terms of predicting how a person will engage in certain practices should be further fine-tuned. Hedgcock and Ferris (2009) point out that "even within the same culture, family attitudes and practices with regard to reading can vary dramatically" (p. 57). Therefore, cultural generalizations should be avoided; instead, it may be more insightful to investigate family as a primary sight of language socialization. Specifically to reading, Hedgcock and Ferris encourage reading researchers to ask such questions as whether readers were raised in

a home where reading was explicitly valued, what attitudes were expressed towards reading and whether children were encouraged to read and had access to a variety of reading materials.

## **CHAPTER 2 METHOD**

### **Context**

ESL 094 Reading is a class offered as part of the highest level of the Intensive English Program in the English Language Center at Michigan State University. It is divided into two parts focusing both on intensive and extensive reading. Class meets four times a week, two of which are dedicated to intensive reading while the remaining one is extensive reading. For this study I focused on the extensive reading part which took place in the afternoon on Fridays. It was set up as a literature circle. In traditional literature circles, students are grouped according to the book they are reading; however, in this class the instructor chose to organize the groups in such a way that all the students in one group would be reading different books. In such a set up the students had an opportunity to learn about other books which they may choose to read in the future.

In the beginning of the semester, the instructor brought a list of recommended books and asked the students to choose one that they would be reading until the end of the semester. She also said that they were free to choose a book that is not on the list as long as it met the criteria: it is fiction; it is a paper book, not an e-book; it is level appropriate, i.e. there are no more than five unknown words on each page; they find it interesting.

Every class started with a 20-minute silent reading section followed by a two minute summary presentation, i.e. two students were randomly selected to present to class what they had read that day during the 20 minute reading part. After that, the students would split into small groups and work on a task the instructor had given them earlier that week or discuss their books. The atmosphere in the classroom was always lively and students talked a lot to each other and to



the instructor. They sometimes engaged me in their conversations, with the instructor's permission.

Such a context seemed to the researcher to be a favorable site for accomplishing the goals of the current study which were to investigate the influence of learners' attitudes to reading in their native language on reading in English, as well how, if at all, those attitudes change over time and whether cultural background is a factor determining attitudes. Thus, the study was guided by the following research questions:

- 1) How do earlier literacy practices, past experience and attitudes in the L1 influence attitudes to the extensive reading of authentic texts in the L2?
- 2) Do attitudes to reading in L2 change over time throughout an extensive reading course?
- 3) Are there differences in attitudes to reading in L1 and L2 between speakers of Portuguese, Arabic, and Chinese as a result of their cultural and family backgrounds?

### **Participants**

The participants of this study are three male students enrolled in the ESL 094 reading course described earlier. They came from different cultural backgrounds and spoke different languages as their L1. Hassan, 25, came to MSU from Saudi Arabia (L1, Arabic) to pursue a master's degree in physiology. His plan was to earn a doctorate degree as well and then return to his home country to teach at his alma mater. By the beginning of the study he had only been in the U.S. for three weeks.

Eduardo, a 20-year-old student from Angola (L1, Portuguese), came to MSU in the summer of 2014 to study electrical engineering. Upon completion of his master's program, he was planning to return to Angola in fulfillment of the government scholarship requirement.

Eric was the youngest of the three participants – he was 18 years old. He came to MSU from China (L1, Mandarin Chinese) to pursue an undergraduate degree majoring in engineering. A more detailed description of the participants’ background is provided in Chapter 3 as part of the data analysis. At this point, it is worth mentioning that all the communication between the researcher and the participants was in English, the participants’ high language proficiency allowed for the choice of English as a means of communication.

### **Materials**

The materials in this study included a questionnaire, semi-structured interviews with the participants and the instructor, journal entries, and classroom observations. The aim of the questionnaire was to identify potential participants of the study. Since I was interested in looking at the change of attitude to reading over time, it was important to recruit participants who had positive and negative attitudes to reading. The questionnaire (see Appendix A) was aimed to collect basic demographic information and to tap into students’ attitudes to reading and their literacy practices. Surveys have been widely used in SLA as a quantitative data collection method (Dörnyei, 2012). In the current study, however, data collected with the help of a questionnaire were used for reference only. The primary goal of the questionnaire was to identify what countries the students in the selected class were from, whether they like to read (yes/no question), what kinds of things they read (multiple choice), and how often they read (multiple choice). Based on the answers to these simple questions, the researcher identified potential participants for the study and then emailed them explaining what the study was about and asking them if they were willing to participate.

The second step of data collection involved conducting interviews with the participants. Interviews are widely used in qualitative research as they “yield notable insights concerning

research participants' identities, experiences, beliefs, attitudes, and orientations toward a range of phenomena" (Talmy, 2010, p. 128). Interviews were, therefore, a suitable data collection method for this study as it aimed to examine the participants' experiences with and attitudes to reading in English. All the interviews were semi-structured, i.e. I prepared a list of questions prior to the interview (see Appendix B). During the first interview, the list of questions was the same for all three participants since my goal was to learn about their cultural and family backgrounds, their experiences with reading in their home countries, both at home and at school, as well as find out what they think about reading in English and what their expectations of this course were.

The second round of interviews was conducted a month later. Based on the responses the participants had provided in the first interview and what they had written in their journal entries, I made three different lists of questions geared towards each individual participant. Richards (2003) argues that "interviewing is never really an answer to anything; it is a journey within a journey" (p. 65). He further explains that they should not be seen as a means to confirm something already known, but rather should be "carefully thought through, with a sensitivity to person and situation" (ibid.). My goal for the second interview was to show such a sensitivity by carefully examining what the participants had already shared with me and following up on those responses. Richards suggests that "if the researcher treats each interview as an individual experience in itself and not merely a contribution to a pile of data that will one day be sorted out and analyzed, the experience should be enjoyable as well as rewarding" (ibid.). I wanted to make sure that the participants enjoyed this experience of being in a research study and that the interviews did not scare them. In the beginning of the first interview, one of the participants felt a little uncomfortable with the recording device, even though he consented to the interview being recorded, but as he started telling me about his childhood he seemed to forget about the device

next to him. By focusing on the participants' individual stories in the second interview, I pursued two goals: to gather rich, insightful data on each of them and to make them feel that what they are doing is important not simply in terms of scientific significance, but to me personally as well.

Another data source used in this study was an interview with the instructor. Student accounts of their experiences in a classroom are very valuable but I also wanted to see how the instructor's goals for this class related to what the students were experiencing. The interview was very informative in that the instructor explained her rationale for setting up the class the way she did and she elaborated on the objectives set by the curriculum committee of the ELC as well as her personal objectives.

In the course of the study the participants were asked to keep journals recording their experiences with reading. Journals can be a valuable source of data if the participants are willing to keep them. In Norton's (2013) study of four immigrant women, the participants kept diaries and had regular meetings with the researcher to talk about their experiences. In turn, Norton provided the women with feedback on their writing, which they highly appreciated. One of the participants in my study asked if I could give him feedback on his writing as well; I did. Even though it was not one of the focal points of the study, it was interesting to see how his writing improved within such a short period of time.

Journals were an important data source for this study given the focus of investigation, student attitudes to reading and agency. Gao (2013) advocates for the use of student journals as a means of examining language learners' reflexive thinking which "helps reveal how agency enables them to discern and deliberate on their concerns, desires and visions in the light of contextual and structural conditions before their commitment to particular learning paths" (as cited in Deters, Gao, Miller & Vitanova, 2014, p. 6). Another argument for using students'

written reflections is provided by Muller (2015), who emphasizes that students' written reflections may reveal whether the course objectives are being met (ibid.). One of the goals of the course in which the participants were enrolled is to promote student autonomy and to encourage students to deeper engage with the text outside of class. Students' written reflections, as elaborate and very well thought through as they were, provided an opportunity to examine to what extent this objective was met.

Finally, classroom observations served as the third data collection source. As mentioned above, in this class students engaged in in-class discussions in their small groups. Observing how students engaged in the discussion and how actively they participated was very telling of their attitude to the book they were reading. Additionally, I had an opportunity to see what roles the participants assumed during the discussions, which was another venue for exploring their agency, or lack thereof.

### **Procedure**

The data for this study were collected over a period of one month. When the data collection process began, in the second week of classes, the students had just chosen the books for the extensive reading part of the class but had not started reading yet. By the time of the second interview, a month later, they had read a significant amount of their books and had participated in four classroom discussions.

The data collection process began with a questionnaire which was administered during the second week of class when the students could no longer switch sections. I explained what the purpose of the study was and that taking the questionnaire was completely voluntary and that students who chose to take it would not receive any extra credit. It was also mentioned that if students chose not to participate it would not result in any penalties or affect their grade. Five

minutes before class was over, 16 students completed the questionnaire from which I chose three students and offered them to participate in the study; they all agreed.

Next, the first round of interviews was conducted. Before the interview began, I explained the purpose of the study in more detail and the participants signed a consent form. The interviews were one-on-one semi-structured interviews that were audio recorded and further transcribed by the researcher. The second round of interviews took place a month later.

Throughout the study, the participants were asked to keep a journal recording their experiences with reading. I gave the participants a list of possible topics they might write about but they could also choose any other subject as long as it was related to reading in some way. The only requirement I had for the journals was the number of words – each entry had to be no less than 500 words; I wanted to make sure that journals provided a sufficient amount of data. The participants wrote one journal entry a week for a total of four entries each.

From the beginning of the study, I observed every Friday class. During group discussions, the instructor allowed me to sit with one of the groups so I could get a better insight into what was going on. During observations, I took field notes reflecting student-teacher and student-student interactions.

## **CHAPTER 3 DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**

### **Data analysis**

Data from three sources were looked at in a recursive manner in an attempt to identify main themes across all three participants. Inductive analysis of the data yielded the results which I organized by the three research questions. Due to the nature of the research questions, the themes I chose to focus on may not have necessarily emerged from the data; rather, the questions I asked during interviews were geared towards a specific topic, such as attitudes to reading in L1 and L2. Other themes, such as benefits of reading and agency emerged from the participants' accounts.

### **Results**

1) How do earlier literacy practices, past experience and attitudes in the L1 influence attitudes to the extensive reading of authentic texts in the L2?

To answer this question, I will start with providing further background information about the participants followed by the description of their beliefs about and attitudes to reading in their first language and in English. Further, I will discuss benefits of extensive reading as identified by the participants. They indicated that extensive reading helps them become better writers, build background knowledge, think critically, and expand their vocabulary.

As mentioned, Hassan is a 25-year-old master's student from Saudi Arabia. He first arrived in the U.S. in January and by the time I began collecting data he had only spent a couple weeks in the States and everything was still new to him. He came to MSU on a Saudi Arabian government scholarship to pursue a Master's degree in Physiology. He had already received a

master's degree from a university in Saudi Arabia and was sponsored to study in the U.S. and then return to his alma mater to teach. His plan is to earn a PhD in physiology after completing his MA program. This first year at MSU was not new only in terms of a change in the environment; he also had gotten married right before coming to the U.S. His 19-year-old wife is studying to be an interior designer and "she decorates [his] life" according to Hassan (Interview1). He is a very friendly outgoing person who seems to be always happy and very chatty.

Eduardo, 20, came to MSU from Angola to study Electrical Engineering in a graduate program. He started the program at the ELC in July 2014. He is a recipient of a very competitive scholarship from the government of Angola. He had to go through a very rigorous application process that, according to him, involved a lot of studying and praying.

E: We were I think 7,000 people for 500 places.

O: Wow. That's intense!

E: It's study, pray; study, pray (laughs).

(Interview 2)

Eduardo was very excited about participating in this study and even tried to help me recruit more Angolan participants. He told some of his friends in other sections about the study I was conducting and was very disappointed when they showed no interest in it. He even apologized for them even though I told him talking to other students was not necessary. He is always very friendly and smiling.

Eric is the youngest participant – he is 18 years old. He came from China to study Mechanical Engineering. After he tests out of the ELC, he is planning to start an undergraduate program majoring in engineering and further pursue a master's degree. One of Eric's most favorite things to do is to play basketball. I once asked him in the course of a conversation if he



wished he studied more; he replied that if he did, he would have to spend all of his time studying and he did not want to do so.

O: Do you think you're a good student?

E: Good student? Me? For GPA I'm a good student but for myself I'm not a good student.

O: Why not?

E: My GPA is high, it's 4.0, almost like that but as for myself I don't think I do my best, I don't think I do all of my powers in studying....

O: Why don't you do your best?

E: (laughs) Sometimes I will... Sometimes I will play basketball, go to the gym so (laughs) I spend time on the other things, not for studying. So if just for studying I didn't do my best but if I do my best I will spend all the time on the studying.

(Interview 2)

Of the three participants in this study, Eric's speaking skills were the weakest and during interviews he would sometimes struggle formulating his thoughts in English. Several times when answering questions about his experiences with literature in Chinese he would say that he knows it in Chinese but cannot say it in English. A lot of the answers to my questions were very short without much elaboration. However, even though writing journal entries and talking to me during interviews required a lot of effort on his part, he was very responsible and diligent always doing everything I asked him to. He is a very nice friendly person and it was always a pleasure to talk to him because he had very unique ideas and viewpoints.

In the next section I provide the participants' accounts of their experiences with and attitudes to reading in their first language and in English.

## Attitudes to reading in L1 and L2

### *Hassan*

I started the first interview with the question about how the participants feel about reading. I did not specify in which language because I wanted to see what language they associate with reading. As I have mentioned above, Hassan had just started the program when the first interview was conducted; however, answering the question he automatically started talking about his attitude to reading in English.

H: 75% of things I have to read are boring, like class works, like things that I *have to* read (emphasis added) but things that I want to read I really enjoy big time. I dream, I get deep inside the stories, especially if it's, like, novels or short stories.

O: Do you read those in English or Arabic?

H: In English.

O: Did you read a lot in Arabic when you were growing up?

H: Yeah, actually I read Holy Book. For our religion we have to read it, like, continuously. It's in Arabic. So I read this frequently. Also, my father's novels, I used to read them. All my scientific books are in English because I graduated from medical school. So all of them are in English.

(Interview 1)

As can be seen from this excerpt, Hassan's attitude to reading in English was not very positive because the vast majority of the texts to which he was exposed were the readings assigned in his classes. He pointed out that the things he had to read were the ones that he found boring, whereas things he chose to read sparked significantly more interest in him. Similarly, the participants in Yamashita's (2007) study had a slightly more negative attitude to reading in English which she attributed to the pedagogically induced nature of reading in English, i.e. students only read in English as part of their class work. A similar effect is seen in Hassan's account of his attitude to reading academic texts in English.

The above account of Hassan's attitude to academic reading is not representative of his overall attitude to reading in English. When he was telling me about his favorite genres of literature, he mentioned that his father is a novelist and a lot of his works were translated into English. He also said that he preferred reading the English versions because he found them more exciting, "I preferred English one more than the original writing in Arabic. Yeah. When they are translated they make more exciting" (Interview 1). He did not explain what makes them more exciting but it is obvious that his attitude to reading is not set; it varies depending on the context. In the following excerpts Hassan is describing his experiences reading a medical encyclopedia. He is very proud of having read the whole book on physiology which he had not planned to read from cover to cover.

O: Well, you'll have to read a lot in your program. Those are very heavy reading classes.

H: Definitely, yeah. Actually, the problem what I'm facing now is medical books are totally different than English books, totally different vocabulary and terms, pictures are different and all of them are linked. So, do you believe it if I say... oh, I'm reading a book now but it's medical; it's, like, physiology book, the holy book of physiology; I have it back home. Every now and then, when something triggers it I just open it and read and find out an answer.

O: And it's in English?

H: Yes. I like it big time.

O: I do believe it. If that's something you're going to do with your life it's good that you like it.

H: Yeah, but some people hate medical books, like, a lot of... my book is this big (motions to show that it's a thick book), so whenever I see it I smile, but other people... When I came home from university and I brought my new book that I just bought, my mother said "Oh, what's this? You're not going to read all of it, right?" I said "No, no, no, just like skimming the chapters." By the end of that year I was shocked that I read every single page. It's 3,000 pages and I read it all. Just open it – all yellow, all highlighted. I was so happy.

(Interview 1)

The two above excerpts show that Hassan has had both positive and negative experiences with reading in English and his attitude to it changes depending on the context. He enjoys reading fiction in English but finds most of the reading he has to do for school boring. The

exception was the medical encyclopedia he described above; the key determinant of Hassan's attitude to reading was whether he *had to* read or not; he would only read the encyclopedia when he was looking for an answer that interested him. So, his statement in the beginning of the first interview about his attitude to reading in English – most things he *has to* read are boring – is accurate. Hassan's behavior exemplifies resistance under specific circumstances – when his ability to make decisions is limited – and resistance is a way he regains control. Duff (2012) argued that agency is inextricably intertwined with power and social context, i.e. people that feel control over their lives and choices they make have the power to succeed. Conversely, they may be reluctant to engage in certain practices if they do not feel that they are the ones making decisions. A more detailed discussion of how the participants exercised their agency is provided under research question 2.

Interestingly, for Hassan, medical books, even though they are written in English, are not the same as *English* books because the vocabulary and illustrations are different. He had been exposed to fiction in English, like his father's novels translated in English, before he started pursuing a degree in physiology and in his mind those two genres are so different that the fact that they are written in the same language does not matter because to him those are almost two different languages.

Another important factor influencing Hassan's attitude to reading in English is the content of the book he is reading, especially if it is a required text, because he does not have the option of not reading it. For example, in the writing class, the students are required to read a class textbook called "American Ways: A Culture Guide to the United States of America" by Gary Althen and Janet Bennett (Figure 1).

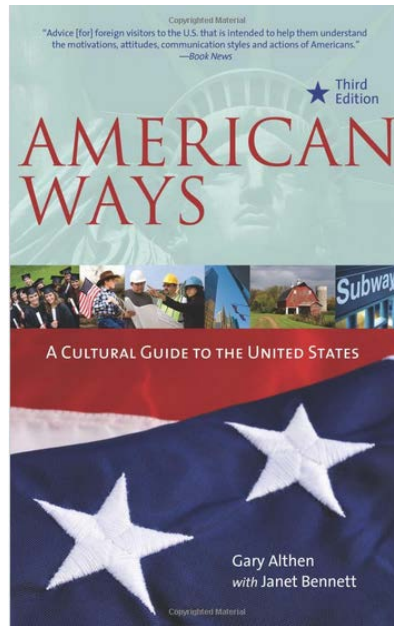


Figure 1: Textbook “American Ways”

Here is a brief description of the third edition of the textbook taken from the website Amazon.com: American Ways: “Whether you're a businessperson beginning to work in the United States or a foreign student visiting for a semester, *American Ways* will help you navigate the diverse and changing culture of the United States. From the deep-seated attitudes that mark the American character to customs and everyday activities, Gary Althen and Janet Bennett provide invaluable information on religion, politics, education, and relationships.” This textbook is used by many instructors at the ELC and is considered to be a good textbook for teaching writing and content classes and introducing students to the basic concepts of American culture. Unfortunately, Hassan did not find this book useful or interesting because it perpetuates stereotypes which, in his opinion, are not true.

- O: Did you read any American writers, or European or any other writers? Other than Arabic?
- H: Yeah, but unfortunately, I never memorize names.
- O: That's fine. Did you like them?
- H: Some of them yeah and some of them no. Like the book we're reading now – "American Ways". Have you read it?
- O: Yeah. You don't like it?
- H: From the introduction it seems like he's exaggerating, like, trying to say that... I know Americans are not but he's trying to... I know Americans don't feel that but he's trying to say that Americans feel that they're the best people in the whole universe and there's nobody but them and other people are inferior and they are the superior. That's not true! He's trying to stereotype Americans like this but it's not true. That's why I started to... it grabs me somehow to just know what he's thinking about but I know that it's not true.

(Interview 1)

Again, Hassan's attitude to reading varies depending on the book he is reading; it is a natural occurrence because people always tend to favor some books over others. However, outside of academia when people do not like a book they can put it aside and pick up a different one but this is not an option for students in English programs, especially when it is a book selected by the curriculum committee to be used in class. Here again we see how the forced nature of reading creates tensions and leads to negative attitudes to reading in English. Hassan, though, acknowledges that it is worth reading about someone else's point of view even though he may not necessarily agree with it. Such an attitude serves as evidence of higher level critical thinking skills: according to Day and Bamford (1998), comparing and questioning evidence, as well as evaluating arguments are the skills that can be promoted by extensive reading. Hassan's experiences with the writing textbook and the stance he took show that he is engaging with the literature in a critical way.

A theme of Hassan being bored when reading was brought up again when we talked about literature classes he had in Saudi Arabia and Hassan admitted that most of them were boring. For the most part instructors used government approved textbooks and the reason Hassan

found them boring is, again, because he had to read them. In the following excerpt he describes his experiences with literature classes in Saudi Arabia in which he had to memorize a lot of information about the authors they studied as well do a thorough analysis of the literary works. However, when teachers brought short fiction stories to class, Hassan enjoyed reading them because they were not part of the curriculum with a set number of pages that had to be read.

H: We have premade books from the government of education. They made us books for... it's not like we're reading stories from outside. Sometimes instructor will bring us some stories to read, at that time it would be interesting but otherwise if we have to read this specific book for this specific pages I don't like it this way.

O: What kind of books were they?

H: Hm... It's like taking quotations from each book, like they'll bring us a poem from one of the ancient people, like 300 years ago, we have to read it and we have to know who wrote it and what's his history and why he wrote it and the meaning of difficult words, yeah like this.

(Interview 1)

As can be seen from the excerpts above, Hassan has very similar attitudes to reading in both his first language, Arabic, and in English. When he is interested in what he is reading and when it is up to him to make a decision as to what to read, he enjoys it; conversely, when he has to read something for class or otherwise, he approaches reading with a biased opinion expecting to not like it. The influence of choice on reading attitudes will be discussed in more detail below; in this section, however, it is worth mentioning that Hassan's attitudes to reading in English were transferred from Arabic. This finding corroborates the findings of Camiciottoli's (2001) study of reading attitudes. The participants in her study not only carried their attitude to reading in L1 over to reading in English; those who read a lot in their L1 followed the same practices in L2. Camiciottoli concluded that multiple aspects of reading attitudes and practices are subject to transfer from students' L1 to their L2. Even though Hassan's attitude to reading in English fluctuates depending on the context and the literature he is reading, his attitude to reading in

Arabic follows the same patterns, i.e. he enjoys it when he can choose what he reads and dislikes it when he is forced to read.

### ***Eduardo***

Of the three participants Eduardo is the one who loves reading the most. In both interviews and his journal entries he emphasized that reading is his most favorite thing to do and that he reads every time he gets a chance: during breaks between classes, while he is eating, he also goes to coffee shops to just read. Since he was a child, he has been reading both fiction and non-fiction literature; he is interested in scientific books because they help him develop professionally, while fiction he reads for pleasure and for inspiration. In his first journal entry, which he gave a title “Why I Like to Read,” he describes his passion for reading as follows:

When I was a child, I loved to hear magical story. I often asked someone to tell me one. Then after I learned to read, I was looking forward to find fiction story book. Since then, my enthusiasm for books has been increasing very much. .... Liking of reading since early was very good experience for me. I am the last son of my mom. My friends and oldest brothers often did not have time to play with me, so I often used to stay alone. It was a little sad at beginning, but when I started explored my domestic books, I began to use my time free for reading all books that I liked or I had just heard about. Also, I began to read newspapers, journals and the Bible. I became too familiar with words that I could spend more than 5 hours only reading, and sometime when I found a very good book like *How to Win Friends and Influence People* by Dale Carnegie, I spent all day only reading it. The fun thing is I enjoy doing it (Journal entry 1).

As illustrated above, Eduardo turned to reading because his siblings and friends did not play with him often, so he dedicated a lot of time to reading. First, he read the books he had in his home library and then he went on reading the books he had heard about as well periodicals and the Bible. In the process, he developed a rich vocabulary so reading became easier and he could spend a significant amount of time on it. And even though the reason Eduardo is so fond of reading may seem sad, reading is now his lifetime companion and he does not seem to regret that he has spent so much time reading since he was a child. On multiple occasions, Eduardo



emphasized that he loves reading and there is no doubt that he has a very positive attitude to reading in his first language.

When Eduardo came to the U.S., his love for reading continued with the only difference that now he reads mostly in English. He buys a lot of books and goes to the library a lot. Our second and final interview took place the week before spring break and his plan was to spend as much time as he can in the library. With Eduardo, it becomes clear that it does not matter which language he reads in; he enjoys it either way. This is another example of a transfer of attitudes to reading from L1 to L2 which aligns with the findings of the study conducted by Camiciottoli (2001). Similar to the participants in her study and Hassan, Eduardo adopted the same reading practices when he came to study in the U.S. as the ones he had in Angola.

### *Eric*

Eric's first reaction to the question about how he feels about reading was that it is boring. However, it does not apply to all genres: he does not like fiction; instead, he prefers books that talk about various theories, social processes and science.

- O: Let's start with how you feel about reading. What are your thoughts about reading?
- E: My feeling about reading? Reading... sometimes I feel like reading is boring because if you're interesting one book that's okay, you can read the book. But some book, you know, it's too boring.
- O: What kind of books are interesting?
- E: I'm interesting some book that are not fiction, talk about the... not novel, not fiction... talk how this social... some things about the social and how to... what's some... just non-fiction.
- O: Okay. So they would be about people, real people? Or about what?
- E: About theory, about science. I think novel book and fiction book sometimes they are not real. I like reading the book talk about the people, science, theories and some people good ideas about this world....
- O: Do you read them in Chinese?
- E: Yes, most books I read in Chinese. I came here just read a little bit of English book.

(Interview 1)

In the excerpt above, Eric mentioned that he mostly read in Chinese and that he did not have much experience reading in English. His attitude to reading in Chinese seems to be positive but it is hard to tell whether he liked it or just had to read because of the school curriculum. As was mentioned above, Eric's proficiency in English, especially speaking, was lower than Hassan's and Eduardo's and it was sometimes hard for him to give more elaborate answers to my questions.

Eric's attitude to reading in English was unclear because, as mentioned in the above excerpt, he was not exposed to many English texts; those that he was exposed to were mostly class readings. Interestingly, his opinion about the textbook in the writing class described above was very different from Hassan's. Eric found it to be very informative and helpful for foreigners in the U.S. because it provides an overview of cultural differences and gives tips on how to avoid embarrassing situations.

I read American Way and The Color of Earth in these week. The American Way talks about the what the American value is and why American do some things which are different from other countries. ... I prefer to read the American Way, because it could help me understand the culture of America.

I like the chapter 4 Differences in Customs in the American Way, it is really helpful. In this chapter, there is about one page talk some behaviors will make the visitors into trouble, and author gives some suggestions for it. It is the treasure in this book. I paraphrase these suggestions for you ... I think it is useful for foreigners.

(Journal entry 1)

Eric's appreciation for the practicality and usefulness of the textbook described in the excerpt shows that he is more drawn to non-fiction literature. It became very important later in the study when he was talking about his experiences with reading a book he chose for extensive reading. All the books on the recommended list provided by the instructor were fiction graphic

novels. Since Eric did not know much about any of the books on the list, he decided to read the one that a lot of his classmates chose. During the second interview, by which time Eric had been reading that book for about a month, he said that he did not like it because it is fiction. Even though the instructor followed one of the key principles of the extensive reading approach, “students select their own materials” (Daniels, 2002, p. 18), the choice given to the students was limited. As a result, Eric did not have a chance to experience fiction in English in a positive way.

### **Perceived benefits of reading**

All three participants, regardless of their attitudes toward reading, identified a number of benefits that reading has both for their personal and language development. Among others, they named such benefits as broadening their horizons, learning about cultures, expanding their vocabulary, and familiarizing themselves with different writing styles. All of these things, according to Mary, the instructor of the course, are exactly the purpose of extensive reading classes.

.... extensive reading is one of the better ways to build vocabulary and this is where most of our students really struggle, they don't have adequate levels of vocabulary at this point. So, fiction is definitely helpful in that sense. But it's also helpful in that it sort of helps them see how people present ideas, how people organize ideas, it gives them an understanding of culture in a lot of cases because a lot of the students will end up choosing books that American students would have read in high school so it sort of helps them gain a footing in that way.

(Interview)

As was mentioned above, the researchers (Alshamrani, 2003; Grabe, 2009; Hedgcock & Ferris, 2009) see a number of potential benefits students can gain from extensive reading. The ones Mary mentioned, such as vocabulary building, improving writing and understanding the culture, are among the key ones. In the next section, I will provide the participants' opinions about the ways they think they can benefit from extensive reading.

**Becoming a better writer.** For Hassan, who loves writing, reading is a way to improve his writing skills. Since he was a child, writing has been his favorite thing to do, “I love writing. I love writing. Since I was, like, a child. Whenever I get bored or depressed, sad or happy or whatever I just grab a paper and start to put my feeling there” (Interview 1). Hassan used writing as a way to express his emotions; reading, in turn, was one of the sources of those emotions. As can be seen from the excerpt below, Hassan believes that books can influence a person’s emotional state, i.e. make them happy or sad, etc.; therefore, he cautions, people should be careful when deciding what books to read.

I think that books have a very strong magic, if you like the book, it can control your mind. Reading can make you happy or sad, positive or negative, successful or unsuccessful. So, make sure what to read, when to read and why to read. Make new friends by reading more books, “Your book is your friend.”

(Journal entry 2)

Reading and writing seem to be closely intertwined for Hassan. In his third journal entry he wrote about his father’s advice, that he had given him a long time ago but that Hassan fully understood now.

“Read More, Write Better” this was my father’s advice to me. He always say that whenever I complain about my writing. I always wanted to be able to write like he does. I always wanted to express my self in writing. Whenever I go to him to seek advice, he always says “Read More, Write Better.”

At first, it was hard to understand what was my father trying to say, but I really do understand it now. By more reading I will be exposed to more writing styles. By time, without thinking, I will unconsciously be attracted to one of the styles or I may combine two ways or maybe create my own style. So, “Read More, Write Better.”

(Journal entry 3)

In the above journal entry, Hassan named one of the main benefits of extensive reading he learned from his father: being exposed to various writing styles. What his father suggested intuitively, drawing on his experience, is backed by research in L1 and L2 reading and writing. Hedgcock and Ferris (2009) argue that “reading is not only helpful to L2 production but

indispensable to it” (p. 215). They further state that even though successful readers may not be good writers, “it is virtually impossible to find successful writers who are not also good readers” (ibid.) because reading not only supplies ideas to write about, it also provides linguistic tools and rhetorical devices with which to express those ideas.

Eduardo too recognizes the value of reading when it comes to improving his writing. In the following interview excerpt he mentioned that reading helps him to learn how to organize and support his ideas in a more effective way so it is easier for his readers to understand what he is trying to communicate.

I’m reading now online. It’s simple book for kids but it’s very good. It’s, I think, simple ideas and I can see how good writer organized his idea because it’s simple and make sense.... after we reading good stuff you think about writing good stuff too and maybe the ideas how to write good stuff, how to make good support sentence.... I think it’s good to be able to make summarize and a good way for everyone understand you.

(Interview 2)

Interestingly, Eduardo thinks that the texts he reads do not have to be complex for him to be able to learn useful rhetorical devices from them. I think it is very wise of him to recognize that at his level of English proficiency he should read simpler texts and then move to more complex ones. This again goes back to the level-appropriateness of texts that students should be exposed to in an extensive reading class. Day and Bamford (1998) specifically emphasize that reading materials should be at such a level that they do not put additional vocabulary and/or grammar burden on the students when they are reading so they do not have to stop to look up words in the dictionary because constant stopping interferes with the fluent reading.

**Building background knowledge.** Extensive reading is believed to be a good avenue for building conceptual knowledge and knowledge about the world. Grabe (2009) argued that “the growth of knowledge from reading extensively would create a “critical mass of knowledge” that students could then use as a resource for further reading comprehension gains as well as for other academic skills” (p. 325). This benefit of extensive reading was recognized by the participants in this study as well. For example, Eduardo mentioned that he incorporates ideas from past readings into his writing assignments.

Normally, when I’m speaking or maybe write something I base it on the reading, maybe quotes, maybe thought that I saw in the reading; I support my ideas from this reading. Yesterday, for example, we were writing essay. The title for essay was “Five life advice for someone.” Someone told like five life advice for good life and the question if we agree or disagree with this question. One of this advice was “life is hard” and one of my ideas I support that I agree with this about one passage that I saw in one reading that I read, okay. The passage was “life is hard, much harder if you’re stupid.” Sentence like this is, wow, I can use and it’s amazing because I can remember it in the right time to write this, it’s amazing.

(Interview 2)

As illustrated in the above excerpt, Eduardo tries to support his ideas in writing with quotes from reading. In this one instance, he himself was surprised that he could remember a quote and successfully incorporate it into his essay. Similarly, Eric talked about the importance of reading when it comes to learning about other people’s ideas. Even though he did not specifically say that he incorporates those ideas into any of his assignments, he admitted that he had not realized before that through reading one can learn about what other people think and be able to communicate one’s own ideas to the world.

One important thing in reading is it can communicate ideas with other. Because if you're thinking by yourself you cannot think all the things. If you didn't know something but some people's ideas in some book can... it's you can know this ideas in this book so that's important.... When I go back to China I think I will read more because in this class I understood something that reading is very important, I think. I realized that reading can communicate ideas with others.... I didn't realize reading is so important and interesting before.

(Interview 1)

The above accounts of the participants align with the findings of the study conducted by Alshamrani (2003). One of the major difficulties his participants encountered when they were reading authentic texts was a lack of background knowledge, especially on the topics specific to American culture. Nevertheless, by the end of the course they thought that extensive reading had provided them with adequate background knowledge and they were planning to continue reading authentic texts so they could further expand that knowledge.

**Thinking critically.** Related to developing background knowledge, extensive reading can be instrumental in developing critical thinking skills. Day and Bamford (1998) make a connection between the two arguing that critical thinking skills can be promoted by the background knowledge students accumulate when engaging in extensive reading. In the following excerpt, Hassan states that reading can open new horizons for him and teach him how to think.

Reading will upgrade your mentality. Whenever you start to read real things it will open up new horizons for you to imagine, for you to think. It will teach you how to think. It will teach you how to be creative.

(Interview 1)

Similarly, in one of his journal entries Eduardo specifically said that he believed reading to be very important because it causes him to think critically about himself and the world. In the

following excerpt, Eduardo pointed out that he intentionally chooses the books that will challenge and make him think critically.

There many kinds of books. Books that leave you a fantasy word, and books show to you the hard reality of life. Books that talk to you about God and love, and books that talk to you about devil and sin. Based on my two favorite books (*How to win friends and influence people* by Dale Carnegie and *Will the Real Me Please Stand Up? 25 Guidelines for Good Communication* by John Powell) I can tell that the kinds of books I love to read are the ones that challenge me to think critically about myself and the world around me.

(Journal entry 2)

**Expanding vocabulary.** Another important benefit of extensive reading that the participants identified was the expansion of their vocabulary knowledge. Hassan and Eduardo were talking about incidental vocabulary acquisition, even though they were not calling it such. In the following excerpt taken from one of his journal entries, Hassan shares his belief that good writers need to have rich vocabulary and the best way to gain it is through reading.

By reading more, you will be more exposed to new words. Every writer wants to build up a good vocabulary bank before even thinking about writing, and the best way is by Reading More.

(Journal entry 3)

During one of the interviews, Eduardo shared his negative experience with learning words as part of intensive reading. In his opinion, words should be learned in context because sometimes he faces the problem of a word in the reading having a different meaning than the one he learned when studying the word on the list.

After reading we have vocabulary to study. Maybe this vocabulary we need to study in reading, in the context, like for example we have separate word like... we are reading something but after that we have vocabulary and this vocabularies sometimes has different word than in the reading. I think it's better that this vocabulary word, it's like take in the



reading or analyze in the context of the reading like we take the sentence in the reading and we analyze the sentence.

(Interview 2)

Like Hassan and Eduardo, Eric too sees reading as a resource for improving his vocabulary. When I asked him in the initial interview what his goals for this course were he said, “I want to improve my reading speed and vocabulary. Yeah. I think vocabulary is so important” (Interview 1). He did not, however, mention vocabulary anywhere else. As I have mentioned before, it was sometimes difficult for Eric to give expansive answers to my questions due to his limited language proficiency.

The above findings corroborate the findings of the study conducted by Alshamrani (2003). After the completion of a three-month long extensive reading course the participants reported that they had improved their vocabulary through context and through repeated encounters with words. They also said that “context introduced them to new meanings of words they already knew” (p. 229). Similarly, the participants in the Camiciottoli’s (2001) study stated that they considered reading important because it helped them acquire a wider vocabulary.

To sum up, in this section I described the participants’ attitudes to reading in their native language and in English, as well as what benefits they attributed to extensive reading in English. Overall, all the three participants felt the same way about reading in English as they did about reading in their L1 and adopted the same practices. This finding corroborates the findings obtained by Camiciottoli (2001) who, based on her data, concluded that L1 reading attitudes may carry over into L2. She also found that low reading frequency in L1 transferred to L2 as well; this was the case with Eric who was quite a reluctant reader in Chinese and did not spend much time reading in English either.

Tasake (2007) found that good reading habits in L1 do not necessarily transfer to L2 reading. However, one of the participants in this study, Eduardo, continued to read avidly in English, just as he did in his first language. The participants in Tasake's study reported that they could not enjoy reading in English as much as they did in Japanese because it was more effortful. A possible explanation of why Eduardo's transition from reading in Portuguese to reading in English was smooth is that with the help and guidance of his reading instructors he chose to read level appropriate literature. Since such literature did not introduce additional cognitive load, Eduardo has experienced reading in English in a very positive way.

In terms of benefits of extensive reading, the participants named improving their writing, building their background knowledge, thinking critically and expanding their vocabulary. These are some of the key benefits widely recognized in the field of L2 reading research. Next, I will turn to research question 2 demonstrating how the participants' attitudes toward reading changed over the period of one month when they were enrolled in an extensive reading course.

## 2) Do attitudes to reading change over time throughout an extensive reading course?

In the following section I discuss factors that contributed to the change in the participants' attitudes to extensive reading in English. Two of the deciding factors were the fact that the participants were given the freedom to choose what they would read and a new literary genre they were introduced to by the instructor – graphic novels. Choice and flexibility of the instructor provided the participants with an opportunity to exercise their agency while graphic novels, despite the participants' initial skepticism, turned out to be linguistically accessible and engaging reading materials. An abundance of illustrations, however, had a mixed effect on the

participants' attitude to reading: Hassan liked the pictures, Eduardo and Eric did not.

Nevertheless, all three of them acknowledged that pictures were instrumental in facilitating their comprehension.

I have observed some major changes in how the participants feel about reading which can be attributed to a number of factors that I will discuss below. The biggest change happened in Hassan's attitude to reading which can be best demonstrated by the following excerpt from our second interview. He went from "most of the things I read are boring" in the first interview to comparing himself to a child who likes books in the second. He also made a funny comment about his wife thinking that he was having an affair with another woman, when in reality he was having an "affair" with books.

I'm like a child who likes books, yeah, this is me. I turned up to this. But I wasn't like this.... You know, my wife feels the difference. She said, "You're changing. What's going on? Do you know another one? Is there anybody else?" I said, "No, no, come on. This is the other one, this is the book....this is the woman I'm dating, so relax, take a deep breath, I'm still yours.

(Interview 2)

Such a striking difference in how he describes his experiences with reading happened for two reasons: he was given an opportunity to decide what he is going to read, i.e. to exercise his agency, and the instructor's suggestion to try reading level appropriate graphic novels which he had not read before. In the next section, I provide a more elaborate account of what role choice played in the change of the participants' attitudes to reading and in what ways they exercised their agency.

## **Agency**

According to Miller (2014), agency is a complex socially-mediated construct which can be manifested in different ways in different contexts. She argues that rather than assuming that individuals are agentive or not agentive by nature, research needs to focus on who has it or lacks it in what context. The context of an academic extensive reading course seems a favorable avenue for investigating how language learners exercise their agency; the data that have been collected in this study showed multiple instances of student agency. One of the main themes related to agency found in the participants' accounts of their experiences in the course were choice and how it stimulates students to be more agentive; engaging others, classmates and teachers, in an activity; and exercising agency in a structured educational environment which entails overcoming obstacles imposed by that environment. I now turn to a more detailed discussion of these themes.

**Agency and choice.** A leitmotiv throughout interviews and journal entries was the appreciation the participants had for the choice they were given. Hassan, as I have mentioned before, was the brightest example of it. He said that he did not realize how much fun it could be to read for pleasure. For him, choice is a vital factor determining whether he is going to like a book or not. He admitted that whenever he has to read something he approaches it with a preconceived notion that he is not going to like it.

O: You have to read a lot while you're in the ELC, homework and all that stuff. But do you read anything other than that here?

H: Actually what Mary's trying to do in the reading class, she wants us to choose what we read, which is so awesome idea. I already commented on that to her face and I sent her an email, thanking her for letting us choose what we have to read, it is making us want to read, you know. And for me there is a big difference between what you *want* to read and what you *have* to read. So when you want to read something, you read it and you enjoy reading it. But when you have to read something, you have to read it so it's ... you'll get bored before even you start.

(Interview 1)

As illustrated in the above excerpt, being able to choose what to read is so important for Hassan that he thanked the instructor twice for letting him make that choice. He also said that reading the literature of his own choice leads him to like it and not get bored. This excerpt was taken from the first interview when Hassan had only picked a book but had not started reading it yet. By the time the second interview, a month later, Hassan had finished reading two books and was on the third one. The following excerpt demonstrates what effect choice had on his attitude to reading and his routine reading practices.

O: So, you've never read for fun until now?

H: No. My native language, yeah, sometimes, but not in English. Whenever I see English words, something comes to my mind that this that you have to read it. Something for exam, something for your career, something that you... but I never enjoyed reading in English; I do now, big time....Can you imagine that I spend, like, I have a break from 12 to 3, from the first day Carmela assigned us to read, and I spend, like, from 12:05 to 2:55 in Dunkin Donuts. Just get my coffee, open my book and start to read. Around then my coffee gets cold, I throw it up and go back to class, yeah.

(Interview 2)

To illustrate the magnitude of change in Hassan's attitude to reading, I would like to remind the reader that in the beginning of the course, Hassan's attitude to reading in English was mostly that of a reluctant reader who read a lot because he had to; by the time of the second interview, however, his attitude had changed dramatically. He started to read authentic English texts for pleasure and he even had certain times dedicated exclusively to extensive reading.

Before this course, Hassan associated reading in English with class work, i.e. something he was required to do; now, it has become a source of pleasure for him.

**Flexibility of the instructor (as a factor influencing student agency).** As demonstrated below, Hassan appeared to be very conscious of the reasons he started to view reading differently – having a choice made a huge difference for him. However, it is not choice in and of itself that triggered that change in his perception of reading; it was also the fact that the instructor did not impose the books she saw fit for the students to read.

When I choose the book I feel it more interesting to read. Like, I keep saying this because it really stuck in my mind “have to read and want to read.” When I pick the book I feel like I really want to read it. I’m not assigned to this book that she likes or he liked it for us to read. I’m the one who chose the book. I’m the one who read the introduction and say “yes, this is the book I want to read. This is the book I want to spend next week reading.

(Interview 2)

By being flexible and allowing the students to make their own choices, the instructor created an environment where they could freely exercise their agency unlike the student Duff (2012) referenced in her book chapter; she could not do so because of the inflexible teaching methods she experienced in her foreign language class which, in turn, caused frustration and loss of motivation.

Echoing Hassan’s explanation of why it is so important to be able to choose what one reads, Eduardo says that when one has to read what the teacher assigned, he would do it but “not with love” (Interview 2). He also pointed out that being able to choose and not feeling pressure from the instructor is what distinguishes extensive and intensive reading.

I like more extensive reading, because do not need to worry about assessment after reading, I can choose what to read, and I can change the reading any time that I wish to. I also prefer this one because intensive reading is kind of require. The professor said to

you, “you have to read this book”. This idea, even that the book is great one, lets me little motivated. Now, for extensive reading, you said for yourself “I want to read this”, that make a big difference because it is more like a suggestion, or a wish that you want to make happen....

When I am doing extensive reading I am the one that chooses the book, and I can also read the way I want to read without any pressure from somebody else.

(Journal entry 3)

As demonstrated in the above excerpt, Eduardo enjoys extensive reading more than intensive for a number of reasons: extensive reading is not assessed; he can choose what to read and is free to stop reading the book if it fails to interest him; extensive reading is not required and if the instructor gives a list of recommended books, it is more of a suggestion than a mandate. Out of the three participants, Eduardo is the one who started this extensive reading class with an already positive attitude to reading; however, even such a motivated learner as he is may become disinterested and lose motivation to read if it is imposed upon him.

It appears to be very important for the participants that they are the ones making a choice, making a decision. If agency is “action potential, mediated by social, interactional, cultural, institutional and other contextual factors” (van Lier, 2008, p. 171, as cited in Miller, 2010, p. 466), in these accounts the participants are showing that not only they have the potential to act but they are also conscious about the constraints, such as instructors imposing their views, that may prevent them from exercising their agency in a structured educational environment. The fact that they are aware of why they may not be motivated to do what is expected of them shows that they want and need to be in an environment that sees them as being able to act and with some guidance from the teacher they can successfully exercise their agency.

**Resistance due to limited choice.** Choice and instructor’s flexibility may not be sufficient motivators for students to exercise their agency. Choice is important for Eric; however,

the options that were available for him to choose from were not sufficient as they did not have the genre he was most interested in – non-fiction literature on the social sciences. Just like Hassan and Eduardo chose to read outside of class, Ethan chose *not* to, “I read the book in the reading class (graphic novel, fiction) but I will not read the book in my free time” (Interview 2). At first, I was wondering if he lacked agency and was not a very agentic individual by nature. Miller (2010) argues that “agency is inherently unstable and inevitably enabled and constrained in the ongoing co-constitution of identity and social reality ... one can express one’s agency by deliberately not acting” (p. 467). So, perhaps the choice he was given in this class was not enough. In the first interview, he said that he likes reading non-fiction, because fictitious characters are not real and he did not see the value in reading about them. Unfortunately, all of the books on the recommended list were fiction and he just chose the one a lot of students in his class were reading. Had he asked the instructor if he could read a different book, I am sure she would have allowed him to do so; unfortunately, he chose not to. One possible reason he decided not to go the extra mile could be that he viewed this class as a place to relax, “I like this class because the homework is few and you can feel relaxed in her class. Her class is in the afternoon and it’s the last in this day” (Interview 1). Perhaps, this specific context was not a favorable venue for him to exercise his agency and he may be more agentic in other contexts.

**Exercising agency by engaging others.** Hassan was the only participant that exercised his agency in a number of ways. He became very invested in reading and wanted his classmates to feel the same way. When during a classroom discussion he realized that one of the Saudi girls did not like the book she was reading, he told her that she should switch and start reading something else. He suggested the book he had read, “Cairo”, because it had made such a good impression on him. He also understood that if at the stage of when they are starting to read



extensively the girl does not enjoy it, she would not enjoy it in the future either. During the interview, the instructor emphasized the importance of students' developing a positive attitude to reading in an extensive reading class because they need to rediscover reading for themselves, going from having to read to learn back to reading for pleasure. Even though she did not explicitly tell the students that this was one of her goals for this class, Hassan realized it on his own and acted on it trying to help his classmates to learn to like reading.

When she started talking about her book I didn't feel that she liked it. She's, like, "it says this and it says this". It doesn't ...I want people to react to the book, to live the story in the book. I don't want them to just read and summarize it or say a couple words and that's it. I know it's only a course that you have to pass, that's it for now but why don't we enjoy what we are doing? I told her to stop reading it and read something meaningful, something, like, you enjoy reading it, something makes you, like, happy, makes you smiling.... It's like a physical connection between you and the book, it's not only words, book's magic.

(Interview 2)

Hassan's agency was not only enacted with his classmates, he suggested the book, *Cairo*, to his writing teacher as well. This fascination with the book had a ripple effect: not only did the instructor read and like the book, but his wife and son did too. Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001) argued that "agency is never a property of an individual but a relationship that is constantly constructed and renegotiated with those around the individual and with society at large" (p. 148, as cited in Deters et al., 2015, p. 5). The way Hassan exercised his agency by suggesting the book he liked to his instructor and classmates is an exemplification of agency being co-constructed.

It is amazing how under the favorable circumstances one student's excitement and agency resulted in many people's being exposed to a literary work they may have not been exposed to otherwise. His enthusiasm is impossible to resist; "Cairo" is now on my list of books to read. And what is even more important is that such a change in one student may lead to the same

change for other students. And all it took was for him to get to choose what he wants to read and that alone sparked the love for reading, which I think, is going to stay with him for a long time. It is impossible to overemphasize the importance of choice for students in a reading class given the effects it produced in such a short time span.

In the next section I will discuss the influence of graphic novels on participants' attitudes to reading. It was the only genre the students in this class were reading because it was level appropriate and is supposed to facilitate comprehension by providing a lot of picture illustrations.

### **Graphic novels**

Graphic novels (GN) deserve special attention because this kind of literature was the one students in this class primarily read. None of the participants had been exposed to graphic novels before this reading class and their attitudes toward it varied. In the beginning, all the three participants were unsure as to what they thought about GNs. The idea of reading a novel that resembled a comic book, i.e. it had many pictures, was very new to them (Figure 2). One possible explanation as to why they felt this way is that students pursuing undergraduate and graduate degrees are more used to literature that does not have pictures other than the ones pertaining to the subject.

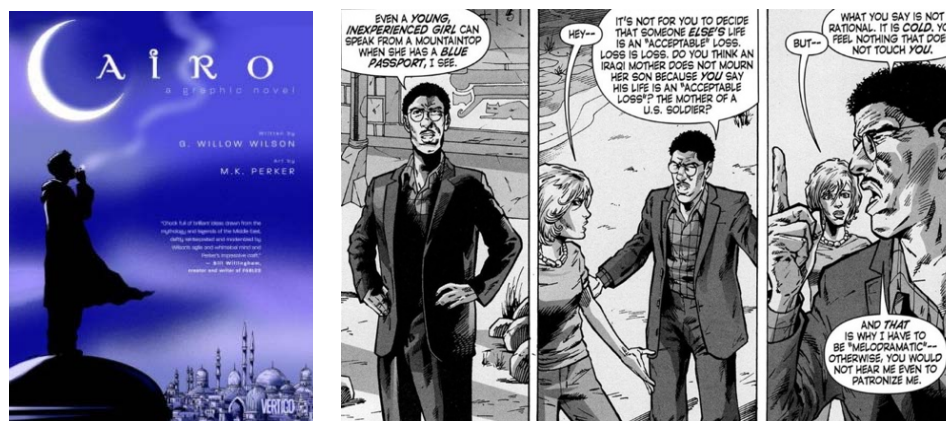


Figure 2: Graphic novel “Cairo”

**Initial skepticism.** Hassan was skeptical about graphic novels because he thought that an abundance of pictures would not let them use their imagination while reading. He had a strong stance regarding the conventions of reading which manifested in how he saw the roles of the writer and the reader: it is the writer’s job to write and it is up to the reader to imagine.

I feel like I won’t like it because it’s better to let you imagine things, not to be drawn. It’s the same like watching a movie. You have to create your own imagination, your own type of story, you know. The writer will write and you have the right to make the pictures but if they make pictures you have nothing to do, you just read, yeah.

(Interview 1)

Eduardo, on the contrary, thought that having pictures in a book is a good idea because they make books more colorful and remove the burden of having to process a large number of words from the reader.

They are more color, I think. It’s less boring, I think. There are some books that are only word, word, word... We can reading and feel exhausted about the words but you can see the picture, you see the personages ...and create more imagination.

(Interview 1)

Eric was unsure how he felt about graphic novels but he chose one because all of the books on the recommended list were graphic novels. Like Eduardo, he had a favorable attitude to the idea of pictures because “the pictures help you understand how the story develop” (Interview 1).

**Fascination with graphic novels.** By the time of the second interview the participants' attitudes to graphic novels had undergone a significant change. Hassan, to his own surprise, started to appreciate GNs and the pictures in them; they had the opposite effect from what he had thought. In his second journal entry he emphasized that GNs have the magic to captivate the reader with the well-done illustrations.

I didn't expect that I will like graphic novels, but I really do. Cairo was the first graphic novel I've ever read. Graphic novels has the magic some time "not always" to attract readers, sometimes you have to read pictures. On Cairo, I spent 2 minutes on a page which has no words. It forced me to imagine, it forced me to be more creative, and it forced me to live the story. By choosing the appropriate pictures, it will make it easier for the writer to describe what he wants us to see, and for the reader to imagine.

(Journal entry 2)

I believe his fascination with GNs was not only due to pictures but also because they were level appropriate and yet not too simplistic. During our interview the instructor provided the rationale for suggesting GNs and one of the reasons she uses them is that they do not scare students away like a regular novel would because the language is so complex. By reading GNs, she believes, they discover a way to read for fun.

Graphic novels are one of my best tools because a lot of the times there are students who even if they don't read comic books necessarily, they're interested in anime or other cartoons and so can kind of build a bridge that way.... If I were to read Romeo & Juliet I would not read a graphic novel because it is one of the joys to read Shakespeare is the language, right? But we're language people and they're not.... I would never teach the original version of that book in my classroom because it's inaccessible and they're not going to be able to see that aspect of the language anyway. They can appreciate the ideas but you know at the level that they are they won't even notice the poetry of the language, so there's no purpose. So if they're interested in knowing what that book is about I might now say, "go read a graded reader and you'll get the idea of the story."

(Interview)

In the above excerpt, Mary named a number of reasons why using graphic novels in a second language classroom may be beneficial. Firstly, a lot of the students tend to be interested in anime and an abundance of illustrations performed in a similar style can potentially ignite the

students' interest in graphic novels. Also, there are many graphic novels that are adaptations of classic literary works with significantly simplified vocabulary; this allows students to become familiar with the main ideas of a book without burdening them with complex vocabulary and grammar.

Through graphic novels, Hassan gained access to literary works that he would not read otherwise because they are too difficult for his level. In the following excerpt, Hassan shares his experience with choosing a book to read. Mary suggested he read *Fahrenheit 451*, an adaptation of a famous dystopian novel by Ray Bradbury published in 1953. Hassan was not ready to read the original novel but was very excited about its graphic novel counterpart.

When I always ask her (Mary) to recommend books and she always give me book and ask me to read it and bring it back. So when she recommended, like, Fahrenheit, she showed me the original novel. I said, "No way!" and she said, "Just breathe. Take a deep breath. This is the one I want you to read." I said, "Okay, that's good." She told me that it was, like, number one bestseller at that time, the real book, the real Fahrenheit book. Then they made, like, a graphic novel for people who doesn't like to read that much. I like it big time."

(Interview 2)

Hassan uses the word *real* to refer to the actual novel. This may mean that he does not see GNs as actual literature. Rather, he sees them as a stepping stone on his way to reading *real* books when his English proficiency is high enough, "I think at some point I'll be, like, ready enough to read a real novel. But not now" (Interview 2). In this excerpt Hassan pointed out to an important aspect of using graphic novels as a stepping stone to reading more complex texts. Since graphic novels use simplified language and an abundance of illustrations to scaffold second language learners, they can be used as a "lure for promoting extensive reading" (Day and Bamford, 1998, as cited in Hedgcock and Ferris, 2009, p. 261). Also, simplified texts can introduce second language learners to high-quality literary texts.

**‘I don’t care about the pictures’.** Eduardo, who had a positive attitude to GNs in the beginning, came to the realization that pictures are only necessary when he does not like the book that he is reading, to keep him interested and motivated to read. In his opinion, as demonstrated in the following excerpt, illustrations make a boring book more interesting; conversely, then the textual content of a book is engaging, there is no need for pictures.

I like picture but if the book is good I don’t care about the picture. But if the book is so, so it’s okay, the picture help me stay more interested in the book because the book is okay, but with no picture, for example, it’s more boring... (laughter)... but with pictures I can go ahead.

(Interview 2)

**Disappointment.** Unfortunately, Eric, who had a positive attitude to GNs in the beginning, ended up not liking the book he had chosen. On multiple occasions he said that the book was strange and he did not enjoy reading it. However, he would not give it up and start reading a new one because, as I have discussed earlier, he was too far into it that it seemed to be too much extra work to start another one. He was not very motivated to do anything extra for this class, just the bare minimum. One of the reasons he liked this class was that it was the last class in the week, there was not a lot of homework and he could relax in it. Perhaps, a lack of the kind of choice he wanted in terms of genres resulted in his reluctance to put any effort into this class. As for the GNs, in the second interview he said that pictures made it easier for him to understand what he was reading.

In the next section I present data on the participants’ cultural and family backgrounds and how they shaped their attitudes to reading.

3) Are there differences in attitudes to reading between speakers of Portuguese, Arabic, and Chinese as a result of their cultural and family backgrounds?

I begin the following section with the participants' accounts of what their home cultures are like in terms reading. Further, I discuss family literacy practices of each participant and what influence those practices had on the participants when they were growing up.

### **Participants' accounts of their home cultures**

To investigate the influence of culture on the participants' attitudes to reading, I was interested in their perceptions more than in the actual state of the matter. In the first interview I asked them if they thought the culture they came from was a 'reading culture'. I found their accounts to be very telling.

#### ***Hassan, Saudi Arabia***

Describing his culture Hassan said that in Saudi Arabia it is not common to read books in public places. If someone is seen reading a book, people might have a negative attitude towards that person. He also pointed out that people usually read in private, in their homes and offices for example.

Back home if they see you, like, having a book... in the waiting area reading a book, they'll say "Oh, he's a psycho." Really, I'm serious about that. All people who like to read they read in their private places... at office, at home, at their, like, man cave, you know, like, private places where nobody can see them.... It's not changing. Especially now that technology is here. When you need to find any information you can just google it, as easy as that. Especially, in school – if you ask, instructor will never tell you to go find the book, it's easily "google it" so nobody is reading anymore.

(Interview 1)

Additionally, Hassan mentioned that now that the technology is so widely spread people tend to read less. Even at school, according to him, teachers encourage students to use Google if they have a question as opposed to looking for an answer in a book.

***Eduardo, Angola***

Similarly, Eduardo states that in Angola not many people engage in leisurely reading. He acknowledges, however, that his perceptions may not be accurate because he does not have facts to corroborate this statement.

O: Do you think Angolan society is a reading culture?

E: No, I don't think so. Maybe I don't have too much information but from my experience I don't think so

(Interview 1)

***Eric, China***

Eric's account of the Chinese culture in terms of reading has a caveat in it as well: it is difficult to make generalizations about the Chinese population because it is large and stratified. Farmers, according to Eric, have very little education and, therefore, do not read. University students, on the contrary, read a lot. On average though, Eric thinks, people in China do not read much.

O: Do a lot of people read?

E: I don't think so because China has lots of people. Some people, they are just part of people educated. There are lots of people like farmers, they don't have enough education so they didn't. If you research university students they may have lots books per week but if you read whole of Chinese I think the average of the book reading is not so... it's just a few.

(Interview 1)



Regardless of whether the participants' accounts are accurate, they provide an insight into what their perceptions of their cultures are. I would argue that those perceptions are very important since that culture, the way they see it, was one of the factors shaping their attitudes and social practices. Grabe (2009) pointed out that "when we learn to read in our L1s, we are shaped in our expectations about reading by our sociocultural backgrounds" (p. 137). Although all the participants described their cultures as non-reading cultures, two of them – Hassan and Eduardo – like reading. A possible explanation of such positive attitudes to reading can be found in the way reading was viewed in the homes of the participants. Family influence may have a greater effect on the formation of reading attitudes and practices than the society at large because family, according to Hedgcock and Ferris (2009), is "a primary source of background and schema formation in reading" (p. 57) and literacy practices may vary dramatically from family to family within the same culture. Therefore, I do not think that any cultural generalizations can be made when it comes to predicting whether a person will like reading or not. Family influence, however, as I will demonstrate next, is one of the key factors in shaping a person's attitude to reading.

### **Family influence on attitudes to reading**

#### ***Hassan***

Hassan's father is a journalist and a novelist in Saudi Arabia. He has published a large number of books some of which were translated into English. Hassan is very proud of his father and values his advice. In our first interview, Hassan described his father as an individual who is one of the ordinary people and who puts a lot of effort into solving some of the problems people in Saudi Arabia have.

I don't know how to describe him but he's interested in the people. He's trying to solve people problems. He's not, like, that big name in terms of he's not, like, royal or VIP of the country, he's one of people who's trying to solve their problems but his voice is heard by the big people and he creates a lot of changes. Once he was on TV, he goes on TV often, he said that if the king doesn't know that some people do not have enough money to eat, they don't have place to stay, they don't have their own homes and they are still... (inaudible)... for life, 30 years he doesn't know that, he shouldn't be king. He was kicked of his real job. He was working at hospital, like, manager of three departments, he was kicked off, he was kicked off from the newspaper. He changed the newspaper, he changed his job, he start from zero.

(Interview 1)

As illustrated above, Hassan's father is a man of integrity and he is willing to take full responsibility for his actions; sometimes, advocating for change and bringing awareness to the rulers of the country may have negative consequences. Hassan was speaking about his father very warmly and respectfully. Interestingly, he called him 'dad' only once; all the other times Hassan referred to him as 'my father', which again shows the great respect that he has for him.

Hassan's father was the key figure in his childhood and influenced the way he views reading. When describing his childhood, Hassan said that his father read to him and his brother a couple of times before they went to bed. He did not do it often and the only reason he did, as illustrated in the following excerpt, was that they were misbehaving and would not go to sleep, in other words "when they were a pain in the neck".

O: Did your parents read to you before you went to bed?

E: No, even my father. Actually, he used to when we were children, only me and my brother 'cause we were pain in the neck – that's why. He just wanted to take us to bed and start to read.

(Interview 1)

Hassan's favorite book from his childhood was one of the children's books his father wrote. He was very emotional when he was telling me about it.

One of my father's books, he wrote, like, a children's story about a handicapped girl that... this story I kept dreaming about it every day for, like, five years. Every day I go to sleep I see this girl the one we wrote about. In front of my eyes I see her, talk to her, play with her. I described her with long hair and pretty face and she becomes my friend. This thing that stick in your mind forever, that's why I still remember the name of the book – Wheelchair Mermaid, something like that. Oh my god, a lot of memories, yeah, I'll cry now, come on (laughs).

(Interview 1)

As can be seen in the above excerpt, Hassan has very vivid memories about the main character of the book. I think the fact that his father wrote it makes the book even more personal and gives it more sentimental value.

In Hassan's family reading was not only highly valued but also actively encouraged by his father: he would bring books home and ask each of the children to choose one; when they were done reading he would take them to a toy store or reward them with other presents.

When we were children he was, like, bringing five or ten books and he ask us to choose one of the books, me and my older two, one brother and one sister. He's ask us to choose one and set up due date, like, after one week if you end up this book you'll get a present. So he gave us money and take us to toy store or something like that.

(Interview 1)

All of the above excerpts paint a picture of his family being an environment where the love for reading was fostered. Somewhere during his school years Hassan stopped reading for pleasure and only read to learn. However, when he started this extensive reading course he rediscovered that love again which may be attributed to the fact that in this course the only purpose of reading was pleasure (Day & Bamford, 1998). As I have mentioned before, the change I saw in him was the most drastic one. When I looked at all the data I collected from him this change started to make sense. I think that exposure to the level appropriate literature that was

interesting and engaging brought out what was already there – the love for reading – which had been nurtured and bred in him by his parents since he was a child.

### ***Eduardo***

The same is true for Eduardo. He is certain that he likes to read because of his mother's influence.

I like reading a lot. I think it's because my mom since I was a child always bring books in my house. She work in school, clean school, stuff like this. Always bring book and I think I get the habit because of my mom.

(Interview 1)

His mother works at a Portuguese school in Luanda, the capital of Angola, where she moved along with her five children a long time ago. She brought so many books home from the school at which she works that Eduardo used to tell his brother that they did not even need to go to the library because they already had a library at their house. Eduardo said that his mother had a big influence on him in terms of his attitude to reading, and so I asked him if she read to him when he was a child. It turned out that she is illiterate; Eduardo, however, is an avid reader and always has been.

Comparing Hassan's and Eduardo's families, I think that it is not the level of education or profession of the parents that influences the child's attitude to reading, it is the parents' attitude. Hassan's and Eduardo's families could not be more different in terms of economic and social conditions; however, they both seem to share the same positive attitude to reading. Hedgcock and Ferris (2009) stated that in order for children to develop a positive attitude to reading, parents need to take an active role in fostering a positive attitude. Eduardo's mother is an

example of a parent who cannot enjoy reading herself but who incentivized her children to read and provided ample opportunities for them to do so.

*Eric*

Eric's family is different. Even though reading may have been in high esteem, his parents did not actively encourage him to read; they left the choice up to him. In the following excerpt, Eric describes his family in terms of reading: his mother enjoys reading poetry, while his father mostly reads news and literature related to his business.

E: My parents? They just read a few, I think. My mother always reads poems, and my father, I don't know, he always work outside, maybe some about business, I don't know, like news maybe.

O: Did your parents read to you when you were little?

E: No. I read because I want to read. My parents just tell me that reading is important, you can try some book if you like.

(Interview 1)

Like I said earlier, Eric's answers to my questions were at times very short, partly due to his limited language ability, partly because he is not much of a talker. He always gives concise answers and does not elaborate even if asked to. For this reason, the data illustrating his experiences and family background are rather scarce.

As becomes obvious from the data from all three participants, family plays a key role as a language socialization medium (Garbe, 2009; Hedgcock and Ferris, 2009). When younger members of the society are apprenticed into key practices, literacy being one of them, the way family members perform that practice and the value it holds will further determine the attitude youngsters will have toward it. Both Hassan and Eduardo like reading and engage in it quite frequently due to the love of reading they were taught by their parents. In both of their households reading was encouraged and highly valued. And it does not even matter whether

parents are avid readers themselves, like Eduardo's mother who cannot read; when children are told that reading is important and are encouraged to read, they do. Eric's family, on the contrary, did not see reading as a priority. Even though his parents gave him the choice whether to read or not, he did not engage in it to the point where he would like it enough to continue reading.

## CHAPTER 4 CONCLUSION

There are three major findings of this study. The first one pertains to the way first language attitudes to reading and literacy practices influence attitudes to reading in a second language: avid readers in their native language follow similar practices in reading in English. The participant from Angola, Eduardo, came into the extensive reading course with a love for reading. His positive attitude in his native language transferred to reading in English as he engaged in the reading of authentic texts. The participant from Saudi Arabia, Hassan, enjoyed reading in his native language but thought that most things he read in English were boring due to his prior experiences with having to read large amounts of required medical texts that were part of his course work. That changed, however, when he started to read for pleasure. The participant from China, Eric, was a reluctant reader in Chinese and had a similar attitude to reading in English. In his case, however, one possible explanation for why an extensive reading course had no effect on his attitudes is that he did not like fiction but chose to read it anyway because all of the books on the recommended list were fiction. He decided to read the book that a lot of his classmates chose and even when he realized that the book was of no interest to him, he continued reading it because he was almost half way through.

Overall, the findings indicate that the transfer of attitudes to reading does happen. This finding is corroborated by the results of the previous studies (Alshamrani, 2003; Camiciottoli, 2001; Yamashita, 2007, 2013). Yamashita (2007) concluded that

Learners who have a positive attitude toward L1 reading are more or less likely to keep it in L2 reading even if they are, at a certain point of their development, not very successful L2 readers. Such learners have the potential to improve in L2 reading in the future, because their positive reading attitude is likely to motivate them to reading in L2. Teachers should encourage such learners by, for example, suggesting reading materials at

an appropriate linguistic level for them.

(pp. 102-103)

The participants in this study experienced the transfer Yamashita talks about: their L2 reading practices were very similar to the ones they had in their L1s. The instructor of the course, drawing on her experience and knowledge of the research in L2 reading, compiled a list of books that could potentially be of interest to the students and matched their proficiency level. The present study found that the requirement of having level appropriate materials can be met by using graphic novels. All the three participants, though to varying degrees, showed a positive attitude to this genre.

One of the most promising findings of the study was that attitudes to reading can change within a short period of time, even though only Hassan showed a significant change. Such a change can be accounted for by the opportunity to choose what to read. Hassan was receptive to and appreciative of the choice that the instructor gave the students; moreover, his agency went beyond just making a decision for himself; he also suggested his favorite graphic novel to his writing teacher and his family as well as his classmates thus proving that agency is socially constructed (Dieters et al., 2015) and can be enacted to a greater extent in favorable settings (Miller, 2014). This finding also suggests that when students have a chance to exercise their agency, it has a positive effect on how they view the activities they engage in. Thus, choice, beliefs (*cognitive* attitudes), and positive feelings (*affective* attitudes) about reading result in students actual involvement in reading (*conative* attitudes).

Since attitude to language learning in general, and reading in particular, may have some predictive value for learning outcomes, i.e. “positive attitudes are generally believed to facilitate second language acquisition” (Lasagabaster, 2013, p.46), in the beginning of each course it is important to establish what learners’ current attitudes are. The results of this study show that past



experiences play a role in shaping current attitudes, and that learners transfer their attitudes from L1 to L2; instructors, therefore, need to be aware of their learners' attitudes. They may choose to administer diagnostic questionnaires to establish what attitudes each particular group of students has in order to structure the curriculum in such a way that it would allow students to experience reading in a new way that may improve their attitudes. Implementation of literature circles in extensive reading courses and allowing students to choose what they read may be an effective method to teach second language reading that promotes more meaningful student engagement with literature.

In traditional literature circles, discussion groups are formed based on the books the students are reading, i.e. all students reading the same book form a group (Daniels, 2002). However, in the future teachers may choose to modify the activity by putting the students reading different books together in a group. The participants in this study indicated that they enjoyed group discussions because it gave them an opportunity to learn about other books and decide if they want to read them in the future. Even though such a set-up may not be useful when the goal is for the students to engage in a deep reflection on the book, which is fostered in the same-book groups, instructors may choose to alternate the set-up so students can benefit from the discussions in a number of ways.

Finally, this study attempted to investigate if there are any cultural differences in attitudes to reading. In the course of data analysis, the researcher found that family attitudes and literacy practices had a stronger influence on the participants' attitudes to reading. This finding is also supported by other research (Grabe, 2009; Hedgcock and Ferris, 2009). In the homes where reading is highly valued and encouraged by family members, children engage in literacy practices more often and develop a positive attitude to it. Conversely, if reading is not regarded

in high esteem in the home, children are likely to not enjoy it as much, even though they may still see the practical value of it. In the future, research may focus on the particular practices of parents and children. For example, researchers could extend their investigation to the homes of language learners. Since the initial and most impactful language socialization takes place during the formative years of a person's development, it would be useful to look at literacy practices of children in their L1. Investigating what kind of behaviors of parents have the most positive effect on their children's attitudes to reading may prove to be rather enlightening. There is a paucity of research on ESL learners from Angola; therefore, conducting first language research in this area would be very informative to teachers who have Angolan students in their classrooms.

One of the major limitations of this study is the short period of data collection, one month. Any observable change in language learning, whether it is the development of language proficiency or shifts in attitude, happens over time; therefore, in order to gain a better understanding of the factors contributing to the change in learner attitudes future studies need to observe learners over a larger span of time, ideally for two to three years. Since attitude is "not static but rather dynamic" (Lasagabaster, 2013, p. 47), it would be interesting to see whether there is a reverse effect. Looking at one of the participants of the present study, Hassan, whose attitude to reading in English changed from reluctant to very positive, I would like to know whether his attitude and engagement will remain the same when he moves on to more difficult literature with fewer illustrations. Additionally, future researchers may want to investigate how enrollment in mainstream courses upon completion of the English language program and the burden academic texts impose on learners influences students' attitudes to reading and whether they continue to read for pleasure.

## **APPENDICES**

## Appendix A – Questionnaire

1. Name and email

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2. Where are you from?

---

3. What is your first language?

---

4. What is your major?

---

5. Do you like to read in your native language?

|            |   |           |   |             |
|------------|---|-----------|---|-------------|
| 1          | 2 | 3         | 4 | 5           |
| Don't like |   | It's okay |   | Really like |

6. How often do you read in your native language?

|                     |        |           |            |
|---------------------|--------|-----------|------------|
| Only when I have to | Rarely | Sometimes | Very often |
|---------------------|--------|-----------|------------|

7. What types of things do you read in your native language?

|                   |                                |
|-------------------|--------------------------------|
| a) Academic texts | b) Magazines and/or newspapers |
| c) Fiction        | d) Other (please specify)      |

8. Do you like to read in English outside of class?

|            |   |           |   |             |
|------------|---|-----------|---|-------------|
| 1          | 2 | 3         | 4 | 5           |
| Don't like |   | It's okay |   | Really like |

9. How often do you read in English?

|                     |        |           |            |
|---------------------|--------|-----------|------------|
| Only when I have to | Rarely | Sometimes | Very often |
|---------------------|--------|-----------|------------|

10. What kind of literature do you usually read in English?

|                   |                                |
|-------------------|--------------------------------|
| a) Academic texts | c) Magazines and/or newspapers |
| b) Fiction        | d) Other (please specify)      |

11. Have you ever taken an extensive reading course in English before? (*Circle*)

Yes                      No

If yes, where?

12. Is this a required course?

Yes                      No

If you no, why did you decide to take it?

## **Appendix B – Questions for Interview 1**

February 4, 2015

1. How do you feel about reading?
2. How often do you read in your first language?
3. How often do you read in English?
4. What is your favorite kind of literature?
5. When and where do you usually read?
6. How often do you read?
7. What do you read besides required materials?
8. Why did you decide to take this course?
9. What are your expectations of this course?
10. In your opinion, how can this course benefit you?
11. What skills do you think this course may help you develop or improve? Why do you think it is important for you to develop those particular skills?
  
12. Did your caregivers read to you when you were little?
13. Did your parents/ grandparents (caregivers) read when they had free time?
14. What kind of literature did they read?
15. What types of reading did you encounter in school? Did you have to read a lot?
16. What were your literature classes like in school?
17. When you were younger, what was a book that made an impression on you? Explain.
  
18. How is reading important to your language development?
19. How do you look up new words? Do you write them down for further review? What kind of dictionary do you use?
20. How do you prepare for your class discussions?
21. What aspects of the book do you like discussing with your peers? If any.
22. Do you like discussing the articles you read online with your peers?
23. What book did you choose for class?
24. Why did you choose it?
25. What do you think about graphic novels?
26. What do you think about the teacher reading to you in class? Do you like it? Why? Why not?

## Appendix C – Questions for Interview 2

March 4, 2015

*Hassan*

1. You said that 75% of things you have to read are boring. You had to read a book for Carmela's class. How do you like it? What has changed in your perception of reading?
2. What do you think about "Cairo"? What was it about? You said you read the whole book the day after you received it. What are you reading now? For your next book would you choose another graphic novel, or a book without pictures? Why?
3. In the first interview, you said you would read more here than you did in Saudi Arabia. Do you? How have your routines changed? Do you find yourself reading more than before?
4. Are you going to read (for pleasure) when you don't have to, when you're not in classes (out of the ELC)?
5. I love it when you compare books to medication. Can you talk a little more about it? (Your entries are great!)
6. How have your reading routines changed during this month? Where do you read?
7. What do you think you're learning in this class? Especially the Friday class.
8. Do you think the ELC is preparing you for your future Physiology classes? Do you think it is going to be easy enough for you?
9. Extensive vs intensive reading. Which one do you like more?
10. How do you feel about intensive reading as opposed to extensive reading?
11. Which do you think is more valuable?
12. In your opinion, which is more useful?
13. Which one do you like more and why?
14. What do you like/dislike about this class?
15. Do you like classroom discussions?
16. In your journal you said you're not an expert to criticize the book. What makes you think so? You said reading helps you be creative and teaches you to think. So, do you think it's okay to criticize?
17. In your journal you also said that you liked it when Carmela read to you in class because it helps to have a native reading model. What do you mean by that?
18. Has your rate of reading changed? You said before you were a slow reader. Did you become a better reader?
19. You were hoping you would learn in this class how to choose books. Do you think you've learned how to do that? What else do you think you need to learn?
20. Who is responsible for your learning? How much of it depends on the teacher?
21. Do you think you're a good student?

*Eduardo*

1. Do you think your reading has improved? Did you become a better reader?
2. You said it was difficult to read in English. Has it become easier?
3. Will you continue reading for pleasure after you finish your ELC courses and start your program?
4. How has your perception of reading changed in this class?
5. What are you reading now? Is it a graphic novel? What do you think about the book you're reading?
6. You said you like books that are simple? Do you want to go for something more difficult next?
7. What book are you going to read next? Is it going to be a graphic novel?
8. Do you like classroom discussions?
9. What do you like/dislike about this class?
10. You said you just love to read. So you don't get disappointed that you have to read articles in your textbook and have to take tests afterwards?
11. Have your reading routines changed at all?
12. What have you learned in this class so far? Friday specifically. What do you think you still need to learn?
13. Who is responsible for your learning? How much of it depend on the teacher?
14. Do you think you're a good student?



*Eric*

1. You said in our first interview that reading is boring. Has that changed now that you're reading a book for Carmela's class? What are you reading? (The Tipping Point, The Color of Earth)? What do you think about it?
2. What are you going to read next? Is it going to be a graphic novel? What do you think about graphic novels?
3. Do you like reading more now than you did before?
4. Do you think your reading has improved? Did you become a better reader? Is it easier for you to read in English now? Has anything changed about the how you read (practices)?
5. You said that you like more scientific books. Do you like fiction more now?
6. Do you read more in English now?
7. Will you continue reading (for pleasure) after you're done with ELC classes? What is going to be your next book? Is it going to be a graphic novel? Did you buy the Color of Water?
8. How has your perception of reading changed? You said you didn't realize reading was so interesting before. What do you think now?
9. Let's talk more about extensive and intensive reading? Which do you like more (extensive)? Why (because you can choose)? Which one is more valuable/useful?
10. What are you learning in this class? What have you learned? What do you think you still need to learn?
11. You said in our first interview that you wanted to improve speed and vocabulary? Have you?
12. What do you like/dislike about this class? Friday specifically.
13. Do you like classroom discussions?
14. When you're done with the ELC and start your program, do you think you'll be prepared for that?
15. Who is responsible for your learning? How much of it depends on the teacher?
16. Do you think you're a good student?

## **Appendix D – Journal suggestion sheet**

- You will write 4 journal entries, on each week (February 13, 20, 27, March 6). Bring a printed version to class on Friday or email it to me before class.
- Each entry should be no less than 500 words.
- You may talk about the following:
  - 1) What do you like about the book you're reading?
  - 2) What do you dislike about it?
  - 3) What did you like/dislike about class last week?

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