

Reading Attitudes of Fourth Year English as a Foreign Language Students

Actitudes de lectura de un grupo de estudiantes de cuarto año de la carrera de inglés como idioma extranjero

LAURA MATA BOSCHINI

Escuela de Lenguas Modernas, Universidad de de Costa Rica

laura.mataboschini@ucr.ac.cr

ORCID ID: [0000-0002-9645-6592](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9645-6592)

MARISELA BONILLA LÓPEZ

Escuela de Lenguas Modernas, Universidad de de Costa Rica

marisela.Bonilla@ucr.ac.cr

ORCID ID: [0000-0002-1194-7721](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1194-7721)

Abstract

The present exploratory study sought to identify the attitudes towards reading for pleasure of a group of fourth year English as a Foreign Language (EFL) majors after taking mandatory literature courses. A total of 45 students from the School of Modern Languages at a public university in San José, Costa Rica participated in this investigation. In order to elicit the participants' attitudes and motivations both before and after entering the university, an online survey was administered. The results of the survey showed that after entering the university almost half of the participants kept good reading habits, apart from the mandatory readings. Main findings also reveal that the main pre-university reading motivators suffered a change after entering the university. Although personal enjoyment and relaxation were maintained, motivators related to the general improvement of language skills obtained a higher relevance for the students. The survey answers also suggested the literary works read in class play an important role in the students' voluntary reading practices. Practical implications are discussed.

Key words: English as a Foreign Language; reading attitudes; motivations; perceived impact; literature courses

Resumen

El presente estudio exploratorio buscó identificar las actitudes de lectura por placer de un grupo de estudiantes de cuarto año de inglés como idioma extranjero, esto luego de que hubieran recibido cursos obligatorios de literatura en la carrera universitaria. Un total de 45 estudiantes de la Escuela de Lenguas Modernas de la Universidad de Costa Rica participó en esta investigación. Con el objetivo de determinar sus actitudes y motivaciones tanto antes como después de ingresar a la universidad, se administró una encuesta en línea. Los resultados mostraron que casi la mitad de los participantes conservaron buenos hábitos de lectura después de haber ingresado a la universidad, aparte de las lecturas obligatorias de los cursos. Los principales hallazgos revelan que las principales motivaciones para leer por gusto cambiaron a la hora de ingresar a la universidad, en comparación con las motivaciones preuniversitarias. El placer personal y la relajación se mantuvieron, pero las motivaciones relacionadas al perfeccionamiento de habilidades lingüísticas obtuvieron una mayor relevancia para los estudiantes. Las respuestas de la encuesta también sugieren que las obras literarias que forman parte de los programas de curso juegan un papel importante en las prácticas de lectura voluntarias de los estudiantes. Se discuten además implicaciones prácticas.

Palabras clave: Inglés como idioma extranjero; actitudes de lectura; motivaciones; impacto percibido; cursos de literatura

Introduction

Throughout the years, several studies have been conducted to investigate students' reading attitudes and reading motivations (e.g., Cole, 2002; Protacio, 2012; Fallas et. al 2014; Mora et. al, 2014). These opened a path for new research to be conducted on this topic and to provide valuable information for professors who want their students to enjoy the readings inside and outside the classroom. As a result of previous investigations, nowadays it is clear that motivations differ from student to student; however, some patterns have emerged that help identify overall general motivators and reading attitudes. For instance, Cole (2002) and Protacio (2012) concur that the social interaction that results from the reading of texts plays an important role in the students' motivation to continue reading.

Despite the notable findings in this field, to the researcher's knowledge, no study has focused on the reading attitudes of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) majors in Costa Rica. Instead, most empirical work has concentrated on the reading habits and motivations of elementary school children (cf. Cole, 2002; Protacio, 2012; Morrow & Weinstein, 1986). Additionally, as explained by Mora et al. (2014), the promotion of good reading habits should be based on several strategies aimed at attracting people to texts—hence the relevance of the present study.

Clearly, the fact that previous research has focused mainly on pre-university reading attitudes calls for more research efforts in the context of university students, especially EFL learners whose major contains a great deal of

literature courses. Therefore, the aim of this exploratory study is twofold: to ascertain the self-perceived impact of literature courses on this study group's reading attitudes and to identify the factors that motivate them to read for pleasure.

Literature Review

Reading in the Costa Rican Educational System

Reading is an activity that is relevant to people of all ages because of the benefits it brings to a person's academic, working, and personal life. Throughout the past decade, several institutions in Costa Rica have investigated and promoted reading attitudes of the general population (i.e. Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos (INEC), 2016; Ministerio de Educación Pública, 2013). Notwithstanding the advantages that reading provides, prior research suggests that the general population of Costa Rica is not interested in reading or in improving their reading attitude. The National Culture Survey conducted by INEC (2016) demonstrated that more than half of the population of the country, more specifically 56,8% does not read. The results of said survey showed that 59.8% of the people between 12 and 17 years of age do practice this activity. However, the next age group, from 18 to 35, shows a significant decrease to 41,2%. These high results in this age group are caused by several reasons, such as lack of time, which was the reason 28,3% of respondents marked. More importantly, within this age range, almost 60% indicated not reading because of lack of interest.

The previous results are a clear contrast to the efforts done by the Ministry of Public Education (2013) to emphasize the creation of policies to promote reading. For instance, the National Policy for Reading is a national action plan that aims at developing good reading habits in children. It states that since childhood, people show a natural interest towards reading, and it continues to develop and gain complexity during adolescence. Additionally, one of the main objectives of this policy is to promote the development of reading and writing capabilities of the youth for them to become autonomous people. For this reason, policies and action plans like this one are imperative in the advancement of the teaching of reading. Nevertheless, although these efforts are substantial, they fail to acknowledge the recreational aspect of reading because they prepare students to read only for academic or social purposes.

As mentioned previously, in Costa Rica, the promotion of reading since childhood has been an important task for educational and governmental institutions because the process of teaching and encouraging reading needs to start at an early age and must be continued throughout the following years in order for it to become a lifetime habit (León, 2018). As explained by Chaves (2015), for children, reading must be an entertaining act that allows their imagination to develop. Chaves further emphasizes that the instilling of a reading habit from an early age helps people see and analyze the world from different perspectives. León (2018) expands on this matter by stating that the lack of proper guidance prevents children from acquiring

knowledge and solutions to the problems they face. However, this guidance should be a continuous one, deliberate, and intentional. In other words, reading has to be taught methodically and objectively throughout a long period of time, considering both the recreational and academic aspects of the field. Moreover, the active participation of parents and teachers has been highlighted as an essential element to the correct development of a reading habit that is not only useful but also enjoyable (Murillo, 2011). Educators must acknowledge that one of the main goals of their profession is to provide children with a wide variety of activities and information to prevent the process from becoming monotonous. In her article regarding the role of preschool and teachers in the reading process, Murillo (2011) observes that the organization of schoolwork must promote students' capabilities, so they can express what and how they want to learn. Namely, the educational system should stimulate students' critical thinking, which would lead to better individual academic and personal success. Still, there is a need to expand this learning process after primary and high school years, continuing to maintain good reading habits in university. This is especially important for EFL students, since their major, as well as their working careers, requires vast amounts of reading.

Reading in the EFL classroom

Research on reading attitudes has focused on the factors that motivate students to read assigned materials and the academic benefits that can arise from that reading. First, in the

field of motivation, prior research suggests that the social aspect of reading, performance and learning goals are some of the main motivators. The results of these studies are highly debatable since the number of participants range from four to six, which makes the data insufficient to make a generalization; however, they give some insight into the topic. For example, Cole (2002) conducted a study with four second grade students during class time. She collected information from different sources such as videotapes, interviews with the parents and written logs. Her research shows that some of the main motivators to read were “social components (discussions), connection to real life, format of books, specific topics and self-expression” (p. 331). However, she emphasizes that all of the students were motivated by totally different factors. Hence, the importance of allowing students to express their opinions in the classroom about what and how they want to read. Similarly, Protacio’s (2012) study concluded that “perceived competence, interesting reading materials, and social motivation” (p. 76) are all prominent factors that motivate students to read. The six participants of this study were immigrants in the United States. For this reason, learning about the new culture and their language competence played an essential role in their motivation to read. These conclusions can have significant applications in the present study, given that the participants of this study also read in a second language.

Moreover, several studies have emphasized that the reading in the classroom is also linked to other aspects such as vocabulary (Hasbún, 2005), and critical thinking (Jie et al., 2014).

For example, Hasbún’s research discusses the connection between learner’s reading attitudes and explicit vocabulary teaching. The participants, students of the English major at the University of Costa Rica, were required to take a vocabulary test at the beginning and end of the course to see if explicit vocabulary teaching techniques had any effects. Her results demonstrated that the strategies taught throughout the course helped students cope with unknown words which, in turn, made the reading activity more enjoyable. Thus, the enhancement of linguistic aspects can improve the attitudes towards reading by helping with fluidity and reading speed. More recently, Jie et al. (2014) investigated the reading habits of EFL students in a university in China, demonstrating that the traditional teaching methods “neglect the cultivation of students’ critical thinking abilities” (p. 87). This led them to have a good English ability, but a superficial understanding of the texts they read, both inside and outside the classroom. Although during the research some students indicated that cultivating a reading habit was important, they admitted that high test scores were their main motivation. Both of these studies suggest that the teaching methods play a crucial role in the students’ attitude towards reading and their expectations as EFL learners.

To the researchers’ knowledge, only one study has focused on the way in which in-class guidance affects the out-of-class behaviors of students when it comes to reading for pleasure. Morrow and Weinstein (1986) conducted a study with six second grade classes to determine if a school program emphasizing the enjoyment of reading

could affect their voluntary reading. However, the results of the study were not promising since they showed no significant increase in the reading choices at home. They attribute these results to the lack of communication and instruction with the parents, which led to a poor tracking of the children's activities. Nevertheless, the study revealed that the creation of regular and appealing literature activities influenced the children's decisions regarding their free time at school, increasing their visits to the school library. This previous research can only be considered a first step towards a more profound understanding of the attitudes and motivations of learners. In this respect, the novelty of this study is that it sheds light on the continuation of the encouragement process, especially with learners that already have experience with reading for pleasure and must, in a way, relearn to enjoy the activity.

Reading attitudes at the University of Costa Rica

As mentioned previously, the participants of this study are EFL students at the University of Costa Rica, which is why it is relevant to understand first the reading habits of the general population of this kind of educational institution. In the literature, there are some studies that describe the reading attitudes and habits of EFL students. Besides finding several issues regarding reading comprehension skills (cf. Longan, 2016), studies have analyzed voluntary reading practices. Fallas et al. (2014), for instance, investigated the reading of novels with 121 students from different majors. They noted that almost

half of the participants read novels for an hour or less weekly, being science fiction and fantasy the most preferred genres. Interestingly, time seems to be a defining factor when it comes to reading for pleasure since this activity consumes many hours that students have to dedicate to other academic assignments. The study by Fallas et al. (2014) shows that there is a considerable increase in voluntary reading activity during vacations.

Nevertheless, Mora et al. (2014) contradict these results with their study in which more than half of a group of 466 students from the courses *Humanidades I* and *II* reported to read for pleasure more than 4 hours a week. They also noted that their academic assignment readings increased with their transition to higher education. It is important to point out that university level texts are more complex and extensive than high school level ones, and this is reflected in the comparison between the time spent reading then and the time spent reading now. Students declared that they read three times more than they used to in high school (Mora et al., 2014). The conflicting results of these two studies, since they were conducted the same year, can be attributed to the characteristics of the participants. In one (i.e., Fallas et al., 2014) participants were already somewhat advanced students of their majors, while in the other (i.e., Mora et al., 2014) students were in their first year of university. Thus, for new entries, the academic load is less, and they have more time to dedicate to reading for pleasure.

In the case of EFL students the situation may differ because of the nature of the majors. Since the habit of

reading is influenced by different factors, EFL students must have a well-designed environment in which they can develop their enjoyment of the activity while completing their academic tasks at the same time. Concerning EFL students, no study has analyzed the reading habits of this population at the University of Costa Rica (UCR), despite the importance of this aspect during these majors. Nevertheless, some research has been done in other countries regarding the factors that are needed to encourage good reading habits in EFL students. As described by Iftanti (2015), “a competitive classroom atmosphere has provided evidence attracting the EFL students to have a lot of regular reading practices for the sake of being the best among their classmates” (p. 367-368). In other words, the classroom environment is crucial to the improvement of individual reading attitudes, which could also result in richer group discussions. The drawback of this study is that the participants were five EFL college students who already had good reading habits, creating a bias in the results since they do not take into consideration the students who struggle to maintain good reading habits.

Moreover, some studies concur in the relevance of establishing good reading habits in the first language before developing that habit in the second language (Iftanti, 2015; Lee & Schallert, 2014). Thus, policies and methodologies to promote reading since childhood in Costa Rica become increasingly relevant. Additionally, the approach teachers give to the readings can have an impact on the students' attitudes. As explained by Tien (2015), in an academic system in which students

are trained to be test takers, extensive reading programs are not welcomed because most of the information in those texts might not be useful for the final test, making it in turn a waste of the students' time. For EFL students at the University of Costa Rica, these findings become of great relevance because the English and English Teaching majors include a minimum of five literature courses (Universidad de Costa Rica, 1990a; Universidad de Costa Rica, 1990b). If indeed the courses' approaches have an impact on the students' reading attitudes, it would be worth noting which factors influence their attitudes and how, especially in these majors that include a great load of reading material.

The Current Study

The present study seeks to ascertain the impact of literature courses on EFL learners' reading attitudes and to identify the factors that motivate them to read for pleasure. The review of the literature shows that the factors that influence students' motivation to read are different and varied (Cole, 2002; Protacio, 2012). Moreover, the literature revealed that especially in university students, if the reading habit is not continuously promoted, the reading activity significantly decreases (Mora et al., 2014; Fallas et al., 2014). Since reading is an essential habit to have in the EFL majors at the UCR, this study aims at understanding how the literature courses impact their attitudes and motivations to read, not only the assigned materials but also voluntarily chosen texts. The following research questions (RQ) guided this study:

RQ1. What is the self-perceived impact of the literature courses on the attitudes of a group of fourth year EFL students towards reading?

RQ2. What factors influence the students' attitudes towards reading before and after taking the courses?

RQ3. How did the attitudes of the students change, if at all, after taking literature courses?

RQ4. How do students motivate themselves to read?

Methods

Participants and setting

This study took place at the main campus of the University of Costa Rica, more specifically in the School of Modern Languages. In total, 40 students from the English major and 5 from English Teaching major, aged 18 to 50, participated in this study. The focus of the study was fourth year students. As such, this implies that they had already taken most of the mandatory literature courses present in both major programs.

Materials

The material used to gather the data was a survey (cf. Appendix A). This was chosen because the survey's versatility allows for qualitative data to be gathered regarding the research questions and objectives of the study. In other words, it provided the necessary tools to discover the students' attitudes towards reading after taking

literature courses and the factors of these courses that motivate them to perform this activity. The design of the survey consisted of four different parts, with multiple choice questions. First, students had to choose which courses they had taken from the list of literature courses of the majors (Universidad de Costa Rica, 1990a and Universidad de Costa Rica 1990b). This was done with the purpose of discovering the experience of the students with mandatory literature courses since the types, genres and objectives varied from course to course and could affect their overall experience. Second, the topic of reading for pleasure was explored. Students had to indicate to what extent they read for pleasure before university and to what extent they do as undergraduates. Moreover, participants had to choose which factors motivated them to read for pleasure then and now. This set of factors was created based on the discoveries made in previous research that showed the most common motivations of students to read (cf. Cole, 2002; Protacio, 2012). Third, the survey sought to elicit the students' attitudes towards reading taking into consideration the influence literature courses might have had on them. Additionally, they had to choose from a list of elements of the course which influenced their attitudes towards reading. Lastly, the fourth part consisted of an open-ended question to collect the general views of the students regarding literature courses throughout the major.

Design and Procedures

The data collection period of this study was conducted over the course of

two weeks, which was the time frame provided to the participants to fill out the survey. Since the global pandemic due to COVID-19 prevents students from receiving on-site classes, the survey was distributed as a Google Form. Specifically, with the help of the instructors who were teaching the fourth-year courses at the time and the information available in the University's virtual setting, a link to the survey was sent to the participants via email. The approximate time to complete the survey was 10 minutes.

Data analysis

To meticulously organize and analyze the information collected through the survey, the information from the Google Form was downloaded in a .csv format. Afterwards, this information was inserted into a table in Excel. The answers were grouped into four categories which were the following: self-perceived impact of literature courses on reading attitudes, influences on reading attitudes before and after the courses, changes in reading attitudes and motivations to read for pleasure. The responses for these sections were quantified according to the number of participants who selected each option, and they were later arranged into graphs and figures. The answers that did not contribute to the purpose of the study were not considered in this process.

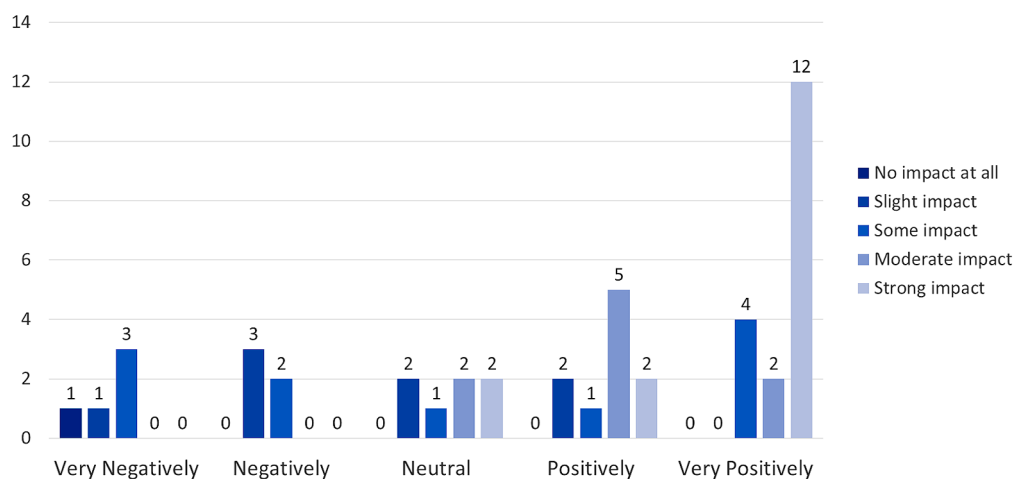
Results

The research questions of this investigation explored the self-perceived impact of the literature courses on the students' reading attitudes (RQ1) and the factors that influence those attitudes both before and after entering the university (RQ2). They also investigated the changes, if any, in the students' reading attitudes after taking mandatory literature courses (RQ3) and the ways students motivate themselves to read for pleasure (RQ4). The results of these research questions will be reported successively in this section.

Self-perceived impact of literature courses on reading attitudes

On the self-perceived impact of literature courses on reading attitudes (RQ1), several scales were shown to the participants to assess their perceptions on this matter. Figure 1 shows the extent of the self-perceived impact of literature courses and the quality of such impact. As can be seen, more than half of the participants reported a strong or moderate impact on their reading attitudes after taking literature courses. An important aspect to highlight is that almost half of the participants ($n = 25$) also reported this impact to be positive or very positive, while only nine reported it to be negative or very negative. Overall, the results reveal that literature courses have a positive impact on the students' attitudes towards reading.

Figure 1
Extent and quality of self-perceived impact of literature courses on reading attitudes



Note: N = 45

Source: Elaborated by authors

Influences on reading attitudes before and after the courses

Regarding the influences on reading attitudes before and after the courses (RQ2), the study focused on discovering the participants' reading frequencies and their preferred reading materials. Table 1 depicts the students' reading frequency by genre before they entered the university. As can be seen, regardless of the reading frequency, the most preferred genre was romance, followed by fantasy,

and mystery. In addition, the participants who selected to read very often before university (33.3%) also marked a higher number of different preferred genres. Figure 2 presents the reading frequency of the participants as university students. The results of this particular question indicate that many of the participants rarely read. Nevertheless, it is relevant to point out that 22 students (48%) selected the options *sometimes*, *often*, and *very often*. This shows a positive result regarding the reading frequency of the participants.

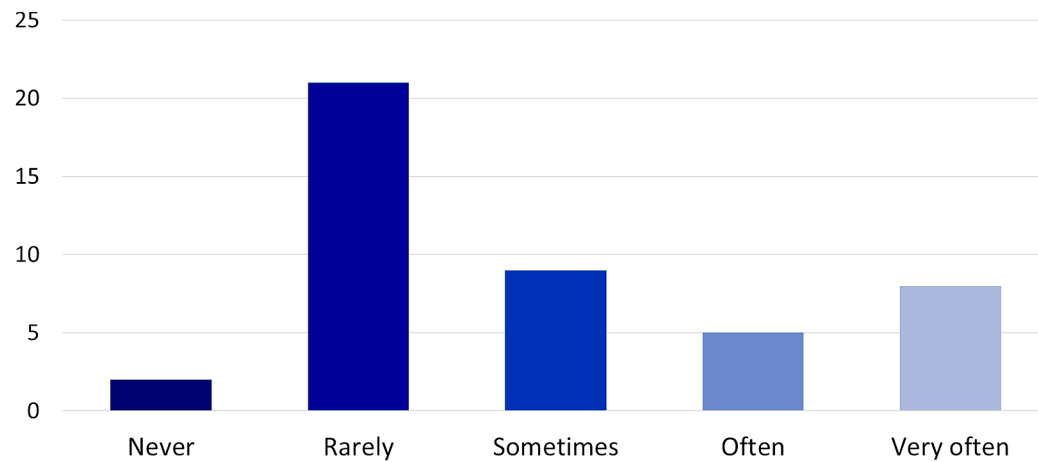
Table 1
Pre-university students' reading frequency by genre

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often
Biographical	1	2	4	0	2
Dystopian	0	3	1	3	8
Fantasy	1	2	7	2	12
Historical	1	2	2	4	5
Mystery	0	2	5	6	10
Romance	2	5	7	5	13
Science fiction	0	1	3	2	11
Thriller/Horror	0	3	3	3	2

Note. N = 45

Source: Elaborated by authors

Figure 2
Reading frequency as university students



Source: Elaborated by authors

Changes in reading attitudes

Regarding the changes in reading attitudes after taking literature courses (RQ3), various questions in the survey were created to discover if there had been, in fact, a change in the students' reading attitudes. Table 2 shows the changes, if any, in the students' interest towards reading, cross referenced with the factors of the course that could have elicited said change.

As can be seen, the option that was selected the most indicates that the students had interest in the beginning of the courses and that it increased after taking them. A closer look at the results reveals that the literary works, their themes, and topics seem to be a crucial aspect of the courses that influenced the students' interest, irrespective of the change or consistency of their reading interests.

Table 2
Change in interest towards reading and factors that elicited that change

	Themes and topics	Professor	Organization of the contents in the course program	Literary works	Classmates
Interest at the beginning and increased	18	17	3	19	2
Interest at the beginning and remained	7	3	4	6	0
No interest at the beginning and remained	5	5	2	3	1
No interest at the beginning and increased	4	3	1	4	0
Interest at the beginning and lost it	1	3	1	1	0

Note: N = 40

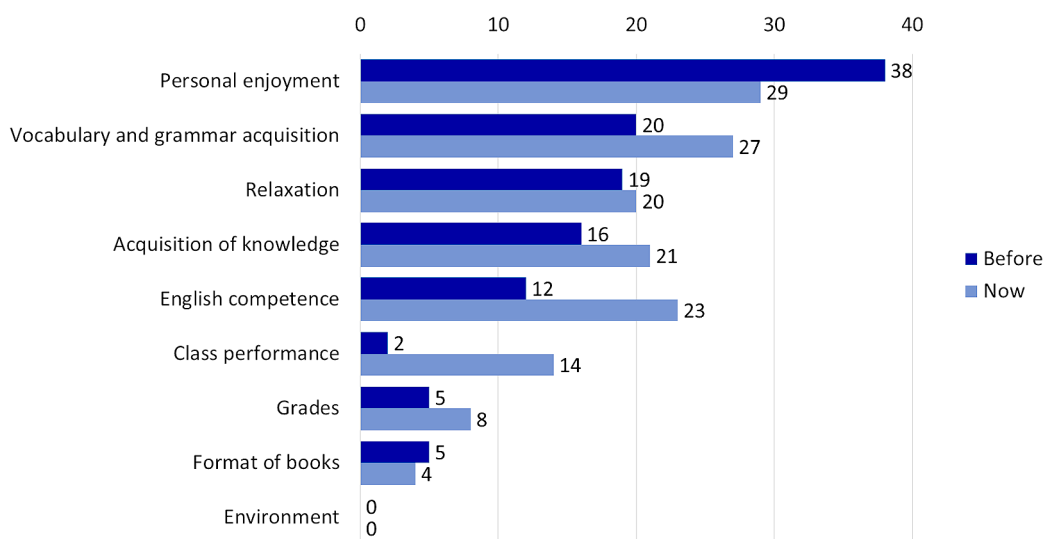
Source: Elaborated by authors

Motivations to read for pleasure

Concerning the motivations to read for pleasure (RQ4), a set of elements carefully chosen after analyzing previous research (Cole, 2002; Protacio, 2012) was given to the participants, so they could choose the ones that applied to them. Figure 3 shows the factors that motivated the students to read for pleasure as pre-university students and as university students. This helps analyze whether their motivations

appear to change after having taken mandatory literature courses. On the whole the students' motivations do not seem to have suffered a significant change after the beginning of university; however, one key finding is that the motivators related to a general improvement of language skills (vocabulary and grammar acquisition, self-perceived English competence, class performance, and grades) seem to have gained a particular importance in the period after entering the university.

Figure 3
Motivations to read for pleasure before and after entering the university



Source: Elaborated by authors

Discussion

This section will discuss the main results of the investigation and touch upon its theoretical and/or practical implications.

Self-perceived impact of literature courses

Regarding the self-perceived impact of the literature courses on the students' reading attitudes (RQ1), our findings show that the literature courses could have generated a positive impact on the students' reading attitudes. It could be hypothesized that these results were obtained due to the characteristics of the population of the study. Since the study plan of the English and English Teaching majors contain a high number of mandatory literature courses (Universidad de Costa Rica, 1990a; Universidad de Costa Rica, 1990b), it could be said that students had to consider their reading habits before entering the majors, and that possibly they already had an open mind to what the courses could bring to their reading habits. These findings are not in agreement with previous studies that dealt with the in-class promotion of good reading habits. In Morrow and Weinstein's (1986) research, the implementation of a school program that emphasized the enjoyment of reading did not seem to have an impact on the students' reading attitudes outside of school. However, the present study shows that despite the inherent mandatory nature of literature courses in the university that could discourage voluntary reading, students seem to perceive these courses as having a positive impact

on their reading habits outside of the classroom. For example, in response to question 14 of the survey (Appendix A), one of the students mentioned that "the themes and topics of the reading from those courses are quite interesting and allow us to be more exposed to different forms of literature which to me was pretty helpful to expand my likes." This difference with previous results could be explained, as was mentioned previously, in terms of the population of the study. In Morrow and Weinstein's (1986) study, the population consisted of second grade students who were still learning the basics of reading and which activities they preferred to do during their free time. On the other hand, this study focuses on students who are in the last year of their major and who already have experience with voluntary reading practices. Thus, it could be suggested that students who choose these career paths are more prone to improving their reading habits both inside and outside the classrooms. In this sense, this study serves as a starting point for further research in the field of reading behaviors of people who not only enjoy reading already but also are obliged to read as part of their academic development. Nevertheless, caution should be exercised in the interpretation of our findings. While the survey did elicit qualitative data to further probe learners' feelings, the question was targeted at eliciting a general impression rather than the underlying reasons behind them. Thus, a more comprehensive survey is in order.

Pre and during university reading attitudes

Concerning the factors of the course that influence the students' reading attitudes (RQ2) and the changes in these attitudes after taking literature courses (RQ3), the results reveal an increased interest in reading that seems to be tightly connected to the themes, topics, and genres of the literary works that are included in the course programs. Regarding the pre-university attitudes, arguably, the students who read more often selected a wider variety of genres since they probably finished books more quickly than people who never read, and their desire to read for pleasure may have led them to explore different genres to discover the ones they preferred the most. Interestingly, further data shows a decrease in the overall reading frequency of the participants after they entered the university since 46.7% indicated they rarely read (see Figure 2). Even though many students mentioned in the open question in the survey that the time allotted to read and the volume of the texts from the courses prevented them from reading for pleasure, the genres of the assigned texts could still play a role in this matter. If students do not enjoy what they read in class, they might be less motivated to continue the reading process once they exit the classroom. As Protacio (2012) explained, "to motivate ELs to read more in English, [professors] must try to meet their interests both in terms of topics and genres" (p. 75). In other words, the choice of literary works present in the course programs should in some way align with the general reading preferences of the students. This hypothesis is further

reinforced by the participants' selections of influential factors (see Figure 4). For instance, almost 75% of the participants indicated that the themes and topics of the literary works read in class influenced their attitude towards reading for pleasure. Certainly, this suggests that the choice of literary works, in voluntary reading and in the course programs, plays an important role in increasing the attitude towards reading for pleasure. Thus, both recreational and academic aspects of reading should be taken into consideration when preparing the lesson plans for literature courses. These findings could suggest a potential course of action for literature professors since they could consider the most preferred genres of the students when creating the course program. What is more, albeit its sample size, the results of the present exploratory study offer a springboard for more research to take place on how to increase the enjoyability of EFL students. In this respect, future studies may want to explore to what extent the present findings may vary when employing a sample that consists of different learner types. If indeed learner type is a relevant variable in reading attitudes, the theoretical and practical implications would be noteworthy.

Main reading motivators

In terms of the reading motivators for EFL students (RQ4), results revealed that, overall, personal enjoyment and relaxation are two of the main motivators, both before and after entering the university. However, the motivators related to improvement of language skills seemed to have acquired a higher relevance for the students as

they reached the last year of their majors. These results were expected since, as mentioned in previous sections, the participants of this study tend to have a positive attitude towards reading for pleasure, and the mandatory literature courses of the majors seem to have yielded an increased interest in the activity. Moreover, as EFL majors, students were expected to have gained an interest in improving the technical elements of the language throughout the major, and it is hypothesized that reading could be used as a tool to reach those goals. For example, one student mentioned in the survey that they believed much of their speaking skills and vocabulary came from literature courses and not from specific communication and grammar courses. These results concur with those of the study conducted by Protacio (2012), whose participants, although of a younger age, were also EFL students. Her study revealed that, for the students, their perceived English competence was one of the main reasons why they read frequently. Additionally, Hasbún's (2005) study explained that explicit vocabulary teaching helped her students enjoy their reading more since they had less problems when faced with unknown words, showing that the improvement of language skills can influence the students' attitudes towards reading. Thus, it could be suggested that for fourth year EFL majors both the academic and leisurely aspects of reading play an important role in their attitudes towards reading for pleasure. In this matter, the current study sheds some light into the students' attitudes should the professors wish to implement both of these aspects of reading in the course plans. That way both the

course and the students can benefit from their good reading habits.

Conclusion

The present study sought to ascertain the students' attitudes towards reading before and after entering the university and to determine if mandatory literature courses had an influence on said attitudes. In general, the results of this study add to previous knowledge on the field of reading habits. Although further research with a larger group of participants could yield firmer answers, the results of this study suggest that mandatory literature courses have a positive impact on the students' reading practices. Moreover, the study provides some insight into the participants' main reading motivators, showing that the choice of literary works as well as the language improvement aspects of the literature courses play a seemingly important role in the students' decisions to read outside of the class.

Indeed, the results of this study shed some light on the students' reading motivations. Our findings suggest that professors could use this information to ensure that the course programs they implement in their literature courses adapt to the overall preferences of the students. This could help the former to maintain a positive attitude towards reading during the semester and improve their voluntary reading practices. Overall, while a future research avenue could be determining more accurately how exactly the students' attitudes changed throughout the major, the present study contributes to broadening current knowledge

by providing an insight into the attitudes of a population that had rarely been investigated before.

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Appendix.

Survey

The following survey seeks to find out the attitudes of fourth year English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students regarding reading and the ways in which they motivate themselves to read. The survey is comprised of three sections in which you will have to answer multiple choice and short answer questions. This survey takes between 10 to 15 minutes to complete.

Section 1:

General information

1. Select your age range.

- 18-22 23-26 27-30 31-34 35-38
 39-42 43-46 47-50 51-54 55-60

2. What major are you enrolled in?

- B.A. in English B.A. in English Teaching Both

3. How many literature courses have you taken?

- 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
 8 9 10 11 12 13 I don't remember

4. Mark all the literature courses you have taken

- FL2162 LITERATURA CLÁSICA PARA LENGUAS MODERNAS
 LM1356 INTRODUCCIÓN A LA NARRATIVA
 LM1365 INTRODUCCIÓN AL DRAMA
 LM1366 INTRODUCCIÓN A LA POESÍA
 LM1475 CURSO PANORÁMICO LITERATURA NORTEAMERICANA
 LM1485 CURSO PANORÁMICO DE LITERATURA BRITÁNICA
 LM1486 CRÍTICA LITERARIA
 LM1237 INTRODUCCIÓN A LA LITERATURA INGLESA
 LM1247 LITERATURA INFANTIL
 LM1358 LITERATURA DE MISTERIO Y SUSPENSO
 LM1368 LITERATURA Y MUJER
 LM1477 LITERATURA Y CINE; LM1487 LITERATURA COMPARADA
 LM1354 POESÍA PARA LA ENSEÑANZA DEL INGLÉS
 LM1364 DRAMA PARA LA ENSEÑANZA DEL INGLÉS

Section 2:

Reading for pleasure: In the following section, you will be asked about your attitudes and behaviors regarding reading for pleasure.

1. On a scale from 1 to 5, to what extent did you read for pleasure before entering the university?

1: Never; 2: Rarely; 3: Sometimes; 4: Quite often; 5: Very often

2. What did you enjoy reading before entering the university? Check all that apply

Mystery; Thriller/Horror; Historical; Romance; Science fiction; Fantasy; Dystopian; Biographical; Other:

3. What motivated you to read before entering the university? Check all that apply

Personal enjoyment; Vocabulary and grammar acquisition; Relaxation; Acquisition of knowledge about other cultures; Environment (place where you read); Improvement of class performance; Improvement of self-perceived English competence; Improvement of grades; Format of books; Other:

4. On a scale from 1 to 5, to what extent do you read for pleasure now?

1: Never; 2: Rarely; 3: Sometimes; 4: Quite often; 5: Very often

Section 3:

Self-perceived impact of literature courses on reading attitude: In this section, you will be asked to measure the self-perceived impact of literature courses on your reading attitude.

1. To what extent do you consider literature courses have had an impact on your attitudes towards reading for pleasure?

1: No impact at all; 2: Slight impact; 3: Some impact; 4: Moderate impact; 5: Strong impact

2. How do you think literature courses have impacted your attitudes towards reading for pleasure?

1: Very negatively; 2: Negatively; 3: Neutral; 4: Positively; 5: Very positively

3. From the following statements, choose the one that most accurately represents your attitude towards reading.

I had no interest in the beginning, and it remained the same after the courses; I had no interest in the beginning, and it increased after the courses; I had interest in the beginning, and I lost it after the courses; I had interest in the beginning, and it remained the same after the courses; I had interest in the beginning, and it increased after the courses.

4. What factors of the course influenced your attitude towards reading for pleasure? Check all that apply

Professor; Literary works; Organization of the contents in the course program; Themes and topics of the literary works; Classmates; Other:

5. Briefly comment on your general feelings towards literature courses of the English and English Teaching majors at UCR