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High Interest Low Readability Books And Motivation In Chinese Classrooms

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HIGH INTEREST LOW READABILITY BOOKS AND MOTIVATION IN CHINESE

CLASSROOMS

By

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master
of Arts in English as a Second Language.

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CHAPTER ONE:

Introduction

Personal Journey into English Language Teaching

Disillusioned with a desk job in healthcare, I decided to take on a new adventure—teaching conversational English in China. I was ready for a change but unaware of how this decision at the time would significantly impact the course of my future. After teaching English in China on and off for several years, I made the decision to make teaching my career path. I enrolled fulltime in the Hamline teacher licensure program. After graduating, I went back in Beijing to teach English again, but this time in a more professional capacity at a public middle school. In my new position, I decided to focus on helping students with their reading development. As such, I purposed this research question: *How do high interest texts mediate Chinese middle school students' reading comprehension?*

I decided to focus my teaching efforts on helping students learn to read for several reasons. First, reading is an effective alternative means of access for students to practice their English language competence due to lack a natural language environment. This is a very straightforward understanding since my students all live in Beijing, China. Second, reading comprehension is a large part of student exams and is a part of the National

English Chinese Standards (NECS). NECS states that teachers should choose appropriate reading materials that are "related to students' lives, extensive in topics and various in text types; conceptual, interesting, informative, challenging and current" (ME, 2003, p.30-31). Going further, I have decided to focus my teaching efforts on reading because I believed more optimal supplemental reading materials should be introduced into the classroom. As such, with the goal of helping students learn to read, I made two key decisions: to use interest as a means for motivation and to use high-interest texts.

Experience to Research

From my experience, the students who displayed signs of less reading motivation, such as disruptive classroom behaviors and non-engagement in tasks either inside or outside of the classroom, preformed more poorly on reading performance sections of tests than did their peers. While this evaluation was informal and subject to limitations, it was an important observation nonetheless because it fits in with L2 motivation research. One's personal investment in the topic stimulates depth of processing in the context and thus enhances, or worsens, the subject-matter learning (Alexander, Kulikowich, & Jetton, 1994; Li, 2012). Particularly, noticing student reading motivation influences and reading outcomes is important for the research of this paper as it gives an anchor point for understanding how students respond to the books they are reading.

Research Significance

Upon initial onset, it may seem easy enough to promote motivation, interest, and high interest easy to read books in the classroom; however, this perspective only views the tip of the iceberg. In fact, I purpose there are some salient contextual constraints that make this quite a challenging process. These items will be discussed in Chapter Two, the

literature review. Despite challenges, conducting research in this area is significant to the English language teaching field for several reasons. First, research on interest and high interest texts using Chinese mainland middle school participants is needed. This is important so that research can be written from a Chinese orientation, rather than a western orientation. Secondly, implications of research on how students respond to and experience high interest texts impacts: decision-making for supplemental classroom reading material, instructional approaches to motivation in the classroom, and student learning attainment outcomes. Going further, learning outcomes also have the ability to impact student exam scores, which in turn have a big impact on the trajectory of that student's life. This is why attempting to answer the research question—*How do high interest texts mediate Chinese middle school students' reading comprehension?*—is significant.

Key Terms

There are several keys terms that are important to define and introduce from the onset of this paper. Prior presentation of these terms will help aid in ease of understanding and clarity while reading this paper. Therefore, a list of terms has been included in this section.

Local vs. Foreign

First, there is a distinctive split between "local" and "foreign" teacher. A "local" teacher is a teacher who is a citizen of the People's Republic of China; a foreign teacher is everyone else. Outside of citizenship, it becomes problematic in determining who is

really foreign. Regardless of fairness, "foreign" and "local" are labels that signal certain ideas about the person and what they "know" about the language.

English Language Teaching

ELT is a catchall term for the entire field of English language teaching and learning. It replaces other terms such as EFL (English as a Foreign Language), ESL (English as a Second Language), and ESOL (English Speakers of Other Languages). Chinese learners are considered to be learning English in a setting in which English is not the official language, or the language used in official government, or the language spoken by residents in daily life. Rather, historically, the term ESL has been used when English is the official language of the country, used in official government, and spoken by the residents on a daily basis, such as in places like the USA or Australia. EFL is not a suitable term either as it ignores the multilingual and translingual realities of global communication practices. The translingual reality of Beijing's use of English can often be seen and heard in China in the state-run newspaper such as the *China Daily*, on restaurant menus, outdoor signs, and on international music radio stations.

Motivation

Motivation is another salient term in this paper. Motivation is a dynamic construct that can change over time affecting the learning process and one's overall disposition (Dörnyei, 2014; Gass, 2013; Lightbrown & Spada, 2013). Motivation is effort, desire, and attitude toward learning (Dörnyei, 2014), in which the desire is intense and persistent helping the learner to succeed in learning the language (Tarone & Swierzbin, 2009). In general, motivation is important because it accounts for differential success in language

acquisition, and to some degree motivation is involved in initial decisions to learn another language and in the decision to maintain it (Gass, 2013; Dörnyei, 2014). Without sufficient motivation, even individuals with the most remarkable abilities cannot accomplish long-term goals. Appropriate curricula and good teaching are not enough on their own to ensure student achievement (Dörnyei, 2014). But, with high motivation considerable deficiencies both in one's language aptitude and learning conditions can be made up for (Dörnyei, 2014).

Intrinsic Motivation vs. Extrinsic Motivation

There are two commonly referred to types of motivation: intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation is imposed on the learner by outside forces (Wigfield, 1996; Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997), and learning goals are associated with non-self-determined motives (Yu, Chen, Levesque-Bristol, & Vansteenkiste, 2018). A student extrinsically motivated to read may be responding to the external environment or social benefits, such as something that will be brought to the individual (Wigfield, 1996; Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997). For example, a student may read to obtain good grades or rewards, to avoid punishment, to compete with others, to receive recognition, or to comply (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997). This is extrinsic motivation. On the other hand, intrinsic motivation is quite the opposite. Intrinsic motivation comes from within the learner; it represents inherent interest (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997; Wigfield, 1996). Learner behavior is self-determined or autonomously motivated (Yu, Chen, Levesque-Bristol, & Vansteenkiste, 2018). The learner may engage for personal growth, cultural enrichment, or out of personal interest in the topic, for the satisfaction obtained from

mastering complex or difficult ideas, or for pleasure gained from being engaged (Wigfield, 1996; Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997).

Interest

Another term related to motivation is interest. Interest in a general sense can be seen as a topic of a person's engagement or as a characteristic of a person (Lipstein & Renninger, 2006). In an educational context, interest can be a motivational variable and a part of the motivational process (Hidi, Renninger, & Krapp, 2004) where the individual exercises a predisposition or psychological state (Ainley, Hidi, & Berndorff, 2002). Interest, in the later phases of development, is also a predisposition to reengage content [objects, events, and ideas] that apply to in-school and out-of-school learning (Hidi & Renninger, 2006). As such, interest is the interaction between person and environment where interest likely develops and deepens with reengagement (Lipstein & Renninger, 2006). This is interest.

High-stakes Testing

High-stakes testing will be a term used often in this paper. A high-stakes test is one that is used in a context in which decisions about admission, promotion, placement, or graduation is directly dependent on test scores (Sholhamy, 1996). For example, in China the national college entrance exam, the *gao kao,* is a high-stakes test because it is the sole criterion to determine if a student is qualified to enter university (McPherron, 2016).

Hi-lo Books vs. Trade Books

Finally, hi-lo books and trade books are two other terms necessary for building understanding about the types of reading materials used in this study. Hi-lo stands for

high interest low readability. Briefly speaking, hi-lo books are particular selection of

books with low readability language levels but high interest, mature, complex themes.

They are usually intended for slightly older readers, preteens through adults, who struggle

to read or are still in the early stages of English language acquisition. On the other hand,

trade books are books intended for general audiences (Merriam-Webster's dictionary,

2004). They are distinct from academic books such as textbooks and reference books.

Hi-lo books produced by Saddleback Educational Publishing and Good English trade

books will be used for the research in this paper.

Summary

In this first chapter, important pieces of reflective information around my research

question have been established. Presented in Chapter One is my personal journey into

English teaching, my reasons for focusing on reading for my research, and the

significance that this research carries. Also presented is a list of key terms to help clarify

understanding for the reader from the onset. Going forward, this paper will continue to

address my research question: *How do high interest texts mediate Chinese middle school*

students' reading comprehension?

Chapter Overviews

The second chapter of this paper will address a short series of subtopics

surrounding my research topic including four key areas: the history of education in China,

the examination system of high-stakes testing, L2 motivation, and classroom reading

materials. These areas will be addressed by looking carefully at seminal work already

done in the field. The third chapter will look at the methods for conducting the research

of this paper, and the fourth and fifth chapters will show research data outcomes and

provide further discussion and analysis, respectively.

CHAPTER TWO:

Review of the Literature

The goal of this thesis is to explore how high interest texts mediate reading comprehension, specifically in the context of teaching English in China with Chinese mainland students. Before attempting to answer this research question—*How do high interest texts mediate Chinese middle school students' reading comprehension?*—important research has been synthesized as it informs the research question and provides a broader understanding of the research territory. Areas to be reviewed include: history of education in China, the examination system of high-stakes testing, L2 motivation, and classroom reading materials.

Initially, these areas may not appear to relate directly to reading a hi-lo text in the classroom on Monday morning, or the teacher's ability to motivate students through interest; however, these larger constructs build the bottom of an iceberg upon which each Monday morning rests. Therefore, it is these larger underpinnings, some which have started thousands of years ago, that influence seemingly minor decisions that are made in the classroom on a daily basis. While these forces may be unbeknownst to the teacher, they still are certainly at work in the classroom, including my classroom. On a final note, review of this literature will again be used in Chapters Four and Chapter Five in order make connections and inferences between my research and the work of other scholars.

History of Education in China

This section will be broken down into three parts: Confucian heritage education, modern history of English language teaching in China, and new education reforms.

Confucian Heritage Education

In order to understand why I purpose interest is not pursued in the Chinese classroom, one first must understand what is. Since ancient times, certain values have been shaping the Chinese educational system. One of those salient sources is Confucian educational heritage. Written in ancient language arts textbooks is the cultural knowledge of Confucian teachings in which texts encourage effort, striving, and diligence (Yu, Chen, Levesque-Bristol, & Vansteenkiste, 2018). Confucian educational values are demonstrated in the following ancient idioms derived from these classic texts: "Through constant devotion and effort, even an iron pestle can be ground into a needle," "for the dedicated there is no difficulty on earth," and "without accumulation of small steps one cannot make a thousand miles, and without accumulation of trickles there will not be rivers and ocean" (Yu, Chen, Levesque-Bristol, & Vansteenkiste, 2018; p.193). These idioms show Chinese Confucian culture's heavy emphasis on learning resulting from willpower and self-discipline. Another idiom from a Confucian classic, the *Three Character Classic*, states, "at inception every individual is good; the human nature is similar, but the behavioral habits are vastly different; if no education on children, their nature will go awry; the essence of education is devotion" (Yu, Chen, Levesque-Bristol, & Vansteenkiste, 2018). This last idiom seems to warn persons of impeding danger of a life disloyal to education, while also reminding one of the responsibilities and duty to

become educated. These idioms create and sustain the common belief that education is: effort, diligence, dedication, devotion, and acceptance of one's fate (Littlewood, 1999). As a result of prioritizing these educational values, learning for the pursuit of interest may exist, but it is almost certainly not a driving value.

In addition to the above-mentioned values, obedience, memorization, transmission, and recitation are also extoled components in the Confucian system. In Confucian heritage teaching, the teacher is the authority figure deserving all respect and obedience (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006; McPherron, 2016). Within this learning environment, teacher instructional practices follow a transmission model in which there is careful heavy memorization of a canon of texts along with disciplined recitation of them (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006; Zhao, Selman, & Haste, 2015). Because the teacher is the transmitter of knowledge, the classroom is very teacher-centered, and emphasis is on what the teacher is doing (Biggs & Tang, 2010). As a result, it is my conclusion that interest becomes a virtue that does not appear to matter. The irrelevancy of interest makes sense because in a transmission model of instruction, the student is a passive learner (Biggs & Tang, 2010). Thus, there is no pressing need for inquiry into learner interests, because students are not co-constructing their learning experiences. Rather, the teacher is an all-knowing receptacle of knowledge (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006), and perhaps inquiry into interests would threaten that, as it would reveal there is knowledge the teacher does not know. This combined with the fact that China is a collectivist society where power and authority is accepted (Littlewood, 1999), the student will not be inclined to advocate for his or her own interests. Even if a student does not agree with a teacher, the student will bow to the power and authority as an unavoidable fact of life (Littlewood, 1999). So, in western

student-centered teaching, the teacher can be seen as a "guide on the side;" however, in traditional Chinese teaching, the teacher is likely seen as the "sage on the stage" (McPherron, 2016). Thus, in the Confucian model of teaching, interest lacks relevancy.

Speaking from personal experience, I have seen evidence of the all-knowing teacher attitude in my classroom, as I have co-taught with local Chinese teachers over the past two years. Although I realize there are limitations in my perspective, there have been a couple of incidents that stood out in my mind that support this assertion. On one occasion, my co-teacher and I were introducing the vocabulary "solid, liquid, gas." An intelligent student in class challenged the teachers stating the steam from boiled water was still a liquid and not a gas. My co-teacher insisted that the student's statement was not true. I was surprised by my co-teacher's strong convictions. This teacher did not encourage the student to go to the science teacher to seek out a more refined explanation nor did my co-teacher really inquire more about the student's thinking. My counterpart just remained insistent and gave a strong, glib, final word so that the class instruction could move on. On another occasion, my co-teacher felt students performed below expectations on a test. At this time, my co-teacher declined to do a student survey asking what genres, or reading material, students would be more interested in reading.

At those times, I could not help but think perhaps those choices, made consciously or unconsciously, were needed so that the co-teacher would not appear uncertain (be it in English, science, or otherwise). In addition, perhaps the teacher also did not want to appear as if not already knowing how to improve student test scores. This teacher's role was to be the knower and the authority, and the teacher was defensive about having that image threatened.

This personal story and this background on Confucian heritage are important because they give considerable insight into why interest as a theme at large is not valued or relevant in the classroom. It demonstrates why interest in the classroom is much less about lack of time or space than it is about philosophical underpinnings that do not support or prioritize interest. Due to Confucian heritage, it is my proposal that interest has largely remained a path not taken.

History of English Language Teaching in China

Shifting to more modern times, the history of English language teaching in China is also helpful for understanding my research question—*How do high interest texts mediate Chinese middle school students' reading comprehension?* In knowing the history of English language teaching in China, one can develop a larger awareness as to why the government is promoting (or at times demoting) English. This also gives reason to why the government should have a vested interest in quality education, in which quality education includes the integration of innovative learning strategies incorporating interest. This can help in small ways build towards accomplishing larger government goals such as economic prosperity.

To begin, first and for most, English is a tool of the state that serves political and economic aspirations (Adamson, 2004; McPherron, 2016). At times the status of English has been promoted for economic reasons, and at other times this it has been demoted for cultural contamination reasons (Jin & Cortazzi, 2002). China's views on teaching English have been seen with extremes from "the language of the enemy" during and after WWII (McPherron, 2016, p. 6) to the principal language of trade partners, academics, technical experts, advisors, tourists and popular culture (Adamson, 2002). Whether the climate of

China has esteemed English as helpful or harmful, choices are made to keep China a strong independent nation rather than one "subjugated by foreign powers" (Adamson, 2004, p. 208).

Next, the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s and 70s was a turbulent time for English but also a catalyst. English learning was banned for fear of cultural contamination, and English teachers (along with all foreign language teachers) were "vilified, persecuted, or sent to the countryside" (Jin & Cortazzi, 2002, p.54). Indeed, the Cultural Revolution was a time of political ideological extremism (Hu, 2004). But after the death of Mao Zedong, the Cultural Revolution ended, and English was redeemed and established as an integral part of the modernization drive (Hu, 2004). In fact, English became so highly valued that it was esteemed as the symbol for modernity and progress (McPherron, 2016). Deng Xiaoping launched the national modernization program, which focused on science and technology and access to other country's knowledge on these topics; this access was all predicated on knowing English (Hu, 2004). Thus, the status and desirability of English was promoted. English was a means for economic development. This is a key pillar in understanding the history of English in China. Some attributing examples of resulting economic successes were China's successful entry into the World Trade Organization and the 2008 Olympic games (Adamson, 2004). Successful entry was due in part to key politicians' ability to cater to the English linguistic needs of foreign mass media and tourists (Adamson, 2004).

The history of teaching English in China informs my research question because it explains why English is being taught. On a national level, English is a means for reaching further future economic prosperity. While this does not explain directly yet how interest

in the classroom will be affected, it does show the government as the underpinning and driving force behind the promotion of English at large and in the classroom, and that the government cares about its ability to produce English language users.

     New reforms. The history of teaching English in China would not be complete if new modern reforms were not addressed. Understanding new educational reforms are important for the purposes of this paper because they shed understanding on the crux between new policies and actual teaching in the classroom. Reforms represent a broad sense about how students should be shifting to a new philosophical way of learning in the classroom (Yan & He, 2012). For example, teachers should be fulfilling new roles as facilitators of a learning process rather than authoritarian instructors; and learners should be active constructors of knowledge instead of passive recipients (Yan & He, 2012). This idea of reform change is important to understanding my research question because reforms show an opportunity, created by the government, for innovative curriculum and learning strategies, like interest, to enter the educational context (Chen, 2006). To understand this hypothesis, a brief synopsis the educational reforms should be understood.

     In 1993, the Ministry of Education (MOE) began making enormous endeavors to reform basic education (Yan, 2012). The reforms were considered radical and ambitious as they created a fundamental shift in educational philosophy moving from traditional teacher-centered, text-based, grammar-based, transmission pedagogies to holistic inquiry-oriented approaches (Carson, 2009; Ryan, Kang, Mitchell, & Erickson, 2009). In 2003, new secondary school curriculum guidelines and curriculum standards were issued (Yan, 2012). On a broad level, these reforms meant students would need to improve their generic skills of independent inquiry, cooperation, communication, and problem solving

(Chinese MOE 2003, as cited in Lee & Yin, 2011). More specific to the English curriculum reforms, constructivist and communicative task-based teaching methodologies that cultivate communicative competence were to be promoted. Components of this curriculum include: linguistic skills, affect, learning strategies, and intercultural awareness (Yan, 2012). In the 2010–2020 educational reforms the strategic goal was to develop each student as

> *... a 'whole healthy person' with mental, physical and social well-being, with an emphasis on values, attitudes, ideology, cognitive, affective and interpersonal skills. The students' critical thinking skills and creativity are also described as one of the strategic goals (Gong & Holliday, 2013, p. 45).*

In short, these new reforms help identify and describe how the government hopes student learning will be improving in quality ways (Zhang, 2011).

From my perspective, the above-mentioned reforms give-way to an opportunity for motivation through interest and high interest texts to enter the classroom, especially as these reforms use key language such as "independent inquiry," "constructivism," and components of "affect" (Gong & Holliday, 2013; Chinese MOE 2003, as cited in Lee, & Yin, 2011; Yan, 2012). The importance of these key phrases will become clearer later in the paper under the section of L2 motivation. However, at this stage in the paper, reforms demonstrate desire for the integration of effective teaching practices to enter the present-day classroom. From my perspective, this includes motivation through interest and the use of high interest texts.

Summary

The first section of the literature review has presented the history of education in China. This section has exhibited background knowledge explaining Confucian heritage as it relates to education, a modern history on English language teaching in China, and a brief presentation of new educational reforms. The next section of the literature review to be investigated is the examination system of high-stakes testing.

The Examination System of High-Stakes Testing

Having discussed the history of the Chinese educational system, another crucial area to address is the examination system. Based on my hypothesis from the research reviewed, I purpose that the single greatest factor affecting interest in the classroom today is high-stakes testing. Understanding the examination system in China is pivotal in understanding my research question. As stated in Chapter One, my overarching goal is to help students develop reading skills by motivating students through interest, with interest as the selected orientation towards motivation and high interest texts as the designated reading material.

Acknowledging the current state of affairs, it is my hypothesis that the astounding force of the examination system has created a disparaging relationship with interest. In order to answer my research question—*How do high interest texts mediate Chinese middle school students' reading comprehension?*—it is absolutely necessary to understand the impact of the externally-oriented, high pressure, examination system on teachers, learners, and society (Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Yu, Chen, Levesque-Bristol, & Vansteenkiste, 2018; Zhang, 2011; Zhao, Selman, & Haste, 2015). To begin, some basic background information on the testing system will be presented.

Background on the Exam System

The large-scale examination-based system of high stakes testing is a salient aspect of Chinese educational culture (Zhang, 2011). The Ministry of Education runs the examination system (Lu & Liu, 2012). Two critical exams in this system are the *gao kao* and the *zhong kao*. Employment is closely connected to the exam system; therefore, this will also be discussed for the purposes of building background knowledge.

Description of the *gao kao*. The *gao kao* is the heart of the examination system. It is arguably the test that will have the biggest impact on students—the test that determines life (Zhang, 2011). *Gao kao* literally means "high exam" which is the local word to refer to the Chinese National College Entrance Exam. This test was established in 1952 (Yu, Chen, Levesque-Bristol, & Vansteenkiste, 2018). It is a universal college entrance exam that tests key high school subject areas, including English. All high school students in China must pass it in order to enter university. The test is administered annually in June (McPherron, 2016). The basic three-part structure and content of the English portion of the exam is as follows: part 1, practical use of English knowledge; part 2, reading comprehension; and part 3, writing (Peng, Tan, & Xie, 2014). Of these sections, stress is put on reading and writing skills (Peng, Tan, & Xie, 2014).

Description of the *zhong kao*. At the middle school level, students take the Senior High School Entrance Examination, locally referred to as the *zhong kao*. This test is for secondary students, and it determines who will be given admission to key upper secondary schools (Guo & Guo, 2016). Passing this test determines whether or not the student will attend senior middle school with the potential to go onto university, or vocational school with no option for university (Jin & Cortazzi, 2002). Even at the middle school levels, exam pressure is significant because limited places are available in

key senior middle schools (Jin & Cortazzi, 2002). The structure and content of the *zhong kao* is very similar to the layout of the *gao kao* (Peng, Tan, & Xie, 2014).

Examinations link to employment. The evaluation system can be understood as a pressurized link to employment. Employers value employee academic backgrounds (Muthanna & Sang, 2015), and with good jobs comes more money (Yu, Chen, Levesque-Bristol, & Vansteenkiste, 2018). Because many employers desire employees with English proficiency certificates issued by universities, students and their families remain strongly invested in test performance. By definition this means that the testing system is high-stakes in that the attached reward is upward mobility for families (Zhang, 2011). In other words, the *gao kao* for many students is not only significantly critical because it grants access into university, but because it is also seen as a way for securing a well-paid future (Muthanna & Sang, 2015).

Low income and limited seats further exacerbate the examination to employment link for students and their families. Income disparities between rural and urban areas means that rural students work especially hard to succeed on exams as a way to escape impoverishment and stigmatization (Yu, Chen, Levesque-Bristol, & Vansteenkiste, 2018). In addition, only a limited number of students get into universities, as universities cannot meet all the demands for study (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006). As a result, this puts economically disadvantaged students under even greater pressure to do well.

However, hope that this link works—that high exam scores lead to admission into key universities, which in turn leads to gainful employment and salaries—is what keeps society optimistic. Arguably if done justly, it maintains social stability and keeps long-

term peace for the county (Zhang, 2011). Particularly for disadvantaged students, the link between exams and employment is like a long tunnel but with a light at the end.

In critical reflection of this assertion, further research shows key universities do indeed link to higher incomes. In fact, higher income is strongly associated with graduation from prestigious universities (Yu, Chen, Levesque-Bristol, & Vansteenkiste, 2018). In further support, a comparative economics study on attending elite colleges in China uses data from the year 2010 on fresh college graduates (Li, Meng, Shi, & Wu, 2012). It shows that students who attended elite colleges do make higher wage premiums—as high as 26.4% and falling to 10.7% once more variables are controlled. As such, this research supports that graduating from prestigious universities leading to gainful employment is more than mere myth.

Negatives of the Exam System

With this background information established, further understandings can be analyzed and investigated as they relate to my research question. As such, part of the purpose for this literature review, is to know why interest previously has not been a prominent or relevant component in a Chinese English classroom. Based on my review of the literature, there seem to be two prevailing reasons: 1) the high-stakes exam system is primarily externally oriented (Yu, Chen, Levesque-Bristol, & Vansteenkiste, 2018), therefore not internally; and 2) negative washback from exams creates a policy-practice gap (Yan, 2012). Therefore, reforms which should allow for innovation, such as the integration of interest, do not (Chen, 2006; Jin & Cortazzi, 2002; Wu, 2001). Each of these categories will be further elaborated upon.

External orientation of the exam system curbs interest. The high-stakes exam system is externally oriented (Yu, Chen, Levesque-Bristol, & Vansteenkiste, 2018). This statement can be evidenced as true through: declarative evidence about the exam's external orientation (Yu, Chen, Levesque-Bristol, & Vansteenkiste, 2018), psychological evidence as students experience the exam system (Yu, Chen, Levesque-Bristol, & Vansteenkiste, 2018; Zhang, 2011; Zhao, Selman, & Haste, 2015), and evidence that supports lack of autonomy (Yu, Chen, Levesque-Bristol, & Vansteenkiste, 2018). All of these factors contribute to how the external orientation of the exam system curbs interest in the classroom.

Declarative evidence for external orientation of the exam. China's high stakes testing system is externally oriented, thus thwarting intrinsic motivation (Yu, Chen, Levesque-Bristol, & Vansteenkiste, 2018), in which interest is factor of intrinsic motivation (Wigfield, 1996; Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997). The idea of external rewards for learning dates back to ancient history from the Song Dynasty, in which a popular poem called "Quan Xue Shi" written by an emperor says, "In books there will be golden mansions, in books there will be beautiful women" (Yu, Chen, Levesque-Bristol, & Vansteenkiste, 2018). Through the centuries, external motivation orientation has remained a salient feature of high stakes testing, including the *gao kao* where performance outcomes come in the form of both rewards and punishments (Yu, Chen, Levesque-Bristol, & Vansteenkiste, 2018). As an example, a report from the Chinese Adolescents Research Center outlines some of these external motivators such as studying: to get a good job, to please parents, to gain other's respect, and to outrank others in exam performance (Sun, 2007). This same study reports that only 30% of adolescents between

ages 6 to 14 study out of interest (Sun, 2007). These statistics show that within the

Chinese high-stakes testing system students learn primarily for external, non-self-

determined reasons, not internal self-determined ones (Yan & He, 2012; Yu, Chen,

Levesque-Bristol, & Vansteenkiste, 2018). As such, external motivation has a strong

influence on Chinese students.

Psychological evidence for external orientation of the exam. Not only is the exam

system externally oriented, students also perceive it that way. This is evidenced by the

thwarted psychological needs of students (Zhao, Selman, & Haste, 2015) where negative

affect is not considered a product of intrinsic motivation (Hidi & Renninger, 2006), and

therefore neither a product of interest. The *gao kao* is widely blamed by multiple

stakeholders for its toxic levels of stress (Zhao, Selman, & Haste, 2015). Immense exam

pressure injures both the physical and mental health of the students (Zhang, 2011; Zhao,

Selman, & Haste, 2015; Yu, Chen, Levesque-Bristol, & Vansteenkiste, 2018). This

pressure, especially in preparation for the *gao kao*, has made some high schools a

battleground for admission into key universities (Zhang & Bray, 2016). An anonymous

student in 2009 shares his experience (as cited in Zhao, Selman, & Haste, 2015):

> *"I was helpless, because of the stress of the exam, the sense of inferiority, the*
>
> *feeling of uncertainty about the future, and all the care and high expectations that*
>
> *only made me more stressed." (p. 2)*

This student's voice, along with the voices of above-mentioned researchers, shows that

high stress is a common effect of the Chinese exam system.

Personal testimonies like this foreshadow other study results. In 2010, a research

study conducted on 2,191 Chinese children ages 9-12 years old from urban and rural

settings found that 81% of students were worried about exams a lot, 63% were afraid of punishment by teachers, and 73% were physically punished by parents for lax effort (Hesketh, Zhen, Lu, Dong, Jun, & Xing, 2010). In addition, over one-third of students reported having psychosomatic symptoms at least once a week (Hesketh, Zhen, Lu, Dong, Jun, & Xing, 2010). All of this leads to an exam system that produces graduates with high scores, low ability, and poor health (Zhao, Selman, & Haste, 2015). Zhao (2014) sums it up by saying, "Chinese educators' struggle to change the system and Chinese students' struggle to survive it" (p. 1). And indeed, this does seem to be the current state of affairs for the Chinese examination system.

Lack of autonomy as evidence for external orientation of the exam. Domination of exams also leads to lack of autonomy (Yu, Chen, Levesque-Bristol, & Vansteenkiste, 2018). Domination of exams in students' lives negatively impact the pursuit of learning for interest. Most notably, students spend so much time on exams that there is little energy left for developing autonomous direction-giving identity, inner compass, or self-discovery of intrinsic motivators (Yu, Chen, Levesque-Bristol, & Vansteenkiste, 2018). In this way, to learn without autonomy means to hinder the cultivation of interest in the classroom, as autonomy is related to intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 1985; Vallerand, 1997).

Washback from exams curbs interest. Students are not the only ones feeling exam pressure—teachers are too (Zhang, 2011). Teachers feel the pressure and stress of making sure their students achieve high test scores. Just as students are ranked according to their test scores, so teachers are ranked by the scores of their students, and administrative districts amongst other districts in the city (Zhao, Selman, & Haste, 2015).

Hence, teachers carry out instructional practices that teach to the test (Yan & He, 2012) and schools "blindly" seek a high rate of graduates entering key schools (Zhang, 2011). This cycle is an example of washback.

I purpose that high stakes testing diminishes learning for interest in the classroom because the tests impact *how* teachers teach. The impact of a test on teaching is washback (Bailey, 1999). Traditional teaching that emphasizes exam obsession, grammar-translation, teacher-centeredness, emphasis on language knowledge with minimal attention to developing students' communicative competence, is a result of teachers' concern about their students' exam results; this is washback (Yan & He, 2012).

To explain washback more thoroughly, several aspects can be described. Washback can be positive or negative. Positive washback leads to learning—a feedback loop between teaching and testing where both are beneficially influencing and informing the other (Bailey, 1999). This occurs when tests and teaching are highly aligned (Chen, 2006). Likewise, when tests and teaching are misaligned, there is negative washback. Either type of washback can cause teachers and learners do things that they would not otherwise do to promote or inhibit learning (Messick, 1996). This last sentence by Messick (1996) is significant in understanding my research. It again demonstrates that washback does impact student learning (Bailey, 1999) as the test enhances or demotes how students learn.

Being able to identify the construct of washback helps shed light on the crux between government reform policy and daily teaching practices. Government reform policies by their nature should illuminate a pathway for interest into the classroom. Unfortunately, they do so ineffectively because washback creates a policy-practice gap,

or implementation gap between reforms and reality in the classroom (Yan, 2012; Yan & He, 2012). This implementation gap can be investigated further.

The implementation gap emerges from a range of interrelated contextual factors occurring simultaneously. These factors include: teacher inclination towards traditional teaching (a teacher-centered, text-book based, transmission approach), learner reluctance towards English or student-centered approaches, lack of school support, pedagogy/policy inconsistencies, and most importantly the "examination culture that preys on the whole education system and society" (Yan & He, 2012, p.437). Therefore, Zhang (2011) states that high-stakes testing erodes quality education. Going further, high-stakes testing is stated as stunting students' deep learning and development into well-rounded individuals (Yu, Chen, Levesque-Bristol, & Vansteenkiste, 2018). This is clear evidence of negative washback from high-stakes testing.

With a clear policy to practice gap and negative washback, top-down Chinese educational reforms having been largely ineffective in reducing the debilitating effects of academic stress in school-aged youth (Zhao, Selman, & Haste, 2015). However, this paper offers two possible ways forward. To alter this, Elton and Laurillard (1979) say "the quickest way to change student learning is to change the assessment system" (p. 100). For students in Chinese public schools, this decision is largely in the hands of the government. Therefore, for teachers, washback effects by external tests should be considered when an innovative curriculum is introduced (Chen, 2006). As such, teachers should carefully consider what they can do to integrate interest into the classroom within the construct of an exam-oriented culture.

Misalignment between classroom practice and assessment is why the principle of constructive alignment (Biggs, 1996; Biggs & Tang, 2010) is quite possibly urgently relevant to the Chinese context. Constructive alignment provides a method different from traditional teaching where teachers have previously transmitted knowledge to students commonly through lectures, demonstrations, and exams. Instead, constructive alignment shifts student activity from passively receiving information to *doing* something with it. In other words, the student constructs meaning by being an active participate in their own learning process, not the teacher dominating. From there, the teacher aligns teaching with learning activities, with assessment tasks, and with intended learning outcomes (Biggs, 1996; Biggs & Tang, 2010). In this way, the problems of misalignment can be avoided.

In hindsight, constructive alignment could have avoided cases like the city of Nanjing in 2004. However, as history shows, Nanjing blamed the pursuit of "quality education" (ie. implementation of new curriculum reforms) for students' low scores on college entrance exams (Zhang, 2011). This event led to the firing of many teachers and administrators and an eventual public apology from the school for low student performance. After the event, the districted recommitted to seeking high test scores (Zhang, 2011). This case study shows how reforms can become ineffective, how washback impacts teaching, and what can happen to a community when there is misalignment.

In review of this section on washback, the research presented here is not meant to negate the fact that much progress has been made in Chinese basic education; however, much improvement is still needed (Lu & Liu, 2012). In addition, washback is indeed an influential force in China and gives truth to the statement that a test's impact extends to

society and throughout its educational system (Bachman & Palmer, 1996). Although

reforms have attempted to improve the quality of education, high-stakes testing remains a

major hurdle for innovative curriculum and interest to overcome.

Benefits of the Exam System

Having stated negatives of the exam system, it should not go unnoticed that there

are some benefits too. Stating the benefits of the exam system as part of this literature

review is important for promoting a balanced view to the reader and for countering

potential hidden bias.

While there are scholars who feel strongly against the examination system, other

educators warn against totally demonizing it (Zhao, Selman, & Haste, 2015). On the

larger scale of society and policy, there are benefits to the *gao kao,* and there are reasons

why it is seen favorably by citizens. From a historical perspective, China has had a long

history of a *keju* testing system, where this system was seen as a way to create a level

playing field for all students who need to compete against each other in order to move up

along the hierarchical ladder of society (Zeng, 1999). The *keju* system advocates

traditional Confucian values of acquisition of skills and seriousness about tasks,

hierarchical relations, obligations to family and the group, and giving or preserving of

'face' (Bond & Hwang, 1986).

In addition, there are other practical benefits of the *gao kao*. First, the *gao kao* has

proven to lead to high achievement in test scores (Yu, Chen, Levesque-Bristol, &

Vansteenkiste, 2018). Chinese students consistently rank high in mathematics, reading,

and science according to the cross-national Program for International Student

Achievement (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2013). Also,

parents show increased involvement in their child's academics and likewise students in their time spent on homework (Yu, Chen, Levesque-Bristol, & Vansteenkiste, 2018). Students also have a higher perceived importance of schoolwork and test scores (Yu, Chen, Levesque-Bristol, & Vansteenkiste, 2018). Furthermore, the *gao kao* does provide informative feedback on student performance (Yu, Chen, Levesque-Bristol, & Vansteenkiste, 2018). These are more visible benefits of the *gao kao*.

There are also other hidden benefits to the *gao kao*. Because China's educational system struggles to protect itself from institutional corruption and bribery, the *gao kao* by many people is accepted as relatively objective and fair (Zhao, Selman, & Haste, 2015). Considering that in the year 2013 alone 9.4 million students received exam scores (McPherron, 2016), it is commendable to have this supported perception of fairness. Wanting to retain this, some educators fear removal of the *gao kao* would inevitably lead to an unfair selection process of students into key schools (Zhao, Selman, & Haste, 2015). Thus, these are some of the benefits of the *gao kao* and exam system.

Summary

Overall, this section has captured the essence of the examination system and high-stakes testing in China. Topics have been elaborated upon as they relate to background information on the system, negatives of the system, and benefits of the system. Other factors such as the external orientation of the exam and washback have been detailed as they expounded upon the larger topics. Most importantly, this section helps inform my research question by establishing the examination system of high-stakes testing as a major underpinning that eventually, and inevitably, affects the day-to-day classroom practice where interest is often left waiting outside the classroom door.
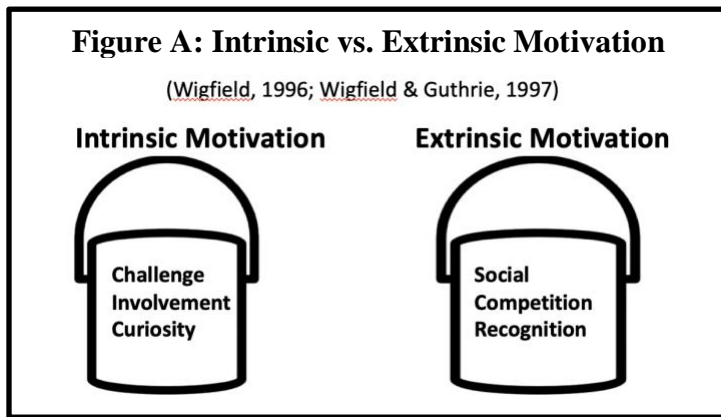
L2 Motivation

This section will focus on motivation. Motivation has long been a topic of conversation in the educational environment as it can be predictive of L2 learning outcomes (Noels, Pelletier, Clément & Vallerand, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 1985). L2 motivation is a broad topic, and scholars have done much research on it over the years. Research in this area will be discussed in order to build up background understanding on motivation, as it is the larger construct that embodies interest. In addition, motivation will aid in understanding implications for student learning outcomes. My research question is: *How do high interest texts mediate Chinese middle school students' reading comprehension?*

Background Information on L2 Motivation

As scholars have discussed motivation, there seem to be several generalizations that rise to the surface. First, scholars construct different frameworks from which to build an understanding of motivation. Reference to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, in some form, usually surface to some degree within these frameworks. Secondly, scholars list and emphasize different orientations towards motivation; numerous orientations have been listed over the years. And furthermore, history shows reoccurring mention of autonomy as a factor. Over time scholars have supported or countered each other's ideas. They have built and refined frameworks, at times rejected and refuted claims, added and sorted motivational orientations, and at other times uncovered past research that may have gone underemphasized. These ideas will be elaborated upon.

To start, in 1996 Wigfield and Guthrie created a framework where intrinsic and extrinsic motivation were put into two categorically different buckets (Wigfield, 1996;

Wigfield, & Guthrie, 1997). They added different motivational variables to those buckets,

which helped determine where a student's motivation lies. Variables included intrinsic

motivators such as challenge, involvement, and curiosity, in addition to extrinsic

motivators such as social, competition, and recognition (Wigfield, & Guthrie, 1997). See

Figure A, a graphic which I have designed.

Figure A: Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Motivation
(Wigfield, 1996; Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997)

Intrinsic Motivation
Challenge
Involvement
Curiosity

Extrinsic Motivation
Social
Competition
Recognition

Due to the nature of intrinsic motivation, these characteristics are desirable and

important in the classroom because they are synonymous with growth promoting values,

which in turn predict well-being (Yu, Chen, Levesque-Bristol, & Vansteenkiste, 2018).

Thus, in comparing extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, intrinsic motivation can be

considered the most important factor for predicting a student's success (Wigfield, 1996;

Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997). Supporting this is a motivational study conducted on 4th and

5th grade European American and African American students (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997).

Different aspects of reading motivation were explored, and results showed that intrinsic

motivation predicts amount and breadth of reading more strongly than extrinsic

motivation (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997).

Moving on, not all scholars agreed that intrinsic and extrinsic motivations were categorically different. As such, the intrinsic versus extrinsic framework for motivation was reconceptualized (Noels, Pelletier, Clément & Vallerand, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 1985; Vallerand, 1997). In 1985, Ryan and Deci used the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) as a base for building their principles on motivation. They placed intrinsic and extrinsic motivation on a continuum. On one end is external influence regulating behavior and on the other end is self-motived determination (Ryan & Deci, 1985). Vallerand (1997) also went on to use the principles of SDT adding three additional orientations to extrinsic motivation: external regulation, introjected regulation, and identified regulation. These categories allowed for the classification of the extent to which behavior was internalized into the self-concept (Vallerand, 1997). Continuing to work with the principles of STD, Vallerand and colleagues further dissected intrinsic motivation, in which they created a three-part taxonomy: knowledge, accomplishment, and stimulation (Vallerand, Pelletier, Blais, Briere, Senecal, & Vallieres, 1993). These orientations for intrinsic motivation can produce stimulation of pleasure, satisfaction, excitement, appreciation, and fun (Vallerand, Pelletier, Blais, Briere, Senecal & Vallieres, 1993). The combined framework and motivational orientations of these scholars can be visualized as a scale as seen in Figure B, a graphic I created.

Figure B: Motivation Using the Construct of SDT

Self-Determination Theory, Ryan & Deci, 1985

Extrinsic Motivation			Intrinsic motivation

Low autonomy
Low internalism

High autonomy
High internalism

External regulation	Introjected regulation	Integrated regulation	Knowledge
			Accomplishment
			Stimulation
Vallerand, 1997			Vallerand, Pelletier, Blais, Briere, Senecal & Vallieres, 1993

Apart from the above-mentioned scholars, there were additional L2 motivational researchers exploring other ways of orientating towards motivation. This research included scholars Gardner and Lambert. They identified two orientations towards motivation: integrative and instrumental (Gardner & Lambert, 1959; Gardner & Lambert, 1972). Integrative orientation is about the desire to learn an L2 in order to have contact with or identify with members from the L2 community. Instrumental motivation is about the desire to learn an L2 to achieve a practical goal (ie. job advancement or course goal). Their conclusion was that the greater the integrative orientation, the greater the motivational effort, which leads to greater L2 competence (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). Thus, if motivation is pictured as fuel for learning a second language, Gardner and Lambert's research can be visualized as seen in Figure C, a graphic that I created.

Figure C: Integrative vs. Instrumental Motivation

Gardner and Lambert (1972): Fuels for motivation

Integrative=
better for L2 acquisition   Instrumental

High power   Low power
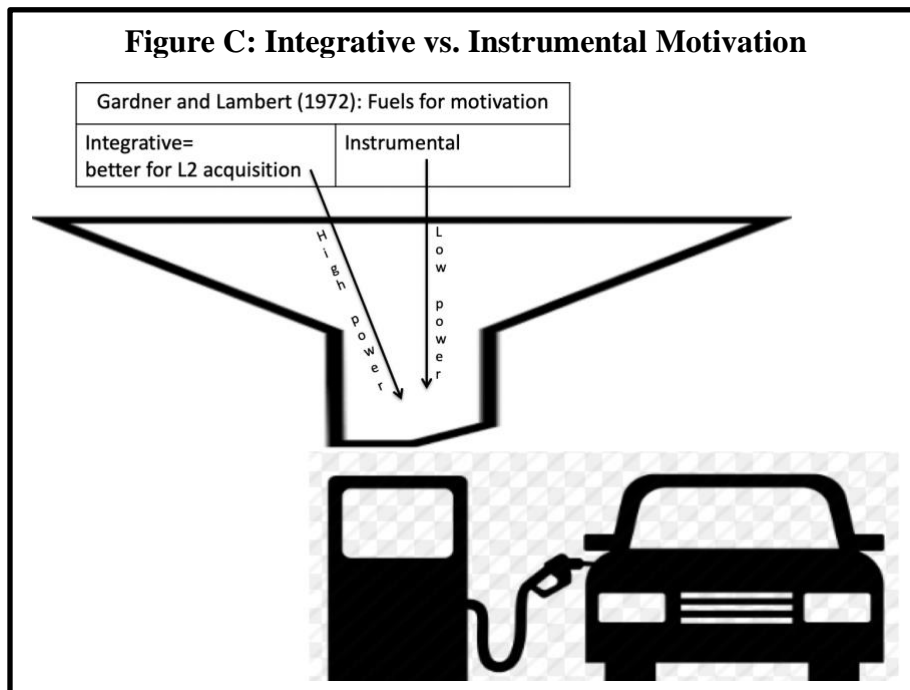
Later, motivational researchers Clément and Kruidenier (1983) slightly refuted

the above-mentioned work of Gardner and Lambert. They claimed that integrative

motivation only applies to multicultural contexts with a dominant group (Clément &

Kruidenier, 1983). For example, if an English-speaking American was living in China, he

or she could experience integrative motivation. However, if the American was living in

America and learning Chinese, integrative motivation decreases in relevancy. Therefore,

integrative motivation is critical but not fundamental to L2 acquisition (Clément &

Kruidenier, 1983). In addition to this claim, Clément and Kruidenier (1983) also went on

to add additional orientations for motivation including travel, friendship, knowledge, and

instrumental. Thus, Clément and Kruidenier (1983) changed and refined Gardner and

Lambert's instrumental vs. integrative motivation construct (1959, 1972).

They were not the only scholars to do so. Motivational researcher Bonny Norton

Peirce (1995) brought in social theory to the construct of integrative motivation. Peirce

(1995) argued that social identities and power structures, which are frequently inequitable, affect relations between language learners and target speakers. Therefore, the learner's social identities and historical context determines his or her relationship to the target language. As such, the learner does not just possess a certain amount of motivation, integrative or instrumental, but rather has a certain amount of investment in the complex relationship between their social identities and the target language and target speakers (Peirce, 1995). This seminal work by Peirce was significant because she argued replacing the term *motivation* with *investment*, as investment captures the complexities between social identity and learner context.

Finally, reappearing as a factor in L2 motivational research is autonomy. In 1985, Ryan and Deci built principles on motivation around the use of the SDT framework. The belief was that intrinsic and extrinsic motivations were on a scale of non-self-determined and self-determined behavior (Ryan & Deci, 1985). In this way self-determination and autonomy were positively correlated (Ryan & Deci, 1985; Vallerand, 1997). For example, a student who reads for the joy of reading has intrinsic motivation, thus the student is reading because he or she has the internal desire to read. The desire to read is self-determined, and thus the student's autonomy is exercised. Later in 1991, Ryan strengthened the explanatory power of autonomy as a factor by demonstrating that it is a basic human need—a psychological mechanism for motivation.

Despite this, in 1999, Iyengar and Lepper downplayed the role of autonomy in Asian students stating that Asians were in fact less motivated by autonomy and choice. Yet, in that same year, Littlewood refuted research claiming East Asians were unsuited to autonomy (Littlewood, 1999). He claimed that East Asians have *autonomous*

interdependence (Littlewood, 1999). Due to sources of influence in Asian culture, such as

their collectivist society and strong attachment to in-groups and harmony, they approach

autonomy slightly differently than western countries (Littlewood, 1999). Thus, despite

differences in their approach toward autonomy, autonomy is still a relevant factor in their

learning motivation (Littlewood, 1999).

Then in 2000, Noels and colleagues went back to the SDT framework and

reconfirmed that it was a reliable and valid framework. They also stated that by linking

motivational factors to psychological needs, there was considerable explanatory power in

determining student learning motivation and in determining which variables of

motivational orientations were more reliable and relevant (Noels, Pelletier, Clément &

Vallerand, 2000). In short, autonomy remains and has been revived as a relevant factor in

motivation theory. I have paraphrased this information as seen in Figure D.

Figure D: Relationship between SDT and Autonomy		
Year	**Scholars**	**Research Claims**
1985	Ryan and Deci	Self-Determination Theory. Motivation can be determined to the degree that it is self-determined, or self-regulated. Thus, self-determination and autonomy are positively correlated.
1991	Ryan	Autonomy is a basic human need.
1999	Ivengar and Lepper	Asians are less motivated by autonomy and choice.
1999	Littlewood	Refuted claims that autonomy is unsuited to East Asians. East Asians have 'autonomous interdependence.'
2000	Noels, Pelletier, Clément & Vallerand	Linking motivation to psychological needs offers considerable explanatory power. As such, they agreed that autonomy as a psychological mechanism is a relevant variable to student learning motivation and that the SDT is a reliable and valid framework.

In summary, L2 motivation research has led scholars to have a firmer grip on what variables and frameworks help motivate students to learn. As such, better constructs and orientations for understanding motivation and learning have been refined and elevated. As Gardner (1985) states, "understanding where the roots of motivation lie are important for understanding where to pour the water" (p. 15).

Interest

With a firm grounding in a basic understanding of motivation, a slight shift and narrower focus can be taken towards interest. Interest has previously been defined in this paper under key terms and has been discussed in relation to high interest texts. Interest will be further discussed in terms of affect, promotion of motivation in general and specific ways, and in terms of topic interest. Interest is significant for this paper because it is the key concept for my action research.

Affect as a Component of Interest and as a Building Block for Interest

Interest consists of an affective component. Affect refers to positive emotions following engagement in something interesting (Hidi & Renninger, 2006). Affect is a critical and unique component of interest separating it from other motivational factors (Hidi & Renninger, 2006). An investigative study done on Hong Kong, Singaporean, and English students aged nine to ten years old, shows that attitude (ie. affect) and attainment are linked (et al. Tse, Lam, Lam, Chan, & Loh, 2006). Results show that attitudes and confidence are significantly related to achievement test scores (Tse, Lam, Lam, Chan, & Loh, 2006). In other words, affective factors influence students' motivation to master reading. More importantly, affective factors are important for positive recollection of feelings about a previous engagement, which thus provides the opportunity to develop a

student's interest further (Lipstein & Renninger, 2006). As such, if a student enjoyed his or her previous reading experience, he or she will be inclined to look forward to the next reading experience. Therefore, positive emotions, attitude, confidence, and previous engagement experiences are key in developing a learner's interest and are related to higher achievement.

Appealing to Interest to Promote Motivation

One of the ten commandments for motivating language learners is to make the class interesting (Dörnyei & Csizér, 1998). Teachers can make a positive contribution to students' motivation to learn if classrooms are places that students enjoy coming to because the content is interesting and relevant to their age and level ability, the learning goals are challenging yet manageable and clear, and the atmosphere is supportive (Lightbrown & Spada, 2013). In addition, teachers can encourage students' engagement in the course, and his or her long-term value placed on learning the language by appealing to a student's task motivation (ie. a learner's interest and willingness to expand effort on any classroom task or activity) (Dörnyei & Kormos, 2000). For this reason, integration of interest into the classroom is desirable, beneficial, and valuable for energizing student and class motivation.

Interest Enhances Literacy Motivation

Interest can be used as a motivational tool particularly to help struggling or reluctant readers (Jobe, Sakari, & Sakari, Dayton, 1999). A reluctant or struggling reader may be a student who does not read because he or she holds a belief that he or she is a slow reader, is too busy, would rather do something else, thinks it is boring, or feels it is easier to watch a video or TV (Jobe, Sakari, & Sakari, Dayton, 1999). For these readers,

high interest books can be used as a tool to shift some of these beliefs (Jobe, Sakari, &

Sakari, Dayton, 1999). For example, reading about new experiences, especially

frightening ones in safe ways, can produce a pleasurable experience (Jobe, Sakari, &

Sakari, & Dayton, 1999). Through a good book, a reader can experience excitement,

adventure, and escape from the pressures of reality allowing the forces of their

imagination to roam (Jobe, Sakari, & Sakari, & Dayton, 1999). In this way, interest can

enhance reading motivation.

Situational and Individual Interest Stimulate and Develop Interest

Moving from more general to specific, individual and situational interests offer

another framework and list of factors to consider when stimulating and developing

interest. For the purposes of this paper, these factors will be put into a context of

stimulating interest via a text. First, situational and individual interest will be defined.

From there, different factors for invoking interest will be discussed.

Situational interest refers to attention that is triggered or generated in the moment

by environmental content, which may be familiar or new, which may or may not last over

time (Hidi & Baird, 1988; Renninger, 2000). Situational interest focuses on

environmental factors to promote or catch student interest thereby producing excitement,

attention, or interest that is likely temporary (Alexander, Kulikowich, & Jetton, 1994).

In contrast, individual interest refers to more of a predisposition to reengage

particular content over time (Renninger, 2000; Renninger & Wozniak, 1985). Individual

interest is associated with long-term personal investment in a topic or domain

(Alexander, Kulikowich, & Jetton, 1994), which likely increases one's knowledge,

perceived value, and positive feelings (Hidi, & Harackiewicz, 2000). Individual interest

is almost always internally driven. Furthermore, individual interest is notably more apt to have enduring, positive, even significant impacts on academic performance as compared to situational interest (Alexander, Kulikowich, & Jetton, 1994).

Specific factors can help develop individual and situational interest (Bergin, 2010). Suggested are several ways a teacher can choose a text by focusing on individual factors: cultural relevancy to the students, accessibility for students to identify with main characters in the text and their ethnicity, stimulation of background knowledge that students have on the topic, and establishment of a need to acquire more knowledge in order to resolve a hole in schema (Bergin, 2010). On the other hand, there are suggested ways a teacher can choose a text by focusing on situational factors. Situational factors mean focusing on structural characteristics or content features (Bergin, 2010). Structural characteristics include: novelty, intensity, ambiguity, and narrative genres (Ainley, Hidi, & Berndorff, 2002; Bergin, 2010). Content features include: human activity, intensity factors, and life themes such as danger, death, sex, or scandal (Ainley, Hidi, & Berndorff, 2002; Bergin, 2010). As a caution, situational interest should be invoked with care because it can interfere with processing of the text if details become too seductive, thus pulling attention away from more central content (Alexander, Kulikowich, & Jetton, 1994). As such, when stimulating interest, educators should be aware of the type of interest being activated.

Using Topic Interest for Learning a Text

In a like manner, topic interest can contribute to learning a text. Topic interest is the level of interest triggered when a specific topic is presented (Ainley, Hidi, & Berndorff, 1999; Ainley, Hidi, & Berndorff, 2002). Topic interest can be triggered when

a teacher presents a student with a word, title, or paragraph that represents the topic.

Topic interest also contains aspects of both individual and situational interest. Going

further, a student with well-developed individual interest in the content will increase the

likelihood that individual factors are contributing to topic interest (Ainley, Hidi, &

Berndorff, 1999).

Topic interest is important because it is one's personal investment in the topic that

stimulates depth of processing in the context and thus enhances the subject-matter

learning (Alexander, Kulikowich, & Jetton, 1994). This is supported by the following

studies. An investigative study conducted on students at two schools in Canada found that

the higher the relative interest in the story topic, the more negative influences of

challenge were buffered against (Fulmer & Frijters, 2011). Their study showed that

higher interests in the story topic meant enjoyment in the task and persistence were

greater sustained (Fulmer & Frijters, 2011). Another study was conducted on Australian

and Canadian 8th and 9th grade students, where it was reported that topic interest

positively influenced students' affect (Ainley, Hidi, & Berndorff, 2002). This positive

influence on affect increased the degree of students' persistence, where persistence

directly influenced reading comprehension. Thus, topic interest is beneficial to promoting

reading comprehension.

In a similar vein to topic interest, the genre of a text, particularly narratives, can

also play a role worth mentioning briefly. Narrative texts are a recommended genre for

student learning (Alexander, Kulikowich, & Jetton, 1994). Reasons include: specific

aspects of narrative structures catch reader attention (Alexander, Kulikowich, & Jetton,

1994), and narratives as a whole are natural a part of human nature (Fitrianingsih, 2017).

First, aspects of narrative story structures can capture learner attention when they are linked to main ideas. This aids the reader in comprehension (this is in contrast to expositions). Second, narrative stories are a natural part of human nature because this type of storytelling helps a person make sense of the world (Fitrianingsih, 2017). For example, storytelling is a part of ancient Chinese history (Yang, 2011). Emperors were told stories as a way of understanding what brought about the ruin or prosperity of a country and as a warning to be careful about their conducts. This method of linking morals to a story matches my experience in the classroom. On school tests, it is common for a reading passage to contain a moral. Likewise, when students write their own stories on tests, encouragement is given to conclude their story with a lesson learned. Therefore, narrative genres can be viewed with some preference for classroom learning purposes.

Summary

In review, this section has exhibited the topic of L2 motivation. A background on L2 motivation was presented as a means for shifting focus more directly onto interest. Interest was broken down into different areas including affect, interest and literacy motivation, interest in terms of individual and situational interest, and topic interest. As a more specific understanding on interest was developed in this section, greater focus was put on how interest can be applied to the constructional elements of a text and interest as a motivation for learning a text.

On a whole, the research presented in this paper shows that the construct of motivation along with interest is beneficial and important in the learning process of a text. However, I believe some educators within my local context still continue to wrestle with the idea of integrating high interest texts into the classroom. I would like to purpose

several factors for speculating why some educators may remain wary or sluggish towards integration of interest into the classroom. This is important as this will lead to the need for my research. Areas for speculation include lack of a comprehensive understanding of motivation, and fear of nonconformity.

First, perhaps some educators mistakenly believe that motivation and interest are simply something one possesses or not, and, if one does not possess it, it is nearly impossible to cultivate. This belief is untrue and unfair (Peirce, 1995). When one conceptualizes a student as motivated or unmotivated, one lacks a comprehensive understanding of the learner (Peirce, 1995). There is not justice if the learner is thought of as a unified, ahistorical person with an identity that does not change over time (Peirce, 1995). It is more accurate to say that sometimes students are motivated, sometimes unmotivated, in one context motivated, and in another context unmotivated (Peirce, 1995). As stated previously, rather than use the term 'motivation,' Peirce argues that it is more productive to use the term 'investment.' Investment offers a powerful construct for capturing a learner's complex identity within the context that he or she is learning (Peirce, 1995).

Furthermore, fear of nonconformity could perhaps be another factor as to why an educator is not inclined to change his or her instructional behavior. Stereotypically, in a Chinese context, conformity plays a larger role than it does in the West. This is in part due to the collectivist nature of Chinese society where first priority is given to the group, and there is reluctance to standout as an individual (Littlewood, 1999). On the other hand, for those that do want to proactively bring about change, there can be many contextual constraints professionally and psychologically that challenge teachers and impede the

facilitation and implementation of reform into a teacher's classroom (Yan, 2012). Yan, a scholar and researcher on new curriculum reform in China states, "we can only change in small way" (Yan, 2012, p. 431). Likewise, within my own local community, whether the glass is seen as half full or half empty, I believe many other educator advocates would agree that we also can only change in a small way.

In a nutshell, lack of a comprehensive understanding of motivation and fear of nonconformity offer suggestions as to why interest as a construct for enhancing learner achievement may be sluggishly entering the Chinese classroom. This gives confirmation supporting why further research on interest and use of high interest texts in a Chinese context is necessary for the field of EFL, particularly research using mainland Chinese participants. Research is needed so that data can be analyzed and discussed in terms of a Chinese-orientation. For this paper, my research question is: *How do high interest texts mediate Chinese middle school students' reading comprehension?*

Classroom Reading Materials

Literature used in the classroom can positively influence the language development of school students (Morrow, 1992). Literature presents natural language, language at its finest, fosters vocabulary development in context, promotes thinking, contributes to emotional development of a child, and fosters positive interpersonal and intercultural attitudes (Ghosn, 2002). Therefore, careful attention should be given to the reading materials used in the classroom.

This part of the literature review will be quite specific to the materials of my current employment context. These materials include: the government textbook, the Good English series, and hi-lo books. A careful description and analysis of these reading

materials will be presented along with some of the unmet needs these materials ensue. Some of these unmet needs overlap with common student complaints among Asians, as reported by Qian (2011). These common complaints about reading materials include: difficulty, overly-long, beyond the student's reading level, and outmoded and impractical themes that bore students and discourage further reading (Qian, 2011). Both of these aspects about reading materials, unmet needs and common complaints, give further support as to why my research is needed. By taking a deeper look at reading materials used in the classroom, I hope to gain meaningful insights that will help inform my research question which is: *How do high interest texts mediate Chinese middle school students' reading comprehension?*

Description and Analysis of the Government Textbook

The government textbook is broken down into grade level seven and eight, volumes one and two. Grade 7 books are: *义务教育教课书英语 七年级 上册 (Compulsory Education Textbook English Seventh Grade Book Volume 1)*, and *义务教育教课书 英语 七年级 下册 (Compulsory Education Textbook English Seventh Grade Book Volume 2)*. Grade 8 books are: *义务教育教课书英语 八年级 上册 (Compulsory Education Textbook English Eighth Grade Book Volume 1)*, and *义务教育教课书英语 八年级 下册 (Compulsory Education Textbook English Eighth Grade Book Volume 2)*. The government textbook was published in 2013 by the Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press (FLTRP) Beijing and Macmillan Publishers (China) Ltd. The FLTRP was founded in 1979 by the Beijing Foreign Studies University and is the largest foreign language publisher in China (Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 2017). Government textbooks are approved by the Ministry of Education

and are revised over the years in order to accommodate new curriculum standards (Li, 2012). Reading passages in the book are short targeted selections a with word count that does not generally go over 280 words; the length is geared towards simulating what would be seen on a test. Topics are a combination of fiction and nonfiction genres, which address a variety of areas such as feelings, experiences, outer space, health, cartoons, hobbies, etc.

An informative description and analysis of the government textbook layout and content are presented as follows. Starting from the cover, the book features a basic colored pencil sketch outlining ordinary school objects, including a boom box and cassette tapes (see Figure 1). I believe that to many Beijing students this cover might present as minimally engaging due to the impact quality of the photo and the outmoded display of technology. Attention to the quality of this cover photo should be noticed because

**Figure E:
The Government
Textbook**
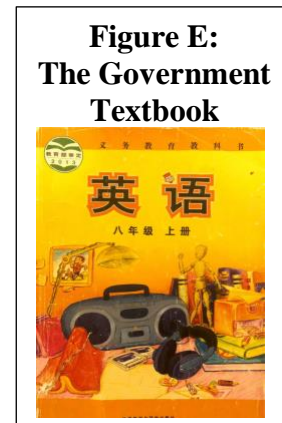
children born into the first years of the twenty-first century are likely to possess a richer and more deft understanding of visual imagery than other generations, and they are expected to function in this kind of world (Lewis, 2001). Furthermore, topic interest stimulates depth of processing (Alexander, Kulikowich, & Jetton, 1994). In this case, the cover photo may be struggling to positively stimulate students' topic interest in the book.

Moving past the cover of the government textbook, the first chapter plays out a dialogue between a teacher and students discussing how English is learned. The student Daming suggests, "Why not write down our mistakes?" and then later adds, "English stories are so interesting." While these bits of the conversation could be argued as

academically purposeful, I feel that those comments read as somewhat artificial. This conversation gives a sense of promoting government purposes, such as morals concerning good student study behavior and the virtues of learning English, more so than they seem to reflect dialogue that mirrors realistic preteen interactions of Beijing's youth. I believe noticing this lack of native authenticity in the writing is significant because it shows the need for additional reading material in the classroom. It shows the need for authentic literature as a means for providing motivating and meaningful context for language learning (Ghosn, 2002) and a need for learners to have opportunities to interact with rich, authentic examples of foreign language (Mourao, 2009).

Continuing through the content of the government textbook, later characters give their friend Lingling a dictionary book for her birthday to which she is delighted to receive. Again, from the perspective of young metropolitan youth, this scenario of gifting a paper dictionary may not be likely to occur nowadays due to advances in technology. Mentioning this lack of display of current technology in the textbook twice now, it is worth saying that during my informal survey with my 8th grade students in spring of 2018, they stated that modern technology is a genre they are interested in. This then suggests that by engaging in themes of modern technology, the teacher could tap into a resource that students are already naturally interested in. On the other hand, by not doing this, the teacher and textbook are likely missing a worthwhile opportunity. As teachers, we should be keen to listen to the voices of our students.

Description and Analysis of the Good English Book Series

For the purposes of this paper, only the Good English readers for grades 7 and 8 will be explored. Good English is a trade book series produced by a publishing

cooperative between Good English and Oxford Reading Tree. Popular fiction stories for children, well-known nonfiction historical narratives, and biographies are rewritten to accommodate the lower readability levels of English learners. Intended for middle schoolers with a native language of Mandarin Chinese, these books include Chinese peritext on the front, back, and inside of the book cover; an English to Chinese translation dictionary is also included at the back of the book. Furthermore, black and white drawings are dispersed throughout the pages. From my analysis, the book series focuses on a variety of themes such as: acceptance, loneliness, competition, self-esteem, fair play, cheating, bullying, humor, differences, western culture, western history, heroism, friendship, lying, magic, jealousy, courage, positive values, overcoming obstacles, overactive imagination, and popularity.

Despite the variety of themes presented within the series, I propose that the books are played out in simple ways. For example, differences might be being tall, bullying might mean intentionally having your foot stepped on by a classmate, lying might be related to stealing test answers, competition might be in a flying carpet race, and overcoming obstacles might be an athlete saying no to doughnuts. So, while these themes in and of themselves can be relevant or engaging to students, I am of the opinion that the content maturity and complexity levels for Good English books do not strongly match to 7th and 8th grade students.

As an ESL licensed teacher, I am of the strong opinion that reading material used in the classroom must match the student's maturity level. Other researchers also support this assertion. Smallwood (1988) states that age-appropriate themes should be considered in the book selection process. In other words, the book's content should be appropriate to

the child's age and intellectual level (Smallwood, 1988). In order to ascertain whether or not a book is mature enough for a student, one can consider the following: its psychological suitability for the age group, student identification with the main character, and content connections to students' personal experiences and interests (Niemann, 2002; Vardell, Hadaway & Young, 2006).

While it may seem obvious to give a student a text that is appropriately mature, from my experience, this does not happen often enough, because comprehensible input often takes precedence over age-appropriacy. Thus, content maturity is sacrificed in order to match the book's language level to the language level of the student. As a result, books for 1st graders are given to 8th graders who have a 1st grade reading level. Although teachers can be aware of this mismatch, often times teachers do not know where to turn otherwise, or do not have the financial means to pursue other resources. As such, the previous cycle continues.

Going back to the Good English series, some of my students came away from the books reporting that they were "boring," "childish," and "not important for my life." Additionally, other themes not addressed or noticed in the Good English series were: the super natural, love for sports, war, curses, social media, good versus evil, gaming, dating, murder, technology, sportsmanship, emergent teen life, horror, mystery, revenge, depression, drama, monsters, and science-fiction. In speculation, finding alternative ways to tap into some of these themes currently unrealized in the Good English series could be a quite useful way to reach more interests of students in the classroom.

Description of Hi-lo Books

A thorough understanding of hi-lo books is necessary for the purposes of this paper because hi-lo books will be used as the intervention tool in my action research. The goal of my research is to see how Chinese middle school students respond to hi-lo books. Their experiences with these books will be analyzed in comparison to the Good English series. While I predict that students will have a favorable reaction to hi-lo books, and therefore experience positive learning outcomes, it is important to understand the rationale behind this prediction and to have a clear understanding of what hi-lo books have to offer. Therefore, a thorough description of hi-lo books will be given. In addition, a comparative analysis chart will help draw out similarities and differences among the government textbook, the Good English series, and hi-lo books. All of this will help further inform my research question, which is: *How do high interest texts mediate Chinese middle school students' reading comprehension?*

Hi-lo books are good books. To start simply, a hi-lo book is just like any other good book, in that it makes one ponder, wonder, and imagine, in addition to offering a sense of enrichment, fulfillment, and pleasure (Jobe, Sakari, & Sakari, Dayton, 1999; Maughan, 2012). Good books extend one's background, vicarious experiences, feelings, thoughts, and emotions. They can help one understand love, joy, and distrust. They can help one experience tremendous joy and relief when one discovers he or she is not the only one. Characters come alive and make one think by questioning their thoughts and actions. Problems, dilemmas, and emotional conflicts of the characters are shared with the reader. Good books help one develop a sense of right and wrong through reflection. Furthermore, good books help one delve into issues affecting him or her (Jobe, Sakari, & Sakari, Dayton, 1999). So, the first point is that hi-lo books are good books.

Hi-lo books are interesting. Many publishers agree hot topics for middle schoolers are sports, mystery, adventure, animals, and natural disasters (Maughan, 2012). While there can be some confusion around the term "interest," because it is an individual's preference, experts in the hi-lo book industry help clarify this issue. Michael Dahl, Capstone editorial director, states that high interest describes any content that children would read on their own and would want to know more about without outside intervention or prompting from adults (Maughan, 2012). Amy Cox, Capstone's library marketing manager, says a high interest book grabs the reader's attention and has fascinating facts (Maughan, 2012). Jim Arena, president at Academic Therapy Publications/High Noon Books, also agrees high interest books captivate readers (Maughan, 2012). On a whole, publishers in general try to focus on contemporary themes, modern cultural issues, and the taste of young people. Publishers also agree there is no exact formula for what makes a book interesting; rather, there are many steps for making a book interesting (Maughan, 2012). These many steps aim at ensuring hi-lo books will be perceived as interesting for their intended audiences.

Hi-lo books are easy to read. The readability of hi-lo books is made more accessible to their intended audience by using controlled vocabulary, short, non-complex sentences, few characters, and linear plots without flashbacks (Maughan, 2012). Overall length is also generally short. In addition, hi-lo publishers often provide a lexile measurement for the book that helps guide teachers and readers in selecting appropriate books. This combination of the book's language, along with interesting content, should help reluctant readers avoid focusing on their anxiety of not being able to read, and in

doing so, shift their thinking away from self-limiting beliefs (Jobe, Sakari, & Sakari, Dayton, 1999).
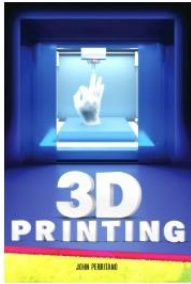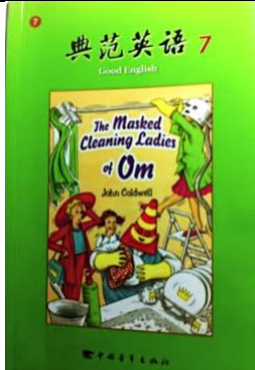
Hi-lo books are aesthetically appealing. Hi-lo books are especially appealing to readers who have a large gap between their age and reading level. Older children and teens do not want to read or be seen reading 'baby books' (books that are overly simple) (Maughan, 2012). Rather, publishers want hi-lo books to look similar to their peers (Maughan, 2012). This means having an edgy cover for the book is paramount. Other appealing elements of hi-lo books include design features such as larger white space around the boarders, slightly larger font, clear images, and paper that is creamy, not white (Maughan, 2012).

Hi-lo books have distinctions from graded trade titles. Hi-lo books are different from trade titles (books for general audiences), which do not necessarily make a distinction between readability and interest (Maughan, 2012). Trade titles usually focus on repackaging and simplifying classical books. For example, in my observations I have seen other English teachers use bestseller books like *Because of Winn-Dixie*. The version used by the teacher was remade at lower readability level. However, I believe that trade title did not operate at the same effectiveness level as a hi-lo book. Hi-lo books are much more targeted and intentional about meeting the multiples needs of struggling, reluctant readers, and ESL students. Generally speaking, trade titles do not compete at this same level of precision as they are marketed toward general audiences for general reading.

It can be summed up that hi-lo books are good, interesting, easy to read, aesthetically appealing, and distinguishable from graded trade titles. Furthermore, based

on the description of hi-lo books, it is my prediction that hi-lo books can be an effective

instrument for learning achievement in middle school English language classrooms.

Altogether, the fourth section of the literature review on classroom reading

materials has given an explanation of three kinds of books: the government textbook,

Good English trade books, and hi-lo Saddleback books. All three reading materials are

succinctly summarized in the comparison chart below, Figure F. This chart provides an

overall snapshot of similarities and differences among these materials.

Figure F: Comparison Chart of Reading Materials			
Category	Hi-lo	Trade title	Textbook
Publisher	Saddleback Educational Publishing	Good English & Oxford Reading Tree	Foreign Language Teaching & Research Press, Beijing
Readability level	Beginning, emergent, and developing learners [Numeric lexile measurement assigned]	Grade 7 & 8 [Numbers 1-18 rank the difficult level of the book; no numeric lexile measurement assigned]	Grade 7 & 8 [No numeric lexile measurement assigned]
Maturity level	Tweens and teens	7th and 8th graders	Chinese 7th & 8th graders
Benefits of the genre	Offers contemporary genres	Mainly classics and bestsellers	Similar to passages on a high-stakes test
Orientation	Western oriented	Western oriented	Chinese oriented
Book cover	High-impact, edgy		
Themes	Mature and complex	Simple	Simple

Summary

As a whole, Chapter Two has reviewed four large key areas that surround my research topic: the history of education in China, the examination system of high-stakes testing, L2 motivation, and classroom reading materials. These categories all meaningfully inform my research question. The history of education in China can provide a necessary reorientation to the reader on what it means to experience an education within the People's Republic of China. The examination system of high-stakes testing provides awareness to reader of the intensity of this system and how it comes impact day-to-day teaching. L2 motivation provides a background orientation to understanding motivation, how that relates to interest, and how interest relates to a text. Finally, the last section on classroom reading materials provides a narrower focus on a description and analysis of the government textbook, Good English trade books, and hi-lo Saddleback books. Understanding these categories offers the reader an awareness about the academic dialogue surrounding my research question. My research question is: *How do high interest texts mediate Chinese middle school students' reading comprehension?*

Preview of Chapter Three

While this chapter has focused on a review of literature concerning my research territory, the next chapter will focus on the research design. Areas including methods, participants, materials, procedures, limitations, and ethics will be addressed.

CHAPTER THREE:

Methods

This chapter will address the type of research and process for my study. A closer look at the research design, methodology, participants, materials, procedures, limitations, and ethics will be exhibited. My research will explore how Chinese students respond to high interest texts and how that mediates their learning outcomes. My research question is: *How do high interest texts mediate Chinese middle school students' reading comprehension?*

Research Design

This is a mixed methods study designed to incorporate both qualitative and quantitative characteristics. My research will apply an additional intervention to my current standard teaching practice. The intervention treatment to be administered will be the Saddleback hi-lo books.

This research paradigm will operationalize a comparative learning experience using twenty participants. Comparisons will be made between students' experiences reading Good English trade title books (already a part of my standard teaching practice) and Saddleback hi-lo books (an additional intervention). English class test scores from standard teaching practices will be used to determine academically average students. Academically average students consenting to participate in the research will complete the first quantitative data collection tool—the motivations for reading questionnaire (MRQ).

The MRQ will provide quantitative data on student reading motivational orientations; thus revealing which students have higher extrinsic motivation. Students with higher extrinsic versus intrinsic motivation will be asked to continue participation in the study (other students will end their participation at that time).

After participants read their Good English and Saddleback books, the research paradigm will identify patterns in student post reading experiences. Data collection tools for measuring these experiences will be the quantitative post reading comprehension quizzes and the qualitative post individual student interviews. All of this data will be analyzed for potential patterns that may emerge. This is the basic framework of my research design.

Quantitative and Qualitative Methods for Triangulation

In this study both quantitative and qualitative approaches will be used in order to achieve triangulation. Several key quantitative features will be applied in the design of this study including statistical analysis of data and use of numbers to present findings. Specifically, the MRQ will be tabulated to quantify intrinsic and extrinsic motivation levels. In addition, completed student comprehension quizzes will be given numeric scores. These tools will be used to calculate and compile quantitative data. Going further, I will also collect qualitative data by conducting individual interviews with participants to gather richer information about their motivations and interest levels throughout their involvement in the study. By doing this, this study will achieve triangulation because research techniques and sources of data used to explore these issues will be from three perspectives. The technique of triangulation will help aid in credibility, transferability, and dependability in the research (Gass, 2013).

Participants

Twenty participants will be selected for this study. Participants for this study are enrolled in a public middle school. They will be 7th grade students from a school in Beijing, China. The population of the participants can be generalized as Chinese born with Mandarin Chinese as their native language. They can be generalized as having formal education since primary school, in addition to extra after school classes. Students are familiar with formal intensive academic reading instructional strategies including the use of worksheets with short-answer and multiple-choice questions. Finally, students can be generalized as having had many opportunities to complete worksheets like this in the past.

Materials

A variety of carefully selected materials will be used to in order to conduct my research. To begin, materials include: Good English trade books, hi-lo Saddleback books, the MRQ (Appendix A), comprehension quizzes (Appendix B), and the interview survey. In addition, two other minor supporting tools have also been incorporated. These include 'the panel of faces' (Appendix C) and the A-Z language proficiency assessment tool (Appendix D). Each of these materials will be discussed in further detail.

Hi-lo Saddleback Books

Saddleback Educational Publishing is the company that produced the hi-lo books that will be used in this research project. These books are approximately fifty pages in length. The exact books selected for this study will be contingent on the individual participants' lexile reading level and personal choices.

Motivations for Reading Questionnaire

The MRQ is a tool designed to assess children's motivations for reading. It was

developed by Wigfield and Guthrie (1996, 1997) and is comprised of a set of possible

dimensions that could comprise reading motivations along with items to measure those

dimensions. The dimensions of reading motivation that will be explored in this research

are: challenge, curiosity, involvement, social, competition, and recognition. While there

is a total of eleven different dimensions presented by Wigfield and Guthrie, the

previously mentioned six categories have been found to be the most reliable (Wigfield,

1996). Challenge, curiosity, and involvement are areas that assess intrinsic motivation.

Social, competition, and recognition are areas that assess extrinsic motivation. *Challenge*

means the student reads for the satisfaction of mastering complex ideas in a text.

Curiosity means the student desires to learn more about a particular topic of interest to

him or her. *Involvement* means one enjoys reading to experience different kinds of texts

that are well written or on topics the student finds interesting. *Social* means the student

reads to think about a story and share what was learned with friends or family.

Competition means the student likes doing better than others in reading. And finally,

recognition means the student reads because he or she can receive something, such as

thanks for doing a good job reading.

The MRQ is scored based on a 4-point Likert scale, 1= *different from me* to 4=

like me. The form includes practice trials to show that the student can discriminate

appropriately between situations in which they would be expected to feel differently.

There are four questions for each reading dimension. There is a total of three dimensions

for intrinsic motivation and a total of three dimensions for extrinsic motivation. The

whole survey consists of twenty-four questions. Scores for both intrinsic and extrinsic

categories will be totaled. The category with the higher score will determine overall if the student is more intrinsically or extrinsically motivated.

The MRQ has been tested for reliability and validity and has been suggested as a relatively good fit model (Guthrie, 2010). The MRQ has been used in published research multiple times. Wang and Guthrie used the MRQ in exploring reading motivation of 3rd graders and 4-5th graders (Guthrie, 2010). Other motivational researchers used it with middle school students from grades 6-8 (Guthrie, 2010). Wang and Guthrie also used the MRQ again in their study involving 187 U.S. and 197 Chinese 4th grade students (Wang & Guthrie, 2004). Considering the MRQ has been used on Chinese middle school students before, I am very inclined to believe that it will be a good fit for my participants also.

For the purposes of this study, the MRQ was revised from the original version and translated into Mandarin Chinese. The tool was piloted on 8th grade middle school students in the spring semester of 2018. Modifications were made as appropriate. For example, the practice sentences were changed from "I like ice cream" and "I like spinach" to "I like free time" and "I like taking tests." This was done to make the trial questions more culturally relevant and to maintain their purpose for making sure students can discriminate appropriately between situations. In addition, complicated language was taken out or replaced with simpler English. Finally, for ease of calculation, equal numbers of intrinsic and extrinsic questions were included so that one could easily conclude if a learner was more intrinsically or extrinsically driven.

Reading Comprehension Quizzes

Reading comprehension quizzes will be used to assess how students respond to both books. Reading comprehension quizzes will be designed based on familiar classroom routines and what is commonly seen on a test. The quiz is worth a total of nineteen points and consists of three different sections: multiple-choice (with four possible choices), short answer, and fill-in-the-blank. Of these sections, question types consist of the following: prediction, identification of the main problem in the story, identification of the main character(s), relationship between cause and effect, identification of details in the text, relationship of ideas to form a conclusion, and relationship of ideas to complete a summary. Both the quiz for the Good English book and the quiz for the Saddleback hi-lo book consist of approximately the same type and number of questions. See comprehension quizzes in Appendix B.

Qualitative Interview

Individual interviews will be used to further understand students' reactions and responses to each book. The interview will consist of the following questions in this order: 1) at the beginning, tell me about which book looked more interesting; 2) during reading, tell me about what parts made the book interesting; 3) during the reading, tell me about what parts made the book boring; 4) when you finished reading, tell me about whether you thought the book was still interesting; 5) tell me about which book helped you learn more. These questions will be used for the qualitative interview.

Panel of Faces

The panel of faces is a minor supporting tool for gauging students' preferred book genres by matching an emoji face to a book sample. Emoji face emotions included: sad, interested, embarrassed, sorry, neutral, angry, surprised, happy, scared, bored, and

disgusted. Students can pick more than one face for each book. This form is attached to twenty-eight different fiction and nonfiction Saddleback book samples (including the book cover and several pages of text).

Researchers Ainley, Hidi, and Berndorff, in their 2002 study on Canadian and Australian grade 8 and grade 9 students, previously used this panel of faces where they investigated interest, learning, and psychological processes. For the research in this study, this supporting tool will be used for the purpose of helping determine which Saddleback books to purchase. This form was modified from the original version to incorporate Mandarin Chinese.

A-Z Language Proficiency Assessment Tool

The A-Z language proficiency assessment tool will be used as a minor supporting instrument. See Appendix D. Student research participants will be assessed for their language level ability by using the A-Z assessment resources including A-Z benchmark passages/books and A-Z benchmark passage/book comprehension quick checks. Students will be assessed until their reading comprehension scores fall between ranges of 80-94%.

A-Z assessment products can also be considered appropriate tools for the purposes of this study. A-Z products meet US State Standards, and Common Core Standards, in addition to international standards for Canada, Australia, India, the United Arab Emirates—Ministry of Education (UAE), and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (www.readinga-z.com, 2018). China was not included as a country in this group; however, it is reasonable to believe that A-Z products are valid and reliable based on the above information.

The A-Z assessment passages were piloted on 7th grade middle schoolers during spring semester of 2018. These students will not be participants in this research project. This was done in order to help develop better strategies for proctoring the assessment. For example, it was found best to assess students individually and beginning with A level passages. In that way students could be individually monitored and familiarized with the process in order to gain confidence. In addition, during the piloting stage it was found that it was best to offer students two choices for the reading topic. In that manner, students could choose a topic more suitable to their interests and exhibit some autonomy.

Procedure

A careful procedure has been designed in order to conduct the research. The students for this study will be chosen through the following manner. First, a group of twenty students will be selected whom represent the approximate average level of the class according to English tests administered earlier this semester, fall 2018. These academic tests are from standard teaching procedures and were not data collection tools for the purposes of this study. Then, these academically average students will be asked for their consent to participate in the research study. Next, participants will complete the first quantitative data collection tool for the purposes of this study—the Motivation for Reading Questionnaire (MRQ). Most students will probably take about 15-20 minutes to finish the questionnaire. Administrators will be available to answer any questions during that time in English or Chinese. Of those students, three final students will be selected based on having higher extrinsic motivation than intrinsic motivation results according to their individual MRQ data. Students with higher intrinsic motivation scores will no longer be needed to continue in the study.

Next, the A-Z language proficiency assessment tool will be administered in order to help the teacher steer students towards a book within their zone of proximal development (ZDP). Zone of proximal development is metaphorical place conceptualized by Vygotsky, who was a child development psychologist (Vygotsky, 1980). ZDP means that in a supportive environment, children are able to advance to higher levels of knowledge and performance (Vygotsky, 1980). If a book is too easy or too hard, it will be out of their ZDP. Likewise, in this study using the A-Z assessment tool will provide information to the researcher so that an appropriate selection of books can be offered to each participant. Each participant will be given the autonomy to select the Good English book and hi-lo book he or she likes best. Thus, by this stage students will have been assigned appropriate books.

From there, the Good English book and comprehension quiz will be assigned. The Good English book is a part of standard teaching procedures. The students will be assigned to read the book as homework. Then, at school in a supervised environment, participants will complete a comprehension quiz, a quantitative data collection tool for the purposes of this study. This quiz will be completed individually. Students will be given thirty-five minutes to complete the task. Teachers will monitor and circulate throughout the room. Students have the option to have questions read out loud (in English only) by the teachers. Students can use their books as a resource during quiz time. These answers will be saved.

Next, students will be assigned the hi-lo Saddleback book and comprehension quiz. The same procedure will follow as before. Students will be asked to read the book at home as homework. This book is not a part of standard teaching procedures. This book

is an intervention tool for the purposes of this study. Then, students will individually complete an in-class comprehension quiz. The quiz is a quantitative data collection tool for the purposes of this study. Students can have the option to have question(s) read out loud (in English only) by the administrators. These scores will be saved.

Finally, the last stage of the procedure will be the qualitative interview, a qualitative data collection tool for the purposes of this study. Students will be individually interviewed. The books read will again be displayed to the students so that they can refresh their memories or refer to specific pages. Each interview will be voice recorded. Interviews will be conducted in the staff office during student independent study time. Each interview will include the individual student, a familiar Chinese school staff to help interpret, and myself.

There is one other item worth mentioning. The procedure for the panel of faces was already carried out in spring semester of 2018 using 8th grade middle school students. Due to shipping challenges related to buying Saddleback hi-lo books in China, books needed to be purchased in advance so that they could be picked up in the United States over the summer and brought back to China. Therefore, the procedure for the panel of faces has already been carried out and completed. The students that gave feedback in that survey will not be the students that participate in this research project. The panel of faces was only a minor supporting tool used so that the researcher would have a frame of reference for purchasing book genres that would likely be interesting and suitable for the future research participants.

The procedure for administering the panel of faces was as follows. Over a dozen students completed the panel of faces form. After students finished marking their sheet, I

briefly debriefed with them about their answers in order to further confirm which books they thought were most interesting. I came to the rough conclusion that on average students' preferred genres were mystery, adventure, technology, and sports.

Limitations

Although considerable effort will be made to ensure fairness throughout the procedural process, there are some limitations to this study. To different degrees, the following areas may present limitations.

To begin, the Good English book will be read first. This may provide unfair, extra English practice before the hi-lo book is introduced. Secondly, the A-Z language proficiency tool cannot encompass all individual considerations of the reader such as students' skills, background, and motivation to the reading task (www.readinga-z.com, 2018). Thus, this presents difficultly in assigning students to their true lexile reading level despite best efforts. Third, the student's Good English book compared to their Saddleback book will not be the exact same reading lexile level. This is due to limitations of available resources, differences between the publishing companies, and student choice. For example, a student may choose one book that is at a 'beginner' lexile level and another that is a 20 lexile level. Finally, both the Good English and Saddleback books may contain some accessibility barriers for students, as both books are not written for a Chinese audience. While the Saddleback hi-lo book does showcase diversity in their characters, there is still an American orientation in the author's writing style. The Good English books were written for a western audience as well. Therefore, there may be some barriers for the students in regard to character ethnic identification and other cultural funds of knowledge.

Ethics

Important measures have been put into place in order to mitigate ethical concerns. This research utilizes the following safety measures to ensure the rights of the students involved in the study:

1. A written consent form has already been obtained from the school. A letter informing the school of the objectives of the research being conducted was presented in both Mandarin Chinese and English. The school was given the opportunity to decline participation at any time.

2. Parents/guardians will be advised of the objectives of the research being conducted through written notification. These letters will be presented in both Mandarin Chinese and English. Parents/guardians will be given the opportunity to decline participation at any time.

3. The anonymity of the school and students will be protected during the study, and the students and school will never be identified.

Through these measures, I believe that the rights of the school, the students, and their families will be safeguarded.

Summary

This chapter has presented the design of the research. Through quantitative and qualitative measures, triangulation will be achieved with the data tools. In addition, a series of materials have been designed and will be used to conduct the research. Materials have been piloted to help ensure reliability and validity of data captured from them. A thorough procedure has been explained including careful attention to limitations and ethics. Chapter Four will present the results of the research along with initial analysis.

Chapter Five will present a discussion of that data and further implications.

CHAPTER FOUR:

Study Results

The purpose of this chapter is to present key findings from this study. My research question was: *How do high interest texts mediate Chinese middle school students' reading comprehension?* The following key findings answer my research question.
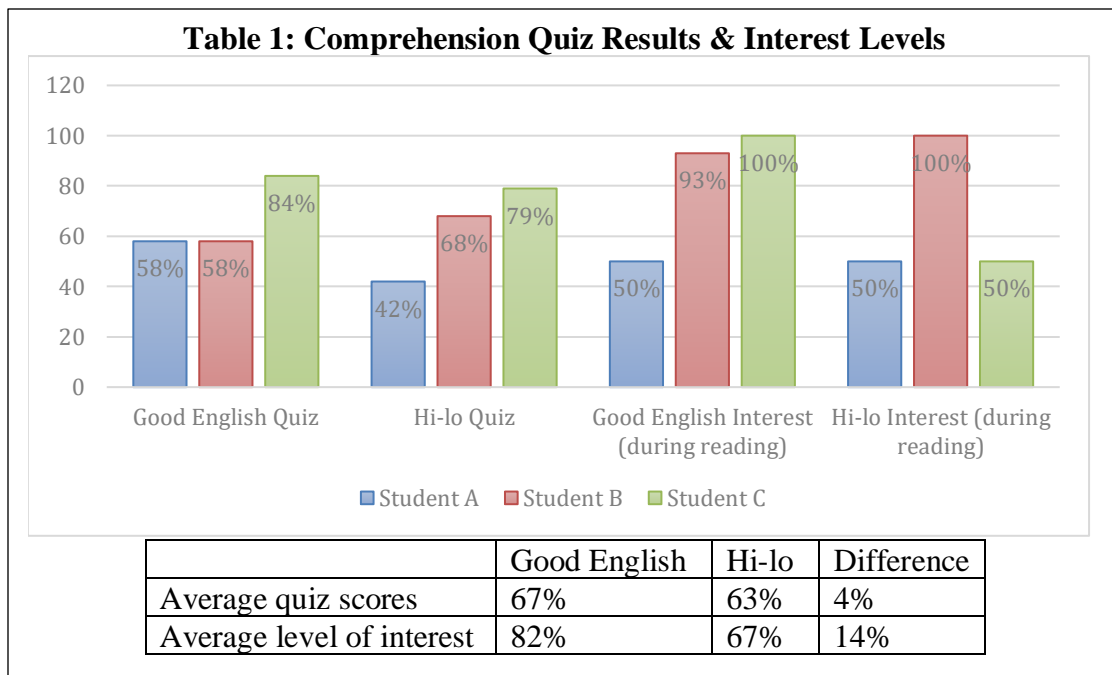
1. Student interest in the text related to higher achievement.

2. Student performance on quantitative thinking was higher.

3. Student interest was elevated through morals and relatable main characters.

4. Student interest diminished during repetitious events.

In this Chapter, these findings will be exhibited individually. Each one will be supported with data along with analysis of the data. Findings in this study were revealed through pattern analysis and observation of unique data points.

Student Interest in the Text Related to Higher Achievement

An important finding in my research was that interest during reading related to higher reading achievement outcomes. Data, particularly from the reading comprehension quizzes in combination with data from the interviews revealed this finding. This data will be exhibited and then analyzed.

To recap, after reading the Good English trade book and the Saddleback hi-lo

book, students completed a reading comprehension quiz. At the end of the study, students

were interviewed individually to assess their interest levels in the book. When the data

from these two tools were compared, study results showed that interest related to higher

reading comprehension for both Student B and C. To illustrate this, Student B's highest

quiz score—68%, was on the hi-lo Saddleback book (*Clan Castles*), and later in the

interview the student stated while reading the hi-lo book, "everything is so interesting".

As such, Student B's quiz score was 10% higher on the hi-lo book. In other words, higher

interest was correlated to a higher quiz score. See Table 1.

Table 1: Comprehension Quiz Results & Interest Levels

	Good English	Hi-lo	Difference
Average quiz scores	67%	63%	4%
Average level of interest	82%	67%	14%

Likewise, Student C's highest quiz score, 84%, was on the Good English trade

book (*Noisy Neighbors*), and this student also later reported in the interview that all parts

of this book were interesting while reading. Student C did 5% better on the reading

comprehension when reading the Good English book. Again, as seen with Student C, higher interest in the book resulted in a higher quiz score. Therefore, both of these cases illustrate how interest mediated Student B and C's learning process resulting in positive reading achievement outcomes.

Percentages in Table 1 were arrived at by taking the following steps. To begin, quiz score percentages were calculated. These were calculated for each student by taking the number of correct points and dividing by the total number of possible points. The combined average quiz scores were calculated by totaling the three students' quiz scores and dividing by the number of participants.

In Table 1, the steps for calculating 'level of interest' were slightly more complex as qualitative data was converted to quantitative numbers. Based on interview data, question three was found to be most revealing of students' true level of interest in the book. Question three of the interview asked: during the reading, tell me about what parts made the book boring. Since students' answers addressed story content and events, the approximate number of book pages addressing this content were added and then subtracted from the total number of pages in the book. This created a quantitative number: total pages minus boring pages. The remaining interesting pages were then divided by the total number of pages, creating the percentages exhibited in Table 1. Overall, average level of interest was calculated by totaling individual percentages and dividing by the total number of participants. The difference between Good English percentages and hi-lo percentages were calculated by subtracting Good English percentages from hi-lo percentages. Results of these calculations can be seen in Table 1.

Unfortunately, the data from Student A was confounded by the fact that neither book was found more than 50% interesting during reading. During the interview, Student A revealed that the first half of the Good English book, *Walrus Joins In*, was boring. Student A also stated that the second half of the hi-lo Saddleback book, *Great Minds*, was boring (excerpts from Student A's interview will be shared later in the paper). Therefore, for Student A, the impact of interest of on reading motivation and learning outcomes could not be fully realized as the student was minimally interested in the books.

The fact that interest related to higher reading achievement for Student B and C in this study is further significant due to the fact that this study used extrinsically motivated students. At the beginning of the study, results from the Motivations for Reading Questionnaire showed that indeed all participants in the study were extrinsically motivated. In fact, their highest motivators were as follows: Student A—social aspects, Student B—teacher recognition, and Student C—competition. All of these dimensions of motivation are extrinsic (Wigfield, 1996; Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997). MRQ results can be seen Table 2 below.

Table 2: MRQ Results
Overall

Student A	Student B	Student C
Intrinsic 49% / Extrinsic 51%	Intrinsic 48% / Extrinsic 52%	Intrinsic 45% / Extrinsic 55%

Individual

	Challenge	Curitosity	Involvement	Social	Recognition	Competition
Student A	88	88	88	100	81	94
Student B	69	94	69	75	100	75
Student C	50	75	81	81	81	87
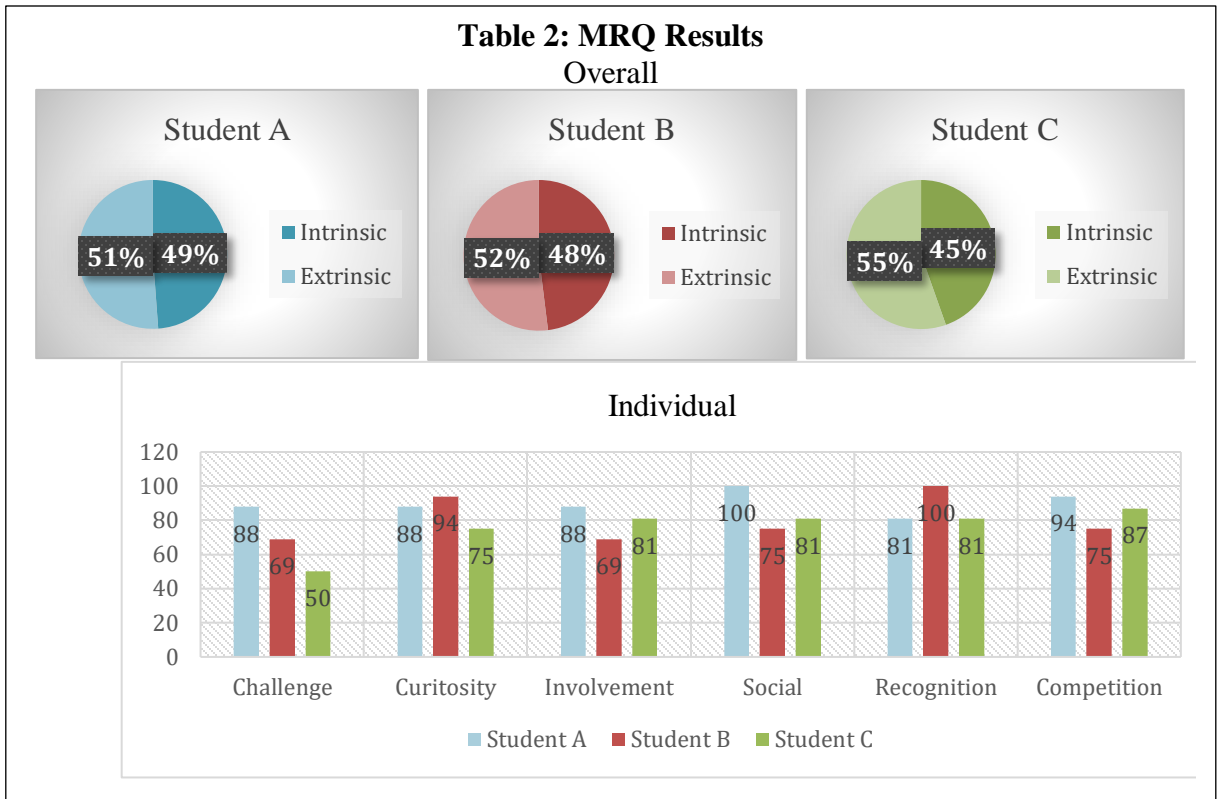
By using interest as a means for igniting motivation, results from the reading comprehension quizzes showed that even extrinsically motivated students were able to benefit from 5-10% increases in reading comprehension. While the MRQ results showed that students were overall more extrinsically motivated to read, the interesting texts used in this study were likely able to do some shifting of students' locus of motivation. Interesting texts were likely able move motivation towards a more intrinsic place by igniting students' intrinsic motivators for learning as outlined by Wigfield and Guthrie (1996, 1997). To recall, these included: motivation to have mastery over a challenging text, motivation to satisfy curiosity about the text, and motivation to have involvement with the text. Involvement in the text can be seen as visualizing the book, empathizing

with the emotions of the characters, and vicariously experiencing the story plot and

actions of the characters (Wigfield, 1996; Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997).

While steps were taken in this study to match students to books of their interest,

not all student to book matches were successful. Some students found 50% of their books

to be boring. As a result, these students were not able to fully experience the benefits of

motivation through interest. During reading interest diminished as Student A read *Great

Minds* and *Walrus Joins In*. In addition, interest also diminished for Student C while

reading *The Mermaid and Me*.

Student A selected the book *Great Minds*, which features a cool guitar player (see

Figure G:
Great Minds **Book Cover**
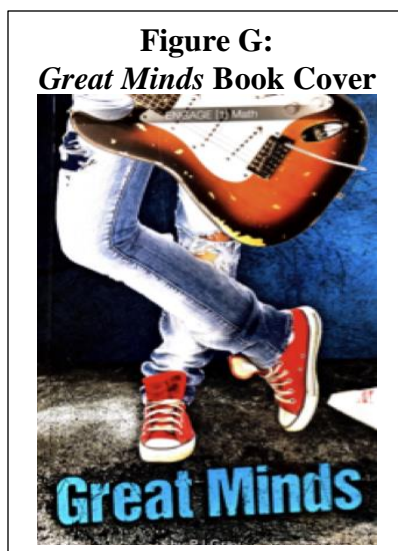
Figure G). However, during reading, the book's central theme became a conflict around math and how to cut the pizza, not music. The conclusion of the book is how the band players solve this problem by cutting the pizzas into smaller pieces. Thus, this switch from dance party and music to pizza and math probably attributed to Student A's diminishing interest in the book. During the interview, Student A stated with confusion— "they just kept talking about pizza." The student perceived this as off topic and boring. Thus, initial

interest tapered off and was not sustained. Likewise, the power for interest to energize

intrinsic motivators and enhance learning outcomes was not strongly present. So, while

the book cover may have stimulated the student's topic interest, deeper individual interest

to keep reengaging the student in the content was lacking presence.

Student A also stated that the Good English book, *Walrus Joins In*, had some boring parts. Student A found 50% of *Walrus Joins In* to be uninteresting. During the interview it was mentioned by Student A that the first part of the book was boring. The author writes about Walrus stumbling and tumbling into the different acts of the animals during the Big Show. Walrus ruins the first animal's performance and then does the same thing again to three more animals. During the interview, Student A said with some annoyance, "he just kept doing it again and again." There is a strong inference here that the book's maturity level was too low for a 13-year-old student (this will be addressed more in Chapter Five).

Student C also found the book *The Mermaid and Me* to have boring parts. Based on the student's interview data, it was reported that Student B was only 50% interested in the book. During the interview, the student said the first half of the book was boring. The first half of the book introduced the cause for main character's problem—Jim was too scared to go swimming because he almost died in a riptide when he was young. In the student's opinion this was boring because "the mom and the boy are just walking on the beach and talking." In addition, the first part was also perceived as strange by the student, "the boy, he goes into the water up to his neck...his mom says, 'I don't want you to die'…but then she walks away." The student only mentions becoming interested when the plot shifts to "the human boy playing with the mermaid in the sea." As such the student's interest declined until events changed and the mermaid entered the plot. Therefore, for the students who read those select books (*Great Minds*, *Walrus Joins In*, and *The Mermaid and Me*), the benefits of motivation through interest were not able to be fully realized during their reading experiences.

As a counter argument, it should be mentioned that the Good English book and Saddleback book combinations were considered to be at roughly the same proficiency level. As such, students received books at proximately the same lexile level according the publisher's information on each book. Therefore, this provides reasonable evidence to rule out proficiency, or readability level, as a factor in the students' disengagement with these particular texts. This leaves interest as the suspected factor for differences in student engagement with the text.

To summarize this section, data collection revealed that interest related to increased achievement in reading outcomes. This was evidenced by the quiz scores of both Student B and C. These findings were made additionally noteworthy because the study participants were extrinsically motivated. Unfortunately, the data of Student A presented a confounding variable; therefore, analysis was unable to determine how interest mediated Student A's learning experience. Interest as motivation resulted in 5-10% higher reading scores for these extrinsically motivated students. For students who experienced significant diminishing interest while reading (50%), the benefits of motivation through interest where not able to be fully realized.

Student Performance on Quantitative Thinking was Higher

Another finding from this study showed students performed higher on quantitative thinking. This conclusion was gathered from further analysis of quiz results according to question type. Data analysis revealed that students did better identifying details and treating them as independent objects than when integrating details into a coherent body of knowledge. Treating pieces of knowledge as independent objects is a phase of

quantitative thinking (Biggs & Collis, 1989). A closer look at the data will be examined in regard to the kinds of question types on the quizzes and accuracy rates produced.

Analysis of the quiz taxonomy is exhibited in Table 3. Table 3 displays two levels of cognitive thinking. On the top of the chart is higher cognitive level thinking representing the qualitative phase. This involves integration of details into a whole. Examples of these question types include: conclusion, cause and effect, and summary. As can be seen by the numbers displayed in the chart, students performed relatively lower on these question types. Students particularly struggled to understand the conclusion of the Good English books, scoring 14% overall. Cause and effect were also an area of equally low performance for the Good English and hi-lo books, 29% and 33% respectively. This score combination makes cause and effect the highest need area for growth with the participants. Finally, performance on summary questions showed some overall improvement on scores, but scores were still lower in comparison to the quantitative cognitive function questions. As can be concluded, students performed lower on areas of the quiz when questions required qualitative thinking or integration of independent objects into a relational whole.

The second half of Table 3 showcases a lower level of cognitive thinking, the quantitative phase. Quantitative thinking is easier because it only requires the identification or listing of aspects of a subject (Biggs & Collis, 1989). Examples of these question types include: details, main problems, and main characters. As can be seen in the chart below, student scores were much higher in this area, particularly for the Good English books.

Table 3: Quiz Taxonomy			
Cognitive Level	**Question Type**	**Good English**	**Hi-lo**
Higher Cognitive Level: Details integrated into relationship	Conclusion	14 %	66 %
	Cause and effect	29 %	33 %
	Summary	81 %	63 %
Lower Cognitive Level: Details treated as independent	Details	86 %	73 %
	Main problem	100 %	67 %
	Main character	100 %	67 %

Furthermore, answering quantitative questions with higher ranges of accuracy did not relate to answering more qualitative questions correctly. According to comprehension quiz scores, five times out of six testing periods students did better when answering quantitative questions. The only exception to this was Student B who did better relating the information of the hi-lo book, *Clan Castles*, as a whole (qualitative) than he did in understanding it in separate details (quantitative). Overall, the conclusion is that ability to identify quantitative information on the quiz did not improve ability of students to identify qualitative information on the quiz. This was a strong pattern.

In addition, whether the question type was multiple-choice, short answer, or fill-in-the-blank, this format did not show a pattern in rate of accuracy. The data showed that Student C got multiple-choice questions wrong the most, Student B got short-answer questions wrong the most, and Student A got fill-in-the-blank questions wrong the most. In other words, multiple choice questions did not show a pattern in making it easier for students to identify the right answer, nor did short answer make it harder. Rather, a pattern in student ability to produce or identify the right answer only appeared when questions were divided into categories of quantitative thinking versus qualitative thinking,

where quantitative questions we answered with more accuracy and qualitative questions were answered with less accuracy.

In short, data analysis revealed that overall students scored higher in quantitative thinking, but lower in qualitative thinking. Answering quantitative questions with higher ranges of accuracy did not relate to answering more qualitative questions correctly. Also, ability to identify quantitative information on the quiz did not improve ability of students to identify qualitative information on the quiz. Finally, question format (multiple-choice, short answer, and fill-in-the-blank) did not show a pattern in rate of accuracy. While these findings may present as unsurprising to an educator, significant implications of these findings will be discussed in Chapter Five.

Student Interest was Elevated through Morals and Relatable Main Characters

A further key finding of this study was morals and relatable main characters were identified as elements contributing to a book's interestingness. Data collection from Student A's interview revealed this finding. Unlike study participants B and C, who mainly focused on the storyline for determining their interest level, Student A focused on story elements including morals and main characters.

This was evidenced by Student A's commentary during the interview. First, while reading *Walrus Joins In*, Student A appreciated the moral because the main character "finds himself and what suits him." This was reported as interesting. Student A also reported on the tone (mood) of the book as "lively" and "fun," also attributing to the book's interestingness.

Next, while reading *Great Minds*, Student A appreciated the relatability of the main characters. Student A reported the characters as more "vivid" and "concrete."

Therefore, Student A stated, "This book is more like my life." Certainly, these two

Figure H:
Main Characters of
Great Minds
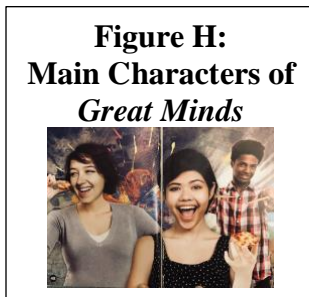
assessments seem reasonable. Walrus (in *Walrus Joins In*) can be perceived as less relatable as he is a sea mammal. See Figure I for an illustration of Walrus. On the other

Figure I: The Main
Character of
Walrus Joins In
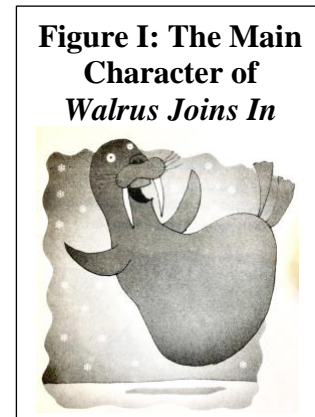
hand, Tim, Lyn, and Li, from *Great Minds*, were humans and quite close in age to Student A. Figure H shows the main characters of *Great Minds*. Student A's feedback was significant as it highlighted the importance of relatable characters and morals for increasing levels of interestingness.

When morals and relatable main characters were perceived positively by the student, the student experienced increased levels of interest in the book. However, when morals were perceived as lacking, or characters as unrelatable, interest began to diminish. For example, it can be inferred that Student A's perception of *Great Minds* lacking a moral contributed to diminishing interest in the book. Student A summed this up in the interview by saying, "there was just pizza talk at the end." Likewise, as reported by Student A, a component causing diminishing interest in *Walrus Joins In* was the student's struggle to become involved with the emotions of the main character or feel as if they were friends.

Student Interest Diminished During Repetitious Events

Repetition in books diminished interest. This was another important finding. Qualitative data showed repetition in the author's writing style attributed to Student A's

decline in interest in the book *Walrus Joins In*. Further elaboration will be given to this finding.

Student A found 50% of *Walrus Joins In* to be uninteresting. Student A's initial interest diminished during reading. During the interview it was mentioned by Student A that the first part of the book was boring as the author writes about Walrus stumbling and tumbling into the different acts of the animals during the Big Show. Walrus ruins the first animal's performance and then does the same thing again to three more animals. Instead of this repetition inducing pleasure for the reader (such as by being able to anticipate what comes next) it had the opposite effect for Student A. During the interview, Student A stated, "he just kept doing it again and again."

Based on the above-mentioned data, an inference can be made that the book's theme was too simple and not complex enough. Student A was a13-year-old middle schooler. While repetition in writing in and of itself is not necessarily good or bad, it is the reader's perception of the repetition that that makes it so. Research shows a book's content should be psychologically suitable to the child's age group and intellectual level (Niemann, 2002; Smallwood, 1988; Vardell, Hadaway & Young, 2006). Therefore, Student A's level of interest in the book, *Walrus Joins In*, declined due to the author's repetitious writing style and the lack of maturity that this presented to the preteen reader. Implications of this will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Five.

Summary

This chapter has presented the key findings of this research. Four key findings in total were presented. Each finding attempted to answer my research question: *How do high interest texts mediate Chinese middle school students' reading comprehension?*

Findings showed how interest had a relationship to reading achievement. Going further, findings showed that students performed better on quantitative quiz tasks and lower in qualitative tasks, where achievement in quantitative thinking did not relate to better achievement in qualitative thinking. Finally, research revealed how certain characteristics of books contributed to students' interest or lack thereof including story elements such as morals and relatable main characters. The next chapter, Chapter Five, will further analyze the findings of this research and explore key implications.

CHAPTER FIVE:

Discussion of Results

This chapter will further discuss the findings of this research and implications. Connections between the literature will be made to key findings, thereby evaluating findings in the context of the literature and the work of other scholars. Areas to be addressed in this chapter include: implications, limitations, further research, and a final conclusion. All of these areas will seek to expound up my research question, which was: *How do high interest texts mediate Chinese middle school students' reading comprehension?*

Implications

Implications for this paper will be broken down into two categories: practical implications and more general implications. These areas will be addressed by making connections to research and by drawing out implications for the professional field. Three main areas of implications will be explored for both practical and general implications.

Practical Implications

Interest can build student momentum for reading development. Research from this study revealed that interest can build momentum for reading development. Ignition of intrinsic motivators for reading enhanced reading comprehension. This created a shift in learning that led to positive momentum in reading development.

Therefore, interesting reading material— as perceived by the student—shifted the attitudes of extrinsically motivated students to a place that is more intrinsic. In turn, higher intrinsic motivation was found to have a relationship to learners achieving higher reading comprehension results. The implication of this finding is that positive learning experiences can be built upon, leading to more positive experiences, and thus continued progress in reading development.

Numerous connections to the literature review can be made to interest correlating to higher reading comprehension. While research uses the broader term *motivation* instead of *interest* (where interest is only one factor of or orientation towards motivation), research continually shows a strong connection between L2 motivation and attainment. The research states that when motivation is ignited it affects the learning process and can be predictive of L2 learning outcomes (Dörnyei, 2014; Gass, 2013; Lightbrown & Spada, 2013; Noels, Pelletier, Clément & Vallerand, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 1985; Tarone & Swierzbin, 2009). This is because motivation becomes effort and desire, in which intense desire helps the learner persist in succeeding to learn the language (Dörnyei, 2014; Gass, 2013; Lightbrown & Spada, 2013; Tarone & Swierzbin, 2009). Furthermore, triggering interest can be a key factor to success because interest is an intrinsic motivator, where intrinsic motivation can be considered the most important factor for predicting a student's success (Wigfield, 1996; Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997). Thus, through this study interest created a positive learning shift for extrinsically motivated students.

Research also shows that this connection between L2 motivation and attainment can be further exploited into an upward spiral for reading development. Attitude and attainment are linked (Tse, Lam, Lam, Chan, & Loh, 2006). Positive recollection of

feelings about a previous reading engagement, provides the opportunity to develop a student's interest further (Lipstein & Renninger, 2006). In the case of topic interest, topic interest shows that a student can use positive previous reading experiences to further develop and deepen their interest in a topic, eventually leading to increased personal investment by the student and deepened depth of processing in the content (Alexander, Kulikowich, & Jetton, 1994). The benefits of interest continue as higher relative interest in the story topic negates negative influences of challenge (Fulmer & Frijters, 2011), where persistence directly influences reading comprehension (Ainley, Hidi, & Berndorff, 2002). Therefore, positive shift in the reading experience of a student, especially a struggling student, is meaningful because that experience has the ability to roll into larger momentum.

Books that sustain students' interest work. This study revealed that only books which sustained interest worked. Likewise, the positive effects of motivation though interest could not be realized if interest was not sustained throughout the reading of the book. Fifty percent interest in the book was not enough to produce gains in reading learning outcomes. Such was the case for students reading the books *Great Minds*, *Walrus Joins In*, and *The Mermaid and Me*. Thus, while student's topic interest may have been initially stimulated by the topic presented on the cover of the book, it did not appear that the students possessed a well-developed individual interest in the content. This is supported by the research of Ainley, Hidi, and Berndorff from1999 and Ainley, Hidi, and Berndorff from 2002. Therefore, teachers should seek out books that can sustain students' interests, not just capture their attention.

In order to do this, the teacher should have a closer conversation with students about what kind of themes and topics can hold the students' interests. I recommend having individual conversations with them. Show them a large variety of books (or book samples) that showcase both fiction and nonfiction and different genres types such as historical/ cultural, mystery, myths/legends, sports, technology, adventure, arts, biology, etc. From there help guide the student in understanding what the genre might entail. Allow the student to take a picture walk through the book. If the student finds one that appears suitable, read the first couple of pages together and then ask again if the student is still interested in the book. If readability level becomes a concern, ask the student to point to the words on the page that he or she do not know. If this is more than five, consider going down a level or back to the language assessment for my information about the student's reading level. If possible, have this conversation with the student in their native language. Encourage the student to share their true opinion of the books, that there are no right or wrong answers. Finally, encourage students to give your more feedback by using the phrase "tell me more." The more descriptive the student's answers, the more informed decisions you both can make. From my experience with this study, I think it is worth reiterating, the more books you can show students, let them touch, feel, and flip through, the better.

Explicit instruction is needed for student achievement in qualitative thinking. Implications of research results are that explicit instruction is needed for attaining greater achievement in qualitative thinking. Students had higher success identifying isolated pieces of information, but accuracy dwindled when qualitative thinking was required. Therefore, students need explicit instruction from teachers on how to integrate

independent objects into a coherent body of knowledge. This means students need instruction on how to analyze for cause, compare and contrast, relate information together into broader generalizations, and to make reflections. Explicit teacher instruction in this area can help improve students' qualitative thinking skills.

Noticing students' limited success in qualitative thinking is also important because it implies that memorization of details does not have a relationship to advancement in qualitative reading comprehension. Simply recalling a detail does not increase a students' success for understanding it in its relationship to cause and effect, the conclusion, or the summary. Memorization can only help students identify objects independently (Biggs & Collis, 1989). Rather, explicit and increased instruction is needed for qualitative thinking development. Teachers should not assume that following the status quo in their teaching practices, or only following the given instruction in textbooks, offers sufficient targeted practice for developing students' relational understanding of information. Teachers must intentionally do more to provide opportunities for qualitative thinking development.

Lower qualitative thinking skills may partially be the result of China's Confucian educational heritage and exam culture. Confucian educational heritage develops memorization skills (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006; Zhao, Selman, & Haste, 2015), thus honing students' abilities for recalling lists of detailed information. Therefore, it is not unlikely that students rely on memorization as a test preparation and test-taking strategy. From my own experience, I have seen students lining up at teachers' offices ready to recite texts they have memorized from the book; this is seen as a good test preparation strategy. As stated in the literature review, washback from the test can cause teachers and learners do

things that they would not otherwise do to promote or inhibit learning (Messick, 1996). As such, whether or not research supports memorization as an effective strategy for language acquisition, the testing culture and historical past of China encourages it. Biggs and Collis (1989) would argue that memorization or recitation is a quantitative skill, and therefore only beneficial to enhancing growth in lower cognitive thinking. Therefore, a relationship among lower qualitative thinking skills, China's Confucian educational heritage, and washback from exams seems to exist.

Offer students books with morals, relatable main characters, and complex plots. First, it may not be surprising that Chinese students would anticipate, or even expect, a moral to be in the story. This statement can be supported by Chinese culture and heritage. In ancient Chinese culture, morals were used in storytelling as a way for emperors to be warned about their conduct (Yang, 2011). The teaching of morals to students is also a part of the values of Confucian heritage (McPherron, 2016). This background knowledge on the culture can be beneficial to foreign teachers as it can be helpful in their book selection process.

After selecting a book with a moral, teachers can tap into the moral of the story and thus satisfy the expectations of Chinese readers. Understanding the moral and how this is important to the conclusion of the story can be beneficial for enhancing reading comprehension at a qualitative thinking level for students. If the moral, or author's purpose, is less obvious, unconventional, or unfamiliar to the student, it is recommended that more teacher guidance be given to uncover it.

Similar to morals, is the author's purpose for writing the text. In this study, *Great Minds* was a STEM book. STEM books are books written for the purposes of engaging

students in learning about science, technology, engineering, and math. To my knowledge, my students have had limited exposure to STEM books. As such, clarification about the author's purpose in STEM books would be beneficial to students. For example, in this study it may have come as a surprise to the student who read *Great Minds* that the author's purpose was to teach a lesson about the daily necessities of math and not some higher ethical value. For this reason, more explicit teaching to uncover the purpose of this story could have increased the student's interest in the book and learning achievement.

Next, interest increased when there was identification with the main character(s). Research tells us that the main character of a book should be culturally relevant, accessible, and identifiable to the reader including ethnically (Bergin, 2010). This can allow the reader to become involved in the book, feeling like they have become friends with the people in the story (Wigfield, 1996; Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997). In this way, the student's intrinsic motivation for reading is invoked (Wigfield, 1996; Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997). I wish I could say I was doing this more in my classroom.

Personally speaking, finding supplementary reading material that features relatable main characters for my students has not been easy, although it is important. Ushioda (2009) encourages teachers to see students as real persons at local and individual levels. This creates a call to teachers to find books with main characters that reflect the real persons and individuals of the teacher's classroom. Simply featuring some characters in the book as Asian, middle-class, or school-aged children is not comprehensive; it does not feature the local culture or students as individuals. However, this seems to be the point where I am at.

Unfortunately, there are some barriers to finding good books with appropriate main characters. First, the authentic high-interest easy reading English materials known by my colleagues and I are largely authored and produced by western foreigners and western publishing companies. Likewise, this means that stories are mostly written from western perspectives with western characters. Although stories may feature Asian characters, they are usually living in a western country. Furthermore, if the characters are local mainland Chinese persons, the book is usually not featuring a current topic or perspective on the country. Rather the book is retelling ancient Chinese legends and folklore. To me, this creates disadvantages in the classroom, namely lack of engagement among my struggling readers and lack of progress in literacy development. The text struggles to ignite intrinsic motivators of the struggling students, and therefore they struggle to process it.

As such, the implication for teacher practice is that continued efforts in finding books where Chinese students can relate deeply to the main character is necessary. Teachers should strive to find books reflecting the classroom population down to the diversity within the diversity of the classroom. For me this means remembering to reflect students with lower socioeconomic backgrounds, students who identify as little persons (dwarfism), students who display signs of being on the autism spectrum, and students who are below or above average maturity or aptitude. This action on the part of the school and teachers can have a domino effect. It can get students more involved in the books they are reading, thus more motivated to read for intrinsic reasons, and more likely to progress in their reading achievement.

Finally, further elaboration about the qualities that contribute to the interestingness of books will be established, specifically in regard to the aspects of repetition and complexity. Repetition of similar events was listed as a characteristic that contributed to decline in reader interest of a middle school student. Research shows a book's content should be psychologically suitable to the child's age group and intellectual level (Niemann, 2002; Smallwood, 1988; Vardell, Hadaway & Young, 2006). In other words, maturity of a book's content is essential and should not be overlooked.

From this data, the inference revealed is that repetition of similar events was not a psychologically suitable aspect of a book for a middle school student. Arguably, it seems repetition did not contribute to building a complex theme, but rather countered it. Therefore, to develop intrinsically motivated readers, educators cannot sacrifice complexity for readability. Educators must seek out books that achieve both qualities.

General Implications

At large, this study showed that interest as a factor for igniting motivation positively benefited the reading comprehension outcomes of extrinsically motivated students. So, what are the implications of better reading comprehension and a new focus on interest in the Chinese classroom? These implications will be discussed in regard to: student and country benefits from academic gains, student benefits from more holistic education, and school gains in increased alignment to reforms.

Students and the country benefit from academic gains. It is no surprise what higher academic scores can do for a student. Since this study used extrinsically motivated students, it is likely that even greater comprehension gains would be seen with students who are intrinsically motivated to read. Better scores on classwork are also likely

predictive of student scores on tests, where middle school students will soon be taking the high-stakes *zhong kao* test. A 4% increase in a student's score could be what makes or breaks his or her entry into a key school and a well-paid job in the future. Indeed, the high-stakes tests of China are high-stakes, especially for economically disadvantaged students (Muthanna & Sang, 2015; Yu, Chen, Levesque-Bristol, & Vansteenkiste, 2018; Zhang, 2011).

Beyond the gains of the individual student, there is also a collective impact on the country when more students become better English users. On a national level, more competent users of the English language help achieve the state's political and economic aspirations of accessing other country's knowledge on science and technology (Adamson, 2004; Hu, 2004; McPherron, 2016). This implication is of strategic importance to the government.

Students benefit from holistic education. A focus on interest as a means of motivation in the classroom implies students will benefit in holistic ways. Good books extend one's background, experiences, emotions, and issues affecting oneself (Jobe, Sakari, & Sakari, Dayton, 1999). In turn, this greater perspective on life and of self can help develop autonomous direction-giving identity, inner compass, and self-discovery (Yu, Chen, Levesque-Bristol, & Vansteenkiste, 2018). More importantly, allowing students to have the autonomy to follow their self-determined, highly internalized interests is psychologically satisfying and a reliable method for invoking intrinsic motivation (Noels, Pelletier, Clément & Vallerand, 2000).

Furthermore, as a reminder, a focus on the student as a whole person is also a call to action of the new reforms, where focusing on the whole person includes developing a

student's social well-being and interpersonal skills (Gong & Holliday, 2013). Likewise, Ushidoa (2009) states that one should lean away from national culture and abstract theoretical senses of who learners are and see them rather as real persons in "small culture" (where *small culture* is a term coined by Holliday, 1999). Ushioda (2009) calls this a person-in-context relational view, where a learner is in a particular culture in a particular historical context. These persons, our learners, are dynamic, complex, and non-linear. Therefore, teachers should not see the pursuit of interest as superfluous to teaching, but as essential. Knowing our students' interests is what helps the teacher know students as real people. Therefore, when teachers allow for the pursuit of interest, it helps students develop as individuals in holistic ways.

Schools benefit by gaining increased alignment to reforms. Motivation through interest for reading development also has implications for achieving closer alignment to reforms. Offering high interest books as supplementary reading material aligns practice to policy. The National English Chinese Standards state reading materials should "relate to students' life, be extensive in topics and various in text types; conceptual, interesting, informative, challenging and current" (ME, 2003, p.30-31). In addition, integration of interest into the classroom shows how schools, their teachers, and students can shift to a new philosophical way of learning in the classroom (Yan & He, 2012), where the teacher is less of an authoritarian instructor and receptacle of all knowledge dictating, "this is the book all students need to and must read," but rather a facilitator guiding students in their reading choices based on conversations with students about their interests and intrinsic motivators. In doing this, students would be allowed to take some responsibility for the navigation of their own learning. As a result of these choices, schools would gain closer

alignment to new reforms and students would experience the psychological satisfaction of exercising some autonomy in their learning.

Limitations

This study had some limitations. First, while this study did not seek to prove generalizability or causality, findings corroborated the extant literature. Secondly, this study utilized twenty participants, only three of which completed the whole study. This meant that the amount of data gathered was small. This was also compounded by the fact that one student's data presented a confounding variable. One participant found neither book more than 50% interesting, thus the benefits of motivation through interest could not be fully realized in that chunk of data.

Thirdly, and more importantly, simply looking at book covers was found to be an ineffective method for determining sustainable student interest in the book. This was a weak step in the study procedure for the book selection process. Three of the books that were selected by students in this study, were reported as only 50% interesting (*Great Minds, Walrus Joins In*, and *The Mermaid and Me*). The implications of this limitation will be discussed later in the paper.

Three limitations were presented in this section. These limitations show the need for further research to be conducted.

Further Research

As stated in the limitations section, further research would be beneficial for grounding the claims of this paper. However before collecting more research, the procedure for book selection should be revised. After that, further searching for eastern-oriented books could be beneficial.

To begin, there are several suggestions I would make in order to foster strong matches between students' interests and the interestingness of the book. To begin, students may need more guidance from the teacher in understanding the genre of the book and what that entails. Likewise, previewing a short synopsis of the book would be helpful. Students might also benefit from doing a picture walk through the book or reading the first several pages together with the teacher. In addition, offering a greater selection of high interest books could lead to a better selection, where the most interesting book is selected instead of the least boring.

Secondly, further research using alternative books that offer an eastern-orientation could be beneficial to the purposes of this study. The general western orientation of the books used for this study partially compromised the quality of the books' interest. As such, this leaves room for improvement. It is possible that using eastern-oriented books would show the benefits of motivation through interest were underestimated in this study.

These are the areas for further research for this study. By doing further research, hopefully current limitations from this study could be avoided. This further research would benefit the ESL professional community, particularly in China.

Conclusion

Through the completion of this study, I was able to reach some substantial new understandings about how motivation through interest can mediate student learning. This is important for my teaching practice going forward and creates a call to action for other educators too. First, I found that for extrinsically motivated students, interest is important for building positive momentum in reading development. Therefore, as educators we

need to rekindled positive reading experiences with extrinsically motivated or struggling students, and perhaps even create that first positive reading experience for a learner.

Secondly, I learned that in order to improve reading comprehension, a stronger focus on qualitative thinking is needed so that students can understand how details relate together to form a whole body of knowledge. Therefore, educators need to find more time giving explicit instruction and practice on qualitative cognitive thinking skills. This likely means needing to go through reading materials more slowly and deeply instead of pushing through numerous reading passages quickly.

Next, through this study I learned that it is effective to offer students books with morals, relatable main characters, and complex themes. This means that as educators we must strive to find books at the appropriate readability level, maturity level, and with characters that look and live like our students. Accepting compromise in any of these areas means accepting compromise in learner achievement. For English language teachers in China working with primarily Chinese students, this is probably the most significant call to action—to find interesting books that strongly match the interests of the students.

Finally, through this study I learned that a focus on interest in the classroom benefits students' holistic education. For educators who are concerned about addressing the social-emotional needs of their students, this is important. Speaking for myself, this is an issue close to my heart. I believe that as educators we should carefully considered how we can help Chinese students manage the academic pressures of an externally oriented exam system and educational culture. Therefore, educators should make the investigation and implementation of students' interests in the classroom a routine practice. This

benefits students' long-term academic gains and the school's alignment to national reform policies in education.

As for a closer look into my own day-to-day practice, this study is helping me build my own classroom library. I have found that I need a much larger inventory of high interest books. In the process of selecting a book, many will be eliminated simply because of their readability level or genre type. The process of finding a good book means many will be ruled out. After that, there still needs to be multiple books for the student to choose from. Therefore, in order for a teacher to satisfy the interests of his or her students, a large inventory of books needs to be available.

For my day-to-day practice, I have also found that rich, thick, descriptive feedback from students on their reading experiences is necessary before the teacher or student take next steps. For the teacher, it is helpful to state that honest opinions about student reading experiences are valued. The teacher can encourage rich student feedback by using similar questions to those used in the interview: during reading, tell me about what parts made the book interesting; during the reading, tell me about what parts made the book boring; when you finished reading, tell me about whether you thought the book was still interesting; and, tell me about what helped you learn English. This feedback can then be used for guiding the student in their next book selection and for guiding the teacher on next purchase choices.

As Gardner (1985) states, "understanding where the roots of motivation lie are important for understanding where to pour the water" (1985, p. 15). For teachers who have grown warry in their efforts to improve the reading development of their students, I

believe these are words to live by. Interest, like water, is a basic need and can foster

students' growth.

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APPENDIX A:

Motivations for Reading Questionnaire

Motivations for Reading Questionnaire

阅读调查问卷动机

We are interested in your reading.

我们对你的阅读感兴趣

The sentences tell how some students feel about reading English books. Read each

sentence and decide whether it talks about a person who is like you or different from you.

There are no right or wrong answers. The only thing we want to know is how you feel

about reading in English.

这些句子说明了部分学生对阅读英语书籍的看法。 阅读每句话，并决定是否谈论

一个像你或与你不同的人。 没有正确或错误的答案，我们只想知道你对英文阅读

的感受。

For many of the following sentences, you should think about the kinds of things you read

in your English classes, at school, or in after-school classes.

在阅读一个句子同时，并考虑你在英语课上，在学校或课后课上阅读的各种东西。

Here are some sentences for practice. 句子练习

1. _____ I like free time. 我喜欢空闲时间

Different	A **Little** Different	A **Little**	
From me	From Me	**Like** Me	**Like** Me
和我不同	和我有些不同	有点像我	像我一样

X_____X_____X_____
___X

        1   2   3   4

If the sentence is **very different from you**, write 1. 如果句子和你的不同，请写 1

If the sentence is **a little different from you**, write 2. 如果句子和你的有些不同，请写 2

If the sentence is **a little like you**, write 3. 如果句子和我有点像，请写 3

If the sentence is **a lot like you**, write 4. 如果句子和我非常像，请写 4

2. _____ I like taking tests. 我喜欢做测试

Different	**A Little Different**		
From me	From Me	**Like** Me	**Like** Me
和我不同	和我有些不同	有点像我	像我一样

X_____X_____X_____
___X

1	2	3	4

If the sentence is **very different from you**, write 1. 如果句子和你的不同，请写 1

If the sentence is **a little different from you**, write 2. 如果句子和你的有些不同，请写 2

If the sentence is **a little like you**, write 3. 如果句子和我有点像，请写 3

If the sentence is **a lot like you**, write 4. 如果句子和我非常像，请写 4

Okay, we are ready to start on the sentences about reading. Remember, when you give your answers you should think about the things you read in your classes. There are no right or wrong answers, we are just interested in YOUR ideas about reading. To give your answer, write ONE number on each line. Write your answers on the answer sheet.

我们准备开始阅读有关的句子。 记住，当你给出你的答案时，你应该考虑你在课堂上阅读的内容。 没有正确或错误的答案，我们只是对你的阅读方式感兴趣。请在每行上填写一个数字，并在答题纸上写下你的答案。

English Name 英文名: _____   Date 时间: _____

Motivations for Reading Questionnaire 阅读调查问卷动机

	A **Little**		
Different	**Different**	A **Little**	
From me	From Me	**Like** Me	**Like** Me
和我不同	和我有些不同	有点像我	像我一样

X_____X_____X_____

___X

    1   2   3   4

1. _____ If the story is interesting, I can read difficult material.

   如果故事有趣，我可以阅读有难度的材料

2. _____ I like to help my friends with their schoolwork in reading.

   我喜欢帮助我的朋友读书

3. _____ I like being the best at reading.

   我喜欢成为阅读能手

4. _____ When the teacher says I'm doing well, I like it.

   我喜欢老师夸奖我读的好

5. _____ I like to talk to my friends about what I am reading.

  我喜欢告诉我的朋友我正在读什么

6. _____ I like to tell my family about what I am reading.

  我喜欢告诉我的家人我正在读什么

7. _____ I usually learn difficult things by reading.

  我通过阅读来学习困难的事情

8. _____ I like it when the questions in books can make me think.

  当书中的问题能让我思考，我喜欢它

9. _____ If the teacher discusses something interesting, I might read

more about it.

  如果老师讨论有趣的话题，我会更多的阅读它

10. _____ If a book is interesting I do not care how difficult it is.

  如果一本书很有趣我不在乎它有多难

11. _____ I like reading something about my hobbies to learn more about

them.

  我喜欢阅读一些关于我的爱好的东西，以了解更多

12. _____ I like compliments for my reading work.

  我喜欢称赞我的阅读

13. _____ I like to read about something new.

  我喜欢阅读新的东西

14. _____ I like to finish my reading ahead of other students.

  我喜欢在其它学生之前完成阅读

15. _____ I have favorite subjects that I like to read about.

我有我喜欢阅读的话题

16. _____ I make pictures in my mind when I read.

我读书时，脑中呈现其画面

17. _____ When I read, I feel like I've made friends with the people in the

book.

我感到我和书中的人成为朋友

18. _____ I like mysteries.

我喜欢推理小说

19. _____ I am willing to work hard to do better than my friends in

reading.

我愿意努力读书比我的朋友们更优秀

20. _____ Sometimes, my friends tell me I am a good reader.

有时候我的朋友说我是个好的阅读者

21. _____ My friends and I like to trade things to read.

我和我的朋友喜欢交换书来阅读

22. _____ I read a lot of adventure stories.

我读了很多关于冒险的故事

23. _____ I like being the only one who knows an answer in something we

read.

我是唯一那个知道我们读的书中问题答案的人，我喜欢这种感

觉

24. _____ My family often tells me what a good job I am doing in reading.

我的家人经常告诉我我的阅读做的特别好

APPENDIX B:

Comprehension Quizzes

English Name: _____   **Date:**

_____

Great Minds

Part 1: Multiple Choice

1. Based on picture on the cover of the book, I think this story will be about:

    a. Food

    b. Music

    c. Sports

    d. School

2. What kind of group will Lyn, Li, and Tim begin?

    a. A math group

    b. A pizza group

    c. A band

    d. A friend group

3. At the beginning, how many people were at the show?

    a. 9

    b. 12

    c. 18

    d. 20

4. What is the main problem that happens during the show?

    a. The music isn't good

    b. Tim gets sick

    c. Not very many friends come

    d. There isn't enough pizza

5. At the end of the story:

    a. Lyn is unhappy

    b. The band is happy because they solved the problem

    c. The band wants to change their name

    d. Lyn, Li, and Tim eat the most pizza

6. Who are the main characters?

    a. The pizza man

    b. The friends

    c. Five guys

    d. Lyn, Li, Tim

Part 2: Short answer

Write two things the band does to prepare (准备)for the show.

Example: They practice their music.

Describe (描述)how the band cuts the pizza. Write 2 answers.

Part 3: Finish the paragraph with the words from the box.

math	smaller	three	band	show	Great Minds
pizza		smart		some	

The 1)_____ friends all like music. So, they decided to make

a 2)_____. The name of their band is 3)_____.

They have a 4)_____ for their friends on the 30th. The music is great!

They order three pizzas. During the break, more friends come! Now there isn't enough

5)_____. Lyn gets angry. They use 6)_____ to

solve the problem. They cut the pizza into7) _____ pieces. Now

everyone can have 8)_____ pizza. Lyn, Li, and Tim smile because

they are really 9)_____!

English Name: _____   **Date:** _____

Clan Castles

Part 1: Multiple Choice

1. Based on picture on the cover of the book, I think this story will be about:

    a. A funny game

    b. A scary game

    c. A relaxing game

    d. A sad game

2. Jake and Kyle are playing a video game. What is the name of the game?

    a. Duckhanas

    b. King Norah

    c. Clan Castles

    d. New World

3. How can Jake and Kyle win the video game?

    a. Defeat （击败） King Norah

    b. Get out of castle 50

    c. Take the money

    d. Get out of the cave

4. What do Jake and Kyle take from the *minagon*?

    a. A *sworderang*

    b. A key

    c. A sandwich

       d. Money

5. At the end of the story Jake and Kyle:

       a. Want to play Clan Castle again

       b. Think maybe they had a bad dream

       c. Want to tell their families what happened

       d. Want to cry

6. Who is the hero in the story:

       a. Jake

       b. King Norah

       c. The villagers

       d. Kyle

Part 2: Short Answer

7. Why **doesn't** Kyle want to play the game anymore? Write 2 answers.

Example: Kyle thinks they are going to die.

8. What successful things does Jake do during the last battle to defeat King Nojra?

Write 2 answers.

Example: Jake defeats （击败） *the serpent.*

Part 3: Finish the paragraph using the words in the box.

home	inside	win	turn back	saves	King
Nojra	Jake	jumps	trapped		

Jake and Kyle are playing a Clan Castles. Suddenly, they go 1)

_____ the TV. They are in the game. To go back home, the boys must play.

They must 2) _____ the game. They must defeat 3) _____.

Kyle is scared. Then, Kyle gets 4) _____. Now 5) _____ must

defeat King Nojra by himself. Jake is in the last battle with King Nojra. The fight is very

difficult, and they fight for a long time. Then, Jake 6) _____ on a bug that

can fly. He 7) _____ Kyle and gets the Reflection Mirror. Jake uses the

mirror to make the fireball 8) _____ and hit King Nojra! Suddenly, the

boys are back 9) _____. Did they win? Was it a bad dream? Nobody knows.

English Name: _____   **Date:**

_____

The Mermaid and Me

Part 1: Multiple Choice

2. Based on picture on the cover of the book, I think this story will be about:

    a. Food

    b. Sports

    c. Water

    d. School

7. Jim has a problem. For a long time he has been:

    a. Too scared to swim in the ocean

    b. Too cold to swim in the ocean

    c. Too young to swim in the ocean

    d. Too busy to swim in the ocean

8. Jim's problem started because:

    a. His mom never let him swim

    b. He went swimming in the dark

    c. When he was young he saw a mermaid

    d. When he was young he almost died swimming

9. Jim thinks he sees a big fish. But actually (实际)it is:

    a. A merman

    b. A mermaid

      c. A human

      d. A fin

10. At the end of the story, Jim:

      a. Let's go of his fear of swimming

      b. Becomes a merman

      c. Almost dies in a riptide

      d. Has a dream

11. The main character of the story is:

      a. Jim's mom

      b. The mermaid

      c. Jim

      d. Flame

Part 2: Short Answer

12. How does the author describe (描述)the mermaid? Write two answers.

Example: She wears pearls.

13. How do you know Jim is a good swimmer now? Write two answers.

Part 3: Finish the paragraph with the words from the box.

afraid	young	died	mermaid
human			
	stay	good	friends	see

Jim is finally ready to swim in the ocean again. He went swimming as a

1)_____ boy. At that time he almost 2)_____.

Now, he will swim again. This time he is a 3)_____ swimmer.

Suddenly, he can 4)_____ a girl. She is a 5)_____.

They swim together. They become 6)_____. Jim cannot

7)_____ forever in the ocean because he is a

8)_____. Jim is no longer (不再) 9)_____ to

swim in the ocean.

English Name: _____   **Date:** _____

Noisy Neighbors

Part 1: Multiple Choice

1. Based on the cover of the book, I think this story will be about:

    a. Sports heroes

    b. Friendly pets

    c. People in the city

    d. Computers and technology

2. Mr. Flinch is unhappy because:

    a. He is fat and ugly

    b. He doesn't have any friends

    c. He is too noisy

    d. Carl and Poppy are loud

3. What noise does Mr. Flinch hear?

    a. Poppy fixing cars and Carl's music

    b. Poppy's music and Carl fixing cars

    c. Poppy's children and Carl's children

    d. The traffic (堵车)on the street

4. Why is Poppy writing angel (天使) music?

    a. She misunderstood Mr. Flinch's long hoowoowoooo

    b. An angel asked her to make music

    c. A ghost (鬼魂) asked her to make music

   d. She needs to make more money

5. Poppy and Carl finally move out. So:

   a. The noise problem is solved forever

   b. The noise problem becomes worse

   c. The noise problem stays the same

   d. The noise problem is solved for a short time

6. Who is the main character in the story?

   a. Mr. Flinch

   b. Poppy

   c. Carl

   d. The children

Part 2: Short Answer

7. What are 2 things Mr. Flinch does to make his neighbors want to move?

Example: He puts a rat in Carl's fridge.

8. At the end of the story, why does Mr. Flinch remain (一直保持) unhappy? Write

  2 answers.

Part 3: Finish the paragraph using the words in the box.

unhappy	happy	Poppy	Mr. Flinch	noisy neighbors
hit	plan	cabinet	put	

1)_____ always seems to be 2)_____

even though he is a rich man. He cannot get the peace and quiet he is looking for because

he has 3)_____. At first, he tried to find a way to live next to his

neighbors. He 4) _____ the wall with his hands, put himself in a

5)_____, wrote a mean note, and 6)_____ a

towel tightly over his ears. Finally, he thinks he must make a

7)_____ to make them move out. However, even though he tried

very hard, he cannot successfully solve the problem. To make things worse,

8)_____ and Carl always seems to be

9)_____ no matter what.

English Name: _____   **Date:**

_____

Walrus Joins In

Part 1: Multiple Choice

3. Based on picture on the cover of the book, I think this story will be about:

   a. Animals

   b. Food

   c. Sports

   d. School

14. What are all the animals preparing for?

   a. Tumbling

   b. A show

   c. Diving

   d. Singing

15. All of the animals do something well, but **NOT**:

   a. Artic Fox

   b. Polar Bear

   c. Seal

   d. Walrus

16. Why doesn't walrus like diving?

   a. The water is cold

   b. Water goes into his nose

    c. He is afraid

    d. It isn't fun

17. At the end of the story, the animals think Walrus should be:

    a. A singer

    b. A tumbler

    c. A diver

    d. A clown

18. The main character of the story is:

    a. Seal

    b. Whale

    c. Walrus

    d. Artic Fox

Part 2: Short Answer

1. Why do the animals get mad at Walrus? Write 2 answers.

    Example: During Fox's act, Walrus made her fall down on her face.

2. At the end of the show, why do the animals cheer (欢呼) for Walrus?

Part 3: Finish the paragraph with the words from the box.

join in	a show	good	bad
Walrus	clowning	practicing	will mistakes

In the North Pole, the animals will have 1)_____ . Almost every

animal can do something special. But, 2)_____ cannot do anything well.

When the show finally starts, Walrus thinks he must 3)_____ the acts.

So, he does. As a result, each act becomes 4)_____. However, something

surprising happens. That animals watching the show think the show is

5)_____. They think Walrus's 6)_____ are part of the

act. They tell Walrus what he is good at 7)_____. So, now Walrus

starts 8)_____ this skill （技能） very hard. Walrus

9)_____ be in the next show. Everyone is happy, especially Walrus.

APPENDIX C:

Panel of Faces
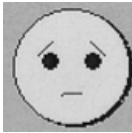
English Name 英文名: _____ Date 时间: _____

Affective Survey: Panel of Faces情感态度调查：表情符号

Set 1

Circle the faces that show how you are feeling NOW. You can circle more than one face.

圈出体现你现在感觉的一张脸，你可以圈出多个选项。

1 Sad 难过	2 Interested 感兴趣	3 Embarrassed 尴尬	4 Sorry 抱歉	5 Neutral 中立	6 Angry 生气
7 Surprise	8 Happy 高兴	9 Scared 害怕	10 Bore	11 Disgust	

d 惊奇			d 无聊	ed 厌恶	

Book	**Face Number**
Heist	
Virtual Reality	
Titanic	
Dark Man: The Dark Woods	
Dive	
Dark Man: The Face in the Mirror	
Choices: No Exceptions	
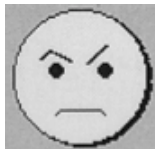
English Name 英文名: _____ Date 时间: _____

Affective Survey: Panel of Faces情感态度调查：表情符号

Set 2

Circle the faces that show how you are feeling NOW. You can circle more than one face.

圈出体现你现在感觉的一张脸，你可以圈出多个选项。

1 Sad 难过	2 Interested 感兴趣	3 Embarrassed 尴尬	4 Sorry 抱歉	5 Neutral 中立	6 Angry 生气
7 Surprised 惊奇	8 Happy 高兴	9 Scared 害怕	10 Bored 无聊	11 Disgusted 厌恶	

Book	Face Number
Area 51	
World's Ugliest Dog	
Dark Man Killer in the Dark	
Monsters on Land	
Vietnam	
Choices: Easy Pass	
Dark Man: The Dark Side of Magic	
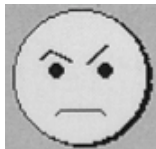
English Name 英文名: _____ Date 时间: _____

Affective Survey: Panel of Faces情感态度调查：表情符号

Set 3

Circle the faces that show how you are feeling NOW. You can circle more than one face.

圈出体现你现在感觉的一张脸，你可以圈出多个选项。

1 Sad 难过	2 Interested 感兴趣	3 Embarrassed 尴尬	4 Sorry 抱歉	5 Neutral 中立	6 Angry 生气
7 Surprised 惊奇	8 Happy 高兴	9 Scared 害怕	10 Bored 无聊	11 Disgusted 厌恶	

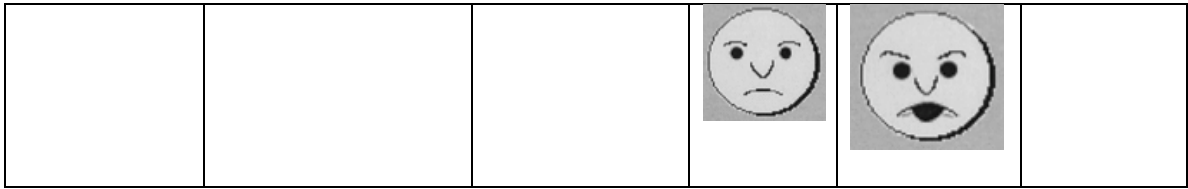| Book	Face Number
3D Printing	
Samurai	
Silentious	
Hacked	
The Amazing Adventures of Abbey McQuade: Virus	
Dark Man: Danger in the Dark	
True Crime	

English Name 英文名: _____ Date 时间: _____

Affective Survey: Panel of Faces情感态度调查：表情符号

Set 4

Circle the faces that show how you are feeling NOW. You can circle more than one face.

圈出体现你现在感觉的一张脸，你可以圈出多个选项。

1 Sad 难过	2 Interested 感兴趣	3 Embarrassed 尴尬	4 Sorry 抱歉	5 Neutral 中立	6 Angry 生气
7 Surprised 惊奇	8 Happy 高兴	9 Scared 害怕	10 Bored 无聊	11 Disgusted 厌恶	

Book	Face Number
Clan Castles	
Qwick Cutter	
Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde	
Emoji of Doom	
Pirate	
Jump	
Dark Man: The Day is Dark	

APPENDIX D:

A-Z Language Proficiency Assessment Tool

Reading a-z

LEVEL H

Benchmark Passage   **Dinner with the Animals**

Name _____   Word Count: 99

Dinner with the Animals

We would ask all our animal friends to dinner.

We would ask them to eat food with us at our table

in the woods.

We would put all the foods they like to eat on the table.

The bears would ask for honey, but they would not

say please.

The bees would buzz around all our animal friends

to get the honey.

The ducks would clean their feathers at the table.

The birds would chirp and chirp at the dinner table.

The jackrabbits would hop around the dinner table.

It would feel just like a family dinner at home.

Reading A-Z

Benchmark Passage Quick Check

Dinner With the Animals

Name _____ Date _____

Instructions: Read each question carefully and choose the best answer.

1. Where does this story take place?
    - Ⓐ in a house
    - Ⓑ in the woods
    - Ⓒ in a restaurant

2. Which tells a fact about the story?
    - Ⓐ Bears are animals.
    - Ⓑ Bears say please.
    - Ⓒ Honey tastes good.

3. Where are the bees in the story?
    - Ⓐ in the trees
    - Ⓑ on the table
    - Ⓒ in the air

4. What would the birds do at the dinner table?
    - Ⓐ clean their feathers
    - Ⓑ chirp and chirp
    - Ⓒ hop around

5. What is **dinner**?
    - Ⓐ a home
    - Ⓑ an animal
    - Ⓒ a meal