

**THE DEVELOPMENT AND EFFECTIVENESS OF  
THE READING BOOST MODULE ON ENGLISH  
READING COMPREHENSION AND READING  
ENGAGEMENT AMONG CHINESE BUSINESS  
ENGLISH UNDERGRADUATES**

**ZHU AIHUA**

**UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA**

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by

**ZHU AIHUA**

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for the degree of  
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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BEC	Business English Cambridge
CSE	Chinese English Proficiency Scale
CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference for Languages
EGP	English for General Purposes
ESP	English for Specific Purposes
GSE	Global Scale of English
LPS	language proficiency scale
NEEC	National English Entrance Examination
RSF	Reading System Framework

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**PEMBANGUNAN DAN KEBERKESANAN MODUL READING BOOST  
TERHADAP PEMAHAMAN MEMBACA BAHASA INGGERIS DAN  
PENGLIBATAN MEMBACA DALAM KALANGAN MAHASISWA  
PERNIAGAAN BAHASA INGGERIS CHINA**

**ABSTRAK**

Dalam era keterhubungan global yang semakin meningkat, Bahasa Inggeris Perniagaan telah menjadi penting untuk komunikasi yang berkesan, mendorong penubuhan pelbagai program sarjana muda di China sejak 2007 untuk memenuhi permintaan ini. Walaupun program Bahasa Inggeris Perniagaan berkembang pesat, pelajar masih menghadapi kesukaran dalam kefahaman bacaan dan penglibatan kerana kaedah pembelajaran terjemahan tatabahasa dan bahan pembelajaran yang tidak sesuai. Kajian ini membangunkan modul "Reading Boost" yang berasaskan teori penetapan matlamat dan konstruktivisme untuk meningkatkan kefahaman bacaan bahasa Inggeris dan penglibatan bacaan. Modul ini merangkumi penilaian sendiri, penetapan matlamat menggunakan deskriptor Skala Global Bahasa Inggeris (GSE), pengajaran kemahiran membaca, bacaan bahan asli, dan refleksi. Menggunakan reka bentuk kuasi-eksperimen dengan pendekatan kaedah campuran, kajian ini menggunakan ujian T sampel berpasangan dan ANCOVA untuk menilai peningkatan kuantitatif, serta temu bual kualitatif untuk meneroka pengalaman pelajar. Analisis menunjukkan peningkatan ketara dalam kefahaman bacaan keseluruhan, terutamanya dalam

pengenalpastian perkataan, kefahaman literal dan inferensial. Walaupun kefahaman penilaian tidak mencapai signifikan statistik, kemajuan diperhatikan dalam kumpulan eksperimen berbanding dengan kumpulan kawalan. Data kualitatif mengesahkan keputusan ini, dengan pelajar melaporkan peningkatan dalam kefahaman bacaan mereka. Penglibatan bacaan keseluruhan pelajar dan subdimensi emosi, tingkah laku, dan kognisi turut menunjukkan peningkatan, seperti yang dibuktikan oleh hasil kuantitatif dan kualitatif. Kajian ini menekankan keberkesanan modul "Reading Boost" dalam menangani masalah kefahaman bacaan dan penglibatan. Bagi pelajar, modul ini meningkatkan kefahaman dan menyediakan mereka untuk memenuhi keperluan profesional. Pendidik digalakkan untuk menggunakan pendekatan berpusatkan pelajar dan memanfaatkan deskriptor GSE untuk penetapan matlamat yang berkesan. Pembuat dasar harus menyokong pembangunan profesional untuk guru bagi memudahkan pembelajaran pelajar, manakala pembangun sumber perlu memberi tumpuan kepada penciptaan bahan yang lebih bersifat kehidupan sebenar untuk memperkayakan amalan pendidikan.

**THE DEVELOPMENT AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE READING  
BOOST MODULE ON ENGLISH READING COMPREHENSION AND  
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**ABSTRACT**

As global interconnectedness increases, Business English has become essential for effective communication, prompting the establishment of numerous undergraduate programs in China since 2007 to address this demand. Despite the proliferation of Business English programs, students struggle with reading comprehension and engagement due to grammar-translation learning methods and inappropriate learning materials. This study developed a Reading Boost module grounded in goal-setting and constructivism theories to improve English reading comprehension and reading engagement. The module includes self-assessment, goal-setting using Global Scale of English (GSE) descriptors, reading skills instruction, authentic material reading, and reflection. Employing a quasi-experimental design with a mixed-methods approach, the study used paired-sample *T*-tests and ANCOVA to assess quantitative data, complemented by qualitative interviews to explore students' experiences. The analysis revealed significant improvements in overall reading comprehension, notably in word identification and literal and inferential comprehension. Although evaluative comprehension did not achieve statistical significance, progress was observed in the

experimental group compared to the control group. Qualitative data confirmed these results, with students reporting improved evaluative reading comprehension. Students' overall reading engagement and its subdimensions in emotion, behaviour, and cognition were also improved, as evidenced by both the quantitative and qualitative results. The study highlights the Reading Boost module's effectiveness in addressing reading comprehension and engagement issues. For students, the module enhances comprehension and prepares them for professional demands. Educators are encouraged to adopt student-centred approaches and utilise GSE descriptors for effective goal-setting. Policymakers should support professional development for teachers to facilitate students' learning, while resource developers should focus on creating more real-life materials to enrich educational practices.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

In Chinese colleges, English education is categorised into English majors and non-majors. Business English, which falls under English for Specific Purposes (ESP), is a specialised area within English majors (The National Administration Committee on Teaching English Language to Majors in Higher Education[NAC], 2018). Effective communication in business contexts requires a combination of language skills, including listening, speaking, and writing. Among these, reading is particularly essential, as it enhances language proficiency, academic performance, and career prospects (Hartshorn et al., 2019; Miranda Torres et al., 2020). Business English reading courses focus on developing skills relevant to business contexts, integrating specific discourse and genres, making them more complex than general English reading making them more complex than general English reading(Belcher, 2006; Łacka-Badura, 2021).

Reading comprehension is a process that involves two steps: word processing and text processing. Word processing includes identifying words and understanding their meanings, while text processing involves integrating these words to form a coherent understanding (Perfetti & Stafura, 2014). For business English learners, good word identification and higher-level comprehension, such as inferential and evaluative comprehension, are paramount(Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998; Gavell, 2021).

However, many Chinese business English students struggle with word identification (Wu, 2019; Xie, 2020), and many undergraduates also have problems with literal comprehension, and their inferencing and evaluative comprehension are even worse (Li & Nair, 2021; Hu et al., 2023).

Good reading comprehension in business English requires active engagement with relevant materials. Unfortunately, many Chinese undergraduates are disengaged, showing low interest and effort and a lack of planning, monitoring, and reflection. (Li & Zhou, 2017; Liu et al., 2020; Hu et al., 2023), This is partly due to ineffective learning methods such as rote memorisation, grammar analysis, and translation (Cao, 2020; Hu & Wu, 2020; Yu, 2019; Yang, 2017). Inappropriate reading materials further disengaged them, thereby worsening their reading comprehension (Zhou, 2020).

Empirical studies have proved that incorporating self-assessment (Panadero et al., 2017) and goal-setting (Shih & Reynolds, 2018) can improve students' reading comprehension and engagement. Reflection supports cognitive growth and academic success (Chang, 2019; Wang et al., 2023). While reading skill instruction helps learners comprehend texts more effectively (Al Roomy, 2022; Hall et al, 2020). Using authentic and relevant materials can further improve comprehension and engagement (Elkasovic & Colakovic, 2023; Namaziandost et al., 2022).

However, several studies have combined these practices to improve learning (Clift, 2015; Yang et al, 2018; Chung et al, 2021), but few in English reading comprehension (Shih & Reynolds, 2018). This study aims to develop a Reading Boost

module by combining self-assessment, goal-setting, reading skill instruction, authentic material, and reflection to improve reading comprehension and reading engagement among business English learners in China, and examine its effectiveness.

## **1.2 Background of the Study**

Due to economic globalisation, English has become the dominant global language, serving as a crucial Lingua Franca for international communication (Lenkaitis & Loranc, 2021). As the demand for business professionals proficient in English continues to rise, the importance of Business English has grown significantly (Roshid et al., 2022). In response to this global trend, over 400 universities and nearly 800 colleges in China have established business English programs since 2007 (Shi & Cheng, 2019). These programs predominantly cater to Chinese college English majors aged 18-22 pursuing four-year bachelor's degrees. Most of them are female and enrolled with CEFR A2 English proficiency level (Peng et al., 2022). The primary objective of these programs is to enhance students' language abilities to meet professional and global business demands.

Recognizing the growing importance of English, the Chinese government has made English education a priority, from primary school through to higher education (Hu, 2021). Following the national college entrance examination, students who major in English focus on advancing their language skills. To support this development and improve foreign language education at the tertiary level, the Chinese Ministry of

Education introduced the *National Standards of Teaching Quality for Undergraduate Foreign Language and Literature Majors* (hereinafter referred to as the *National Standards*) in 2018 and the *Teaching Guide for Undergraduate English Major* (hereinafter referred to as *Teaching Guide*) in 2020. These documents underscore that business English majors must possess excellent English language proficiency and broad business knowledge and skills.

### **1.2.1 Business English Reading Comprehension**

The *Teaching Guide* and *National Standards* emphasised the importance of Business English reading for Business English majors, particularly the ability to understand the author's viewpoints, attitudes, and implicit meanings. Additionally, they require students to acquire accurate information, apply business knowledge to solve problems and carry out practical tasks (NAC, 2018; NAC, 2020). By the second year, Business English majors are required to reach level 6 according to China's Standards of English Scales (CSE), equivalent to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) B2 level (NAC, 2018).

According to Cummins (2000), effective reading comprehension progresses from basic communication skills to cognitive academic language proficiency, which is crucial for professional success. This progression prepares them to excel in professional environments by enhancing their ability to compare, evaluate, and infer information. For business English majors, good reading comprehension ability is essential not only for academic achievement but also for professional readiness

(Łacka-Badura, 2021). Accurate reading is vital in the business world for understanding documents like manuals, contracts, and emails (Li, 2023). Additionally, professionals must interpret market reports and financial documents, which require a high level of reading proficiency (Zhong, 2021). Many job descriptions in China explicitly require advanced English reading abilities. Therefore, strong reading comprehension is essential for meeting professional requirements and excelling in the workplace (Kim et al., 2020; Łacka-Badura, 2021), making it a key element of Business English education and career preparation.

Reading consists of two main elements: word recognition and comprehension processes (Perfetti & Hart, 2002). Word processing refers to the ability to recognize written words, retrieve their meanings from mental lexicons, and decode them efficiently (Perfetti & Stafura, 2014). Accurate word identification is foundational in Business English due to the frequent use of specialized terminology (He & Cirocki, 2024; Park et al., 2021). This word level of understanding is the foundation for understanding texts (Perfetti, 2007) and developing other skills (Ellis, 1997; Milton, 2013). Text processing, on the other hand, involves integrating individual words into meaningful structures to construct a coherent understanding of the text. This comprehension occurs at different levels: literal comprehension involves understanding explicit information, inferential comprehension requires drawing conclusions based on textual clues and prior knowledge, and evaluative comprehension entails critically analyzing and assessing the text's meaning and

implications (Basaraba et al., 2013; Pearson & Johanson, 1978). Among these, inferential and evaluative are at higher levels. Business English reading particularly emphasises higher-level comprehension skills, such as utilising text features, identifying organisational structures, making inferences (Dudley -Evans & St John, 1998), critically assessing information (Hirsch, 2003; Kärbla et al., 2020; Vacca et al., 2021).

These four dimensions of reading comprehension—word identification, literal, inferential, and evaluative comprehension—are vital for Business English learners (Kärbla et al., 2020; NAC, 2020). They enable learners to understand specialised vocabulary, accurately interpret explicit information, infer underlying meanings, and critically assess business texts. A good command of business English reading is indispensable for facilitating effective communication, informed decision-making, and attaining success within professional environments.

### **1.2.2 Reading Engagement**

Reading comprehension necessitates active engagement with the text (Hamedi et al., 2020; Sweet & Snow, 2003). The more engaged the reader is, the better their reading skills and performance are (Lee et al., 2021).

Fredricks et al. (2004) categorised engagement into emotion, behaviour, and cognition. This categorisation is widely accepted in reading (Wigfield & Guthrie, 2000; Lee et al., 2021). Emotional engagement involves students' feelings, attitudes, and emotional reactions toward reading tasks (e.g., enjoyment, interest); Behavioral

engagement reflects students' active participation and effort in reading activities, including focus, persistence, and interaction with the text; Cognitive engagement refers to the mental effort and strategies students use to engage with and comprehend the text, such as deep processing, critical thinking, and connecting prior knowledge (Wigfield & Guthrie, 2000).

Reading engagement strongly predicts reading comprehension (Lin et al., 2021; Hamed, 2020), with each dimension having a significant impact on comprehension outcomes (Cho et al., 2019). When readers are emotionally engaged in their reading experience, they derive pleasure from their reading and feel confident in their abilities. They are more likely to persevere through challenges and persist until they achieve their reading goals (Wigfield & Guthrie, 2000). When readers are behaviorally engaged, they are more focused, attentive, and persistent in their reading tasks, leading to improved comprehension (Bråten et al., 2018; Guthrie & Klauda, 2014). Cognitively engaged readers are often involved in deep mental processing and strategic thinking. They actively apply strategies like making connections with prior knowledge, monitoring their understanding, and analysing the text (Tarchi, 2017). This mental investment helps them construct meaning, interpret complex ideas, and retain information, ultimately enhancing their comprehension (Guthrie et al., 2004; Wigfield & Guthrie, 2000).

In essence, engaged readers are strategic, motivated, and driven by knowledge (Guthrie et al., 2004). Therefore, fostering reading engagement among Chinese

business English learners enhances their ability to succeed academically and professionally (Cho et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2021).

### **1.2.3 Business English Reading in Higher Education**

In line with the *National Standards* and the *Teaching Guide*, business English reading is designated as a core course in universities and colleges, spanning four semesters starting from the second year. This 90-minute weekly course aims to equip students with the skills to master business-specific reading (NAC, 2020). By the end, students should be capable of effectively reading and understanding business articles from authentic English sources, applying their knowledge to solve problems and completing practical tasks (NAC, 2018).

Despite these requirements, many students continue to use high school reading strategies, focusing on memorisation and grammar analysis rather than understanding the text's overall context (L. Hu et al., 2023; Cao, 2020). Translation is also a frequently used learning method for business English reading (J. Hu & Wu, 2020; Yang, 2017; Yu, 2019). Reading is taken as a simple process of passive decoding (Dai, 2024), where students are expected to sit, take notes, and memorise the material taught by the teacher (Yu, 2019). These problems are even more serious in private colleges, where students depend their reading heavily on teachers' instruction instead of making discoveries by themselves (Hu, 2018; Xing & Wang, 2017). This passive learning made college students at this level struggle to attain the requirements of the *National*

*Standards* compared to their peers at public universities (R. Hu, 2018; Xing & Wang, 2017; X. Zhang et al., 2021).

In light of these challenges, the selection of appropriate textbooks becomes even more critical in effectively delivering a comprehensive business English course. To effectively implement this comprehensive business English course, the selection of textbooks plays a crucial role in delivering relevant and updated content (Łącka-Badura, 2021). Many Chinese Business English programs use the same textbooks, first printed in 2010, across various institutions (Han Y., 2018). Students at key universities generally have higher English proficiency levels than private colleges. As a result, using the same reading materials across institutions creates significant challenges for students with weaker foundations, particularly those in private colleges. These students may struggle to keep pace with the content, leading to comprehension and performance gaps. Additionally, these textbooks include some articles from sources like *Fortune* and *The Economist* but primarily cover general English topics and have not been updated to reflect recent business changes (Jia, 2017; Liu D., 2020). The 2023 reprint retained the original content, which has become outdated due to the rapid economic and social developments that have occurred since its initial publication.

### **1.3 Problem Statement**

Despite the recognised importance of reading comprehension for language proficiency and future career success and the critical role of reading engagement in

enhancing comprehension, studies consistently reveal deficiencies in both reading comprehension (Jiang, 2020; Wu, 2019; Li, 2023; Zhang, 2024) and engagement (Zhou & Huang, 2018; Chen, 2022) among Chinese business English learners.

Many business English learners struggle with reading comprehension, which hampers their ability to fully grasp texts, thereby affecting their academic performance and future careers (Liu., 2020; Li, 2023). Evidence from Business English Cambridge (BEC) tests shows that Chinese students perform poorly compared to their peers in other non-English-speaking countries. This observation is supported by their notably lower passing rates and grades (Bi, 2019; Tang, 2020). The poor performance in these exams highlights a critical deficiency in reading comprehension skills, especially in evaluative and inferential comprehension tasks (Lian et al., 2016; Yin, 2022; B. Wu & Fang, 2021).

A deeper understanding of these challenges reveals specific difficulties. One of them is the deficiency of word identification in business English domain (Cao, 2020; Wang & Cui, 2020; Wu, 2019; Xie, 2020). Scholars claim that this lack of business-related words is a fundamental challenge to reading comprehension that many students face (Chen & Intaraprasert, 2014; Cui et al., 2021; Cho et al., 2019). It leads to difficulties in understanding specific business texts (Wu, 2019) and the inability to grasp the main points (Sun, 2024; Zhou, 2023). Moreover, the challenge of poor word identification has a knock-on effect on students' higher-level reading abilities. For example, research by Jiang (2020) highlighted students' challenges in inferential

thinking beyond explicit text information. Li and Nair (2021) also documented deficiencies in effective information inference and evaluation. L. Hu et al. (2023) confirmed that many Chinese English learners rely on memorisation rather than developing evaluative and inferential comprehension skills. These deficiencies were interrelated, causing a chain effect: the word identification deficiency led to limited literal comprehension, which made higher-level comprehension more challenging (Yin, 2022; Jiang, 2020; Cain & Oakhill, 2014; Kärbla et al., 2021).

Another significant challenge is the lack of reading engagement among Chinese business English learners, which severely undermines their ability to engage in comprehending business-related texts (Zhang, 2023; Zhou, 2022). Studies have found that many students demonstrate emotional disengagement, characterised by reading without purpose or interest (Chen & Deng, 2023; Chen, 2022; J. Zhang, 2023). Their reading is limited to passing course exams rather than understanding the material genuinely (Li, 2020). Additionally, behavioural disengagement is prevalent. For example, many students limit reading to textbooks or spend time on online entertainment instead of exploring diverse business materials (Zhou, 2022; Wu, 2019; Zhou & Huang, 2018; Zhang, 2023). Research indicates that approximately 50% of business English students read less than 30 minutes daily (Zhou & Huang, 2018); the percentage is 85% in the study by Hou et al. (2020). Moreover, 69% did not take notes while reading (Ge, 2021). Cognitive disengagement compounds the issue. Studies found that students often engage in superficial reading and rarely plan, set goals, self-

evaluate, or reflect on their progress (Chen & Deng,2023; Hu et al., 2021; Zhu & Hu, 2017; R. Li, 2023), especially planning and goal-setting. For example, Zhou and Huang(2018) found that 80% of students lack reading goals. Similar high proportions were found in Hou et al.(2020) and Ge (2021); some students have goals but fail to take action to achieve them (Zha, 2016).

These issues reveal significant gaps in reading comprehension and engagement among Business English learners. These problems were rooted in the current learning approach where the grammar-translation method is adopted by Chinese business English learners. This passive and inefficient reading approach is more prevalent in private colleges(Liu,2019). Additionally, the reading materials used are also inappropriate. The challenges specific to Chinese business English learners remain underexplored. Poor English reading comprehension leaves them unprepared for professional reading demands (D. Liu,2020; Jia, 2017). Targeted support is needed to improve both their comprehension and engagement.

Good readers are active learners with clear goals (Duke et al., 2011). Previous studies consistently proved that goal-setting enhances engagement and improves learning outcomes, especially when goals are relevant to students' work and life (Daumiller et al., 2021; Li et al.,2019; Bahrami et al., 2022). Achieving these goals requires not only setting goals but also monitoring progress and self-reflection(Schunk, 2001). Self-assessment is a way of monitoring (Pintrich, 2000). By identifying gaps in learning (Ndoeye, 2017), Self-assessment helps students be more engaged in their goals

(Mahmood & Jacobo, 2019). It also provides feedback essential for goal-setting (Locke & Latham, 2002). Reflection deepens understanding of knowledge construction (Wang et al., 2023) and offers feedback for adjusting goals and strategies (Oo et al., 2021). Similarly, reflection supports goal-setting. Reading skill instruction improves reading comprehension (Anderson & Cheng, 2004; Kung, 2019; Nuttall, 2005; Grabe & Stoller, 2020; Zhang et al., 2019), and the more diverse and customised skills the learners adopt, the better their reading comprehension becomes (Shih et al., 2018; Brevik, 2019). Empirical evidence also shows that integrating authentic materials could improve reading comprehension and engagement (Shobeiry, 2020; Gavell, 2021; Kung, 2019; Łacka-Badura, 2021).

Despite extensive global research on improving English reading comprehension and engagement, studies on English reading in China are limited. For example, only few studies have examined goal-setting in English reading: Shih and Reynold (2018) in Taiwan, and Qian and Lau (2022) in mainland China; Teng (2020) investigated reflection in English reading among English learners in Hong Kong; Li et al. (2022) examined the effectiveness of reading skill instruction for teaching English for general purposes; Martyn (2018) explored the use of authentic material among Chinese business English learners without statistical evidence of its effectiveness.

Research focusing on business English reading comprehension and engagement is even scarce. Given the complexities that Chinese Business English learners face, a single instructional approach is inadequate. Research suggests that

combining several activities, such as goal-setting with reading skill instruction(Qian & Lau, 2022), goal-setting with reflection(Yanget al., 2018), and self-assessment with both goal-setting and reflection (Chung et al., 2021), leads to improved outcomes. Integrating reading skills instruction with authentic materials (Kung, 2019) also proves more effective than isolated strategies. However, there is a notable lack of research in this respect, as no studies have combined these five practices together to improve students' English reading comprehension and reading engagement.

To close this gap, this study aims to develop a Reading Boost module to improve Chinese business English learners' reading comprehension and engagement by integrating self-assessment, goal-setting, reading skill instruction, authentic materials, and reflection.

#### **1.4 Research Objectives**

The objectives of this research are as follows:

(1) To design and develop a Reading Boost module for Chinese business English learners to improve English reading comprehension and engagement;

(2) To compare the effectiveness of the Reading Boost module on students' English reading comprehension between the experimental group and the control group in terms of:

- a) Word identification.
- b) literal comprehension

c) inferential comprehension

d) evaluative comprehension

(3) To examine the effectiveness of the Reading Boost module on students'

English reading comprehension in the experimental group in terms of:

a) Word identification.

b) literal comprehension

c) inferential comprehension

d) evaluative comprehension

(4) To compare the effectiveness of the Reading Boost module on students'

reading engagement between the experimental group and the control group in terms

of:

a) emotion

b) behaviour,

c) cognition.

(5). To examine the effectiveness of the Reading Boost module on the reading

engagement in the experimental group in terms of:

a) emotion

b) behaviour,

c) cognition.

(6) To explore students' experience of using this module.

## 1.5 Research Questions:

The research questions and sub-questions guiding this study are:

Question 1: Is there a significant difference in English reading comprehension between the experimental group and the control group in terms of:

- a) word identification,
- b) literal comprehension,
- c) inferential comprehension,
- d) evaluative comprehension?

Question 2: Is there a significant within-group effect on English reading comprehension between the pre-test and post-test in the experimental group in terms of:

- a) word identification,
- b) literal comprehension,
- c) inferential comprehension,
- d) evaluative comprehension?

Question 3: Is there a significant difference in reading engagement between the experimental group and the control group in terms of:

- a) emotion,
- b) behaviour,
- c) cognition.

Question 4: Is there a significant within-group effect on reading engagement between the pre-test and post-test in the experimental group in terms of:

- a) emotion
- b) behaviour,
- c) cognition.

Question 5: What are students' experiences using the Reading Boost module?

## **1.6 Hypothesis**

Based on questions 1 to 4, research hypotheses are constructed:

There are four null hypotheses based on the questions mentioned above:

$H_{01}$ : There is no significant difference in students' English reading comprehension test between the experimental group and the control group in terms of:

- a) Word identification.
- b) literal comprehension
- c) inferential comprehension
- d) evaluative comprehension

$H_{02}$ : There is no significant within-group effect on the pre-test and post-test of English reading comprehension in the experimental group in terms of :

- a) Word identification.
- b) literal comprehension
- c) inferential comprehension

d) evaluative comprehension

H<sub>03</sub>: There is no significant difference in engagement between the experimental group and the control group in terms of:

a) emotion

b) behaviour,

c) cognition.

H<sub>04</sub>: There is no significant within-group effect on pre-and post-scores of reading engagement in the experiment group in terms of:

a) emotion

b) behaviour,

c) cognition.

## **1.7 Significance of the Research**

The significance of this study lies in several aspects. Foremost, it contributes to filling a critical gap in the existing literature, contributing to academic research. While previous studies have explored general English reading comprehension, limited research has specifically addressed the reading challenges and engagement issues faced by Chinese Business English learners. This study directly responds to this gap by investigating the effectiveness of the Reading Boost module in improving both reading comprehension and engagement.

This research may also benefit students. By improving these foundational skills, the Reading Boost module equips learners with the necessary abilities for academic success and professional development in an increasingly interconnected world. Moreover, enhanced reading comprehension and engagement can have a cascading effect on other language skills, including vocabulary acquisition, writing proficiency, and speaking fluency. Additionally, this module promotes self-regulated learning by assisting business English learners in setting individualized goals, fostering intrinsic motivation, and encouraging reflective learning practices, thereby making learning more sustainable.

For teachers, this module may help them create an environment that promotes active engagement, individualised learning, and skill development tailored to each student's needs, thus making teaching more rewarding. The module may also support differentiated instruction, allowing educators to address varying proficiency levels and learning needs more effectively.

This study may also have implications for curriculum development and the compiling of textbooks. Curriculum could take the standards in language proficiency scales into consideration. And Reading material should be developed aligned to students' professional needs, Educational Goals and Standards. The relevancy and authenticity of reading materials should also be highlighted.

Beyond the classroom, the findings of this research may have implications for educational institutions and policymakers. Universities and language training

programs could integrate research-based interventions like the Reading Boost module into their curricula to improve Business English instruction. Teachers training should also be supported.

## **1.8 Research Limitation**

Quantitative research is well regarded for its capacity to generate reliable, measurable, and generalisable data. However, this study employed a quasi-experimental design, and the sample size was determined based on practical constraints and the required statistical power. The non-random assignment of groups and the use of two classes from a private college restrict generalizability and may introduce bias. Consequently, the findings might not be applicable to other contexts or easily replicated.

However, this limitation is complemented by the qualitative methods that ensued. Integrating the qualitative investigation enhances the robustness of the research. The quasi-experiment yields quantitative data and demonstrates correlations, whereas the qualitative study offers a more comprehensive understanding by providing depth, context, and insights into participants' experiences and perspectives.

Another constraint is the duration of the intervention. The intervention lasted for eight weeks. The short timeframe may have influenced the results, as long-term learning effects were not fully observed. Future studies could investigate the sustained impact of similar modules over an extended period.

## **1.9 Operational Definitions**

In this research, there are some important operational terms, namely the Reading Boost module, English reading comprehension, and reading engagement.

These terms are defined as follows:

### **1.9.1 Reading Boost Module**

The Reading Boost Module in this study is an intervention designed to enhance students' reading comprehension and engagement by incorporating evidence-based reading practices (Duke et al., 2011). It includes five key components:

- a) Self-assessment: Students identify learning gaps based on GSE B1–B2 descriptors.
- b) Goal-setting: Students set specific, challenging, and attainable goals aligned with GSE scales.
- c) Reading skill instruction: Focuses on essential comprehension skills, including skimming, scanning, inferencing, summarizing, and evaluating.
- d) Authentic material reading: Uses business-related texts aligned with B1–B2 GSE descriptors.
- e) Reflection: Encourages learners to assess goal achievement, knowledge gained, and areas for improvement.

### **1.9.2 English Reading Comprehension**

According to Perfetti and Adlof (2012), reading comprehension is the cognitive process, including word identification and text comprehension, that

integrates these words into coherent mental representations. Text comprehension could be further divided into different levels: literal, inferential, and evaluative comprehension, based on Pearson and Johnson (1978). Building on these concepts, reading comprehension in this study refers to how readers understand the written texts from word level to text level, including word identification and literal, inferential, and evaluative comprehension.

- a) Word identification: Recognizing written words accurately and efficiently.
- b) Literal comprehension: Understanding explicitly stated information.
- c) Inferential comprehension: Interpreting implicit meanings, synthesizing ideas, and drawing conclusions.
- d) Evaluative comprehension: Critically assessing text by integrating prior knowledge and identifying biases.

These constructs were measured through reading comprehension tests.

### **1.9.3 Reading Engagement**

Fredricks et al. (2004) defined engagement through three dimensions: emotional (students' feelings about learning), behavioural (participation in academic and extracurricular activities), and cognitive (investment in understanding complex ideas and using self-regulation strategies). Based on this conceptualisation, reading engagement in this study is defined as the active involvement of students in reading activities, characterised by emotional responses, behavioural actions, and cognitive investments.

- a) Emotional Engagement: The emotions and attitudes towards reading that influence student involvement.
- b) Behavioural Engagement: The level of active participation in reading shown through focus, effort, and persistence.
- c) Cognitive Engagement: The application of metacognitive strategies and deep thinking to understand the text.

These constructs were measured by reading engagement scales.

### **1.10 Summary**

This chapter outlined the critical issues faced by Chinese Business English learners, including deficiencies in reading comprehension and engagement. It details the impact of these challenges on academic and professional success, highlighting specific difficulties such as poor word identification and higher-order reading comprehension. The chapter emphasises the need for targeted interventions, proposing a Reading Boost module that integrates self-assessment, goal-setting, reading skill instruction, authentic materials, and reflection. It also covered the significance of the research, the limitations of the research, and the operational definition of specific terms and concepts of the research.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter is structured to present reading comprehension and engagement issues, and to examine various facets related to the Reading Boost module, which was designed to improve reading comprehension and engagement. The review starts by introducing studies related to the Reading Boost module. Next, it explores the concepts of reading comprehension and engagement, offering a thorough overview of these key variables. Following this, the review introduces the model used to design the Reading Boost module, detailing how it integrates various elements to tackle the identified challenges. Finally, it discusses the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that support these concepts.

#### **2.2 English Reading Comprehension**

The ability to read is widely regarded as the most crucial language skill, playing a vital role in teaching and learning (Clarke et al., 2013; Łacka-Badura, 2021). To a great extent, language learners' activities revolve around reading, which is essential in understanding the target community's language and practices and supporting the development of other vital skills (Cummins, 2000; Graham, 2020; Graham et al., 2018; Tsang, 2023). Reading also underpins social development, supporting an active and fulfilling existence (Mirasol & Topacio, 2021). Moreover, it fosters lifelong learning and critical thinking (Buyukgoze, 2023; Mican et al., 2023).