

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.18928154

READING MOTIVATION AND READING STRATEGY USE AMONG SAUDI EFL UNDERGRADUATES: A QUALITATIVE STUDY AT IMAM MOHAMMAD IBN SAUD ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY (IMSIU)

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Received: 27/12/2025
Accepted: 19/02/2026

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore how motivation affects the use of reading strategies among Saudi EFL undergraduates. Data were collected through online interviews with 27 final-year students via Google Forms. The resulting transcripts were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis. Findings revealed a strong link between intrinsic motivation, especially goals of self-improvement and mastery, and the sustained, adaptable application of reading strategies. Intrinsically motivated learners reported using more inferencing, rereading, and integrating strategies, whereas extrinsically motivated learners were largely linked to efficiency-oriented strategies, including dictionary use and translation. The findings also revealed that motivation and strategy use are in a reciprocal relationship, with successful strategy use supporting motivation. However, the contextual and linguistic limitations, such as time pressure, fatigue, and vocabulary challenge, determine this kind of relationship. Comprehensively, the research finds the strategy of reading to be highly motivational, and it is possible to emphasize that the strategic awareness of reading and intrinsic motivation should be promoted in Saudi higher education settings to support the achievement of reading instructional goals.

KEYWORDS: Reading motivation; Reading strategies; Saudi EFL undergraduates; Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation; Strategic reading; Higher education.

1. INTRODUCTION

Learning in a foreign language is one of the pillars of academic achievement at the university level, and this is especially true in EFL, whereby students depend largely on written materials as sources of disciplinary knowledge, evaluation, and through self-study. In the case of Saudi EFL undergraduates, English reading is not only a language ability but a gatekeeping academic ability that intervenes in access to content knowledge, English translation of religious and cultural texts, as well as global academic discourse. In spite of the mass exposure to the teaching of English in both school and university levels, Saudi EFL learners still portray the same stunning failures in reading comprehension, strategic reading, and lasting reading of English texts.

Studies conducted within the Saudi setting have consistently shown that EFL students have poor reading skills due to a combination of language, cognitive, pedagogical, and motivational factors. Al Qahtani (2016) explains the low reading performance of Saudi EFL learners by a lack of vocabulary knowledge, excessive bottom-up decoding, an inability to be strategically aware, and with little purposeful reading. On the same note, Al Nafisah (2011) reiterates that the interest of the Saudi students in reading is usually instrumental as opposed to being intrinsic and learners read primarily due to examination as opposed to leisure or intellectual development.

It is within this context that the constructs of reading motivation and the use of reading strategies have emerged as two related constructs that are decisive in determining the reading performance of EFL learners. Motivation defines the reason why learners read, the amount of effort they use, as well as the persistence of the involvement of the learners in reading texts, whereas reading strategies define how learners approach text, track understanding, and solve breakdowns in understanding. According to empirical research in Saudi Arabia, motivated readers are more likely to employ metacognitive and cognitive reading strategies, which subsequently lead to improved understanding and better performance (Meniado, 2016; Kassem & Alqahtani, 2023).

This research paper is based on this area of study as it seeks to determine the relationship between reading motivation and reading strategy use in Saudi male EFL undergraduates pursuing their degree programs at Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University (IMSIU). This study seeks to give a subtle understanding of the perception of Saudi EFL

learners who read English, the reason why they read, and the strategies they use prior to, during, and after reading academic literature. This study will add value to the EFL curriculum design, reading learning, and teacher training in Saudi higher education by placing the voices of learners in the framework of existing theoretical and empirical literature.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. *Reading Difficulties in the Saudi Efl Context*

The literature has extensively recorded the problem of reading among Saudi EFL learners. In his argument, Al Qahtani (2016) claims that most Saudi university students do not read actively to make meanings out of the text but instead passively engage in a form of decoding. The teaching techniques that focus on grammar translation, short answer comprehension questions, and exam-based activities also reduce the chances of students attaining higher-order reading skills. Similar results are also presented by Al Roomy and Alhawsawi (2019), who state that Saudi EFL students more often resort to surface level strategies of translation word by word, but underuse the strategy of inferencing, summarization, and monitoring.

Recent studies have also brought up the issues Saudi EFL learners have to encounter in reading specialized or culturally dense texts. In fact, Almalki and Alzahrani (2025) demonstrate that Saudi college students often encounter difficulties in comprehending English religious texts due to the use of complex lexical elements, abstract concepts, and a lack of background knowledge, which can lead to frustration and a loss of motivation. These results highlight the necessity of pedagogical strategies that allow an explicit combination of instruction in strategies and motivation support.

2.2. *Reading Motivation during EFL Learning*

Reading motivation is an aspect that is multidimensional to include intrinsic motivation (reading to have fun or interest) and extrinsic motivation (reading to get grades, pass exams, or other outside incentives). Within the Saudi EFL context, there are various studies that reveal that extrinsic motivation is likely to prevail among the reading behaviors of the students. Al Nafisah (2011) has discovered that Saudi EFL learners read English texts mainly because of academic demands and do not have a lot of voluntary or recreational reading.

According to Meniado (2016), the empirical research shows that the level of reading motivation is an important predictor of reading comprehension performance among Saudi EFL learners. His research

shows that more intrinsically motivated learners show more metacognitive strategies, including planning, monitoring and assessing understanding. Lastly, Kassem and Alqahtani (2023) affirmed that motivation, strategy use, and reading comprehension are highly correlated in Saudi preparatory year students, which indicates that motivation is a trigger to strategic reading behavior.

The recent global studies also support the key position of motivation in developing reading. Bogaert et al. (2025) and Aktaş (2025) demonstrate that reading strategies intervention can also be used to improve students' reading motivation, resulting in long-term improvements in their reading comprehension. On the university level, Anggia and Habok (2025) state that the extensive reading program has a positive impact on both the affective variables and the reading achievement, which indicates the mutual relationship between motivation and comprehension.

2.3. Reading Strategies and Metacognitive Awareness

Reading strategies are those conscious activities that are employed by readers in order to make meaning out of texts. These tactics are typically divided into cognitive tactics (e.g., summarization, inference by taking into consideration the surrounding context) and metacognitive tactics (e.g., planning, monitoring, and evaluating reading). Studies conducted in the Saudi EFL setting always note the role of metacognitive awareness towards successful reading.

Al Roomy and Alhawsawi (2019) have found that Saudi EFL students report using some reading strategies, but these are not always systematic or conscious. As Meniado (2016) showed, those students who actively utilize metacognitive strategies score much higher in reading comprehension than the students who utilize basic cognitive strategies. Al Hawamdeh (2025) also states that the best teaching of EFL reading must explicitly teach the idea of strategic thinking, and guided practice should be reinforced to ensure that the students internalize the strategies of strategic thinking.

Reading strategy instruction has also been affected by advances in technology in the recent past. It has also been demonstrated that AI based tools and digital interventions facilitate strategy use and motivation through the provision of immediate feedback and personalized scaffolding (Al Bogami and Alahmadi, 2025; Lopez Rodriguez et al., 2026). On the same note, augmented reality and web-based

reading platforms have shown to introduce positive impacts on reading and its understanding at all educational levels (Mohamed, 2022; Shaaban and Mohamed, 2024).

2.4. The combination of Motivation and Strategy Use as an Intervention in EFL Reading

Meeting point of motivation and strategy use is one of the most important research questions of EFL reading. Research with a person centered and mixed method indicates that the motivational profiles of learners are interconnected with cognitive and metacognitive processes in determining academic development (Miller Cotto & Byrnes, 2026). However, in the Saudi EFL setting, qualitative and situation-specific studies are still necessary to predict the attitude of the learners towards reading motivation and strategies application.

The current research paper fills this void by examining the reported motivations of Saudi male EFL undergraduates who read in English and the strategies they employ when working with academic texts. Combining the findings of the traditional Saudi and foreign literature with the empirical proof gathered within the context of IMSIU, the study aims to contributing to a more comprehensive perspective of EFL reading that would bridge the motivation, strategy teaching, and curriculum building.

2.5. Theoretical Framework

The current research is based on an integrative theoretical framework that unites motivation theory in second/foreign language acquisition, cognitive/metacognitive theories of reading, and socio-cognitive theories of academic literacy. In this framework, EFL reading is a conceptualized process that is active and goal-oriented, influenced by learners' motivational orientations and their strategic interaction with the texts. The synthesis of these views enables the study to explain how the motivation of Saudi EFL undergraduates to read English determines the choice of reading strategies and their application, which in turn impact reading engagement and comprehension.

2.5.1 EFL Reading Theory of Motivation

Self-Determination Theory is the most used theory to elucidate the motivational aspect of the study, initially formulated by Deci and Ryan (1985, 2000). SDT differentiates intrinsic motivation, which involves doing something because one is intrinsically interested in it or likes it or finds it valuable, and extrinsic motivation, in which one does a thing because a superior forces, rewards, or study

demands it. Based on SDT, intrinsic motivation is linked to greater thinking, perseverance as well as self-managed learning, which are critical to effective reading in a foreign language.

SDT has been extensively used in EFL reading studies to describe the differences in the ways students engage with a text and the effort they are willing to dedicate to the comprehension process. Learners who read spontaneously tend to be more attuned to meaning-making and tolerate linguistic ambiguity, and the use of higher-order strategies than extrinsically motivated learners who usually tend to engage in task completion but not quality comprehension. These theoretical assertions are supported by empirical studies on EFL in the Saudi context. Meniado (2016) and Kassem and Alqahtani (2023) demonstrate that intrinsic motivation is positively correlated with the use of metacognitive strategies and higher reading comprehension results, whereas the use of extrinsic motives is not strongly correlated with strategic use.

Reading motivation in the current study is thus theorized as a dynamic psychological construct that has a direct impact on the cognitive investment of learners in reading activities and indirectly has an impact on the strategic behavior of learners in the process of reading.

2.5.2. Cognitive/Metacognition Model of Reading

The strategic component of the framework relies on cognitive and metacognitive theories of reading, particularly the work of Flavell (1979) on metacognition and Anderson (1991) on metacognitive knowledge in reading. According to Flavell, metacognition can be described as the knowledge and control of cognitive processes among people with specific focus on planning, monitoring, and evaluation as fundamental regulatory processes. When applied to reading, this viewpoint implies that accomplished readers actively engage in controlling their understanding processes and do not simply decode the text passively.

Cognitive theories of reading reduce reading comprehension to an interactive process that entails both bottom-up processing (e.g. word recognition and syntactic interpretation) with top-down processing (e.g. activation of background knowledge and predictions) as suggested by Rumelhart (1980) and later developed by Grabe (2009). In these models, reading strategies serve as an instrument that helps readers align their linguistic knowledge with the construction of meaning.

Metacognitive reading theory suggests that good

readers are not incomparable to bad readers in the strategies they have, but rather in the way they apply the strategies to good effect. Research by Al Roomy and Alhawsawi (2019) and Al-Hawamdeh (2025) in the Saudi EFL setting suggests that low levels of metacognitive awareness are one of the reasons behind passive reading and problems in understanding. Therefore, the reading strategies of this research are conceptualized as intervening processes that convert motivation into productive reading activity.

2.5.3. Socio-Cognitive Perspective on Academic Reading

Another insight to inform the framework is the socio-cognitive approach to literacy that combines social, cultural, and institutional factors of learning with cognitive processes. This point of view is based on the sociocultural theory of cognitive development proposed by Vygotsky (1978), according to which social interaction, cultural tools, and the mediation of instruction play significant roles in cognitive development. From this viewpoint, reading is not an isolated mental activity but a socially situated practice shaped by educational norms, curricular expectations, and cultural values.

Within the academic EFL context, socio-cognitive models of reading (e.g., Gee, 2008; Street, 2003) point to the fact that motivation and strategy choice of EFL learners is conditioned by the way in which reading activities are framed, assessed, and valued in institutions. The reading habits of Saudi EFL undergraduates are conditioned by the exam-based curriculum, the traditional stages of previous instruction, and the vision of English as a high-stakes academic item. The studies on the language habits of Saudi EFL learners suggest that at the times when the texts are considered dense in language or culturally non-proximate, the motivation levels of students decline and lead to a decrease in strategic effort.

2.5.4. Conceptual Model of the Study

According to the adoption of Self-Determination Theory (Deci and Ryan, 1985, 2000), cognitive-metacognitive reading theory (Flavell, 1979; Rumelhart, 1980; Anderson, 1991), and socio-cognitive perspective of literacy (Vygotsky, 1978), the theoretical framework of the given study suggests the following:

1. The motivation of Saudi EFL undergraduates to read English (intrinsic and extrinsic motivation) has a direct effect on their reading of English texts.
2. Reading motivation influences the nature and

frequency of reading strategies acquired by the learners, especially metacognitive strategies.

3. Strategies of reading also serve as a mediator to motivation and successful reading.
4. The general academic and social culture influences the way motivation and the use of the strategy are reflected in the reading behavior of students.

This theoretically-based framework offers a

strong point of analysis of the self-reported motivations of Saudi EFL learners and reading strategies and also in making sense of the results according to a logical explanatory framework. By explicitly linking foundational theories to contemporary EFL research, the framework supports the study's aim of informing curriculum design and reading instruction in Saudi higher education.

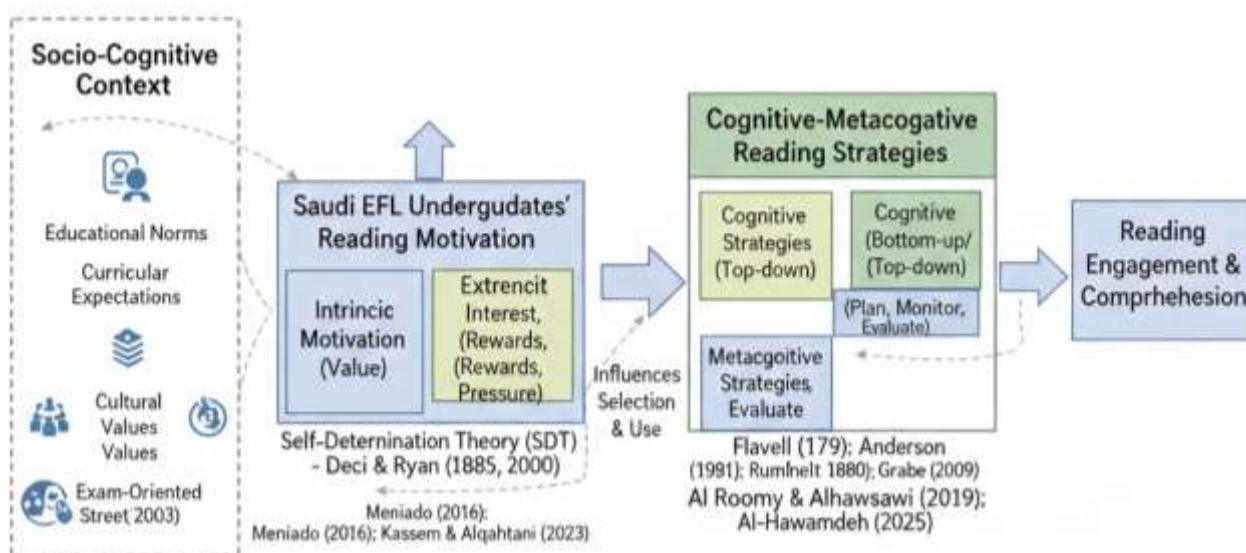


Figure 1: Integrative Theoretical Framework of EFL Reading Engagement.

Figure 1. Integrative Theoretical Framework of EFL Reading Engagement. This model synthesizes Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), Cognitive-Metacognitive Reading Theory (Flavell, 1979), and Socio-Cognitive Perspectives (Vygotsky, 1978). It illustrates the pathway from Motivational Orientations (Intrinsic/Extrinsic) to Reading Engagement and Comprehension, mediated by the strategic application of Metacognitive and Cognitive Strategies within the Saudi academic context.

Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between learner motivation and the use of reading strategies among Saudi EFL university students?
2. How do different types of motivation (intrinsic vs. extrinsic) influence the choice of reading strategies?
3. What challenges do motivated learners face in applying reading strategies?

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

This qualitative study used semi-structured interviews to examine the relationship between reading motivation and strategy use among Saudi

EFL undergraduates. The data were analyzed through reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021) to explore participants' detailed experiences and self-reported behaviors within the academic environment of Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University (IMSIU).

3.2. Participants

The sample included 27 male undergraduate students who were selected during the last (graduating) year of the bachelor's program of the College of Languages and Translation at IMSIU. The mean age of the participants in the study was 22-25 years ($M = 23.4$, $SD = 0.9$), which is a sensible age for students who are about to graduate in the Saudi context. This was not an accidental homogeneous sampling that is done at a gender-, institution-, and academic-level with the aim of enhancing internal consistency of results, to control extraneous variability in academic background, curricular exposure, and institutional culture, and still to capture individual differences in this defined cohort (Creswell, 2014). All participants possessed the majority of their program requirements, which suggests extensive previous experience in the EFL

program offered by the department, teaching strategies, and evaluation techniques.

3.3. Instruments

A Semi-Structured Interview Protocol was developed based on research questions and a review of relevant literature. The protocol included 13 open-ended questions and prompts designed to elicit detailed narratives on: (a) sources and types of reading motivation (e.g., "What motivates you to read texts in English?"), (b) specific reading strategies employed before, during, and after reading (e.g., "When you face a difficult word, what do you do?"), and (c) perceived challenges and the role of contextual factors. Interviews were conducted in Arabic to ensure comfort and nuanced expression, and later transcribed verbatim and translated into English for analysis.

In order to ascertain validity, the semi-structured interview protocol was subjected to expert scrutiny by two experts and a pilot test. This process validated the questions in terms of relevance, clarity, and competence to get useful information about motivation and reading strategies. Thematic interpretations were also further validated by members checking with participants.

3.4. Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was undertaken in two stages by following ethical approval and written informed consent. First, the participants filled in the structured form. This was followed by online interviews via Google Forms. The interviewer worked with the protocol in a flexible manner whereby the participants were allowed to elaborate their experiences, and the interviewer also probed them on additional questions (e.g., Can you give me a specific example) in order to get more out of them. It was considered that the saturation had been achieved when the next interviews did not provide any new thematic information regarding the main research questions.

3.5. Data Analysis

The transcripts of the interviews were followed in a 6-step reflexive thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2021). Patterns were created out of the themes after repetitive reading and subsequent systematic codification, which were then refined and defined.

The qualitative dominance classification system (Table 1) was the main characteristic of the analysis, and the prevalence of themes was categorized as Very High ($\geq 70\%$), High (40-69%), Moderate (20-

39%), or Low ($< 20\%$) depending on the participants ($N=27$). This methodology kept the interpretive emphasis on the strength of patterns and did not transform the data into counts.

The overall thematic organization clearly answered the research questions, accompanied by rich quotes of the interviewees. Structured forms were used to gather quantitative data, which were analyzed using descriptive statistics, so as to profile the sample and put the qualitative results into perspective.

Table 1: Dominance Range Classification Used in the Thematic Analysis ($N = 27$).

Dominance Range	Symbol	Proportion of Participants	Operational Definition	Interpretive Meaning
Very High	●	$\geq 70\%$ of participants	The code/sub-theme appears across the clear majority of interviews	Indicates a core experiential pattern that is widely shared and structurally central to the phenomenon
High		40-69% of participants	The code/sub-theme recurs across many interviews but is not universal	Represents a salient and influential pattern that meaningfully shapes the phenomenon
Moderate		20-39% of participants	The code/sub-theme appears in a notable minority of cases	Reflects a context-dependent or conditional pattern, relevant but not dominant
Low		$< 20\%$ of participants	The code/sub-theme appears in relatively few interviews	Signals a peripheral or situational pattern, important for nuance rather than generalization

The dominance ranges were used to illustrate the relative prominence of themes and sub-themes in the dataset, rather than using literal frequency counts. Such a choice is similar to reflexive thematic analysis, where consistent significance is prioritized over interpretative salience and analytical value, rather than numerical popularity (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The dominance ranges can be used to clearly compare across themes without the quantification fallacy, which would occur with statistically representative qualitative data. It is also a suitable

methodology when dealing with medium-sized qualitative samples because it combines methodological rigor with epistemological coherence by indicating the force of common experience patterns without rendering qualitative insights by numerical measures. In line with this, systematic interpretation was supported by the dominance ranges, which preserved the depth and contextual sensitivity of the participants' accounts.

4. Results

4.1. Overview of Thematic Findings

The qualitative thematic analysis yielded four general themes: Motivation Drivers, Reading Strategies, Motivation Strategy Interaction, and Challenges and Constraints. These themes are

employed to describe the influence of motivation on the use of reading strategies by Saudi EFL university students, as well as the moderating variables of context and language. To promote transparency and analytic rigor, the relative importance of themes and sub-themes was reported as dominance ranges rather than raw frequencies, as per the reflexive thematic analysis approach. The thematic analysis framework and supporting qualitative evidence are depicted in detail in the form of themes, sub-themes, dominance levels, and illustrative codes, with examples of excerpts from participants in Appendix A, which will also serve as the main referent for the thematic analysis framework. Table 2 summarizes the primary themes and sub-themes, the dominance levels, and illustrative codes of the dataset.

Table 2: Summary of Themes, Sub-Themes, and Dominance Levels (N = 27).

Theme	Sub-theme	Dominance	Representative Codes
Motivation Drivers	Intrinsic: Self-improvement & mastery	High	Vocabulary growth, skill development, progress
	Intrinsic: Curiosity & interest	Moderate	Cultural exploration, interest-driven reading
	Extrinsic: Grades / career	Low	Academic performance, future job
Reading Strategies	Guessing meaning from context	● Very High	Inferencing, context clues
	Dictionary use	High	Lookup, verification
	Translation to L1	Moderate	Arabic translation
	Text management strategies	Moderate	Rereading, chunking, summarizing
Motivation-Strategy Interaction	Motivation increases effort & strategy use	High	Persistence, strategic flexibility
	Low motivation leads to disengagement	Moderate	Skipping, stopping reading
Challenges / Constraints	Time & fatigue	Moderate	Limited time, low energy
	Vocabulary difficulty	Moderate	Lexical load
	Low interest / text complexity	Low	Boredom, long texts

4.2 Motivation Drivers

The results of the analysis of the answers provided by participants showed that intrinsic motivation was the most effective force that influenced the role of English reading of learners. The sub-theme of self-improvement and mastery orientation appeared very dominant. Many learners often referred to reading as a way of vocabulary building, enhancing language skills in general, and monitoring personal progress. For example, one participant stated, "Learn and develop my vocabulary" (S03 - Intrinsic: Self-improvement), while another emphasized the motivational value of progress: "Getting improved step by step and measure your progress is what drives you to practice more" (S05 - Intrinsic: Mastery orientation). Similar expressions such as "My will to practice and get

better at reading" (S15) and "To be a better reader" (S22) further illustrate learners' internalized commitment to reading as a self-development activity.

Meaningful motivational factors were in turn in the form of curiosity and personal interest alongside mastery orientation. Students indicated that they were more engaged when reading texts that were of interest, culturally informative or one that matched their preferences. One participant explained, "Curiosity and my love for learning languages... through English texts, I can learn about different cultures and ideas" (S07 - Intrinsic: Curiosity & interest). Others highlighted interest-driven engagement through comments such as "Something interesting like a story or a novel" (S23) and "Interesting headlines about my favorite sport" (S25).

These accounts suggest that interest enhances persistence and cognitive engagement, even when texts are linguistically demanding.

In contrast, extrinsic motivators like grades and career goals were less dominant and were viewed as practical necessities rather than sources of enjoyment. For instance, one learner noted, "Reading helps me understand my courses better and get good grades" (S19 - Extrinsic: Academic performance), while another stated, "My motivation comes from needing English for my future career" (S21 - Extrinsic: Career orientation). Overall, extrinsic motivation functioned primarily as a trigger for reading rather than a driver of deep strategic engagement.

4.3. Reading Strategies

Learners' reported reading strategies reflected their motivational orientations, with lexical strategies emerging as the most dominant. Among them, context-based meaning decoding showed very high dominance, indicating that the majority of learners tried to extract meaning on their own and sought help only after that. This strategy was often defined as the default approach of the participants, as illustrated by statements such as "I always try to guess the meaning based on the context" (S15 - Lexical: Contextual inferencing) and "Link the words that I know with the words that I don't until I understand them" (S10). Several learners emphasized strategic sequencing, for example, "I usually guess the meaning from context first, then check a dictionary if needed" (S20).

Dictionary use also appeared prominently but was typically combined with contextual guessing rather than used in isolation. One learner explained, "When I face difficult words, I try to understand them from the context first... then I use a dictionary as a last option" (S07 - Lexical: Dictionary lookup). Arabic translation was characterized by medium dominance and was often referred to as an auxiliary or compensatory approach, as seen in comments such as "If that does not work, I translate the word to see its meaning in my native language" (S07 - Lexical: Translation to L1).

Besides the lexical strategies, learners were found to employ a number of techniques employed in text management, such as re-reading, skimming, chunking, summarizing, and highlighting. Such strategies became especially noticeable among learners with a high level of intrinsic motivation. For example, one participant noted, "I break the text into smaller parts and read slowly to understand the main ideas" (S16 - Text management: Chunking), while

another stated, "I reread difficult parts to understand them better" (S10 - Text management: Rereading). Such responses indicate that motivated learners employ a broader and more flexible range of strategies.

4.4. Motivation-Strategy Interaction

A central finding of the analysis is the dynamic interaction between motivation and strategy use. Learners consistently reported that higher motivation led to increased effort, persistence, and strategic engagement. One participant stated, "Motivation dictates if I read bare minimum or maximum in terms of effort" (S02 - Motivation regulating effort), while another explained, "When I am motivated, I read carefully and use more strategies" (S19). These accounts demonstrate that motivation influences not only whether learners read but also how deeply they engage with texts.

Conversely, reduced motivation was associated with avoidance and disengagement. Learners reported skipping texts, reading superficially, or stopping altogether, as illustrated by statements such as "If it isn't academic, then I just skip it" (S02) and "I stop reading completely" (S13). These contrasting behaviors highlight motivation as a decisive factor governing the activation or abandonment of reading strategies.

4.5. Challenges and Constraints

Although motivated and strategic learners were noted to be aware, they cited a number of challenges that limited the use of strategy. Time pressure and fatigue were found to be the most salient contextual barriers and they restricted the possibilities of rereading and combining the strategies carefully. One learner remarked, "I read a few lines and then I stop" (S25 - Time/fatigue constraint), while another described adaptive coping strategies: "I divide the text into small parts and take short breaks" (S19).

Vocabulary Difficulty was also a consistent problem that increased cognitive load and interrupted reading. Compensatory strategies commonly reported by learners included dictionary work alongside contextual guessing, as illustrated by "When I face difficult words, I guess the meaning from context... if I cannot understand, I use a dictionary" (S16). Less frequently, low interest and text length further constrained engagement, particularly when combined with fatigue.

4.6. Grounded Model Interpretation

Cumulating these results, the grounded model proposes that strategic reading engagement is

motivated by both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, which subsequently lead to better reading outcomes such as comprehension, engagement, and retention. Nevertheless, contextual and affective issues, such as time pressure, exhaustion, vocabulary, and text

features, moderate this pathway. Another important aspect of the model is a feedback loop, according to which when a strategy is successfully used, one gets more motivated, and the process of further involvement becomes a cycle.

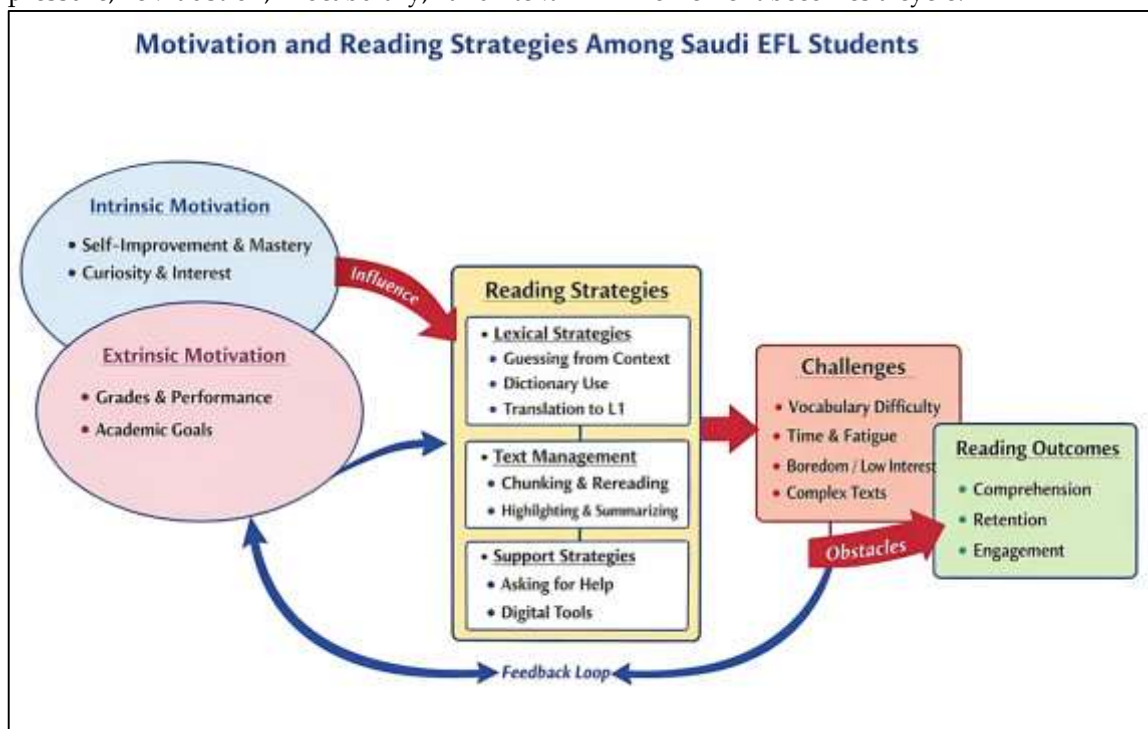


Figure 1: A Conceptualized Model of the Relationship between Motivation and Reading Strategies.

In general, it has been demonstrated in the discussion that the reading behavior of Saudi EFL university students can be described as a motivationally mediated strategic process and not an array of skills. Motivation is such a factor that not only determines the occurrence or non-occurrence of reading among students, but also determines how they read, tactfully, strategically, perseveringly, and tactfully. This subtle association underscores the need to develop intrinsic motivation and strategy awareness, as well as to seek solutions to contextual constraints that hinder strategy implementation.

4.7. Discussion

4.7.1. Motivation and Strategic Reading Engagement (RQ1)

The findings demonstrate a strong positive relationship between learner motivation and the use of reading strategies, confirming motivation as a central driver of strategic reading engagement among Saudi EFL university students. It was found that highly motivated learners complained of higher effort, persistence, and strategic flexibility that is close to the past studies in Saudi Arabia. Meniado (2016) found that motivated Saudi EFL learners were

more inclined to use metacognitive strategies, lead to an increase in the reading comprehension performance. In a similar way, Kassem and Alqahtani (2023) also noted that motivation was a great predictor of strategy use and understanding of the preparatory year among Saudi students.

This research builds on prior research by highlighting the central role of motivation in learners' strategic behavior. Learner reports confirm that motivation governs the extent, quality, and depth of cognitive engagement during reading. This supports findings that strategic reading among Saudi EFL learners depends on their willingness to engage actively with texts (Al Roomy & Alhawsawi, 2019).

4.7.2. Differential Effects of Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation (RQ2)

The results reveal that there are no qualitatively similar effects on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in the use of reading strategies. The higher and mobile strategies, such as inferencing, rereading, and summarizing, were linked with intrinsic motivation, especially mastery orientation. This tendency coincides with the Self-Determination Theory and Saudi EFL research that suggests that more motivated learners are those with intrinsic

motivation (Meniado, 2016; Kassem & Alqahtani, 2023).

Conversely, extrinsic motivation was closely associated with surface-level or efficiency-oriented approaches, i.e. dictionary use and translation to complete tasks without understanding them. This observation is mirrored by the conclusion of Al-Nafisah (2011), who finds that Saudi EFL students tend to read instrumentally to obtain grades and not to engage in reading itself. While extrinsic motivation remains important for initiating reading, the present study suggests that it is insufficient on its own to sustain strategic experimentation or persistence.

4.7.3. Challenges as Moderating Constraints (RQ3)

Although there was strong motivation, the learners encountered contextual and linguistic barriers that constrained the effective use of strategies. Stress and exhaustion regarding time were also particularly strong, and they are representative of the general problems that Al-Qahtani (2016) articulates, as her reading problems among Saudi EFL students are partly a result of the overload of instruction and the absence of strategic practice. Vocabulary difficulty was also a constant problem, confirming the results of Almalki and Alzahrani (2025), who stated that vocabulary density was an influential factor that impeded understanding among Saudi college students.

Notably, these problems did not eliminate motivation but moderated it when implementing strategies. Individual learners learned to adjust to the new strategy by adjusting their reading pace or focusing on slower strategies, which is evidence of new self-regulatory awareness. This aligns with Al-Hawamdeh's (2025) argument that effective EFL reading instruction should explicitly scaffold strategy use under real academic constraints.

4.7.4. Pedagogical and Research Implications

Collectively, the results highlight the necessity of EFL reading teaching that incorporates motivational support and strategy teaching. Promising directions include instructional interventions that have been reported to solve both motivation and strategy use, e.g. extensive reading, reciprocal teaching, timed reading and technology-supported scaffolding. The most recent research on artificial intelligence and augmented reality solutions also indicates that technology can help maintain attention when aligned with pedagogical objectives.

Future studies ought to adopt a mixed-methods or longitudinal design to observe the time-course

changes in motivational profiles and the mediation of individual differences in reading development.

5. CONCLUSION

This study reviews how learner motivation and the use of reading strategies have been reported among Saudi EFL university students, with a specific focus on the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and the obstacles learners face when implementing reading strategies. Informed by qualitative thematic analysis, the results show that Saudi EFL learners' reading behavior is conceptualized as a motivationally mediated strategic action in which motivation influences the depth, flexibility, and persistence of strategy deployment rather than just the frequency of reading.

Across the dataset, intrinsic motivation, particularly self-improvement and mastery orientation, became the key determinant of successful strategic reading. Students who had placed importance on reading as a source of personal and linguistic growth had indicated that they were more tolerant of ambiguity, more often used inferencing and rereading strategies, and were more persistent when they faced difficulty. Conversely, extrinsic motivation, though significant in the development of reading behavior, was more strongly related to efficiency-based strategies, including using a dictionary and translation, and was less consistently related to profound cognitive involvement. These results corroborate the previous Saudi EFL studies by showing that motivation and the strategy use do not only go hand in hand, but that various motivational orientations also define the quality of strategic reading use.

Another point which has been raised in the study is that motivation and strategy work in a reciprocal relationship. The effective application of a strategy strengthened the understanding and trustworthiness, which further supported motivation and maintained interest. This positive circuit was, however, regulated by contextual and linguistic limitations. The most salient challenges that reduced learners' ability to fully implement strategies despite high motivation were time pressure, fatigue, and vocabulary difficulty. These limitations highlight the need for instructional settings that facilitate strategic growth and cognitive demands that can be effectively handled.

5.1. Limitations

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the research was based on self-reported qualitative data, which show

how learners perceive their motivation and the strategies they use, rather than on direct observation of reading behavior. Despite their usefulness in informing understanding of learners' cognitive and affective experiences, self-reports may not capture the actual deployment of strategies during reading. Second, the study sample was limited to the male undergraduate students of one Saudi university, and thus the generalizability of the results to other institutional environments, level of proficiency, or female students is limited. Third, the qualitative design is most appropriate for investigating depth and meaning; however, statistical generalization and causal inference provide information about the relationships among motivation, strategy use, and reading comprehension outcomes.

5.2. Recommendations for Future Research

The limitations in future studies ought to be overcome by using mixed-methods or longitudinal research to integrate qualitative knowledge with quantitative indicators of motivation, strategy use, and reading performance. More direct evidence of

strategy deployment in real-time reading situations might be available through observational, think-aloud, or eye-tracking procedures. It would be beneficial to increase the number of participants to cover female learners, different universities and varying levels of proficiency to improve the contextual reach and extrapolation of results.

Furthermore, research is needed on how intrinsic motivation and long-term strategic involvement can be promoted through the implementation of instructional activities such as explicit strategy instruction, extensive reading programs, or technology-supported reading conditions. Considering the recent developments in the field of AI- and AR-mediated language learning, it is appropriate to focus on the importance of research into new domains of the application of digital tools in pedagogical practice that support the motivation-strategies correspondence rather than faster task accomplishment. Lastly, person-centered solutions that investigate the motivation and cognitive profiles of individuals can provide useful insights into differentiated instruction and personal reading assistance in Saudi EFL settings.

Declarations: The authors acknowledge the use of DeepSeek and Grammarly for language editing and proofreading purposes. These tools were not involved in the conceptualization of the study, data analysis, interpretation of findings, or content development. Any remaining errors or omissions are the sole responsibility of the authors.

Data Availability: The datasets generated and analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Competing Interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Acknowledgment: This work was supported and funded by the Deanship of Scientific Research at Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University (IMSIU) (grant number IMSIU-DDRSP2602).

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