

The Relationship between English Reading Motivation, English Reading Attitude, and English Reading Performance among Chinese Primary Students

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Abstract

English reading is a key pathway to developing language skills and intercultural literacy in primary school students, yet it is often overlooked, leading to suboptimal reading performance. Reading motivation and reading attitude, as important non-cognitive factors, have been separately proven to be related to reading performance, but their joint mechanism in Chinese primary school students has not been systematically explored. This study, involving 330 fourth to fifth-grade primary school students in Shenzhen, China, measured their English reading motivation and reading attitude through questionnaires and combined with final English exam scores. Using correlation analysis and multiple regression methods, the relationship between motivation, attitude, and reading performance was systematically examined. The results showed that reading motivation and reading attitude were significantly positively correlated with reading performance. Further analysis revealed that reading motivation and reading attitude jointly explained 58.9% of the variance in reading performance, with motivation playing a particularly prominent predictive role. This study confirms that in the context of English education in Chinese primary schools, reading motivation and reading attitude are key predictive variables affecting students' reading performance, and their synergistic effect is significant. The findings provide empirical evidence for educational practice, suggesting that teachers should focus on both stimulating students' motivation and cultivating positive attitudes in instructional design and interventions to effectively enhance students' English reading ability and academic performance.

Keywords: English Reading Motivation, Reading Attitude, English Reading Performance

Introduction

English reading serves as a critical role in the holistic language development of Chinese primary school students, forming an essential foundation not only for their academic success within the domestic curriculum but also for their future readiness in an increasingly

interconnected and information-driven global society(Jing, 2019). Beyond the immediate goals of vocabulary expansion and grammatical mastery, sustained engagement with English reading cultivates higher-order cognitive skills—including analytical thinking, critical evaluation, and cross-cultural awareness—which are indispensable competencies for the 21st century(Sandi Pradana, 2025; Sintya Wulandari, 2020; Zhang, 2024). Recognizing this strategic importance, China’s Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards explicitly designates reading as a core component of English instruction(Shao, 2020). However, in actual teaching practice, systematic reading training is often marginalized due to factors such as exam pressure and resource constraints, resulting in generally unsatisfactory English reading outcomes among primary school students(Qi, 2024). This early deficit, if unaddressed, can trigger a cascade of negative long-term consequences, including eroded learning confidence, heightened anxiety in subsequent English learning stages, and a widening gap in language proficiency that may hinder students' future academic and career opportunities(Ding, 2024). This disconnect underscores an urgent need to investigate the key determinants of English reading performance during these formative years. Therefore, clarifying these influencing factors will provide educators and policymakers with empirical evidence, enabling the design of targeted intervention strategies to optimize teaching practices and enhance students' English reading proficiency and academic performance(Cynthia B. Bernido, 2024).

Studies have shown that reading motivation is one of the key predictors of English reading performance(Jianjun Li 2020). According to the theory of self-determination, the inner motivation comes from the basic psychological needs of students, such as autonomy, competence and belonging(Lustyantie & Aprilia, 2020). This intrinsic motivation can not only make students enjoy the pleasure and knowledge from reading, but also cultivate their comprehension ability and lay the foundation for lifelong learning(Lustyantie & Aprilia, 2020), It can also directly translate into broader readership and deeper comprehension(Mengting, 2021), and ultimately reflected in better reading performance(Ahmadi, 2017). However, the current widespread issue of low motivation and lack of initiative among primary school students in China(Qiang, 2022), This perception leads them to view English reading as a tedious and challenging task. Such cognitive bias significantly reduces their reading engagement, thereby triggering fear and avoidance behaviors, which ultimately severely hinders their reading performance and long-term language development(Xiaoli, 2021).

Secondly, students' attitude towards English reading is another key factor in predicting their reading performance(Yuliani et al., 2023). Reading Attitude as a Multidimensional Construct, Covering the Three Levels of Cognition, Emotion and Consciousness(Dalaf, 2022). A positive attitude towards reading can encourage students to spend more time reading and gradually improve their comprehension(Yanyue et al., 2019). Conversely, neglecting the cultivation of students' reading attitude will lead to their interest weakening and ability degeneration(Yusnitasari & Novita, 2022). However, some Chinese primary school students have a relatively negative attitude towards English reading. Many students regard English reading as a passive task rather than a pleasant exploration. Faced with unfamiliar language symbols, they are prone to feelings of frustration and anxiety, which further damages their confidence and initiative in reading(Xinghua, 2016). If this negative attitude is not intervened, it will directly induce the fear and avoidance psychology of English reading(Xiaoli, 2021), and it creates a persistent obstacle to individual long-term reading performance and language development(Fauzi et al., 2022).

Among the various influences on reading outcomes, motivation and attitude emerge as particularly powerful psychological levers (Tisa et al., 2021). Rooted in self-determination theory, intrinsic reading motivation arises from students' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Wang et al., 2019). When nurtured, it transforms reading from a duty into a source of enjoyment, promoting deeper engagement and better performance. Similarly, students' attitude toward English reading serves as a key predictor of their reading engagement and success (Fridkin & Hurry, 2025). Despite their acknowledged roles, existing research has largely examined these factors in isolation (Liu, 2023). There remains a notable lack of systematic investigation into how both variables interact and jointly shape reading performance in the context of Chinese primary education (Liu, 2003). Crucially, since motivation and attitude are dynamically interrelated in practice (e.g., a negative attitude can undermine motivational drive), understanding their joint mechanism is essential for developing comprehensive and synergistic support strategies that are likely more effective than interventions targeting a single factor (Liu, 2003). Therefore, this study aims to systematically explore the specific effects of English reading motivation and English reading attitude on English reading performance in the context of Chinese primary education, focusing on analyzing how these two factors jointly influence students' reading achievement, in order to provide empirical evidence for teaching improvement and evaluation reform.

Literature Review

The Relationship between English Reading Motivation and English Reading Performance

English reading motivation is the intrinsic psychological force that drives students to engage in reading activities, sustain reading behaviors, and pursue reading achievements. It primarily stems from fulfilling three fundamental psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and belonging. When these needs are met, students are more likely to develop intrinsic motivation—reading out of interest, enjoyment, or value identification, rather than merely seeking external rewards or avoiding punishment. Extensive research has demonstrated that reading motivation is one of the key predictors of English reading performance, with its influence widely validated (Jianjun Li 2020).

High-level reading motivation enhances reading performance through multiple pathways. Firstly, motivation directly influences the frequency and persistence of reading behavior. Students with strong motivation are more likely to proactively seek reading opportunities and dedicate more time to extracurricular reading, thereby increasing language input and laying the foundation for vocabulary expansion, grammar internalization, and linguistic intuition development. For instance, Mason's research in Japan demonstrates that students who consistently engage in extensive reading training show significant improvements in reading speed, comprehension, as well as vocabulary retention and writing skills (Mason, 2007). Secondly, reading motivation promotes the positive application of reading strategies. Students with intrinsic motivation are more willing to adopt metacognitive strategies during reading, such as setting reading goals, monitoring comprehension processes, and adjusting strategies when encountering difficulties (Korinth & Nagler, 2021). These strategies help them process textual information more effectively and deepen their understanding. For example, cognitive language models show that efficient readers skillfully use strategies to manage their reading behavior, with their reading efficiency closely tied to comprehension quality (Haiyan, 2023). Furthermore, motivation indirectly enhances reading performance by boosting self-efficacy. When students read with genuine interest and experience success, they develop

greater confidence in their reading abilities. This confidence further motivates them to tackle more challenging materials, creating a virtuous cycle of 'motivation → success---self-efficacy--stronger motivation(Bandura, 1986). The study also found that reading motivation was significantly positively correlated with self-efficacy, which was an important predictor of reading achievement(Ahmadi, 2017).

Specifically, motivation (e.g. curiosity, interest, enjoyment, achievement, recognition, reward) has a more stable and lasting effect on reading performance(McKenna et al., 2021; Ryan, 2000). Wigfield and Guthrie's research demonstrates that motivation (e.g., reading engagement and curiosity) is strongly correlated with reading performance(Wigfield & Guthrie, 2000). Goodman also stressed that creating a reading environment that sparks intrinsic motivation and offers choices is key to improving reading performance(Shan, 2020; Weinstein, 2021). However, in the current English reading teaching practice for primary school students in China, motivation (such as exam pressure) often dominates, while the cultivation of intrinsic motivation is relatively lacking(Qiang et al., 2020). This may make students regard reading as a boring task, and it is difficult to achieve deep involvement, which will restrict the long-term development of their reading ability(Xiaoli, 2021). Based on the above, hypothesis 1 is proposed: there is a significant correlation between English reading motivation and English reading achievement.

The Relationship between Attitude and Performance of English Reading

An English reading attitude refers to students 'relatively stable emotional tendencies, cognitive evaluations, and behavioral readiness regarding English reading activities. According to McKenna's attitude model, reading attitudes comprise three interconnected dimensions: cognitive, affective, and behavioral. The cognitive dimension involves beliefs about the value and importance of reading; the affective dimension encompasses emotions such as enjoyment, pleasure, and anxiety experienced during reading; while the behavioral dimension reflects actual tendencies toward reading behavior(McKenna & Kear, 1990). A large number of empirical studies have confirmed that there is a significant positive correlation between positive reading attitude and excellent reading performance(McKenna et al., 1995).

On the emotional level, students who have a love, interest and pleasure in reading are more likely to experience "flow" in the process of reading, that is, they are completely immersed in the reading activity, which can improve the concentration, persistence and depth of understanding of reading (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihaly, 1990; Pearsall, 2018). Such positive emotional experiences alleviate reading anxiety, motivating students to engage with and sustain reading habits. Conversely, negative attitudes (e.g., aversion or anxiety) trigger cognitive avoidance, diminishing reading engagement and impeding skill development. At the cognitive level, students 'belief in reading's value and significance (i.e., positive cognitive attitudes) directly drives more proactive reading planning and higher levels of reading engagement(Yamashita, 2007).For instance, Park's research demonstrates that cognitive attitude serves as a key predictor of students' reading engagement. This value-based active participation acts as the core cognitive driver for enhancing reading comprehension and overall performance. Behaviorally, it motivates students to read more frequently and extensively(Sur & Ünal, 2024),Students not only complete assigned reading tasks but also actively pursue leisure reading in their free time. Large-scale assessment data (e.g.,

Programme for International Student Assessment [PISA]) consistently show that students who view reading as a pleasure achieve significantly higher reading scores than those who read merely to fulfill assignments (Yi, 2022), this directly confirms the effect of attitude-driven reading behavior on improving reading performance.

Accordingly, hypothesis 2 is proposed: there is a significant correlation between the attitude of English reading and English reading achievement.

Motivation, Attitude and Performance of English Reading

Motivation and attitude jointly shape students' reading engagement patterns: Students who are highly motivated by reading interest and enjoy the process (positive attitude) are more likely to engage in deep, sustained, and strategic reading. Synthesizing previous research findings, English reading motivation and reading attitude are two key non-cognitive factors influencing students' reading performance, with their complementary and synergistic functions (Moneba & Lovitos, 2024). Reading motivation acts as the "engine" driving reading behavior, directly influencing its initiation and energy supply, determining whether students are willing to start reading and how much effort they are willing to invest. Reading attitude, particularly its emotional component, functions like a "lubricant" and "catalyst" that sustains and regulates the behavioral process, primarily relating to "emotional experience" and "sustained engagement" during reading. However, while existing research has established the significant impact of reading motivation and attitude on reading performance, studies exploring how these two factors interact within the same framework to influence reading performance remain relatively scarce (Palma & Barotas, 2023). Most studies tend to examine the effect of motivation or attitude alone, or regard attitude as a sub-dimension of motivation, and fail to fully reveal the interaction mechanism between the two as relative independent but closely related psychological variables (S. Sukarni, 2019). Especially for the primary school students, whose cognitive and emotional development is still in the critical stage, the formation and interaction mechanism of motivation and attitude may have the uniqueness and dynamism, but the existing researches pay insufficient attention to this (Seitz & College, 2010). In addition, in the context of English as a foreign language, factors such as cultural background and teaching environment may lead to different patterns in the relationship between motivation and attitude, and integrated research on English learning among Chinese primary school students is particularly scarce (Honggang, 2014). So, a significant gap in the current research is the lack of systematic investigation on how the reading motivation and reading attitude of primary school students can predict their reading performance.

Based on the above, this study aims to investigate the independent and combined effects of English reading motivation and attitude on English reading performance of primary school students, in order to fill the research gap.

Research Method

Object of Study

This study employed a simple sampling method, selecting fourth to fifth graders from a primary school in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province as research subjects, with a total of 450 participants. A total of 450 questionnaires were distributed, and after screening, 330 valid responses were collected, achieving a 73.3% valid response rate. The sample composition was as follows: 165 boys and 165 girls; among them, 137 fourth graders (70 boys, 67 girls) and 193 fifth graders (101 boys, 92 girls). There were 4 fourth-grade classes and 6 fifth-grade classes.

All participants were in good physical and mental health, free from special diseases, and aged between 9 and 11 years. Data collection was conducted in school classrooms using paper-and-pencil methods.

Before collecting data, clearly inform students and parents about the research purpose and the use of the results, emphasize that the questionnaire results will not be evaluated as good or bad, will not be included in the assessment, and ensure the parents' right to know. Inform the parents of the relevant information about the test in advance, and obtain the consent of both parents and students before starting the formal test.

Research Instrument

Reading Motivation Questionnaire

The Reading Motivation Questionnaire is designed based on the self-determination theory, aiming to assess the types of reading motivation among primary school students in China, covering three dimensions: autonomy, competence, and belonging. The questionnaire was designed by Pui-sze Yeung. Specifically, the autonomy dimension includes 9 questions, the competence dimension includes 3 questions, and the belonging dimension includes 5 questions, totaling 17 test items. Scoring uses the Likert scale (4-point scale), with options ranging from "not at all" to "very much." The overall reliability of the questionnaire is Cronbach $\alpha = 0.78$. Among them, the internal consistency coefficient of the autonomy dimension is Cronbach $\alpha = 0.88$, with an AVE of 0.46; the internal consistency coefficient of the competence dimension is Cronbach $\alpha = 0.73$, with an AVE of 0.47; the internal consistency coefficient of the belonging dimension is Cronbach $\alpha = 0.83$, with an AVE of 0.49. These data indicate that the questionnaire demonstrates good reliability and validity.

Elementary Reading Attitude Survey

The Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (ERAS), a self-assessment tool developed by Michael C. McKenna and Dennis J. Kear, provides a reliable measure of students' attitudes toward English reading. The questionnaire comprises two subscales: Leisure Reading Attitude (covering recreational reading) and Academic Reading Attitude (focusing on scholarly reading). Its 20 items are divided into two sections: the first 10 assess leisure reading attitudes, while the latter 10 evaluate academic reading attitudes. For example, leisure reading items might include "How do you feel about reading for entertainment at home?", whereas academic reading items could be "What are your thoughts on reading school textbooks?". The Likert 4-point scale is used, with responses ranging from 1 (least positive) to 4 (most positive). The overall Cronbach's α coefficient is 0.84, with sub-scales showing 0.86 (Leisure Reading) and 0.37 (Academic Reading) respectively. These results demonstrate strong reliability and validity of the questionnaire.

Reading Performance

The data source is the official written English test scores from the 2024 academic year's second semester primary school English examination in Shenzhen. Considering grade-level differences, the fifth-grade test contains 35 questions, while the fourth-grade test has 34 questions. This English assessment evaluates students' language proficiency, comprehensive application skills, and cross-cultural understanding. All questions are scored on a fixed-point scale with a maximum of 100 points, where higher scores indicate better mastery. The written test demonstrates high content validity and reliability. Through extensive practice data and

feedback, the tool's broad applicability and stability further validate its high reliability and validity.

Process

With the consent of school administrators, teachers, parents, and students, the reading motivation and attitude scales were administered through written tests conducted in class-based groups. The process began with the examiner reading the instructions and precautions, followed by 20-minute testing sessions for each student. After collecting 330 valid questionnaires, the English test scores of the corresponding 330 students were obtained.

Data Processing

After screening all questionnaires, the data of valid questionnaires were input and managed by SPSS 20.6, and descriptive statistics and correlation analysis were performed.

To investigate the specific mechanisms through which reading motivation and reading attitude influence reading performance, this study employed multiple regression analysis. This method was chosen to go beyond simple correlations between variables, aiming to construct a statistical model that quantitatively predicts the relationship between independent variables (reading motivation and reading attitude) and the dependent variable (reading performance). Through this analysis, we first evaluate the combined explanatory power of reading motivation and reading attitude in explaining reading performance variations. Second, regression analysis helps verify the statistical significance of the entire predictive model, ensuring observed relationships are not accidental. Finally, this approach allows us to separately test the independent effects of reading motivation and reading attitude on reading performance while controlling for another independent variable, thereby identifying their distinct predictive roles.

Result

The Correlation of Reading Motivation, Reading Attitude and Reading Performance

Table 1

Pearson Correlation Analysis Among Reading motivation Reading attitude and Performance Among Primary School Students

Pearson correlation	Reading motivation	Reading attitude	Reading performance
Reading motivation	1		
Reading attitude	0.66*	1	
Reading performance	0.71**	0.69*	1

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

In order to explore the relationship between reading motivation, reading attitude and reading performance, we conducted a Pearson correlation analysis. In Table 1, the results showed that there was a significant positive correlation between the three variables, that is, when the level of any variable increased, the level of the other variables tended to be higher.

Specifically, there is a significant positive correlation between reading motivation and reading attitude ($r = 0.66$, $p < 0.05$). This indicates that students with stronger reading motivation tend to have more positive reading attitudes, and vice versa.

Moreover, reading motivation shows a strong positive correlation with reading performance ($r = 0.71, p < 0.01$), the strongest among all relationships. This indicates that students' reading motivation is likely a powerful predictor of their reading achievement. Similarly, reading attitude demonstrates a significant positive correlation with reading performance ($r = 0.69, p < 0.05$), with an intensity approaching strong correlation. This suggests that students with a more positive attitude toward reading generally achieve better reading performance.

In conclusion, these results clearly reveal that reading motivation, attitude and performance are closely related psychological and behavioral constructs. This lays a solid foundation for establishing regression models to further explore how motivation and attitude jointly predict reading performance.

Regression Study

Table 2

Multiple Regression Model Summary: Predicting Reading Performance from

Model	R	R-squared	Adjusted squared	R-	Standard error of estimation	Durbin-Watson
1	0.768 ^a	0.589	0.587		13.84	0.79

a. Predictor variables: (Constant), Reading Motivation, Reading Attitude

b. Dependent variable: Reading Performance

Table 3

ANOVA Results for Multiple Regression Model: Motivation and Attitude Predicting Reading Performance

Model		Sum squares	of Freedom degrees	of Mean Squared	F	Significance
1	Return	89834.75	2	44917.37	234.39	<0.001 ^b
	Residual	62665.75	327	191.64		
	Total	152500.50	329			

a. Dependent variable: Reading Performance

b. Predictor variables: (Constant), Reading Motivation, Reading Attitude

Table 4

Regression Coefficient^a for Motivation and Attitude Predicting Reading Performance performance's

Model		Unstandardized coefficients		Standardization coefficient	t	Significance
		B	Standard error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-10.69	3.43		-3.12	0.002
	Motivation	16.55	1.78	0.45	9.28	<0.001
	Attitude	12.96	1.59	0.39	8.17	<0.001

a. Dependent variable: Reading Performance

To investigate the impact of reading motivation and attitude on reading performance, we conducted a multiple regression analysis. As shown in Table 2, the model's coefficient of determination (R^2) was 0.589, with an adjusted R^2 of 0.587. This indicates that reading motivation and attitude together explain 58.9% of the variance in reading performance, suggesting these independent variables significantly influence the dependent variable. The remaining 41% variance was attributed to other factors not included in the model. The ANOVA results in Table 3 demonstrated statistical significance ($F = 234.39$, $p < 0.001$), confirming the validity of the regression model and the statistical significance of R^2 . Further analysis of regression coefficients in Table 4 revealed that motivation ($B = 16.55$, $t = 9.28$, $p < 0.001$) and attitude ($B = 12.96$, $t = 8.17$, $p < 0.001$) both had significant positive effects on reading performance. The t-test significance suggests these effects are not limited to the sample but may generalize to the population. Therefore, this model effectively identifies motivation and attitude as important predictors of reading performance.

Analysis and Discussion

This study quantitatively explores the relationship between reading motivation, reading attitude and reading performance of primary school students, and identifies the key predictors of reading performance.

The Relationship between Reading Motivation and Reading Performance in English Reading

This study investigates the relationship between English reading motivation and reading performance through correlation analysis. The results demonstrate a significant positive correlation between the two, validating the research hypothesis. This finding aligns with the conclusions of Wigfield and Ryan & Deci, confirming the crucial role of reading motivation in improving reading performance (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997).

From the perspective of the mechanism, the reading motivation mainly influences the reading performance through the following ways: firstly, the high motivation level makes students invest more reading time and increase the reading volume, which is the basis of improving the reading ability (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997). Secondly, students with higher motivation levels are more likely to actively employ various reading strategies, such as prediction, inference, and summarization, which can effectively enhance reading comprehension (Haiyan, 2023). In addition, motivation can promote reading performance indirectly by enhancing self-efficacy, forming a virtuous cycle of motivation-confidence-performance.

The Relationship between Attitude and Performance in English Reading

This study examined the relationship between English reading attitude and reading performance through correlation analysis. The results demonstrated a significant positive correlation, supporting the research hypothesis. This finding aligns with the findings of Linh and Sukarni, confirming the crucial role of positive reading attitudes in enhancing reading performance (Linh, 2021; Sukarni, 2019).

The positive reading attitude promotes reading performance mainly through the following mechanisms: First, the positive attitude can stimulate students' interest in reading, and make them more active in reading activities (O. M. Hasan, 2023). Secondly, a good attitude helps to form positive emotional experience, which makes students get more pleasure in the process of reading, and thus increases the frequency of reading (Rafi et al., 2021). The positive cycle

between attitude and behavior is finally reflected in the improvement of reading performance.

The Relationship between Reading Motivation and Reading Attitude in English Reading

This study investigates the relationship between English reading motivation and attitude through correlation analysis. The results demonstrate a significant positive correlation, validating the research hypothesis. This finding supports the theoretical perspectives of Gardner and Mathewson, indicating that motivation and attitude are closely linked in language learning processes (Brown, 1988; Mathewson, 1994).

There is a bidirectional relationship between motivation and attitude: on the one hand, strong reading motivation can promote students to form a more positive reading attitude; on the other hand, positive reading attitude can also enhance students' reading motivation (Moneba & Lovitos, 2024). The interaction relationship shows that the motivation and attitude of students should be paid attention to at the same time in the teaching.

Key Predictive Factors of English Reading Performance

The study identified key predictors of English reading performance through multiple regression analysis. The results showed that reading motivation and reading attitude together explained 58.9% of the variance in reading performance, which is considered moderately strong in social science research. This indicates that these two variables are core factors influencing reading performance.

Specifically, reading motivation showed the strongest predictive power, indicating that among the various factors influencing students' reading performance, reading motivation plays the most crucial role (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997). Although the predictive effect of reading attitude is weak, it is still of great value, which shows that the emotional factors are indispensable in the process of reading learning.

Conclusion and Significance

This study systematically quantified the intrinsic connections among English reading motivation, attitude, and performance. Key findings include: First, the three variables exhibit a significant positive correlation; Second, motivation and attitude jointly constitute key predictors of reading performance; Third, reading motivation demonstrates the most prominent predictive role.

The significance of this inquiry extends far beyond academic interest; it carries substantial and direct implications for educational quality, equity, and effectiveness (Chen, chunjin, 2020). Clarifying the key influencing factors generate actionable insights for multiple stakeholders:

For educators, it can inform the design of targeted instructional strategies and interventions that address the root causes of reading difficulties, moving beyond one-size-fits-all approaches (See & Gorard, 2020). **For curriculum and material developers**, it provides evidence for creating reading content that is more engaging and psychologically attuned to students' needs (Skinner et al., 2008). **For school administrators and policymakers**, it offers an empirical basis for optimizing resource allocation, designing teacher training programs,

and evaluating the effectiveness of reading initiatives (Deci, 2000). Ultimately, **for the students themselves**, research-driven improvements in practice aim to transform their reading experience, enhance their proficiency, and foster a sustainable interest in English learning (TAYLOR, 2007).

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