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2. TITLE

Reading and Affect: University Spanish Learners' Perceptions of a Reading Program

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4. THE CHALLENGE. The Challenge statement for your article

Are L2 students anxious about curricular changes? How do students react to a new reading program with graded readers in an otherwise form-focused first-year language program? This study explores university students' experiences during two iterations of a reading program and provides actionable strategies to lower anxiety and promote positive attitudes.

5. ABSTRACT: The abstract of your article.

While the literature on L2 reading agrees that exposing students to graded readers (GRs) is beneficial, little is known about how students perceive them. This study explores students' anxiety and overall experiences in a reading program (RP) using GRs in a large First-Year Spanish language program. Data is based on 312 students' pre and post questionnaires during the first iteration of the RP (Study 1) and 299 students' questionnaires during the third iteration of the RP (Study 2). Study 1 compared students' experiences when reading individually versus in pairs, revealing an overall preference for the latter, as it increased peer-to-peer support. Study 2 compared classes where students read the same book with others where learners selected a book from a list. Many students who chose their book felt distressed as they wanted more support from their teachers. Study 2 also revealed that students' familiarity with the RP reduced their anxiety.

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Keywords: L2 Reading, L2 Reading Anxiety, Graded Readers, Reading Program Development, Spanish

7. ITALICIZED POSITION AND AFFILIATION FOR ALL AUTHORS: The highest degree attained and the university from which it was earned it. Please include this information for ALL authors.

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Reading and Affect: University Spanish Learners' Perceptions of a Reading Program

Challenge Statement

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Abstract

While the literature on L2 reading agrees that exposing students to graded readers (GRs) is beneficial, little is known about how students perceive them. This study explores students' anxiety and overall experiences in a reading program (RP) using GRs in a large First-Year Spanish language program. Data is based on 312 students' pre and post questionnaires during the first iteration of the RP (Study 1) and 299 students' questionnaires during the third iteration of the RP (Study 2). Study 1 compared students' experiences when reading individually versus in pairs, revealing an overall preference for the latter, as it increased peer-to-peer support. Study 2 compared classes where students read the same book with others where learners selected a book from a list. Many students who chose their book felt distressed as they wanted more support from their teachers. Study 2 also revealed that students' familiarity with the RP reduced their anxiety.

Keywords: L2 Reading, L2 Reading Anxiety, Graded Readers, Reading Program Development, Spanish

1. Introduction

Reading in language classes to promote language acquisition has long been supported by a considerable and growing body of research that sees reading as a source of comprehensible input (Krashen & Terrell, 1983; Lichtman & VanPatten, 2021). However, little is known about students' experiences and perceptions while reading, especially in Spanish as a Second Language (L2) courses that are part of large multi-section language programs. More specifically, while various affective factors (e.g., introversion/extroversion, motivation, self-efficacy) have been linked to language learning since the 1970s (Brown, 2014), few studies have focused on the relationship between affect and students' experiences while reading Graded Readers (GRs) in the abovementioned context.

GRs are simplified texts written to be accessible for L2 learners, and many are likely to include annotations, comprehension activities, and glossaries to facilitate learners' understanding of the text. Several scholars have advocated for their inclusion in lower-level L2 curricula to facilitate language acquisition because of their accessibility, which results from them being adapted to learners' proficiency level (Beglar & Hunt, 2014; Rodrigo, 2018; Yamashita, 2008). Said accessibility should ideally lead to more positive experiences with reading and less reading anxiety.

Based on students' questionnaire data, the two mixed-methods studies presented in this article offer insights into Spanish L2 students' reading anxiety and overall perceptions of the implementation of a Reading Program (RP) using GRs. Study 1 compares students' experiences when reading in pairs and individually. Study 2 compares the experiences of students who were able to choose their own GR from a selection of five with those of students who read a GR that was imposed by the program. Study 2 also examines the effect of students' familiarity with the

RP, as some had taken part in it for several academic terms.

These studies explore which factors may increase and decrease student anxiety during the implementation of a new RP. Lower-level Spanish learners accustomed to a form-focused language program may react with resistance or anxiety to curricular changes, negatively impacting their motivation to continue study of the Spanish language. Thus, it is important to study their reactions and anxiety levels when making significant curricular changes (i.e., implementing a RP) to promote positive attitudes towards language learning.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Benefits of, and Approaches to, Graded Readers in L2 Learning

Introducing L2 students to enjoyable reading experiences early on in their linguistic development can facilitate the transition to reading authentic texts (Rodrigo, 2018), especially when the texts chosen are appropriately adapted to learners' proficiency levels (Rodrigo, 2011). In order to promote interest and motivation to read in beginner learners, students must believe they are capable of understanding the texts presented to them (Day & Bamford, 1998). For these reasons, the use of GRs has been found to be beneficial for promoting positive attitudes towards reading (Rodrigo, 2011) and for reducing reading anxiety (Yamashita, 2013). Thus, choosing books that are within a learner's proficiency level, such as GRs, "will make the difference between a motivated reader and a frustrated one" (Rodrigo, 2018, p. 150).

While most proponents of L2 reading support extensive reading programs where students read freely without explicit attention to linguistic forms or comprehension questions (Al-Homoud & Schmitt, 2009; Nation & Waring, 2020), this type of program may be difficult to implement in large language programs. Large programs have to adhere to widespread curricular

constraints and assessment practices across numerous class sections organized by levels (Macalister, 2014), with each level required to cover certain content in order for students to progress to the next. Thus, it is easier for large programs to implement methodologies that homogenize learning outcomes and assessments. In contrast, implementing methodologies that likely lead to heterogeneous learning outcomes (i.e., extensive RPs) make it difficult to know what students have learned or not, which in turn makes it difficult to know if they have met required learning outcomes to progress to the next level.

Moreover, it would be difficult for large programs implementing extensive RPs to shift numerous teachers' practices and expectations that favor curricular coherence (e.g., aligning reading activities with vocabulary or grammar content) (Alins Breda et al., 2022; Macalister, 2014). Alternatively, intensive RPs, which aim to use reading to attain specific learning goals and generally include language focused activities and/or comprehension questions (Rodrigo, 2018), seem to be better received by instructors (Alins Breda et al., 2022) and to be better suited for beginner learners (Park et al., 2018). Indeed, since intensive RPs tend to promote language-focused learning (Nation, 2007), they are more in line with the learning goals of the language programs they are embedded in. Consequently, language teachers may feel more comfortable introducing them in their classes, and beginner students will likely enjoy the support they provide.

Instead of choosing between both approaches, previous literature has proposed that hybrid extensive-intensive reading models can also be implemented (Beglar et al., 2012; Macaro & Mutton, 2009; Nation, 2007), advocating for the integration of typical extensive reading learning goals, such as reading enjoyment, and intensive reading learning goals, such as the acquisition of specific grammatical content (Alins Breda et al., 2022). Interestingly, these hybrid

approaches are not only better accepted by teachers, but they also do not appear to hinder learners' enjoyment of reading. For instance, Stoeckel et al. (2012) compared a typical extensive RP, where students read on their own without any specific learning goal, with another program where students' reading was accompanied by comprehension quizzes. Both groups developed similarly positive attitudes towards reading, demonstrating that the inclusion of quizzes, as a way of assessing students' comprehension during reading sessions, does not impede students' positive experiences with L2 reading. In sum, less rigid distinctions between extensive and intensive reading may be beneficial for both teachers and students, especially in RPs directed to lower-proficiency learners.

In light of these findings, hybrid extensive-intensive reading models may be best suited for large multi-section first-year Spanish language programs, as pure extensive RPs may be difficult to implement and may be received with a certain distrust by the teachers (Alins Breda et al., 2022; Macalister, 2014). By combining teaching goals that align with teachers' previous experiences and expectations (e.g., explicit attention to certain grammatical or lexical contents in the text) and others that may be less aligned with typical teaching goals in these sorts of large programs, such as the focus on reading enjoyment, hybrid RPs can be easier to integrate into an existing curriculum. This article offers an example of one such RP and describes how it was received, initially, and after three academic terms, by the students who participated in it.

2.2 Foreign Language Reading Anxiety and Positive Attitudes towards Reading

Simply defined, anxiety is feelings of uneasiness, frustration, self-doubt, apprehension, or worry (Brown, 2014). Anxiety can be broadly categorized into trait anxiety, a more permanent susceptibility to experience anxiety, or state anxiety, a reactive state caused by particular stimuli

(Horwitz, 2001). In 1991, MacIntyre and Gardner expanded this dual categorization to include situation specific anxiety, which is more persistent and complex than state anxiety but less permanent than trait anxiety (Horwitz, 2001). It is here, in situation specific anxiety, where Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety lies.

Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety stems from the inherent inability to communicate and portray oneself in a new language (Horwitz et al., 1986). It is an important construct to better understand learners' "frustration and discomfort" while learning an L2 (Horwitz, 2001, p. 122), and it can be measured through Horwitz et al.'s (1986) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale. However, since the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale measures mostly anxiety related to the experience of speaking in the L2 classroom (Teimouri et al., 2019), additional instruments have been designed to measure anxiety related to other skill sets. Relevant to the present article, several studies have now focused on Foreign Language Reading Anxiety (FLRA) as a separate construct from that of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (Hamada & Takaki, 2021), using the Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (FLRAS; Saito et al., 1999). It needs to be noted that even though FLRA has been broadly used in research about L2 reading, some researchers have contested its status as a measure of L2 reading anxiety and have proposed that it is rather a proxy of learners' overall L2 achievement (Sparks et al., 2018).

Even though the study of anxiety has been central to current theories of affect in L2 learning, some researchers have shifted the focus of this type of research to include positive emotions (Dewaele & Dewaele, 2020), such as enjoyment, pride, and motivation. Importantly, high levels of enjoyment do not always correlate with low anxiety (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014), which means that both aspects need to be explored. However, while there have been studies that looked at both enjoyment and anxiety in L2 learning (Dewaele & Dewaele, 2020),

few have looked into both positive and negative emotions, and the factors that affect such emotions, in the context of Spanish L2 reading.

2.3 Variables that Affect Reading Anxiety and Positive Attitudes towards Reading

Collaborative learning and student agency are known to reduce L2 learners' anxiety levels (Suwantarathip & Wichadee, 2010; Toyama & Yamazaki, 2021) and favor positive emotions, such as motivation (Ambrose et al., 2010; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). The role of the instructor has also been found to be central to reducing students' anxiety, especially when group work and other socializing activities are also promoted (Liao & Wang, 2015; Nosratinia & Abdi, 2017; Tang, 2016; Zarrinabadi & Rezazadeh, 2020).

Regarding FLRA specifically, Nejad and Keshavarzi (2015) found that pre-university English learners favored collaborative learning approaches and demonstrated lower levels of FLRA when participating in collaborative learning models. With respect to learning materials, ensuring an appropriate level for students' competency can also make a difference in learners' anxiety. Bahmani and Farvardin (2017) found that when reading a text just below their level of competence, English learners' FLRA decreased whereas reading a text just beyond their level of competence resulted in higher FLRA. When studying FLRA in advanced Spanish learners, Brantmeier (2005) found that learners were more anxious when completing oral and written tasks after the reading than during the reading itself. To the best of our knowledge, there are currently no studies that explore the impact of collaborative learning approaches on FLRA in first-year Spanish classrooms.

Besides collaborative learning and the learning materials themselves, learner agency (e.g., students' choosing their own book) and its impact on FLRA has been less studied. That

said, allowing learners to choose what they want to read has been identified as a key principle of extensive reading (Day & Bamford, 2002). Kargar (2013) found that English learners' FLRA decreased after the implementation of a *scaffolded* extensive reading program, in which the texts were selected based on "negotiation with the participants" (p. 6), instead of being chosen by the students on their own or imposed by the teacher. This finding highlights that learners' agency does not eliminate the role of the teacher but rather requires the support of an instructor, especially at lower-proficiency levels.

When it comes to positive emotions and attitudes towards L2 reading, these have been mainly studied in the context of extensive reading. For instance, Briggs and Walter (2016) found that ensuring learner autonomy, such as choosing which material to read, as well as an appropriate level of reading material, can lead to positive attitudes towards reading in L2 learners. However, less is known about how such positive attitudes develop in intensive RPs or hybrid extensive-intensive ones. The present study aims to bridge this gap in the literature by analyzing students' perceptions and the factors that reduced FLRA during a hybrid extensive-intensive RP at a large US university.

Finally, students can be resistant to change when pedagogical innovations do not concur with their beliefs about L2 learning or with their previous experiences, especially when these innovations require more autonomous work on their end (Stover & Holland, 2018; Walton, 2011). Little is known, however, about how that initial resistance wanes as learners get acquainted with a new methodology, especially in the context of RPs. Since the language program described here followed a generally traditional *Focus-on-Forms* curriculum, the introduction of a RP that does not include clear grammatical and lexical goals, may conflict with students' general expectations about what a language class looks like. The studies in this article

thus aim to investigate whether that initial resistance was indeed present in students' responses and, if so, how it evolved between the first and third iteration of the RP.

3. Context of the Studies

Studies 1 and 2 were carried out within the same RP at a large North American University. The institution operates on a quarter system in which one academic year consists of three 11-week quarters: Fall, Winter, and Spring. The first-year Spanish language program consists of three courses (i.e., SPA 1, 2 and 3) that are offered for beginner learners, taught by Graduate Student Teaching Assistants, and can be taken to satisfy the university's language requirement. In all three levels, students attend 50-minute in-person classes five days a week. Since Winter 2019, when the RP was first introduced, students complete one weekly 50-minute reading workshop in class every Thursday. The reading workshops include a sequence of activities: pre-reading (i.e., recalling relevant information from previous chapters), while-reading (i.e., comprehension questions), and post-reading (i.e., predictions of the plot).

Throughout the successive iterations of the RP presented in Figure 1, questionnaires were distributed seeking feedback from the students. Suggestions were subsequently adopted to improve the RP. In the first iteration, some students read individually whereas others read in pairs. Based on learners' feedback (see Results of Study 1), all learners read in pairs in subsequent offerings of the RP. For the first and second iteration, one GR was selected per course. In the third iteration, four other GRs were added in SPA 3, thus allowing students to choose a GR from a selection of five. Given students' expressed desires for more teacher support and a shared book for the whole class (see Results of Study 2), RP offerings afterwards have used one single book per course level.

[Figure one approximately here]

4. Goals and Research Questions

The goal of Studies 1 and 2 is to address the following research questions:

1. Study 1: Does reading a GR in pairs reduce FLRA levels to a greater extent than reading individually, or not reading at all?

2. Study 2: What are students' perspectives on choosing the book they want to read, as opposed to reading an imposed book that is the same for the whole class?

3. Study 2: Does increased familiarity with the RP, through participation in it during several academic terms, reduce FLRA levels?

4. Study 1 and 2: What were students' overall perceptions of the RP during its first and third iteration?

In terms of the organization of this article, data that were unique to Study 1 (i.e., paired vs. individual reading) and 2 (i.e., familiarity with the program and book choice) will first be presented separately in order to answer research questions 1, 2 and 3. Then, responses to open-ended questions about the RP from Study 1 and Study 2 are presented conjointly to better summarize the evolution of students' overall perceptions from the first to the third iteration of the RP and to respond to research question 4.

In addition to responding to these research questions, data collected for both studies also drove the pedagogical changes described above. This article thus also aims to illustrate how research and daily pedagogical practices can enter a productive feedback loop to develop RPs that are better adapted to the realities of the language program they are embedded in (see Rose, 2019).

5. Study 1: Effects of Collaborative Learning in Reducing FLRA

The goal of Study 1 was to compare FLRA levels and overall perceptions between classes that did not read (control group) and those that read either individually or in pairs. In the classes where students read individually, students were explicitly asked to not interact with each other either when reading or when completing the activities. Students that read in pairs were asked to work with a peer throughout the 50 minute-sessions of the RP, asking each other vocabulary questions, checking on each other's understanding of the text, and/or responding collaboratively to the questions in the activities. Students in the control group completed activities in class that were not related to reading, but rather to reviewing content seen in previous classes.

5.1 Methods

5.1.1 Participants and Reading Materials. A total of 312[1] students from the First-Year Spanish program, divided in 18 classes (6 per course level), participated in Study 1 in Winter 2019. In each of the three levels, two classes served as the control group and did not read, two classes read in pairs, and two classes read individually. Their average age was 20.21, with a minimum of 18 and a maximum of 42. One hundred identified as male and 212 as female. In total, 89 students read individually, 111 read in pairs, and 112 did not read. The specific GRs read in each course, as well as the number of participants per course and treatment group, are presented in Table 1.

[Table 1 approximately here]

5.1.2 Data Collection and Instruments. Data for the Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale, as well as demographic information, were collected via Qualtrics, an online survey system, at the beginning of Winter 2019, before the first reading workshop, and at the end of the quarter, after

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[1] Only students who responded to both the beginning-of-quarter and end-of-quarter questionnaires are included in Study 1 and 2.

the last reading workshop. An additional Final Questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was also completed on Qualtrics only at the end of the quarter.

Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (FLRAS)

In the Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (FLRAS), developed by Saito et al. (1999), participants need to indicate their level of agreement with 20 statements, on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). While some of these items consist of physiological anxiety (e.g., *I get upset when I don't get what I'm reading in Spanish*), most resonate with cognitive anxiety (e.g., *I get intimidated when I see a whole page of Spanish in front of me*). Sixteen items are negative statements about reading but four are positive (e.g., *I feel confident when I read in Spanish*). For those items, the scale was reverted and went from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). In this way, the higher the average score on the scale, the higher the level of reading anxiety. The Cronbach Alpha coefficient calculated from our participants' responses was .765, exceeding the minimum of .70 recommended by Dörnyei and Taguchi (2009).

Final Questionnaire

The Final Questionnaire (FQ) asked participants about their interest in the RP, their sense of whether the book helped them develop their different linguistic skills in Spanish, and their reading confidence levels. It also included two open-ended questions about their enjoyment of the RP and suggestions for improving the program (see Appendix 1). The questionnaire used in the present study can be freely downloaded on the IRIS Database; iris-database.org.

5.1.3 Data Analysis. FLRA data were analyzed through a mixed effects-model that looked at the evolution of FLRA scores from pre-to post-questionnaire in students who either did not read the GRs, read them individually, or read them in pairs. The dependent variable was students' score

on the FLRAS. The random and fixed effects were the following:

- Random effect: Participant ID

- Fixed effects:

  - Pre-post (questionnaire completed before the first reading workshop vs. questionnaire completed after the last reading workshop)

  - Group (no reading, individual, paired)

Qualitative data were analyzed in three steps. First, one researcher identified common themes that emerged from the data and created qualitative codes. Two researchers then coded 20% of the data. Inter-rater agreement analyses were carried out in NVivo (QSR International Pty Ltd, 2020), resulting in a 94% score. Finally, the first researcher extracted the coded data and conducted another close reading to define the categories for analysis.

5.2 Results of Study 1

5.2.1. Evolution of FLRA Scores per Group. Results indicate that FLRA scores decreased for all groups between the beginning-of-quarter and the end-of-quarter FLRAS questionnaire, with no differences between groups (see Tables 2 and 3), demonstrating that even students who did not participate in the RP reduced their FLRA throughout the quarter. R^2 values for this model showed a medium effect size, as the variance was explained at around 30%.

[Table 2 approximately here]

[Table 3 approximately here]

Given that this data did not show a statistically significant advantage of paired over individual reading in students' FLRA scores, open-ended responses from the Final Questionnaire can help

us better understand how reading in pairs or individually influenced learners' perceptions of the RP.

5.2.2 Qualitative Data on Paired Versus Individual Reading. Out of the 200 students who responded to the open-ended questions in the Final Questionnaire, 57 mentioned individual or paired work. Forty-six, of which 22 read individually, voiced their preference for working in pairs, though a small number of students appreciated working alone (n=11). One student who worked individually stated that they:

"did not like that [they] had to do it alone… [and they] got very overwhelmed when [they] saw this by [themselves] …[and] if [they] could have done it with a small group [they] would have preferred that or with a dictionary" [Winter FQ SPA 2, 2 ind[2]].

Unlike these students' need for support, a small group of students appreciated the time alone to wrestle with the material and activities, as one liked "how [they] got to do them alone so [they] could see if [they] were getting the material by [themselves]" [Winter FQ SPA 1, 7, ind]. One student suggested "individuals [should] read first then answer questions with a partner" [Winter FQ SPA 1, 1, pairs]. Thus, allowing students to read quietly on their own first to test their skills before a more interactive discussion may be ideal for some students. Regardless, students' need for support from their peers when completing the reading and activities was clearly noticeable in their responses. Not only did they want reassurance from their classmates to make sure they understood what they read but many, even those that worked in pairs, also wanted "more talking in Spanish that had followed the reading" [Winter FQ SPA 1, 7, pairs].

6. Study 2: Effects of Students' Agency and Familiarity with the RP in Reducing FLRA

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[2] The identifying information that appears between brackets indicates the term, the class, the participant number, and whether the participant read in pairs or individually. For example, [Winter FQ SPA 2, 2 ind] means that the comment is from the second participant from the winter term who was taking SPA 2 and read individually.

Data for Study 2 were collected during the third iteration of the RP, when students in SPA 2 and especially in SPA 3 were more familiar with its structure and purpose. At this point in time, students enrolled in SPA 1 and 2 were reading one book per class, while SPA 3 students could select their favorite book from a list of five options. The purpose was thus to assess the effect of choosing one's book on FLRA levels. Additionally, since SPA 2 and 3 students were expected to be more familiar with the RP, results indicating lower FLRA levels in both those courses could be an indicator of the positive effect of familiarity on anxiety levels. This was further tested in a follow-up analysis that included pretest results from both the first and third iteration.

6.1 Methods

6.1.1 Participants and Reading Materials. A total of 299 students from the First-Year Spanish program participated in Study 2. Their age ranged from 18 to 51, with an average of 20.08. One-hundred and twelve identified as male, 185 as female and two did not identify with either. All 7 sections of SPA 1 (N=91) and 6 of SPA 2 (N=98) read a GR chosen by the research team and were thus considered as the *no book-choice* group. In all 7 sections of SPA 3 (N=110) students were able to choose their own book from a selection of five GRs (see Table 4) and were considered as the *book-choice* group. The four GRs that were added during the third iteration for SPA 3 are marked with an * in Table 4. The GRs that students could choose from varied in terms of their themes, genres, and geographical varieties of Spanish.

At the beginning of the academic term, students in SPA 3 received the summaries of each book in English and could make their decision about which book they wanted to read. All students who read the same book worked together during the reading workshops and completed

the activities collaboratively in class. Each group was composed of approximately five

participants.

[Table 4 approximately here]

6.1.2. Instruments and Data Analysis. Instruments and qualitative data analyses in Study 2

were identical to those used in Study 1. Quantitative data to assess the effect of choosing one's

book were analyzed through a mixed effects-model that looked at the evolution of FLRA from

beginning to end of quarter in the *book choice* group (SPA 3) and the *no-book choice* group (SPA

1 and 2). The dependent variable was students' FLRAS score per. The random and fixed

variables were the following:

- Random effect: Participant ID

- Fixed effects:

    - Pre-post (questionnaire completed before the first reading workshop vs.

      questionnaire completed after the last reading workshop)

    - Group (book choice vs. no book choice)

Since the results of this initial model suggested that the effect of familiarity with the

program may play a key role in reducing FLRA (see 6.2.1), a follow-up regression analysis was

conducted, which compared the pretest FLRA scores of students in each course level in the first

and third iteration. The regression model was run with the following variables:

- Dependent variable: FLRAS scores

- Independent variables:

    - Iteration (first vs. third)

    - Course level (SPA 1, 2, 3)

6.2 Results of Study 2

6.2.1. Evolution of FLRA Scores in *Book-choice* versus *No Book-choice* Groups. Results of the mixed-effects model presented in Table 6 indicate that FLRA rates decreased from pretest to posttest overall, but more so in the *no book-choice* group than in the *book-choice* group. However, this effect was probably due to the fact that FLRA levels were already the lowest for participants in the *book-choice* group in the pretest (see Table 5), leaving little room for additional decreases from beginning to end of quarter.

[Table 5 approximately here]

[Table 6 approximately here]

Since the *book-choice* group corresponded with SPA 3, the last course in the first-year Spanish program, it may be that these low FLRA scores in the pretest could be explained by students' greater familiarity with the RP. This hypothesis is further tested in a follow-up analysis presented in the next section, which compares pretest results for students in the different courses (i.e., SPA 1, 2 and 3) during the first and third iteration. If the hypothesis were correct, pretest results for SPA 2 and 3 should be significantly lower in the third iteration when compared to results in the first iteration, while SPA 1 FLRA scores should not decrease as much from first to third iteration.

6.2.2. Effects of Familiarity with the RP. As evidenced in Tables 7 and 8, pretest FLRA was higher during the first iteration than during the third, with overall scores being always higher for students in SPA 1 than in SPA 2 and 3. This main effect of course level indicates that students' more advanced knowledge of Spanish (i.e., higher in SPA 3 than in SPA 1 and 2) may have helped them feel less anxious about reading, even at the beginning of the quarter. However, the

significant interaction between course level and iteration shows that increased familiarity favored lower FLRA levels, since FLRA pretest scores were significantly lower in the third iteration for SPA 2 and SPA 3 students while SPA 1 students did not display such a dramatic decrease in FLRA from the first to the third iteration (see Table 7). This clearly shows that familiarity with the RP helps lower anxiety levels to a greater extent than course level alone.

[Table 7 approximately here]

[Table 8 approximately here]

Since the differences in FLRA observed in the initial mixed-effects model seem to be driven by students' familiarity with the program, and the design of the study in the third iteration makes it impossible to independently assess the effect of choosing one's book, additional qualitative data of the Final Questionnaire will help explain to what extent (if at all) students' agency in choosing their own book affected their reading experiences.

6.2.3 Qualitative Data on Choosing the Book. While none of the students in SPA 3 specifically mentioned being able to choose their own book as a positive experience in their responses to the Final Questionnaire, 42 out of 66 responses in SPA 3 reported enjoying working in groups and feeling supported by their reading group. Since these groups were larger than the typical paired reading they had experienced in SPA 2 and/or SPA 1 as all students who read the same book (N=5) worked together, this result confirms the importance of peer-support. One student reported that if they "[were] confused about what was going on, [they] were able to ask someone in [their] group" [Fall FQ SPA 3, 41]. That said, 15 students expressed wanting the class to read the same book, pointing to the need for more support (presumably from the teacher), as evidenced in the suggestion below:

I think it would be easier if we all read the same thing together, because it is hard to understand all the words or main concepts without help. [Fall FQ SPA 3, 39]

Thus, even though the students appreciated the reading groups, not all found value in having different books read by different groups of students, since this situation divided the attention of the teacher and resulted in less support on their part. Sometimes the more limited supervision of the teacher even resulted in unsuccessful group work as students felt that they needed more guidance on how to work together and how to create their own discussions without the teacher being present. For instance, one student suggested teachers "encourage students to interact with their group mates more. Most groups were quiet during the reading activities" [Fall FQ SPA 3, 4]. This comment clearly indicates that the division in groups that read different books had the potential of complicating classroom dynamics and of limiting the teacher's ability to properly support students.

7. Learners' Overall Perceptions of the RP

While the previous sections presented results from Study 1 and 2 separately, focusing on the effects of collaboration, learner agency, and familiarity with the program, respectively, some of the questions in the Final Questionnaire were identical in both iterations and provide useful information on learners' overall perceptions of the RP as they continued on from the 1st to the 3rd iteration. These qualitative results, organized by main themes that emerged from students' responses (i.e., the graded reader, the activities, and sense of support) are presented in the next sections. This analysis provides a comprehensive view of what mattered most to students in both iterations of the RP and how these comments affected the subsequent offerings of the RP.

7.1 The Graded Reader (GR)

In the data from both iterations of the RP, more students reported enjoying the book plot (n=117) than those who did not (n=31). In the first iteration of the RP, about half of the students who did not enjoy the book plot came from SPA 2, likely due to the complex vocabulary, grammar, and storyline of the book as well as the challenging activities. Across levels, 14 students thought the book was appropriate for the level of their course, whereas 26 students thought the book was too hard, of which 20 were from SPA 2. One student from SPA 2 recommended "choos[ing] an easier book…some of the grammar [they] had never seen before and it made it very hard to understand. [They] would get frustrated and give up entirely" [Winter FQ SPA 2, 8, partners]. Based on this feedback from the students, the SPA 2 book was switched with the one in SPA 3 for the third iteration of the RP (see tables 1 and 4). After this modification, only one student in SPA 2 reported disliking the plot and fewer students from SPA 2 thought their new book was too hard (n=9).

7.2 The Activities

Qualitative results related to the general perception of the RP match the quantitative findings in that as students became more familiar with the RP, after having participated in it for at least a full academic term, they also became more accepting of it. In the first iteration, seven students showed difficulties adjusting to the novelty of the RP and 13 expressed being too challenged by the immersive nature of reading. One student reported that "[they] feel like with this reading workshop, [they] missed out on two weeks worth of Spanish [sic] class and in turn, made this course harder than it already is" [Winter FQ SPA 2, 8, ind]. In contrast, in the third iteration, no students reported difficulties adjusting to the novelty of the RP, but actually more of them

expressed being challenged by the immersive nature of reading (n=29). Although students became more accepting of the RP, they still considered this new way of learning to be quite challenging.

One reason why students may have had difficulties adjusting to the RP in the first iteration is because many of them (n=13) were worried about the activities aligning with the other course content, as evidenced by the comment below:

I thought the reading activities were helpful, but they took time away from learning the actual material for the course [Winter FQ Spa 3, 1, pairs].

In light of this feedback, in the next iteration of the RP, questions about the GRs were incorporated into the summative assessments of the course (i.e., midterm and final exams). Additionally, the pre-, while-, and post-reading activities were revised to better align with the rest of the course content. For example, a grammar exercise was added for each workshop that both matched with a structure that appeared in the book and with the contents covered in class. As the activities became more tailored to other course content, less students voiced dissatisfaction with the (mis-)alignment of the activities in the third iteration (n=5).

Many students from both iterations of the RP also expressed that they enjoyed answering the comprehension questions. All activities were completed during class time, but these comprehension questions were completed while reading (as opposed to pre- or post-reading) and helped guide students' reading to focus on key information and make meaning of the text, as recommended in Macalister (2014). These guiding comprehension questions enabled students to deal with the immersive nature of reading, which likely made the experience more pleasant and less stressful, as described in the comment below:

I liked ... that we had questions to answer to help [us] understand what was going on page

by page. [Winter FQ SPA 3, 3, pairs]

Even though the students thought the revised activities were useful, in both iterations of the RP, students voiced that there were just too many activities for them to complete in the allotted time (n=55). Only two students expressed satisfaction with the number of activities and time allotted. One student reported that "having too many activities in a day caused [them] more stress than just having one or two activities so that [they] didn't have to feel rushed when learning and comprehending the reading" [Winter FQ SPA 2, 2, ind]. Based on this feedback, the number of pre-and post-reading activities was reduced after the third iteration, prioritizing the time for reading and for the completion of while-reading activities that guided students' understanding of the text. In the most recent iterations, after-reading activities could be completed at home and submitted online through Canvas, the learning management system used at the university where the study took place.

7.3. Sense of Support

As was mentioned above, in both the first and the third iteration of the RP across all levels, many students felt challenged by the immersive nature of the RP, though there were also students who appreciated the demanding immersive task. In both the first and third iterations of the RP, the number of students who reported more negative experiences (i.e., 8 in the first iteration and 29 in the third) was actually similar to the number of students who reported positive experiences (13 in the first iteration and 27 in the third) when dealing with the immersive nature of the RP. Importantly, the difference between students who had more positive versus more negative experiences towards the immersive nature of the RP seemed to be related to their sense of support. Indeed, students who reported positive experiences with the immersive nature of the RP

mostly described feeling supported by their classmates and the teacher, as evidenced in the comment below:

> … it was fun and challenging to try and figure out sentences or words that I did not well understand already from context clues and the help of my classmates and instructor [Fall FQ SPA 1, 1].

Overall, in order for students to feel at ease and confident tackling the immersive nature of reading tasks, they needed more support not only from their classmates but also from their teachers, as demonstrated in Study 1 and Study 2.

8. Discussion

The two studies in this article aimed to offer insights into the dynamics that favor the successful implementation of a RP in a large multi-section Spanish language program, based on students' perceptions and FLRA levels. Specifically, the focus was on the effects of collaboration, agency, and familiarity in reducing FLRA and developing positive attitudes towards reading and the RP. Since the first iteration of the RP in Winter 2019, the constant feedback of the students has been key in determining which practices reduce students' FLRA and promote overall positive perceptions of the RP. Concretely, Study 1 compared the experiences of students who read individually versus in pairs (i.e., the effect of collaboration), while Study 2 compared their experiences during the third implementation of the RP when they were offered the option of selecting their GR (i.e., the effect of agency). Since the group who could choose their GR was also the one where students had likely been involved with the RP for the longest time, Study 2 also offers insights into the effects of familiarity with the RP on FLRA levels.

While one past study (Nejad & Keshavarzi, 2015) found lower levels of students' FLRA when participating in collaborative learning models, reading in pairs in our study did not contribute to a reduction in FLRAS scores to a greater extent than reading individually. That said, in the open-ended questions of the Final Questionnaire, many students described working in pairs as helpful and supportive. In contrast, the qualitative data from Study 2 showed that working in larger groups with different books, thus requiring more autonomy and receiving less support from the teacher, was less successful and could even become stressful for many students. These new findings in the qualitative data highlight the importance of convergent parallel mixed-methods studies as they allow the researcher to "merge quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive analysis of the problem" (Creswell, 2017, p. 104).

Akin to past studies (Liao & Wang, 2015; Nosratinia & Abdi, 2017; Tang, 2016; Zarrinabadi & Rezazadeh, 2020) which found that strictly student-student interaction was not enough to reduce learner anxiety, students in these studies also expressed wanting more support and guidance from the teacher. Students in both studies also felt anxious and overwhelmed by the amount and difficulty of the activities, especially those that were completed pre- or post-reading, much like the students expressed in Brantmeier (2005). Thus, in order to reduce students' anxiety around the activities, these should be restricted to content that helps students make meaning of the text (e.g., comprehension questions) (Macalister, 2014). In addition to these comprehension questions, many students expressed the need for a greater connection between the reading activities and other course contents, as they originally saw the RP as a distractor from the general flow of the course. As more activities that tapped into course contents were included in the reading activities, students started to express more positive attitudes towards the RP.

Similar to what was found in past studies, some students were originally somewhat resistant to this newly implemented RP (Stover & Holland, 2018; Walton, 2011). However, as students became more familiar with the RP and saw that their feedback resulted in noticeable changes in the RP, FLRA levels lowered and learners showed more positive attitudes towards the RP, as demonstrated in Study 2. Sparks et al. (2018) suggested that FLRA does not really measure reading anxiety but is rather a proxy of learners' L2 achievement, based on their study in which learners enrolled in more advanced course levels had lower FLRA scores than those enrolled in less advanced courses. While it is true that in Study 2 SPA 3 students displayed lower FLRA than learners in SPA 1 in both the first and third iteration, that difference increased significantly when students in SPA 3 had already participated in the RP for at least one academic term. This finding shows that, even though FLRA may be related to students' general L2 achievement, it still seems to be influenced by factors that are directly related to reading experience and not overall L2 skills.

Concerning the effect of choosing one's book, contrary to what previous literature on learner autonomy (Ambrose et al., 2010) and freedom of choice over material (Briggs & Walter, 2016; Day & Bamford, 2002) would have predicted, none of the participants in the *book-choice* group mentioned choosing the book as a determining factor in promoting positive experiences with the RP. Instead, they highlighted the support from classmates and the teacher as playing a central role in creating positive experiences with the RP. Students in SPA 3 who mentioned wanting the whole class to read the same book all related this preference to needing more help and guidance from the instructor and wanting more discussion or review sessions. Thus, this model that more resembled extensive RPs by allowing students to choose their book may not be suitable for first-year Spanish RPs in which the learners have not quite gained enough knowledge

or skills in the language to be autonomous when reading in Spanish and in which the rest of the program itself does not fully rely on reading for pleasure. Since reading was only a once-a-week activity, students may have needed more support than in programs where the whole week is devoted to exposing students to comprehensible input. Thus, in the context of a large multi-section program such as the one depicted in this article, hybrid extensive-intensive RP models may be more suitable and may better address students' immediate needs and overall beliefs. This conclusion corresponds to Kargar's proposal for a *scaffolded* extensive RP for lower-level learners (2013) or Stoeckel et al.'s (2012) idea of including quizzes in reading sessions. These hybrid extensive-intensive RP models that prioritize both teacher support and positive attitudes towards reading are also backed by language teachers, as seen in Alins Breda et al. (2022) and Macalister (2014).

The lack of importance of choosing one's book is not to say that the book does not matter at all. In agreement with past literature (Bahmani & Farvardin, 2017; Briggs & Walter, 2016), the plot and level of the GR greatly mattered to the students. That said, the varied responses regarding the appropriate level of the GR illustrates the varying levels present in language classes and how it can be hard to accommodate all students if the entire class is reading the same book. Even if the entire class were the same level, the GRs do not use consistent determining factors for labeling books as certain levels. A heterogeneous student population and the variability across publishers make it extremely challenging to identify an appropriate book for a class (Rodrigo, 2018), even though this is one of the most important factors for creating a successful RP that aims to reduce students' anxiety (Bahmani & Farvardin, 2017). In this context, after two years of RP offerings, the research team ended up creating GRs that were better adapted to their context, where the plot and characters are associated with the daily

realities of the students on campus and where the grammatical and lexical contents better fit into the overall learning objectives of the first-year Spanish program.

In terms of the studies' limitations, while these two studies explored the impact paired reading, familiarity with the RP, and the ability for students to choose their own book had on students' FLRA and their overall perceptions of the RP, there are many other variables that should be explored in future research, such as L1 reading enjoyment, or motivation towards L2 learning, for example. Additionally, systematic quantitative analyses were only performed on FLRA data, whereas data about positive emotions and attitudes were reported mostly as qualitative data due to space limitations. Future research would benefit from the systematic collection and report of both qualitative and quantitative data for both types of emotions. Finally, this study is limited to a single setting, which limits its transferability to contexts that greatly differ from the program where the study was carried out. Researchers and practitioners interested in developing similar RPs in other contexts are thus invited to document their experiences and students' evolving attitudes towards the RP in order to share them and shed light on which factors are context-dependent and which seem to be shared across different settings.

9. Conclusion

This article set out to examine how L2 learners' FLRA and overall perceptions of a RP varied depending on the reading set up (i.e., paired vs. individual reading), students' options in selecting the book (i.e., agency), and learners' familiarity with the RP. Study 1 revealed that while paired reading did not significantly reduce the FLRA when measured by the FLRAS, students did express a preference for reading in pairs in their responses to open-ended questions. Study 2 showed that students who had participated in the RP for one or two academic terms presented

lower FLRA than those who participated in it for the first time. Choosing the book that one reads did not seem to particularly affect students' anxiety levels, while peer and teacher support was what they expressed needing the most. Results also indicate that reading engaging and appropriate GRs for their level, completing minimal activities that supported comprehension and were aligned with other course content, and feeling a sense of community and support with their classmates and teacher were key in developing positive attitudes towards the RP.

Importantly, these studies were not only designed to respond to our research questions, but they also drove important changes that were introduced in the RP during the past three years. We suggest that this model that encompasses research-informed teaching and teaching-informed research (Rose, 2019) could be adopted by language program coordinators and directors as a way to develop pedagogical innovations through an iterative feedback loop between students, teachers, and researchers.

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Appendix 1: Final Questionnaire

This quarter, your Spanish course included weekly sessions where you had to read a **graded reader** in Spanish. Please answer these questions about your opinions on these activities.

1. Do you think the book was interesting? (Select the option that best reflects your opinion)

Very interesting	Interesting	Neither interesting nor boring	Boring	Very boring

2. Do you think the reading activities contributed to the development of your reading skills in Spanish? (Select the option that best reflects your opinion)

They contributed a lot	They contributed a little	They did not contribute but weren't bad either	They did not contribute much	They did not contribute at all

3. Do you think the reading activities contributed to your overall language development in Spanish? (Select the option that best reflects your opinion)

They contributed a lot	They contributed a little	They did not contribute but weren't bad either	They did not contribute much	They did not contribute at all

4. Did the reading activities make you feel more confident in reading Spanish? (Select the option that best reflects your opinion)

Yes, I feel much more confident in that area	Yes, I feel a little more confident in that area	I am not sure I feel more confident, but it probably didn't hurt.	No, I don't feel much more confident in that area	No, I don't feel more confident at all in that area

5. What did you enjoy the most about the reading activities with the graded readers?

6. What suggestions do you have to improve the way we treat reading activities with the graded readers in this course?

Figure 1: Evolution of RP and data collection

Year one of Reading Workshops: Winter 2019 – Fall 2019

Fall 2018
Reading Workshops planning:
Selection of Graded Readers and
Creation of Activities

Winter 2019: First
Iteration of RP

Spring 2019: Second
Iteration of RP

Fall 2019: Third
Iteration of RP

Winter 2022 -
Present RP

**Study 1: Treatment
groups in all levels read
in pairs and individually**

**Study 2: SPA 1-2 students read
a GR selected by the research
team; SPA 3 students chose a
GR from a selection of five**

**One book is read in each
level in pairs and all levels
read GRs written by a team
of instructors**

Table 1 GRs by course level in 1st iteration of RP

	# paired	# individual	Title	Publisher	Themes	Genre	Setting
SPA 1	35	33	El secreto de su nombre	Santillana	Art, History, adventure	Fiction, mystery	Mexico
SPA 2	40	32	El misterio de la llave	Santillana	History, culture, adventure	Fiction, mystery novel	Spain
SPA 3	36	24	Lola Lago: Vacaciones al sol	Difusión	Adventure, mystery	Fiction	Spain

Table 2 FLRA per group and pre-post

Pre-post	Individual	Pairs	No reading
Before the 1st reading workshop	Mean: 3.51 SD: 0.37	Mean: 3.52 SD: 0.37	Mean: 3.47 SD: 0.37
After the final reading workshop	Mean: 3.03 SD: 0.46	Mean: 2.92 SD: 0.46	Mean: 2.96 SD: 0.46

Table 3 Parameter estimates and derived values from the mixed-effect model FLRA ~ pre-post * group + (1|id)

Random effects	Groups	Name	Variance	Standard deviation
	Participant ID	(Intercept)	0.01	0.09
	Residual		0.17	0.41

Fixed effects	Parameter	Estimate	Standard error	*df*	*t*-value	*p*-value
	Intercept	3.5	0.02	616.37	146.7	<.001 ***
	Pre-post posttest	-0.53	0.03	309	-16.11	<.001 ***
	Group individual – no reading	0.04	0.06	616.37	0.61	0.54
	Group pairs - individual	0.01	0.06	616.37	0.17	0.87
	Group pairs – no reading	0.05	0.06	616.37	0.82	0.41
	Pre-post posttest: Group individual – no reading	0.03	0.08	309	0.37	0.71
	Pre-post posttest: Group pairs - individual	-0.12	0.08	309	-1.47	0.14
	Pre-post posttest: Group pairs – no reading	-0.09	0.08	309	-1.16	0.25

R^2 values	R^2 marginal	R^2 conditional
	0.29	0.33

Table 4 GRs by course level in 3rd iteration of RP

	# participants	Title	Publisher	Themes	Genre	Setting
SPA 1	91	El secreto de su nombre	Santillana	Art, History, adventure	Fiction, mystery	Mexico
SPA 2	98	Lola Lago: Vacaciones al sol	Difusión	Adventure, mystery	Fiction	Spain

SPA 3	21	El misterio de la llave	Santillana	History, culture, adventure	Fiction, mystery novel	Spain
SPA 3	23	Guantanameras*	Difusión	Family, coming of age	Fiction, drama novel	Cuba/ Florida
SPA 3	17	Rebeldes de Tejas*	TPRS Publishing	History, war	Fiction	Texas/ Mexico
SPA 3	28	Fantasmas en la escalera*	Difusión	Friendship	Fiction, mystery novel	Spain
SPA 3	21	48 Horas*	Fluency Matters	Travel, study abroad	Fiction, Adventure novel	Ecuador

Table 5 FLRA per group and pre-post

Pre-post	Book choice	No book-choice
Before the 1st reading workshop	Mean: 2.98 SD: 0.58	Mean: 3.14 SD: 0.58
After the final reading workshop	Mean: 2.94 SD: 0.58	Mean: 2.9 SD: 0.58

Table 6 Parameter estimates and derived values from the mixed-effect model FLRA ~ pre-post * group + (1|id)

	Groups	Name	Variance		Standard deviation	
Random effects	Participant ID	(Intercept)	0.22		0.47	
	Residual		0.11		0.33	
	Parameter	**Estimate**	**Standard error**	***df***	***t*-value**	***p*-value**
Fixed effects	Intercept	3.14	0.04	414.04	74.7	<.001***

	Pre-post posttest	-0.24	0.03	296.2	-6.98	<.001***
	Book choice_yes	-0.16	0.07	413.09	-2.26	0.02*
	Pre_post: book choice_yes	0.19	0.06	295.64	3.38	<.001***

R^2 values	R^2 marginal	R^2 conditional
	0.03	0.67

Table 7 FLRA per course and iteration

Course	1st iteration	3rd iteration
SPA 1	Mean: 3.51 SD: 0.37	Mean: 3.3 SD: 0.58
SPA 2	Mean: 3.56 SD: 0.37	Mean: 2.99 SD: 0.57
SPA 3	Mean: 3.42 SD: 0.37	Mean: 2.98 SD: 0.58

Table 8 Parameter estimates and derived values from the regression model FLRA ~ iteration * course

	Parameter	Estimate	Standard error	*t*-value	*p*-value
	Intercept	3.09	0.03	112.34	<.001***
	Iteration_1st	0.4	0.04	10.45	<.001***
	Course SPA 2 -SPA 1	-0.3	0.07	-4.41	<.001***
Fixed effects	Course SPA 3 - SPA 2	-0.008	0.07	-0.13	0.9
	Course SPA 3 – SPA 1	-0.31	0.07	-4.65	<.001***
	Iteration_1st: Course SPA 2 – SPA 1	0.35	0.09	3.73	<.001***

	Iteration_1st: Course SPA 3 – SPA 2	-0.13	0.09	-1.39	0.16
	Iteration_1st: Course SPA 3 – SPA 1	0.22	0.09	2.35	<.02*

R^2 values	Adjusted R^2
	0.19