

# *Reading Motivation and Reading Strategies of Non-English Majors in Selected Universities in China*

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**Abstract:** English reading is a significant component of College English teaching. Reading is a critical way to absorb English language information and understand culture and the foundation for cultivating students' practical language application ability. High standards for students' reading comprehension skills have been outlined in Teaching Requirements for English Courses in universities. Despite the widespread focus on reading in school education, students' overall reading proficiency has not considerably increased. Therefore, this study examined the correlation between non-English majors' reading motivation and reading strategies to provide pedagogical suggestions for teaching and learning in EFL reading. In this study, 420 non-English majors from two universities in east China's Anhui Province were investigated by answering questionnaires on reading motivation and reading strategies. Quantitative research techniques were used to analyze whether the two variables were significant, and the correlation between the two. The results demonstrated that Chinese non-English majors showed an average level of reading motivation, with utility ranking as the main driver. The respondents frequently employed reading strategies, where they were most likely to apply problem-solving strategies. Meanwhile, reading motivation and reading strategies were positively correlated.

## **1. Introduction**

English is a crucial tool for modern talents because of the economy's globalization. Proficiency in English is a requirement of the curriculum for university students as well as something that society today expects. Reading helps students acquire new knowledge, expand their vocabulary, and gain a deeper understanding of the target language, all of which contribute to an improvement in their language proficiency. Reading in English is a significant component of university English instruction. Reading is crucial for students to develop their practical language application skills as well as their capacity to absorb information about the English language and British and American culture. There are strict standards for students' reading comprehension skills in College English Course Teaching Requirements and CET-4 (College English Test Band 4) and CET-6. However, despite the broad focus on school instruction, students' overall reading skills have not considerably increased.

As the focus of foreign language teaching research shifts from language knowledge to language

learners, the research on individual differences of students has become one of the focuses. Motivation is a very important factor in the study of individual differences of students because motivation is to solve the problem of learning motivation. Foreign language learning motivation is closely related to learning attitude, learning strategy, and learning achievement. Therefore, it is necessary to improve the learning motivation of Chinese college students. Although Chinese English learners have been learning English for many years, they still cannot effectively read and fully understand the content conveyed by the text. Many students do not have successful reading strategies. Their reading strategies are limited and cannot meet the requirements of college English reading, nor can reading strategies be adjusted according to different requirements, purposes, and genres of reading tasks. Therefore, it is necessary to introduce English reading strategies to them and improve their awareness of using appropriate reading strategies in the reading process. If students can read the materials effectively, it will help broaden their cultural horizons, enrich their professional knowledge, and give them an educational edge that will benefit their lifelong learning.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Reading Motivation**

Reading motivation is a common research object in many disciplines. Within linguistics, scholars have different research perspectives, so the academic circle has not formed a complete consensus on reading motivation. However, the academic community generally believes that reading motivation is a multidimensional and systematic structure. Guthrie & Wigfield (1999) points out that reading motivation refers to individuals' goals and beliefs about reading, which will affect individuals' reading behaviors as well as their interaction and learning behaviors with reading texts [1]. Kristin Conradi (2014) believes that reading motivation is a comprehensive motivation driven by an individual's efficacy or belief in his own reading ability, reading attitude and reading goals, including two dimensions: internal motivation and external motivation [2].

As a multi-dimensional system structure, reading motivation can be categorized from various angles. Based on their learning objectives, Gardner & Lambert (1974) divided students' motivation for learning into two categories: integrative motivation and instrumental motivation [3]. In accordance with pertinent theories of cognitive psychology, Deci & Ryan (1985) split learning motivation into intrinsic motivation and extrinsic incentive [4]. Extrinsic motivation denotes that students' incentive for learning originates from sources outside of themselves, whereas intrinsic motivation denotes that students' motivation for learning comes from sources inside of themselves. Based on these classifications, following researchers improved reading motivation and created several reading motivation questionnaires. The Motivation for Reading Questionnaire (MRQ), created by Wigfield & Guthrie (1997), is the most significant questionnaire on reading motivation in the academic world [5]. The questionnaire divided motivation into three categories based on reading efficacy, achievement and goal, and goal and social motivation. These categories were based on self-efficacy theory and achievement value and goal theory.

### **2.2. Reading Strategies**

Reading strategy is a reading skill that will be actively selected and used by readers in the process of reading, which can cultivate readers' self-learning ability. The study of reading strategies began in the 1980s, and it is an effective learning strategy to improve English reading skills. Reading strategy is a part of the learning strategy. Many experts have studied reading strategy from different perspectives. Johnson (1998) believes that reading strategies refer to the reading tasks completed by students through reading skills such as prediction, reasoning, skimming, and jumping

in the process of reading, and include the selective and controlled activities carried out by students to achieve their expected reading goals [6]. Like Johnson, Wallace (1992) points out that reading strategies refer to learners' selective use of reading methods in terms of reading methods, content, and goals [7]. Cohen (1998), on the other hand, linked reading strategies with psychology and regarded reading strategies as a kind of psychological activity, in which readers can complete reading tasks to a certain extent [8]. Aarnoutse and Schellings (2003) also put forward the view that reading strategies are related to psychological activities and believe that reading strategies refer to a cognitive behavior carried out by readers to achieve reading goals to a certain extent [9].

Block (1986) separated reading strategies into general strategies and local strategies according to the "top-down" and "bottom-up" reading patterns [10]. Oxford (1990) divided reading strategies into cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, emotional strategies, and social strategies [11]. Based on Oxford and guided by learning strategies, O'Malley & Chamot (1990) separated reading strategies into cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, and social-emotional strategies [12].

Research on reading strategies has been carried out by educators, educational psychologists, and language and literacy acquisition specialists for decades. In terms of the study on the use of reading strategies and individual differences, Hosenfeld (1977) studied successful readers and unsuccessful readers, and the research results show that successful readers have certain advantages in many aspects, compared with unsuccessful readers, they can obtain better reading results and apply the knowledge learned from reading to actual production and life [13]. In terms of reading strategy training and reading achievement, Pardis Zafarani (2014) studied the differences brought about by strategic training in students. By conducting group reading strategy training on students, she found that the reading comprehension performance of trained students is higher than that of untrained students [14]. According to Agus Rianto (2021), his study investigated at how reading strategies and English competence varied by gender among EFL university students. It was found that the ability of female participants to use reading strategies in English online reading projects is higher than that of male participants [15].

### **3. Methods**

#### **3.1. Research Design**

The purpose of the study is to analyze the correlation among non-English majors' reading motivation and reading strategies, to provide pedagogical suggestions for teaching and learning in EFL reading. Quantitative analysis method is used to measure students' reading motivation and reading strategy, and to determine the relationship between them.

#### **3.2. Participants**

The 420 participants in the study were freshmen and sophomores at two universities in East China's Anhui Province. The non-English majors from each university were chosen by the researchers using random sampling. There were 205 and 215 participants from the two universities, respectively. To reduce level-related error and provide a thorough grasp of the research, a stratified sampling of freshmen and sophomores was used in this study. Each participant used the "Questionnaire Star" app on their phone to complete the questionnaire while being guided by the teacher.

#### **3.3. Instruments**

The two questionnaires of this study have been tested for reliability. Cronbach's alpha value of

each variable was greater than 0.7, indicating strong reliability and high internal consistency of the research data. The English reading motivation for Questionnaire 1 was derived from the revised MRQ and the English Reading Motivation Questionnaire. The former aims to measure children's motivation to read in their native language. The latter aims at the second language reading motivation of college students. The questionnaire consists of 30 items, including 7 factors: curiosity, involvement, compliance, grades, competition, recognition, and utility. After the pilot test, Cronbach's alpha value of item 14, "It is very important for me to complete each reading assignment" was 0.699, lower than 0.70. After this item was removed, the Cronbach alpha value for the total table was 0.80. The English Reading Strategies Questionnaire by Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002), which has been widely used and has established itself as a valid and reliable method of evaluating students' reading methods, served as the basis for Questionnaire 2. 29 questions make up the survey, which is divided into three categories: global, problem-solving, and support reading strategies.

### **3.4. Data Gathering Procedure**

The study began with a pilot study of 25 non-English major students. During the data collection phase, respondents were informed of the purpose of the study and responded in a "Questionnaire Star". The researchers tested the reliability of the data and modified the questionnaire to ensure the reliability and validity of the questionnaire. Next, questionnaires were sent to the two university subjects and processed and analyzed statistically.

### **3.5. Data Analysis**

The respondents' reading motivation and use of reading strategies were examined for validity and reliability. Descriptive statistics were used to examine the mean and standard deviation of each variable for non-English students. Pearson correlation analysis was used to see if there was any connection between students' motivation for reading and their reading techniques.

## **4. Results and Discussion**

### **4.1. Reading Motivation**

Reading motivation is the specific, complicated, and deterministic manifestation of motivation in reading activities. According to Indrayadi (2021), a person's internal psychological state that directs, motivates, and supports their reading process is known as reading motivation [16]. For the students' reading behavior to consistently move in the direction of the specific reading goals, they need motivation that can stimulate, maintain, and encourage them to engage in reading activities. If students lack the proper reading motivation during the English reading process, it is challenging to keep reading activities consistent. Active reading motivation can therefore encourage students to read in English independently and improve students' initiative and awareness while doing so.

Table 1 shows the respondents' summary assessment of the seven dimensions of English reading motivation. The average reading motivation of non-English major ranges from 2.50 to 3.49, in which the factor "utility" value is the highest (3.09). The factor "involvement" has the lowest value (2.75). In general, the reading motivation of Chinese non-English majors is highly utilitarian and cognitive. They are relatively motivated by competition, achievement, and curiosity. In addition, participation and obedience had little effect on their reading. The study shows that the reading motivation of non-English majors in the two universities is generally average. Among the various dimensions of reading motivation, the "utility" dimension gets the highest mean, indicating that

students think reading offers tangible advantages for them, such as improving their reading skills and widening their horizons. The “involvement” dimension’s lowest mean score suggests that most students are not particularly subjectively engaged in reading English.

Table 1: Summary Table on Reading Motivation

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
Curiosity	2.87	Agree	5
Involvement	2.75	Agree	7
Compliance	2.85	Agree	6
Grades	2.98	Agree	3
Competition	2.94	Agree	4
Recognition	3.01	Agree	2
Utility	3.09	Agree	1
Composite Mean	2.93	Agree	

Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Strongly Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 = Agree; 1.50 – 2.49 = Disagree; 1.00 - 1.49 = Strongly Disagree

In terms of intrinsic motivation, the respondents’ curiosity scores are more significant than their level of involvement, which may indicate that students are more interested in the content of an English text than in reading it in English. The low involvement score reflects students’ low interest in and love of English reading. Compared with the total score of intrinsic motivation, the extrinsic motivation of non-English majors is more obvious. To sum up, the average score of intrinsic reading motivation (curiosity and involvement) is lower than the comprehensive average score of 2.90, while the average value of extrinsic reading motivation (compliance, grades, competition, recognition, and utility) is higher than the comprehensive average. The participants’ extrinsic reading motivation is greater than their intrinsic reading motivation, indicating that external factors more likely impact their reading than internal ones do, such as teacher and peer praise, reading grades, utility, etc.

The finding is in line with Kanonire’s (2022) study that reading motivation plays a mediating role between students’ reading skills and reading performance, and extrinsic motivation influences students’ reading performance to some extent [17]. Maghsoudi’s (2022) results show that participants with high reading comprehension motivation perform better in reading comprehension than those with low reading comprehension motivation. Different dimensions of reading motivation have different effects on reading performance [18]. According to Kusmartini (2022), his study explores the reading motivation of engineering students and its impact on their reading ability in the context of Covid-19 pandemic and the results show that students’ reading motivation has a significant impact on their reading level [19].

## 4.2. Reading Strategies

Table 2 shows the participants’ use of reading strategies. Through the statistics of the survey data, it is found that the reading strategies of non-English majors are at the average level (M=2.99). Among them, the average value of problem-solving strategies gets the highest value. Global and support strategies both get an average value of 2.97, which suggests that non-English majors in selected universities also frequently use these reading strategies. The item “I try to get back on track when I lose concentration” in problem-solving strategies gets the highest mean of 3.10, which demonstrates that when students become distracted, they rapidly realize it, make an adjustment, and return to paying attention to the material.

Table 2: Summary Table on Reading Strategies

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
Global Reading Strategies	2.97	Agree	2.5
Problem-solving Strategies	3.02	Agree	1
Support Strategies	2.97	Agree	2.5
Composite Mean	2.99	Agree	

*Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Strongly Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 = Agree; 1.50 – 2.49 = Disagree; 1.00 - 1.49 = Strongly Disagree*

This finding is basically consistent with most research results of Ma (2022) [20]. In reading, students are more inclined to choose problem-solving strategies. Global reading strategies and support strategies are less frequently used, students' reading plan execution ability is not strong, and self-evaluation ability is not high. In addition, students seldom communicate with their peers and have a poor sense of cooperation. This is related to both students and teachers. On the one hand, students should attach importance to and strengthen the practice of reading strategies in the process of reading, change their reading attitude, and improve their reading interest. On the other hand, students' mastery of reading strategies is also influenced by teachers' teaching. Kambara (2022) pointed out that through teachers' effective guidance and training in student's use of reading strategies, students' reading levels will be improved [21]. To improve students' ability to employ suitable reading strategies, teachers may actively direct students to do so during the teaching process. Anggraini (2022) studied the reading strategies commonly used by English college students with different reading abilities and personalities [22]. The results show that students with different reading levels and personality types use English web texts differently.

#### 4.3. Relationship between Reading Motivation and Reading Strategies

Table 3 shows the relationship between reading motivation and strategies of the respondents in selected two universities. The table demonstrates a substantial correlation between the r-values, and all the p-values are below the alpha level of 0.01 as well. As a result, the findings suggest a strong connection between reading motivation and reading techniques. The respondents use reading strategies more effectively the more motivated they are to read. Specifically, the "utility" factor in reading motivation has the greatest impact on the participants' use of reading strategies, and the students who use more global strategies frequently have the strongest reading motivation.

The study's results are comparable to those of earlier investigations. Teng (2016) looked at the relationship between reading motivation and cognitive reading strategies employed by English majors in vocational colleges when reading in English [23]. The results show a strong positive relationship between the two, and from the perspectives of educators, students, and educational institutions, certain suggestions are given for the instruction of English reading. Chen's (2017) study of non-English majors demonstrates that there is a substantial positive link between students' English reading motivation and the use of reading strategies [24]. This conclusion is based on pertinent theories and research on English reading motivation and reading strategies. Students at private schools read English with more extrinsic drive and less intrinsic desire. Thao & Long (2021) studied the English learning motivation and the use of reading strategies among freshmen majoring in English at Vietnamese universities. The results show that students have higher English motivation, and their metacognitive strategies have better effects on reading performance. The more motivated they are in English language learning, the more metacognitive and cognitive strategies they use in reading comprehension [25].

Extrinsic motivation is closely tied to each aspect of reading strategies among the seven

components that influence reading motivation. It reveals how the student’s extrinsic motivation has a big impact on the reading strategies they choose. According to Ye’s (2018) study, high school students generally do not have enough reading motivation, and their usage of reading strategies is only moderate [26]. Reading motivation and strategies have a positive relationship; extrinsic motivation and strategies have the strongest relationship, followed by self-efficacy, social motivation, and intrinsic motivation.

Table 3: Relationship between Reading Motivation and Reading Strategies

Curiosity	r-value	p-value	Interpretation
Global Reading Strategies	.484**	0.000	Highly Significant
Problem-solving Strategies	.512**	0.000	Highly Significant
Support Strategies	.500**	0.000	Highly Significant
Involvement			
Global Reading Strategies	.607**	0.000	Highly Significant
Problem-solving Strategies	.600**	0.000	Highly Significant
Support Strategies	.591**	0.000	Highly Significant
Compliance			
Global Reading Strategies	.582**	0.000	Highly Significant
Problem-solving Strategies	.559**	0.000	Highly Significant
Support Strategies	.577**	0.000	Highly Significant
Grades			
Global Reading Strategies	.631**	0.000	Highly Significant
Problem-solving Strategies	.602**	0.000	Highly Significant
Support Strategies	.580**	0.000	Highly Significant
Competition			
Global Reading Strategies	.605**	0.000	Highly Significant
Problem-solving Strategies	.584**	0.000	Highly Significant
Support Strategies	.552**	0.000	Highly Significant
Recognition			
Global Reading Strategies	.556**	0.000	Highly Significant
Problem-solving Strategies	.511**	0.000	Highly Significant
Support Strategies	.498**	0.000	Highly Significant
Utility			
Global Reading Strategies	.668**	0.000	Highly Significant
Problem-solving Strategies	.655**	0.000	Highly Significant
Support Strategies	.588**	0.000	Highly Significant

Legend: Significant at  $p$ -value < 0.01

## 5. Conclusion

The aim of this study is to explore the reading motivation and strategies of non-English major college students and to understand the relationship between the two. The reading motivation level of Chinese non-English majors is medium, with which the dimension “utility” ranking as the main driving factor, and the “involvement” factor ranks the lowest. The respondents often use reading strategies, and problem-solving strategies are most frequently used, followed by support strategies and global reading strategies. There is a favorable relationship between reading motivation and strategies among non-English majors, and they are mutually beneficial. The higher the level of students’ reading motivation, the stronger their ability and effectiveness in using reading strategies.

The results of this survey also reflect that the respondents have less effort and less time investment in language learning. How to make students do better is a major problem. Universities may offer a range of English reading programs to encourage students to participate actively in reading activities and to increase their motivation to read in English. When grading and evaluating

students, teachers may evaluate their talents and strengths as much as possible, rather than focusing exclusively on their grades. In teaching practice, teachers may enhance college students' reading motivation through some concrete methods. To create conditions for cultivating students' interest in English reading, teachers should improve their reading teaching process with great enthusiasm and innovative consciousness and increase students' involvement. Teachers may also notice learning object differences, take into account all students as much as possible while presenting reading strategies, and select reading strategies appropriate for their learning and understanding based on the teaching objects in the teaching process. In addition, the scope of future studies may be further expanded to ensure diversity and representation of the findings. At the same time, it can also verify the correlation between reading motivation, strategies, and achievement from the aspects of gender, school type, and grade.

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