

ENGLISH READING PERFORMANCE, LEARNING INTEREST AND MOTIVATION STATUS IN VOCATIONAL COLLEGE WITHIN GUIZHOU PROVINCE, CHINA

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ABSTRACT

English education encompasses four fundamental skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Reading plays a pivotal role in the acquisition of the English language. While most students acknowledge the significance of English reading, there are still numerous challenges in its practical application. This study employed the English Reading Interest and Motivation Questionnaire along with the Star Reading test to examine the English reading performance, interest, and motivation of 102 freshmen from vocational colleges in Guizhou Province. By conducting descriptive and correlation analyses on the survey results, our aim is to present an overview of the current state of English reading proficiency among students in vocational colleges in Guizhou Province. Furthermore, we seek to analyze existing conditions and contributing factors while proposing corresponding solutions based on an extensive analysis of underlying causes. The objective of this study is to identify factors influencing the current situation regarding English reading among vocational students in Guizhou and suggest appropriate measures through comprehensive research analysis. The findings of this study can assist educators in conducting a more comprehensive analysis of students' sources, formulating appropriate instructional content based on individual student needs, and employing suitable pedagogical approaches to effectively enhance the quality of English reading instruction.

Keywords:

English reading performance, learning interest, motivation, vocational student, English reading status

INTRODUCTION

The English teaching curriculum encompasses four fundamental components: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Different courses exhibit distinct characteristics. Reading plays a pivotal role in facilitating individuals' effective acquisition of information from external sources. The Vocational Education College English Curriculum Standards (2021 edition) (MOE.PRC, 2021) explicitly emphasize the urgent need to enhance students' proficiency in English reading. To meet these standards, it is essential for grammar professors at the intermediate stage of subject learning to employ various methods such as serial memory blocks to facilitate comprehensive mastery and alleviate vocational students' anxiety towards English reading. This approach aims to cultivate their interest in English reading and ultimately improve their language acquisition and utilization skills (Xiang & Shi, 2022). Through an assessment of the levels of English reading among vocational college students, Liang (2019) discovered that approximately 80% of students failed to reach the passing level. Further analysis of the test content revealed lower scores on more academic text types like argumentative essays compared to narrative essays. Considering the current state of vocational students' performance in English reading, both objective factors and subjective factors contribute to this situation (Liu, 2020). By analyzing the results of an interest and motivation survey as well as an English reading test administered to 102 vocational college students in Guizhou Province, China, this study aims to examine the present state of proficiency in English reading among these students.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Research Questions

There are two research questions in this study, and they are:

- (1) What is the current situation of vocational college students' English reading performance, learning interest and motivation in China context?
- (2) What factors influence the English reading performance, learning interest, and learning motivation of vocational college students in China?

Research Objectives

- (1) To identify the current situation of vocational college students' English reading performance, learning interest and motivation in China context.
- (2) To investigate the factors influencing English reading performance, learning interest, and learning motivation among vocational college students in China.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The teaching of reading plays a crucial role in enhancing students' English proficiency, as it facilitates the acquisition of extensive knowledge and enhances their practical application skills. Currently, numerous vocational institutions in China are actively addressing the unscientific practices in English instruction to optimize the effectiveness of language education and foster well-rounded individuals with comprehensive English competence (Wu, 2020). Through a questionnaire survey conducted on two natural science classes comprising of 72 students, Wang (2019) discovered that over 70% of vocational students perceived their English proficiency to be inferior compared to their high school years, and experienced difficulties when engaging in English reading activities upon entering college. Wang asserts that addressing this issue necessitates enhancing students' English reading abilities and modifying the teaching approach. However, it should be noted that the questionnaire survey may not accurately reflect students' actual reading performance. Liang (2019) enhanced this study by employing a questionnaire and test methodology. He administered a questionnaire survey to 264 freshmen across six natural science classes, while also utilizing six reading articles to assess their reading proficiency. Based on the evaluation results, Liang posits that students exhibit competence in comprehending narrative texts compared to argumentative and expository ones. Regrettably, he does not provide further elucidation for this phenomenon. Vocational students exhibit a lack of interest in the pursuit of English language acquisition. This deficiency can be primarily attributed to several key factors pertaining to their approach towards English learning: firstly, disparities exist in terms of proficiency levels; secondly, there is a disconnect between English language instruction and vocational-technical courses; thirdly, the psychology surrounding English language acquisition is distinct (Lei, 2017). The learning motivation of English reading was examined by Fu (2022) using the literature method. He posited that learning motivation played a pivotal role in influencing learning performance, and delving into motivational factors constituted an effective approach to enhancing learning outcomes.

In conclusion, it can be observed from previous research that numerous scholars have partially delineated the English proficiency of students in Chinese vocational colleges; however, an assessment of their reading skills is lacking. Simultaneously, the analysis of current circumstances has often treated interest and motivation for reading as separate entities without delving into their interconnection. Scholars propose a need to re-explore and organize the relationship between motivation, interest, and reading performance in conjunction with contemporary developments while objectively examining the present situation (Fu, 2022; Wu, 2020; Bao, 2021). The research gap lies in the fact that previous studies on students' English reading have examined their reading

performance, reading interest, and learning motivation separately, without integrating these three aspects. This study will employ the motivation and interest questionnaire in conjunction with a professional English reading assessment system to examine the English reading performance, learning interest, and motivation of students enrolled in vocational colleges. Additionally, it will analyze the factors contributing to the current situation, as well.

METHODOLOGY

Methods and Participants

The data collection method of questionnaire survey involves the development of comprehensive questionnaires and the solicitation of respondent answers in accordance with these questionnaires. These questionnaires consist of inquiries that are relevant to the research objective or an investigation form, which are commonly utilized in social research activities for gathering data. Researchers employ this tool to accurately and precisely measure the progression of social activities, applying sociological statistical methods to describe and analyze quantity, thereby obtaining necessary survey data (Xiao, 1995). This study utilized the English Reading Interest and Motivation questionnaire to examine the levels of interest and motivation towards English learning among 102 vocational freshmen in Guizhou, China. Simultaneously, a Star reading test was administered to all participants. The findings from both the reading test and questionnaire were analyzed to assess their English reading performance, learning interest, and motivation. Furthermore, this study aimed to identify the factors influencing their interest, motivation, and performance.

RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

Questionnaire

In order to assess the current motivation and interests in English reading among Chinese vocational students, this study utilized a Motivations and Interest for English Reading Questionnaire consisting of two parts: personal information about subjects in part one; self-assessment checklist for students in part two. Adapted from Gao's (2003a) proposed questionnaire and Oxford University's Learning Strategies scale (2008), it comprises 60 items presented exclusively in English language format scored on a range from 1 (Not matched.) to 5 (Completely matched).

Star Reading Test

The Lexile Reading measurement system was employed to administer reading performance using the Star Reading test as an assessment tool. The Star Reading English reading ability assessment system, developed by Renaissance Company (Yang, 2021), is a comprehensive and data-driven set of professional graded tests for evaluating English reading proficiency. Its efficacy has been extensively validated through over 400 research studies, garnering recognition from the scientific community. This computer adaptive test dynamically adjusts question difficulty based on students' responses, ensuring precise measurement of their English reading abilities (Byer, 2022). The reading test report encompassed the tester's Scaled score, alongside the scores obtained in each of the three sections, namely literature, informational text and language.

Data Collection and Analysis

The administration of both the questionnaire and reading comprehension test took place within a classroom setting, where every participant received an individual copy for completion. To ensure optimal subject cooperation as well as a high retrieval rate for both questionnaires and test papers, these materials were promptly collected upon completion. A total distribution count of 102 copies was achieved for each questionnaire/test paper pair, all successfully retrieved. Consequently, our analysis is based solely on valid returns expressed through numerical counts or percentages.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The present study aims to provide an in-depth analysis of the English reading performance, learning interest, and motivation among students in vocational colleges in Guizhou Province. Additionally, it seeks to explore the underlying factors contributing to these situations.

Findings

Current Situation of Learning Interest

In this study, there are a total of 30 interest-related questions, with an average score of 3.07 points and a standard deviation of 0.88 (see table 1).

Table 1: Findings of interest-related questions

N	Valid	102
	Missing	0
Mean		3.0722
Std. Deviation		.88441

The questionnaire results indicate that 90% of the students demonstrate an awareness of the significance of English reading in language acquisition, yet only 19.6% derive pleasure from it. Another 5.9% exhibit no interest in English reading whatsoever. Simultaneously, despite perceiving English reading as enjoyable (see table 2)

Table 2: Percentage of feeling enjoyable in English reading

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
lid	Not matched	6	5.9	5.9	5.9
	Mostly not matched	24	23.5	23.5	29.4
	Basicly matched	23	22.5	22.5	52.0
	Mostly matched	29	28.4	28.4	80.4
	Completely matched	20	19.6	19.6	100.0
	Total	102	100.0	100.0	

Only a meager 7.8% of students actively participate in independent reading following the completion of assignments given by their instructors. Faced with demanding reading materials, only a paltry 14.7

percent choose to persist and overcome the challenges they present. The atmosphere in the English reading class was deemed unsatisfactory by over 50% of the students. Additionally, over half of the students express feelings of boredom and distraction while engaging in English reading activities. The percentage of students who reported being able to keep pace with their teachers in class was less than 20 percent. Only 8.8% claim to possess the ability to resist external temptations and maintain focus for profound engagement in studying English literature study. Moreover, an overwhelming majority (over 90%) recognize that while engrossed in perusing English texts, they are able to forge personal connections and immerse themselves into a vivid realm. The majority of students in vocational colleges generally exhibit a lack of interest in English reading, while simultaneously expressing a greater demand for more engaging reading materials.

Current Situation of Learning Motivation

In terms of motivation, this questionnaire consists of 30 items pertaining to the motivation for learning English language, with an average score of 3.11 and standard deviation of 0.89.(see table 3)

Table 3: Finding of motivation-related questions

N	Valid	102
	Missing	0
Mean		3.1173
Std. Deviation		.88569

In this questionnaire, only 14.7% of the respondents indicate their proactive engagement in English reading classes, while less than 10% claim independence in previewing materials. Over half of the students express a preference for not being assigned tasks related to English reading. Consequently, without such assignments, most students would not actively pursue English reading activities. Merely 12.7% of those surveyed display enthusiasm towards enrolling in an English reading course. On the other hand, a significant majority (80%) express a desire to enhance their proficiency in English reading skills. Approximately three-quarters of the students indicate a predilection for reading materials pertaining to their individual interests, including topics related to customs and culture. Additionally, an exceedingly high percentage (95%) express a desire for content that directly relates to their academic discipline or prospective career.

In terms of motivational factors, significant contributions are observed from external stimuli like commendation received from educators and parents in conjunction with the potential real-life implications and academic benefits associated with reading activities aimed at enhancing understanding of novel ideas. Concurrently, intrinsic motivators encompassing the development of expressive capabilities, enhancement of logical reasoning skills, and expansionary experiences played pivotal roles in motivating students' engagement in English literature.

Current Situation of Reading Performance

The reading performance test utilized the Star reading test system to evaluate seven English abilities across three sections corresponding to the tester's Level. These abilities include Key Ideas and Details in literature, Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity; Key Ideas and Details in Information text, Craft and Structure, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity; Vocabulary Acquisition and Use in Language. Additionally, the scaled score ranging from 0 to 1400 was provided for each student.

The average scaled score of students on the test is 175.35, indicating a relatively low performance. The highest score achieve was 547, while the lowest score obtained is 74. With a

standard deviation of 96.646, there is considerable variation in student proficiency levels. Students scoring below 100 accounted for 26.6% of the total, those between 100 and 200 accounted for 48.1%, those between 200 and 300 accounted for 17.7%, and only a mere fraction (6.3%) scored above the threshold of 300.

In terms of domain scores (ranging from 0 to 99), vocabulary in the language sector attain the highest mean score at 38.86. However, craft and structure as well as integration of knowledge and ideas within Information text exhibited comparatively lower scores at 20.37 and 20.91 respectively. (see in table 4).

Table 4: Findings of Star reading test

		(Literature) Scaled Score	(Literature) Key and Details	(Literature) Reading Level of Complexity	(Information text) Key Ideas and Details	(Information text) Craft and Structure	(Information text) Knowledge and Complexity	(Information text) Range of Text and Complexity	(Language) Vocabulary and Acquisition Use
N	Valid	102	102	102	102	102	102	102	102
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		175.35	30.72	28.68	32.25	20.91	20.37	32.42	38.86
Std. Deviation		96.646	20.527	20.551	26.401	18.380	18.063	21.220	21.131
Percentiles	25	90.00	15.00	13.00	12.00	6.00	7.00	16.00	23.00
	50	166.00	29.00	27.00	30.00	18.00	17.00	31.00	40.00
	75	205.00	41.00	38.00	41.00	27.00	25.00	43.00	51.00

Correlations of Factors

We used a Pearson's correlation to understand whether there is an association between learning interest and reading performance. The two variables are interest, measured from 1-5. and reading performance score, measured from 0-1400. (Table 5)

Table 5: Correlations analysis between reading performance and learning interest

		Reading performance	Mean of interest
Reading performance	Pearson Correlation	1	.833**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	102	102
Mean of interest	Pearson Correlation	.833**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	102	102

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The Pearson Correlation figure, which is 0.833 in this case. Pearsons r varies between +1 and -1, where +1 is a perfect positive correlation, and -1 is a perfect negative correlation. 0 means there is no linear correlation at all.

Our figure of 0.833 indicates a very strong positive correlation. The greater the level of interest exhibited by test subjects towards English reading, the great the perform in English reading. And, the strength of the association is strong. $|r| > .5$

We were also interested in the 2-tailed significance value-which in this case is $<.000$. The standard alpha is 0.05, which means that our correlation is highly significance, not just a function of random sampling error.

We employed Pearson's correlation coefficient to examine the presence of a relationship between learning motivation and reading performance. The two variables under investigation include interest, assessed on a scale ranging from 1 to 5, and reading performance score, measured on a scale from 0 to 1400 (refer to Table 6).

Table 6: Correlations analysis between reading performance and learning motivation

		Reading performancee	Mean of motivation
Reading performancee	Pearson Correlation	1	.840**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	102	102
Mean of motivation	Pearson Correlation	.840**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	102	102

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Our correlation coefficient of 0.840 indicates a robust positive association, suggesting that as the level of motivation in English reading increases among test subjects, their performance in English reading also improves significantly. Moreover, the strength of this relationship is substantial ($|r| > .5$). Additionally, we observed a highly significant two-tailed p-value ($<.000$), surpassing the standard alpha level of 0.05 and confirming that our correlation is higher not merely attributable to random sampling error.

After analyzing the data, we have observed a strong correlation between learning interest and learning motivation (refer to Table 7). It is evident that levels of interest lead to greater motivation for learning.

	Mean of motivation	Mean of interst
Pearson Correlation	1	.994**
Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
N	102	102
Pearson Correlation	.994**	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
N	102	102

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study is to investigate the current state of English reading proficiency, learning interest, and motivation among students in vocational colleges. Our findings indicate that students in vocational colleges exhibit relatively poor English reading skills, with an average score of only 175 out of 1400 points. In terms of specific abilities, due to increased emphasis on vocabulary and grammar instruction by teachers, students tend to perform better in Vocabulary Acquisition and Use skills. However, they face challenges when it comes to comprehending main ideas, details, as well as handling a wide range of texts and complex information. This suggests that vocational students encounter difficulties in information-based reading to some extent.

In terms of students' engagement, majority of the students exhibit disinterest towards English reading; however, if the reading material aligns with their personal interests, this predicament can be ameliorated. Henceforth, it can be inferred that the content of reading materials significantly impacts students' level of interest in reading. Simultaneously, an optimal classroom environment and effective teaching methodologies also contribute to enhancing students' enthusiasm for learning.

The motivation for learning English is weakened in vocational colleges due to its status as a mere public course, which corresponds to the majors pursued by students. Simultaneously, inadequate teaching methods and content exert a negative impact on students' motivation for language acquisition.

Through the analysis, it becomes evident that a significant correlation exists between English reading performance and reading interest and motivation. Enhanced levels of motivation and keen interest among students invariably lead to improved English reading proficiency.

The findings from the questionnaire and reading comprehension test indicate that:

The English reading proficiency of students in vocational colleges is generally subpar.

There are significant variations in the English reading proficiency among students across different sectors within vocational colleges.

Students exhibit low levels of motivation and competence in their reading learning, with extrinsic motivation outweighing intrinsic motivation.

The improvement of English reading performance, reading interest, and motivation among students in vocational colleges can be achieved through the following measures. Firstly, enhancing the teaching mode of English reading to enhance students' independent reading ability is crucial. Chastain (1976) argued that teachers should primarily focus on encouraging students to read by selecting content that aligns with their interests and appropriate language difficulty levels. Additionally, providing specific guidance and planning auxiliary activities are essential components of this approach. Moreover, it is necessary for teachers to shift from the traditional translation and explanation-based teaching mode towards a student-centered approach such as task-based learning. Second, foster students' interest in reading. According to Lindgren's (1991) investigation on the impact of interest on learning outcomes, it was found that interest has a greater influence on learning effectiveness compared to intelligence. By enhancing the classroom content and selecting appropriate materials, the reading course can be made more engaging and captivating. Thirdly, foster students' intrinsic motivation for learning. The significance of learning motivation in education and psychology has long been a prominent research area, exerting a profound impact on the advancement of foreign language teaching and acquisition. Learning motivation is intricately linked to students' learning outcomes as it directly influences their proactive engagement in foreign language learning and their self-assurance in mastering English (Hou & Zhang, 2021). Intrinsic motivation serves as a catalyst for sustained student progress.

CONCLUSION

Based on the aforementioned results and discussions, it can be concluded that students in vocational colleges in Guizhou Province exhibit a low level of English reading proficiency along with limited interest and motivation towards English learning. Three factors have been identified as influencing students' reading performance: (1) teaching methods. The predominant focus of teachers on vocabulary and grammar explanations within reading materials tends to result in a relatively strong grasp of vocabulary and grammar but neglects comprehension and text processing. Furthermore, this pedagogical approach renders reading classes unstimulating for students, leading to a lack of motivation for active learning. (2) Reading materials. The selection of appropriate reading materials directly impacts students' interest and motivation, subsequently affecting their overall reading performance. Therefore, careful consideration must be given to the choice of suitable texts. (3) Students' individual abilities. The varying levels among vocational college students can significantly impact their subsequent performance as well as their interest and motivation towards English reading if their current level is not sufficiently mastered.

To enhance English reading scores, it is recommended to adopt student-centered teaching methods that foster students' interests and motivations for learning while incorporating topics that captivate their attention into the curriculum gradually enhancing enthusiasm for acquiring knowledge. These findings will serve as a valuable reference for adjusting teaching methods and content accordingly. Future research endeavors should focus on aligning appropriate teaching methods with the existing circumstances.

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