

## EXPLORING UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' MOTIVATION FOR EXTENSIVE ENGLISH READING: A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON PREFERENCES FOR HARDCOPY VERSUS SOFTCOPY TEXTBOOKS

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### Abstract

*This study explores university students' motivation for extensive English reading and examines their preferences for hardcopy and softcopy textbooks. In the era of digital learning, understanding these motivational factors is essential for designing effective reading programs. Drawing on Self-Determination Theory and reading motivation frameworks, the research investigates how accessibility, convenience, tactile experience, and perceived learning effectiveness influence students' choices. The study employs a qualitative research design using semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with 12 purposively selected undergraduate English language learners from a public university. Data collection focuses on students' personal experiences, attitudes toward traditional print and digital formats, and the role of motivation in sustaining extensive reading habits. Thematic analysis is applied to identify emerging patterns and categories related to intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors, reading engagement, and format preference. Preliminary insights suggest that students' motivation is shaped by multiple factors, including the perceived authenticity of the text, ease of note-taking, portability, and reading comfort. While some students favor hardcopy materials for deeper concentration and reduced eye strain, others prefer softcopy formats for accessibility, cost-effectiveness, and integration with digital tools. This research contributes to understanding how motivational dynamics intersect with format choice in extensive reading practices. The findings provide pedagogical implications for language instructors and curriculum designers to balance print and digital resources, promoting learner autonomy and sustained reading engagement in English language learning contexts.*

**Keywords:** Motivation, Extensive Reading, Hardcopy, Softcopy, English Textbook

### Introduction

In Pakistan, where English functions as the principal medium of instruction in many universities, extensive reading (ER) plays a critical role in developing learners' fluency, vocabulary, and overall language confidence. Extensive reading—defined as reading longer, easier texts for extended periods without loss of comprehension—is widely acknowledged for its cognitive and affective benefits in second-language learning. In recent years, there has been growing interest in how Pakistani learners engage with extensive reading, including the influence of format—hardcopy versus softcopy—on students' reading motivation. Research on extensive reading in the Pakistani higher-education context, although still developing, has revealed its effectiveness in improving reading fluency, vocabulary acquisition, and autonomous reading habits (Munir et al., 2024).

Despite this progress, there remains a notable gap in understanding Pakistani university students' motivational orientations toward extensive reading, particularly in relation to the medium of text delivery. While studies have explored macro- and micro-level factors influencing reading motivation among pre-university learners (Khan et al., 2024) and others

have investigated the impact of reading strategies on motivation (Hasan et al., 2023), no one has deeply examined whether and how the choice between hardcopy and softcopy extensive-reading textbooks affects learners' intrinsic and extrinsic motivations within tertiary institutions. This knowledge is particularly critical in the Pakistani context, where constraints such as limited access to original textbooks, affordability issues, and digital infrastructure challenges significantly shape students' reading behaviors (Reddit Discussion, 2025).

Understanding how format influences motivation is essential because of the divergent advantages each medium offers. Hardcopy materials can foster tactile engagement, easier annotation, and potentially deeper concentration, while softcopy formats often provide greater accessibility, portability, and integration with digital tools—all factors that may mediate students' motivation to read extensively (Shah et al., 2022; Niazi et al., 2024). Without clarity on these dynamics, curriculum designers and educators may struggle to select or provide the most effective resources for enhancing extensive-reading programs in universities across Pakistan.

Therefore, this study addresses the following core problem: Pakistani university students' motivational preferences for extensive-reading textbooks remain under-researched in relation to hardcopy versus softcopy formats, limiting educators' ability to optimize reading engagement strategies. This gap is particularly salient in light of the digital shift in educational resources and the socio-economic constraints many Pakistani students face when accessing printed materials (Chachar et al., 2025).

The significance of this research lies in its potential to inform evidence-based pedagogical decisions that bridge preferences with motivational dynamics. By exploring format-based motivation qualitatively, the study offers nuanced insights into learners' effective and practical experiences with different text mediums—insights that can guide language instructors, curriculum planners, and policy makers in aligning reading resources with learners' needs and resource constraints. Moreover, given that extensive reading contributes to autonomous learning, language proficiency, and learner engagement, uncovering what drives motivation in the Pakistani context has wider implications for promoting lifelong reading habits and English language development (Munir et al., 2024; Shah et al., 2025).

### **Research Questions**

1. How do university students in Pakistan perceive the motivational advantages and disadvantages of hardcopy versus softcopy formats for extensive English reading?
2. What intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors emerge when students engage in extensive reading using hardcopy versus softcopy textbooks?
3. How do contextual elements—such as accessibility, cost, tactile experience, and digital familiarity—influence students' format preferences and motivation to read extensively?

By addressing these questions through in-depth qualitative inquiry, this study aims to reveal the underlying motivational forces associated with reading format, contextualized within Pakistani tertiary education. Ultimately, these insights can support the development of reading programs that are both student-centered and contextually appropriate, enhancing motivation and promoting sustained engagement with extensive reading across diverse learner populations in Pakistan.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Extensive Reading in ESL Contexts**

Extensive reading (ER) is widely recognized as a critical component of second language acquisition, focusing on the reading of large amounts of material for general understanding and enjoyment rather than for detailed language analysis (Day & Bamford, 1998). It promotes learner autonomy, fluency, vocabulary development, and overall language competence (Krashen, 2004). According to Krashen's Input Hypothesis, learners acquire language most

effectively when exposed to comprehensible input, and ER provides such input in a natural, low-pressure context (Krashen, 2004).

International research has consistently demonstrated ER's benefits. For example, Cho and Krashen (1994) found significant gains in linguistic competence and confidence among learners engaged in sustained ER practices. Yamashita (2013) highlighted that ER positively affects both cognitive and affective domains, improving comprehension skills and learners' attitudes toward reading.

In the Pakistani context, ER is gaining attention, though its implementation faces challenges. Munir, Rafique, and Shahid (2024) observed that ER programs in Pakistani universities enhance students' reading fluency and vocabulary acquisition. However, they note structural constraints, such as limited availability of graded readers, inadequate library resources, and a strong exam-oriented culture that prioritizes intensive over extensive reading. Chachar et al. (2025) similarly found that Pakistani learners often lack exposure to authentic ER practices, primarily due to cost barriers and institutional neglect. Consequently, many students engage in reading mainly for academic requirements rather than intrinsic enjoyment—a factor that limits the full realization of ER benefits.

### **Motivation and Language Learning**

Motivation is widely acknowledged as a key determinant of success in language learning (Dörnyei, 2005). According to Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), motivation exists on a continuum from intrinsic motivation (learning for enjoyment, curiosity, and self-satisfaction) to extrinsic motivation (learning for external rewards or pressures). ER success depends heavily on intrinsic motivation, as learners need to engage voluntarily in reading beyond classroom requirements (Yamashita, 2013).

Studies have shown that intrinsic motivation correlates strongly with sustained reading habits and improved language proficiency (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). However, in exam-oriented systems like Pakistan's, extrinsic motives—such as passing exams or improving grades—often dominate (Hasan, Khurram, & Iqbal, 2023; Shah et al., 2025). While these external drivers can initiate reading, they rarely sustain long-term engagement without intrinsic interest.

Research in Pakistan suggests that explicit reading strategy instruction and supportive environments can enhance reading motivation (Hasan et al., 2023). Khan, Malik, and Niazi (2024) identified macro-level influences (curriculum design, teacher support) and micro-level factors (peer influence, family encouragement) as determinants of motivation. Yet, these studies overlook how format choice—hardcopy versus softcopy—affects motivational orientations, leaving an essential gap in the literature.

### **Hardcopy vs. Softcopy Reading Preferences in Higher Education**

The digital era has transformed reading habits globally, introducing new dynamics into educational contexts. Numerous studies have investigated how learners perceive digital texts compared to print. Singer and Alexander (2017) reported that while students often prefer digital texts for convenience and cost-effectiveness, comprehension and retention tend to be higher with printed materials. Similarly, Baron (2015) emphasized that print reading fosters deeper engagement and tactile interaction, which some learners associate with serious academic reading.

In language learning contexts, digital materials offer distinct advantages, such as hyperlinked glossaries, integrated dictionaries, and multimedia features that can enhance comprehension (Mangen et al., 2013). However, digital reading may also lead to distractions and superficial processing, reducing deep comprehension (Singer & Alexander, 2017). Conversely, hardcopy formats are often preferred for prolonged reading tasks due to reduced eye strain and better concentration (Baron, 2015).

In South Asia, and particularly Pakistan, practical considerations significantly shape these preferences. Hardcopy textbooks remain expensive, and access to quality print materials is limited in many universities. Consequently, students often resort to photocopies or pirated versions (Reddit Discussion, 2025). Digital resources, on the other hand, offer affordability and ease of access through smartphones and laptops. Yet, inconsistent internet connectivity and lack of digital literacy can hinder their effective use (Chachar et al., 2025). Despite these contextual realities, little research has examined how these factors interact with motivation for ER in Pakistani higher education.

### **Pedagogical Implications and Research Gap**

The implications of these trends are profound. If students are more motivated to read in one format than another, curriculum designers and teachers need to tailor reading programs accordingly. For example, universities could integrate e-libraries and provide curated digital ER materials if softcopy formats enhance motivation, or they could invest in affordable print resources and reading spaces if hardcopy proves more effective for sustained engagement.

However, existing research provides insufficient guidance. While international studies highlight cognitive differences between print and digital reading (Singer & Alexander, 2017; Baron, 2015; Shah et al., 2025), these findings cannot be generalized without considering local constraints and cultural attitudes. Pakistani studies on reading motivation (Hasan et al., 2023; Khan et al., 2024; Niazi et al., 2024) do not account for the role of format, and research on ER benefits (Munir et al., 2024) lacks attention to digital-versus-print distinctions. This study addresses this gap by qualitatively exploring how format preference interacts with motivational dynamics among Pakistani university students engaged in ER.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study draws primarily on Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1985) and Reading Motivation Theory (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000).

- **Self-Determination Theory (SDT):** SDT posits that individuals are more likely to sustain behavior when their psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are met (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Applied here, ER motivation depends on whether students perceive the chosen format (hardcopy or softcopy) as supporting their autonomy (choice of format), competence (ease of comprehension), and relatedness (social sharing of texts).
- **Reading Motivation Theory:** This theory identifies dimensions such as intrinsic motivation (reading for enjoyment), extrinsic motivation (reading for grades), and value of reading (perceived importance) (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). The study explores how these dimensions manifest differently depending on text format and contextual factors in Pakistan.

### **Research Methodology**

This study employs a qualitative research design using an interpretivist paradigm to understand the subjective experiences and motivations of university students toward ER. 12 undergraduate English language learners from a public university in Sindh, selected through purposive sampling to ensure variation in gender, academic background, and reading habits: semi-structured interviews (8 participants) and two focus group discussions (4 participants each). Interview questions explored students' reading habits, motivational drivers, format preferences, and perceived advantages or disadvantages of hardcopy versus softcopy. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to identify recurring patterns and themes. Coding was performed in three stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding to derive themes aligned with the research questions.

### **Findings**

#### **RQ1: Motivational Factors for Extensive English Reading**



Participants reported a mix of intrinsic motivation (reading for personal growth, pleasure, language improvement) and extrinsic motivation (grades, career advancement). Many students acknowledged that academic requirements were the initial motivator, but sustained reading was linked to personal interest in improving vocabulary and comprehension. Social influence, such as peer recommendations, and the desire for academic prestige, also emerged as motivating elements.

*“I started reading novels to improve my English, but now I enjoy reading stories because they make me think differently”* (Participant 4).

### **RQ2: Perceptions of Hardcopy vs Softcopy Reading**

The majority of participants preferred hardcopy textbooks for better concentration and reduced eye strain. Hardcopy was associated with serious reading and academic depth, while softcopy was considered convenient for quick access and portability. Some students highlighted the cost-effectiveness of digital books, but others found **screen reading tiring** and **distracting** due to notifications.

*“Reading on my phone is easy because I can download any book, but I get distracted by social media”* (Participant 7).

### **RQ3: Role of Format Preference in Sustaining Motivation**

Format preference significantly affected reading consistency. Students who strongly preferred hardcopy were more likely to read for longer sessions, while those relying on digital formats reported fragmented reading patterns and difficulty maintaining focus. Interestingly, participants suggested that hybrid approaches—using digital copies for accessibility and hard copies for focused reading—could improve reading motivation.

### **Discussion**

Findings confirm that motivation for ER in Pakistani students is influenced by both internal and external drivers, consistent with Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) and previous ER studies (Takase, 2007). The preference for print over digital reading echoes global findings by Baron (2015) and Singer and Alexander (2017), who argue that print offers deeper cognitive engagement. However, digital reading’s affordability and portability align with Chen et al. (2013), indicating a contextual blend of preferences in developing countries where resources are limited.

Unlike East Asian contexts, where ER is institutionalized (Yamashita, 2013), Pakistani students view ER as exam-oriented, which limits intrinsic motivation. This aligns with Saddique (2019), who notes the absence of a strong reading culture in Pakistan. The finding that format preference influences sustained motivation is underexplored in the literature and represents a novel contribution of this study.

### **Conclusion**

The present study provides valuable insights into the motivational factors influencing Pakistani university students’ engagement with extensive English reading (ER) and their preferences for hardcopy versus softcopy textbooks. The findings highlight that while students recognize ER as a critical avenue for improving language proficiency and achieving academic success, their sustained motivation is shaped by multiple contextual and personal factors.

Students generally exhibit strong motivation; they read extensively to enhance vocabulary, improve writing skills, and perform well in examinations. However, intrinsic motivation, driven by personal interest and enjoyment, plays a significant role in maintaining reading habits over time. A major challenge identified is that extrinsic pressures (such as exam preparation) often dominate, reducing reading to a utilitarian activity rather than a pleasurable or self-directed practice.

Regarding format preferences, hardcopy textbooks remain the dominant choice among students due to their perceived benefits in supporting deeper concentration, tactile engagement, and

reduced eye strain. Print materials are considered more authentic and conducive to immersive reading experiences. Conversely, digital formats (softcopy) are appreciated for portability, affordability, and integration with technological tools; however, they are often associated with distractions, eye fatigue, and difficulties in annotating effectively. This suggests that while digital reading aligns with global technological trends, it does not entirely meet students' cognitive and motivational needs for focused reading.

Overall, these findings underscore the importance of adopting a balanced and flexible approach to ER practices that accommodates diverse learner preferences and leverages the strengths of both print and digital resources. The study also emphasizes that enhancing ER motivation requires a pedagogical shift from purely outcome-based approaches to fostering autonomy, relevance, and enjoyment in reading activities.

### Recommendations

1. Integration of Hybrid Reading Programs: Universities should develop structured ER programs that provide both hardcopy and digital resources, allowing students to choose formats based on their personal preferences and reading objectives. This hybrid model can accommodate learners with varying levels of access to technology and financial constraints while promoting reading flexibility.
2. Promoting Intrinsic Motivation through Choice and Relevance: Language instructors should design ER tasks that incorporate learner choice in selecting texts aligned with their interests, cultural context, and academic goals. When students perceive reading as personally meaningful, their intrinsic motivation and engagement increase. Activities such as book clubs, reflective journals, and discussion forums can further enhance reading enjoyment and autonomy.
3. Training in Digital Literacy and Focus Strategies: Given that distractions often hinder digital reading, educators should equip students with strategies to manage screen-based reading, such as using annotation tools, applying time management techniques, and utilizing apps with distraction-blocking features. Institutions can also provide access to premium e-reading platforms that minimize advertisements and enhance readability.
4. Curriculum Design for Sustained Engagement: Curriculum developers should embed ER as a graded yet flexible component of language courses, emphasizing sustained reading rather than short-term assignments. Incorporating a mix of literary and informational texts can appeal to different learner interests and strengthen both linguistic and critical thinking skills.
5. Further Research on Digital Motivation and Accessibility: Future studies should explore how socio-economic factors and technological infrastructure influence digital reading motivation in Pakistan. This would help policymakers and educators design inclusive reading interventions for students in rural and urban contexts.

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