

# Fostering Engagement with English Extracurricular Reading: A Care-Oriented Pedagogical Approach

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## Abstract

In today's globalized world, English proficiency is crucial for academic and career success. Extracurricular English reading in primary school is key to language development. However, many students lack interest in reading English materials outside class, hindering their language acquisition and cultural understanding. Employing a mixed-methods approach, this study aims to investigate the effectiveness of a care-oriented approach in fostering interest in extracurricular English reading among primary school students in Taizhou, Jiangsu Province. The findings revealed a positive correlation between students' perceptions of care and their interest in English extracurricular reading and suggested the strategies—feeling valued and supported, the reduction in reading anxiety, and the desire for more challenging reading materials. This research provides valuable insights for educators seeking to boost students' extracurricular English reading engagement through affective domain interventions.

**Keywords:** care-perspective, English reading interest, primary school students, extracurricular reading, pedagogical strategies

## 1. Introduction

In today's era of global communication and information exchange, proficiency in English is indispensable. For primary school students, cultivating an interest in English reading is vital for language acquisition and future academic achievements (Chen & Yu, 2022). Beyond classroom teaching, the significance of extracurricular reading should not be underestimated. However, fostering such interest can be challenging due to various factors, including linguistic barriers and cultural differences. Primary school students often face specific problems in reading, such as a lack of reading habits and proficiency, which are common issues in many educational contexts (Li, 2018; Liu, 2020). For instance, research has shown that students in different countries, including China, face reading difficulties due to traditional teacher-centered reading instructions (Gao et al., 2020). This study aims to explore the role of a care-perspective in nurturing students' interest in English extracurricular reading, addressing these challenges and optimizing students' attitudes and habits towards English extracurricular reading.

The main goals of this study are threefold: (1) to explore the current level of interest in English extracurricular reading among primary school students; (2) to assess how a care-focused teaching method affects students' reading interest; and (3) to suggest practical strategies backed by evidence to boost English reading interest in primary school students. This research enriches the field by offering empirical support for the importance of emotional factors, especially care, in second language learning. It also expands the research that calls for a comprehensive language teaching approach, which considers not just intellectual growth but also the emotional and social dimensions of learning.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Theoretical Framework of Care-Perspective in Education

The care-perspective in education is rooted in the belief that learning is a holistic process that involves not just the acquisition of knowledge but also the development of the whole child. This approach emphasizes the importance of emotional, social, and cognitive development in educational practices. Ren and Edwards (2015) posit that care is fundamental to ethical and educational relationships, suggesting that a caring environment fosters trust and openness, which are essential for effective learning (Ren & Edwards, 2015). In the context of

language learning, a care-perspective can create a supportive atmosphere where students feel safe to explore, make mistakes, and learn from them (Norton, 2000).

The application of a care-perspective in second language acquisition (SLA) is gaining traction, with researchers like MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012) highlighting the role of affective factors in language learning. They argue that a positive learning environment can reduce anxiety and increase motivation, which in turn can enhance language acquisition (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). Moreover, the affective filter hypothesis by Krashen (1985) suggests that reducing affective filtering through care and support can lead to better language learning outcomes (Krashen, 1985).

In summary, the care-perspective in education integrates emotional, social, and cognitive aspects, enhancing learning and overcoming barriers to language acquisition. A caring environment boosts students' interest in extracurricular English reading, improving language proficiency and academic success. This framework guides the study's practical strategies to enhance students' reading engagement.

### *2.2 Reading Interest and Language Acquisition*

The relationship between reading interest and language acquisition has been well-documented. Krashen's theory on the importance of "free voluntary reading" for language skill development is still relevant, but recent studies have provided further insights. For instance, a study by Kidd and Castano (2013) suggests that reading literary fiction can improve theory of mind, which is closely related to language acquisition. Research by Oakley et al. (2021) indicates that students who are interested in reading are more likely to engage in reading activities, leading to increased vocabulary, comprehension, and language proficiency.

Educators have explored various strategies to stimulate students' interest in reading. Livingston and Colvert (2019) suggest that teaching reading strategies, such as prediction and summarization, can increase students' engagement and comprehension. Additionally, the use of literature circles, where students discuss books in a small group setting, has been shown to enhance reading interest and comprehension.

In conclusion, reading interest correlates with language acquisition, with recent studies emphasizing cognitive benefits. Strategies like reading techniques and literature circles boost interest and comprehension, underlining the importance of fostering reading interest to enhance language proficiency and extracurricular English reading engagement.

### *2.3 Care-Perspective in Reading Instruction*

The integration of a care-perspective in reading instruction involves creating a classroom environment that values students' perspectives and emotional experiences. Research by Collie et al. (2016) demonstrates that when teachers show care and support, students are more likely to be engaged and interested in reading. This approach is particularly important for English language learners, who may experience additional challenges and require additional support (Graham & Perin, 2007). Recently, Borowski (2019) proposed an SEL framework, emphasizing the importance of promoting core competency areas in education, which is also applicable to reading instruction.

The selection of culturally relevant reading materials is crucial for engaging students in reading. Ladson-Billings (2014) argues that reading materials should reflect students' backgrounds and experiences to make reading more meaningful and engaging. This is particularly relevant for English as a foreign language setting, where students may connect more readily with local stories and contexts.

In summary, a care-perspective in reading instruction boosts engagement by valuing emotions and providing support. Culturally relevant materials further engage students, particularly English learners. This aligns with CASEL's SEL framework, highlighting the need for a supportive, inclusive environment to foster reading love and enhance language skills.

## **3. Methodology**

### *3.1 Sampling and Data Collection*

The study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to gather data on students' English reading interest and their perceptions of the care-oriented teaching strategies implemented. The research is conducted at a public primary school in Taizhou, Jiangsu Province with participants including students from fourth to sixth grade. Data is collected through surveys distributed to students and teachers, as well as through focus group interviews with students to gain deeper insights into their experiences and perceptions. There are 147 male students and 153 female students; 100 students in the fourth grade, 99 students in the fifth grade, and 101 students in the sixth grade. This survey was conducted with the

consent of students and their parents, and it has also obtained ethical approval from Jiangsu University of Science and Technology.

### 3.2 Research Tools

The survey in this study was conducted among primary school students using a questionnaire. The first part of the questionnaire includes demographic information of the students, such as gender and grade. The second part consists of questions about English reading interest, perception of care-oriented teaching strategies, and the frequency of extracurricular English reading (1 question). There are 3 questions on English reading interest and 6 questions on the perception of care-oriented teaching strategies, all scored on a 5-point scale, where 1 represents "strongly disagree" and 5 represents "strongly agree". For the frequency of extracurricular English reading, there is 1 question scored on a 5-point scale, with 1 representing "never" and 5 representing "5 times or more". The interview questions are: "Does teachers' concern stimulate students' interest in reading?" and "Can teachers' encouragement alleviate students' anxiety in English reading?"

### 3.3 Data Analysis

Quantitative data from surveys was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods to identify trends and patterns. Descriptive statistics, including mean, standard deviation, and frequency distributions, were calculated to summarize the data. Inferential statistics, such as t-tests and ANOVA, were employed to test hypotheses and determine significant differences among groups. The formulas used for these tests are as follows:

$$(1) \text{ Mean } (\mu): \mu = \frac{\sum X}{N}$$

$$(2) \text{ Standard Deviation } (\sigma): \sigma = \sqrt{\frac{\sum (X - \mu)^2}{N}}$$

$$(3) \text{ t-test: } t = \frac{\bar{X}_1 - \bar{X}_2}{\sqrt{s^2 \left( \frac{1}{n_1} + \frac{1}{n_2} \right)}}$$

$$(4) \text{ ANOVA (F-test): } F = \frac{MS_{\text{between}}}{MS_{\text{within}}}$$

Qualitative data from interviews was analyzed thematically. The data was coded and categorized based on recurring themes and patterns. This involved a step-by-step process of familiarizing with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. The thematic analysis aimed to capture the essence of students' perspectives and experiences.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Quantitative Findings

The quantitative data collected from the surveys administered to students provided insights into their current levels of interest in English extracurricular reading and their perceptions of the care-oriented teaching strategies implemented. The survey included Likert-scale questions ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

#### 4.1.1 Interest in English Reading

The average interest score in English reading among the surveyed students was 3.8 out of 5. The standard deviation of the interest scores was 1.025. As is presented in table 1, the average interest score of 3.8 points to a generally positive engagement with English reading among the students, which is encouraging for educators. It indicates that a majority of students have at least a moderate interest in English reading, providing a solid base for further educational efforts. However, the standard deviation of 1.025 reveals a significant spread in interest levels, suggesting that while many students are quite engaged, there is a notable number who may not share the same level of enthusiasm.

As is presented in table 2, the distribution of interest levels shows that a substantial majority (61%) of students either agree or strongly agree with the statement about their interest in English reading, which is a positive sign. Nevertheless, the fact that 28% of students are neutral and 11% disagree or strongly disagree indicates that there is a significant group that may not be as motivated to engage with English reading materials. This highlights the necessity for educators to implement tailored strategies to stimulate interest and improve engagement among these students.

Table 1. Interest in English Reading Among Students

Name	Average	Standard Deviation
Interest in English Reading	3.8	1.025

Table 2. Distribution of interest levels in English Reading

Interest Levels	Percentage of Students
1 (Strongly Disagree)	1%
2 (Disagree)	10%
3 (Neutral)	28%
4 (Agree)	30%
5 (Strongly Agree)	31%

#### 4.1.2 Perceptions of Care-Oriented Strategies

The average perception score for care-oriented teaching strategies was 3.56 out of 5, with a standard deviation of 0.903, indicating a generally positive yet mixed view among students. As Table 3 shows, most students appreciate the individual attention and support, contributing to a positive learning environment. However, the moderate standard deviation suggests significant variation, with 43% of students scoring 3 or below, as revealed in Table 4.

To explore why some students didn't perceive these strategies positively, we might consider factors such as differing personal learning preferences, varied relationships with teachers, or unmet expectations regarding the type or amount of care provided. To address these needs, teachers could conduct surveys or one-on-one interviews to identify specific concerns and expectations. They could also provide more tailored support, such as personalized learning plans or additional resources for those who need them. Encouraging peer mentoring to offer different perspectives and support systems is another effective approach. Lastly, teachers should regularly review and adjust care strategies based on ongoing feedback to ensure they meet the diverse needs of all students.

Table 3. Student Perceptions of Care-Oriented Teaching Strategies

Name	Average	Standard Deviation
Perceptions of Care-Oriented Strategies	3.56	0.903

Table 4. Distribution of Student Perceptions of Care-Oriented Teaching Strategies

Perceptions	Percentage of Students
1 (Strongly Disagree)	1%
2 (Disagree)	12%
3 (Neutral)	30%
4 (Agree)	44%
5 (Strongly Agree)	13%

#### 4.1.3 Impact of Care on Reading Frequency

As is shown in Table 5, the survey also asked students about the frequency of their English reading activities outside of class. Students who reported higher levels of care from their teachers read English materials outside of class more frequently, with an average of 4.5 times per week compared to 2.0 times per week for those who reported lower levels of care. It's crucial to understand why some students didn't respond positively to care-oriented strategies. They might have different care expectations, like needing more personalized attention or specific support not offered. Alternatively, a competitive mindset could make them see care as weakness. To

meet these students' needs, teachers should use tailored care strategies. One-on-one interviews can help identify unique care needs. Then, teachers can offer personalized feedback and support, like recommending interest-aligned reading or providing extra challenges. Peer support groups can also be organized to build community and mutual support. These strategies can ensure all students feel cared for and motivated to read English.

Table 5. Impact of Perceived Care on English Reading Frequency

Care Level	Average Frequency of English Reading (times per week)
1 (Low)	2.0
2	2.5
3 (Neutral)	3.0
4	3.8
5 (High)	4.5

#### 4.2 Qualitative Findings

Qualitative data from focus group interviews with students were analyzed thematically, revealing several key themes related to students' experiences with English reading and the care-perspective approach. The findings are presented in the following.

Many students expressed feeling valued and supported when teachers showed interest in their personal lives and learning progress. One student said, "When my teacher asks me how I feel about the story we read, it makes me want to read more to have more to share with her."

Students reported enjoying reading activities more when they felt their teachers cared about their learning experiences. This was evident when students discussed literature circles and one-to-one reading sessions with teachers, which they found engaging and motivating.

Several students mentioned feeling less anxious about reading in English when they felt supported by their teachers. One student remarked, "I used to be scared to read out loud, but my teacher encouraged me and now I don't mind it as much."

While students appreciated the care and support, there was a desire expressed for more challenging reading materials to further develop their English skills. This indicates that students are looking for a balance between support and challenge in their reading activities.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1 Interpretation of Quantitative Findings

Firstly, the positive correlation between students' perceptions of care and their interest in English reading aligns with the theoretical framework emphasizing the significance of affective factors in second language acquisition. This finding supports the idea that a caring teaching environment can lower the affective filter, as Krashen (1985) proposed, enabling students to engage more deeply with the language. Secondly, the increased reading frequency among students perceiving higher levels of care from their teachers indicates that care can be a motivational factor for extracurricular reading. This aligns with the intrinsic motivation literature, where feelings of competence and relatedness are key drivers of engagement in academic activities (Deci & Ryan, 2012).

The findings suggest broad applicability across diverse educational settings. In urban schools with ample resources, teachers can leverage advanced tech and varied materials to create sophisticated caring environments, boosting students' interest and motivation in English reading. In rural schools facing resource constraints, focusing on personal relationships and providing emotional support can effectively reduce the affective filter and encourage more reading. In culturally diverse schools, understanding and respecting cultural values while showing care can bridge cultural divides and create an inclusive, engaging learning environment. Overall, a caring teaching environment likely promotes English reading engagement in various settings, addressing the universal need for emotional connection and support in learning.

### 5.2 Interpretation of Qualitative Findings

Qualitative Findings are presented as follows. Firstly, the study reveals that students thrive in an environment where they feel valued and supported. This is consistent with Noddings' (2013) care ethics, which posits that care is essential for fostering trust and openness in educational relationships. The students' narratives indicate that care can be a catalyst for their engagement with English reading. Secondly, the reduction in reading anxiety among students who feel supported by their teachers is significant. This finding is in line with MacIntyre and Gregersen's (2012) work on the role of affective factors in language learning, where they argue that anxiety can hinder language acquisition. The study's results suggest that a care-perspective can mitigate this anxiety, thus facilitating reading in English. Thirdly, the study's findings underscore the importance of pedagogical strategies that incorporate a care-perspective. By providing individual attention and support, teachers can create a positive learning environment that fosters interest and engagement in English reading. This aligns with research highlighting the role of teacher support in enhancing student motivation and achievement. Fourthly, the qualitative data's indication of students' desire for more challenging reading materials suggests that while a care-perspective is beneficial, it must be complemented with materials that cater to students' evolving language skills and interests. This is in accordance with Ladson-Billings (2014), who argues for culturally relevant and challenging materials to engage students in meaningful learning. Lastly, while the study did not directly measure the impact of technology on reading interest, the qualitative data hinted at students' interest in digital reading materials. This aligns with Coiro's (2011) research on the potential of digital reading environments to engage students in reading. Future research should explore the integration of technology in a care-perspective framework to enhance reading interest.

## 6. Conclusion

The conclusion begins with a brief summary of the key findings from the study. The quantitative data revealed a positive correlation between students' perceptions of care and their interest in English extracurricular reading, indicating that as students felt more cared for, their interest in English reading increased. Qualitative data from interviews highlighted the importance of feeling valued and supported, the reduction in reading anxiety, and the desire for more challenging reading materials.

### 6.1 Implications for Educational Practice

Theoretically, integrating a care-perspective in language education aligns with the holistic learning framework, which encompasses cognitive, emotional, and social development. This approach acknowledges the interplay among these domains and their collective impact on language acquisition. The study supports the growing research emphasizing the importance of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) in educational outcomes. By fostering a caring environment, educators enhance students' social-emotional competencies, crucial for overall development and academic success. Additionally, the study highlights the importance of selecting culturally relevant reading materials to engage students, emphasizing the need for materials that reflect students' backgrounds and experiences, making reading more meaningful.

Practically, the study offers several insights. Firstly, educators should create supportive learning environments to foster students' emotional well-being and academic engagement. Implementing SEL programs that prioritize the social, emotional, and academic success of all students is key. For example, in EFL contexts, using culturally relevant materials such as local folktales, diverse cultural stories, or global festival articles can boost engagement. Secondly, the study underscores the need for professional development systems that integrate SEL with academic learning. Teachers and school personnel require ongoing training to effectively implement SEL strategies. Workshops on using culturally relevant texts to teach empathy, respect for diversity, and cross-cultural communication skills are particularly beneficial in EFL settings. Thirdly, fostering collaborative efforts among families, schools, and the community is essential for creating conducive extracurricular reading environments. Aligning with "home-school-community cooperation reading plans" can enhance students' reading abilities and academic performance. For instance, Schools could host community reading events with diverse books or form reading clubs for families and community members to share and discuss multicultural texts, supporting EFL students' language learning journey.

## 6.2 Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

The study acknowledges several limitations. Firstly, the small sample size, confined to a single school, restricts the generalizability of the findings. The specific context of the case study may not be representative of broader educational settings. Future studies could focus on larger and more diverse samples across multiple schools and regions to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Secondly, the study's focus on a particular grade level and subject area may limit the applicability of the results to other educational contexts. Future studies could examine how digital tools and culturally relevant texts can enhance student engagement and learning outcomes in English language education. Thirdly, the reliance on cross-sectional study, which may introduce biases, affecting the accuracy of the findings. In the future studies, longitudinal studies should be conducted to explore the long-term effects of a care-perspective on students' English reading habits and language proficiency.

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