# Study of Factors That Influence Pathein University Undergraduate Students' English Reading Motivation

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**Abstract**

This study attempts to identify the underlying factors that influence Pathein University undergraduate students' English reading motivation and to understand Pathein University undergraduate students' reading habit and the amount reading. The population was 180 English major students from Pathein University. The instruments used to gather the data was the questionnaire using 5 Likert scale adapted from Komiyama (2013) based on Wigfield and Guthrie's (1997) *Eleven Dimensions of Reading Motivation*. In addition, semi structured interview was also used to select students, so areas which need clarification could be explained clearly. The findings of this study showed that the undergraduate students of English major from Pathein University have 'high' motivation towards English reading. The findings also indicated that 'socialization and good grades' have no motivating effect to the students. There are few pedagogical implications in this study. Among them are the role of teachers and the institution to foster students reading motivation not only in English but also other languages. Parents are also recommended to do their part to inculcate the love for reading at home as this is the first place where the reading habit can be developed.

**Keywords:** Pathein University, Undergraduate Students, English Reading Motivation, reading habit, dimensions

## Introduction

Reading plays a vital role in one's success in academic life. It is viewed as a crucial skill for foreign language learners to improve their language ability. Nunan (2003) defined reading as a fluent process of readers combining information from a text and their own background knowledge to build meaning. As reading is an effortful activity that students often choose to do or not to do, it therefore needs motivation. Researchers have long recognized that motivation cannot be neglected in understanding how second language reading works. As motivation tends to be one of the reasons that influence students' attitude with regards to reading, this area

therefore can be regarded as an important topic to be discussed specifically in language pedagogy.

When it comes to individual differences in reading literacy, students' reading behavior is a prominent explanatory variable (Cunningham & Stanovich, 2001), and reading behavior is often seen as one cause of low reading literacy (Watkins & Edwards, 1992). This is therefore important to understand the importance of reading motivation because in the long run, it is believed that reading can increase the automaticity of the processes needed for comprehension (e.g., decoding skills or practice in an effective use of reading strategies may both free resources for higher comprehension processes; Perfetti, Landi, & Oakhill, 2005).

**Statement of the Problem**

A reading knowledge of a foreign language is often important to academic studies, professional success, and personal development in many parts of the world. This is particularly true of English as many professional, technical and scientific literatures are published in English today. In fact, it is frequently the case that the ability to read in English is required of students by their subject departments, often assessed by a test of reading comprehension. All that is needed by learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), as well as of other foreign languages is reading ability. Unfortunately, not all students possess the motivation to read. One task teacher's face is to understand what motivates individual students to reach their different comprehension level. For teachers therefore, fostering the love for reading is crucial to promote reading literacy (Gambrell, 1996). Roger (2012) stated that a lack of reading motivation affects the students' reading engagement. Therefore, lack of motivation might lead to a decline in reading that influence students reading achievement which is necessary to all academic subjects.

**Significance of the Study**

There are different reasons why this particular research is being chosen. First, Kintsch & Rawson (2005) argued that reading could lead to an increase in prior knowledge because of the information the learners gain from different text. Therefore, the more prior knowledge the learners have, the more retrieval knowledge is readily available to support text comprehension. For this reason, once students are motivated to read, this might lead to an increase of students' development in reading comprehension that could lead to vocabulary development.

Second, reading has a tendency to influence a student's self-esteem and self-efficacy because it can boost students' cognitive activities which help to extend students vocabulary by learning new word meanings from the reading context. Thus, students who are motivated to read develop their reading skills faster and become efficient and competent readers. Compared to undergraduate students, graduate students are forced to read and their motivation level to read is

assumed to be high. Therefore, investigating the motivation level of undergraduate students might be more beneficial and worthwhile than graduate students.

Third, reading has a prominent position in Second language learning. According to Sweeney (1993), there are three reasons for ensuring the importance of reading in Second language learning, these concerns with reading techniques, language acquisition and motivation. Therefore, once the factors are recognized, it can be easier for the teacher to help students improve their reading literacy.  As Guthrie (2008) posits, student's motivation is integral to reaching comprehension and achievement.

Fourth, although motivation has been studied extensively, there has been limited attention given to the role of motivation in reading development. In fact, there is a lack of current research on the topic of young adult literacy in general, as well as, a lack of research regarding adult reading motivation (Cassidy et al., 2010; National Research Council, 2012; Schutte & Malouff; 2007). Furthermore, debate exists regarding the impact of extrinsic motivation on individuals' intrinsic motivation to read (Chen & Wu, 2010; Deci et al., 1999; Gurland & Glowacky, 2011; Huang, 2011; Marinak & Gambrell, 2008; Smith & Westberg, 2011; Thompson et al., 2008).

Fifth, the importance of motivation in L1 reading development suggests the need to thoroughly explore the potential impact of motivation on L2 reading behaviors and outcomes. This need seems particularly prominent in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) contexts where students are often under tremendous pressure to become highly proficient in L2 readers. Therefore, identifying students L2 reading motivation might be an indication to their L1 reading motivation.

Sixth, providing young adults the opportunity to voice the influence of factors on their reading experiences has offered insight on the topic to aid with motivating individuals to read. Additionally, findings from this study could be used in developing and designing effective reading programs for young adult. Because findings from studies reveal that intrinsic reading motivation declines for adolescents and that extrinsic motivation has been shown to stabilize as early as fourth grade, it is important to better understand these factors and their long-term effects on readers as students or learners reach adulthood (Paige, 2011; Pecjak & Kosir, 2008).

As motivation tends to be one of the reasons that influence students' attitude with regards to reading, this area therefore can be regarded as an important topic needs to be discussed specifically in language pedagogy (Kormos & Csizer, 2010). As Gambrell, (1996, p.15,) stresses 'teachers value motivation as it often makes the difference between learning that is superficial and shallow, and learning that is deep and internalized,' being able to investigate and understand students' reading motivation can be an important process, therefore teaching reading can be

fostered to students' learning, and in the future, teachers and educators will be able to better understand students drive to read. To date, very few studies have been conducted based on understanding students reading motivation in the context of Myanmar young adult students.

More importantly, as there was no previous research emphasis on this study at Pathein University, the findings therefore would be beneficial for the University administrator/principal, lecturers and students at large. It would also bring advantages to the future researchers. By conducting this research, it can be a tool to help students to understand the importance of reading literacy not only in the English classroom but also as other source of entertainment at home, such as reading for pleasure.

As reading is regarded as a process of decoding, thus this moves from the bottom to the top of the system of language. As well as, this study can motivate other Universities in Myanmar to underline the importance of reading and English reading motivation as other factors to foster learning autonomy.

**Review of Literature**

Theorists within the field of motivation have presented justifications for students who become motivated to complete tasks such as reading. Many researchers interested in motivation focus on students' sense of efficacy beliefs about their ability. Intrinsic motivation is necessary for learning and is also an identified goal of education in general (Pulfrey et al., 2013; Spinath & Steinmayr, 2008; Spinath & Steinmayr, 2012). An intrinsically motivated student will be enthusiastic toward reading, read more, and therefore demonstrate a tremendous level of comprehension (Schiefele, et al., 2012; Taboada et al., 2009). Sources of intrinsic motivation include positive reading experiences, books regarded as pleasurable, realizing the personal importance of reading, and interest in the topic of reading (Becker et al., 2010).

Wang and Guthrie (2004) stated that intrinsic motivation is critical to successful reading. Students who are engaged and intrinsically motivated to read are stated to have high satisfaction with their reading involvements. Therefore, they engage in reading more often, which leads to improved learning, increased reading skill, and higher academic achievement (Becker et al., 2010; Froiland et al., 2012; Lepper et al., 2005; Mol & Bus, 2011; Senn, 2012). The extent and amount of their reading far surpasses than students who are not intrinsically motivated (Putman & Walker, 2010; Wang & Guthrie, 2004). Those who perceive themselves as competent become increasingly more intrinsically motivated (Guay et al., 2010). Therefore, it is believed that the advancement of this form of motivation is associated with an increase in reading comprehension (Becker et al., 2010; Miller, 2012; Putman & Walker, 2010).

On the other hand, extrinsically motivated students have a tendency to be cautious on the reward and recognition in reading instead of learning from texts (Guthrie & Humenick, 2004; Lepper et al., 2005; Wang & Guthrie, 2004). Unlike intrinsic motivation, extrinsically motivated students participate in an activity for its potential to help them earn a good grade, please a teacher, or achieve the respect of peers (Froiland, 2011). The focus is on superficial learning outcomes; therefore, these students will not actively participate in classroom learning (Crow & Small, 2011; Law, 2008). Student attention is distracted from the text, greatly reducing text comprehension (Wang & Guthrie, 2004).

One and only focus on extrinsic motivation can considerably reduce intrinsic interest as well as the pleasure for learning alone (Crow & Small, 2011; Lepper et al., 2005). Such motivation has a significant negative effect on the intrinsic motivation to perform tasks that would be viewed as interesting (Crow & Small, 2011). Guthrie and Humenick (2004) maintained that students who depend upon teachers, peers, or methods other than themselves to provide the benefits of reading are considered to be extrinsically motivated because these sources are all considered to be external in nature.

Three of the evident theories of motivation related to this study are "self-efficacy theory, self-worth theory, and achievement goal theory". Many researchers interested in motivation focus on students' sense of efficacy and beliefs about their ability (e.g., Bandura, 1977; Eccles et al., 1983; Nicholls, 1990). Schunk and his colleagues demonstrated that student's sense of efficacy relates to their academic performance, and that training students both to be more efficacious and to believe they are efficacious will improve their achievement in different subject areas such as math and reading (Schunk, 1991; Schunk & Zimmer- man, 1997). An important implication of this work for motivation to read is that when students believe they are competent and efficacious at reading they should be more likely to engage in reading.

Renandya (2015) assumed that students with a sense of self-worth recognize the importance of having the ability to read well. They know that they would be respected, valued, and are loved by others as people. Students become more motivated when they feel good about themselves as a result of their being able to complete a task (Morgan et al., 2008; Seifert, 2004). Because of this they are likely to do things that intensify their personal value and worth and avoid face-threatening activities as these can weaken their self-worth. This self-worth theory of motivation (Covington, 1998) is particularly relevant for adult learners of English who often have to participate in potentially face-threatening activities.

On the other hand, a primary feature of achievement goal theory is the determination of goals. Achievement goals are the reason many students engage in a task (Spinath & Steinmayr,

2012; Was, 2006). The basis of achievement goal theory is that behavior is tied to the need to complete specific tasks. Task-mastery goals portray students' keenness to improve ability and understand instructional material (Schiefele, et al., 2012). Students focus on learning material by securing new skills, attempting to comprehend their work, strengthening their confidence, and mastering or achieving the task at hand (Ames, 1992; Was, 2006). Students believe that effort leads to success or mastery.  Students with a goal of task mastery invest time in learning tasks through a variety of strategies and prefer challenging work (Fitch, 2013). They are viewed as self-regulating and self-determining, which in turn, foster cognitive development (Seifert, 2004).

**The Aim of the Study**
- To identify the underlying factors that influence Pathein University undergraduate students' English reading motivation.
- To understand students reading habit and their reading amount.

**Method**
**Participants**
    A total of 180 undergraduate students whose age ranges between 16 to 20 years from the English Department of Pathein university, Myanmar, were selected for the study. The number of male students and female students were 40 and 140 respectively.

**Material**
    Motivation for Reading in English Questionnaire given by Komiyama (2013) was used to assess the reading motivation. However, some of the statements were modified and added to the MREQ to suit the context of the study and then the questionnaire was verified and validated by the three experts. The modified questionnaire consists of total 40 questions and were divided into 8 dimensions namely, (1) Curiosity, (2) Involvement, (3) Challenge, (4) Competition, (5) Recognition, (6) Compliance, (7) Social, (8) Grades. There were 5 items for each dimension.

**Procedure**
    The study takes a form of mixed method, (Explanatory Design) that can be used to obtain both quantitative and qualitative data in order to get a holistic understanding of the research topic. The researcher distributed the questionnaires among the undergraduate students whose age range between 16 to 20 years. The participants were required to state their perceptions on reading motivation in English by ticking in the box. The box has corresponding values of 5-point Likert scales. The criteria range from 5 to 1, with the interpretation of 5= Strongly Agree, 4= Agree, 3= Neutral, 2= Disagree and 1= Strongly Disagree.

The possible total mean score was 5.00 and the level of motivation was determined on the basis of the total score. The score between 1.00-1.50 was considered as a Very low motivator, 1.51-2.50 as a Low motivator, 2.51-3.50 as Neither high nor low motivator, 3.51-4.50 as a High motivator and 4.51-5.00 as a Very high motivator. After the quantitative data collection, the researcher made appointments with 10 students who were randomly selected for the follow-up interview.

**Data Analysis**

Collected data were statistically analysed in order to identify students' English reading motivation. Then, the follow-up interviews were conducted to gain insights and understand students' response. Through analyzing the interviews with the ten participants, the researcher firstly looked at the transcriptions and identified those that were relevant to answer the research questions. Secondly, the researcher went through the audio file and transcribed all the relevant parts. The data collected from the interviews were used to support the interpretation of the quantitative data being analyzed.

**Findings and Discussion**

The aim of the study was to identify the factors that influence Pathein University undergraduate students' reading motivation.

*Table 1: Summary of the findings of Year1 and Year 2 English major Students' English reading motivation at Pathein University*

| Factors of English reading motivation | N | Mean | SD | Motivation Level | Statistical Interpretation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Curiosity | 180 | 3.76 | .86 | Agree | High motivator |
| Involvement | 180 | 3.68 | .83 | Agree | High motivator |
| Preference of challenge | 180 | 3.86 | .78 | Agree | High motivator |
| Competition | 180 | 3.70 | .97 | Agree | High motivator |
| Recognition | 180 | 3.67 | .95 | Agree | High motivator |
| Compliance | 180 | 3.68 | .90 | Agree | High motivator |
| Social | 180 | 3.38 | .98 | Neutral | Neither high nor low motivator |
| Grades | 180 | 3.35 | .97 | Neutral | Neither high nor low motivator |
| Total | 180 | 3.63 | .90 | Agree | High motivator |

Table 1 illustrated the overall mean scores and the standard deviation of the eight factors of reading motivation which are *Curiosity, Involvement, Preference of challenge, Competition, Recognition, Compliance, social preferences and Grades*. Based on the interpretation, *Social* and *Grades* factors are considered to be 'neutral' among the eight factors which means these factors have 'neither high nor low motivating factors' to students while the six factors are considered high motivators to students English reading motivation in which *Preference of challenge* as a factor is considered as main contributing factor. It was followed by the other two intrinsic factors, *Involvement* and *Curiosity* with .83 and .86 respectively. As indicated in the result, students tend to be motivated to read English reading materials differently, some tend to be intrinsic and others extrinsic.

## Reading Habit and Reading Amount

*Table 2: Percentage of students categorized by reading habits.*

| English Reading Habit | Number | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Only when teacher ask | 74 | 41.1 |
| Weekends, holidays | 52 | 28.9 |
| Whenever I have time | 36 | 20.0 |
| Every night before I sleep | 18 | 10.0 |
| Total | 180 | 100.0 |

Table 2 illustrated the findings of students' English reading habits. Out of 180 students 74 of those or 41.1% stated that they read, "Only when teacher ask"; 52 students or 28.9 of the students read on "Weekends, holidays", followed by 20% or 36 students, "Whenever I have time" and 10% or 18 students read, "Every night before I sleep".

The result indicated that the amount of time students spent to read tend to be influenced by the number of books they have and their reading habit.

*Table 3: Frequency of average reading hours spent for class*

| Hours spent reading (per week) | Frequency (school reading) | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| 1-5 hours | 81 | 45.0% |
| 6-10 hours | 39 | 21.7% |
| 11-above | 60 | 33.3% |
| Total | 180 | 100% |

*Table 4: Frequency of average reading hours spent for pleasure*

| Hours spent for reading (per week) | Frequency (reading for pleasure) | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| 1-5 hours | 113 | 62.8% |
| 6-10 hours | 53 | 29.4% |
| 11- above | 14 | 7.8% |
| Total | 180 | 100% |

Table 3 and 4 presented the percentage of students according to the average hours of reading in English students spent for their study and reading for pleasure. According to the table, 45% of the students spent one to five hours reading in school, while 62.8% spent the same amount of time on reading for pleasure. Moreover, when 21.7% of the students spent 6 to 10 hours to read for academic purposes, 29.4% spent up to 10 hours for reading for pleasure. In contrast only 33.3% of the students spent more than 11 hours per week reading in school while 7.8% spent the same amount of time reading for pleasure.

**Discussion**

To become lifelong literacy learners, students must be motivated to engage in literacy activities. Possessing the cognitive skills necessary for reading itself is not enough. An indication that reading motivation is multidimensional comes from the analysis on the mean scores, which showed that students endorsed some dimensions of reading motivation more strongly than they did others. Both intrinsic (e.g. curiosity, involvement, challenge) and extrinsic (e,g. competition, recognition) dimensions were included among the high motivators. The least prominent motivators are social and grades. Thus, most students do not seem to be highly motivated to read for social interaction as well as for earning good points.

It is important to create a shared experience centered on reading. Over time, providing a stimulating instructional environment with classroom and instructional practices may lead to an increase in generalized intrinsic reading motivation. By using books as a vehicle for sharing, it can be a contribution to interpersonal connections and friendships, which are positively associated with one's well-being.

As noted in an article of National Endowment for the Arts, (2007), leisure reading, especially among adolescents, has declined over the last 20 years. However, as the second objective of this study was to examine the students' reading habit and reading amount, the result

indicated that the students seemed to enjoy leisure reading than reading for school. This result can be supported by the survey done as these students suggested that 'grade' was not one of the motivating factors why they read.

Providing material that appeals to students would also encourage them to engage in voluntary reading, which is positively associated with increased academic achievement. In other words, if the teacher wanted to increase the amount of time students spend engaged both in classroom reading and voluntary reading, it is essential that they offer reading material that is interesting to students and it will promote learning. Besides, learning can be more meaningful when the students have a sense of control over their learning.

In addition, the result presented above provides some guidelines for schools and teachers in developing classroom instructional programs designed to increase motivation to read for academic and leisure purposes. If the students are provided to access to reading material and appropriate incentives, it can be helpful to promote increased leisure reading, especially when the reading material selection is such that students find it interesting, offers opportunities for learning, and provides for autonomous experiences.

**Summary and Conclusion**

The aim of the present study was to identify the factors that influence undergraduates' English reading motivation. A total number of 180 students (40 males and 140 females) from English Department of Pathein University were randomly selected for the current study. The subjects were provided with the questionnaire, which was validated by three experts. The questionnaire included 40 questions.

The first objective of the study was to determine the factors that influence the students' English reading motivation. The analysis of mean scores on eight dimensions showed students' motivation are 'high' in terms of 'curiosity', 'involvement', 'challenge', 'competition', 'recognition', and 'compliance' and neutral with regards to 'social' and 'grades' factors. These findings suggest students read for both intrinsic and extrinsic reasons, especially in English. One aspect that indicated in this study is that, if topics interest and challenge students reading ability, they are likely motivated to read because of the 'curiosity' factor.

The second objective of the study was to understand the students' reading habit and reading amount. The result illustrated that students who own more books and reading materials tend to spend more time reading. The result also indicated that that majority of the students read more English reading for 'personal pleasure' than for school. This result can be supported by the survey done as these students suggested that 'grade' was not one of the motivating factors why they read.

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**The Implication of the Study**

First, teachers need to explore and select the best reading options for the students. Through this reading process teachers should be able to assess individual students reading ability which help them to consider what reading materials they need that are likely suited to the students. An interactive and collaborative reading method can be used to motivate students who have no passion in reading connect to the rest of the class. The fact that the teacher is a reader can be part of the solution to motivating reluctant readers, because the best way to introduce students to the pleasure of reading is to interact with them as a reader as well as a teacher.

By being a role model of a reader, teachers can build a reading community with their students, a community of people who are enjoying and sharing English reading and are making it a part of their lives. Teachers who can demonstrate the joy and value of reading are likely to be a good motivator in fostering reading motivation among student. As a teacher, knowing what kind of readings student like can guide them to gauge their reading motivation depending on the format they choose, and it will help them to take control over their reading and learning experiences.

Second, as students are becoming adults, knowing their own learning interest will help them what reading materials they will find. In order to do so, they (students) need to take initiative to read. As no matter how many books, magazines and other reading materials they buy, if they will not start reading, teachers, parents and anybody else effort will be wasted.

Third, having a large number of a variety of text is important with regards to reading motivation. If students can pick books that interest them, they are likely to open the book and read it. However, having a large library is not enough if students are not aware of what is in the library. Showcasing different reading and colorful materials at vicinity of the library which expose to students immediately might temp students to go into the library and start browsing these books.

In sum, the present study demonstrated conclusively that we must think about students' English reading motivation as multifaceted, rather than as a single thing. Students should not be characterized as either motivated or not motivated to read. Instead, they are motivated to read in English for different reasons or purposes, and it is important to distinguish among them.

**Future Research**

First, a correlational study comparing level of motivation and college level could offer further insight regarding young adult reading motivation. Besides, comparing incoming freshman

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responses with graduating senior responses might also offer interesting findings concerning the effect of assigned reading on overall reading motivation among young adults. Longitudinal studies could examine the probable development of reading motivation and increasing interests among participants in high school, college, or both.

Future research that focuses on developing interests and their potential effect on reading motivation could offer further insight in the area of reading motivation as educators develop curriculum and implement best teaching practices in the context of ELT. It is also recommended to find the English reading motivation of the EFL learners by using different instruments. The other researcher also can observe reading in relation to variables such as aptitudes, and learning strategies. This research expectedly can help further researchers in doing observations related to motivation of Myanmar EFL learners. Hopefully, this study can contribute to the other similar studies which deal with second language acquisition and learning.

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