Listening to Students: Modification of a Reading Program Based on the Sources of Foreign Language Reading Anxiety

Belgin Aydın

Anadolu University, Tıurkey
baydin@anadolu.edu.tr

İpek Kuru Gönen

Anadolu University, Tıurkey
ipekkuru@anadolu.edu.tr

Abstract

This paper is concerned with the modifications implemented in a second year foreign language (FL) reading program with respect to the problems students experience while reading in FL. This research draws on the sources of FL reading anxiety identified in the first year reading program with a motivation to re-design the second year program to help the students perceive reading positively free from the anxiety. This paper reports on the responses of students to the modifications implemented in the second year reading program.

The participants of the study were 50 FL students who were in their second year at a state university in Turkey. All participants had already taken the first year reading course and were enrolled in the second year reading course. It was based on two qualitative research instruments. The first instrument was a semi-structured questionnaire administered to all participants. The second one was a semi-structured interview conducted with half of the participants to obtain more in depth information concerning the modifications that had been introduced. Both instruments revealed that students responded positively to the modifications introduced. The results of the study put forward that obtaining students' opinions, giving them responsibility and involving them in decision making processes enhance their motivation, confidence and analytical skills while reading in a foreign language.

Keywords: *Students' perceptions; involving students in decision making; foreign language reading anxiety; program modifications*.

Introduction

Researchers and teachers have been aware of the relationship between anxiety and learning. While many researchers (Ellis, 1995; Horwitz, Horwitz &Cope, 1986; Matsuda & Gobel, 2004; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989) maintain that anxiety has negative influences on learning (known as debilitating anxiety), others (Campbell & Ortiz, 1991; Oxford, 1999; Scovel, 1991) argue that such anxiety does not always have negative effects. They claim that a certain degree of what is described as facilitating anxiety will enhance students' motivation to learn. This non-linear relationship between anxiety and learning is more vexed in a foreign language (FL) learning environment due to the uniqueness or the peculiarities of language learning. This uniqueness stems from the risks experienced by students when they undertake to learn a FL. Even if a correct answer is given to a teacher's question, students may still experience anxiety over whether or not they have provided the 'correct' or 'most appropriate'

pronunciation. (Ehrman, Leaver & Oxford, 2003; Horner & Redmond, 2002; Kitano, 2001; McKnight & Redmond, 2003; Woodrow & Chapman, 2002; Kondo, 2010).

Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) were the first to suggest that foreign language anxiety is different from other anxieties experienced by students. They maintained that a complex set of behaviors, feelings and beliefs are unique to language learning. Although anxiety was often associated with speaking skills (Hewitt & Stephenson, 2011), increasing emphasis has been placed on other skills (Woodrow, 2006), with possibly the best example being listening (Christenberry, 2001; Elkhafaifi, 2005; Bekleyen, 2009). Students frequently complain about being unable to discriminate between sounds and understanding the meaning of the language presented to them. Cheng, Horwitz and Schallert (1999) and Leki (1999) found that writing in a FL is also a source of anxiety.

 The demands of reading, the motivation of students and the problems they experience in comprehending the cultural elements while reading a 'foreign' text are also among the sources of anxiety (Lee, 1999; Sellers, 2000; Kim, 2009; Yao & Jingna, 2011). Lacking motivation and confidence in learning reduces the ability of students to learn a FL (Cookes & Schmidt, 1991; Matsuda & Gobel, 2004; Mills, Pajares & Herron, 2006; Oxford, 1996). In addition, students with reading difficulties are unable to experience the 'peculiar joy', the play of words, the sounds and cadences and the various nuances associated with a foreign language (Mori, 2002). The incapability of comprehending and understanding various cultural elements contained in a reading is an additional source of student anxiety (Alptekin, 2006; Erten & Razı, 2009; Knutson, 1998).

In Aydin's (2001) study, even students who experienced low levels of anxiety said that language anxiety inhibited their capability to learn. They experienced difficulties in expressing themselves in front of others and were fearful of negative social or formal evaluations accompanied by feelings of incompetence (Also see Kuru-Gonen, 2005). Vanci-Osam's (1996) claim that Turkish students experience additional problems due to the Turkish educational system's traditional neglect of in-class activities and associated tasks necessary for FL learning might be a possible explanation for Turkish students' anxiety.

It is obvious that the possibility of anxiety students might be experiencing in learning a new language should be taken into account while designing FL programs. With this in mind, we aim to re-design the reading program in an English Language Teaching (ELT) Department tailored to foreign language students' needs and demands. This study emerged as a result of the sources of the foreign language reading anxiety identified in an earlier study by Kuru-Gonen (2005). After the identification of the sources of the reading anxiety students reported in the first year reading program in Kuru-Gonen's study, necessary modifications on the second year reading program were made. The distinctive contribution of this paper is to report the reactions of students to these modifications. Hence, the following research question is addressed in this paper:

> How did the students respond to the modifications introduced to the second year reading program re-designed considering the anxieties they had identified in the first year reading program?

This paper specifically focuses on student perceptions of the changes that were introduced. We postulate that such perceptions are a significant factor in determining whether or not there will be positive or negative responses in the classroom. Despite the growing amount of published research on the effects and the sources of anxiety there has been little research on how students respond to

changes introduced to take account of their concerns. This paper is one of the first steps in filling this gap.

The Modifications Made on the Second Year Reading Program

Kuru-Gonen (2005) identified the underlying factors that contribute to FL reading anxiety for the first year reading program. After clarifying what made our students anxious in the reading course based on the findings of this study, we decided to make some modifications in the second year reading program. This second year reading program was followed by the same students who participated in Kuru-Gonen's study the previous year. With these modifications, we hoped to enhance the learning environment and increase the potential pleasure our students would get from reading in a foreign language by taking their perceptions into consideration (Also see Pang, 2008).

In order to highlight the importance and the contribution of the current study, it would be better to briefly summarize the methodology and the findings of the Kuru-Gonen's study which focused on identifying the possible sources of FL reading anxiety. In Kuru-Gonen's study, fifty first year Turkish students undertaking the reading course in the ELT Department at Anadolu University, Eskisehir, were randomly chosen. The anxiety levels of these students were determined by using the Turkish adaptation (Aydin, 2001) of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS, Horwitz et al., 1986). Along with this instrument, in order to determine whether or not anxiety is specific to FL reading, students were also given the Turkish adaptation (Kuru-Gonen,2005) of the Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (FLRAS) developed by Saito, Garza and Horwitz (1999). Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient analysis between the adapted Turkish versions of FLCAS and FLRAS revealed that FL reading anxiety was related to, but distinct from general FL anxiety (r =.45). That is, the two constructs shared 20% of variance with 80% linked to reading in a FL. As the second step, these 50 students were asked to maintain diaries of their reading classes and to identify any anxieties they experienced. Then, 25 students were then randomly selected to participate in interviews in an attempt to obtain further in-depth information. As a result, three major sources of anxiety were identified: personal factors, problems associated with the text, and characteristics of the reading program. Personal factors involved such matters as the implementation of inadequate strategies while reading, fears concerning comprehension, lack of motivation and self-confidence, negative background experiences and high expectations. Problems associated with the text included uninteresting or unfamiliar topics, unknown vocabulary, complex linguistic structures, unknown cultural content and presentation of material in the texts. As the final category, negative characteristics of the reading program which provoked anxiety included having compulsory reading in the classroom and concerns associated with evaluation of the course.

Identifying the sources of reading anxiety was the basic motivation for us. We took a further step in making the necessary modifications regarding the students' anxiety sources to help our students get more pleasure of reading. Another motive was to make our students aware that their perceptions were valuable for us and were taken into consideration. After the implementation of the modifications in the second year reading program, we were curious about exploring how our students perceived these modifications which constituted the main focus of this study. Before presenting the results let us provide some background information concerning the pedagogical basis of the program.

The second year program followed a similar procedure to that of the first year. In both courses, classes were held once a week, in a three hour time slot, and used a course book. The two classes involved three main sections; 'pre-reading', where the teacher aimed to guide students in their reading of allocated material; 'reading', where the students read the prescribed material; and 'post

reading', where the students were encouraged to utilize 'lessons' obtained from their reading more broadly. In addition to the course book, students in the first year were required to read various short stories whereas the students in the second year were required to read articles chosen from various English language journals.

Kuru-Gonen's study had revealed that following a course book induced anxiety in the first year students. They did not like being 'forced' to read a text chosen by someone else. They wanted a more flexible, rather than rigid reading course content. As a result, they were less motivated to read, which in turn, negatively impacted their comprehension. In response to this, we decided not to use a single course book in the second year. Moreover, students were informed that they would be involved in the decision making process of text selection for the second year of the program. Following discussions with students regarding the course content, it was decided that half of the reading materials would be determined by the course teachers and the other half by the students. For the teacher weeks, the materials were presented in the form of a course pack which was distributed to the students at the beginning of term. In material selection, teachers had a close eye in avoiding the predictability and boredom associated with a course book which had been so roundly criticized by students. The materials varied ranging from a newspaper article on child labor to a poem on immigration. Similarly, the materials chosen by the students were selected on the basis of enhancing various goals and strategies of the course. The students were free to choose their own reading materials, but in order to ensure the overall unity of the program teachers identified the general framework to be followed. This framework included topics and strategies that would guide students in their materials selection. For example, if 'entertainment' was the general topic and 'paraphrasing' was the strategy that would be focused on, students were free to choose any entertaining text but were required to prepare tasks focusing on paraphrasing. This application was called "free reading".

Another source of anxiety for the students was related to the difficulties they experienced in achieving reading strategies. They maintained that the course book used in the first year reading program was antipathetic to their reading needs. Some students also said they were not provided with the ability to use the reading strategies emphasized in the course. As a modification, the second year students were explicitly told to apply the reading strategies they learnt in the first year to the texts that they choose for "free reading". In particular, they were encouraged to use specific strategies such as preparing questions, making an outline or making a summary. The main objective here was to enable students to evaluate themselves. In addition to "free reading" in class, students were also encouraged to read texts that they chose for extensive reading. They were free to choose any type of literary work as an extensive reading material.

In order to promote students' critical thinking, analytical abilities and to obtain information concerning their responses to what they read extensively, they were asked to keep a weekly reading journal. In keeping their journals, students were provided with a list of suggestions focusing on different reading strategies. These included such things as writing a letter to one of the characters in a book they read, preparing a poster based on the book or writing a review for a magazine or journal. They were also encouraged to explore any other "creative" idea not included in the list.

As the last source of anxiety, students expressed worries about how they would be evaluated in the first year reading program. In an attempt to overcome their concerns and to include the contributions of students as well as to reward them for their work throughout the term, reading journals were included in their final evaluation as a modification in the second year reading program.

As a summary, after the implementation of the modifications related to the sources of the anxieties students experienced in the first year, the second year reading program included the following components;

- Not following a specific course book
- Keeping a reading journal
- Free reading
- Extensive reading

This paper will report on how students responded to these modifications implemented in the second year reading program.

Methodology

Participants

Fifty second year ELT students who were also enrolled in the first year reading program were the participants of the present study. The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 21. At the time of the study, the participants were taking a second year compulsory reading course. This reading course aimed at enabling the students to become aware and make use of various skills and strategies in their readings. The students in this course were required to do the assignments and attend the course. The assessment for this course was done by two midterms and a final exam in which students were asked to apply the reading and vocabulary strategies to the given texts. Half of the participants, randomly chosen, agreed to be interviewed to provide more in depth and qualitative information concerning students' opinions on the changes that had been introduced. A protocol was negotiated by the teachers and students to ensure confidentiality.

Procedure

A semi-structured questionnaire (see Appendix A) was designed to investigate the participants' perceptions on the modifications introduced in the second year reading program. Students were encouraged to provide their views on any aspect of the modifications introduced; negative or positive. They were also asked to offer any further suggestions which would help to enhance their future learning. The questionnaire had four sections which referred to the four main modifications implemented in the second year reading program. These were:

a. A course pack comprising different types of reading;
b. Free reading weeks and allowing students choose their own materials;
c. Extensive reading on different genres and topics,
d. Reading journals including students' weekly reflections on what they had read.

After collecting the questionnaire data from all participants, semi-structured interviews covering the same categories of the questionnaire items (see Appendix B) were conducted. Half of the participants were interviewed to shed more light on how students perceived the modifications. The interviews were conducted in students' native language and were tape recorded for analysis.

Both the questionnaire and the interviews were qualitatively analyzed using the Constant Comparison Method (Dye, Schatz, Rosenberg, & Coleman, 2000; Zepeda & Mayers, 2002). This method enables data to "naturally" form into categories rather than to be "allocated" to predetermined categories (see Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Merriam. 1998). The first stage of the analysis in this method is to identify the communication units. A communication unit is a separate expression about a thought or behavior

(Langer & Applebee, 1987). In this study, after the identification of the communication units, the ones which contained similar ideas were grouped together to form categories. They were given titles covering the ideas and the thoughts expressed. In order to enhance the internal reliability of such qualitative analysis, two separate researchers examined the data. First, 10% of the data was analyzed separately. The raters then examined and compared their "individual" results and reached agreement concerning the identification of the communication units. In the second step, 20% of the data was analyzed separately. Inter-rater reliability was measured using the following formula suggested by Tawney and Gast (1984):

$$\frac{\text{The number of agreements}}{\text{The number of agreements x disagreements}} \text{ X } 100$$

When the agreement between the two raters was identified as 93%, the rest of the data was analyzed based on the determined categories.

Results and Discussion

The questionnaires and interviews revealed 1449 communication units concerning the modifications made in the second year reading program. These units were combined into four main categories: free reading (47%); not following a specific course book (19%); keeping a reading journal (19%) and extensive reading (15%). This information is reported in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of the Communication Units Related the Modifications

Categories	Number	Percentage
Free Reading	684	47
No Course book Use	272	19
Reading Journal	272	19
Extensive Reading	221	15
TOTAL	**1449**	**100**

The majority of the students' opinions were related to 'free reading'. Prior to this study, students said they became anxious, especially when they were forced to read materials which they found uninteresting. As seen in Table 2, students' views revealed that including a free reading component was an almost overwhelming success; 86% of the communication units involved positive comments compared to 14% with negative responses.

Table 2. Distribution of the Communication Units Related to Free Reading

	Items	**Number**	**Percentage**
Positive	Increase in Motivation	241	35
	Improvement in Strategy Use	89	13
	Access to Various Texts	62	9
	Increase in Critical Thinking	52	8
	More opportunities for Feedback	42	6
	More student-centered learning	40	6
	Improvement in Success	40	6
	Improvement in Research Skills	22	3
Total		**588**	**86**
Negative	Difficulty in text selection	36	5
	Decrease in Motivation	31	5
	Problems with the Texts Brought by Peers	19	3
	Not helpful	10	1
Total		**96**	**14**
TOTAL		**684**	**100**

As displayed in Table 2, 35% of the communication units included expressions of the students who reported that free reading enhanced their motivation in the course. Students said that reading their own materials or the ones chosen by their peers was more enjoyable than reading texts in a predetermined textbook. The following can be presented as examples of how the students were motivated to read their own materials (pseudo names were used to protect the identity of the participants):

"We did not have one of those boring classes… Reading our friends' texts about current issues also solved the attendance problems; everybody participated in the class." (Enes)

"*We had very enjoyable classes. I understood that reading was not such a boring activity." (Bilge)*

Thirteen percent of the communication units indicated that students were more able to apply reading strategies when they chose materials themselves, as illustrated by the following response:

"I can use the strategies I learnt last year when I find the text myself. Otherwise, we don't know what to do with the text in the book except following the exercises." (Melike)

Another positive perception (9%) involved students' having access to various reading materials. One student expressed this opinion as:

"We read lots of different texts; we learned a lot about various world issues. Now, I enjoy reading more." (Murat)

Students also reported that their critical thinking was enhanced as a result of choosing and analyzing their own materials (8%). Additionally, six percent of the communication units revealed that students received more peer feedback in class because their materials were read by many of their friends.

Furthermore, the questions they prepared were answered by many students, and they helped each other with problems or difficulties while doing the required tasks in the class. There was also more opportunity for student-centered learning in class (6%) which, in turn, encouraged students to feel more successful in their reading course (6%). Finding appropriate texts acceptable to class mates also assisted enhancement of research skills (3%), as one of the students said:

> "I had difficulties while finding an appropriate text. But now, I know how to search and where to find them. I don't waste time trying to search in irrelevant sources anymore. Gaining this skill helps me in other courses as well." (Nursen)

In conclusion, including students in the decision making process of material selection enhanced their motivation and increased their in-class participation as advocated in the literature (see McKool, 2007; Mori, 2004; Brantmeier, 2006; Huang, 2006). In addition, when the students are involved in the decision making process, they believe that their self-confidence increases, which in return, enhances a positive classroom environment (also see Matsuda & Gobel, 2004).

Contrariwise, the idea of free reading was not perceived positively by all the students (14%). Five percent of these negative comments were related to not being able to find appropriate texts. In particular, they experienced difficulties in finding appropriate materials on the various topics covered in the course. This, in turn, resulted in feelings of frustration and a decline in motivation (5%), as reported in the following;

> "I sometimes could not be sure whether the text I found was appropriate or not. And if the text I found was not appropriate, I felt sad because I had spent so much time on it". (Nergiz)

There were also complaints (3%) about some of the texts their fellow students brought to class; they were not satisfied with the appropriateness of the texts brought in the class. A small minority (1%) of the units revealed that the introduction of free reading was unhelpful. These negative results might be due to the novelty of this teaching method which required students to read extensively out of class as well. It is probably unsurprising to report that especially in the initial stages of the education, FL students find the demands of such extensive reading challenging, if not leading to feelings of anxiety (also see Leung, 2002).

Table 3. Distribution of the Communication Units Related to No Course Book Use

	Items	Number	Percentage
Positive	Improvement in World Knowledge	125	46
	Increase in Motivation	77	28
	Improvement in English	48	18
Total		**250**	**92**
Negative	Decrease in Motivation	22	8
Total		**22**	**8**
TOTAL		**272**	**100**

Table 3 summarizes the response of students concerning the use of a course pack rather than a specific course book. Similar to free reading, an overwhelming majority (92%) of the communication units supported the use of a course pack with a small minority (8%) opposed. In examining the expressions of support, 46% of the units revealed that students' general world knowledge was

enhanced by being exposed to a variety of texts on different topics. Consistent with the findings of free reading, motivation to read in class was boosted (28%). In addition, some students reported increases in English proficiency (18%), as in the following example;

> *"This term reading course helped me to become aware of current world issues. I feel more enthusiastic about reading on different topics. I can say that my English has also improved as a result of reading all these materials." (Bilal)*

Table 4. Distribution of the Communication Units Related to Keeping A Reading Journal

	Items	**Number**	**Percentage**
Positive	Improvement in Analytic and Synthetic abilities	61	23
	Having a Word in Evaluation	42	15
	Improvement in Reading Skills	19	7
	Increase in Self-expression	8	3
Total		**130**	**48**
	Fear of Evaluation	79	29
Negative	Problems Due to Insufficient Feedback	63	23
Total		**142**	**52**
TOTAL		**272**	**100**

Table 4 presents students' perceptions of keeping a reading journal. In this category, there were more negative communication units than the positive ones (52% to 48%). Students who perceived keeping a reading journal positively reported that these journals helped to improve their analytic and synthetic abilities (23%); as well as their motivation (15%). Likewise, they stated that these journals helped to increase their reading skills (7%); and provided an opportunity to express personal opinions (3%). One student said:

> *"I think these journals helped me to improve my writing ability as well. Expressing what I think about a subject in English motivated me to participate to the class discussions more." (Meliha)*

On the other hand, keeping reading journals was a source of anxiety for some of the students as expressed in 29% of the communication units. In particular, concern was expressed about journals being a component of evaluation, which had a negative impact on their writing as illustrated by the following statement by a student:

> *"I do not think keeping these journals contributed to me a lot. Since we discuss everything in the classroom, I found keeping a journal a waste of time." (Bugra)*

There were also negative comments (23%) concerning the lack of receiving regular feedback from teachers, as exemplified by the following statement:

> **"***I am not sure about what to write on the journal. I wish we had feedback about our journals. Doing this job without getting feedback is like doing it just for the sake of getting a grade". (Ahmet)*

As demonstrated in Table 4, getting feedback from the teachers was perceived important but insufficient by some participants. Such negative feelings might be due to the teachers' lack of

adequate time for providing individual feedback. In addition, as a result of the fact that journals were part of their overall evaluation, many students confessed that the only real reason why they kept journals was for the purpose of obtaining a good grade rather than trying to improve reading skills.

Table 5. Distribution of the Communication Units Related to Extensive Reading

	Items	Number	Percentage
Positive	Having a Word in Selection of Reading Material	127	57
	Improvement in Reading Skills	46	21
	Gaining Reading Habit	27	12
	Increase in Self-confidence	13	6
Total		**213**	**96**
Negative	Difficulty Due to Insufficient In-class Work	8	4
Total		**8**	**4**
TOTAL		**221**	**100**

Table 5 provides information on students' active involvement in selecting materials for the course. The results here are most promising, with 96% of the communication units expressing support for the implementation of extensive reading. In particular, 57% of the communication units were most appreciative of having been given the chance to make such selections. One student said:

> *"I read because I wanted to read, not because of the grade". (Bilal)*

In parallel with the other findings, Table 5 provides support for involving students in the decision making process in the organization of FL courses. As seen above, students enjoyed escaping from the pressure of having to read pre-determined texts and doing pre-determined activities. Escaping from such pressures and having a word in determining the course content also enhanced the motivation of students to read rather than to do things to chase good grades (see Harmer, 2007). Moreover, students perceived improvement in their reading skills (21%); gain in their reading habit (12%); and increase in their self-confidence (6%). What one of the students said is an example of such perceptions:

> **"***Being able to choose the novel I want to read increased my self esteem. I read it much more enjoyably." (Bilge)*

The relatively small amount (4%) of negative comments were from students who would rather have had more time devoted to in-class activities and who wanted more feedback from their teacher. A student said:

> **"***I wish we had talked about the extensive reading material in the class. I do not know whether I am on the right way." (Hülya)*

The results reported in Table 5 are consistent with the findings of Leung (2002) and Horst (2005). They maintain that extensive reading is beneficial to develop students' reading fluency and vocabulary acquisition, enhancing their ability to comprehend and to become effective readers with positive attitudes.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to explore the reaction of students on the modifications implemented in the second year reading program which were based on the expressions of anxiety revealed in the first year reading program. The overall conclusion of this study is that involving students in the decision making process associated with their learning is perceived positively by the students. Students expressed high levels of support for most of the changes that were introduced. They reported feeling more motivated and more self-confident and believed to have developed a more analytical and critical approach to reading. Most importantly, they stated that they enjoyed while reading in a foreign language. This study concludes that the introduction of such changes creates a positive learning environment which may be considered as a first step in reducing anxieties associated with FL learning. Therefore, although this study did not aim at investigating the effects of the modifications in reducing anxiety, obtaining students' opinions and involving them in decision making process is the most important finding of this paper.

The students expressed strong support for including the idea of free reading in class. Just like the participants in Buckmaster's (2005) study, Turkish learners enjoyed being able to choose their texts. They also said that being motivated enhanced their comprehension and helped them to apply reading strategies they had learnt in the previous year (also see He, 2008). Likewise, searching for appropriate material for class encouraged critical thinking and improved their research skills, as they perceived. As concluded by Benson and Voller (1997), interaction among students and providing feedback to each other helped to create a more student-centered learning environment.

Some students, however, experienced particular difficulties in finding appropriate texts. Others had problems with the texts chosen by their classmates. This may have been due to individual differences that might occur in any group, with some students being more able to operate autonomously than others. Aase (2003) explains such "unwillingness" to participate in activities due to relying more on the teachers. While our Turkish students did not explicitly state this, it may have played a role for those who expressed negative feelings. One way of overcoming such negative perceptions for the next time might be training students in selecting the appropriate texts. Since our students are not accustomed to participating in the text selection process, such training will definitely be helpful in the elimination of these types of negative perceptions.

The majority of the negative opinions were expressed about keeping a reading journal. This might have been due to various reasons; not being familiar with the idea of a reading journal in the students' educational backgrounds. Another reason might be the individual differences in students' motivation, learning styles and strategies as illustrated in the literature (Oxford, 1996; Reid, 1995; Zhang, 2003). In this study, similar to the ones in Huang's (2006), Mori's (2002) and Winke's (2005), several students expressed that they required more help, guidance and feedback from their teachers. Hence, in order for students to see reading journals a way for personal improvement and to get more pleasure of reading, future modifications are necessary. Eliminating journals from the evaluation process and making keeping a journal an experience not solely directed at getting grades might be one way of solving this problem. More importantly, priority might be given to explain how the students would benefit from keeping reading journals.

Implications

Some caveats associated with this paper should be noted. The paper only focuses on students' perceptions. In trying to create a positive learning environment which reduces feelings of anxiety,

other factors also need to be considered. For instance, as Asraf and Ahmad (2003) point out, the response of teachers to such changes, especially on teaching methods and curricula changes need to be considered.

While this paper has presented information on students' perceptions, it has not examined whether or not the modifications had any effect on anxiety levels of the students. The FLCAS was not used to measure whether involving the students' perceptions in modifying reading program helped them to feel less anxious. This might limit the value of this study. As the same students were enrolled in both of the reading courses, FLCAS might have given us a clearer picture in the elimination of anxiety. It would also have been useful to determine whether the modifications improved students' reading skills, in parallel to the positive perceptions of students.

In spite of the limitations, we believe that this study fills a gap in the field by taking a further step in modifying a program by considering the concerns and ideas of students. Past research has generally been associated with a set curriculum, mainly based on a course book and has not incorporated any feedback from students. This study provides valuable new insights to the ongoing quest of foreign language teachers to enhance the ability of students to both learn and enjoy the learning of a new language. As a summary, we can conclude that making modifications based on feedback form students, involving students in the decision making process and creating an atmosphere where students felt that their views were important and were taken seriously produced positive perceived results for the students.

Appendix A

Questionnaire on student opinions about the changes implemented

Dear Student,
This questionnaire has been prepared to elicit your opinions about the changes implemented in the second year reading program. These changes were made regarding your concerns and ideas about the first year reading course you took last year. In this questionnaire, we wish to get your opinions about these changes. Your opinions have a great importance for improving the reading program. Please feel free to write anything you wish to express either positively or negatively. Thank you for your participation.

No Course book use

1. What do you think about not using a pre-determined course book in your reading class?
- Positive:
- Negative:

Free Reading

2. a. How do you think bringing your own materials for in-class study affect your learning?
- Positive:
- Negative:

   b. What do you think about reading the materials your friends brought for in-class study?
- Positive:
- Negative:

Reading Journal

3. a. What are the effects of keeping a reading journal on your learning?
- Positive:
- Negative:

   b. What do you think about the inclusion of your reading journals in the evaluation process?
- Positive:
- Negative:

Extensive Reading

4. What are the effects of extensive reading (choosing your reading materials for out -of-class study) on your learning?
- Positive:
- Negative:

Appendix B

Semi-structured Interview Questions

For your reading class:

1. Consider your 2nd year reading course and tell us what you think about:
   a. Not following a course book
   b. Free reading (regarding both your own materials and your friends')
   c. Keeping a reading journal and its inclusion in the evaluation
   d. Extensive reading

2. Do you have any other comments you want to make about the reading program and the changes being implemented?

References

Aase, L. (2003). Cultural competence: a basis for participation in society. In Little, D., Ridley, J., Ushioda, E. (Eds.), *Learner autonomy in foreign language classrooms: Teacher, learner, curriculum and assessment* (pp.185-197). Dublin: Authentik.

Alptekin, C. (2006). Cultural familiarity in inferential and literal comprehension in L2 reading. *System*, *34*, 494-508.

Asraf, R. M., & Ahmad, I. S. (2003). Promoting English language development and the reading habit among students in rural schools through the Guided Extensive Reading program. *Reading in a Foreign Language, 15*(2), 83-102.

Aydin, B. (2001). *A study of sources of foreign language classroom anxiety in speaking and writing classes*. Eskisehir: Anadolu Üniversitesi Yayınları.

Bekleyen, N. (2009). Helping teachers become better English students: Causes, effects, and coping strategies for foreign language listening anxiety. *System, 37*(4), 664-675.

Benson, P., & Voller, P. (1997). *Autonomy and independence in language learning*. London: Longman.

Brantmeier, C. (2006). Toward a multicomponent model of interest and L2 reading: Sources of interest, perceived situational interest, and comprehension. *Reading in a Foreign Language. 18*(2), 89-115.

Buckmaster, R. (2005). Reading and reading skills: Exploiting texts to the full. *Modern English Teacher, 14*(2), 38-41.

Campbell, C. M., & Ortiz, J. A. (1991). Helping students overcome foreign language anxiety: A FL anxiety workshop". In Horwitz, E. K. & Young, D. J. (Eds.), *Language anxiety: From theory and research to classroom implications*. (pp.153-167). London: Prentice-Hall International.

Cheng, Y. S., Horwitz, E. K., & Schallert, D. L. (1999). Language anxiety: Differentiating writing and speaking components. *Language Learning, 49*, 417-446.

Christenberry, B. (2001). Listening comprehension in the foreign language classroom. Retrieved September 26, 2006, from http://www.langlab.uta.edu/german/lana.rings/fall01gradstudents/2001paperchristenberry.html.

Cookes, G., & Schmidt R. W. (1991). Motivation: Re-opening the research agenda. *Language Learning, 41*(4), 469-512.

Dye, J. F., Schatz, I. M., Rosenberg, R. A., & Coleman, S. T. (2000). Constant comparison method: A kaleidoscope of data. *The Qualitative Report, 4*(1/2).

Ehrman, M. E, Leaver, B. L., & Oxford, R. .L. (2003). A brief overview of individual differences in second language learning. *System, 31*, 313-330.

Ellis, R. (1995). *The Study of Second Language Acquisition,* Oxford: OUP.

Elkhafaifi, H. (2005). Listening comprehension and anxiety in the Arabic language classroom. *The Modern Language Journal, 89*(2), 206-220.

Erten, İ. H., & Razı, S. (2009). The effects of cultural familiarity in reading comprehension. *Reading in a Foreign Language. 21*(1), 60-77.

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A.L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Hawthorne, NY: Aldine de Gruyer.

Harmer, J. (2007). *The practice of English language teaching*. Essex: Pearson Education Limited.

He, T. (2008). Reading for different goals: the interplay of EFL college students' multiple goals, reading strategy use and reading comprehension. *Journal of Research in Reading, 31*(2), 224-242.

Hewitt, E and Stephenson,J. (2011). Foreign Language Anxiety and Oral Exam Performance: A Replication of Phillips's *MLJ* Study. *The Modern Language Journal, 95*(3), 1-20.

Horner, L., & Redmond, M. L. (2002). Fear factor: foreign language anxiety in the secondary Spanish program. Retrieved July 12, 2005, from

htpp://www.google.com/foreignlanguageanxiety/studiesinthesecondlanguageeducation/researc h.html.

Horst, M. (2005). Learning L2 vocabulary through extensive reading: A measurement study. *The Canadian Modern Language Review, 61*(3), 355-382.

Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, A. J. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal, 70*(2), 125-32.

Huang, S. (2006). Reading English for academic purposes – What situational factors may motivate learners to read? *System, 34*, 371-383.

Kim, S. Y. (2009). Questioning the stability of foreign language classroom anxiety and motivation across different classroom contexts. *Foreign Language Annals, 42*(1), 138-157.

Kitano, K. (2001). Anxiety in the college Japanese language classroom. *The Modern Language Journal, 85*(4), 549-566.

Knutson, E. K. (1998). Reading with a purpose: Communicative reading: Tasks for the FL classroom. Retrieved May 27, 2008 from http://www.cal.org/ericcll/digest/reading_digest.html.

Kondo, Y. (2010). A study on the relationship between language anxiety and proficiency: In a case of Japanese learners of English. Retrieved November 28, 2011 from http://www.paaljapan.org/resources/proceedings/PAAL10/pdfs/kondo.pdf

Kuru-Gonen, S. I. (2005). The sources of foreign language reading anxiety of students in a Turkish EFL context. Unpublished dissertation. Eskisehir: Anadolu University.

Langer, S., & Applebee, A. (1987). *How writing shapes thinking*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Lee, J. F. (1999). Clashes in L2 Reading: Research versus Practice and Readers' Misconceptions. In Young, D. J. (Ed.), *Affect in foreign language and second language learning: A practical guide to creating a low-anxiety classroom atmosphere*. (pp. 49-63). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Leki, I. (1999). Techniques for Reducing Second Language Writing Anxiety. In Young, D. J. (Ed.), *Affect in foreign language and second language learning: A practical guide to creating a low-anxiety classroom atmosphere*. (pp.64-88). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Leung, C. Y. (2002). Extensive Reading and Language Learning: A Diary Study of a Beginning Learner of Japanese. *Reading in a Foreign Language,14*(1). Retrieved December 22, 2009, from http://www.nflrc.hawaii.edu/RFL/April2002/leung/leung.html.

MacIntyre, P. D., & Gardner, R. C. (1989). Anxiety and SLL: Toward a Theoratical Clarification. *Language Learning, 39*(2), 251-75.

Matsuda, S., & Gobel, P. (2004). Anxiety and predictors of performance in the foreign language classroom. *System, 32*, 21-36.

McKool, S. S. (2007). Factors that influence the decision to read: an investigation of fifth grade students' out-of-school reading habits. *Reading Improvement, 44*(3), 111-131.

Mcknight, L., & Redmond, M. L. (2003). Anxiety in the secondary FL class. Retrieved October 20, 2004, from htpp://www.wfu.edu/depofeducation/articles/anxiety.html.

Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research in case study applications in education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Mills, N., Pajares, F., & Herron, C. (2006). A reevaluation of the role of anxiety: Self-efficacy, anxiety, and their relation to reading and listening proficiency. *Foreign Language Annals*, *39*(2), 276-295.

Mori, Y. (2002). Individual differences in the integration of information from context and word parts in interpreting unknown kanji words. *Applied Psycholinguistics, 23*, 375-397.

Mori, S. (2004). Significant motivational predictors of the amount of reading by EFL learners in Japan. *RELC*, *35*(1), 63-81.

Oxford, R. L. (1996). *Language learning strategies around the world: Cross-cultural perspectives*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii, Second Language Teaching & Curriculum Center Press.

Oxford, R. L. (1999). Anxiety and the language learner: New insights. In Arnold, J. (Ed.), *Affect in language learning*. (pp. 58-67). Cambridge: CUP.

Pang, J. (2008). Research on good and poor reader characteristics: Implications for L2 reading research in China. *Reading in Foreign Language*, *20*(1), 1-18.

Reid, J. M. (1995). *Learning styles in the ESL/EFL classroom*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.

Saito, Y., Garza, T., & Horwitz, E. K. (1999). Foreign language reading anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal*, *83*, 202-218.

Scovel, T. (1991). The Effect of Affect on FLL: A Review of the Anxiety Research. In Horwitz, E.K. & Young, D. J. *Language Anxiety*. London: Prentice-Hall International (UK), 15-23.

Sellers, V. D. (2000). Anxiety and reading comprehension in Spanish as a foreign language. *Foreign Language Annals*, *33*(5), 512-520.

Tawney, J. W., & Gast, D. L. (1984). *Single Subject Research in Special Education.* Columbus, OH: Charles E. Merrill Co.

Vanci-Osam, Ü. (1996). Foreign language classroom anxiety: How can we get our students to participate more? Paper presented on the International ELT Conference from Diversity to Synergy. Ankara, Turkey.

Winke, P. (2005). *Promoting motivation in the foreign language classroom*. *Clear News*, 9(2), 1-12.

Woodrow, L., & Chapman, E. (2002). Second language speaking anxiety of learners of English for academic purposes in Australia. Retrieved September 26, 2005, from htpp://www.google.com/foreignlanguageanxiety/uofsyndney/research.html.

Woodrow, L. (2006). Anxiety and speaking English as a second language. *RELC*, *37*(3), 308-328.

Yao, W., Jingna, L. (2011). The interference of foreign language anxiety in the reading comprehension of agricultural engineering students. Retrieved 28 November, 2011 from http://ieeexplore.ieee.org/xpl/freeabs_all.jsp?arnumber=5943882.

Zepeda, S. J., & Mayers, R. S. (2002). A case study of leadership in the middle grades: the work of the instructional lead teacher. *Research in Middle Level Education, 25*(1), 1-15.

Zhang, L. J. (2003). Research into Chinese EFL strategies: Methods, findings and instructional issues. *RELC*, *34*(3), 284-322.