

# Reading Motivations and Metacognitive Strategies of Chinese English Majors

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**Abstract:** Reading in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has received a great deal of attention in foreign language teaching, and EFL reading is still crucial in most countries. This study aimed to assess the reading motivations and metacognitive strategies used by sophomore English majors in three universities in China to find out how the variables differ and relate. This research involved 429 respondents from three different universities. 429 valid questionnaires were retrieved. Findings show that there are significant differences in Chinese English majors' reading motivations in terms of sex, types of university, and home location. And there exists strong relationship between reading motivations and metacognitive strategies.

**Keywords:** Reading motivations, Metacognitive strategies, English majors.

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## 1. Introduction

English reading is an important part of English language teaching and one of the main ways for students to realize language input (Peters et al., 2019). Reading is a multi-level cognitive activity, a process that penetrates subjective emotion and consciousness. The main factors influencing reading are mainly learners' cognitive ability, non-verbal knowledge, and non-intellectual factors. Among them, reading motivation, as an internal psychological process or internal motivation for individuals to guide, stimulate and maintain reading activities in reading tasks or reading goals, builds a bridge between reader factors and task factors, and should be the starting point of our research (Ahmadi, 2017). And a lot of practical experience in teaching reading also fully proves that whether it is a small amount of reading or insufficient reading depth, the lack of reading motivation has become the main reason for the failure of reading comprehension (Schiefele et al., 2016). Solving students' English reading problems and stimulating students' reading motivation is the key.

Besides, although many scholars have done much research on students' reading comprehension challenges and difficulties, reading is still difficult for most English learners. EFL reading can go through many reading obstacles, which are influenced by many factors (Cho et al., 2019). How to solve the common English reading obstacles and problems in their English reading process and research on the reading strategies are of great importance to improve learners' reading comprehension skills.

Metacognitive reading strategies widely help to monitor and regulate cognitive strategies (Baas et al., 2015). The use of metacognitive techniques is crucial while reading. During the reading procedure, on the one hand, students need to extract the semantic meaning of the text information being processed according to the context, and on the other hand, they need to predict the following content based on the semantic extraction. At the same time, they need to monitor the semantic extraction and prediction activities in real-time, and make timely evaluations and adjustments of some strategies used in the reading process. What metacognition is responsible for is monitoring the reading process in real-time

and evaluating and adjusting the selection and use of strategies. Raising awareness of metacognitive strategies helps students reflect on their learning progress, which is an advanced learning management skill and plays a core role in effective learning.

In recent years, research on the motivation of low-level foreign language learners, such as junior college students, vocational college students, and primary and secondary school students, has seriously lacked attention, and there is almost a blank phenomenon. Studies on the reading motivation of low-level learners are few, and there are almost no research results on low-level students in undergraduate colleges. It is the same with reading strategy research. Additionally, research showed, on the one hand, there was a significant correlation between metacognitive reading strategies and reading motivation in English (Lau 2009; McGeown et al., 2014; Meniado, 2016; Shi Jinmei, 2018). Most of the research on students' English reading focuses on reading methods and strategies, and there are few studies on readers' motivation or its correlation with reading strategies. Therefore, this study will attempt to fill this research gap.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Reading Motivations

McGeown et al. (2016) defined that it is an internal mechanism that can stimulate and sustain a learner's reading activity, and direct the reading activity toward a specific goal. Klauda and Guthrie (2015) defined reading motivation as the aims and beliefs of people about reading, which influence one's reading performance. Wu (2016) further pointed out that reading motivation is a type of psychological disposition or intrinsic motivation that serves to stimulate a person to engage in reading activities, sustain existing reading activities, and ensure that a person's behavior is directed toward a specific reading goal.

Currently, there is a lot of controversy about the classification of English reading motivation. According to the purpose of reading, Van Staden and Ellis (2017) divided reading motivation into the following three categories: reading for knowledge, enjoyment, and comprehension at a deep level. They believed that the reading motivation for

enjoyment is mainly to read actively, and they consider reading as a hobby. For these learners, there is no difference between reading in English and reading in their native language, both for knowledge acquisition and enjoyment. The motivation for comprehension is mainly to find information and understand knowledge.

Scholars studied the relationships between reading motivations and other aspects related to reading motivation. For example, reading motivation has a significant impact on students' reading comprehension, and intrinsic motivation is stronger than extrinsic motivation (Schaffner & Schiefele, 2016). Reading motivation might influence foreign language performance. It is discussed that intrinsic motivation could promote great English reading performance, and intrinsic motivation in the high-performing group is greater than that in the intermediate group (Lee & Zentall, 2017).

## 2.2. Reading Strategies

The concept of metacognitive strategy has been proposed by scholars for a long time, and different scholars have given different definitions. The metacognitive strategy was first proposed by the American psychologist Flavell in the 1970s, who argued that metacognitive strategies are concerned with all kinds of strategies used in different learning processes. Flavell (1979) believed that it is a method used to plan, monitor and manage learners' cognitive activities, and learners can use metacognitive strategy to evaluate and correct their learning strategies (as cited in Moritz and Lysaker, 2018). Brown believed that metacognitive strategies can help learners know how to design, perform, and evaluate their learning activities and behaviors. It is a powerful learning strategy (Channa et al., 2015). In contrast to Brown's view, O'Malley and Chamot argued that metacognitive strategies could help learners manage, monitor, and evaluate their reading processes and outcomes. Metacognitive strategies enable learners to modify and adjust their reading process before, during, and after reading according to their reading situation and ideal reading situation (Nhem, 2019).

Metacognitive strategy is defined as a type of ability to "plan for learning, reflect on the learning process that is taking place, monitor one's understanding, and evaluate learning after completing a task" (Semtin & Maniam, 2015). Metacognition helps learners to understand their own cognitive processes. The metacognitive ability of different individuals and the use of metacognitive strategies reflect differences in abilities among individuals. These differences are reflected not only in the acquisition of knowledge, but also in the application of knowledge (Rhodes, 2019).

Metacognitive strategies affect the subject's ability to behave. They can be adapted and controlled throughout human cognitive processes, such as planning and control methods and appropriate evaluation systems, all of which are related to metacognition.

Metacognitive strategies emphasize the learner's cognition and evaluation of learning methods, and also include how learners choose appropriate learning methods for themselves. Metacognitive strategies are largely equivalent to management strategies, emphasizing that the application of metacognitive strategies includes learners' selection and setting of learning goals, application of learning strategies suitable for themselves, mastery and adjustment of learning time, and adjustment of assessment efficiency (Shih & Huang, 2020).

Previous studies have researched the relationship between

reading strategies and reading motivations. Schmeck (2013) investigated the relationship that exists between different learning styles and levels of reading motivation and found a close relationship between them. Zhang and Hao (2005) presented the findings of a study that looked at the link between learning styles, motivation, and English language acquisition. The findings revealed that students majoring in English exhibited higher levels of integrative drive. Besides, further consideration was given to their connection by several academics. In a research involving 80 students in grades 7 and 8, Catherine (2009) investigated the reading motivation and metacognitive skills of the pupils. After that, they presented evidence indicating that the relationship was beneficial. Joel (2016) also stated the influence of reading strategies on motivation.

## 3. Research Methods

This study used quantitative method to collect information from participants by designing and administering questionnaires based on research objectives.

The participants of the study are sophomore English majors from three public universities in Henan Province of China. The simple random sampling method was used, and a sample size of 429 is conservatively determined, and 123 students from the first university, 123 students from the second university, and 183 students from the third university.

Two questionnaires were used in the study as the main data gathering instrument.

The first questionnaire is a modified Chinese Reading Motivation Questionnaire (CRMQ) to determine the sample's reading motivations. There is a 4-factor structure with 22 items in the revised questionnaire. Participants were asked to check in the 4-point scale and determine which situation applied to them most. The second questionnaire is the Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS), which is based on the Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory (MARSII) and modified to be more effective in assessing L2 learners' reading strategies (Mokhtari & Sheorey, 2002). The SORS has a 3-factor structure with 30 items, each of which uses a four-point Likert scale.

The pilot study is significant and indispensable to ensure the reliability of the instruments. Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was used to examine the stability and consistency of the scales in these two instruments. All of the Cronbach Alpha were more than 0.7, which indicated that the participants understood the items and gave correct answers. The questionnaires were reliable and stable in consistency.

Version 26.0 of the SPSS statistical software was used for statistical analysis. The learners' ideas about reading motivations and strategies were described using the frequency and percentage distribution. The relationships between them were examined using correlation analysis and regression analysis (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015).

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1. Reading Motivations of Chinese English Majors

According to the descriptive statistics, the mean overall of Chinese reading motivation is 2.71, which shows that the survey respondents concur with the earlier indications.

According to the survey's results, intrinsic motivation is the most powerful kind of reading motivation. This finding is in

line with the conclusion that Lau (2009) came to. It is also been proved that Chinese students have a strong intrinsic motivation to learn (Huang, 2013). This is due to the fact that because learners who are motivated by their intrinsic interests are more likely to actively read more books and articles, hence improving their knowledge. Thus, it seems crucial for EFL teachers to increase intrinsic reading motivation intentionally and consistently by fostering students' interest in English books through encouragement (Lee & Schallert, 2014) or providing reasonably demanding tasks along with appropriate support.

Then comes the secondary drive, which had a mean score of 2.85 and a common rating. This may be because, according to the research, certain students primarily encourage themselves through praise, achievements, or competitiveness. The social motivation yielded a mean score of 2.50 (ranked 3), which was deemed acceptable. This might be because the respondents have a strong competitive spirit, in which they want to win to experience the satisfaction of winning and the acceptance of their peers while they are gaining knowledge.

Self-efficacy ranked last, with a mean score of 2.47. The primary cause of this phenomenon is that learners have a weak language foundation, poor learning ability, and have not reviewed and consolidated the knowledge they have acquired, resulting in relatively large deficiencies in basic language ability (such as vocabulary or grammar) and insufficient language ability. This may affect the learners' self-esteem, and a lack of self-esteem further diminishes their motivation to read.

## 4.2. Metacognitive Strategies of Chinese English Majors

According to the descriptive statistics, the mean overall reading strategies is 2.67, which shows that the respondents agree with the previously mentioned indicators. This is in line with the findings that Al-Mekhlafi (2018) came to, which state that respondents made heavy use of all three reading styles.

Problem-solving strategies rank first, with the highest weighted mean 2.77, compared with the other two kinds of strategies, the respondents preferred to choose problem-solving strategies. This result was same with the finding of Yüksel and Yüksel (2012), Veloo and Krishnasamy (2014), Fitrisia et al. (2015), Meniado (2016), Ahmadian and Pasand (2017) and Miller (2017). This may imply that readers of EFL frequently experience difficulties with reading, and as a result, they are accustomed to employing reading strategies such as attempting to get back on track when they lose attention. On the other hand, EFL readers rarely utilize reading strategies such as questioning themselves or taking notes to support their reading. Readers can verify how well they grasp texts by using these two reading tactics, even though they aren't utilized very often. These strategies are vital and helpful. Therefore, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers may need to incorporate more Global Reading and Support Strategies into their reading sessions to give students the opportunity to improve their reading performance as well as their language skills.

The next was the strategy of support reading strategies with a weighed mean of 2.68. The least preferred strategy is the global reading strategies, with a weighted mean of 2.56. Besides, Veloo and Krishnasamy (2014) got the same result that the global reading strategy was used the least.

While, this study's result is different from Al-Mekhlafi's

result (2018), which stated that support reading strategies receive the highest overall mean followed by problem-solving strategies and global reading strategies. The findings were inconsistent with Yüksel and Yüksel (2012), Chen and Chen (2015), Azher et al. (2015), Barrot (2016) finding that the reading strategy most frequently used by students was the global reading strategy, followed by support or problem-solving strategies. These disparities may be because the way English is taught to pupils in China is different from the way it is taught in other countries, which in turn results in learners employing different reading methods. At this time, the English education that the vast majority of students receive is still exam-oriented, and while they are reading, learners concentrate mostly on answering the appropriate questions.

## 4.3. Relationships between Reading Motivations and Metacognitive Strategies

It was observed that the computed rho-values indicate a moderate direct correlation and the resulting p-values were all less than the alpha level. This depicts that there was significant relationship exists and implies that the more that they are motivated, the better the strategies used. They also suggest that both of them have an impact on one another and create a positive reading cycle, which is in line with the research of McGeown et al. (2014), and Meniado (2016) found that there is a positive correlation between reading strategies and reading motivation. According to Coronel (2018), when a student has great reading skills, they are more driven to read than when their reading skills are weak. Besides, Schmeck (2013) demonstrated that one form of motivation, in particular intrinsic motivation, is significantly and more closely connected with some strategies than with others.

Zhang and Hao (2005) found that when it comes to reading strategies, students who majored in English utilized meta-cognitive, affective, and social strategies significantly more frequently than students who did not major in English. A clear association between reading motivation and the method of reading strategy choosing was another finding of this study.

Based on the positive correlation between reading strategies and reading motivation, the following instruction suggestions are intended to increase reading motivation and promote the use of effective reading strategies. First, teachers can offer detailed guidance on a range of reading techniques, including previewing, summarizing, drawing connections, and asking questions. Second, the teacher should think out loud while reading a text to show how reading techniques can be used. Third, teachers can let students choose books or texts that match their hobbies and preferences.

## 5. Conclusions

Respondents from English majors of the three universities are relatively even, and are mostly females. More than 73 percent of all respondents, or the majority, are from rural. Intrinsic motivation is the most powerful kind of reading motivations to motivate the respondents to read, followed by extrinsic motivation, social motivation, and self-efficacy. English majors experience fewer reading obstacles, among which, they believe that the most difficult reading items are cognitive reading items. The respondents reportedly prefer to use problem-solving strategies, followed by support reading strategies and global reading strategies. Sex, type of university, and home location vary on Chinese English majors'

reading motivation and obstacles. But there is no significant difference between sex, types of university, and home location in terms of reading strategies. The correlation of reading motivations, obstacles, and strategies is highly significant. Individuals can be motivated to surmount obstacles and develop effective reading strategies by their motivations.

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