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An Ecological Understanding of L2 Reading Motivation: The Case of Chinese Tertiary-Level Students in an Elective Extensive Reading Course

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ABSTRACT

Previous studies have identified a range of learner factors and factors within more immediate contexts that affect students' motivation in L2 extensive reading (ER) programs. However, much remains to be known about the effect of sociocultural factors on L2 reading motivation, especially in instructed ER settings. To address the issue, the paper adopted Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory to investigate factors impacting Chinese undergraduates' L2 reading motivation in an elective ER course. Data were collected from semi-structured interviews, classroom observation and reading logs. In addition to factors identified by previous studies, our study further revealed that learner factors like characteristics, and contextual factors like past EFL learning experiences at the mesosystemic level, class time and course evaluation at the exosystemic level, collectivism and face concern at the macrosystemic level, and novelty at the chronosystemic level also exerted influence on students' L2 reading motivation in the ER course. Pedagogical implications were suggested to improve ER instruction and cultivate students' L2 reading motivation.

Keywords: Reading Motivation; Extensive Reading; Ecological Systems Theory; Contextual Factors; Learner Factors

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1. Introduction

Second language (L2) reading brings enormous benefits in the information age. It improves learners' L2 proficiency, enhances their cross-cultural understanding, and allows them to access up-to-date information [1,2]. Learners' L2 reading proficiency can be improved effectively through extensive reading (ER) [3,4]. ER requires students to read extensively and continuously, which necessitates sustained motivation. Sustaining students' reading motivation in L2 ER is challenging, however, as it is a dynamic process influenced by multiple factors [5,6]. Previous studies have identified a range of individual and contextual factors affecting the change of L2 reading motivation in ER programs [5–11]. However, these studies were mainly conducted outside the classroom and focused on the contextual factors from more proximal environments, neglecting the impact brought by sociocultural factors. To fill the gap, an ecological understanding of L2 reading motivation in an elective ER course was proposed in this study. The biological perspective allows us to examine the learners' actions in the classroom from different layers of contextual systems and illuminates the ER instruction.

2. Literature Review

2.1. L2 Reading Motivation in ER Programs and Its Affecting Factors

Extensive Reading, involving "each learner independently and silently reading a lot of material which is at the right level for them" [4], is considered important and effective practice to improve learners' language skills and affection towards reading. While extensive reading has gained traction in recent years, successful implementation requires a nuanced understanding of the factors that contribute to sustained reading motivation in the classroom. This recognition stems from the understanding that teacher guidance and engaging reading activities are indispensable for keeping students engaged and ensuring positive ER outcomes [10,12].

Reading motivation is defined as "the individual's personal goals, values, and beliefs with regards to the topics, processes, and outcomes of reading" [13]. Reference [14] proposed a theoretical model for L2 reading motivation, which highlights four key factors that shape it: reading materials, reading ability, attitudes towards L2 reading and the social-cultural environment. They claimed that suitable reading material and positive attitudes towards L2 reading exert greater influence on students' L2 reading motivation, which could compensate for the insufficiency in reading ability and the inappropriateness of the socio-cultural environment.

Empirical research examined reading motivation in L2 ER from quantitative or qualitative perspectives. These quantitative studies used questionnaires and identified various factors affecting students' reading motivation in L2 ER. They include intrinsic motivation for both L1 reading and L2 reading, entrance exam-related extrinsic motivation, importance of reading, reading efficacy, parents' involvement in and family attitudes toward reading [15–17]. However, quantitative research tends to be decontextualized and reductionistic, leading to an incomplete understanding of the subject [18].

Qualitative research in L2 ER revealed that L2 reading motivation displayed a dynamic rather than stable trait, in response to a range of learners and contextual factors [5,6]. Several learner factors, such as interest in reading materials [6,8], L2 proficiency [6,8], and beliefs about L2 learning and L2 reading [6,7] and self-regulation [7] were identified. Contextual factors identified in previous studies include books [6,8,9,11,19], teachers [5,8,10,11], peers [5,8,11], reading activities [16] external demands like homework and exams [6–8] and distractions like friends and sports [9].

In sum, these contextualized studies have reported the dynamic nature of L2 reading motivation in ER programs, with multiple learner and contextual factors come into play. Nevertheless, one major issue is that these contextual factors were identified within more immediate contexts, with sociocultural factors being somewhat overlooked. Reference [20] pointed out, as academic motivation is embedded within the broader environment, the pervasive social and cultural forces might exert influence on it. Therefore, it is essential to consider the impact of sociocultural environment when understanding the factors that influence reading motivation in L2 ER. Another issue

is that only a few of these studies have been conducted in instructional settings [10,11,21], resulting in a limited understanding of ER instruction [12]. One promising way to overcome the limitations is to understand the fluctuation of L2 reading motivation in ER classrooms from an ecological perspective. The ecological view sees human development as being shaped by interactions between individuals and their environments, which consist of various interconnected systems, including both physical and social contexts. It not only offers a framework for the factors already identified by previous studies, but also suggests ways to explore additional learner and contextual factors that shape students' L2 reading motivation and its development [22].

2.2. Ecological Systems Theory

Proposed by Bronfenbrenner [23], Ecological Systems Theory (EST) adopted concepts of "ecology" and "ecosystem" from the field of ecology to enlighten the interaction between individuals and the environment where they live and grow. In EST, the environment was conceived in terms of systems. It introduced five levels of environmental systems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem, composing them into a model of nested concentric circles. **Table 1** displays the definitions of each

ecosystem. The nested model of ecological systems draws researchers' attention to various individual factors and contextual factors originating in both proximal and distal systems, facilitating a more comprehensive understanding of human development.

EST and the nested model of ecological systems have been first introduced to language learning research by van Lier [24]. After this seminal work, numerous studies applied the theory to L2 acquisition research in the decades that followed. However, this body of research has typically addressed microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystems, overlooking exploration of the chronosystem [25–27]. However, to the researchers' knowledge, few studies explored the development of L2 reading motivation in ER from the ecological systems perspective.

To fill the gap, this investigation aims to answer the following questions:

Research Question 1: What are the learner factors affecting students' reading motivation in an L2 ER course at a Chinese university?

Research Question 2: What are the contextual factors affecting students' reading motivation in an L2 ER course at a Chinese university?

Table 1. Definition of Ecosystems in EST.

Ecosystem	Definition
Microsystem	". . . a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics" [23].
Mesosystem	". . . the interrelations among two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates" [23].
Exosystem	". . . one or more settings that do not involve the developing person as an active participant, but in which events occur that affect, or are affected by, what happens in the setting containing the developing person" [23].
Macrosystem	". . . consistencies, in the form and content of lower-order systems that exist, or could exist, at the level of subculture or culture as a whole, along with any belief systems or ideology underlying such consistencies" [23].
Chronosystem	". . . the influence on the person's development of changes (and continuities) over time in the environments in which the person is living" [28].

3. Methods

3.1. Research Context

This study was situated in an elective L2 extensive reading course at a local university in central China where students learn English as their L2. The university's English instruction is exam-oriented and features intensive reading.

Non-English majors in their second year or beyond could take this ER course. The teacher, the first researcher, has 16 years of experience teaching College English and a special interest in teaching English reading.

The course spanned 16 weeks, with classes conducted once a week for 90 minutes. **Table 2** displays the activities across the semester.

Table 2. Teaching Activities in the ER Course.

Week	Teaching Content	Assignment
1	◇ Course Introduction ◇ Pre-reading assessment of vocabulary and reading proficiency	None
2–8, 10, 12, 14	◇ In-class English ER and related discussion in English or Chinese ◇ Keeping reading logs in English	◇ Out-of-class English ER ◇ Activity of "flatman" in week 7
9,11,13,15	◇ Collaborative English reading and related discussion in English or Chinese ◇ In-class English ER	◇ Out-of-class English ER ◇ Keeping reading logs in English
16	◇ Post-reading assessment of reading proficiency	None

For the extensive reading, 250 books with diverse titles in nine levels of difficulty were laid out on the last row of desks in the classroom, with the most challenging on the left and the easiest on the right. Students selected books matching their vocabulary size, reading proficiency and interests. They were encouraged to switch to another book anytime if they found the current one unattractive or too difficult. After the in-class reading, students participated in different group activities and shared their thoughts on the books they read.

Each week, students kept reading logs where they noted down the title of the book they read during the week and wrote an English summary of it. They were also encouraged to record other information (e.g. difficulties, thoughts and reflections) concerning their reading in the week.

In week 7, a reading activity called "Flatman" was developed to encourage communication about reading with people outside the university. In this activity, students selected a character from the books they read during the first 6 weeks and cut out the character using hard paper and painted it in colors. Then they mailed the paper-cut character along with a letter introducing this character to anyone they wished to share it with. The recipient was required to take a picture with the Flatman at a significant location and then mail the photo together with its description back to the sender.

For the collaborative English reading, the teacher provided 4 to 5 theme-based articles each time, each article available in 3 to 4 versions of varying levels of difficulty. Students worked in groups of two and read the article they selected based on their language proficiency and interest. After reading, they discussed questions related to the week's theme.

During the course, the teacher provided reading materials, monitored their reading process, helped them as needed, set a reading example to the students during the extensive reading session, led the discussion and gave feedback.

3.2. Participants

Four participants from the elective L2 ER course participated in the study. **Table 3** shows the demographic information of the participants, including their pseudonyms, ages, genders, majors and reading proficiency.

Table 3. Demographic information of the participants.

Participants (Pseudonyms)	Lijie	Zhangtian	Wuxin	Liyong
Age	20	21	20	20
Gender	Male	Female	Female	Male
Major	Mathematics	Law	Horticulture	Network Engineering
Year of Study	Second year	Third year	Second year	Second year
Reading proficiency	advanced	average	average	Below average

3.3. Data Collection

This qualitative study took a multiple-case-study approach to understand the factors affecting students' reading motivation in an elective English ER course. In week 1, students were informed of purposes and procedures of the study. Their participation in the study was voluntary and they could withdraw anytime during the study period without any consequences.

Data from multiple sources were collected to achieve

triangulation, including classroom observations, reading logs, and semi-structured interviews. First, during the course, the teacher kept field notes as she observed students' performance in the classrooms and reflected her reading instruction. Second, the reading logs where students kept thoughts on their weekly reading were collected by the researcher (see Section 3.1).

Third, in week 17, the four students mentioned above were invited to participate in the one-on-one semi-structured interviews. The selection of the interviewees was informed by classroom observations, taking genders, reading proficiencies and performance in the class into consideration (see Section 3.2 for detailed information of the four participants). In the interviews, they were first instructed to draw a motivational timeline graph with the aim of directly and visually displaying the dynamics of their reading motivation during the semester. Timeline graphs are a useful tool for investigating students' longitudinal motivational change [29]. After this, they were invited to retrospect their experiences in this course and explain the changes in their reading motivation.

The semi-structured interviews, taking place in a quiet office in the university, were conducted in Mandarin, as students were more comfortable expressing their thoughts in their native language, and recorded with students' consent. The researcher prepared 4 open-ended questions beforehand (see Appendix A), and raised some emergent and follow-up questions during the interviews. Each interview lasted 20–30 minutes. Recorded semi-structured interviews were transcribed and translated by the researchers.

3.4. Data Analysis

Data analysis involved thematic analysis of the written data collected from semi-structured interviews, relevant parts of field notes from classroom observation and reading logs with the aim of investigating the learner and environmental factors affecting students' L2 reading motivation in the course.

This written data related to each student was compiled to form individual case profiles. The first round of coding involved reading case profiles repeatedly and labelling data chunks that informed the learner and con-

textual factors that influence reading motivation [30]. Then, we looked for patterns among the codes to decide themes, which were further categorized into different ecological systems. For example, the remarks, "when I saw my friend playing on the phone secretly in the class, I could not stop myself from reaching for my phone" and "During the discussion, I noticed others read a lot in a week and had a lot to share. I decided to read more next week" were coded negative influence of peers and positive influence of peers respectively. Based on the initial codes, the theme of peers was decided, which, together with other themes such as teachers, reading materials, was categorized into the microsystem.

There are several strategies used to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings of a study [18]. In addition to the data triangulation, the three researchers, two of who are experts in qualitative studies, examined and coded the data independently and reached consensus by engaging in discussions throughout the whole process. Third, we ensured that the case description, the themes, and the major findings from this study represented the participants' intended meanings by obtaining approvals from them.

4. Findings

The data indicated that although students were in the same classroom, provided with the same set of materials, and received the same style of reading instruction, their reading motivation fluctuated and differed from each other (see **Figure 1**), influenced by the interaction of learner and contextual factors.
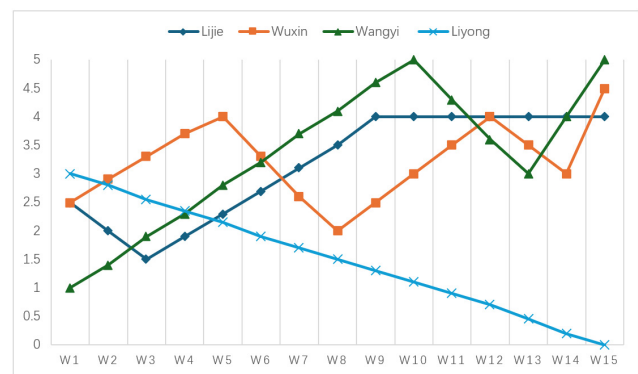
Figure 1. Chronological Changes of Four Participants' L2 Reading Motivation.

4.1. Learner Factors Affecting Students' L2 Reading Motivation in the Elective ER Course

The first question inquire is about the learner factors affecting students' L2 reading motivation in the ER course. Learner factors emerging from the cases included reading interests, L2 reading proficiency, characteristics, and attitudes towards L2 reading.

Reading interests seem to be the most important factor affecting their L2 reading motivation in the ER course where students were obliged to read in the classroom . Lijie, Zhangtian, and Wuxin had different preferences for reading topics and they prioritized this interest when selecting books. As Lijie reported, "I didn't find any interesting book in the first 3 weeks. I felt bored in the class. I'd rather read on my own than take this course." Zhangtian noted that she finished an engaging book although it was somewhat beyond her reading proficiency. Both Zhangtian and Wuxin expressed disappointment when they found the book interesting to them beyond their reading proficiency.

Students' L2 reading proficiency is another factor affecting their reading motivation in the ER course. First, they were motivated to elect the course out of the reason that "my English reading was poor. I wanted to improve it", as Liyong remarked. Second, during the course, participants' L2 reading proficiency restricted the books they could choose. They had to give up the books they found interesting but too challenging for them.

Characteristics are the typical qualities, traits, or features a person, thing, or group has. In this study they refer to participants' extraversion and self-regulation. During the course, Zhangtian' s extroverted nature enabled her to share her ideas in front of the classroom and gain praise from the teacher and classmates, which spurred her to read more. In contrast, Lijie, in explaining the cease of increase in his reading motivation from week 9, remarked, "I am an introverted person. I suffer from social phobia. I didn't like the interpersonal communication part of the course, especially reading articles with others. I think it would interrupt my mind. For me, reading is quite personal". However, Lijie was quite self-regulated. He kept reading after class as required while Wuxin was distracted easily by other affairs. Zhangtian even didn't bring back the books because she knew she "would not read it."

Attitudes towards L2 reading refer to opinions or judgments regarding the importance of L2 reading in this study. Liyong considered face-saving more important than L2 reading. Although he wanted to improve his English reading through this course, he didn't want to choose books within his levels because everyone would see him going to that section and knew his English was very poor. This would be a loss of face for him. Therefore, he didn't truly participate in the course throughout the semester, despite the teachers' reminders and special attention to him. For Zhangtian, passing the qualification exam for legal professions was more important than English reading. Therefore, when she prepared for the qualification exam in December, her reading motivation decreased.

4.2. Contextual Factors Affecting Students' L2 Reading Motivation in the Elective ER Course

Contextual factors involved reading materials, reading tasks, teachers, peers, activities outside the classroom, past English learning experience, class time, course evaluation, College English Test, Band 4 (CET-4), collectivism and novelty. These factors can be categorized into five ecological systems as illustrated in Table 1 above.

4.2.1. At the Microsystemic Level

The current study discovered four factors at the microsystemic level: reading materials, teachers, peers, and reading tasks.

Lijie, Wuxin, and Zhangtian reported a surge of reading motivation every time they read an appropriate book. They were attracted by the content of the books. Both Wuxin and Zhangtian mentioned the sense of accomplishment upon finishing an interesting book. Lijie, a more advanced student, focused more on the communication of ideas with books. He mentioned, "I prefer reflecting on what I read by myself".

Participants recognized the teacher's role in motivating their L2 reading in the course. Zhangtian was greatly motivated to read by the teacher who praised her ideas and

comments on the reading materials. Wuxin expressed her gratitude to the teacher. "It was your attitude towards us that made my friends and me more willing to attend the class and read in English." For Lijie, his reading motivation was restored when he found a suitable book under the teacher's guidance.

Peers would exert either negative or positive effect on students' L2 reading motivation. Both Wuxin and Zhangtian enjoyed interactive activities in the course because they could communicate with partners and thereby "confirm their understanding of the text", "learn from others", "find consonance" and even "wanted to outperform" their peers. Zhangtian stated, in a discussion where "another student mentioned a book I read", "we talked a lot about the book and recommended books to each other". However, the negative effect of peers is worth attention, too. When Wuxin noticed that some students were using their phones secretly in the class, she stopped reading and reached for her phone.

The reading tasks play an important role in shaping students' motivation for reading. Participants have varying preferences for reading tasks. Wuxin was averse to the task of summary writing. "It's too difficult for me. I simply couldn't finish it with 20 minutes." Lijie reported little interest in communicative tasks which were favored by Zhangtian.

4.2.2. At the Mesosystemic Level

Activities outside the classroom and past English learning experiences are affecting factors from the mesosystemic level.

Outside the course, participants were confronted with different demands outside the classroom as time goes by, such as basketball training in Liyong's case, and the qualification exam in Zhangtian's case. Most of these activities drew students' attention from L2 reading, making them reluctant to attend the course or preventing them from focusing on L2 reading in and out of the classroom. Therefore, their reading motivation declined. From week 13-14, Wuxin' reading motivation decreased to 3. She explained she felt frustrated by the fact that she took the book to her dormitory every week but ended up in reading nothing at all. However, this is where participants' self-regulation

came into play. As stated in Section 4.3.1, self-regulated students like Lijie would not be distracted by these activities as he would "set a fixed time to read and finish the daily goal of 15 pages".

The data revealed that past English learning experience was a contributing factor to the change in students' L2 reading motivation. Before taking the course, all participants only received instruction in intensive reading. Lijie, Wuxin and Zhangtian considered the ER more relaxing compared to the stressful intensive reading. In contrast, Liyong's reading motivation greatly decreased when he was astonished to find "students just read and discussed without the teachers' explanation of important and difficult language points in the materials", which he was accustomed to.

4.2.3. At the Exosystemic Level

Class time and course evaluation constituted the exosystem of students' L2 reading motivation. The elective ER course was held on Thursday evenings. The class time made both Lijie and Wunxin reluctant to attend the class. However, Lijie complained he "was too tired after a full day of classes on that day" while Wuxin said she "was unwilling to go out and attend the class in the evening because she had no class during the daytime".

As for course evaluation, there was no final exam in the course. Students were evaluated based on their attendance and performance throughout the semester. This was one of the reasons why participants chose this course. They all mentioned that they were happy to know that "there is no final exam in this the course. Why not register for it?".

4.2.4. At the Macrosystemic Level

The macrosystem was considered to have a sociocultural influence on the microsystem. At this level, College English Test, band 4 (CET-4) and collectivism and face concern are two factors stimulating their desire to read in English. Participants, except Lijie who didn't have a problem in passing CET-4, chose the course with the aim of improving their reading proficiency through the course and passing CET-4 eventually. Especially, in Wuxin's case, her previously declining intrinsic reading motivation

was restored when the CET-4 approached. This extrinsic motivation spurred her to find a book suitable for her and concentrated on the reading, leading to improvement in intrinsic reading motivation.

In addition, the Chinese cultural elements of collectivism and face concern shaped participants' motivation to reading. As discerned in the data, Zhangtian was concerned that she might "be too conspicuous" when expressing her views in front of classroom and gained praise from the teacher and classmates repeatedly. Wuxin identified herself as a "rare bird" for choosing an offline reading course and suffered from some stress while other students around her chose online elective courses. Especially, Liyong was reluctant to select a book matching his low English proficiency in class because he would feel a sense of embarrassment if everyone saw him going to the section where books suitable for him were stacked. All this showed that students' reading motivation in the course was affected by collectivism and faced concern to different degrees.

4.2.5. At the Chronosystemic Level

Novelty is a chronosystemic factor for participants' L2 reading motivation.

Wuxin's case presented a good example. Wuxin's reading motivation was high at the beginning of the course because she noticed the difference of the ER course from other intensive reading courses and felt excited to read. However, Wuxin experienced a downfall in reading motivation as we went through the same procedure for several consecutive weeks. "I found we were going through the same procedure every week, though the discussion activities varied a little." But her reading motivation was boosted again by the "Flatman" activity. "It was meaningful and interesting. I prepared it carefully and received enthusiastic response from my friend…This increased my passion for English reading again."

5. Discussion

5.1. Learner Factors Affecting Students' Reading Motivation in the Elective ER Course

According to reference [31], individual variables are important factors for their development. This study identified several learner factors influencing students' L2 reading motivation, including reading interests, L2 reading proficiency, self-regulation, and attitudes toward L2 reading—factors previously documented in research—along with extroversion, which emerged as a novel finding in this context. This study found that reading interests were the most crucial factor, followed by reading proficiency, in affecting students' reading motivation when they were obliged to read in the classroom. This is aligned with the requirements set by the definition of extensive reading [4] and identified by previous studies [6,8].

One of participants' characteristics, being self-regulated or not, was also vital in sustaining students' reading motivation due to ubiquitous distractions in and out of the classroom. This is not aligned with proposition by reference [14], but consistent with reference [7], which revealed that students' ability to self-regulate their ER was more significant than materials and attitudes towards L2 reading when they were faced with difficulties. This is corroborated by a quantitative study which showed that students with higher self-directed learning ability demonstrated significantly more motivation for extensive reading than those with lower self-directed learning ability [32].

This study also revealed that another characteristic, being extrovert or not, could also affect students' L2 reading motivation in the ER classroom. It shows that in an ER instructional setting where students read and discuss together, being extrovert or not served notable functions in forming students' L2 reading motivation. More extrovert students enjoyed communication and benefited from it more, whereas more introvert students preferred independent reading. Though seldom detected in ER studies, extraversion has been found by studies in other fields to be positively related to academic motivation [33], and influence English learning motivation, which in turn affects English

achievement [34].

5.2. Contextual Factors Affecting Students' Reading Motivation in an Elective ER Course

5.2.1. At the Microsystemic Level

Our data informed us that reading materials, teachers, peers, and reading tasks were factors at the microsystemic level affecting students' reading motivation.

Interesting and comprehensible reading materials, essential to an extensive reading program, can significantly improve students' intrinsic reading motivation [4,14]. Such materials enable readers to focus on the content and experience flow [6,35]. Finishing a book fosters a sense of accomplishment, strengthening students' self-efficacy [36], an antecedent of intrinsic reading motivation [37], and positively influenced L2 reading attitudes [21], a construct similar to intrinsic reading motivation [37].

Teacher is another factor discovered in microsystem. The ten principles of ER suggest the central status of learners and the secondary status of teachers in ER programs [14]. However, teachers' role is much more influential than was once thought [5]. In this study, in addition to designing the course, the teacher's communication with students and guidance on their reading helped sustain or rouse their L2 reading motivation. Both Sun [10] and Zhou and Day [21] reported that far more than half the students expected teachers' guidance on material selection and encouragement in their ER. The prominent role of the teachers demonstrated again the necessity of ER instruction.

As microsystems are places where individuals have direct interactions with others [38], we identified both the positive and negative influence of peers on the participants' reading motivation. Peers serve as role models and sources of feedback. By observing partners who are more engaged in L2 reading, students could be inspired to adopt similar attitudes towards reading. By communicating or collaborating with partners, students could share their opinions and experiences in reading and get feedback, which could further boost their reading motivation. Nevertheless, peers sometimes demonstrated a distraction, hindering them from concentrating on L2 reading [7].

The current data revealed that students' motivation was boosted by different reading tasks. This is corroborated by reference [16] which found different reading activities were effective in increasing students' motivation in ER. It is recommended that different reading tasks be implemented in the ER classroom to cater for different interests and characters [39,40]. However, generally, most learners were motivated collaborative activities [10,41]. Students' reading motivation was influenced positively by social interaction with their peers where they found sources of reading materials, developed better relationships with classmates, confirmed their understanding of the text, improved their reading confidence and motivation, and established an English-user identity in this type of activity [19,35,41,42].

5.2.2. At the Mesosystemic Level

Activities outside the classroom affected students' reading motivation in the classroom. Outside the course, participants confronted different demands as time went by, such as basketball training, the qualification exam or heavy study burden. To maintain their reading motivation, students should be self-regulated enough to cope with these external factors. Otherwise, they would limit and even abandon ER if in non-instructional settings [6,7,32].

The current study was one of the first to identify the impact of past EFL learning experiences on L2 reading motivation though this factor was found to affect learners' willingness to communicate in EFL classrooms [27]. The intensive reading approach has been deeply embedded in Chinese L2 instruction [43]. Students might either be bored of it and need some new elements to freshen them up or get used to it and expect it in different situations.

5.2.3. At the Exosystemic Level

Class time and course evaluation were factors that arose in the exosystem. While the class time of the course would exert varying influence on participants, how students were evaluated in the course acted as a deciding factor for them to choose it and affected their attitudes towards L2 reading during the course.

The two exosystemic factors were found to affect students' willingness to communicate and engagement in written corrective feedback in EFL classroom as well [26,27]. To the researchers' knowledge, this could be considered an

early case in which the two factors have been given attention in L2 reading motivation. However, this is quite normal as limited qualitative studies in ER were conducted in the classroom environment.

5.2.4. At the Macrosystemic Level

CET 4, collectivism and face concern are factors within the broader macrosystem, with collectivism and face concern identified as a novel factor in this context.

Participants mentioned repeatedly they were motivated by CET-4 to read in English, which reflects the exam-oriented education in China. In this culture, success in exams is the primary goal of education which creates significant stress for students as their future opportunities may heavily depend on their test scores. It is commonly recognized that students' employment prospects upon graduation can be enhanced by their good performance in the CET-4 and CET-6 [44]. Students in secondary schools in China were initially motivated to read in English by exams, too [41]. However, it is pleasing to note that this stress compels students to engage in L2 ER. This finding is consistent with the proposition identified by previous research that extrinsic reading motivation can serve as a catalyst to foster intrinsic reading motivation [12].

In addition, this study might be one of the first to discover that the Chinese cultural elements of collectivism and face concern shaped participants' motivation in L2 reading to different degrees. Collectivism prioritizes the goals, values, and interests of the group or community over those of the individual [45]. Face concern refers to the degree to which an individual is concerned with maintaining their own or others' social self-image or "face" during social interactions. Under this pattern of social interaction, people strive to avoid standing out and maintain their social image to prevent causing discomfort or drawing negative attention, which exerts influence on their academic motivation, behavior, and achievement [45,46]. Therefore, participants' behaviors, such as reluctance to attract excessive attention in the classroom, or unwillingness to appear incompetent in English were understandable.

5.2.5. At the Chronosystemic Level

Chronosystem reflects the impact of change or continuity across time on other systems [38]. The current study found that novelty is a chronosystemic factor affecting participants' L2 reading motivation.

L2 reading motivation fluctuated as reading activities changed during the course. This is supported by reference [21] which found that students valued the variation in activities provided each week. It manifests that the temporal change in context across time will affect the individuals situated in it [38]. Therefore, to enhance students' reading motivation, it is necessary to introduce new tasks because novelty plays an important role in students' intrinsic motivation by capturing attention, preventing boredom and stimulating creativity [47–49].

6. Conclusions

The present study qualitatively examined the factors affecting L2 reading motivation in an ER course by employing the ecological systems theory. Except for the sociocultural factor of collectivism and face concern, our findings revealed a range of learner and contextual factors, some consistent with previous research and others unique to this study. First, learner factors affecting L2 reading motivation in the instructional context are reading interests, L2 reading proficiency, characteristics and attitudes towards L2 reading; second, all the contextual factors identified could be categorized into different contextual systems proposed by EST. They are reading materials, reading tasks, teachers, peers at the microsystemic level, activities outside the classroom and past English learning experience at the mesosystemic level, class time and course evaluation at the exosystemic level, CET-4, and collectivism and face concern at the macrosystemic level and novelty at the chronosystemic level.

Therefore, to foster L2 reading motivation, especially intrinsic reading motivation, ER classrooms should consider both learner factors and contextual factors from different layers of systems discovered the current study. First, a supportive microsystem should be created, including providing a wide range of books, designing different reading activities to encourage collaboration and sharing in reading and providing novelty and freshness in the classroom. Second, the effects of sociocultural factors, col-

lectivism and face concern, on reading motivation should be considered. Although the behavior of L2 ER mainly happened in the classroom, students' reading motivation was subject to the influence of sociocultural environment. Third, extrinsic motivation can be used to enhance students' intrinsic reading motivation. This can be achieved by allocating part of the classroom time for ER, making after-class reading mandator, and emphasizing the importance of ER for English proficiency and College English Test Band 4 (CET-4).

As a qualitative study, the current research has its limitations. First, the findings cannot claim generalization to a larger group of Chinese L2 learners, or L2 learners in other contexts than this study. Second, the findings might be affected by the bias of the first researcher. The first researcher herself is the teacher of the elective ER course, which might limit her horizon and cause bias in the data interpretation. Therefore, caution should be taken when interpreting the findings of this study.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, J.Z. and L.C.D.; methodology, J.Z. and L.C.D.; validation, J.Z., L.C.D., and M.M.N.; formal analysis, J.Z., L.C.D., and M.M.N.; investigation, J.Z.; writing—original draft preparation, J.Z.; writing—review and editing, L.C.D. and M.M.N.; supervision, L.C.D.; project administration, L.C.D.

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Institutional Review Board Statement

Ethical approval was not required for this study as it did not involve sensitive personal information. However, all participants provided informed consent, and their privacy were strictly protected throughout the research process.

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement

Due to the nature of this research, the data are not publicly available to protect the privacy of the participants.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Appendix A

Pre-Prepared Questions for Semi-Structured Interviews

1. What motivated you to choose this course?

2. How do you think of your ER experience in the course?

3. What factors do you believe contributed to the decline in your L2 reading motivation at that specific time?

4. What factors do you believe boosted your L2 reading motivation at that specific time?

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