

Driving Student Engagement through Reading Motivation: A Tertiary-Level Analysis of Self-Efficacy and Motivational Factors

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Abstract

This study investigates the influence of multidimensional factors, self-efficacy, intrinsic, extrinsic, and social motivation on reading motivation among undergraduate students in Cambodian higher education, with a specific focus on business-related disciplines. Employing quantitative research design, data were collected from 360 students across various majors and academic year levels using a structured questionnaire disseminated via digital platforms. A non-probability sampling strategy—combining convenience, purposive, and quota techniques—was adopted to ensure diverse representation. The instrument measured key motivational constructs using a five-point Likert scale. A total of 360 valid responses were obtained and analyzed using SPSS, JASP software and a structured excel calculator. SPSS (26) and JASP (0.19.3) were used to check factor loading and internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha), run correlation matrices, and analyze multiple regressions to test the relationships among variables. And a structured excel calculator was used to calculate composite reliability (CR), average variance extract (AVE), and discriminant validity. Findings revealed that self-efficacy and extrinsic motivation have significant influences on reading motivation. However, intrinsic motivation and social motivation did not have significant effect on reading motivation. These results revealed pathways linking motivational dimensions to students' reading engagement, offering empirical insights to inform curriculum design, faculty development, and student support strategies. The study contributes to evidence-based improvements in academic engagement and institutional quality enhancement within the Cambodian higher education context.

Keywords: *Self-Efficacy, Intrinsic Motivation, Extrinsic Motivation, Social Motivation, Reading Motivation*

1. Introduction

Prior to the 1970s, Cambodia's higher education system had only modest institutional development. During the Khmer Rouge regime, universities were dismantled and much of the nation's intellectual infrastructures was eradicated. The system nearly completely collapsed. Cambodia has tried to restore its academic sector via institutional development, international cooperation, and policy change in the decades that have followed this destruction. Today, Cambodian universities are undergoing a new phase of transformation, with increasing emphasis on faculty development, curriculum modernization, and student-centered learning (Schetter, 2013). Despite these efforts, challenges persist: limited research capacity, uneven teaching quality, and underdeveloped academic cultures continue to affect student engagement and learning outcomes (Iqbal et al., 2023; Huang, 2022).

One critical area of concern is students' reading motivation—a key determinant of academic achievement, intellectual growth, and lifelong learning in postsecondary education. In many university settings, including Cambodia, students frequently exhibit low levels of reading enthusiasm and engagement, which can impair their performance and hinder the development of critical thinking skills (Bergman, 2016; Barotas & Palma, 2023). Understanding and addressing the factors that influence reading motivation is therefore essential for improving educational outcomes and fostering a more vibrant academic culture in Cambodian higher education.

Research and innovation are still becoming strategic priority at the majority of Cambodian universities, which largely serve as teaching establishments (CDRI, 2023). Obstacles that students frequently encounter include a lack of willingness to engage extensively with books beyond exam preparation, restricted access to academic resources, and underdeveloped reading cultures (Huang et al., 2022). Given these circumstances, it is particularly critical to comprehend the factors that motivate reading in this setting.

Designing effective curricula, teaching methodologies, and student support systems requires an understanding of how these aspects interact within the Cambodian university context. Although deeper engagement and academic resilience are frequently linked to intrinsic and self-efficacy-based motivations, extrinsic and social motivations can also be beneficial in structured learning environments (Barotas & Palma, 2023; Zhang et al., 2025). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate how these motivating elements relate to university students in Cambodia's reading engagement.

2. Literature review

Reading motivation refers to the internal and external factors that influence a student's willingness to engage in reading activities. It is a complex, multidimensional construct shaped by psychological beliefs, personal interests, social dynamics, and reward systems (van der Sande et al., 2023; Conradi et al., 2014). This study conceptualizes reading motivation as the dependent variable, influenced by four key independent variables. These include self-efficacy, or students' belief in their ability to succeed in reading tasks (Bakkaloğlu & Pilten, 2023); intrinsic motivation, which stems from personal enjoyment or interest in reading; extrinsic motivation, driven by external rewards such as grades or recognition (Iqbal et al., 2023; Huang & Reynolds, 2022); and social motivation, which encompasses the influence of peers, collaborative learning, and social norms (Zhang et al., 2025). Together, these factors provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the drivers of reading engagement among university students.

Three well-known psychological theories serve as the foundation for this research paradigm, which together shed light on the complex nature of reading motivation. According to Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, self-efficacy—the conviction that one can succeed—is a crucial factor in determining motivation and behavioral engagement (Bandura, 1997). By distinguishing between intrinsic motivation—which results from sincere desire and personal fulfillment—and extrinsic motivation—which is fueled by outside incentives or pressures—Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (2000) enhances this viewpoint even further. Complementing these views, Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory emphasizes the critical role of social interaction and cultural context in shaping learners' motivation, suggesting that engagement is co-constructed through collaborative experiences and shared meaning-making (Vygotsky, 1978). Together, these theoretical foundations provide a robust basis for examining the psychological and social factors that influence students' motivation to read.

Reading Motivation

It is often acknowledged that reading motivation is a multifaceted concept that is essential to academic achievement, especially in higher education. It affects students' comprehension of literature, critical thinking skills, and perseverance in academic assignments. According to Barotas and Palma (2023), reading motivation is closely linked to students' attitudes, levels of engagement, and learning practices, highlighting its crucial role in determining academic results. Bergman (2024) further emphasized that academic reading presents a variety of difficulties for college students, from restricted

access to resources to language hurdles, and that motivation is essential to overcoming these challenges. In support of these conclusions, Balan et al., (2019) showed that motivated students who engage in excellent reading habits have a significant GPA prediction. According to Huang and Reynolds (2022), extrinsic incentive frequently surpasses intrinsic motivation in many academic contexts, and reading motivation is influenced by institutional and demographic factors.

Self-Efficacy

Reading motivation has been demonstrated to be positively and directly impacted by students' self-efficacy, which is defined as their confidence in their capacity to complete reading assignments. According to Bakkaloğlu and Pilten (2023), motivation and reading comprehension self-efficacy have a moderately favorable relationship, indicating that engagement is increased when one feels confident in their reading skills. Van der Sande et al (2023) suggests that self-efficacy-focused interventions led to significant improvements in reading results for a variety of student demographics. Furthermore, self-efficacy-building mentoring techniques can promote intrinsic motivation and long-term reading engagement, according to Luther (2022). According to a comprehensive study by Yang et al., (2018), self-efficacy was the best indicator of reading achievement, highlighting its fundamental significance in a variety of circumstances and educational levels.

Intrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic motivation, or the desire to read for pleasure or personal interest, is a strong predictor of long-term reading engagement and academic success. Johansen et al., (2023), using Self-Determination Theory, demonstrated that when students see reading activities as important and autonomous, their intrinsic motivation rises, resulting in increased vitality and academic effort. Pérez-Navío et al., (2023) discovered that intrinsic motivation was positively connected with study habits and academic achievement among university students. Mikami (2017) found that goal commitment and perceived task difficulty had a direct impact on intrinsic motivation in lengthy reading environments, particularly among language learners. In the Cambodian context, Kheang (2025) stressed the importance of intrinsic motivation for EFL students' reading comprehension, especially when combined with instructor modeling and exposure to a variety of genres.

Extrinsic Motivation

Extrinsic motivation, which is motivated by external rewards such as grades, recognition, or competition, also influences reading behavior, but in a more varied and context-dependent manner. According to Huang and Reynolds (2022), extrinsic motivation ratings among college students were slightly higher than intrinsic scores, showing that it is common in academic settings. According to Iqbal et al., (2023), extrinsic motivation may not have a significant direct influence on academic results, but it does improve institutional performance through quality culture. Wang et al., (2020) demonstrated that although extrinsic motivation had a negative correlation with reading achievement, it had a positive correlation with the application of reading methods, indicating a complex relationship. According to Hunus et al., (2015), university students frequently use extrinsic motivators like grades and competition, but these may not be sufficient to maintain deep learning or long-term engagement.

Social Motivation

Social motivation, which includes peer influence, collaborative learning, and recognition within social groups, is critical for increasing reading engagement. Webber et al. (2023) examined a variety of initiatives, including book clubs and whole-school reading cultures, and discovered that they are helpful in promoting teenage reading behavior through social reinforcement. Li et al., (2021) found that social connection and peer recognition are strong determinants of reading behavior, even in digital situations. Zhang et al., (2025) expanded on this idea by demonstrating that digital reading literacy and social motivation both increase reading engagement, particularly among adolescents navigating online learning environments. Webber (2024) noted that students enjoy social reading practices that are personally meaningful and rewarding, implying that peer-led initiatives can improve volitional reading and academic identity.

Integrated Perspectives

Recent models of reading motivation emphasize the interplay among self-efficacy, intrinsic, extrinsic, and social factors. Barotas and Palma (2023) used structural equation modeling to demonstrate that these motivational dimensions are interdependent and collectively shape students' reading engagement. van der Sande et al. (2023) concluded that interventions combining multiple motivational mechanisms—especially those that trigger interest and relevance—yield the strongest effects on reading comprehension. Jang et al. (2020) found that metacognitive strategies mediate the relationship between

motivation and achievement, highlighting the need to integrate cognitive and affective dimensions in instructional design. Zhang et al., (2025) proposed a digital-social reading model in which digital literacy and social motivation interact to shape reading behavior, reinforcing the importance of holistic frameworks in contemporary higher education.

Research Framework

The research framework was constructed based on a thorough review of relevant theoretical foundations. This study seeks to investigate the key determinants influencing reading motivation, focusing on four core constructs: self-efficacy (SE), intrinsic motivation (IM), extrinsic motivation (EM), and social motivation (SM). These variables are hypothesized to exert significant effects on students' reading motivation (RM).

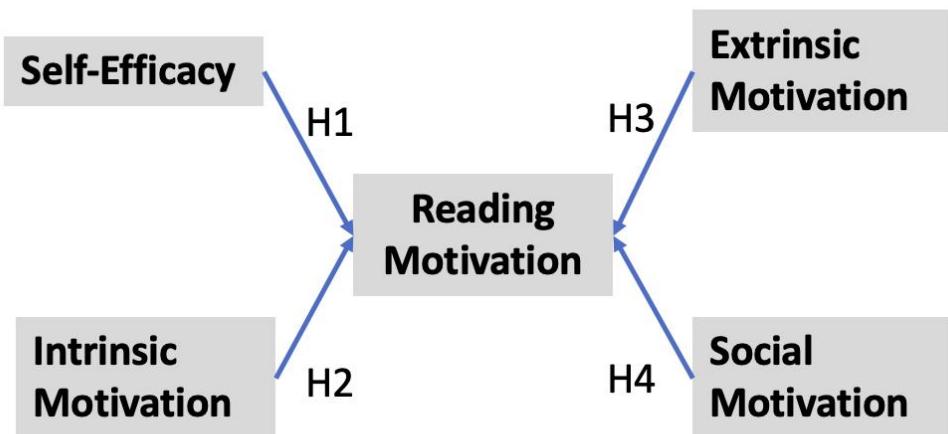


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

3. Research methodology

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research design to investigate the factors influencing students' reading motivation within Cambodian higher education. Quantitative methods are widely recognized for their ability to identify patterns, test theoretical relationships, and generalize findings across populations in educational research (Winkler & Wofford, 2024). The research focused on undergraduate students enrolled in business-related disciplines, encompassing a diverse range of majors and academic year levels—from first-year to final-year students. This population was selected to reflect the varied

academic experiences and motivational profiles within the business education context, consistent with prior studies that emphasize the importance of discipline-specific sampling in motivation research (Ziar, 2025). By using structured survey instruments and statistical analysis, the study aims to generate actionable insights into how psychological and social factors shape reading engagement among Cambodian university students.

To ensure broad representation across programs and cohorts, a non-probability sampling strategy was adopted, combining convenience, purposive, and quota sampling techniques. This multi-method approach was appropriate given the exploratory nature of the study and the practical constraints of participant accessibility. Quota sampling was used to balance responses across academic years, purposive sampling ensured inclusion of students from key business-related majors, and convenience sampling facilitated efficient data collection through digital platforms.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed in Google Forms. The instrument was disseminated via widely used social media channels, including Telegram and Messenger group networks, to maximize reach and engagement. The questionnaire employed a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (“Strongly Disagree”) to 5 (“Strongly Agree”) to capture student perceptions across multiple motivational dimensions.

A total of 360 valid responses were obtained and analyzed using SPSS, JASP software and a structured excel calculator. SPSS (26) and JASP (0.19.3) were used to check factor loading and internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha), run correlation matrices, and analyze multiple regressions to test the relationships among variables. And a structured excel calculator was used to calculate composite reliability (CR), average variance extract (AVE), and discriminant validity.

4. Data analysis and result discussion

Table 1: Respondent Profiles (n = 360)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	276	76.7%
	Male	84	23.3%
Education Level	Bachelor's Degree	267	74.2%
	Associate Degree	89	24.7%
	Master's Degree	3	0.8%
	Doctoral	1	0.3%
Year of Study	Year 1	289	80.3%

(To be continued)

Table 1: Respondent Profiles (n = 360) (continued)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Year	Year 2	48	13.3%
	Year 3	18	5.0%
	Year 4	5	1.4%
Reading Duration	Below 1 hour/day	283	78.6%
	1–3 hours/day	66	18.3%
	Over 3 hours/day	11	3.1%
Best Time to Read	At night	198	55.0%
	In the Morning	117	32.5%
	In the Evening	29	8.1%
	In the Afternoon	16	4.4%
Purpose of Reading	To Understand Learning Topics	221	61.4%
	Search for Information	110	30.6%
	For Fun or Pleasure	29	8.1%
Reading Materials	Course Textbooks	203	56.4%
	Novels	107	29.7%
	Newspapers	39	10.8%
	Magazines	11	3.1%

Based on the statistical frequency and percentage from the table above, the majority of respondents are female (76.7%), while male participants make up 23.3%. Most are enrolled in a Bachelor's degree program (74.2%), followed by Associate degree students (24.7%), with a very small number in Master's and Doctoral programs (1.1%). A large proportion are in Year 1 (80.3%), with fewer in Year 2 (13.3%), Year 3 (5.3%), and Year 4 (1.1%). In terms of reading habits, 78.6% of students read less than 1 hour per day, while 18.3% read between 1–3 hours, and only 3.1% read more than 3 hours daily. The most preferred reading time is at night (55%), followed by morning (32.5%), evening (8.1%), and afternoon (4.4%). Regarding reading purpose, 61.4% read to understand learning topics, 30.6% to search for information, and 8.1% for fun or pleasure. The most commonly used reading materials are course textbooks (56.4%), followed by novels (29.7%), newspapers (10.8%), and magazines (3.1%).

Table 2. Convergent Validity: Factor Loading, Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability, and Average variance

Constructs	Items	Factor Loading	CR	AVE	Alpha(α)
Self-Efficacy	SE3	0.783	0.812	0.52	0.691
	SE4	0.624			
	SE5	0.758			
	SE8	0.712			
Intrinsic Motivation	IM2	0.661	0.781	0.47	0.625
	IM4	0.670			
	IM5	0.691			
	IM6	0.722			
Extrinsic Motivation	EM1	0.699	0.831	0.49	0.746
	EM2	0.698			
	EM3	0.740			
	EM4	0.700			
	EM5	0.686			
Social Motivation	SM1	0.700	0.845	0.52	0.770
	SM2	0.797			
	SM3	0.793			
	SM5	0.664			
	SM6	0.650			
Reading Motivation	RM2	0.769	0.842	0.641	0.719
	RM3	0.857			
	RM4	0.773			

The initial model of each construct has a total item of eight (8) for Self-Efficacy (SE), eight (8) for Intrinsic Motivation (IM), seven (7) for Extrinsic Motivation, eight (8) for Social Motivation (SM), and four (4) for Reading Motivation (RM). For Self-Efficacy (SE), (item 1, 2, 6) were removed due to its threshold below 0.6 as recommended by Guadagnoli & Velicer (1988) to ensure reliability of factors. Intrinsic Motivation (Item 1,3,7,8), Extrinsic Motivation (item 6,7), Social Motivation (4, 7, 8), and Reading Motivation (item 1) also dropped. The remaining items of all constructs and their factor loadings range from (0.624-0.783) for Self-Efficacy, Intrinsic (0.66-0.722), Extrinsic

Motivation (0.686-0.740), Social Motivation (0.650-0.797), and Reading Motivation (0.763-0.857).

Regarding Composite Reliability (CR), the recommended minimum value is 0.70, and all the constructs range from 0.781 (IM) to 0.845 (SM). The internal consistency of the instruments is consistently measured and reinforced with the values of CR of each construct: SE (0.812), IM (0.781), EM (0.831), SM (0.845), and RM (0.842).

In addition, Average Variance Extract (AVE) values were all acceptable. Some are below the thresholds. SE (0.52), SM (0.52, and RM (0.64) exceed 0.5, confirming convergent validity. However, IM (0.47) and EM (0.49) are below the threshold of 0.5. Lam (2012) stated that AVE is acceptable at a value of less than 0.5 if CR is higher than 0.6.

Finally, Cronbach's alpha, indicating internal consistency has an acceptable and strong values, ranging from IM (0.625), SE (6.91), RM (0.719), EM (0.746), to SM (0.770). These values confirm that all the constructs are reliably measured and fit for use.

Table 3. Discriminant Validity (Fornell-Larcker Criterion)

Variables	SE	IM	EM	SM	RM
SE	0.721				
IM	0.491	0.686			
EM	0.440	0.429	0.704		
SM	0.426	0.283	0.315	0.723	
RM	0.469	0.384	0.527	0.270	0.800

Table 4. Multiple Regression Analysis

Model	Unstandardized	Standard Error	Standardized	t	p
SE	0.279	0.060	0.250	4.665	< .001
IM	0.106	0.056	0.097	1.899	0.058
EM	0.388	0.052	0.370	7.424	< .001
SM	0.019	0.046	0.020	0.413	0.680

Self-Efficacy, predictor, shows a statistical significance of reading motivation. The standardized $\beta = 0.250$, $t = 4.665$, $p < 0.001$ indicate that students believing in their ability to comprehend and apply reading materials are more likely to engage in reading. This finding aligns with some literature, showing confidence in academic persistence. In academic practices, the faculty or the academic management should be dependent on instructional design, offering formative feedback, scaffolding reading tasks, and building students' self-belief. In addition, Extrinsic Motivation was the strongest predictor in the model. The standard beta = 0.370, t-value = 7.424, and p-value < 0.001 indicate a strong effect and confirm statistical significance. The result is responsive to the external incentives such as grades, recognition, or career-related factors when coming to reading engagement. Cambodian students have been so familiar to the culture of future employment opportunities with their current academic achievement. Several academic activities should be considered and integrated into the school's curriculum design such as reading challenge competitions, reading milestones, and digital badges.

However, the other two constructs, intrinsic motivation and social motivation do not have strong prediction in the model. They have no significant effects on reading motivation. IM (standardized $\beta = 0.097$, $t = 1.899$, $p = 0.058$) indicate that among the students, they do not read for personal growth, curiosity, or enjoyment. The students prioritize academic utility over personal enrichment. Intrinsic motivation remains the core foundation since it is from the inside of the students. Faculty may consider integrating more engaging and relevant texts to provide students with graduate intrinsic interests. And for SM (standardized $\beta = 0.020$, $t = 0.413$, $p = 0.680$) do not meet the thresholds. This indicates that peer influence or social reading activities are not important to students' reading behavior. This could be from the couture of Cambodian teaching context which is a teacher-centered learning environment or the teaching method is limited for collaborative engagement opportunities. The university may consider introducing group reading, discussion session forums or a reading center.

Discussion

With the thresholds ($\beta = 0.370$, $t = 7.424$, $p < 0.001$), extrinsic motivation is the most influential factor on reading motivation. This suggests that students are driven by external rewards such as recognition, final grades, GPA, and career related advancement. This finding aligns with some previous studies by Kelley & O'Decker (2009) that extrinsic motivation is an important role in academic reading. Cambodian culture of tertiary education remains close the future employment and academic success. Another research

by McGeown et al., (2015) found and suggested that extrinsic motivation initiated reading behavior and sustain ambitious learners. In addition to extrinsic motivation, self-efficacy showed a significant positive effect ($\beta = 0.250$, $t = 4.665$, $p < .001$), indicating that believing in their ability students tend to comprehend and use reading materials to participate in reading. There were some studies by Guthrie (2007) and Schiefele et al. (2012) identifying that reading self-efficacy was a key predictor of reading success and motivation. The result should be considered by the faculty to initiate and offer challenges to build students' confidence by scaffolding reading tasks and formative feedback.

Intrinsic motivation ($\beta = 0.097$, $t = 1.899$, $p = 0.058$) and social motivation ($\beta = 0.020$, $t = 0.413$, $p = 0.680$) do not significantly predict reading motivation. The result is contradicted to research by Wigfield & Guthrie (1997) that intrinsic motivation is often enjoyed by most readers for their lifelong learning. Similarly, social motivation is not key factor influencing reading motivation. There are several causes from a learning and teaching culture among Cambodian higher education that have so far adopted teacher-center learning cultures which limited to the collaborative reading opportunities.

5. Conclusion, implication, and recommendation

The study investigated four key motivational factors affecting reading motivation at a tertiary education level, self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and social motivation. The results showed that extrinsic motivation and self-efficacy strongly and significantly predict and affect the reading motivation, while intrinsic motivation and social motivation do not reveal this statistical significance and prediction. From these results achievement-oriented incentives and confidence in reading ability play significant roles in driving reading motivation. It is a pragmatic academic culture where students perceive reading as a means of academic success and future job oriented. Curriculum design and reforms and instructional methods should be taken into consideration based in these results since Cambodian higher education context highly appreciate the future employment and outcome-based performance.

The findings of this study carry important implications for curriculum designers, educators, and higher education policymakers in Cambodia. Curriculum reforms and instructional strategies should align with this motivational profile by embedding performance-based incentives. Creating spaces for voluntary reading, integrating diverse and culturally relevant texts, and promoting peer-led reading initiatives can gradually shift students' perceptions of reading from a purely instrumental activity to a personally meaningful one.

Several factors should be considered such as recognition systems, reading milestones, and digital badges for extrinsic motivation and scaffolding reading tasks, formative feedback, and reflection for self-efficacy and be integrated into the program structure to promote reading engagement. It is a performance-based motivator. However, while intrinsic motivation and social motivation were not significant in this study, they deserve a degree of consideration whether and in what ways the higher educational institution should create an environment where students learn to enjoy reading rather than reading for outcomes. And the collaborative reading environment among students should also be created or embedded into the program of study. In this sense, to boost engagement among students and learners, strategies such as reading competition, public speaking, or digital badges should be considered integrating into the curriculum design.

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Author's Biography

Bunteng Long is a professor, a scholar and a researcher who has a doctoral degree in Innovative Technology and Business Management, a Master's degree in General Management from Assumption University of Thailand (AU), and a Bachelor's degree in Finance and Banking from the National University of Management (Cambodia). He has been in higher education for almost 20 years. In this education career, he has been teaching different disciplines of business-related courses, researches, digital business, and supply chain management in both undergraduate and post-graduate levels. Moreover, Dr. Bunteng has developed and designed a number of academic programs and professional skills and has provided several corporate training courses in the business industry. At the same time, he has also produced several articles and journals, all of which have been published internationally. He is also a well-recognized reviewer and supervisor for lots of researches and articles for higher educational institutions in Cambodia. In late 2023, Dr. Bunteng was awarded an outstanding Ph.D. Holder's Award for his Research contribution in Digital Education by ACLEDA Institute of Business, and a nomination as a research fellow and visiting scholar at a well-known university in Malaysia, INTI International University of Malaysia.

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