GUIDED READING FOR SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING IN BAHRAIN:
IS IT WORTH IT?

A THESIS IN TEACHING ENGLISH TO SPEAKERS OF OTHER LANGUAGES

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GUIDED READING FOR SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING IN BAHRAIN: IS
IT WORTH IT?

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ABSTRACT

Much research has shown that Extensive Reading (ER) is beneficial for
second language learning. It helps in building up the four language skills, and in
developing positive attitudes and motivation to learn the language. In the year 2000,
the Ministry of Education in Bahrain took serious steps towards developing a type of
extensive reading program, the Guided Reading Program (GRP), in government
primary schools. However, to date, there have been no serious research attempts to
investigate the effectiveness of the program, or at least teachers' and students attitudes
towards it. As a result, there are still lots of questions and areas to be uncovered
regarding this program. This thesis research is a preliminary attempt to shed light on
what government primary school teachers in Bahrain think about the Guided Reading
Program, in terms of its benefits to second language learning, and also the difficulties
teachers encounter when trying to implement it in their classrooms. In addition, this
study explores primary-level students' attitudes towards this extensive reading
program.

To investigate such perceptions and attitudes, surveys and interviews were
used. The main participants of the study included 35 English teachers and 15 female
students from 13 government primary schools in Bahrain. Findings of this study
indicated that despite the challenges associated with the implementation of the
program, most of the teachers surveyed and interviewed for the study were in favor of
using the GRP in their classroom, and were aware of its immense benefits. Results
also showed that the primary-level students interviewed found joy in the GRP
sessions, and thought they were learning a lot from the program.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

DEDICATION

This thesis is lovingly dedicated to my parents and first teachers, Hassan Jassim Radhi and Shaikha Abdulla Al-Zayani, for their continuous love, support, and guidance.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Despite nine years of learning English in Bahrain government schools, my level of language proficiency when I graduated from high school was still low and limited. It was only in college, when I got immersed in the language, that I experienced dramatic improvement in my second language proficiency. This improvement could largely be attributed to being continuously exposed to a rich input, mainly an enormous quantity of reading materials. Reading is not only a means of acquiring general knowledge but also a means of acquiring new words, styles, and ways of expression. The simple action of reading a printed text can be a pleasurable learning activity with immense benefits, whereby the reader consciously or unconsciously acquires a wealth of linguistic features. To my mind, exposing second language learners to a large quantity of reading materials is one of the best methods to ensure successful language learning. In fact, Nuttall (1996) states, "The best way to improve your knowledge of a foreign language is to go and live among its speakers. The next best way is to read extensively in it" (p. 128). Reading is not just an academic language skill, but a critical component of a life-long learning that should not start and stops at the classroom door. As such, Anderson (2009) thinks that helping learners become successful readers involves much more than teaching them a few discrete cognitive skills. Reading instructors, he believes, are responsible for "cultivating real readers" (p. 7).

Based on such convictions, and the strong empirical and anecdotal evidence in favor of extensive reading, various second/foreign language educational programs around the world have integrated extensive reading in English either as a separate course, a part of an existing reading course, or a noncredit addition to an existing course, or as an extracurricular activity. In Bahrain, for instance, the Department of English at the Directorate of Curricula opted for integrating extensive reading as a noncredit addition to the existing English language curricula in government primary schools. The initiative started in the year 2000 through using the Guided Reading Program (GRP), a prominent type of extensive reading, for teaching English to the upper three primary-level grades, and was followed by other initiatives such as the Rigby Star story-telling program, which is a reading program designed for students in

grades 1-3 that aims to reinforce the acquisition of English language skills through the use of exciting illustrated stories.

Purpose of the Study

There has been a lot of research, in different contexts, on the role of extensive reading (ER) in promoting second language learning. In those studies, many students and teachers have expressed positive attitudes towards the incorporation of an ER program in their language classes. However, I have only found one study (Al-Ansari & Bulaila, 2004) that attempted to explore the status of extensive reading programs in Bahrain schools, and it was conducted before the Ministry of Education in Bahrain extended the use of the Guided Reading Program (GRP) to all government primary schools. The study strongly recommended incorporating a constructive supplementary literary reading program in the English syllabi taught at Bahrain's government schools in order to achieve a better standard of English language education in the country. Another study that slightly touches upon the subject is a master's thesis by Al-Buflasa (2002), which is titled *The Use of Literature in the EFL Curriculum to Improve Reading Skills at Second Intermediate Level in Bahrain Government Schools*. Al-Buflasa conducted a reading program based on selecting varied genres of literature and designing varied reading comprehension activities. Her main findings indicated that through reading literary texts, students' reading comprehension was developed and enhanced. Also, her study showed that students' attitudes towards learning English, and towards reading in particular, were converted from negative into positive attitudes. In fact, national research done in this area is still very rare because, in reality, most educational institutions in the Kingdom of Bahrain have lacked coherent extensive reading programs. I think that shedding light on the anecdotal and empirical evidence for ER, and particularly guided extensive reading, will convince teachers, students, and administrators of the importance of such programs in language learning. Also, I believe that the findings of this study will give us clear insight into Bahrain government teachers' and learners' perceptions towards using the GRP as a tool for language learning.

I think my research will help to clarify whether English teachers in the Kingdom of Bahrain believe that exposure to a larger quantity of reading can improve the students' abilities in the four language skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. It will also attempt to find out whether those teachers believe in the

importance of guided reading in developing students' positive attitudes and motivation towards learning English.

Research Questions

As primary school teachers are the key players here, we need to know what they think about the use of extensive reading, in our case the GRP, in learning and teaching English. We need to find out how committed they are to implementing this reading program, and what challenges, if any, they might have encountered. In addition, I believe the views of the program's target, primary-level students, are also crucial because they can be regarded as indicators of the program's success or failure. Thus, my research questions were the following:

1. What are the views of government primary school teachers in Bahrain regarding the use of the GRP in learning a second language?
2. How do government primary school students in Bahrain perceive the GRP?
3. What are the problems/drawbacks associated with implementing an ER program (specifically the GRP) in Bahrain's government primary schools?

Context

Within the Gulf region, Bahrain has been a pioneer in the field of education. It was the first country in the region to start modern schools and to introduce female education and technical education. Bahrainis value education very highly; it was the people who initiated and administered the first organized school, Al-Hidaya School for Boys, which opened in 1919. Education kept progressing in the island and more schools were established, despite the financial and social difficulties. The year 1933 marked the beginning of official formal education in Bahrain when the government brought all the schools together under the direction of one educational council (Shirawi, 1989).

Wheels of progress have continued to turn ever since. Today, there are over 200 government schools and around 50 private schools, and the illiteracy rate in the country is almost negligible (2.7%). Education is free for all Bahraini and non-Bahraini students who are attending government schools, and is compulsory for ages 6-15. The pre-university formal education system in the Kingdom of Bahrain is structured in three levels: the primary, the intermediate, and the secondary. For each level there are separate schools for boys and girls that comprise students, teachers,

and administrative staff of the same sex. Yet, there are many government primary schools for boys where the teaching and administrative staff is completely female.

Government primary schools in Bahrain, the context of this particular study, take in the age group from 6 to 11 years old. There are over 100 all-boys and all-girls primary schools spread out across the country. The primary level lasts for six years and consists of two cycles: cycle one combines the first three grades, and cycle two includes grades four to six. The class density reaches around 20-25 students in cycle one classes, and around 25-35 students in cycle two classes, depending on the school size and location. The teaching staff is mostly Bahraini, and a few are from other Arab nationalities. The weekly teaching load for primary-level teachers is the equivalent of 22, 50-minute, teaching periods.

The Directorate of Curricula at the Ministry of Education has always paid special care to English education. English language is now a compulsory core subject in the syllabi for the first and second cycles of primary education. In the school year 2004/2005, the Ministry of Education introduced the project of teaching English language from the first primary grade. By the year 2009/2010, all primary schools in Bahrain have been inducted into this project. Although a class-teacher system for cycle one is applied in all primary schools, the English language subject is being taught by a specialized teacher. In addition, the primary-level English language curricula have always been subject to continuous improvement. Recently, a new series of textbooks, *The Backpack* (Herrera & Pinkley, 2007), has been adopted for cycle two grades to match the new textbooks that have been chosen for cycle one students.

In relatively recent years, the English Curriculum Department has recognized the insufficiency of standard-based textbooks in developing students' literacy levels. This realization, along with ongoing efforts to improve English education in the kingdom, made it take serious steps towards developing several types of extensive reading (ER) programs in all government schools. The initiative started from primary education by introducing the Guided Reading Program (GRP) to be implemented as a supplementary reading program to the subject of English in cycle two. A few years later, it was followed by the *Rigby Star* (e.g., Andrew & Scruton, 2007; Hughes & Gardiner, 2007; and Mitton & Brooker, 2007) story-telling program for cycle one grades. In the year 2000, the GRP was introduced into 25 of Bahrain's primary schools. By the school year 2007/2008, the program was extended to all primary

schools in the country. The GRP includes a collection of 600 books graded into 10 levels of difficulty. It aims to teach learners how to read silently and independently for pleasure, as they read stories within groups according to their abilities and needs.

However, there are still lots of questions and areas to be uncovered regarding this program. Around eight years ago, Al-Buflasa (2002) observed that "teachers still do not take this program seriously and do not conduct this program effectively due to their lack of experience, knowledge of the usefulness of reading literature, good techniques, and methods of teaching reading" (p. 6). Nevertheless, this remains a personal observation that might or might not have been true. To see the current real picture, we need to shed light on what English teachers think about the usefulness of this program and what challenges they are struggling with.

Overview of the Chapters and Appendices

Chapter 1 is an introduction to the theme of the study, its purpose, research questions, and context. Chapter 2 reviews the literature related to the study. It provides the necessary background on extensive reading, and presents different studies related to its impact on improving second language proficiency. It also offers a discussion of guided reading as a type of extensive reading, ending with a discussion of the Guided Reading Program (GRP) that is currently being implemented in Bahrain's government primary schools. Chapter 3, on methodology, first provides a detailed description of the participants and their attributes, such as their number, nationality, and teaching experience. Then, it describes the instruments and the procedures followed in collecting and analyzing data. Chapter 4 reports the findings of the study and discusses them in detail. The data gathered are analyzed and categorized into four sections: teachers' general attitudes towards the GRP, teachers' perceptions of the benefits of the GRP, students' attitudes towards the GRP, and the challenges of implementing the GRP. Chapter 5, the conclusion, includes a summary of the findings, followed by a discussion of the pedagogical implications and limitations of the study, as well as recommendations for future research.

There are five appendices: Appendix 1 is the teachers' survey. Appendix 2 is the teachers' interview questions. Appendix 3 is the students' interview questions. Appendix 4 is the teachers' survey results. Finally, Appendix 5 is a sample transcript of teachers' interviews.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter is roughly organized from a macro to a micro survey of literature pertaining to the study. It begins with a description of extensive reading, followed by a discussion of the theory that underlies and the principles that characterize it. Second, it reviews different studies related to the impact of extensive reading in improving language skills, for different ages, across a variety of contexts. Third, some problems related to the implementation of extensive reading programs are discussed. Next, the chapter moves into a general discussion of an extensive reading approach—guided reading—ending with a discussion of the Guided Reading Program (GRP) that is currently being implemented in Bahrain's government primary schools.

What Is Extensive Reading?

The lack of language input is said to be one of the major factors that explain the lack of success in learning a second/foreign language. Unlike in L1 learning, the amount of input in L2, especially in EFL contexts, is often severely limited, and in some places it even lacks adequate quality. In such cases, books and other reading materials become valuable and relatively easily obtained sources that can provide a direct and genuine exposure to L2. This is illustrated in Nuttall's (1996) statement, "The best way to improve your knowledge of a foreign language is to go and live among its speakers. The next best way is to read extensively in it" (p. 128). Krashen (1995), father of the comprehensible input theory, claims that "comprehensible input in the form of reading is the major source of our literacy development" (p. 187). He argues that Free Voluntary Reading (FVR) is the major educational tool for such development.

In fact, FVR is one of the many terms used to refer to what is usually known as Extensive Reading (ER). Other terms for extensive reading programs include Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading (USSR), Silent Uninterrupted Reading for Fun (SURF), Drop Everything and Read (DEAR), the Book Flood Program (Renandya, 2007), and Guided Extensive Reading (GER) (Ahmed & Asraf, 2003). The common purpose of these programs is that learners read large quantities of books and other materials in order to improve their reading fluency and consequently enhance their language skills.

Renandya (2007) points out that Krashen's comprehensible input hypothesis forms the theoretical framework for extensive reading. According to Krashen's Input Hypothesis, the input should be abundantly available, comprehensible, and slightly above students' current level of competence, and to allow that input "in" the learner's affective filter should be low enough in order for acquisition to take place. Thus, when learners are repeatedly exposed to such input, without being negatively affected by some possible affective factors, they gradually and successfully acquire the language (Krashen, 1985).

Day and Bamford (1998) assert, "Without reading materials that are attractive, interesting, at a range of appropriate levels, and of an appropriate length, a [an ER] program cannot exist, let alone succeed" (p. 96). According to Maley (2008), ER materials for the second language classroom may include graded readers that are simplified or adapted editions of some original classic titles such as *Robin Hood*, *Jane Eyre*, and *The Three Musketeers*. They may also include graded readers that are original stories; these stories are either written with a certain level of vocabulary and structure in mind, or the level is determined intuitively by the teacher on the basis of teaching experience. Other types of ER materials may consist of simple L1 reading materials, authentic un-simplified L1 reading matter such as locally-produced English-language newspapers and magazines. However, and despite arguments regarding the authenticity of language used in writing such materials, graded readers are currently the most common ER material. Nation (2005) mentions, "Without graded readers, reading for a second language learner would be one continuous struggle against an overwhelming vocabulary level" (p. 588).

In fact, the notion of ER, Maley (2008) notes, is far from new; it goes back to the work and research done by Harold Palmer and Michael West in the 1920s and 1930s. However, with the advent of the communicative approaches to language teaching and learning, ER has been mostly ignored in syllabus design and has been, at best, suggested as a voluntary activity. As Maley puts it, "ER remained a 'maid in waiting,' not invited to the communicative wedding party!" (p. 134).

There are many definitions for the term "extensive reading." A recent and a general one offered by Maley (2008) is "reading large quantities of text at an appropriate level of difficulty as an effective way of acquiring a foreign language" (p. 133). In more detail, and from a classroom implementation perspective, Davis (1995) offers a definition for an ER program as "a supplementary class library scheme,

attached to an English course, in which pupils are given the time, encouragement, and materials to read pleasurably, at their own level, as many books as they can, without the pressure of testing or marks" (p. 329).

Extensive reading is usually contrasted with "intensive reading," which is a common reading practice that normally involves studying a short text closely or reading it for specific understanding of information. "Extensive reading, in contrast to intensive reading, generally involves rapid reading of large quantities of material or longer readings (e.g., whole books) for general understanding, with the focus generally on the meaning of what is being read than on the language" (Carrell & Carson, 1997, p. 50). In other words, extensive reading is more like reading for the sake of reading, and less like reading for the sake of finding a specific piece of information or mastering a particular linguistic structure. Day and Bamford (1998) think that extensive reading has gained a special status in the context of language teaching because, unlike intensive reading, it is "real-world reading but for a pedagogical purpose" (p. 5). Renandya (2007) asserts, though, that intensive and extensive reading "should not be seen as being in opposition, as both serve different but complementary purposes" (p. 135).

Day and Bamford (2002), to help teachers understand the complexity of ER, which has many terms and definitions, put forward 10 key characteristics or basic ingredients for what constitutes a successful extensive reading program. I summarize these below:

1. The reading material is within the language competence of the learner.
2. A variety of reading material on a wide range of topics must be available.
3. Learners choose what they want to read.
4. Learners read often and as much as possible.
5. Learners read for pleasure, information, and general knowledge.
6. Reading is its own reward; the reading experience is just like reading in everyday life.
7. Reading speed is fast, not deliberate and slow.
8. Learners read individually and silently.
9. The teacher orients, guides, and monitors the learners.
10. The teacher is a role model of a good reader.

However, Maley (2008), who conducted a simple worldwide survey to assemble information on the practice of extensive reading in English language

classrooms, found out that the actual practice was often at odds with these characteristics. For example, he notes that in many cases learners do not read a lot or often, because extensive reading is often no more than part of a lesson or one lesson per week. Also, Maley notes that materials are often narrow in range and limited to a collection of extracts, and that students are not usually given a choice of what to read; they are more often than not required to read books selected by the teacher or the institution. In addition, he observes that reading is not viewed as a reward in its own; sometimes teachers do not resist the urge to teach, to test, to monitor, and to intervene in the process, which in turn causes an interruption in the flow of the reading experience. Maley mentions as well that teachers are frequently not committed readers themselves and are not aware of the benefits of reading to language learning and educational development. The danger, he thinks, is that "in cases like this, students draw the inevitable conclusion: that reading is a chore to be endured and is of little use to them in passing the examination!" (p. 136). However, Maley explains,

> These issues reflect the paradox inherent in the intersection of the essentially private, free activity of reading with the institutional constraints implicit in public systems of education. Reading in the sense of ER is not amenable to the kinds of control so beloved by institutions. When these constraints come into play, it is therefore hardly surprising that the true nature of reading is so often subverted. (Maley, 2008, p. 136)

Yet, when an ER program is institutionally supported, carefully planned, and implemented according to the basic principles of extensive reading, the resulting pedagogical benefits are plenty. The following section presents some evidence of positive outcomes of different successfully executed ER programs across different learning contexts.

Impact of ER on Second Language Proficiency

ER has been proved beneficial in a variety of settings with diverse populations, from young children to adults. Day and Bamford (1998) provide a summary of successful significant results of extensive reading programs that were done in both second and foreign language settings. They note that these programs helped students increase their reading, vocabulary, and writing skills; also, these programs helped students develop positive attitudes toward reading, and increased their motivation to read. Day and Bamford provide two justifications for the inclusion

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of ER in the second language reading curriculum. The first justification is a cognitive one. Viewing reading as an interactive cognitive process, they believe that ER helps develop a large sight vocabulary which is a requirement for fluent reading. Besides, reading large amounts of comprehensible and interesting texts helps students to develop a large general vocabulary. Day and Bamford also think that such reading plays a vital role in developing the linguistic and world knowledge needed for reading comprehension. That is, in a nutshell, "an extensive reading approach makes it possible for students to develop into fluent readers" (p. 19).

The second justification is an affective one. Day and Bamford (1998) explain how ER has an extraordinary impact on both learners' attitude and motivation. In a well-designed ER program, choice of reading material is free and individualized. Students can follow their own interests in reading, and be introduced naturally and positively to the second language culture. Day and Bamford note that "the individual private nature of extensive reading also makes it easier for teachers to establish a non-competitive, nonjudgmental community of readers" (p. 26), and because the emphasis is not on a right answer, but on a student's personal reaction to the reading material, there is almost no fear of teacher or peer evaluation. These elements, in the long run, help establish positive attitudes towards second language reading. These attitudes, as Day and Bamford point out, are one of the four major variables that increase learners' desire to read in a second language. The other three are materials, reading ability, and sociocultural environment.

One of the early studies which provide solid evidence for the importance of ER in second language learning was a study done by Elley and Mangubhai (1983). They pointed out five critical factors that differentiate between L1 and L2 learning. These include strength of motivation, emphasis on meaning verses form, amount of exposure to language, type of exposure to language, and the quality of models. To reduce the effect of these factors, Elley and Mangubhai proposed an instructional strategy. The hypothesis that underlies this strategy is that repeated exposure to a large quantity of high-interest illustrated story books in the target language will speed up L2 learning. To test their hypothesis, they conducted a study in eight rural primary schools in Fiji, with a sample of 380 grades 4 and 5 pupils. Results showed that pupils exposed to many stories progressed in reading and listening comprehension at twice the normal rate, and confirmed their hypothesis that high-interest story reading would produce rapid L2 learning.

Elley (2000), who participated in conducting literacy projects and promoted the Book Flood approach in some developing countries, summarizes the findings of Book Flood studies in Niue, Fiji, Singapore, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Solomon Islands, and several other countries. He states that "the benefits for reading skill and enthusiasm are consistent across diverse cultures, mother tongues and age levels, and they appear to generate corresponding improvements in children's writing, listening comprehension, and related language skills" (p. 233).

Furthermore, one of the recent studies that show the instrumental role of ER in the development of L2 vocabulary knowledge and skills was a study conducted with 40 intermediate and advanced level students at a private Japanese university. Rosszell (2006) found that intensive vocabulary study, within the context of an ER class, resulted in greater gains in knowledge of word meaning and use, and the ability to recall words, than doing writing tasks. Also, Lee (2007) reports the findings of three consecutive studies on the effect of ER on the development of English language for Taiwanese university non-English majors. He concludes that it is possible to integrate ER, or sustained silent reading as he terms it, at the university level. Lee found that ER is "at least as effective and efficient as traditional instruction in acquiring English as a foreign language" (p. 150), and the longer the treatment, the better the results. He also notes that the accessibility of books and self-selection are two factors that guarantee the success of a sustained silent program.

Challenges Associated with Doing ER Programs

Given the huge amount of research that has provided anecdotal and empirical evidence for the use of ER in improving second language proficiency, the abandonment of ER in the modern ESL classroom seems odd. However, what might prevent extensive reading programs from being universally applied are a number of problems that cannot be overlooked. Davis (1995) first refers to the monetary cost of such programs which may not be readily available. Second, he points out that setting up the program and ensuring its effective and efficient implementation requires a lot of organization and paperwork. Also, he refers to the problem of time, saying that an ER program requires some curriculum time, which some school principals are unwilling to offer.

Maley (2008), based on the survey he conducted, also refers to issues of insufficient time and high cost, and adds to them issues of availability of materials,

lack of understanding ER and its benefits, and the "apprehension on the part of teachers, who find it impossible to stop teaching and to allow learning to take place" (p. 150). Renandya (2007) explains that in intensive reading the instruction is more teacher-centered, i.e., the teacher does most of the talking, while in extensive reading the teacher plays a less central role and becomes a guide and a member in the reading community. He highlights that "many teachers are perhaps still uncomfortable with the idea of playing a 'less' central role in the classroom" (p. 146). In addition, both Renandya and Maley mention that the indifference to ER might be because it is not directly linked to the syllabus and not directly assessed. As a result, teachers feel that the curriculum time is better spent on topics that students will be tested on. Moreover, they both refer to the downward pressure on teachers to cover the predetermined materials specified in the syllabus, saying that such pressure leaves no time to get students to read extensively.

Certainly, the issues of cost, time, materials availability, teachers' mentality, and the administrative pressure discussed above should not be and cannot be overlooked. Renandya (2007) states, "Even in places where extensive reading has been incorporated into the second language curriculum (e.g., Singapore), full implementation of the extensive reading programs is hampered by these practical considerations" (p. 147). However, instead of looking at these issues as hurdles preventing the use of ER, we can look at them as implementation variables that need careful consideration.

Guided Reading as a Pedagogical Approach

Guided reading is one of the current prominent types of extensive reading programs. It is usually used for children and beginner learners. In the United States, it has become a significant and popular contemporary reading instructional practice (Fawson & Reutzel, 2000). In fact, it was Fountas and Pinnell (1996) who introduced guided reading to the United States in their 1996 publication *Guided Reading: Good First Teaching for All Students*. Their work was instrumental in popularizing guided reading and making it widely used as a comprehensive framework for literacy instruction, not only in the United States but also in other parts of the world. Guided reading is defined by Pinnell and Fountas (2010) as "small-group reading instruction designed to provide differentiated teaching that supports students in developing reading proficiency" (p. 2). They note that the history of small-group reading

instruction in the United States goes back to the late 1800s, when educators realized the need for differentiated instruction, and began creating reading groups within classes. That practice was naturally accompanied with a growth in the market for leveled books or what is commonly referred to as "graded readers." Bell (2001) notes that the use of graded readers dates back to the1950s, yet guided reading, as a new kind of small-group reading instruction, first emerged in schools in New Zealand and Australia in the 1980s. It was specifically structured to avoid the drawbacks of traditional reading groups, such as static grouping and "round robin" reading (Pinnell & Fountas, 2010). According to Iaquinta (2006), guided reading usually involves small groups of students who are at a similar place in their reading development, and share similar learning needs. Unlike the traditional grouping, guided reading groups are temporary and expected to change, as teachers are free to change the composition of groups frequently to accommodate the different learning paths of readers. Iaquinta points out "Grouping that is dynamic or flexible, and varied allows students to support one another as readers and to feel part of a community of readers" (p. 414). Pinnell and Fountas (2010) refer to additional distinctive characteristics of the guided reading approach. They say that across all levels, teachers teach a wide range of reading strategies such as word solving, searching for information, summarizing information, maintaining fluency, predicting, making connections, inferring, analyzing, and critiquing. Another characteristic that Pinnell and Fountas mention is that in guided reading "the teacher incorporates explicit vocabulary instruction and phonics or word work" (p. 3). They also mention that the teacher's introduction to the text promotes critical thinking and deep comprehension, and that students may write or draw about the reading rather than completing exercises or workbook pages.

But what exactly are the objectives of guided reading as a teaching approach? According to Fawson and Reutzel (2000), the general goal of guided reading is "to assist children in becoming independent, fluent, silent readers through a teaching process that scaffolds students' selection and application of a variety of effective reading strategies" (p. 85). Iaquinta (2006) thinks that guided reading is an all-learners teaching approach that has three essential purposes: first, meeting the varied instructional needs of all students in the classroom; second, teaching students to read increasingly difficult texts with understanding and fluency; and third, helping students to construct meaning while using problem solving strategies to work out unfamiliar words, analyze complex sentence structure, and understand new concepts or ideas.

As for how guided reading is implemented in the classroom, Iaquinta (2006) notes that through ongoing observation of students and systematic assessment, teachers draw together groups of students with similar reading abilities and similar learning needs. Then, teachers select materials that both match students' current abilities and at the same time provide the appropriate challenge for them. During the guided reading lesson, which takes approximately 15-20 minutes, each student is provided with a text. Based on the classroom context, there are variations in the ways in which guided reading is administered. However, Fawson and Reutzel (2000) refer us to some common steps for conducting the guided reading lesson. These are three main stages. First, the teacher introduces the story by triggering a general discussion of the text in order to provide the students with the essential background needed for reading the story. Second, after the teacher has introduced the story or a section of it, the students participate in supported reading. They quietly read aloud the identified text. During that time, the teacher observes each student's application of reading strategies, and provides the necessary support to help struggling readers to become independent and fluent. Third, after completing the story, students may participate in some follow-up activities related to the story or a strategy introduced during the reading.

However, for the teacher to focus on the small guided reading group at hand, the remaining students have to be occupied with some independent activities. As Ford and Optiz (2002) put it, "the success of guided reading as an instructional practice certainly depends on the implementation of a classroom structure that provides teachers with opportunities to effectively work with small groups of readers while keeping other readers independently engaged in meaningful literacy activities" (p. 711). For instruction away from the teacher, Ford and Optiz list and discuss three organizational structures: The first is collaborating with other professionals such as reading specialists and special educators; the second is combining the use of an established program like writers' workshop with guided reading; and the third one involves using learning centers. In fact, from what appears in the literature, it seems that learning centers are the most common classroom structure in guided reading. Ford and Optiz (2002) define learning centers as "small areas within the classroom where students work alone or together to explore literacy activities independently while the teacher provides small-group guided reading instruction" (p. 711).

According to the literature, it seems that teachers who have used guided reading as a pedagogical approach do find it beneficial, and they appreciate the flexibility and scaffolding it offers for dealing with the diverse instructional needs of learners. Fawson and Reutzel (2000), who have worked in elementary school classrooms and with elementary school teachers, report that teachers they have worked with "are typically excited about the possibilities of providing the necessary scaffolding and instructional support to their students that guided reading offers" (p. 84). Likewise, Asraf and Ahmad (2003), who implemented a four-month guided extensive reading program in three rural middle schools in Malaysia as part of their qualitative study, reported that teachers by the end of the school term came to realize the benefits of the program, "because they began to see some improvements in their students' attitudes towards reading English" (p. 18). When Asraf and Ahmad asked the students about how they felt about the guided reading program, students said that the stories were "quite interesting," and thought they really had benefited from the program "especially to improve their writing skills because they were exposed to so many new words which [they] had never come across before" (p. 17).

However, since an extensive reading program involves lots of resources, setting up a guided reading program is not always easy. Fawson and Reutzel (2000) refer to one of the major challenges associated with establishing a guided reading program, particularly the lack of appropriate quantities and varieties of leveled reading materials. They say, "Many teachers who are just beginning to implement guided reading often express frustration with the need to provide large numbers of leveled books in classrooms where they do not have ready access to the quantities and varieties of leveled titles needed" (p. 84).

The Guided Reading Program (GRP) in Bahrain

The Ministry of Education in Bahrain, in its continuous initiatives to improve students' performance in English education across all levels, especially at the primary stage, has come up with several projects. Among these projects is the Guided Reading Program (GRP) for students in cycle two. According to the website of the Ministry of Education in Bahrain (http://www.moe.gov.bh/divisions/curriculum/Dreamweaver/ page13.htm), the Guided Reading Program (GRP) was first introduced in the year 2000 starting with 25 government primary schools. Over the following years, other primary and primary intermediate schools were inducted into the program. As

declared by the Ministry of Education, the main goal of the GRP is "to develop independent, silent readers who have a love of reading and books." The GRP does not replace the standard-textbook lessons; instead, the GRP is designed to enrich the ordinary English curriculum. It is an opportunity for teachers to work on developing their learners' reading skills, as this lesson provides a relaxed learning environment for interaction. The teacher here plays the role of a guide and observer. She/he reads to and with the learners, and observes them to check if they are still reading books that are challenging enough for their reading abilities. As learners progress they are moved to newer groups to read higher levels of books. In addition, the teacher is encouraged to make links between the books the learners are reading in the GRP and the topics or language they are studying in their ordinary English lessons, or even real life situations.

The materials used in this program are leveled story books, or what is commonly known as graded readers. The books vary in their subject, length, illustrations, and language, becoming more complex as the learner progresses from the first to the last levels. These well-illustrated storybooks were authored by Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell and published by a global children's publishing company called Scholastic. The graded readers series used for the GRP program are freely supplied by the Directorate of Curricula to all government primary schools.

To familiarize English teachers with the program, the Department of English at the Directorate of Curricula held several workshops. In these workshops, teachers were supplied with classroom implementation guidelines for the GRP. During the first years of its establishment, teachers were required to execute the program five days a week, for 15-20 minutes in each English period. However, upon teachers' complaints, the number of GRP sessions per week was shortened to twice a week.

Before starting to implement the program, teachers have to do some paperwork and prepare some teaching aids and materials that ensure an effective and efficient running of the program. These include things like class rules, word walls, the management board, the schedule, tables' labels or stands, the composition of the GRP groups and learning centers, the learning center corner or shelves, and the activities' files (Hussan, 2008). After that preparation stage, the teacher has to explain the program and its concepts to the students, and start assessing learners' reading ability in order to place them in their appropriate GRP levels. Students with similar reading ability level are to be placed in the same GRP group. Hussan's handout recommends

that the number of students in each GRP group should not exceed six students in each level.

In the GRP session, the class is divided into groups. While six students are in the GRP center, other students are placed in learning centers. The teacher has the freedom to choose from many types of learning centers, such as spelling, writing, reading, art, etc. In each learning center, students are engaged in an independent activity away from the teacher. A leader and a vice leader are chosen for each group/center. The teacher explains to the leaders the duties they are going to have. The teacher has to change the labels on the management board and on the tables of the learning centers according to the schedule she/he prepared before starting the lesson so that students know which activities they are doing without telling them and for the group leaders to know which activities to take from the shelves (Hussan, 2008).

While students are busy with doing various activities in their learning centers, a lesson is started in the GRP center. First, the teacher has to introduce the story and lead the pre-reading discussion. Then, the GRP students have to read their graded readers silently/softly. At that time, the teacher acts as a guide and records students' reading behaviors. When they finish reading, the teacher leads a post-reading comprehension discussion, and then conducts some word study skills work focusing on the pronunciation of consonants, digraphs, plurals, vowels, or compound words. Finally, the students are given a follow-up activity connected to the story they just read. While the GRP students are doing this activity, the teacher does the running record (assessment of progress) with one student at a time from the GRP center, and when the student finishes, the teacher lets that student do the activity. When the GRP lesson finishes, the teacher rewards or praises students as groups when they all followed the rules and procedures. The teacher should praise behavior, effort, and co-operation, not only good work (Hussan, 2008).

The Ministry of Education in Bahrain claims that schools that have implemented the GRP report its popularity with young learners who are enjoying reading stories to their friends and their teacher. Also, in the ER studies I have presented above, positive attitudes towards the incorporation of an ER program in second language classrooms were expressed. Still, however, we are in need of some tangible evidence with regards to teachers' and learners' perceptions of extensive reading programs such as the GRP in Bahrain's government primary schools. My

study seeks to provide some solid data to gain valuable insight into this particular matter.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Design of the Study

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate perceptions and attitudes towards the effectiveness of the Guided Reading Program (GRP) in teaching English to primary-level students at Bahrain's government schools. First, the study aimed to look at what government primary school teachers in Bahrain think about the usefulness of the GRP in English education, in terms of its benefits to students, the drawbacks, and also the difficulties that teachers might have encountered when trying to execute the program in their classrooms. Second, through the teachers and the targeted learners themselves, the study attempted to explore what primary-level students think and feel about the GRP.

This study was predominantly qualitative in nature, yet it relied on a combination of quantitative and qualitative data-collection methods: surveys for teachers to gather background data and explore opinions, and semi-structured interviews for teachers and students to gain further insights into their perceptions and attitudes toward the GRP. Before starting the data-collection process, the Directorate of Scientific Research in the Ministry of Education in Bahrain was informed about the whole procedure of carrying out the study and an official approval was obtained. The official approval was then presented to the principals of the selected government primary schools.

The data were gathered personally by the researcher during the period of January 4-14, 2010, that is, at the end of the first semester of the academic year 2009/2010. It was expected that by this time the teachers would have implemented enough GRP sessions to enable the researcher to investigate students' opinions on the program. For the sake of location triangulation, the researcher tried to include multiple data-gathering sites by visiting 14 government primary schools in four different towns in Bahrain, seven all-boys schools and seven all-girls schools. However, only 12 of the schools I visited, five all-boys and seven all-girls, participated in the study. Two all-boys schools refrained from participating because they claimed their English teachers' input would be of no value to the study as they were either novice teachers starting their first year or had not tried implementing the

GRP before. In addition, a few teachers from four other primary schools responded to the survey via email during the month of January 2010.

<center>The Participants</center>

The population of the study was primary school English teachers and primary-level, cycle two students in Bahrain's government schools. The whole number of participants, before analyzing the data and ruling out some of them, were 48 female teachers and 15 cycle two female students from 16 different primary schools in Bahrain. The teachers were all female because in most primary schools in Bahrain, whether all-girls or all-boys schools, the faculty is female. Also, due to social reasons, it would not have been easy to get access and arrange meetings in all-boys schools, where the faculty is dominantly male. In addition, the students were all female because, during the period of my data collection, I could not find an all-boys primary school that had implemented the program at some point in the first academic semester of the school year 2009/2010.

43 out of 48 teachers responded to the survey, and 20 teachers and 15 students were interviewed. However, only 35 out of the 48 teachers were implementing or had implemented the Guided Reading Program in their classroom. Those who indicated they had not tried the program were either primary school teachers who had not taught cycle two students before, or teachers who were currently teaching cycle two students but had not implemented the program because they were new, had not been trained, or made the choice not to do it due to lack of time or for personal reasons. This group of teachers was excluded from the study as their opinions would not serve the main purpose of the study.

The actual participants in the study, then, were 35 female teachers, working at 13 different all-girls and all-boys primary schools, who had tried using the GRP in teaching English. 31 of them responded to the survey, while 20 out of the 35 teachers were interviewed. Most of them were Bahraini nationals, but there were also three Egyptian teachers. All of them were bachelor degree holders. Eight of the teachers had taught for five years or less, while 23 of the teachers had taught for more than five years. Two of them were no longer teaching English because they had been promoted recently to carry out administrative responsibilities within their schools. Table 1 below summarizes some background data about the participants who had tried using the GRP.

<center>20</center>

Table1: Teachers' and students' demographics

	Schools	No. of participating schools	No. of participating teachers and students	
			Ts	Ss
1	Boys' Schools	5	10	0
2	Girls' Schools	8	25	15
	Total	13	35	15

Ts: Teachers, Ss: Students

Furthermore, during the 16th International TESOL Arabia Conference that was held in March, 2010, I was fortunate to have the chance to meet the senior English curriculum specialist for basic education who works for the Directorate of Curricula at the Ministry of Education in Bahrain. I conducted a short informal interview with her about the use of the Guided Reading Program in Bahrain's primary schools, and the difficulties teachers encounter when trying to implement it.

Development of the Instruments

Surveys

A three-page survey was a source of collecting both quantitative and qualitative types of data. 31 teachers out of the 35 teacher participants in the study completed the survey. I developed the survey items from the research questions and from significant ideas identified in the related literature. The survey was bilingual in order to suggest that teachers were allowed to express their ideas in their first language. Some teachers preferred to respond in their native language, Arabic, and I translated their responses. The survey consisted of three sections (see Appendix A). The first section elicited some personal data and general information about the respondents. The second section contained 14 close-ended statements which were mainly designed to find out teachers' perceptions of the usefulness of the GRP in teaching English. Unlike the rest of the survey, these close-ended statements were not translated into Arabic. I thought that translating them might cause some confusion— my literal translation of these statements might convey the general idea but fail to convey the precise intended meaning. Teachers might read a statement in English and then, when comparing it to its Arabic version, reach a different or insufficient understanding of what the statement denoted. Instead, I opted for writing them

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carefully with a simple level of English language. These statements had five response categories: strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree, and not sure. The third section of the survey included two open-ended questions in order for teachers to add their remarks about what they thought were the difficulties/problems associated with implementing the GRP, and to provide the chance to elicit qualitative responses regarding respondents' attitudes towards the integration of the GRP in language education.

To collect data, I selected and visited 14 all-girls and all-boys primary government schools in four different towns in the Kingdom of Bahrain: Manama, Muharraq, Hamad Town, and Isa Town. In my selection of these schools, I chose only schools with female faculty, and visited schools in each town that were close to each other for the purpose of saving time. However, two all-boys schools of these 14 government primary schools refrained from participating in the study as they claimed that their English teachers had not implemented the program before, and had not yet received any training on implementing it.

Moreover, after collecting some data by personally visiting the schools and finding out that not many teachers had tried using the GRP in their classes, I tried to increase the number of the teacher participants in the study by sending a soft copy of the survey via e-mail to a group of 53 primary school English teachers that I have on my e-mail list. However, only six of these teachers responded to the survey, of whom only three had used the GRP before.

Interviews

20 teachers and 15 students were interviewed. Teachers' interviews were conducted in English while students' interviews were conducted in Arabic. All of the interviewed teachers had responded to the survey before the interview took place, except for four teachers who did not respond to the survey before or after their interviews. The 3-10 minute interviews were administered in the schools' premises, either in the staff room, the library, or the room of the English Club. Interviews were mobile-recorded, transcribed, and translated by me.

A number of questions were prepared to obtain further information about the teachers' account of the GRP—when and how they were trained to implement it, when they started to do the program, and how they implemented it in their classrooms. The teachers' interview questions were also designed to provide deeper

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insight into the teachers' views of the effectiveness of the program—what they think are the challenges surrounding it, and how they believe such challenges can be overcome (see Appendix B). The 20 teachers who were willing to be interviewed were interviewed individually either during the school break time or during their free periods.

The students' interview questions (see Appendix C) were initially designed to be administered right after they had their GRP session. However, due to limitations of time and the small number of the given GRP sessions during the semester, the students were interviewed during their break time and were asked general questions to elicit their thoughts and attitudes towards the GRP. The 15 interviewed students were presumably chosen randomly by their class English teacher, because I instructed the teachers to pick any five students of their classes and not to make their choices on the basis of students' academic standing or proficiency level. They were from grades 4, 5, and 6, from two different primary all-girls schools. As I explained earlier, during the time of my data collection I could not find any all-boys primary school that had implemented the GRP during the current semester. The interviews took the form of four focus-group interviews, where I sat with 2-5 students of each group in a relaxed, stress-free environment.

I also interviewed the senior English curriculum specialist for basic education who works for the Directorate of Curricula at the Ministry of Education in Bahrain. The interview was short and informal in nature due to the circumstances of the time and place. We talked about how often the GRP should be implemented in the classroom, and why English teachers in Bahrain find it difficult to implement the program. In general, the teachers' and the students' interviews, in addition to the informal interview with the Ministry's curriculum specialist, served as consolidating and complementary qualitative data to the survey data.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

This chapter presents the data analysis and findings of the study. The study results are based on the responses of 35 female teachers working at 13 different all-girls and all-boys government primary schools in Bahrain, who had tried using the GRP in teaching English. Some of the teachers gave their impressions of the GRP based on memories of having used it in the past, and not actually during the academic semester in which I collected my data. 31 of them responded to the survey, while 20 out of the 35 teachers were interviewed. The data analysis also employs the responses of 15 primary-level female students attending two different government schools. Moreover, there is a reference to some information that was disclosed in an informal interview with a senior English curriculum specialist at the Ministry of Education. The relevant findings are discussed in the following order: teachers' general attitudes towards the GRP, teachers' perceptions of the benefits of the GRP, students' attitudes towards the GRP, and challenges of implementing the GRP.

Teacher's General Attitudes towards the GRP

The second section of the survey, which contained 14 close-ended statements, was analyzed by calculating frequencies and percentages (see Appendix D). There seemed to be no important differences between the number of responses for the strongly agree and agree categories, and for the strongly disagree and disagree categories. Therefore, I preferred to count the responses under only two categories: agree and disagree. Statements 2, 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14 are indicators of teachers' general attitudes towards the GRP and extensive reading. Results showed that the participants were in favor of the integration of the GRP as a supplementary reading program to the English curriculum they teach. The majority of the survey respondents (93.5%) thought that the GRP is useful for young learners, and 27 out of the 31 teachers said that the GRP makes learning a second language an enjoyable experience for both teachers and students. Only five teachers (16%) viewed the GRP as an unnecessary burden on the English teacher (see Table 2).

In addition, only 10% of the respondents said that they tend to ignore the GRP sessions in their English classes. Results also showed that the majority, over 80%, thought that extensive reading programs such as the GRP are useful for students and

should be implemented in all Bahrain government schools, which again confirms the teachers' positive attitudes towards the GRP. Also, all the participants reported that they always encourage their students to read books and stories in English (see Table 2). Moreover, in their qualitative responses to the open-ended and interview questions, teachers expressed positive attitudes towards using the GRP as a tool for teaching English. Many of them indicated that they enjoy the GRP when they carry it out in their classrooms. One interviewed teacher said, "It's really fun." Another interviewee said, "I enjoy it very much because I like reading." One more teacher wrote, "In my experience GRP is very important and useful program for government students."

Table (2): Teachers' general attitudes towards the GRP (n=31)

No.	Statements	SA/A	SD/D	NS
2.	The GRP (graded readers) is an unnecessary burden on the English teacher.	5 16%	26 84 %	0 0%
10.	I tend to ignore the "graded reader" sessions in the English syllabus I teach. *1 not answered	3 10%	25 83%	2 6%
11.	The GRP (graded readers) is useful for young learners (students in primary schools).	29 94%	1 3%	1 3%
12.	The GRP (graded readers) makes learning a second language an enjoyable experience for both teachers and students.	27 87%	2 6%	2 6%
13.	I always encourage my students to read books and stories in English.	31 100%	0 0%	0 0%
14.	I think that extensive reading programs such as the GRP are useful for students and should be implemented in all Bahrain government schools.	26 84%	5 16%	0 0%

Teachers' Perceptions of the Benefits of the GRP

When it came to the participants' perceptions of the benefits of the GRP for second language learning, results showed that the participants seemed to be aware of the role of extensive reading in developing students' reading, vocabulary, writing, listening, and speaking skills. According to the teachers' responses to the close-ended statements in the survey, 97% of them agreed that the GRP motivates students to read, and that it helps develop fluent second language readers. Also, all teachers agreed that the GRP helps develop students' general vocabulary knowledge. According to most of

the survey respondents, the GRP helps improve students' speaking (84%) and listening (77%) skills. However, a lower percentage (70%) agreed with the statement regarding the benefits of the GRP in improving students' writing skills, and one teacher was not sure. Eight teachers (27%) did not believe that the GRP can help improve students' writing skills. Yet, 24 out of the 31 (77%) teachers who responded to the survey reported that the GRP helps improve students' performance in language tests (see Table 3).

In response to an interview question that prompted them to explain how the GRP is useful for learning English, one teacher said, "It's motivating, and it breaks the routine. It enriches the students' vocab, and also they read, self-learn in the program. It enriches the students' phonics. The program also encourages them to do other or extra reading apart from the books that we do." Another teacher said, "The program enriches the pupils with vocabulary. It develops their speaking, writing, because they're going to read aloud; they're going to do a follow-up activity after reading the story. I'm going to ask them some questions about the story so it develops their comprehension [skills]." One teacher who teaches at an all-boys school said, "It improves their reading, writing, and speaking skills, and also their relationships become stronger, and my relationship to them, and I discover their weaknesses and their strengths in each skill, and I discover their talented area they have in drawing, imagination, and even I discover the weak ones, I prepare remedial activities."

Table (3): Teachers' perceptions of the benefits of the GRP (n=31)

No.	Statements	SA/A	SD/D	NS
3.	The GRP (graded readers) motivates students to read in the second language.	30 97%	0 0%	1 3%
4.	The GRP (graded readers) helps develop fluent second language readers.	30 97%	1 3%	0 0%
5.	The GRP (graded readers) helps develop students' general vocabulary knowledge.	31 100%	0 0%	0 0%
6.	The GRP (graded readers) helps improve students' writing abilities. *1 not answered	21 70%	8 27%	1 3%
7.	The GRP (graded readers) helps improve students' speaking skill.	26 84%	3 10%	2 6%
8.	The GRP (graded readers) helps improve students' listening skill. *1 not answered	23 77%	3 10%	4 13%
9.	The GRP (graded readers) helps improve students' performance in language tests.	24 77%	3 10%	4 6%

Students' Attitudes towards the GRP

It was my intention to interview both male and female primary-level students directly after they had their GRP session, in order to obtain quite in-depth, spontaneous, qualitative responses. However, because the Guided Reading Program was overlooked by English teachers in almost all of the 14 primary schools that I visited, I only managed to interview 15 cycle 2 female students. Those students had been given fewer than five GRP sessions, although the academic semester was about to end. As such was the case, I had to modify the initial interview questions. When interviewed, students were asked whether they like the GRP program or not, whether they think it can help them improve their English, and whether they would like to have more GRP sessions.

All 15 students maintained that they like the program and the stories that their teacher gives them. One grade 5 student said she likes it when the teacher gives them a story to read "because first, it's fun, and it makes us learn about things we did not know" (translated). They also said that they would like to have more GRP sessions. For example, one student from grade 6 said that she would like to have the GRP at least three days a week. As for the benefits, they thought they were gaining from the program, with emphasis on building vocabulary skills; all students repeated the idea that they learn the meaning and spelling of some difficult words found in the stories. One grade 5 student said, "We learn the difficult words, the teacher tells us the spelling, and we tell her the meaning of those words" (translated).

In addition, teachers were asked whether they thought their students enjoy the program or not. Almost all teachers indicated that students do like the program and are even excited about it. One teacher said, "I enjoy it, and the students also. They like it very much. They're happy when they know they have it like today." Another teacher said, "They like English; they love English from the GRP." One more teacher even said, "They like it more than the [textbook]."

Some teachers even reported how eager the students are to have their GRP session. One teacher said, "They enjoy it so much, and they ask me, 'When are we going to have GRP?'" Another teacher said, "Students enjoy it, because it's due to their levels, level A alone, level B alone, so they understand what's going on in the story and they learn at the same time. They always ask when are we going to take GRP. They always ask. They like it. They like the activities. They like the story itself. They love their improvement in reading." One more teacher said, "They insist that I

have to do it. I have [had] to do it for four periods or five periods one week, then I stop for one week, then I start again the week after. When I stop, they're like, 'Teacher…GRP please.'" However, unfortunately, the data revealed a number of challenges that hinder teachers from implementing the program as often as the students wish. These challenges are discussed in the next section.

Challenges of Implementing the GRP

The third section of the survey included an open-ended question about the problems that the teachers might have encountered when trying to implement the GRP in their classrooms (see Appendix A). 30 teachers responded to this question, and their responses were analyzed, categorized, and then numbered according to their number of occurrences. Results revealed that the main problems the teachers associated with implementing the GRP in Bahrain government primary schools are the following:

1. Lack of time (22)
2. The rich curriculum and its requirements (17)
3. Materials preparation takes time and effort (10)
4. The large number of students (6)
5. Management issues (4)
6. Classifying the students according to their reading ability (4)
7. Program paperwork (3)

In the first years of introducing the GRP in primary schools, teachers were required to implement the program in each lesson, during the last 15-20 minutes of each English period. Then, in response to teachers' complaints, the number of GRP sessions was reduced to at least twice a week. Yet, according to teachers' responses to the survey and interview questions, lack of time is the major problem they have encountered when trying to implement the Guided Reading Program. They attributed the cause of this problem to several factors such as the following: planning for the program, the program's paperwork, the limited time of the English period, and teachers' routine paperwork and other administrative responsibilities. For example, one teacher said, "Actually, GRP is so useful, enjoyable for students. All what I wish is, to reduce little bit all the stuffs that ministry always recommended us to do which makes our teaching is the victim. I mean, we can do it easily if we are just teachers."

But alongside these factors, many teachers complained about the limited time and the shortness of the first semester of the academic year 2009/2010.

During the first semester, almost all teachers who were supposed to implement the program reported that they could not, because of time. In fact, the semester was shorter than previous ones for two reasons: First, government primary schools in Bahrain started three weeks late as a proactive measure against the transmission of the Swine Flu epidemic among the vulnerable young children. Second, there were a lot of holidays in that particular semester—a total of 12 days. These included six days of Eid holidays, two days for the National Day holiday, one day for the New Year's holiday, one day for the Islamic New Year's holiday, and two days for the Ashura holiday.

The Directorate of Curricula at the Ministry of Education tried to make up for the shortage of the academic days by omitting some parts of the required syllabi in all subjects. Two units of the required English language syllabi for grades 4, 5, and 6 were omitted. Still, it seems that was not enough; teachers were still struggling with time. This is evident in the teachers' responses to the open-ended and the interview questions. For example, one teacher said, "This semester is too short; full of holidays. We don't have enough time. We have three units, and we have the [GRP] twice a week. That means this will take a lot of time from our teaching time." Another teacher wrote, "Implementing the GRP in the first semester of the academic year is very difficult, as there are many holidays in this semester. Consequently, time doesn't allow me to implement the program while also covering the required curriculum. However, in the second semester, I don't see a difficulty in implementing the program" (translated).

Closely related to the problem of time was the challenge of the new rich English curriculum and its requirements. This challenge was mentioned by 17 teachers. Teachers were naturally expected to finish their assigned syllabus on time because it constitutes the content of students' end-of-year assessment, and they would be held accountable by parents and the school administration if they failed to cover the required units. So, when compared to the English curriculum, the GRP became a secondary requirement, and the priority was always for finishing the required units in the textbooks. One teacher said, "There isn't enough time to use GRP because we have a lot of activities to do in the class books and work books." Another one said, "I can manage the difficulty of time. I think the difficulty was with the curriculum, not

with the GRP. The book itself; the 5th grade one." One more teacher said, "When I did the program in Zobaida School, I used to do it twice or three times a week, just like 20 minutes of the lesson, but the previous syllabus, the previous book helped us because the content of the book wasn't as much as the content of the new book, *Backpack*. Now *Backpack* is loaded. That's why it's like an obstacle for us to implement GRP together with the *Backpack."* It is worthy of note that *Backpack* is the title of a series of books that has been recently adopted by the Ministry for teaching English in cycle two. The books are very rich in content in comparison to the previous series of textbooks, *English Together*, and teachers are still experimenting with them.

However, in my informal conversation with the senior English curriculum specialist for basic education, she pointed out that many English teachers are overwhelmed with the new curriculum because they insist on teaching every single activity in the textbook, although they have been told during teachers' meetings that they are not required to do so. She also noted that some English teachers do not seem to see the links between the GRP and the curriculum they teach. They are supposed to accomplish some of the intended objectives of the curriculum by employing the GRP session, but many of them fail to do so. In my opinion, what the curriculum specialist said suggests a deficiency in teachers' education and a weakness in teachers' training.

Another important challenge, which 10 teachers emphasized, is that materials preparation takes time and effort, especially since they have very busy timetables. For the GRP, teachers are supposed to find and employ multi-level activities, while at the same time such activities should cover a variety of language skills. In addition, a few teachers complained that materials preparation costs them money, in addition to time and effort. One teacher said, "The preparation of the materials cost me a lot both money and time…and I have to prepare different activities, five or six different activities for the centers besides the GRP." Another teacher said, "It's kind of difficult to find the suitable activity for the students to do, and then it's a little bit difficult to find a good activity for the GRP group itself because it has to be like…the vocabulary first, and then you have to go through something with writing…. It shouldn't be like all speaking and reading, you have to apply a writing thing, and at the same time it has to be enjoying [enjoyable] and exciting for them." One more teacher said, "There is no time to prepare various activities for different levels of students…for different centers—you have to prepare activities for the main center, for writing center, for

reading, for spelling, no enough time. If they want us to implement it, we're in need to provide us with activities."

However, when I asked some teachers about where they get their materials from, some of them said that the Ministry had provided them with a collection of materials, and that they try to make up for the shortage of materials by sharing the activities they make with other teachers. One teacher said, "The Ministry had provided us with handouts, with varied activities. Plus, we share some activities with our colleagues in the school or outside." However, other teachers said that they did not get any activities or handouts from the Ministry, and actually suggested that they should be provided with some. For example, one teacher said, "I think they should help us in preparing materials; they can give us in advance." Also, in response to teachers' complaints about the shortage of materials, English supervisors suggested that teachers could make use of the activities in the textbooks. Yet, it seems that some teachers were not satisfied with this solution. One teacher said, "This year, they said you can use the book, the activity book, let the students do an activity and you sit with GRP group. It's not giving pleasure to students! Boring!... They're doing GRP, and this group are doing their homework." Another teacher said, "The Ministry suggested that we can take the writing and the reading activities from the workbook itself, but it is not useful."

The number of students per classroom is another challenge that teachers have to deal with. Six teachers complained about the large number of students in their classes which sometimes reaches above 30 students, and which in turn might cause other problems such as shortage in the number of story copies and failing to cater to all students' needs. One of those teachers said, "Sometimes, I have seven girls in each group. We have only six copies of each story, so one girl has to share her story with her friend." Another teacher said, "The less students you have, it's always the better, and the class will be more quiet, and you can have more activities for them, because you'll be able to tell what she likes and what she doesn't like, as long as you have less number of students. Sometimes, if it's too big number of students, you misjudge someone, you know, you cannot tell from the beginning that she's perfect [or] she's not."

There are also some management difficulties associated with the implementation of the GRP. These were highlighted by four teachers. For example, one teacher said, "They stay still but sometimes some students they don't want to go

to the reading group or writing group, they want to stay in their group. They want to sit with their friends, so it's sometimes tiring to do [the GRP]." Another teacher said, "I have difficulties just changing their groups. They're so noisy." And, what compounds the problem of classroom management is of course the number of students. For example, one teacher said, "Even if you're the best teacher ever, you cannot manage a class with 30 or 32 students, or now the 6th grade, it's 38 students, and you're supposed to be with only five or six of them. What about the rest? It's true you're giving them activities, they're enjoying it, they're working on it, but still you have to manage other things."

Other challenges mentioned by the teachers included classifying the students according to their reading levels and the paperwork associated with implementing the program, such as the forms and records they have to fill in.

In conclusion, findings of this study definitely revealed that both the teachers and the students had positive attitudes towards the GRP and were relatively aware of its immense benefits. Yet, teachers felt that there are a number of problems associated with the program. In fact, all of the problems discussed above should be taken seriously because they affect how the program is being implemented, and how often it is being implemented, and hence they affect the success of the program. For example, one teacher said, "They should have centers actually, but I didn't do that, because I didn't have time for that, so I give them an activity about anything.... I didn't have centers, because I didn't have time for all these things." Another teacher wrote, "The Curriculum is very rich in the 5th grade. I don't have time to do the GRP lesson as much as I wish."

The next chapter summarizes the major findings of this study, provides some implications for teachers and the Ministry of Education, and also lists some limitations of the study and suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Summary of Findings

This chapter discusses conclusions about teachers' and students' attitudes towards the use of Guided Reading Program (GRP) in teaching English as a second language at Bahrain's government primary schools. First, a brief summary of the study's findings is provided. Then, based on the discussion of the results, implications for English teachers and the Ministry of Education are discussed. Finally, limitations of this study are pointed out and directions for further research are suggested.

The main purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions and attitudes of teachers and students towards the usefulness of the GRP in teaching English. Interpreting the results of the study, it is clear that, despite the challenges associated with the implementation of the program, most of the 35 teachers surveyed and interviewed for the study were in favor of using the GRP in their classroom, and were aware of its immense benefits. Results also showed that the 15 primary-level students interviewed found joy in the GRP sessions, and thought they were learning a lot from the program.

First, with regard to teachers' general attitude towards the GRP, most teachers thought that the program is useful for young learners and makes learning a second language an enjoyable experience for both teachers and students. They also thought that extensive reading programs like the GRP are useful for second language learners and should be extended to all government schools in Bahrain. In addition, when it came to teachers' perceptions of the benefits of the GRP for second language learners, results showed that they were aware of the role of extensive reading in developing students' reading, vocabulary, writing, speaking, and listening skills.

Second, exploring students' attitudes towards the use of the GRP in learning English, results showed that the students like the program and the graded storybooks. They think of the GRP as something fun, interesting, and exciting. Also, students thought that they were benefiting from the program, especially in learning new vocabulary. These findings are consistent with the results of Asraf and Ahmed's (2003) study that was mentioned earlier, in that both teachers and students demonstrated positive attitudes towards the GRP and in that the students mainly referred to gains in their vocabulary skills.

The study also aimed to investigate the problems associated with the use of the GRP in Bahrain's government primary schools. Results showed that lack of time, the richness of the required curriculum, materials preparation, and the large number of students in each class were the major challenges that the teachers said they faced when trying to implement the GRP in their classrooms. In fact, most of these challenges are not atypical to the extensive reading problems that were discussed earlier in the literature review, and they all seem to evolve around the number one challenge –lack of time. Yet, in Bahrain's government primary schools, it seems that such challenges are seriously affecting how often the program is implemented, and how it is being implemented. Consequently, this puts the extensive nature of the GRP and the amount of benefit the students are gaining into question.

However, instead of looking at these challenges as hurdles preventing the use of the GRP in the classroom, we can look at them as implementation variables that need careful consideration, because as Davis (1995) asserts, "Ultimately, whether or not these problems are overcome is a matter of priorities. Teachers and educational planners first have to become convinced of the enormous boost such a program can give to their pupils' command of the language in order to feel it worthwhile committing the resources required" (p. 331). I believe that highlighting those challenges by considering teachers' points of view is the first step towards finding solutions that will ease the implementation of the GRP in primary schools in Bahrain and contribute to its success as a tool for learning a second language. Some suggestions are offered in the next section for teachers and the Ministry of Education to help promote the use of GRP, and to facilitate overcoming some of the challenges related to it.

Implications of the Study

Implications for Teachers

I believe that teachers' positive attitudes towards the GRP and their awareness of its benefits should drive them to work harder towards playing an active role in overcoming the challenges associated with the program, instead of waiting for some ready-made solutions from the English education specialists at the Ministry of Education. As preparing for and executing the GRP lesson is time-consuming, teachers should strive to plan their time well by organizing their priorities and learning some time management techniques. Instead of enslaving themselves to the

textbooks they teach, teachers should learn how to be selective in the activities they address in class, and how the textbook and the GRP session are interplayed to serve the overall objectives of the curriculum. Teachers can also cooperate with their colleagues in designing and collecting materials and activities for the GRP group and the other learning centers. They can come up with a national scholastic bank for the activities used in the English classroom and make it available online for ease of access. In addition, teacher-to-teacher support is indeed very important. I think veteran teachers should help novice teachers with regard to the GRP, training them on how to implement the program and how to better manage time and control the classroom. I also recommend that teachers should seek to develop their professional tools in order to make the maximum use of such a good extensive reading program. Reading more about guided reading programs and learning new techniques for teaching reading to second language learners might be a good start.

Implications for the Ministry of Education

The Ministry's integration of the GRP as a supplementary addition to the English curriculum was a sensible action. Yet, like any new project or program, the GRP needs proper planning, follow-up, and evaluation schemes, not to mention sufficient resources. Clearly, there are no problems concerning lack of quantity or variety of books, as adequate collection of books are supplied free by the Ministry to all government primary schools. Yet, as evident in teachers' complaints, it seems that the resource of time is lacking. Undeniably, there are different reasons for this. It could be the new dense curriculum, the search for materials, the program's paperwork, the limited time of the English period, the teachers' routine paperwork and other administrative responsibilities, etc. In any case, the Ministry should discuss with the teachers the problem of time shortage in order to find out its major roots, and then negotiate some proper solutions.

In addition, the fact that many teachers had not made time for the use of the GRP during the semester of the study and that a number of teachers have tended to ignore it without being reprimanded suggests a lack in the follow-up and evaluation schemes of teachers' implementation of the program and/or an over amount of flexibility. I think that leniency in such matters does not serve the objectives behind the initiation of the program. It has to be made clear to all teachers that the GRP is an essential element of the English curriculum they teach and not something optional. A

minimum number of GRP sessions and of stories to be read during the semester should be specified and made a compulsory task for all teachers. The GRP should be regarded as a priority even if it is not something the students are going to be evaluated on by the end of the year.

Another thing that the Ministry should take into consideration is the large number of students in each primary-level class. The number of students certainly matters when trying to execute such a program because it affects class management, the time needed to do the classroom activities, and the quality of instruction. This is especially the case in the all-boys schools. If, for certain financial and strategic restraints, the Ministry cannot lessen the number of students per class, then what could be done is training teachers on how to manage large classes.

Teacher training is crucial for the successful implementation of the GRP. Yet, through the process of data collection and analyzing the survey results, I found that not all of the English teachers at Bahrain's primary schools had received proper training on how to implement the GRP in the classroom. Some teachers had the opportunity to attend several workshops, while others attended only three-day or one-day workshops. Also, some teachers never attended the workshops organized by the Ministry, and were only trained by their senior teachers for a few hours, while others did not get training at all. In fact, two all-boys schools I visited during the process of collecting data apologized for not taking part in the study because they claimed that almost all the English teachers in the school had not implemented the program before, and had not even received any training on implementing it. Upon talking with the senior English curriculum specialist at the Ministry of Education about this matter, she admitted that there was a weakness in the training sessions organized for cycle two teachers because, since English had been recently introduced in grade one, the emphasis had been on training English teachers in cycle one. However, she told me that they will be organizing more training sessions for cycle two teachers in upcoming semesters. I think that if the Ministry wants the program to be properly implemented in all government primary schools, then it should ensure that all primary-level English teachers get adequate training on the use of the GRP.

Limitations of the Study and Directions for Further Research

The study encompassed government primary schools in four different towns in Bahrain, and included responses of both experienced and novice English teachers, as

well as the responses of primary-level students in three different grades. Yet, the generalizability of findings to all Bahrain's primary-level school teachers is still limited because it might not represent the opinions and attitudes of all teachers who experienced the use of the GRP in the English classroom. The number of teachers whose responses were counted was only 35, and they were all females. In addition, the number of teacher participants who are teaching in all-boys primary schools was less than the number of participating teachers working at all-girls primary schools. I think the study might have yielded different results if there had been an equal number of both. An equal number of both might also have allowed for a comparison between the responses of teachers working at all-girls' schools and teachers who work at all-boys' schools. Moreover, although the number of male teachers working at primary-level schools is far smaller in comparison to the number of female teachers, it would be interesting to see whether they have different attitudes and opinions from their female colleagues. However, the responses of the 35 English teachers who participated in this study provide us with preliminary insights into how primary-level teachers perceive the benefits and the challenges associated with implementing the GRP. In order to obtain more comprehensive understanding of teachers' attitudes and perceptions of the effectiveness and use of the GRP in the English classroom, larger scale studies that would include more female and male teacher participants from different government primary schools in Bahrain are needed.

Likewise, the number of students who participated in the study does not allow for generalization of results. They were only 15 students studying in all-girls primary schools. The study would yield more interesting results if male students were included, and if the overall number of student participants was larger. This would allow for a comparison between male and female students' attitudes towards the GRP, and also for a comparison between students' attitudes towards the program across the three cycle-two grades.

Another limitation of this study was the rather unfortunate time in which the data collection took place. The data were collected during the first semester of the academic year 2009/2010. That semester's length was relatively shorter than the average duration of other semesters due to several reasons listed in the previous chapter. Almost all of the teachers claimed that the shortness of that semester did not allow them to implement the GRP in their classes, and hence it was difficult for me to find a sufficient number of students to participate in the study. Also, this limitation

might have affected teachers' responses to the questions related to the challenges they have faced when trying to implement the GRP. This might have made teachers focus more on the challenge of time and overlook other possible challenges.

Moreover, I believe the study would have provided richer data and some more lucid justifications for various responses if the interviews had been conducted after analyzing the survey data. I might have changed some of the interview questions to elicit more detailed responses. Due to limitations in my time and also teachers' time, this option was not feasible. This could have been compensated for had I designed a more detailed survey that would ask teachers to explain some of their responses, especially their responses to the Likert items.

However, regardless of these few limitations, I believe this study provides a good basis for other studies to build on. It is the first systematic study to investigate perceptions and attitudes toward the use of a guided reading program in Bahrain's government primary schools. It has provided some valuable insights into teachers' and students' opinions of the GRP, and it has also opened new doors to expand on this area of research, providing a point of departure for future local or regional studies. Future studies are indeed needed not only to investigate more views and opinions towards this important program, but also to assess its outcomes and effects on the process of second language learning at Bahrain's primary schools.

Final Thought

In conclusion, I am inclined to believe that positive attitudes toward the use of a guided reading program in second language classrooms and awareness of its benefits are not enough to ensure its success. The actual success of such programs depends on several factors, such as how the program is planned, executed, and monitored; how often it is conducted; and how teachers and students persevere to make it work. Unless the Ministry of Education and the primary-level school teachers take all of these factors into consideration and exert their efforts to promote the use of the GRP and overcome the challenges associated with it, the program is not likely to achieve its intended goals.

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Survey of Teachers' Perceptions of the Use of the Guided Reading Program (GRP) in Bahrain's Government Primary Schools
استبيان لرصد آراء المعلمين بشأن جدوى استخدام برنامج القراءة الموجهة لتعليم اللغة الانجليزية في مدارس البحرين الابتدائية

Note: This survey consists of (3) sections and (3) pages. It will only be used for research purposes. Try your best to answer all questions. Your time and effort are very much appreciated.

ملاحظة: الاستبيان يتكون من 3 أقسام و3 صفحات، وسوف يستخدم فقط لأغراض بحثية. الرجاء الاجابة على جميع الأسئلة. مع خالص التقدير لوقتكم ومجهودكم.

Section (1) Personal data of respondent	القسم (1): المعلومات الشخصية

- Gender الجنس :

☐ Male ذكر   ☐ Female أنثى

- Nationality الجنسية: --

- E-mail البريد الالكتروني: ----------------------------------

-Teaching Experience خبرة التدريس :

☐ 0-5 Years   ☐ 6-15 Years   ☐ 16-25 Years   ☐ 26+ Years

-Education المستوى التعليمي:

☐ PhD دكتوراة   ☐ MA ماجستير   ☐ BA بكالريوس

-Name of the school you work for اسم المدرسة التي تعمل بها حاليا: -----------------------------

-Grades/Classes you are teaching الصفوف/ المراحل التي تقوم بتدريسها : ---------------------

-Does the school you work at now have an extensive reading program (e.g. GRP)? هل يوجد برنامج للقراءة الموجهة في المدرسة التي تعمل بها الآن؟

☐Yes نعم   ☐No لا

-Have you been trained on using extensive reading materials (e.g., graded readers) for teaching English?

هل تم تدريبك على كيفية استخدام مواد /وسائل القراءة المكثفة لتعليم اللغة الإنجليزية ؟

☐ Yes نعم   ☐No لا   For how long? المدة الزمنية -------------------- ----------

-Have you tried using the GRP materials (e.g., graded readers) in your classroom? هل استخدمت كتب/وسائل برنامج القراءة الموجهة في صفك؟

☐ Yes نعم   ☐No لا

42

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">Section (2) Teachers' perceptions of extensive reading programs
القسم (2): آراء المعلمين في برامج القراءة المكثفة</td></tr>
</table>

Directions: *Please tick (✓) the response that reflects your opinion after reading each statement.*

إرشادات: ضع علامة (✓) عند الاجابة التي تمثل رأيك بعد قراءة كل من العبارات التالية:

SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree; NS = Not Sure

No.	Statements العبارات	SA أوافق بشدة	A أوافق	D لا أوافق	SD أبدا لا أوافق	NS لست متأكد
1.	The reading comprehension activities in the English curriculum I teach are sufficient. The GRP (graded readers) should **not** be part of the syllabus.					
2.	The GRP (graded readers) is an unnecessary burden on the English teacher.					
3.	The GRP (graded readers) motivates students to read in the second language.					
4.	The GRP (graded readers) helps develop fluent second language readers.					
5.	The GRP (graded readers) helps develop students' general vocabulary knowledge.					
6.	The GRP (graded readers) helps improve students' writing abilities.					
7.	The GRP (graded readers) helps improve students' speaking skills.					
8.	The GRP (graded readers) helps improve students' listening skills.					
9.	The GRP (graded readers) helps improve students' performance in language tests.					
10.	I tend to ignore the "graded reader" sessions in the English syllabus I teach.					
11.	The GRP (graded readers) is useful for young learners (students in primary schools).					
12.	The GRP (graded readers) makes learning a second language an enjoyable experience for both teachers and students.					
13.	I always encourage my students to read books and stories in English.					
14.	I think that extensive reading programs such as the GRP are useful for students and should be implemented in all Bahrain government schools.					

Section (3) Teachers' perceptions of the challenges of implementing the GRP in government schools

القسم (3): آراء المعلمين في التحديات التي تواجههم عند تطبيق برنامج القراءة الموجهة في المدارس الحكومية الابتدائية

Directions: Please answer this question if you have tried using any extensive reading material (e.g., graded readers) in your language classroom.

إرشادات: الرجاء الإجابة على الأسئلة التالية إذا كنت من الذين حاولوا تطبيق برنامج للقراءة الموجهة في صفوف اللغة الانجليزية التي تقوم بتدريسها.

Have you encountered any problems when trying to use extensive reading materials in your language classroom? Please explain.

هل واجهت أية مشكلات عندما حاولت تطبيق برنامج القراءة الموجهة في الصفوف التي تقوم بتدريسها؟ اشرح من فضلك.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Please write any additional comments you would like to make regarding the use of extensive reading in second language learning.

من فضلك اكتب أية تعليقات إضافية أو أية آراء تودّ إبداءها بشأن استخدام برنامج القراءة الموجهة في تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

☺
Thank you for your time

Appendix B: Teachers' Interview Questions

1. When and how have you been trained to execute the GRP?

2. When did you start implementing the GRP in your classroom?

3. Do you think the GRP is useful for learning English? Why?

4. Describe a GRP session in your classroom.

5. Do you enjoy the GRP sessions?

6. Do you think there are enough or too many of these sessions in the syllabus?

7. What difficulties, if any, are associated with the GRP?

8. In your opinion, how can such challenges be overcome?

Appendix C: Students' Interview Questions

1. Do you enjoy the GRP session? Explain.

2. Did you like today's story?

3. What did you like about it?

4. What new things have you learnt from today's GRP session?

5. Do you think the graded reader books can help you learn English? Explain.

6. Do you want more GRP sessions in your English class?

Appendix D: Teachers' Survey Results

Teachers' Perceptions of the Guided Reading Program (N= 31)

SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree; NS = Not Sure

No.	Statements	SA/A	SD/D	NS
1.	The reading comprehension activities in the English curriculum I teach are sufficient. The GRP (graded readers) should **not** be part of the syllabus.	12 (39%)	19 (61%)	0 (0%)
2.	The GRP (graded readers) is an unnecessary burden on the English teacher.	5 (16%)	26 (84%)	0 (0%)
3.	The GRP (graded readers) motivates students to read in the second language.	30 (97%)	0 (0%)	1 (3%)
4.	The GRP (graded readers) helps develop fluent second language readers.	30 (97%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)
5.	The GRP (graded readers) helps develop students' general vocabulary knowledge.	31 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
6.	The GRP (graded readers) helps improve students' writing abilities. *1 not answered	21 70%	8 27%	1 3%
7.	The GRP (graded readers) helps improve students' speaking skill.	26 84%	3 10%	2 6%
8.	The GRP (graded readers) helps improve students' listening skill. *1 not answered	23 77%	3 10%	4 13%
9.	The GRP (graded readers) helps improve students' performance in language tests.	24 77%	3 10%	4 6%
10.	I tend to ignore the "graded reader" sessions in the English syllabus I teach. *1 not answered	3 10%	25 83%	2 6%
11.	The GRP (graded readers) is useful for young learners (students in primary schools).	29 (94%)	1 (3%)	1 (3%)
12.	The GRP (graded readers) makes learning a second language an enjoyable experience for both teachers and students.	27 (87%)	2 (6%)	2 (6 %)
13.	I always encourage my students to read books and stories in English.	31 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
14.	I think that extensive reading programs such as the GRP are useful for students and should be implemented in all Bahrain government schools.	26 (84%)	5 (16%)	0 (0%)

Appendix E: A Sample Transcript of Teachers' Interviews

An Interview with a Teacher at Al-Manhal Primary Girls School:

What grades do you teach?
5th grade.

When and how have been trained to do the GRP?
2 years ago, and it was for one month, like 2 or 3 days a week for 4 or three weeks.

So your training was longer than other teachers?
Yes.

Was it useful?
Yeah, it was by the Ministry.

How long have you been teaching?
For 6 years.

When did you start implementing the program?
3 years ago, exactly when they [people at the Ministry] decided to make it important!

Do you think the GRP is useful for students?
It is.

How is it useful?
In so many ways. I mean it makes the lesson so enjoyable for them. It makes them feel that they can read, and they understand English, and they like English. They do enjoy it a lot, but it's a lot of work for us.

Can you describe for me a GRP lesson in your classroom? How would you do it?
Usually, at the beginning of the year, or let's say within 2 to 3 months, we have to level or group students. First year, it was personal judgment, but the second year I tried to do something else and it didn't work as well. We usually give them a test, a reading test, so I level them according to their reading test marks, but still it doesn't work, because whatever they do on paper it is not the same, because the GRP depends on their speaking, their reading fluency. I mean she's good, she can read on paper, and she can apply, but when it comes to the group, she's not so active. No.

The Ministry didn't give you anything to help with assessing students' level?
No

So you group them and give them activities?
Before we were supposed to give each group different activities. Centers, as they used to call them, reading center, writing center, blah, blah, blah.. but now, no. We're free to give them like even a homework. We can assign it for them, during the lesson they can work on it, and we still have to manage the other groups as well. Although we're sitting with this GRP group, we have to manage the others, like we have to assign a group leader for this group.

Is that difficult for you?
It is a little bit difficult, because even if you're the best teacher ever, you cannot manage a class with 30 or 32 students, or now the 6th grade it's 38 students, and you're supposed to be with only 5 or 6 of them. What about the rest? It's true you're giving them activities, they're enjoying it, they're working on it, but still you have to manage other things, you know.

And, what other difficulties have you faced?
It's leveling the students. At the beginning it's kind of difficult to find the suitable activity for the students to do, and then it's a little bit difficult to find a good activity for the GRP group itself because it has to be like, you know, the vocabulary first, and then you have to go through something with writing, you know. It shouldn't be like all speaking and reading, you have to apply a writing thing, and at the same time it has to be enjoying [enjoyable] and exciting for them. It's not difficult, but it needs work. It needs someone who is free, or at least with less students.

So this semester, you haven't applied this program?
Not yet. We don't have time, we have to finish the syllabus. It's kind of very busy semester. But we do give them a free-reading classes.

How is that?
It's like we can come to the library here, and we can let them choose any story they want, but from the beginning we can write for them 3 or 2 questions they have to answer after reading that story, which are of course, general questions.. What's the title of the story? What's the moral of the story? This is too general and whatever kind of story they're reading, they can answer it.

The challenges you mentioned previously, how can we overcome them?
Let's be fair. This year I think it'll be little bit be easier for me, because I don't have 4 classes, I have 3 classes only, and the less students you have, it's always the better, and the class will be more quiet, and you can have more activities for them, because you'll be able to tell what she likes and what she doesn't like, as long as you have less number of students. Sometimes, if it's too big number of students, you miss-judge someone, you know, you cannot tell from the beginning that she's perfect she's not..and it means a lot of time to recognize she's the best but you cannot see it.

VITA

Afrah Hasan Ali was born in Bahrain, on October 17, 1983. She graduated from University of Bahrain, Kingdom of Bahrain, in June 2006, with a BA degree in English Language and Literature and a minor in American Studies. While doing her BA, she worked as a part-time English teacher in a local private institute. After graduation, she worked at a private school, Pakistan School, Bahrain, teaching boys and girls, grade 7 and 8, from September 2006 to June 2007. Then, for a few months, she served in Bahrain's Ministry of Education as an English teacher for boys at primary schools. In 2008, Afrah decided to join the MA TESOL program at the American University of Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates to prepare herself for a career in teaching English at institutes of higher education. Afrah is a member of TESOL Arabia and the ASC Alumni Association. Her interests include teaching reading and writing, cross-cultural pragmatics, and language assessment.