



# Chinese University Students' English Reading Strategies: An Analysis of the Current Situation and A Proposal for Enhancement

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**Abstract:** English reading strategies and awareness of reading strategies are of great significance for English learners to master and possess high English reading abilities, but in reality, learners' ability to apply English reading strategies is still unsatisfactory. Moreover, this issue seems to be a common and urgent issue for all learners of English as a second language. This study taking a Chinese university as an example, using the Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS) to measure three broad categories of reading strategies, 527 respondents involved, through comparing data mean values of English majors with non-English majors and the composite mean value of these respondents, found that: (a) English major students have higher reading strategy awareness than non-English major students; (b) English major and non-English major students are at different levels in terms of reading strategy awareness and generally have a moderate level of reading strategies; (c) There is great room for improvement in university students' reading strategy. Centering on how to make good use of the teaching resources of reading courses and how to use innovative ways and methods to enhance the awareness and ability of college students' reading strategies, this study puts forward four measures, namely, attaching importance to reading strategy education in reading course teaching, attaching importance to the leading role of reading course teachers in improving students' reading strategy level in curriculum teaching, attaching importance to students' main role, and strengthening students' reading strategy training.

**Keywords:** Chinese University Student, English Reading Strategies, Current Situation, Proposals

## Introduction

Reading strategies are generally regarded as a series of cognitive operations with clear goal orientation carried out by readers in the process of reading. Kung <sup>[1]</sup> in 2019 stated that reading strategy is one of the significant ways to enhance second language acquisition effectively. Reading strategies play an active role in students' reading literacy. When reading activities are in progress, if the strategy is used properly, it can reduce the load of working memory and promote the transmission of information, so it is helpful to understand the main idea of the article.

To improve reading ability, it cannot be separated from the proper use of reading strategies. Wang <sup>[2]</sup> in 2017 stated there were certain problems with both teaching and learning in English in China. English teachers still use the traditional teaching methods and spend most of the time teaching language knowledge such as grammar and words and ignoring the teaching of non-linguistic knowledge and do not give enough full attention to improving students' awareness of non-linguistic factors, such as reading strategy. Students are lack of knowledge of reading strategy, as a result, they failed to improve their reading. It is necessary to explore reading strategy as an individual affective factor that have great influence on reading.

There are a large number of learners in China who learn English as a second language, especially a large number of university students. How to improve their English reading strategies to help them improve their English proficiency is of great significance.

## Literature Review

Sheorey and Mokhtari <sup>[3]</sup> in 2001 said that procedures to assist students' comprehension significantly are reading strategies. Kung <sup>[4]</sup> in 2019 stated when students have reading skills, their skill will improve in many areas. This skill will give effects on their academic success. Yapp et al. <sup>[5]</sup> in 2021 stated that students who have reading strategies will have their way to interpret the meaning of a text that they have read. By using reading strategies, students can determine the important part of a text that they have read.

Domestic research on reading strategies in China began in the 1990s. Pan <sup>[6]</sup> in 2012 compared the differences between learners of different reading metacognitive strategies, and found that learners with high awareness of reading metacognitive strategies were significantly better than learners with low awareness when solving problems. Feng & Reynolds BL <sup>[7]</sup> in 2019 stated, recent research has highlighted the value of providing metacognitive guidance for learning English in a small group setting. The findings of their study highlight the importance of training students' self-regulated learning and suggest that the use of metacognitive prompts in a group setting is an effective means to boost EFL reading comprehension and the incidental vocabulary learning for Chinese university students. Yuan <sup>[8]</sup> in



2022 based on the data collected from 110 Chinese college students (Non-English major with similar English proficiency level) to explore in-depth the reading strategies employed in Chinese college students' English reading and the factors influencing the pattern of Chinese college students' English reading strategy use. It is found that there are differences among three types of reading strategies adopted by college students. He et al. <sup>[9]</sup> in 2022 investigated the level of metacognitive awareness of English reading strategies of third-grade 235 students in a university in northwest China and found that the students had a high level of metacognitive awareness of foreign language reading strategies as a whole.

These studies show the complex process of English learners' reading, and also highlight the importance of using good English reading strategies.

### **Description of the Study Area:**

Reading strategies, as the psychological and behavioral actions taken by readers to achieve the purpose of reading in the process of interacting with the article. It includes two aspects of meaning: First one is the techniques and skills used by readers in reading activities or before reading, highlighting the choice of reading methods, the planning and adjustment process in reading, and the self-psychological operation in reading. Second one, the regulation and control methods of these rules, methods and skills reflect the individual initiative, highlighting the interaction between readers and texts in reading process.

### **Statement of the Problem:**

English reading strategies and awareness of reading strategies are of great significance for English learners to master and possess high English reading abilities, but in reality, learners' ability to apply English reading strategies is still unsatisfactory. Moreover, this issue seems to be a common and urgent issue for all learners of English as a second language. Mokhtari and Sheorey <sup>[10]</sup> in 2002 pointed that low ability readers are not prepared to read academic reading materials such as textbooks and, further, tend not to possess the necessary reading strategies and skills for efficient comprehension. In our experiences in teaching developmental reading to college students, we consistently find that students who lack metacognitive awareness and control of reading strategies often have difficulties coping with academic reading materials such as textbooks. They tend to expend more time and energy struggling with individual words than on constructing meaning from the text-a condition which often results in a slow, bored, and choppy reading style that strains their attention and interest. Chen Min <sup>[11]</sup> in 2018 conducted a survey among 90 English major freshmen from a university in Yunnan, China, found that English major freshmen generally do not have a clear concept of reading skills and cannot distinguish between fast reading and reading comprehension. Therefore, further exploration is needed on how to improve English reading strategies for English learners.

### **Objective of the study:**

To survey the level of Chinese university students' English reading strategies.

To explore the difference of the students of reading strategies between English and non-English majors.

To verify the conclusions of previous researchers on the level of English reading strategies among university students.

### **Research Questions:**

1. What status of this Chinese university students' reading strategies level?
2. What the differences between non-English and English major students in reading strategies?
3. What ways do this Chinese university need to take to improve the English reading strategies of their students?

### **Research Approach:**

#### ***Participants:***

There are 16,462 students in this Chinese university in 2023. 700 of them are English majors. Using Raosoft calculator to get the sample size of English majors is 249. For the sample size of the non-English major students, this study selected the 2 largest population majors of non-English majors, Major of Law with the population of 495 and Major of Computer Science and Technology with the population of 497. The total population is 992. Same using Raosoft calculator to get the sample size is the number of 278. All together 527 respondents were involved in this study.

***Instrument for the Study:*** The Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS) was used. It was developed and adopted by Mokhtari and Sheorey <sup>[12]</sup> in 2002. The purpose of using this questionnaire is to find out students' reading strategies, especially reading strategies that they mostly used, and intended to measure adolescent and adult ESL students' metacognitive awareness and perceived use of reading strategies while reading academic materials such as textbooks. The SORS consists of 30 items, each of which uses a 5 point Likert scale ranging from 1("I never or almost never do this") to 5 ("I always or almost always do this") and measures three broad categories of reading strategies: namely, (a) Global reading strategies (13 items), (b) Problem Solving reading strategies (8 items), and (c) Support reading strategies (9 items).

In the data analysis of the scale, the values of each item will be accumulated and averaged, and the resulting mean will be classified according to the following criteria. "Legend: 4.50 – 5.00 = Very High (VH); 3.50 – 4.49= High (H); 2.50 – 3.49= Somewhat High (SWH); 1.5 – 2.49= Slightly High (SLH); 1 – 1.49 = Not at all High (NH)."

**Procedures:** This study use the Questionnaire Online App, the respondents were given the questionnaire through giving the link of the questionnaire, and let them finish this questionnaire on their cellphone. The total time of answer is estimated to be approximately 10 to 12 minutes, depending on the students' overall language and reading ability. They should also be encouraged to respond honestly to each statement in the inventory and to ask questions about any aspect of the instrument they do not understand. It took 10 days to distribute the questionnaires at English major classes and non-English major classes. Since cluster sampling was used in the study, the researcher made sure that all questionnaires were 100 percent collected.

**Results and Discussion:**

The collected data were entered and analyzed by using SPSS 26(Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) program. Descriptive statistics on the data are utilized to answer the above research questions of this study through relevant mean analysis.

**Levels of Students' Reading Strategies Level:**

	English majors			Non English majors			Over-all		
	Mean	R	VI	Mean	R	VI	Mean	VI	R
Global Reading Strategy(GLOB)	<b>3.59</b>	2	H	<b>3.37</b>	2	SWH	<b>3.48</b>	SWH	2
Support Reading Strategy(SUP)	<b>3.54</b>	3	H	<b>3.34</b>	3	SWH	<b>3.43</b>	SWH	3
Problem-Solving Reading Strategy(PROB)	<b>3.65</b>	1	H	<b>3.41</b>	1	SWH	<b>3.52</b>	H	1
<b>Composite Mean</b>	<b>3.59</b>		<b>H</b>	<b>3.37</b>		<b>SWH</b>	<b>3.48</b>	<b>SWH</b>	

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Table 1 Levels of Students' Reading Strategies

Overall, the three aspects of students' reading strategies have a composite mean of 3.48, which is in the SWH level (a middle level). The average values for English majors and non-English majors are 3.59 and 3.37, respectively, belonging to the High level and the SWH level (a middle level). The mean values of English major students in all three dimensions are in the High level, while the mean values of non-English major students are all in the SWH level (a middle level). It indicates that the overall perceived use of reading strategies by the two groups of students is still in the SWH level (a middle level), with English major students having a higher level of reading strategy use than non-English major students. Specifically,

The top ranked one is PROB, with an overall mean of 3.52, which is within the High level and the only dimension among the three dimensions that is within the High level. The average values for English majors and non-English majors are 3.65 and 3.41, respectively, belonging to the High level and the SWH level.

The second and third ranked individuals are GLOB and SUP, with an average of 3.48 and 3.43, respectively, both within the SWH level.

This result is consistent with the research results of Ika Nur Aini, Suvi Akhriyah <sup>[13]</sup> in 2022. They took 74 ninth graders as the subjects of their study in one of the junior high schools in Surabaya, Indonesia and found that Problem-Solving Strategies (PROB) was the most commonly used reading strategy for secondary school students. The second is Global Reading Strategies (GLOB), SUP got the fewest score.

Here are two empirical studies conducted in recent years, with English major and non-English major college students as the survey subjects, and the results are generally consistent with the data analysis above. Tang Yan <sup>[14]</sup> in 2022 took 219 English majors as research subjects from one university in Heilongjiang, China and the results were the reading strategies of English majors are at a high level. There were differences in the use of reading strategies between the students with different reading self-efficacy. This is consistent with Liu Jing's <sup>[15]</sup> in 2017 study on reading strategies among 120 sophomore non-English major students in a certain university in Shandong, which found that the subjects did not use English reading strategies frequently and was in a moderate level of reading strategies.

The reasons are as follows:

Firstly, English major students have better knowledge reserves and ability improvement in reading strategies than non-English major students. English major students have received more professional guidance in learning English reading strategies during their university years compared to non-English major students, gaining corresponding professional knowledge and abilities. Through the accumulation of reading strategy knowledge and guidance and

insights in application skills, English major students will demonstrate a stronger ability state in the application of English reading strategies.

Secondly, English major students engage in more training and practice in English reading strategies than non-English major students. English major students invest more time and energy in English learning. They receive more English reading training, including reading strategy training, and are more proficient in using Problem Solving Strategy, Global Reading Strategy, Support Reading Strategy, in English reading.

Thirdly, English majors have more psychological advantages in reading strategies than non-English majors. Compared with non-English majors, English majors have higher psychological advantages in long-term reading strategy knowledge storage and ability training, which can be seen in the previous data analysis of reading self-efficacy. English majors show greater confidence in reading strategies.

### **Conclusion:**

From the analysis of empirical survey data, it can be seen that (a) English major students have higher reading strategy awareness than non-English major students; (b) English major and non-English major students are at different levels in terms of reading strategy awareness and generally have a moderate level of reading strategies; (c) There is great room for improvement in university students' reading strategy.

### **Proposals:**

Centering on how to make good use of the teaching resources of reading courses and how to use innovative ways and methods to enhance the awareness and ability of college students' reading strategies, this study puts forward four measures, namely, attaching importance to reading strategy education in reading course teaching, attaching importance to the leading role of reading course teachers in improving students' reading strategy level in curriculum teaching, attaching importance to students' main role, and strengthening students' reading strategy training.

(a) Attaching importance to reading strategy education in reading course teaching.

In the consciousness of teaching design, teachers attach importance to the teaching of reading strategy content. Chen Min <sup>[16]</sup> in 2018 found that English major freshmen generally do not have a clear concept of reading skills and cannot distinguish between fast reading and reading comprehension. Tuhumury <sup>[17]</sup> in 2020 argued that teaching reading strategies are more difficult so that it requires a more effective approach. The possible reason is that teachers do not teach reading strategies in detail, especially GLOB strategies. Mokhtari and Sheorey <sup>[18]</sup> in 2002 pointed it is important for metacognitive reading strategies instruction to be integrated within the overall reading curriculum so as to enhance students' metacognition about reading. As can be seen from the above existing research conclusions, reading classroom is an important way for college students to improve their English reading, among which strengthening the teaching of reading strategies is beneficial to the improvement of college students' reading strategies and reading comprehension. Through the detailed introduction of the content of reading strategies (PROB, GLOB and SUP) and specific use methods of reading strategies, to improve students' awareness of reading strategies, to achieve the improvement of students' reading comprehension.

In the content of teaching design, teachers attach importance to the correlation between reading strategies and reading comprehension and reading ability. Sari <sup>[19]</sup> in 2016 found that students with good reading strategies do not always have good reading comprehension. The result of this study was inconsistent with Thesia <sup>[20]</sup> in 2019, Sun et al. <sup>[21]</sup> in 2021, who found a correlation between reading strategy and reading comprehension. This could be caused by not all reading strategies have effect on the students' reading comprehension as Erliana <sup>[22]</sup> in 2015 stated that reading strategies are not determinants of students' understanding. Furthermore, another possible explanation is the students' lack of knowledge about various reading strategies, especially students who are still in the beginning level. Whether improving the awareness of reading strategies can definitely promote the improvement of students' reading comprehension and reading ability remains to be further explored. However, before that, this study tends to suggest that there is a positive correlation between awareness of reading strategies and reading comprehension and reading ability, that is, it is necessary to enhance students' awareness of reading strategies through classroom teaching, so as to improve their reading comprehension and reading ability.

In the course teaching and training process, the selection of reading materials should be strategic. Mokhtari and Sheorey <sup>[23]</sup> in 2002 pointed that low ability readers are not prepared to read academic reading materials such as textbooks and, further, tend not to possess the necessary reading strategies and skills for efficient comprehension. In our experiences in teaching developmental reading to students, we consistently find that students who lack metacognitive awareness and control of reading strategies often have difficulties coping with academic reading materials such as textbooks. They tend to expend more time and energy struggling with individual words than on constructing meaning from the text—a condition which often results in a slow, bored, and choppy reading style that strains their attention and interest. Freahat <sup>[24]</sup> in 2014 stated that the harder the text, the more difficult it is to understand, and students are more frustrated with the text. Furthermore, most of the statements in this aspect allow students more time to underline, organize, summarize, and take notes. When students faced difficulties in reading, they just read without paying more attention to the text. So it can be seen that if students give up reading, there are subjective reasons for their reading attitude and reading self-efficacy, objective reasons for the text being too difficult, and the inability to do anything about reading strategies. Krashen's second language acquisition theory also requires

that learners should achieve language learning through acquisition and choose "understandable materials input" in terms of learning materials. In other words, in this study, One of the solutions to improve students' reading acquisition is to choose reading materials of different levels suitable for students of different reading levels to guide students gradually from reading general reading materials to reading high-level academic reading materials, in this process, students can feel the joy and harvest of reading, and thus improve their reading ability, so as to promote their reading growth.

(b) Attaching importance to teachers' leading role in improving students' reading strategy level in curriculum teaching. Firstly, attaching importance to the improvement of teachers' reading strategy literacy. Mokhtari and Sheorey <sup>[25]</sup> in 2002 pointed that mere awareness of certain reading strategies does not always translate into actual use of the strategies concerned. Additionally, mere awareness of strategies is not sufficient; rather, teacher judgment and common sense are clearly required to validate the discrepancy between students' beliefs about using the strategies and actual practice. The level of teachers' reading strategy literacy determines the quality of the design and implementation of reading courses, as well as the resulting impact on students' reading strategy literacy.

Secondly, encouraging teachers to conduct relevant research in the field of improving students' reading strategies. Ika Nur Aini , Suvi Akhiriyah <sup>[26]</sup> in 2022 pointed that teachers are encouraged to investigate more and introduce students to the appropriate reading strategy. It highlights the role of teachers in improving students' reading self-efficacy and helps students develop good reading self-efficacy. In class, teachers should provide students with positive feedback and encouraging evaluation, so that students can realize their own potential and advantages, and increase students' confidence in their reading ability; Set up a successful example for students to overcome reading difficulties and constantly improve their reading level, so that students can bravely face the setbacks and challenges in learning, and improve their reading ability in the reading practice struggle; Guide students to set reasonable reading goals, so that students can experience the success and harvest of reading, and increase their interest and motivation in reading; Strengthen students' practice in using reading strategies and improve their skills in using reading strategies.

(c) Attaching importance to students' main role.

From the original intention of questionnaire design, Mokhtari and Sheorey <sup>[27]</sup> in 2002 said the information derived from the instrument (SORS) can be helpful to students increasing their awareness of reading strategies while reading, improving their understanding of the reading process, and enhancing confidence in their own reading ability. This information can also be helpful to teachers in helping their students learn to become "constructively responsive" and thoughtful readers. Li Yan <sup>[28]</sup> in 2021 made a survey in an university of Shanxi Yuncheng, China and 276 English major students of Sophomore and Junior, and the data analysis results show there was a significant positive correlation between the use of reading strategies and self-efficacy; the use of global strategies had the greatest influence on learners' self-efficacy; there are significant differences between high and low self-efficacy readers in the use of reading strategies. To promote the awareness of reading strategy and reading ability by improving students' reading self-efficacy.

(d) Strengthening students' reading strategy training

Wang Lina and Wu Yongyi <sup>[29]</sup> in 2017 conducted a meta-analysis on the impact of reading strategy training on students' reading comprehension ability, and the results showed that "students who received reading strategy training improved their reading comprehension ability more significantly than those who did not receive reading strategy training.

To teachers, teachers need to overcome the lack of training awareness. English reading teachers focus more on teaching and evaluating professional areas such as English language knowledge points, English language learning skills, English language ability, and English language learning effectiveness in the courses, while there is little training on background skills that students should possess beyond language learning, including memory ability, reading ability, speaking ability, communication ability, etc. Because teachers often believe that these abilities should be already possessed by students before language learning, students often lack sufficient training in memory, reading, speaking, and communication skills during second language learning, and their corresponding abilities cannot be improved.

To students, students need sufficient skill training, such as how to quickly remember, how to remember for a long time, and how to form one's own personalized memory methods. These all involve skills in memory use. However, in addition to professional courses and occasional elective courses on memory ability or skills on university campuses, corresponding skill training and ability enhancement need to be completed by students themselves, and there is no good mentor guidance or relevant reference materials, Even if very few students improve their memory ability and skills through self-training, the effect is not very good.

To teachers and students, they need to sufficient investment in training or practice time. Without proper training awareness, professional skill training, and a series of activities such as courses, studies, and social interactions during university life, students have very little time available for memory training or practice, and the improvement of memory ability and other reading strategies becomes a "castle in the air".

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