

CSE-Informed Summary Writing as Criterion-Referenced Self-Assessment: Chinese EFL Students' Engagement with Reading

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Abstract

The paper explores Chinese undergraduates' perceptions and experiences of CSE-informed summary writing used as a criterion-referenced self-assessment practice in the English as a foreign language (EFL) context. Thirty-nine sophomores majoring in International Business participated in the study. The data collected consist of student reflective journals and individual retrospective interviews. Results showed that the students reported greater cognitive, behavioral, and affective engagement with reading through completing successive summary-writing tasks. A set of factors were identified as affecting the learning effects of summary writing, including the synergy of summative and formative assessment elements, the workload of other assignments, the assessment formats, and the choice of reading materials. The study sheds light on how CSE-derived criteria were incorporated into summary writing to support criterion-referenced self-assessment and engagement with reading in the Chinese EFL context.

Keywords

China's Standards of English Language Ability (CSE),
Criterion-Referenced Self-Assessment, Summary Writing,
Reading Engagement, EFL Reading

1. Introduction

Assessment tasks, "the assignments which students need to complete as part of the courses which make up their degree programs" (Carless, 2015: p. 58), are key drivers of student learning. How students perceive and experience assessment

tasks would largely determine what they learn, how they learn, and how much they learn (Gibbs & Simpson, 2005). It is important and challenging for teachers to choose assessment tasks suitable for different student cohorts (Bearman et al., 2017). Firstly, the administration of assessment tasks may need to serve multiple functions like accountability, certification, and the promotion of student learning (Broadbent et al., 2018). Secondly, the choice of assessment tasks involves the consideration of a wide array of contextual, individual, and task factors, like the institutional and disciplinary contexts (Joughin et al., 2017), the students' prior assessment experiences (Iannone & Simpson, 2012), and the task workload, complexity or difficulty (Kyndt et al., 2011). Given the strengths and weaknesses of each type of assessment task, there is no one-size-fits-all task suitable for all educational contexts and student cohorts (Race, 2020). Ongoing inquiries are needed to evaluate the choice, design, and administration of assessment tasks in different educational settings (Ibarra-Sáiz et al., 2021). Over the past decades, a multitude of empirical inquiries have been conducted into students' perceptions and experiences of varied assessment tasks in diverse disciplines and educational contexts (Pereira et al., 2016). There is, nonetheless, a dearth of research on the impact of assessment tasks on student learning in the Chinese English as a foreign language (EFL) reading context, which features the teacher-centered instruction, a test-dominant culture, and the prevalent use of multiple-choice questions (MCQs) (Cheng, 2010). The present study aims to explore students' perceptions and experiences of completing summary writing tasks and how such perceptions and experiences relate to their engagement with EFL reading.

1.1. Studies on the Learning Impact of Assessment Tasks in Second Language Education

In second language education, research on the learning impact of assessment tasks mainly focuses on the washback effects of traditional, multiple-choice, large-scale standardized tests on teaching and learning (Alderson, Brunfaut, & Harding, 2017). Those studies found that innovations in large-scale tests mainly led to the changes in the content, rather than the processes, of teaching and learning. It was thus concluded that simply changing the design of decontextualized large-scale tests cannot lead to the expected beneficial changes in teaching and learning (Tsagari & Cheng, 2017). Systematic efforts need to be made to improve assessment at the course/module level (Joughin et al., 2017). However, with only a few exceptions (e.g. Huang, 2011; Hung, 2012; Levrai & Bolster, 2019; Marzec-Stawiarska, 2016; Sundrarajun & Kiely, 2010), how assessment tasks impact on Chinese EFL students' learning remains largely under-researched, particularly in tertiary settings. Huang (2011), for instance, found that "divergent" (e.g., group presentations) assessment tasks promoted higher levels of motivation and strategy use than "convergent" tasks (e.g., MCQs) in the speaking class, but not in the listening class. Marzec-Stawiarska's (2016) quasi-experimental research on the effects of summary writing on EFL students' development of reading skills showed that the students who regularly wrote summaries outperformed their peers taking MCQs

and true-or-false questions in reading comprehension tests. That study, however, used an outcome-based approach to evaluating the learning effects of summary writing, without uncovering the learning processes triggered by students' completion of summary writing.

1.2. Conceptualizing Student Engagement with Reading

The present study focuses on student engagement with EFL reading as the lens for examining students' perceptions and experiences of completing summary writing tasks. Student engagement refers to the extent of student involvement in activities that lead to high-quality outcomes. Student engagement consists of three interrelated or reciprocal dimensions: behavioral, cognitive, and affective (Fredricks et al., 2004). Behavioral engagement relates to students' participation, effort, attention, persistence/time, positive conduct, and the absence of disruptive behavior. Emotional engagement denotes the extent of students' positive and negative reactions towards their studies, like interest, boredom, or anxiety. Cognitive engagement concerns students' level of strategic/metacognitive, cognitive, and motivational investment in learning. Roughly speaking, these three dimensions of engagement correspond to how students behave, feel, and think about their studies.

1.3. CSE-Informed Summary Writing as Criterion-Referenced Self-Assessment in the Chinese EFL Reading Context

Summary writing, a task in which students read to write the gist of what they have read (Marzec-Stawiarska, 2016), was chosen as a regular assessment task in a Chinese undergraduates' EFL reading course based on three considerations: 1. The status quo of EFL reading instruction and assessment in Chinese tertiary settings; 2. The potential of summary writing to engage students in purposeful reading processes; 3. The alignment of the reading processes required by summary writing with the course goals of the EFL reading class in which the present study was conducted. In the present study, this task was further supported by explicit reading criteria adapted from Level 4 - 6 descriptors of China's Standards of English Language Ability (CSE), as detailed in the Methods section.

Reading has occupied a central position in English language education in China, with the course of Intensive Reading being a core English language course (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996). The EFL reading instruction, however, has been characterized by teachers' lopsided focus on the explanations of vocabulary and grammar in the textbook (Cheng, 2010), without paying due attention to text-level reading processes such as working out idea progressions and identifying the gist. As a result, students equal reading in English to the study and recall of words and sentence structures. This situation is aggravated by the prevalent use of MCQs measuring students' command of vocabulary and grammar in key large-scale English tests: students spend a large share of their study time memorizing the vocabulary and grammar structures to pass tests (Jin & Cortazzi, 2002).

Summary writing has been mostly used in large-scale language proficiency tests to assess students' abilities to construct the macro structure and extract the gist of

a text (Kintsch & van Dijk, 1978; Li, 2014; Plakans, 2012). When writing summaries, students are supposed to employ several reading processes central to text comprehension: identifying the most important information and eliminating unimportant and redundant information, generalizing details, inferencing and reading between lines (Oded & Walters, 2001). Moreover, compared with tasks assessing individual language skills, summary writing has higher degrees of authenticity or resemblance to real-life language-use situations (Plakans, 2012). This is particularly important for tertiary settings, where students are supposed to evaluate, summarize, and synthesize what they have read in written forms (Yamanishi, Ono, & Hijikata, 2019). There is a good match between the skills assessed by summary writing and the curriculum goals of the EFL reading course in which the study was conducted. The reading course aims to cultivate students' abilities to comprehend and analyze English texts in business contexts in a fluent and accurate manner and to be proficient in using English to acquire information on business-related topics. Out of these considerations, the present study chose to explore the learning impact of summary writing as a regular assessment task in the Chinese EFL reading context. It aims to address two research questions:

How did students perceive the influence of CSE-informed summary writing as a criterion-referenced self-assessment practice on their engagement with EFL reading?

What task-related and contextual conditions did students perceive as facilitating or constraining students' engagement with reading through this self-assessment practice?

2. Methods

2.1. Context and Participants

The study was conducted from March to July 2021 in a 4-credit sixteen-week EFL reading course for sophomores majoring in International Business at a Chinese university. The teacher of the course is also the researcher of the present study, which offers a vantage point of conducting classroom-based research. The course materials comprise four units on general business issues, e.g., leadership, business ethics, investment, money and banking. Two extra passages related on the same theme of each unit were selected from *Financial Times* or *the Economist* as post-class reading materials, with altogether 8 passages assigned over the term. Students were required to summarize the passages as their regular assignment, and their performance on each summary contributes 5% to their final score (40% in total for eight summaries); 40% of their final score came from their performance on the final exam, while another 20% came from their oral presentations.

Altogether 39 sophomores from two intact classes participated in the study. They had around 10 years of EFL learning experience and had passed the National Matriculation English Test (NMET) to be enrolled as undergraduates. Level 4 - 6 descriptors from the reading-related scales of China's Standards of English Language Ability (CSE) were used as the source of classroom criteria for the sum-

mary-writing activities. The CSE levels were used as criterion sources for task design rather than as measured proficiency classifications of individual participants.

2.2. CSE-Informed Criteria for Summary Writing and Criterion-Referenced Self-Assessment

The CSE is a national proficiency framework that describes English language ability across nine levels and is intended to serve as a reference for assessment, teaching, and learning (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China & National Language Commission of the People's Republic of China, 2018). For the present study, 16 descriptors were selected from the Level 4 - 6 reading-comprehension and reading-strategy scales and adapted into learner-usable criteria for summary writing. The selected descriptors targeted reading processes directly relevant to summary writing, including identifying overall meaning and key information, representing logical relationships and discourse organisation, interpreting viewpoint and stance, and monitoring comprehension.

Table 1 presents the source CSE descriptors and their adapted forms as the criteria used in the summary-writing activities. The adaptation kept the core reading abilities that were described in each descriptor but rephrased them to be user-friendly. They offered clear benchmarks for students to judge themselves against, rather than being compared to their peers. This approach aligns with the CSE's own self-assessment scales, which are designed for learners and use "Can = do" statements.

Table 1. CSE-to-summary-writing criteria mapping.

No.	Dimension	CSE source descriptor	Adapted criterion for summary writing/self-assessment
1	Overall meaning & key information	CSE 4, Overall reading comprehension: Can locate detailed information and summarise the main idea whilst reading different kinds of linguistically simple materials.	I can identify and accurately represent the main idea and relevant details of the source text.
2	Overall meaning & key information	CSE 5, Overall reading comprehension: Can grasp essential meaning, analyse linguistic features, and understand cultural implications whilst reading materials of medium linguistic difficulty.	I can capture the essential meaning of the text rather than reproduce isolated details.
3	Overall meaning & key information	CSE 6, Overall reading comprehension: Can grasp significant relevant information and briefly comment on the language and content of subject-related materials of medium linguistic difficulty.	I can select significant and relevant information that is necessary for an adequate summary.
4	Overall meaning & key information	CSE 6, Understanding written exposition: Can identify the key points of information supplied by common news stories.	I can identify the key points in news and business-related reading materials.
5	Selection & summarisation	CSE 4, Understanding written exposition: Can summarise the main points made in short expository essays on Chinese and foreign cultures.	I can condense an expository text into its main points without unnecessary detail.

Continued

6	Selection & summarisation	CSE 5, Understanding written argumentation: Can summarise the viewpoints and arguments in commentaries on familiar topics.	I can summarise the author's major viewpoints and the arguments used to support them.
7	Selection & summarisation	CSE 6, Understanding written argumentation: Can understand and summarise the author's viewpoints and stances in commentaries written in relatively complex language.	I can accurately represent the author's viewpoint and stance in my summary.
8	Selection & prioritisation	CSE 4, Understanding written argumentation: Can differentiate primary viewpoints from secondary ones in short argumentative texts on current affairs.	I can distinguish primary viewpoints from secondary information and prioritise the former.
9	Selection & prioritisation	CSE 4, Understanding written argumentation: Can distinguish between opinions and facts when reading linguistically simple speeches.	I can distinguish factual information from opinions and represent each appropriately.
10	Logical relations & organisation	CSE 4, Overall reading comprehension: Can understand the relationship between ideas by analysing the structures of sentences and discourse whilst reading materials of medium linguistic difficulty.	I can identify and preserve important relationships among ideas when writing the summary.
11	Logical relations & organisation	CSE 4, Reading comprehension strategies: Can understand viewpoints by identifying the logical connections among sentences.	I can use logical connections among sentences to understand and represent the author's viewpoints.
12	Logical relations & organisation	CSE 5, Understanding written argumentation: Can understand the connection between the viewpoints and illustrations in argumentative texts on topical social issues.	I can distinguish central claims from examples or illustrations and represent their relationship accurately.
13	Logical relations & organisation	CSE 5, Reading comprehension strategies: Can comment on the logical structure of the text with reference to the sequencing of the information.	I can identify the text's overall organisation and logical progression and reflect them in the summary.
14	Viewpoint & stance	CSE 5, Understanding written argumentation: Can analyse argumentative texts on common topics to infer the authors' implicit viewpoints and attitudes.	I can infer implicit viewpoints or attitudes when they are relevant to the text's main meaning.
15	Generalising & monitoring	CSE 5, Reading comprehension strategies: Can deepen understanding by generalising from what has been read.	I can generalise what I have read in order to deepen and check my understanding.
16	Monitoring & regulation	CSE 4, Reading comprehension strategies: Can make correct use of reading skills and make adjustments by assessing his/her comprehension.	I can use the summary-writing process to assess my comprehension and adjust my reading when I notice gaps or misunderstandings.

Note: Descriptors were adapted from CSE Levels 4 - 6, especially the Overall Reading Comprehension, Understanding Written Exposition, Understanding Written Argumentation, and Reading Comprehension Strategies scales (GF 0018-2018). The adapted statements are learner-facing criteria used to connect reading comprehension with summary writing as observable evidence.

2.3. Task Implementation and Data Collection

The data were collected after the administration of summary writing over the 16-week term (see **Figure 1**). The task implementation followed **Winstone and Carless' (2020)** model of “Pre-task guidance” and “Task series” of assessment task design. According to this model, the teacher/researcher shared with the students the 16 CSE-derived criteria for summary writing (**Table 1**) and an exemplar written by the teacher/researcher before they took on the task; students were instructed to use the criteria to guide and check their reading and summary writing. They then completed a sequence of summaries after reading assigned passages as post-class assignments over the term (see **Figure 2** for the timeline of assignments). After they finished each summary, in-class peer feedback sessions were organized, in which students were organized into groups composed of 4 or 5 students and were required to offer criterion-referenced feedback on each other's work. For each summary task, in-class teacher feedback was offered, with reference to the same criteria, on three student exemplars representing different levels of quality. Though the students were not required to revise their summaries based on the peer and teacher feedback, it was suggested that they take the feedback into consideration when writing the subsequent summary.

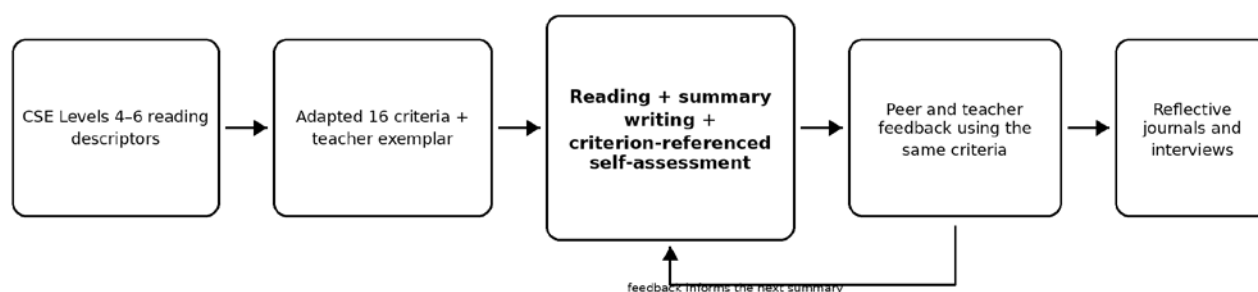


Figure 1. Flowchart of the CSE-informed summary-writing and self-assessment cycle.

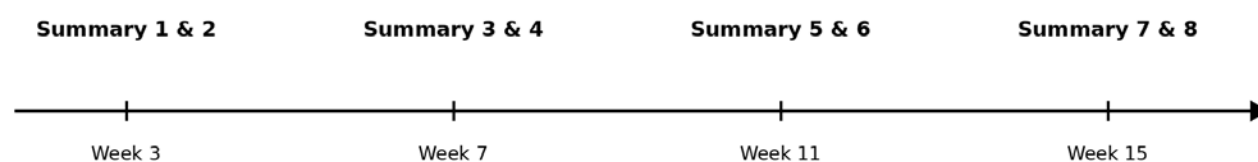


Figure 2. Timeline of summary assignments.

Two sources of data were collected: 1. Reflective journals (see Appendix 1) completed by all the participants near the end of the study; this source of data was used to elicit students' retrospective experiences and perceptions of finishing the summary tasks over the term; 2. Individual retrospective interviews (see Appendix 2 for the interview questions) conducted with six students to gain detailed accounts of their experiences of completing summary writing tasks and the influences of such experiences on their reading engagement. The reflective journals and interviews complement each other in that the former offers a holistic picture of the participants' general perceptions and experiences, while the latter serves to pro-

vide nuanced understandings of the learning impact of summary writing. Six interviewees (2 males and four females) were selected based on their English language proficiency, willingness to participate and time availability for being interviewees. Their English proficiency was mainly determined by their scores in the school-based English language proficiency test delivered at the end of second term (the end of the first academic year), with 70 to 80 denoting intermediate level and 80+ classified as high proficiency level. The cut-off point was discussed by their Comprehensive English Teacher of the first academic year and the researcher of the course. Students of different proficiency levels were recruited as interviewees to ensure that diverse opinions were encompassed. **Table 2** presents the interviewees' profiles. To ensure the participants' anonymity, their names were replaced with abbreviations like "C1". All the interviews were conducted in Chinese and audio-recorded. The interview data were then transcribed verbatim by the first author for data analysis.

Table 2. Student interviewees' profile.

Interviewee	Gender	Age	English proficiency
C1	Female	21	High
C2	Male	20	Intermediate
C3	Male	21	Intermediate
C4	Female	20	Intermediate
C5	Female	20	High
C6	Female	20	Intermediate

2.4. Data Analysis

The reflective journals and interviews were analyzed using both theoretical and inductive approaches of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). NVivo 11 was used to aid data analysis. Regarding the first research question, a theoretical approach was used by referring to the research question and the conception of student engagement reviewed above (Fredricks et al., 2004). For the second research question, all the data were also inductively read to identify task-related and contextual factors affecting the impact of summary writing on students' engagement with reading. All coding was conducted on the original Chinese-language journal and interview data. After coding and participant validation, the coding results and illustrative excerpts selected for reporting were translated from Chinese into English by the author. The accuracy of translated excerpts was checked by the author and a research assistant, a PhD specialized in qualitative research on second language education. The data analysis went through four phases. In the first phase, the teacher/researcher the research assistant recursively read all the data to generate an initial set of codes, with the relevant data (excerpts from reflective journals and interviews) collated to each code. In the second phase, themes were formed by comparing and contrasting the codes. For instance, codes like "Increased

amounts of time spent on reading” and “Heightened levels of attention to reading” led to the theme of “Student behavioral engagement with reading”. Disagreement between the two coders over the coding results was resolved through discussion, which resulted in minor refinement of the themes. In the third phase, the illustrative statements under each theme were selected and compiled by the teacher/researcher into the results. In the fourth phase, member checking was done by sending a summary of the results to the six interviewees for their comments, and they all agreed with the coding results. In the Results section below, the themes and illustrative excerpts corresponding each research question are presented. The source of each excerpt was denoted as follows: “C1, Interview” stands for the first interviewee’s excerpt in the retrospective interviews; “S1, Journal” refers to the first student’s excerpt in the reflective journal.

2.5. Ethical Considerations

All participants signed an informed consent form (see Appendix 3) before the formal research. The consent form described the research aims and clarified to students that their participation was fully voluntary: they had the right to withdraw at any moment without any influence on their grades. It is important to note that though their summaries count as part of their grades, their completion and submission of the reflective journals or (non-)participation in the interviews bear no relationship with their grades. Such arrangements serve to minimize the potential influence of the teacher-researcher’s dual role on students’ participation in the research or their responses. It also aims to reduce the possibility of grade-related pressure and ensure the students’ free expression of their viewpoints.

3. Results

3.1. RQ1. How Did Students Perceive the Influence of CSE-Informed Summary Writing as Criterion-Referenced Self-Assessment on Their Engagement with EFL Reading?

3.1.1. Student Behavioral Engagement with Reading

Student behavioral engagement with reading was demonstrated by both the time and efforts the students invested in reading the materials.

Without the task or assignment, I would have probably found every excuse for not reading the passages at all. To finish the summary writing assignment, I must allocate a certain amount of time for reading the assigned passage. It is amazing to find that at the end of this term, I have already finished reading 8 passages and writing 8 summaries for them. (S18, Journal)

The students’ investment of efforts in reading the passage was also demonstrated by their recursive reading behaviors and heightened levels of attention during the reading process.

Because of the need to complete summaries, I must read one passage for several times in order to achieve a thorough understanding of it, because reading

the passage in a casual, careless or relaxing manner does no help to writing its summary. (C6, Interview)

Their behavioral engagement was also shown by their help-seeking behaviors regarding the use of reference materials for knowledge acquisition, instead of being waited be “spoon-fed the knowledge or language points” as is usually the case in textbook learning.

The Economist or Financial Times passages are based on business themes. Because of that, I need to have a good grasp of the related topics to comprehend the passages well. In order to do that, I would check Baidu or Bing for the relevant background knowledge when I drafted a summary. My knowledge about general business topics like leadership and banking has been expanded. (C4, Interview)

The summary writing task pushes me to understand the key words in it well. If I met some words that posed difficulties to my comprehension of the passage, I would mark them and check the dictionary later on. This is different from reading the textbook passages, in which case I just wait for the teacher’s explanation of the key language points. (S29, Journal)

3.1.2. Student Cognitive Engagement with Reading

Summary writing fosters students’ cognitive engagement in EFL reading by prompting deliberate processing of the text beyond the narrower information-retrieval strategies often associated with other reading tasks (e.g., multiple-choice questions, or MCQs).

Cognitive engagement manifests in students’ active efforts to construct and master meaning, as summary writing requires them to move beyond passive information reception to purposeful comprehension. Unlike MCQ-based reading—where cognitive focus is limited to extracting discrete, question-related details (“a ‘quantity’ game,” S16, Journal)—summary writing demands that students engage in complex mental operations: differentiating between major and minor points, grasping the logical relationships among sentences and paragraphs, and identifying core elements like thesis statements, topic sentences, and supporting details. As one student noted, “When writing summaries, I am responsible for constructing my own understandings of the passage. Because of that, I need to ensure that I have really achieved a thorough understanding of the passage” (C3, Interview). This reflects a shift in cognitive focus from fragmented information retrieval to holistic meaning-making.

The contrast between cognitive engagement in summary-writing and non-summary situations further illustrates this. When reading without summarizing, students report minimal cognitive investment: they “at most scan the passage and check the meanings of new words” or underline viewpoints without “bother[ing] to achieve a real understanding” (S5, Journal). In contrast, summary writing compels them to “truly understand the meaning of the entire passage” (S19, Journal) and engage in “reading for information and mastery” (S5, Journal), indicating

sustained cognitive engagement with the text. Students emphasize that this cognitive effort is intentional: “Summary writing... requires me to focus on the logic, content, and organization of the assigned reading passages” (S16, Journal), a focus that drives sustained mental engagement with the text’s structure and substance.

The first aspect of student cognitive engagement triggered by the completion of summary writing relates to their using the task as a self-monitoring and self-reflective tool.

The summary writing task makes me form the habit of checking and reflecting on, from time to time, my comprehension of the passage to ensure a good mastery of the information. These reading habits, after they have been formed, are transferred to the reading of other passages. (S22, Journal)

Another student mentioned how the CSE-derived criteria served as a yardstick to reflect on his reading performance and subsequently improve his engagement with EFL reading:

My reflections on the quality of my summary writing were changed by the use of summary writing criteria. In particular, I previously regarded that my summary was good enough if it encompasses all the viewpoints of a passage. With the use of the criteria, I found that the mere juxtaposition of those viewpoints was not enough. I also need to reorganize them so that they appear in a logical manner in the summary. This practice prompts me to pay more attention to the logical progression of viewpoints in a passage in my reading. (S16, Journal)

The second aspect relates to students’ employment of multiple strategies when writing summaries. One typical strategy mentioned is using the “top-down” approach and following “multiple steps”. For instance,

When I took on the task for the first time, I just tried to understand the passage sentence by sentence, but that way of reading was a waste of time. Then I followed a multi-round reading procedure. During the first round, I just read fast to achieve a holistic picture of the passage. In the second round, I identified its theme, topic sentences, and supporting details. It is important not to pause to check the meanings of new words in this round. In the third round, I would try to work out the meanings of complicated sentences by analyzing their grammar components and work out the meanings of new words by referring to the contextual clues. These steps facilitated my understanding of the passage and subsequent summary writing. (C2, Interview)

The third theme of the students’ cognitive engagement with summary writing refers to their conscious regulation of the pace of reading.

The practice of summary writing makes me realize how to adjust my reading pace when it comes to different types of information in the passage. I often spend more time identifying and understanding the topic sentences and key viewpoints because of their importance to understanding the author’s viewpoints. When it comes to supporting details, I would mainly scan them because

of their relative subordinate role in content development. (S11, Journal)

3.1.3. Student Affective Engagement with Reading

When it comes to student affective engagement triggered by the task, their attitudes and emotions became more positive over time. At the beginning stage they tended to “struggle to complete a teacher-imposed task” and were kind of “resistant” towards or “anxious” about completing it.

It was boring or even painful for me when I wrote summaries at the beginning of this semester, because I couldn't just scan the passages like before and had to read for several times before writing the summary. I struggled to select viewpoints and supporting details to be presented in my summary and to transform my thoughts into words. That was kind of frustrating. I would probably enjoy the process more if I needed not to work under the pressure of writing a summary. (C6, Interview)

However, after the students have practiced summary writing for an extended period, like two to three times, they came to treat the task in a more positive light, and such positive feelings about the task were generally in tandem with their improved skills and efficiency in finishing the tasks.

Though I was kind of resistant towards writing summaries at the beginning stage, I did what I was required to do and became more familiar with the patterns of summary writing. As a result, my efficiency of completing the tasks got improved. Because of that, I no longer found the task so difficult and boring as and even became fond of it. (C6, Interview)

Even though I found summary writing challenging and had to spend much time on it, the accumulation of the summaries over time made me see the progress that I made over time, though the progress may not be very significant. I came to value the task over time and would like to invest more time in it. Through this process, I also gained more confidence as a reader. (S17, Journal)

Another salient manifestation of the positive change in students' affective engagement with the task is sense of fulfillment derived from the increased number of summaries over time. For instance,

I have finished writing almost ten summaries over the term. When I looked at them, I had a strong sense of achievement, because the task prompted me to persist in reading a regular and systematic manner over a sustained time period, which would be hardly imaginable. (S25, Journal)

3.2. RQ2. What Task-Related and Contextual Conditions Did Students Perceive as Facilitating or Constraining Students' Engagement with Reading through This Self-Assessment Practice?

A set of factors, both facilitating and debilitating ones, have been identified as af-

fecting the influence of completing summary writing tasks on student engagement with reading. The facilitating factors include the combination of summative and formative assessment elements in the summary writing task. The first theme of the facilitating factors relates to the students' valuing the "assignment of grades to their summaries". This is reflected by both the coercive and motivating functions of the assessment task.

After all, homework is homework. I treated the summary writing task seriously because it was an assignment that would account for part of my overall performance. (C5, Interview)

I found the teacher's grading useful because the grades on my work stimulate me to work hard. If I received an A- on my previous work and an A on the present work, I would feel encouraged. However, if I received an A+ on my previous work and an A on the present work, I would realize that I needed to work hard to improve. (S17, Journal)

The students also noted the benefits of incorporating formative elements (e.g., the sharing of the rubric and exemplars, the provision of teacher and peer feedback, the cumulative nature of assessment task administration) into task design.

The sharing and explanation of the rubric for summary writing is important for me to know the qualities of a good summary, so I could reflect on my reading and writing performance by referring to those qualities. Moreover, the use of exemplars written by the teacher and my peers further illustrated to me the descriptors in the rubric. A more useful aspect of the exemplars was that after the teacher's explanation of exemplars, I would try to emulate the teacher's practice when writing the summary of the next assigned passage. (S36, Journal)

The teacher's feedback is helpful for identifying the typical mistakes in our understanding of the passage and the problems with our writing performance as well, and the group peer feedback provided me with opportunities to see how and how well my classmates understood the same passage and wrote their summaries. Interestingly, teacher and peer feedback complemented each other because they might focus on different aspects. More importantly, the teacher and peer feedback on a previous summary could be utilized to improve my performance on the next summary. (C1, Interview)

The debilitating factors relate to the workload of assignments from other courses, the difficulty levels of the reading materials, and the rigidity of the format of summary writing.

It was difficult for me to spend much time writing the summary when there were numerous assignments from other courses or when I had to prepare for the term exam. In that case, I would suggest that the frequency or number of summary writing tasks be decreased to alleviate the workload. (S14, Journal)

My interest in summary writing would diminish if the assigned reading pas-

sage contained too many new words or if its content was difficult for me to understand. (S8, Journal)

Although summary writing is a good way to check and improve our understandings of the reading passages, I found the process of writing summaries kind of tedious after having been familiar with the task format and requirements. This is mainly because summary writing leaves no room for me to express my own thoughts. Would it be possible that other forms of “reading-to-write” integrated tasks, like “response essays”, be used to offer us more chances of expressing our own thoughts on the passages? (C3, Interview)

The students also mentioned inadequate writing abilities as a factor negatively affecting the reported learning benefits of completing summary writing.

When I took on the summary writing task, I was kind of dissatisfied with my inadequate writing skills to transform my understandings of the original passages into my own words. There seems to be a mismatch between what I have understood and what I could produce through writing. Such feelings of dissatisfaction would, to a large extent, discourage me from writing summaries. (S9, Journal)

4. Discussion and Implications

4.1. Overview

The study illustrates students’ reported learning benefits of summary writing for students’ learning in the Chinese EFL reading context. The students reported that the administration of summary writing in a sequence improved their behavioral, cognitive, and affective engagement with reading. It is noteworthy that summary writing was supported by explicit criteria adapted from Level 4 - 6 reading-related descriptors of the CSE. These criteria provided students with concrete reference points for attending to main ideas, key information, logical relationships, viewpoints and stance, and for monitoring their comprehension while completing the summaries. Although they reported anxiety and pressure of finishing the tasks at the beginning of the term, they cumulatively built up their abilities through working on a sequence of tasks and derived more confidence and a sense of fulfillment from the process. A set of factors have also been identified as affecting the learning effects of summary writing, which include facilitating ones like the grades assigned to their summaries, the incorporation of formative assessment elements like the sharing of the rubric for summary writing, the use of exemplars, and the organization of teacher and peer feedback sessions, and debilitating ones like the overly long, difficult or unfamiliar reading materials, the workload of assignments from other courses, the insufficient writing skills and the rigidity of task formats.

4.2. Alignment between Assessment Tasks with Expected Learning Outcomes

The study supports Carless’s (2015) assertion that the administration of rightly

chosen assessment tasks is the key towards productive student learning processes. This argument holds true even in the Chinese EFL context, which is characterized by the test-dominant culture and the prevalent use of MCQs. The choice of an appropriate type of assessment task is apparently of primary importance. At least two implications can be drawn from the research results regarding task choice. First, a systematic analysis of the construct of task(s) needs to be conducted (Al-derson, Brunfaut, & Harding, 2017). It is important for assessment practitioners to examine what an assessment task really assesses before its implementation. In the present study, summary writing was selected because its construct has been empirically verified as encompassing text-level comprehension and metacognitive reading processes. It prompts the students to be more responsible readers, to construct their own understandings of the passages instead of being spoon-fed knowledge and language points by the teacher, to shift their attention from isolated language features to the macro-structure and meaning relationships of the reading materials, and to become more metacognitively aware readers. Secondly, there should be a constructive alignment between the assessment task with the curriculum goals or expected learning outcomes (Biggs & Tang, 2011; Cheng, Wu, & Liu, 2015). Summary writing, as a form of “reading-to-write” integrated task, closely matches the expected learning outcomes of getting students to use the English language to acquire business-related knowledge. Such an alignment turns assessment tasks into learning tasks, enabling students to practice what they are expected to learn through task completion.

The present study also illustrates a possible classroom use of a proficiency framework such as the CSE. The pedagogical value of the framework lies not simply in describing levels of language ability, but in the possibility of selecting and adapting relevant descriptors into learner-usable criteria for particular tasks. In this study, that mediation connected the course reading goals, the summary-writing task, and students’ subsequent self-reflection on their reading performance.

4.3. Synergy of Summative and Formative Assessment Elements

The study corroborates previous research on the potential of regular, continuous assessment tasks for synergizing formative and summative functions for learning benefits (Hernández, 2012; Holmes, 2018; Trotter, 2006). Firstly, it demonstrates the usefulness of the summative or grading function of assessment tasks for facilitating students’ engagement with learning. Even if the stakes of summary writing are low, the students treated the task seriously because of its role in their overall evaluation. The grading functions of the assessment tasks are not only coercive but also incentivizing, with the students reporting their treating the grades as cues about the desired levels of engagement with reading.

The study also echoes the proposed assessment design of “Pre-task guidance” and “Task-series” (Winstone & Carless, 2020: p. 85) by highlighting the interplay between assessment tasks and formative assessment elements. Being integral com-

ponents of the learning environment, assessment tasks and formative assessment elements are in a symbiotic or mutually influential relationship. On the one hand, students' performance in the tasks provides abundant room or space for the incorporation of formative elements. For instance, the students' tackling summaries involves their externalizing, through written forms, the generally implicit or recondite reading process. Summary writing can elicit multiple dimensions of students' reading performance, which provide abundant opportunities for generating different types of feedback (self-, peer, and teacher feedback). When such feedback is anchored to explicit CSE-informed criteria, the summary can serve not only as a product to be graded but also as evidence that students can compare with an external criterion reference in order to identify strengths, gaps, and possible directions for subsequent reading. The sequential or cumulative nature of assessment tasks is also important because it offers room for the utilization of feedback on a previous task in the completion of a subsequent task. The students valued the opportunities of working on a series of tasks, which facilitated their uptake of teacher and peer feedback. On the other hand, the incorporation of those formative elements would serve to further tap the learning potential of assessment tasks. This is especially the case if the abilities, knowledge, or skills embodied by the tasks are complex and take time for students to acquire. For example, the process of completing summaries, which involves multiple reading and writing skills, poses challenges to students especially when they tackled the tasks at the beginning stages. It takes time for students to get used to the task and adjust their perceptions and levels of engagement. The incorporation of formative assessment elements, as demonstrated in the present study, would no doubt shorten the period of the "sleeper effects" of assessment tasks (Segers, Nijhuis, & Gijsselaers, 2006) and improve students' behavioral, cognitive, and affective engagement with learning in an incremental manner.

4.4. A Teacher-Student Partnership Approach to Task Planning and Implementation

The study reveals the complexities of task planning and administration. Factors like students' inadequate writing skills, the workload of other assignments, the rigid format of summary writing, and the inappropriate choice of reading materials may constitute barriers towards the effective implementation of summary writing. This finding points towards the need of making the task planning and administration more democratic by sharing decision-making power with students (Carless, 2020; Deeley & Bovill, 2017). Firstly, teachers and students can co-decide on the specific types of assessment tasks to be used. Summary writing, by its nature as an essay-based assignment requiring students' employment of writing skills, may disadvantage the students who are not good at writing. Those students who reported an inadequate command of English writing skills were frustrated with completing the task. This finding verifies the stance that there is not a universally applicable assessment task that suits each and every student. To ensure the fair-

ness of assessment tasks, other types of assessment tasks, as long as they align well with the expected learning outcomes, can be co-selected by teachers and students as regular assignments. The inclusion of other assessment tasks may also mitigate students' boredom with repeatedly practicing the singular format of summary writing over time. Secondly, the study also found that students perceived that the workload of other assignments and the inappropriate choice of reading materials (too many new words and unfamiliar topics) constituted barriers to the effective implementation of summary writing, a research result echoing the finding of (Kyndt et al., 2011). In that case, teachers can cooperate with students to determine the number and frequency of administering assessment tasks as well as the difficulty levels and topics of the reading materials. Thirdly, a partnership approach can also be adopted to further promoting the learning impact of formative elements, e.g., more teacher-student dialogues on feedback modes and timing, the co-construction of rubrics and co-selection of exemplars.

5. Conclusion

The present study reports a qualitative inquiry into a cohort of Chinese undergraduates' perceptions and experiences of summary writing, a type of essay-based "read-to-write" integrated tasks, in EFL reading class. More specifically, the study examined summary writing when it was supported by reading criteria adapted from Level 4 - 6 CSE descriptors and used as a criterion-referenced self-assessment practice. It contributes to our knowledge about students' perceptions and experiences of assessment tasks at the module level in Chinese higher education, an under-researched field (Guo & Shi, 2016). It also demonstrates the complexities of task planning and implementation in the Chinese EFL reading context. The research implications regarding task design and implementation should be understood as transferable rather than generalizable. The relevance of these findings should be evaluated in relation to the contexts with similar students, EFL reading courses, and assessment arrangements. The study, nonetheless, explores the perceived learning benefits of only one form of "read-to-write" integrated task. Future research needs to be conducted to explore how different types of "integrated tasks", i.e., "read-to-speak" tasks, may affect the learning of students with differing assessment preferences. More studies are also needed on how teachers, the key agents of assessment innovations, perceive and experience the design and implementation of assessment tasks in tertiary settings. Thirdly, it is essential to further explore the interplay between assessment tasks and the incorporation of summative and formative elements. What types of tasks would provide enough space for the generation and uptake of feedback? How can summative and formative assessment elements be incorporated to better facilitate students' learning embodied by assessment tasks? Addressing these questions will help us better understand the working mechanisms of assessment tasks and fine-tune task planning and administration.

Limitations of the study need to be noted when interpreting the findings. First,

the study was conducted in a single EFL reading course at one institution, involving only six interviewees, thus limiting its generalizability across contexts. Secondly, the reflective journals and interviews elicited retrospective accounts and may be subject to students' recall bias. Thirdly, because the course teacher also served as the researcher, the possibility of social-desirability effects cannot be entirely excluded, although participation was voluntary and separated from course grading.

Future studies might examine how learners understand and put into practice the CSE-derived criteria. They could also investigate whether and to what extent students' self-assessments actually match up with judgments made by teachers or other external evaluators. Additionally, research could track how students' use of such criteria evolves as they engage in repeated reading-to-write exercises over time. This kind of research would help clarify when and how a national proficiency framework can move beyond serving merely as a set of descriptors and instead become a practical tool for guiding self-assessment and fostering deeper, ongoing interaction with reading tasks in the classroom.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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Appendix 1. Student Self-Reflective Journal

The prompts below reproduce the self-reflective journal questions preserved in the study documentation. Students provided their reflections in Chinese.

1. How do you feel about writing summaries of the passages over the term?
2. What are the benefits, if any, of writing summaries of those passages?
3. What are the difficulties, if any, of writing summaries of those passages?
4. How did you complete the summary writing tasks?
5. What suggestions would you have for improving the summary writing tasks?

Appendix 2. Individual Retrospective Interview Questions

The interviews were conducted in Chinese. The questions below reproduce the interview guide preserved in the study documentation.

1. What are your previous experiences of EFL reading, including reading textbook materials, extracurricular materials, and participating in reading assessment/tests?
2. What do you think about the summary writing tasks in this semester in general? How do the experiences of completing summary writing compare with your previous EFL reading experiences?
3. How did you finish the summary writing tasks?
4. What suggestions do you have for improving the summary writing tasks?

Appendix 3. Informed Consent Form

Study on CSE-Informed Summary Writing and EFL Reading

Researcher

Affiliation

Email

Address

Purpose of the Study:

You are invited to participate in this classroom-based research, which explores students' experiences and perceptions of using CSE-informed summary writing tasks with an English as a foreign language (EFL) reading course. It examines students' views on how this writing practice relates to their reading engagement, as well as task-specific and situational factors that may either facilitate or limit such engagement.

What Participation Involves:

If you agree to participate, your written reflective notes produced during summary-writing tasks may be collected as research data. A subgroup of participants will also be asked to participate in individual retrospective interviews about their experiences with reading and summary writing. If you join an interview, the session may be audio-recorded, transcribed and analyzed.

Voluntary Participation and Right to Withdraw:

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary, and you are free to leave the study at any time point. You are not required to explain your reasons for withdrawing. Whether you choose to participate in this research will have no influence your course assessment. To be more specific, your grades depend partly on your summary writing performance, but not on whether you submit reflective journals or participate in interviews or not.

Confidentiality and Use of Data:

Your identity will be safeguarded throughout analysis and publication. Real names and identifying information will be removed from research outputs; anonymized participant codes will be used instead. Data may be used for academic analysis, conference presentations and scholarly publications related to this research.

Consent:

By signing below, I confirm I have read and understood this information. I understand the study's aims and procedures, my voluntary participation, my right to withdraw at any time, and that participation or withdrawal will not affect my course grade. I consent to my anonymized data being used for the purposes stated.

Participant name:

Student ID:

Participant signature:

Date:

Optional interview consent (if applicable): I agree that, if I volunteer for an interview, the interview may be audio-recorded for transcription and analysis.

Yes ☐ No ☐