The Impact of Learning Motivation on Students' English Reading: How Should Teachers Design English Courses?

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Abstract. This study employs a literature review method, drawing on perspectives such as self-determination theory and social constructivism, to systematically explore the impact of learning motivation on students' English reading and effective course design pathways. Research findings reveal that intrinsic motivation drives students to engage in deep reading and active vocabulary learning, exhibiting stability and sustainability; extrinsic motivation can guide reading behaviour in the short term and may transition into intrinsic motivation. Learning motivation influences vocabulary processing strategies and retention rates, thereby promoting vocabulary knowledge accumulation; simultaneously, it regulates reading engagement, strategy selection, and obstacle-coping behaviours, thereby deepening text comprehension. In teaching practice, task-based teaching methods meet students' practical and competence needs through authentic, stepwise tasks; multimedia teaching reduces cognitive load and stimulates interest through multi-sensory interaction; and cooperative learning reinforces a sense of responsibility and belonging through social interaction. All three approaches effectively stimulate reading motivation. Based on this, when designing English courses, teachers should comprehensively cultivate intrinsic motivation, reasonably utilize extrinsic incentives, integrate multimedia resources, and organize cooperative learning to achieve the coordinated development of students' reading motivation and abilities.

Keywords: Learning motivation, English reading, vocabulary knowledge, text comprehension, teaching methods, course design, self-determination theory.

1. Introduction

In the wake of globalization, English reading proficiency has become a core competency for students' academic advancement and cross-cultural communication, serving as both a key channel for information acquisition and a vital foundation for the development of comprehensive language skills. However, current English reading practices among students are plagued by issues such as lack of motivation and weak interest, leading to low reading efficiency and hindering overall language learning outcomes. Learning motivation, as a core psychological variable regulating learning behaviour, exerts its influence throughout the entire reading process. It not only determines students' proactive and sustained engagement in reading but also profoundly impacts the selection of reading strategies and the achievement of reading outcomes. Therefore, systematically analysing the mechanisms through which learning motivation influences English reading and providing scientific basis for teachers to optimize course design holds significant theoretical value and practical significance. This paper is based on relevant research literature and begins with a binary classification of motivation types to explore the specific impact of learning motivation on vocabulary knowledge acquisition and text comprehension. It further analyses the regulatory effects of different teaching methods on reading motivation, ultimately providing practical pathways for teachers to design English courses that stimulate students' reading motivation and enhance their reading abilities.

2. Types of Motivation

2.1. Intrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic motivation stems from an individual's interest in and intrinsic satisfaction from the activity itself, driven by curiosity, a desire for knowledge, or the need for self-actualization [1]. In the context of English reading, intrinsic motivation manifests as students actively engaging in reading activities due to their interest in the reading content, their desire to explore English culture, or the pleasurable experience gained from reading. For example, students interested in literary works may voluntarily read English novels, naturally improving their reading skills as they immerse themselves in the plot; students curious about the field of science and technology may actively follow English-language scientific journals to satisfy their curiosity about new knowledge. This motivation does not rely on external rewards, possesses strong stability and persistence, and can prompt students to invest more cognitive resources in reading, actively employ deep reading strategies such as prediction, inference, and reflection, thereby enhancing their reading comprehension abilities [2]. From the perspective of self-determination theory, the core of intrinsic motivation lies in fulfilling an individual's needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. When students can independently choose materials, feel their abilities improving, and emotionally connect with the text during reading, intrinsic motivation is further strengthened.

2.2. Extrinsic Motivation

Extrinsic motivation is driven by external factors and directed toward goals outside the activity itself, such as achieving grades, gaining others' approval, meeting course requirements, or fulfilling career plans [1]. In English reading, students may engage in targeted reading training to pass language exams such as IELTS or TOEFL, or participate in reading activities to complete assigned reading tasks and receive classroom praise. Compared to intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation is less sustainable; if external incentives or pressure disappear, students' reading enthusiasm may decline accordingly. However, extrinsic motivation is not entirely negative; it can serve as a "bridge" to intrinsic motivation at specific stages. For students with initially low reading interest, teachers can guide them to gradually adapt to the reading rhythm and accumulate reading experience by setting reasonable external goals (such as rewards for completing reading tasks or feedback from periodic tests), thereby fostering intrinsic interest through sustained reading practice [3]. For example, to prepare for English course exams, students may focus on memorizing high-frequency vocabulary. If they discover that an increase in vocabulary significantly improves reading fluency, they may gradually develop an interest in reading itself, thereby transforming external motivation into intrinsic motivation.

3. The Impact of Learning Motivation on English Reading

3.1. Vocabulary Knowledge

Learning motivation plays a pivotal role in students' accumulation and application of vocabulary knowledge. From the initial stages of perceiving words and understanding meanings to memorizing vocabulary and practical usage, motivation consistently exerts its influence. From a cognitive psychology perspective, different types of motivation prompt students to adopt varied learning approaches, leading to disparities in vocabulary learning outcomes. Intrinsic motivation demonstrates a more pronounced driving force and is closely linked to students' ability to flexibly employ advanced metacognitive strategies.

When students possess strong intrinsic motivation, they actively seek to comprehend the content of English materials that interest them. This naturally integrates vocabulary acquisition with contextual understanding. Throughout this proactive learning process, students also flexibly employ metacognitive strategies. From the perspective of self-regulated learning theory, intrinsically

motivated learners are more likely to develop structured vocabulary learning plans: when encountering unfamiliar words, they not only consult dictionaries and analyse roots and affixes to grasp meanings but also infer emotional connotations and common collocations from context. They actively connect newly learned words with existing vocabulary. Simultaneously, they regularly review learned vocabulary, test its usage through reading practice, and even experiment with new words in writing and oral expression to reinforce memory and master flexible application [4]. For instance, when reading English literature, students might actively analyse emotional expressions like "melancholy" or "nostalgic" within specific contexts, deepening memory by contrasting synonyms and recording representative examples. When reading popular science articles, they focus on the disciplinary meanings of specialized terms like 'photosynthesis' or "quantum" to ensure accurate comprehension of the text. This context-based active learning approach helps students overcome the limitations of rote memorization, making vocabulary knowledge easier to absorb and retrieve, thereby significantly improving retention rates.

Extrinsic motivation also aids vocabulary learning, particularly in scenarios requiring short-term reading goals. To meet external demands like exams or academic assignments, students often adopt goal-oriented vocabulary strategies—such as memorizing high-frequency reading lists, compiling subject-specific terminology, or using flashcards to rapidly expand vocabulary [3]. While this approach may lack contextualization or metacognitive strategies, it effectively meets specific reading demands—for instance, preparing for IELTS reading exams might involve intensive memorization of vocabulary like "paraphrase" and "inference" for comprehension tasks, or high-frequency subject-specific terms such as 'anthropology' and "ecology" to accelerate text processing across diverse genres.

Research indicates that highly motivated learners invest significantly more time and effort into vocabulary acquisition (whether intrinsically or extrinsically motivated). Their vocabulary growth rate and application ability consistently outperform less motivated peers [4]. Conversely, unmotivated learners tend to avoid unfamiliar words during reading. They opt to skip over such words rather than actively look up their meanings. This leads to stagnant vocabulary growth, trapping them in a vicious cycle: "insufficient vocabulary → reading difficulties → diminished motivation," severely hindering reading skill development.

3.2. Text Reading

The impact of learning motivation on students' reading of texts is evident throughout the entire process, from preparation to deep comprehension. It directly determines how much effort students invest in reading, which methods they choose, and ultimately how well they understand the material. From a reading psychology perspective, highly motivated students are better able to engage their cognitive abilities and read using more in-depth thinking patterns, leading to a more comprehensive and profound understanding of the text.

Before beginning to read, highly motivated students are more inclined to proactively scan the text's structure—such as examining headings, tables of contents, or diagrams—and combine this with their prior knowledge to predict the text's likely content. They also set clear reading objectives for themselves. When reading argumentative texts, they anticipate potential arguments and supporting evidence; when encountering narrative works, they proactively predict plot developments and character relationships. This purposeful preparation helps students rapidly build cognitive frameworks for texts, leading to more focused and efficient reading [5].

Highly motivated students are better at selecting effective reading strategies and solving problems flexibly and efficiently during reading. When encountering texts of varying types and difficulty levels, they adjust their approaches based on reading objectives — when reading informational texts, they skim to quickly locate key information; when reading literary texts, they engage in close reading to analyse linguistic style, emotional expression, and thematic ideas. If they encounter obstacles during reading—such as complex sentence structures, abstract concepts, or cultural differences—they do not easily give up. Instead, they find ways to overcome them, such as rereading several times, consulting

relevant materials, or analysing logical relationships. For instance, when encountering texts involving Western cultural customs, they proactively research background knowledge to accurately interpret metaphors or allusions. Faced with complex sentences, they dissect meaning by identifying sentence components and analysing grammatical structures [6]. This proactive problem-solving approach helps them overcome reading bottlenecks and achieve deep textual comprehension.

From a motivational perspective, students driven by intrinsic motivation focus more on actively constructing meaning and establishing emotional resonance with the text. During reading, they integrate the text's information with their own life experiences and values to form unique interpretations. When reading biographies, they focus on the characters' growth experiences and spiritual qualities, gaining emotional inspiration or life insights from them. This deep engagement not only enhances text comprehension but also provides students with emotional fulfilment and self-improvement through reading, further reinforcing their reading motivation [2]. From a constructivist perspective, intrinsically motivated reading is essentially a "dialogue" process between students and the text. By actively integrating textual information with prior knowledge, students can construct richer and more systematic cognitive structures, achieving the internalization and transfer of knowledge.

While extrinsic motivation is goal-oriented, it can also promote effective text reading. To complete reading tests, write book reports, or participate in classroom discussions, students need to carefully read the text, extract key information, organize logical structures, and analyse the author's perspectives. For example, to prepare for reading comprehension tests, students may engage in targeted training to develop skills such as "identifying the main idea" and "judging inference questions"; for academic reading tasks, they may focus on the scientific validity of the text's arguments, the sufficiency of the evidence, and the logical coherence of the reasoning. While this goal-oriented reading may lack emotional engagement, it plays a positive role in enhancing students' text analysis skills, information screening abilities, and critical thinking [3]. Research indicates that motivation levels are significantly positively correlated with text comprehension scores. High-motivation students perform better in terms of accuracy (e.g., extraction of key information), completeness (e.g., coverage of content), and depth (e.g., grasp of central themes) in text comprehension [5].

Beyond this, learning motivation also influences the breadth and persistence of students' reading habits. Highly motivated students are more willing to explore diverse text types and fields, such as news reports, academic papers, essays, and novels. Extensive reading helps them broaden their knowledge base, enrich their language skills, and ultimately enhance their overall reading literacy. In contrast, students with low motivation often limit themselves to assigned materials, resulting in narrow reading scope and hindering the comprehensive development of their reading abilities. In the long term, highly motivated students maintain consistent reading habits [7]. Even without supervision, they proactively schedule reading time and select materials, enabling continuous improvement in their reading skills. Conversely, students with low motivation are easily swayed by external factors, resulting in inconsistent reading behaviour and making it difficult to establish a systematic path for developing reading proficiency [8].

4. The Impact of Teaching Methods on Students' Motivation for English Reading

4.1. Task-Based Teaching Method

Task-based teaching methods centre on "tasks," combining reading with real-world applications through the design of meaningful and goal-oriented reading tasks, thereby effectively stimulating students' motivation to read [9]. The core advantage of this teaching method lies in meeting students' "practical needs." When students realize that reading can help them accomplish valuable tasks, they become more actively engaged in reading activities. For example, teachers can design a task such as "planning an activity proposal for the class English Culture Festival," requiring students to read

English activity planning cases and festival-related materials, extract useful information, and integrate it into a proposal; or design a “simulated international conference speech” task, where students read English academic speech texts to learn speech structure and language expression techniques. Such tasks closely link reading with students’ real-life and academic needs, enabling them to perceive the practical value of reading and thereby enhance their intrinsic motivation.

The effectiveness of task-based teaching also depends on the rationality of task design, particularly the balance between task difficulty and diversity. From Vygotsky’s “zone of proximal development” theory, task difficulty should be slightly above students’ current level, requiring effort while ensuring completion with appropriate support — overly simple tasks fail to stimulate a desire for challenge, while overly difficult tasks may lead to frustration, both of which weaken motivation. Teachers can adopt a “stepwise task design” approach, gradually increasing difficulty from basic to complex: for example, for the same text on a given topic, first design a basic task such as “extracting key information,” then an intermediate task like “analysing the author’s perspective,” and finally an advanced task such as “writing a counterargument.” This progressive task arrangement allows students to build confidence through continuous successful experiences, thereby reinforcing their motivation to read [9]. At the same time, the diversity of task types is also crucial — combining tasks of different forms, such as information retrieval, opinion debate, creative writing, and role-playing, can meet students’ personalized interests and avoid the monotony of reading activities. For example, after reading an English novel, a “role-playing” task can be designed to have students act out the plot, or a “writing the ending” task can be designed to stimulate creative expression, transforming reading from “passive reception” to “active participation [10].”

Additionally, the “task feedback” component of task-based teaching plays a critical role in maintaining motivation. Teachers provide timely and specific feedback to acknowledge students’ strengths during task completion (such as accuracy in information extraction or logical expression of viewpoints) and offer targeted suggestions for improvement. This helps students feel a sense of progress and fulfils their need for competence. Additionally, organizing student presentations and peer evaluations of task outcomes allows students’ efforts to be recognized by peers, further reinforcing their sense of belonging and achievement, thereby forming a positive feedback loop of "task completion — positive feedback — motivation enhancement" positive feedback loop [9]. Regarding the mechanism linking task-based instruction to reading motivation, when tasks are designed to align with students' cognitive levels and interests, they are more willing to engage proactively in reading to complete assignments. In this process, they not only independently attempt to employ reading strategies such as scanning and inference to enhance task quality but also gradually cultivate a sense of cooperation through task interactions with peers. For instance, collaborating on a reading report requires division of labour and coordination of perspectives. This process not only deepens comprehension of the text but also fosters a positive attitude toward reading through social interaction, thereby reinforcing learning motivation [11].

4.2. Multimedia Teaching

Multimedia instruction can be delivered through various media formats such as images, audio, video, and animation. It breaks away from the traditional text-only reading model, engaging students through multiple senses like sight and hearing to stimulate reading interest. This teaching method has a significant positive effect on enhancing students’ motivation for English reading [6]. For non-native English speakers in particular, English texts often contain specific cultural background knowledge—such as customs, allusions, or values—that can easily become reading barriers. Multimedia instruction effectively addresses this “cultural gap.” For instance, when reading a text about Western Thanksgiving, teachers can use short videos explaining its origins and images depicting family reunions to help students intuitively grasp the cultural connotations behind concepts like “gratitude” and “family reunion.” When students can effortlessly overcome cultural barriers and accurately comprehend text meanings, their reading confidence markedly increases. Students then become more

willing to actively explore additional English texts containing cultural elements, creating a virtuous cycle of "smooth comprehension—confidence boost—enhanced motivation" [6].

From a cognitive load theory perspective, multimedia instruction also reduces students' comprehension burden. Abstract textual information becomes visually accessible through videos and animations, eliminating the need for students to rely solely on imagination to grasp complex concepts. For instance, when reading an English science article about "volcanic eruptions," students can directly observe the eruption process and understand its principles through video clips and geological structure animations presented by the teacher. The comprehension difficulty of specialized terms like "magma" and "lava" in the text is significantly reduced, diminishing reading anxiety and naturally encouraging students to continue reading.

Besides, the interactive nature of multimedia teaching further strengthens students' reading motivation. Gamified design is a key factor in increasing classroom engagement. Many English learning platforms and apps now incorporate interactive features. When encountering unfamiliar words while reading, students can tap the screen to view definitions and example sentences. After completing a text, they can participate in fun tasks like "reading challenges" to test comprehension. Such software often includes rewards like accumulating points and earning badges, which stimulate sustained interest in reading [6]. This instant interaction not only provides students with a convenient learning method but also transforms reading from "passive information reception" into "active challenge-based progression." Through the sense of accomplishment gained from completing tasks, students gradually develop a more positive attitude toward reading. This approach is particularly effective for guiding students with initially low reading motivation.

However, caution is needed to avoid falling into the trap of "media overload" in multimedia instruction—teachers must select multimedia resources judiciously based on reading objectives and students' actual proficiency levels. Only then can these media serve to enhance text comprehension without distracting students. This approach maximizes the role of multimedia instruction in boosting reading motivation [12].

4.3. Cooperative Learning

Collaborative learning refers to organizing students into small groups to engage in reading activities, such as completing reading tasks together, discussing text content, and sharing reading insights. Teachers can leverage social interaction to foster a positive learning environment, thereby effectively stimulating and sustaining students' motivation for English reading [13]. From the perspective of social constructivism theory, learning is a process of social interaction. Through collaboration with peers, students can inspire one another and progress together. This interaction not only facilitates knowledge construction but also satisfies students' need for belonging and reduces learning anxiety. For students with weaker English reading abilities or low self-confidence, the group environment provides a safe space for expression—this approach avoids the nervousness of speaking in front of the entire class. With peer encouragement, they can articulate their thoughts and pose questions. For instance, when tackling challenging academic texts, group members can divide responsibilities to interpret different paragraphs, then synthesize information through discussion. Weaker students gain both peer support and a sense of contributing to the group, gradually building reading confidence [14].

Task interdependence in cooperative learning enhances students' sense of responsibility and engagement in reading. When designing cooperative reading tasks, teachers typically assign specific roles to each group member—such as "information gatherer," "idea organizer," "spokesperson," and "recorder"—ensuring every student has distinct reading responsibilities. For example: the "Information Gatherer" extracts key textual details, the "Viewpoint Organizer" synthesizes core discussion points, and the "Spokesperson" presents the group's findings. This division of roles makes students aware that their individual reading contributions directly impact the group's task quality, fostering more proactive engagement. Such clear responsibilities also prevent free-riding within group activities [13]. Simultaneously, completing group tasks often requires deep collaboration

among members. For instance, when co-authoring a reading report, group members must discuss the text's themes, coordinate viewpoints, and divide writing responsibilities. This collaborative process enhances the interactivity of reading, allows students to experience the joy of cooperation, which further strengthens their reading motivation.

Feedback and evaluation mechanisms in cooperative learning are crucial factors for sustaining motivation. During group discussions, students receive immediate feedback from peers. When their perspectives are acknowledged, they experience a sense of accomplishment; when encountering misunderstandings, peers' reminders and corrections help them refine their understanding. Such peer feedback is often more aligned with students' cognitive levels, making it easier to accept and comprehend. Additionally, teachers' evaluations of group outcomes further reinforce students' motivation. Teachers not only focus on the quality of outcomes but also acknowledge the collaborative process within groups, such as effective communication and mutual assistance among members. This comprehensive evaluation makes students feel that their efforts are recognized, thereby increasing their willingness to participate in subsequent reading activities [14]. Research indicates that students in cooperative learning environments exhibit higher reading motivation and engagement than those learning individually, and their improvements in reading performance are more significant [14]. Additionally, cooperative learning can cultivate students' critical thinking and communication skills. When discussing textual perspectives, students need to listen to differing opinions, rationally analyse discrepancies, and articulate their own positions. The development of these skills not only enhances reading depth but also strengthens students' overall literacy, further reinforcing their learning motivation.

5. Conclusion

This paper employs a literature review methodology to explore three core aspects: "types of motivation," "the impact of learning motivation on English reading," and "the role of teaching methods in reading motivation." Key findings are as follows: Regarding motivation types, intrinsic motivation stems from interest in the reading activity itself. Driven by the needs for "autonomy, competence, and relatedness" in self-determination theory, it prompts students to engage in deep reading proactively and exhibits stability and persistence. Extrinsic motivation, driven by external goals, is effective in the short term but can be transformed into intrinsic motivation with proper guidance. Both types can synergistically support the development of reading abilities. Regarding the impact of learning motivation on English reading: in vocabulary acquisition, intrinsic motivation drives students to actively explore words within context, while extrinsic motivation promotes targeted memorization of high-frequency vocabulary; In text comprehension, highly motivated students excel at setting goals and overcoming obstacles, while low-motivation students are prone to "avoidance behaviours," resulting in significant differences in reading efficiency and effectiveness. Regarding the role of teaching methods in reading motivation: task-based instruction enhances competence through authentic, tiered tasks; multimedia teaching reduces cognitive load through diverse media and interactive design; cooperative learning fosters a safe environment through group division and peer interaction. All three effectively stimulate and sustain motivation.

Based on the above analysis and proven effective practices in the literature, teachers can adopt the following strategies in designing English reading courses: Balance intrinsic and extrinsic motivation by prioritizing reading materials aligned with student interests and designing activities like self-selected topics to satisfy autonomy needs, while setting reasonable external goals and providing timely feedback to guide the transformation of extrinsic motivation into intrinsic motivation; Focus on vocabulary and textual competency enhancement by guiding students to learn vocabulary in context and transfer its application, while stimulating exploratory interest through strategy instruction and deep text activities. Integrate diverse teaching methods, design tasks following the Zone of Proximal Development theory, select multimedia resources tailored to text types to avoid overload,

clarify roles and reinforce peer assessment in cooperative learning, and comprehensively optimize motivation pathways.

Learning motivation is the core psychological factor influencing students' English reading effectiveness. Differences in motivation types determine the proactivity of reading behaviour, while its mechanisms correlate with vocabulary and text comprehension outcomes. Scientific teaching methods are key to regulating motivation. Intrinsic motivation serves as the core driver for long-term enhancement of reading depth, while extrinsic motivation can act as a supplement. The synergistic application of both with teaching methods forms an effective logical loop in English reading instruction. Future research should further explore the suitability of different teaching methods for diverse student groups, providing more targeted instructional guidance. This will support students in achieving dual cognitive and affective growth in English reading, ultimately enhancing their comprehensive English proficiency and cross-cultural communication skills.

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