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Comprehensive English Reading Comprehension Module for Non-English Major College Undergraduates in China

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Abstract. Reading comprehension is a central component of English language learning and a key determinant of academic success among Chinese undergraduates. However, many non-English-major students struggle to progress beyond literal understanding toward reorganization and inferential comprehension, partly due to misalignment between the College English Syllabus and prevailing textbook practices. This study aimed to design, develop, and evaluate an English Reading Comprehension Module (ERCM) to strengthen multi-level reading proficiency in a private Chinese university. Guided by Design and Development Research (DDR), the module was grounded in Schema Theory and bottom-up, interactive, and top-down reading models. Barrett's Taxonomy informed the construction of literal, reorganization, and inferential comprehension tasks to ensure progressive cognitive development. The finalized ERCM comprised 32 syllabus-aligned reading passages with graded question sets reflecting College English Syllabus and CET-4 requirements. Content validity was confirmed through expert review, and KR-20 analysis indicated acceptable internal consistency. The module was implemented with 160 first-year non-English-major undergraduates. Comparative analysis of diagnostic and achievement test results showed improvements across all comprehension levels: literal comprehension increased from 55.88% to 72.55%, reorganization from 28.33% to 43.44%, and inferential comprehension from 16.56% to 35.31%. These findings demonstrate that the ERCM effectively supports the development of hierarchical reading skills. The study highlighted the value of syllabus-aligned and taxonomy-based

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instructional materials in promoting higher-order comprehension and enhancing alignment with CET-4 reading demands.

Keywords: English Reading Comprehension Module; Design and Development Research; CET-4; College English Syllabus

1. Introduction

Reading comprehension has long been regarded as a cornerstone of English language learning, serving as both a fundamental linguistic skill and a key determinant of students' academic success (Grabe & Stoller, 2019). It not only enhances learners' vocabulary, grammar, and discourse awareness, but also supports the development of higher-order skills such as analysis, synthesis, and critical evaluation (Grabe & Stoller, 2019; Kuzina et al., 2022). In the context of higher education, proficient reading comprehension enables students to engage with a wide range of academic materials, including textbooks, journal articles, and research reports, thereby facilitating intellectual growth and academic achievement (Bergman, 2024). As English remains the dominant language of global scholarship, the ability to comprehend complex English texts is essential for students to participate in international academic discourse and research collaboration (Adriansen et al., 2023).

In China's higher education system, reading comprehension occupies a central role in College English instruction. The College English Syllabus (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2017) explicitly emphasizes cultivating students' comprehensive English ability, particularly their reading comprehension skills in both academic and professional contexts. Reading competence is also a major determinant of success in large-scale national examinations such as the College English Test Band 4 (CET-4), in which the reading section typically accounts for 40% to 50% of the total score (Zheng & Cheng, 2008). Despite this emphasis, a considerable number of Chinese undergraduates still find it difficult to comprehend English texts beyond the literal level (Li et al., 2022). Many students can extract explicit information but struggle to reorganize and infer meaning, indicating limited exposure to higher-order comprehension questions (Hu & Trenkic, 2019; Ke, 2022).

One key reason for this limitation lies in the misalignment between the College English Syllabus and the textbooks currently used in College English courses (Li & Deocampo, 2021). Although the Syllabus specifies progressive reading comprehension goals: from basic understanding to analytical and inferential interpretation, most textbooks continue to prioritize vocabulary and grammar instruction (Feng, 2021). As a result, reading sections often emphasize detail recognition and surface comprehension, while neglecting systematic practice in information reorganization, inference, and critical reasoning (Zeng et al., 2025). This content imbalance has created a pedagogical gap between the intended learning outcomes stated in the Syllabus and the actual instructional practices in college classrooms (Gong, 2021).

Recent research has highlighted efforts to improve the quality of College English teaching through curriculum alignment and the introduction of graded readers and communicative tasks (Pan & Zhu, 2022; Yin & Fang, 2024). However, these attempts remain fragmented and have not led to the establishment of a structured, empirically validated framework for developing multi-level reading comprehension. Many existing studies focus on general reading strategies or vocabulary enrichment rather than on cultivating literal, reorganization, and inferential comprehension in a systematic and progressive way (Harper, 2020).

Consequently, students' reading performance continues to fall short of the expectations outlined in both the Syllabus and standardized national assessments. Previous studies in EFL contexts have explored instructional approaches to reading comprehension development, including strategy-based instruction and integrated reading models (Li et al., 2022; Mekuria et al., 2024). While these studies have demonstrated the value of structured reading instruction, most focus on general comprehension or isolated subskills rather than the systematic development of literal, reorganization, and inferential comprehension within a single instructional framework (Aynalem & Tesmand, 2023).

In the Chinese tertiary context, existing research has primarily examined students' reading performance or strategy use, with limited attention to the design and implementation of structured instructional modules aligned with both national syllabus requirements and standardized assessments such as the CET-4 (Li et al., 2022). Consequently, there remains a lack of empirically validated instructional frameworks that explicitly target multiple hierarchical levels of reading comprehension in College English courses (Cheng & Wei, 2021).

To address this gap, the present study developed an English Reading Comprehension Module (ERCM) guided by Design and Development Research (DDR) (Richey & Klein, 2014). The ERCM integrates Schema Theory and the Bottom-up, Interactive, and Top-down Reading Models to strengthen Chinese undergraduates' ability to process texts across literal, reorganization, and inferential levels. Through iterative design, expert validation, and classroom implementation, this module seeks to bridge the gap between syllabus objectives and actual teaching practices, thereby enhancing college students' English reading competence and fostering their overall academic literacy.

To evaluate the practicality of the ERCM, the module was implemented in a regular classroom setting. A diagnostic test was administered prior to development to identify students' initial reading performance, and an achievement test was conducted after implementation to assess learning achievements. However, the study did not employ a controlled experimental intervention design. Instead, it followed a Design and Development Research (DDR) framework, focusing on product development, validation, and refinement rather than causal comparison.

To clarify the focus of the present study and guide the subsequent theoretical discussion, the research questions are presented below.

RQ1: How was the English Reading Comprehension Module (ERCM) designed and developed, following Design and Development Research (DDR), to align with the College English Syllabus and CET-4 reading comprehension requirements?

RQ2: To what extent does the ERCM improve Chinese first-year non-English-major undergraduates' overall English reading comprehension?

RQ3: To what extent does the ERCM enhance students' reading performance at the literal, reorganization, and inferential levels of comprehension?

2. Literature Review

2.1 English Reading Comprehension

English reading comprehension is a core component of foreign language learning and an essential means through which learners acquire linguistic knowledge, develop thinking ability, and engage in academic study. It involves far more than the recognition of words or sentences; rather, it represents an interactive and constructive process in which readers actively extract, connect, and interpret information from written texts to create meaning (Grabe & Stoller, 2019). In this sense, reading comprehension integrates multiple dimensions of language use: lexical, syntactic, semantic, and textual, within a dynamic process of understanding (Perfetti et al., 2005).

In the context of college English education, reading comprehension serves as the foundation for developing academic literacy and professional competence. The College English Teaching Guidelines (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2020) emphasize that effective reading instruction should cultivate students' ability to understand, analyze, and evaluate written information rather than focus solely on vocabulary and grammar (Fu & Wang, 2021). This view reflects a shift from basic recognition of ideas to deeper interpretation and integration of meaning.

Scholars generally agree that reading comprehension develops progressively across multiple levels of understanding. As learners' linguistic and cognitive capacity expands, they move from identifying explicit details toward organizing textual information and drawing implicit relationships among ideas (Duke et al., 2011; Feng, 2021). Such a hierarchical perspective underscores that reading ability is not static but grows through systematic training and purposeful practice (Yang, 2023). Within classroom contexts, a well-designed reading program therefore needs to provide sequenced tasks that guide students from surface comprehension to deeper engagement with texts.

In summary, English reading comprehension should be regarded as a multi-dimensional and developmental process that integrates language or linguistic knowledge with meaning-making ability (Wang & Zhang, 2025). Understanding its layered nature is crucial for designing pedagogical materials and instructional frameworks that promote continuous skill growth (Guo & Feng, 2025). Grounded

in this perspective, the present study focuses on constructing an English Reading Comprehension Module that systematically develops undergraduates' reading abilities at successive levels of comprehension as well as accommodating and meeting the demands of the College English Teaching Guidelines.

In the context of the present study, English reading comprehension is conceptualized as a multi-level ability encompassing literal comprehension, reorganization, and inferential comprehension. These levels represent learners' capacity to identify explicitly stated information, integrate and reorganize ideas across texts, and interpret implied meanings based on textual evidence. For research and instructional purposes, reading comprehension is operationalized through students' performance on diagnostic and achievement reading tests designed to assess these three levels. Changes in reading comprehension are measured by comparing students' diagnostic test and achievement test results following the implementation of the English Reading Comprehension Module (ERCM).

2.2 Schema Theory

Schema theory, a psychological concept first introduced by Frederic Bartlett in the 1930s (Bartlett, 1932), describes how our brains categorize information into mental structures known as schemas, which aid in interpreting and understanding our environment. In a study by Bransford and Johnson (1972) on the influence of prior knowledge on comprehension and problem-solving, it was discovered that individuals with relevant background knowledge were more effective at understanding and solving problems within that domain compared to those lacking such knowledge. This research highlights the significance of activating relevant schemas and incorporating new information into existing knowledge frameworks.

There are three main types of schemata: linguistic schemata, formal schemata, and content schemata. Linguistic schemata involve a reader's proficiency in language, including vocabulary, grammar, and idiomatic expressions (Huang, 2023). These are the building blocks of schemata and are crucial for understanding text. Formal schemata refer to the organizational patterns and rhetorical structures of written texts (Wang, 2023). As Razavi and Gilakjani (2020) suggested, recognizing the type and genre of a text can enhance comprehension, as these elements provide clues about the text's content. Content schemata, on the other hand, involve background knowledge related to the subject matter or topic of the text. This type of schema is vital for grasping the overall meaning of the text.

2.3 Barrett's Taxonomy

Barrett's taxonomy was originally developed as a framework to support the construction of reading comprehension questions and assessments, particularly those targeting higher-order cognitive processes (Ramadea et al., 2023). Rather than functioning solely as a measure of students' reading proficiency, the taxonomy has been widely adopted as an instructional guide for designing comprehension tasks that promote different levels of cognitive engagement with texts (Maram & Farrah, 2019). In EFL contexts, previous studies have shown that Barrett's taxonomy can be used to structure reading instruction and assessment

by encouraging learners to interact with texts beyond surface-level understanding, including summarizing, inferring, and evaluating information across various text types (Rahmadani & Zainil, 2023). As such, the taxonomy provides a pedagogical framework for organizing reading activities and comprehension questions according to increasing levels of cognitive demand. Barrett's Taxonomy of Reading Comprehension has five levels of difficulty: literal, reorganization, inferential, assessment, and appreciation, as illustrated in Figure 1.

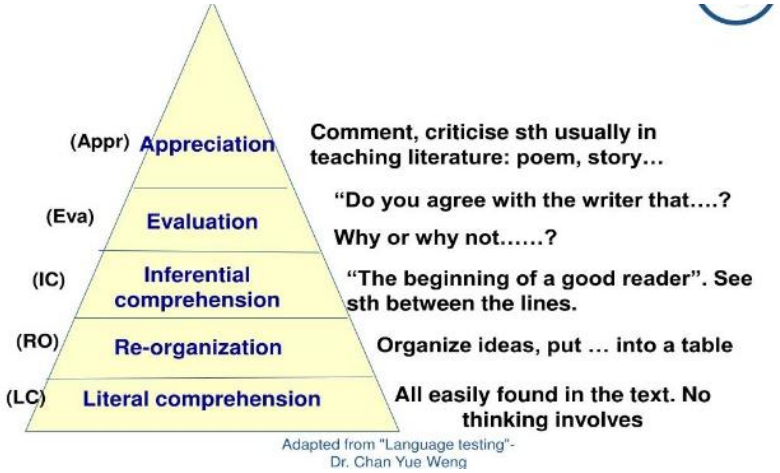

Figure 1: Barrett's Taxonomy of Reading Comprehension (adapted from Barrett, 1976; instructional illustration adapted from Weng, Language Testing lecture materials)

The first three levels are concerned with teaching language skills, while the last two are devoted to literary instruction. Therefore, this study focused on the first three levels.

Literal comprehension involves understanding ideas that are explicitly stated in the text (Oo & Habók, 2022). It focuses on recognizing or recalling specific details, main ideas, and explicitly mentioned reasons (Koparan, 2025). Reorganization comprehension requires the reader to analyze, synthesize, and organize the ideas presented in the text (Aynalem and Tesmand, 2023). It involves tasks such as classifying information, outlining, or filling in blanks based on the text (Putri, 2025). Inferential comprehension goes beyond the explicitly stated information and requires the reader to make inferences based on the text (Lin et al., 2021). This involves thinking about what is implied but not directly stated. It requires the reader to imagine or deduce information that is not explicitly mentioned in the text (Ernawati et al., 2022).

To illustrate how the theoretical foundations guided the structure of the English Reading Comprehension Module (ERCM), Figure 2 presents the theoretical framework integrating Schema Theory, Barrett's Taxonomy, and the hierarchical reading models.

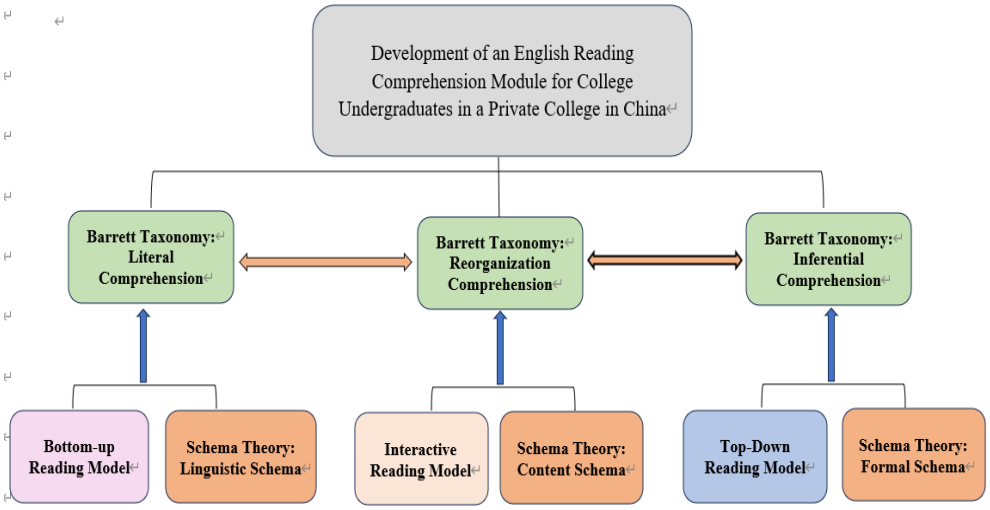

Figure 2: Theoretical Framework of the study

Figure 2 illustrates this theoretical framework and its role in shaping the ERCM. Schema Theory provides the cognitive foundation by explaining how readers draw upon linguistic, formal, and content knowledge to interpret written texts (Wang, 2023). It highlights the dynamic interaction between prior knowledge and textual information, supporting the progressive development of comprehension from basic decoding to higher-order reasoning (Aqdas, 2025).

Barrett's Taxonomy complements this perspective by defining a hierarchical structure of reading comprehension consisting of literal, reorganization, and inferential levels (Koparan, 2025). These levels form the core of the ERCM and guide the design of tasks that gradually move learners from recognizing explicit information to reorganizing textual ideas and making context-based inferences.

The three reading models further clarify how comprehension processes operate at each level. The bottom-up model explains the processes involved in literal comprehension, where readers decode linguistic details and retrieve explicitly stated information (Medranda-Morales et al., 2023). They also pointed out that the interactive model aligns with reorganization comprehension, emphasizing how readers integrate textual clues and cognitive processes to group, classify, and synthesize ideas. The top-down model supports inferential comprehension by describing how readers rely on background knowledge, logical reasoning, and contextual cues to derive implicit meanings (Nadalini et al., 2025).

Together, these theories form an integrated framework that underpins the content and task design of the ERCM. They ensure that the module provides a structured and cognitively scaffolded pathway for developing reading skills, progressing from literal understanding to reorganization and inferential interpretation. Based on the theoretical foundations discussed above, the following section explains the methodological approach adopted to develop and evaluate the ERCM.

3. Methodology

The study adopted the Design and Development Research (DDR) approach to develop a syllabus-aligned English Reading Comprehension Module (ERCM) for first-year non-English majors in China. The study followed DDR Type I, which focuses on the systematic development and evaluation of an instructional product. This approach was carried out in three phases: (1) needs analysis, (2) design and development, and (3) evaluation (Low, 2024).

This development-oriented methodology ensured that the ERCM was grounded in both theoretical principles, such as Schema Theory, Barrett's Taxonomy, and interactive models of reading, and practical classroom needs (Hanis et al., 2025). Guided by the DDR framework, the development process involved iterative refinement (Nurdiana et al., 2025). Content validity was established through expert judgment using the Content Validity Index (CVI), while reliability was examined using the KR-20 coefficient during the pilot phase. Descriptive statistics was used to report students' performance changes across literal, reorganization, and inferential comprehension levels.

To ensure representation of typical first-year non-English majors in the target teaching context, a total of 160 undergraduates from a private Chinese university participated in the main study. The participants were selected through purposive sampling to align with the instructional context for which the ERCM was designed. Specifically, the selection criteria included first-year non-English-major undergraduates who were enrolled in College English courses, shared a comparable general English proficiency level, and had not received prior systematic instruction targeting literal, reorganization, and inferential reading comprehension skills.

Throughout the study, ethical procedures were strictly adhered to. Approval was obtained from the university's ethics committee. Prior to participation, informed consent was obtained from all teachers and students. Participants' anonymity and data confidentiality were ensured throughout data collection, analysis, and reporting.

4. Development of English Reading Comprehension Module (ERCM)

The development of the ERCM followed a three-stage DDR framework, where each stage played a distinct role in shaping the module's overall design and instructional components. Details of the process are illustrated in Figure 3.

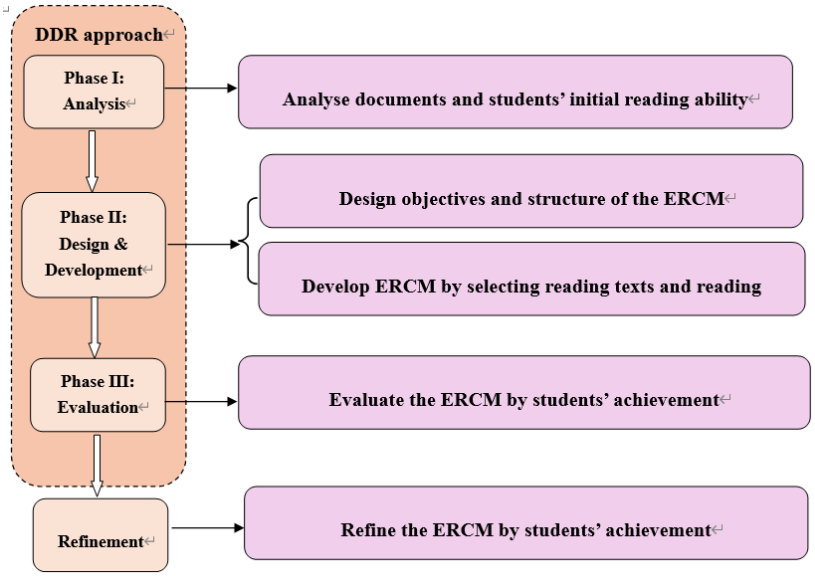

Figure 3: DDR Approach in the development of ERCM

4.1 Need Analysis Phase

4.1.1 Analysis of the College English Syllabus (2020), the textbook and the College English Test Band 4 (CET-4)

The analysis phase aimed to identify students' reading comprehension needs and define the instructional focus for developing the English Reading Comprehension Module (ERCM). Document analysis was first conducted on the College English Syllabus (2020), the textbook *College English in the New Era* (Fudan University Press, 2021), and the reading section of the College English Test Band 4 (CET-4) to determine the alignment between syllabus objectives, textbook content, and national test requirements. The analysis revealed that while the syllabus emphasizes multi-level comprehension abilities, the existing materials mainly focus on literal understanding with limited attention to reorganization and inferential skills.

4.1.2 Analysis of Student's Needs

A diagnostic reading test adapted from CET-4 was administered to 160 first-year non-English majors to establish their baseline reading proficiency. The test was conducted prior to any instructional intervention related to the ERCM. The assessment consisted of 30 items targeting literal, reorganization, and inferential comprehension. Students' performance showed a clear gradient across the three levels. Literal comprehension recorded the highest accuracy (approximately 58%), indicating that most students could retrieve explicitly stated information. However, performance declined sharply in reorganization items (around 33%), where students were required to reorganize or synthesize details across sentences. The lowest scores were observed in inferential comprehension (about 19%), revealing significant difficulty in interpreting implied meanings and drawing logical conclusions.

The results showed that students performed relatively well on literal comprehension but encountered significant difficulties in reorganization and inferential comprehension. These findings provided the basis for the subsequent design and development of ERCM, which aimed to address these specific weaknesses through systematic and progressive reading tasks. Overall, the results indicate a clear need for targeted instructional support in reorganization and inferential reading comprehension, which therefore became the primary focus of the ERCM design.

4.2 Design and Development Phase

4.2.1 Design of the Objectives and Structure of the ERCM

Based on the results of the analysis, the design and development phase focused on constructing an English Reading Comprehension Module (ERCM) that systematically addressed the deficiencies identified in students' reading skills. The design process involved two major components: the objectives and the overall structure of the ERCM.

The objectives of the ERCM were determined with reference to the College English Syllabus (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2020) and the reading requirements of the College English Test Band 4 (CET-4). The ERCM aims to:

(1) strengthen students' ability to identify explicitly stated information (literal comprehension)

(2) develop their skills in reorganizing and synthesizing textual details (reorganization comprehension)

(3) enhance their capacity to interpret implied meanings and draw inferences (inferential comprehension)

The overall goal was to promote a gradual improvement in students' literal comprehension skills, reorganization comprehension skills, and inferential comprehension skills.

The structure of the ERCM was arranged in accordance with these objectives (as outlined in Table 1). The finalized ERCM was organized into four sections that reflect a progressive development of reading comprehension skills. The first three sections focused respectively on literal, reorganization, and inferential comprehension. Each section contains eight main reading texts, each accompanied by a set of multiple-choice questions targeting the corresponding comprehension level. All questions adopted a four-option multiple-choice format modelled on CET-4 to ensure consistency with standardised assessment practices.

The fourth section serves as an integrated comprehension component based on Text A from Units 1–8 of *College English in the New Era* (Fudan University Press, 2021). While the original passages were retained, each unit was supplemented with newly designed literal, reorganization, and inferential questions. This section required students to apply multiple comprehension skills simultaneously in longer, contextually familiar texts, creating a smooth transition between the skill-focused ERCM passages and the regular textbook materials. It also provided exam-relevant practice, as the integrated items reflect the mixed-skill demands commonly found in CET-4 reading tasks.

Table 1: Layout of the ERCM

ERCM	Number of Texts	Number of Questions in Each Text	Question Format	Total Questions
Literal Comprehension	8	5	4-option MCQs	40
Reorganization Comprehension	8	5	4-option MCQs	40
Inferential Comprehension	8	5	4-option MCQs	40
Integrated (Text A Units 1–8) Comprehension	8	10	4-option MCQs	80

Prior to implementation, the prototype ERCM was reviewed by five ELT specialists to evaluate the content validity, question clarity, and difficulty balance. Expert feedback led to refinements in the wording of certain items, the sequencing of passages, and the alignment between question type and targeted comprehension skill. The finalized version thus provided a pedagogically grounded, syllabus-aligned, and exam-relevant reading comprehension module designed to foster progressive skill development among college English learners.

4.2.2 Development of the ERCM

a) Selecting Reading Comprehension Texts

The reading texts included in the ERCM were selected and adapted according to the module structure. All texts were authentic or semi-authentic materials chosen to ensure alignment with CET-4 reading requirements and the comprehension levels targeted in this study.

First, the texts followed an appropriate length and complexity for Chinese non-English-major undergraduates. Each reading passage contained about 700 words, which is comparable to the typical length of CET-4 reading comprehension passages. This ensured that learners engaged with texts that resembled real examination tasks in terms of cognitive load and linguistic demand.

Second, the selected texts reflected the major CET-4 reading purposes, such as identifying main ideas, locating specific information, understanding logical relations, and interpreting implied meaning. The texts covered a variety of genres commonly found in CET-4, including short expository passages, descriptive texts, cause-effect articles, and problem-solution texts. These genres exposed students to diverse rhetorical patterns and trained them to process information efficiently.

Third, all texts were thematically relevant to college students' academic and everyday experiences. Themes such as campus life, technology use, environmental concerns, and health were included to enhance familiarity and engagement. This thematic relevance also supported reading comprehension by activating learners' existing schemata, thereby facilitating easier information processing.

In addition, visuals were kept to a minimum because CET-4 reading passages do not typically include pictures. However, formatting such as paragraphing and spacing followed standard academic text presentation to simulate authentic test conditions. This careful selection of texts ensured that the ERCM provides reading materials that are appropriately challenging, cognitively engaging, and directly aligned with the linguistic and structural characteristics of CET-4.

b) Developing Reading Comprehension Questions

The reading comprehension questions in the ERCM were designed with reference to Barrett's taxonomy, which divides comprehension into three levels: literal, reorganization, and inferential. Literal comprehension involved locating directly stated information. Reorganization tasks required learners to link, categorize, or summarize ideas that may appear in different parts of the text, drawing on both bottom-up and top-down processing. Inferential comprehension went beyond what is explicitly written by prompting learners to interpret implied viewpoints, evaluate underlying meanings, and draw logical conclusions.

An example of a literal item was taken from Literal Comprehension Text 1 – Ambition. Since this section aimed to help learners extract directly stated details, one of the questions asks:
What is the author's major in college?
A: Chemistry
B: Biology
C: Geometry
D: Mathematics

This question required students to locate a specific factual statement ("I was a biology major") in the passage. Such items trained learners to scan for keywords, match information between the question and the text, and retrieve surface-level meaning without interpretation. This mirrors the literal-level questions commonly found in CET-4 reading, where answers can be located directly by identifying synonyms or repeated words.

A second example was taken from Reorganization Comprehension Text 3 – When Too Much Choice Is No Choice at All. This part of the module required students to synthesize information from different portions of the text. One representative question asked:
What is the effect of social media on our humanity? It…
A: makes us feel closer and farther with people at the same time.
B: largely shortens the distance between people than before.
C: makes the distance between people farther than before.
D: does not influence the distance between people at all.

To answer this item, students had to locate several relevant ideas spread across different parts of the text. Specifically, they need to connect how social media creates a sense of connection while simultaneously producing emotional distance, as discussed in separate paragraphs. Because these ideas are not presented together, the answer cannot be obtained through simple scanning. The passage presents these ideas in separate paragraphs, so the answer cannot be found

through simple scanning. Learners were required to pull together these pieces of information to understand the overall effect described by the author. This process exemplified reorganization comprehension, as students synthesized multiple textual cues to form a coherent interpretation of the social and emotional impact of social media.

A third example was taken from Inferential Comprehension Text 5 – Why Health Is More Important Than Wealth. This section targets higher-order reasoning skills. One of the inferential items asked:
What can be inferred about author's attitude towards wealth accumulation?
A: He believes accumulating wealth should be a top priority in life.
B: He values health over wealth based on his personal experience.
C: He thinks people can buy happiness with enough money.
D: He believes financial success leads to better health.

To answer this question, students had to examine the author's tone and evaluate subtle cues across the text. Although the passage didn't not explicitly declare the author's stance, phrases emphasizing the limitations of wealth and the importance of maintaining physical and mental well-being allowed readers to infer that the author prioritizes health over material gain. This required students to integrate implied meanings and evaluate the underlying message of the text. Such inferential tasks develop higher-order reasoning skills that are essential for handling the implicit and attitude-based questions commonly found in CET-4.

c) Validity and Reliability
After the ERCM had been developed, its content validity was examined by three English-language-teaching experts using the Percentage Calculation Method (PCM). The experts evaluated the relevance, clarity, and representativeness of the module contents, including text selection and question design. The Content Validity Index (CVI) values ranged from 0.80 to 1.00, indicating strong agreement among the experts. Minor revisions were made according to the feedback received to further improve the clarity and alignment of the materials with the College English Syllabus.

The revised ERCM was subsequently administered to 30 first-year college students in a pilot study to test its internal consistency. Students completed the reading comprehension tasks that covered literal, reorganization, and inferential levels. The reliability of the comprehension questions was analysed using Kuder Richardson Formula 20 (KR-20). The coefficient obtained was 0.86, which demonstrated high internal consistency and confirmed that the prototype ERCM was a reliable instrument for measuring multi-level reading comprehension.

4.3 Evaluation Phase
The evaluation of the English Reading Comprehension Module (ERCM) was carried out to examine the module's practicality. Students' achievement was evaluated through a follow-up achievement test administered after the completion of the ERCM. The test shared the same format and comprehension levels: literal, reorganization, and inferential, as the initial assessment. Descriptive analysis was employed to compare students' performance across the three levels

in order to identify overall progress and determine whether the module facilitated comprehension development. This evaluation process aimed to verify whether the ERCM provided appropriate scaffolding for reading comprehension in accordance with the College English Syllabus.

ERCM implementation was carried out with 160 first-year non-English-major undergraduates enrolled in a compulsory College English course at a private university in Guangxi. The implementation served as the main study to examine whether the module functioned effectively. All students first completed a diagnostic reading comprehension test, which was used to establish their baseline performance before engaging with the module. Following the diagnostic test, the ERCM was implemented as an instructional intervention (refer to Appendix 1). The module was delivered over a period of 16 weeks during regular College English classes. Instruction was conducted by the course instructor following the instructional texts specified in the ERCM, with a focus on developing students' literal, reorganization, and inferential reading comprehension.

Upon completing the module, students sat for an achievement test using a parallel version of the CET-4 reading comprehension test. The diagnostic test and achievement test mean percentage were compared to identify achievement in students' performance across literal, reorganization, and inferential comprehension. Table 2 presents the comparison of students' reading comprehension mean percentage before and after completing the ERCM in the main study.

Table 2: Students' achievement before and after the implementation of the ERCM

	Literal Comprehension	Reorganization Comprehension	Inferential Comprehension
Mean in diagnostic test (%)	55.88%	28.33%	16.56%
Mean in achievement test (%)	72.55%	43.44%	35.31%
Difference (%)	16.67%	15.11%	18.75%

As shown in Table 2, students' mean scores increased in all three types of reading comprehension. Literal comprehension improved from 55.88% in the diagnostic test to 72.55% in the achievement test, while reorganization comprehension increased from 28.33% to 43.44%. Inferential comprehension also showed a higher mean score, rising from 16.56% to 35.31%. Overall, the achievement test mean percentage were higher than the diagnostic test mean percentage across all reading comprehension categories. These overall gains provided an overview of students' improved performance. To present a more detailed picture of students' achievement in each reading comprehension category separately, Tables 3, Table 4, and Table 5 report the diagnostic and achievement test results for literal, reorganization, and inferential comprehension.

Table 3 presents their diagnostic and achievement test mean percentages for the two sub-skills assessed: identifying supporting details and identifying main ideas. The table summarises the changes in students' mean percentage before and after completing the ERCM in this comprehension category.

Table 3: Students' achievement before and after the implementation of the ERCM in literal comprehension

	Identifying Supporting Details	Identifying Main Ideas
Mean in diagnostic test (%)	55.86%	55.93%
Mean in achievement test (%)	72.12%	73.12%
Difference (%)	16.67%	17.19%

The largest gain was observed in extracting supporting details, with the mean percentage increasing from 25.83% to 46.42%. Noticeable improvements were also found in extracting cause-and-effect relations and acquiring meaning of words, while a relatively smaller increase was observed in extracting main ideas. Overall, the results suggest that students made consistent progress in reorganization comprehension, with greater gains in tasks requiring the integration and restructuring of textual information.

Table 4 presents their diagnostic and achievement test mean percentages across four sub-skills: extracting supporting details, extracting main ideas, acquiring meaning of words, and extracting cause-and-effect relations.

Table 4: Students' achievement before and after the implementation of the ERCM in reorganization comprehension

	Extracting supportin g details	Extracting main ideas	Acquiring meaning of words	Extracting cause-and-effect relation
Mean in diagnostic test (%)	25.83%	32.83%	29.79%	25.62%
Mean in achievement test (%)	46.42%	44.17%	43.13%	40.42%
Difference (%)	20.59%	11.34%	13.34%	14.80%

As shown in Table 4, students demonstrated increases across all four-reorganization comprehension sub-skills. The mean percentage for extracting supporting details increased from 25.83% to 46.42%, while extracting main ideas rose from 32.83% to 44.17%. Mean percentage for acquiring meaning of words increased from 29.79% to 43.13%, and extracting cause-and-effect relations increased from 25.62% to 40.42%. These results indicate higher performance in reorganization comprehension.

To provide insight into students' inferential comprehension, Table 5 summarises the diagnostic and achievement test mean percentages for the two sub-skills assessed: making inferences and drawing conclusions.

Table 5: Students' achievement before and after the implementation of the ERCM in inferential comprehension

	Making inferences	Drawing conclusions
Mean in diagnostic test (%)	22.22%	17.22%
Mean in achievement test (%)	32.00%	31.11%
Difference (%)	10.00%	13.89%

As shown in Table 5, students' mean percentage s increased in both inferential comprehension sub-skills. The mean percentage for making inferences increased from 22.22% to 32.00%, while drawing conclusions rose from 17.22% to 31.11%. These improvements represent higher performance in inferential comprehension. This finding corresponds with previous research (Lin et al., 2021; Roman & Belda-medina, 2025), which emphasized that EFL learners typically acquire literal comprehension earlier than higher-level comprehension skills. The steady improvement across levels also shows that the ERCM aligns with the hierarchical structure of Barrett's Taxonomy and provides a coherent sequence for multi-level reading comprehension development.

4.4 Iteration of the ERCM

Following the principles of Design and Development Research (DDR), this study underwent a series of systematic and iterative refinement cycles to progressively improve the English Reading Comprehension Module (ERCM). Guided by continuous evaluation, each phase generated concrete evidence drawn from syllabus analysis, test data, expert comments, and students' achievement, to ensure that the module became increasingly aligned with learners' needs and curriculum requirements. In this study, three iterations were carried out to optimize the ERCM based on findings from the diagnostic test, pilot study and students' evaluation.

Iteration 1 focused on expert validation. Their feedback led to several refinements, including adjusting the wording of objectives (e.g., changing "Guess meaning of words" to "Acquire meaning of words") and adding a "Guidance" sub-section to each comprehension part to improve instructional clarity. These revisions ensured that the module met syllabus expectations and provided learners with a clearer structure for developing literal, reorganization, and inferential comprehension skills.

Iteration 2 involved pilot testing with 30 students to examine the reliability of the reading comprehension exercises. Using KR-20, the researcher identified which items demonstrated acceptable internal consistency and which required modification. This phase also revealed practical issues related to wording clarity, distractor quality, and text–item alignment. Based on these findings, several items were refined to improve discrimination, accuracy, and consistency with Barrett's Taxonomy. The outcomes of this iteration strengthened the reliability of the module before its implementation in the main study.

Iteration 3 involved refining the ERCM based on students' performance in the achievement test. Analyses of test data highlighted areas requiring improvement, such as simplifying difficult vocabulary, adding clearer worked examples, and refining task instructions. These revisions ensured that the final version of the module aligned more closely with learners' needs and their demonstrated levels of reading comprehension.

Through these iterative cycles, each phase contributed to the development of a well-structured, reliable, and pedagogically grounded reading comprehension module. The continuous refinement ensured strong alignment with the syllabus, responsiveness to learners' challenges, and systematic enhancement of students' literal, reorganization, and inferential comprehension abilities.

5. Discussion

The results reported above indicate that the ERCM contributed to improvements across multiple levels of reading comprehension. This study aimed to develop an English Reading Comprehension Module (ERCM) for non-English-major undergraduates in China, using syllabus-aligned reading skills and structured comprehension tasks to strengthen multi-level reading performance. Guided by a Design and Development Research (DDR) approach, the study followed four phases: analysis, design, development, and evaluation. Through syllabus and textbook review, diagnostic testing, expert validation, and classroom implementation, the ERCM was progressively refined to address students' weaknesses in literal, reorganization, and inferential comprehension.

During the analysis phase, the study identified clear gaps between the requirements of the College English Syllabus and students' actual reading performance. While the syllabus emphasized multi-level comprehension aligned with CET-4 expectations, the diagnostic test revealed that learners performed well on literal items but struggled markedly with reorganization and inferential tasks. This pattern is consistent with recent cognitive-diagnostic evidence from Chinese university EFL learners, showing that higher-proficiency students tend to perform better on literal comprehension than on more demanding inference-related subskills, whereas lower-proficiency learners demonstrate broad weaknesses in global inferencing (Du & Ma, 2021).

Textbook analysis further showed that most reading activities emphasized vocabulary and detail recognition, offering limited opportunities for synthesizing information or making inferences. This concern also echoes recent validation work on CET-4 reading constructs, which reports that CET-4 subtests heavily prioritize scanning and comprehension of explicit details and relatively seldom target higher-level gist construction (Zhang et al., 2025). The ERCM was therefore designed to address these gaps by incorporating the syllabus with structured tasks that gradually extend learners' abilities beyond surface comprehension. By grounding the module with the national syllabus and the cognitive demands of CET-4 texts, the design sought to provide materials that more accurately match learners' needs and support progression toward higher-level comprehension (Liang & Osman, 2025).

Barrett's Taxonomy of Reading Comprehension was used to structure the ERCM's question design across literal, reorganization, and inferential levels, ensuring a systematic progression in cognitive complexity. This framework enabled the module to move learners from basic detail identification to integrating information across sentences and constructing meaning beyond the surface of the text. Such an approach is consistent with findings from Ke (2022), who reported that Chinese EFL learners typically demonstrate stronger literal comprehension but face persistent difficulties with reorganization and inferential skills.

Similar concerns have been raised by Feng (2021), who noted that widely used college English textbooks still prioritize vocabulary and surface-level comprehension while offering limited opportunities for higher-order processing. Aligning with these needs, the ERCM incorporated reading skills specified in the College English Syllabus and the reading comprehension requirements of CET-4 to ensure that each comprehension level corresponded to appropriate linguistic and cognitive demands (Wu et al., 2021). By combining Barrett's Taxonomy with the syllabus specifications and CET-4 task types, the ERCM provided a coherent reading progression that supported learners' development toward higher-level comprehension (Ma & Lin, 2025).

Passages in the ERCM were selected to align with the text types, difficulty levels, and reading abilities specified in the College English Syllabus and represented in CET-4 reading materials. The module incorporated a range of topics frequently encountered in Chinese college English learning contexts, including education, technology, culture, and social issues, ensuring that the texts were relevant to students' academic and everyday experiences. The ERCM employed structured question types, covering literal, reorganization, and inferential comprehension, to support learners' understanding and gradually extend their processing beyond surface meaning, a practice widely recognized as effective for developing reading proficiency in EFL contexts (Duke et al., 2011).

The ERCM was implemented in a private college in China, involving 160 Year 1 undergraduates. The evaluation results showed clear improvements across all three comprehension levels after students completed the ERCM. Literal comprehension increased from 55.88% to 72.55%, reorganization comprehension rose from 28.33% to 43.44%, and inferential comprehension improved from 16.56% to 35.31%. These improvements are consistent with previous EFL reading research suggesting that structured and hierarchical task sequencing can facilitate learners' progression from surface-level understanding to higher-order comprehension, particularly when instructional tasks move systematically from literal to inferential processing (Mekheimer, 2025; Zhang & Singh, 2025).

Prior studies have similarly reported that graded reading tasks aligned with cognitive difficulty levels help learners integrate textual information more effectively and develop interpretive skills beyond factual recall (Thohir et al., 2020; Samiei & Ebadi, 2021). Students' perceptions of the module as clear, manageable, and supportive also echo earlier findings that repeated exposure to level-appropriate tasks enhances learners' confidence and engagement in exam-

oriented reading contexts, such as CET-4-style passages (Li, 2021; Wang et al., 2025). Research on EFL reading instruction has shown that scaffolding and task familiarity play an important role in reducing cognitive load and increasing learners' self-efficacy when handling complex reading demands (Cholsakorn & Piamsai, 2022).

From a pedagogical perspective, these findings align with existing literature advocating the integration of syllabus-aligned and assessment-informed instructional materials in college English teaching. By mirroring CET-4 text types and question formats while extending learners' engagement beyond vocabulary-focused drills, the ERCM provides a structured and progressive resource that supports the development of higher-level comprehension skills (Sural & Aksoy, 2024; Wang et al., 2025). At the institutional level, the results further support previous arguments that theory-driven reading modules grounded in taxonomic frameworks can be effectively translated into coherent instructional materials (Ma & Lin, 2025), particularly in contexts where conventional textbooks offer limited support for reorganization and inferential processing (Saidi, 2025).

Despite its positive outcomes, this study had several limitations that warrant consideration. The sample was drawn from a single institution, which may limit the generalizability of the results to broader university contexts. In addition, the implementation period was relatively short, and the impact of the ERCM on long-term retention of reading skills could not be examined. The study also employed a single-group diagnostic test and achievement test design without a comparison group, making it difficult to attribute all improvements solely to the module. Future studies could adopt a larger and more diverse sample, implement the ERCM over an extended period, and incorporate control groups to strengthen causal claims. Further research may also explore integrating additional inferential tasks and expanding the module to other disciplines or proficiency levels to enhance its applicability across different university settings.

Although the ERCM was developed and tested within the context of Chinese non-English-major undergraduates, the significance of this study extends beyond this specific setting. Many EFL contexts worldwide face similar challenges, including overemphasis on vocabulary-focused instruction and insufficient attention to higher-order comprehension processes (Akbar et al., 2025). By demonstrating how Barrett's Taxonomy can be systematically operationalized into structured instructional materials through a Design and Development Research framework, this study provides a transferable model for reading module development in comparable EFL environments. Therefore, the contribution of the present research lies not only in its local application but also in offering a replicable framework for theory-driven reading instruction in broader contexts.

6. Implications

This study provides several research implications for EFL reading instruction and material development. First, the findings show that Barrett's Taxonomy can be effectively operationalized into a structured reading comprehension module, supporting its use beyond assessment purposes. Second, the study illustrates how

the Design and Development Research (DDR) approach can bridge reading theory, syllabus requirements, and classroom practice through systematic and iterative development. Finally, the results suggest that syllabus-aligned and taxonomy-based reading modules can facilitate learners' progression from literal to higher-level comprehension, indicating the potential for future research to extend this approach to other learner groups and instructional contexts.

7. Conclusion

This study affirmed that a systematically designed, syllabus-aligned English Reading Comprehension Module (ERCM) can effectively strengthen multi-level reading comprehension among Chinese non-English-major undergraduates. Grounded in Barrett's Taxonomy, CET-4 reading requirements, and the College English Syllabus, the ERCM addressed key pedagogical gaps, including the overemphasis on literal processing and insufficient support for reorganization and inferential comprehension, by providing structured exposure to increasingly complex tasks.

Implemented through expert validation, iterative refinement, and classroom application, the ERCM demonstrated clear learning gains across comprehension levels. The improvements reflect a developmental shift from basic text recognition toward higher-order meaning construction, indicating learners' growing capacity to reorganize information and engage in inferential processing beyond surface-level comprehension. Taken together, these findings highlighted the potential of structured and theory-informed reading modules to support skill development in contexts where conventional textbooks offer limited scaffolding for higher-order processing.

Beyond its empirical findings, the ERCM provided practical implications for key stakeholders. For teachers, the module offered ready-to-use materials aligned with CET-4 expectations, enhancing coherence between instruction and assessment. For curriculum developers, it demonstrated how syllabus requirements and established reading theories could be translated into pedagogically sound materials that scaffold comprehension in a progressive and measurable manner. At the institutional level, the ERCM illustrated the value of integrating structured reading modules into College English courses to better support differentiated proficiency needs.

Looking forward, future work could expand the ERCM to additional proficiency levels, incorporate longer implementation periods, or include digital components to enhance accessibility and learner autonomy. As Chinese universities continue strengthening reading instruction in alignment with national standards, this study demonstrated that theory-driven and context-responsive interventions can enhance undergraduate reading proficiency.

8. Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Appendix 1

Literal Comprehension Text 1-Ambition

In college, my friend Beth was very ambitious, not only for herself but for her friends. She was interested in foreign relations, in travel, in going to law school. "I plan to be the Secretary of State someday," she would say matter-of-factly. I was a biology major, which was a problem: Beth's friend from childhood was also studying biology, and Beth had already decided she would win the Nobel Prize. This was resolved by my interest in writing fiction. I would win that Nobel, while her other friend would win for science.

Source: https://www.forbes.com/sites/roncarucci/2022/08/05/why-ambition-matters-and-how-to-develop-the-right-amount-of-it/

It was a joke; we were all smart-ass college freshmen, pretending the world was ours for the asking. But it was not entirely a joke. We were smart college freshmen, and why should we limit our ambitions?

I've always liked ambitious people, not because I am desperate to be buddies with a future Secretary of State but because I find ambitious people entertaining — interesting to talk to, fun to watch. And, of course, I like such people because I am ambitious myself, and I would rather not feel apologetic about it.

What I mean by ambition is dreaming big dreams, putting no limits on your expectations and your hopes. I don't really like very specific, attainable ambitions. I like big ambitions that suggest the world could open up at any time, with work and luck and determination. The next book could hit it big. The next research project could lead to something fantastic. The next bright idea could change history.

Of course, eventually you have to stop being a freshman in college. You limit your ambitions and become more realistic, wiser about your potential, your abilities, and the number of things your life can hold. Sometimes you get close to something you wanted to do, only to find it looks better from far away. Back when I was a freshman, to tell the truth, I wanted to be Jane Goodall, go into the jungle to study monkeys and learn things no one had ever dreamed of, but it turned out that wasn't enough of a basis for a life. And I was not fated to live a wild, adventurous life, to travel alone to all the most exotic parts of the world, to leave behind a string of broken hearts.

One of the worst things ambition can do is tell you you're a failure. The world is full of measuring tapes, books, and articles to tell you where you should be at your age, after so many years of doing what you do. However, the world is full of disappointed people. Some of them probably never had much ambition to start with; they sat back and waited for something good and felt cheated because it

never happened. Some of them had very set, specific ambitions and, for one reason or another, never got what they wanted. Others got what they wanted but found it wasn't exactly what they'd expected it to be.

As you grow up, your ambitions may come into conflict. Part of growing up, of course, is realizing that there is only so much room in one life. You can do one thing whole-heartedly and single-mindedly and give up some other things. Or you can be greedy and grab for something new without wanting to give up what you already have. This leads to a chaotic and crowded life in which you are always late, always overdue, always behind, but rarely bored. Even so, you have to come to terms with limitations; you cannot crowd your life with occupations and then expect to do each one as well as you might if it were all you had to do.

Of course, I try to be mature about ambition. I don't assign my friends Nobel Prizes or top government posts. I don't pretend that there is room in my life for any and every kind of ambition I can imagine. Instead, all I want are three things: I want to write as well as I can, I want to have a family, and I want to be a good paediatrician. And then, of course, a voice inside whispers: to write a best-seller, to have 10 children, to do amazing medical research … Even though I'm not a college freshman anymore, I'm glad to find that little voice still there, whispering sweet nothings in my ear. (733 words)

(Adapted from: *Ambition* at https://www.coursehero.com/file/24266402/Ambition-by-Perri-Klassdocx/)

1: What was the author's major in college?
(Type: identify supporting detail)
A: Chemistry
B: Biology
C: Geometry
D: Mathematics

2: Why does the author like ambitious people? Because they are…
(Type: identify supporting detail)
A: entertaining.
B: very rich.
C: talented.
D: good-looking.

3: Who did the author want to be when she was a freshman?
(Type: identify supporting detail)
A: Doris Lessing
B: Alfred Brendel
C: Andrea Ghez
D: Jane Goodall

4: What is the worst thing that ambition can do?
(Type: identify supporting detail)
A: Telling you that you're a failure.
B: Lying to you that you're the best.
C: Showing you that you can do better.
D: Convincing you that you deserve better.

5: Hom many things does the author want?
(Type: identify supporting detail)
A: Two. B: Three. C: Four. D: Five

- **Reorganization Comprehension Text 1-Is Social Media the Enemy?**

Two events today, although worlds apart, seem closely tied together. And the bond between them is as human as it is electronic.

First, on my way to the coffee shop, I got a message from my 10-year-old son, just saying good morning and letting me know he was going to a birthday party today. I don't get to see him all the time. He's growing up in two houses, as I did. But recently, I handed down my old iPhone to him so we could communicate with each other when we're apart.

Source:https://www.aliem.com/5-rules-to-guide-your-approach-to-learning-in-social-media/

The amount of calming satisfaction it gives me to be able to communicate with my son through technology is undeniable and human. It's the other side of the "I don't care what you ate for breakfast this morning" argument against the *mundane* broadcasting of social media. In this case, I absolutely care about this. I'd listen to him describe a piece of bacon and hang on every word. Is it better than a conversation with "real words"? No. But is it better than waiting two more days, when the mundane moment that I long to hear about so much is gone? Definitely yes.

Moments later, I sat down and opened the paper. A piece of news immediately caught my attention: In China, social media has been used to find lost kids. I'm reading about the tears of the family, the rapt attention of the town and country, and I'm again marvelling at the human side of the Internet.

I recently asked the question to my friends: "Are social media apps making you feel closer to people or farther away?" It sparked a lot of responses and seemed to touch one of our generation's exposed nerves. What is the effect of the Internet and social media on our humanity?

From the outside view, digital interactions appear to be cold and inhuman. The theme of the responses to my questions seemed to be summed up by my friend Jason, who wrote, "Closer to people I'm far away from." Then, a minute later, he wrote, "But maybe farther from the people I'm close enough to." And then he added, "I just got confused."

It is confusing. We live in this paradox now, where two seemingly conflicting realities exist side by side. Social media simultaneously draws us nearer and distances us. But I think very often, we lament what we miss and forget to admire what we've become. And it is human nature to reject the machine the moment we feel it becoming ubiquitous. We have seen it with the printing press, moving pictures, television, video games, just about any other advanced technology that captures our attention. What romantic rituals of relationship and social interaction

will die in the process? Our hearts want to know.

In The New Yorker this week, there's an article "How the Internet Gets Inside Us." The author breaks down a large number of new books on the subject and categorizes them all into the viewpoints: "the Never-Betters, the Better-Nevers, and the Ever-Wasers." In short, there are three groups of people who see the current movement as good, bad, or normal. But ultimately, the last group is the one best equipped to handle it all.

Another observation from the coffee shop: Sitting not far from me, five people are looking at screens, and four people are reading something on paper. And I'm doing both. The dynamics in this coffee shop is quite a bit more revealing than any article or book. Think about the dynamic relationships between physical and digital. People aren't giving up long-form reading, considered thinking, or social interaction. They are just filling all the space between. And even that is not entirely true as I watch the occasional stare out the window or long glance around the room.

The way people engage with the Internet and social media isn't like any kind of interaction we've ever seen before. It's like an intertwining sine wave that touches in and out continuously.

The Internet doesn't steal our humanity; it reflects it. The Internet doesn't get inside us; it shows what's inside us. And social media isn't cold; it's just complex and hard to define. The machine does not control us. It is a tool. Looking through this lens, perhaps we should re-frame our discussions about technology from how it is changing us to how we are using it. (732words)
(Adapted from: *Is Social Media the Enemy?*
https://www.coursesidekick.com/marketing/573896)

1: Why doesn't the author see her son all the time? Because…
(Type: extract cause-and-effect relation)
A: she works in another country.
B: her son lives in school.
C: she is a divorced woman.
D: her son lives all by his own.

2: What does the word "mundane" mean in the second paragraph? It refers to something that…
(Type: acquire meaning of words)
A: is very popular.
B: has many audiences.
C: is very challenging.
D: is not interesting.

3: What is the effect of the social media on our humanity? It…
(Type: extract main idea)
A: makes us feel closer and farther with people at the same time.
B: largely shortens the distance between people than before.
C: makes the distance between people farther than before.
D: does not influence the distance between people at all.

4: Which group of people is the one best equipped to handle the Internet? The group which thinks that the Internet……
(Type: extract supporting detail)
A: has been developed to the best.
B: has been developed to the worst.
C: is now developing in a normal way.
D: doesn't influence human society.

5: What can be revealed from the dynamics in the coffee shop?
(Type: extract main idea)
A: People are filling physical and digital space.
B: People prefer reading than social interaction.
C: The Internet draw people nearer than before.
D: The Internet makes people indifferent and cold.

Inferential Comprehension Text 1-The Soothing British Ritual of Tea-time

Source: https://www.shicheng.news/v/oq70X#new

When I started working in London four years ago, I repeatedly made a serious mistake: Whenever a colleague would offer me a cup of tea, I'd politely decline. To me, a mug of hot tea with milk tasted okay, but it was more the kind of thing you use to accompany something actually delicious, like cake.

But this awkward exchange kept happening. It happened at work more than four times a day. The offers from my English colleagues began to drive me a little crazy, and I could tell that my repeated refusal was annoying them, as well. That's because in Britain, I soon learned, rejecting a cup of tea is like rejecting a gesture of friendship.

I'd always considered tea a relatively simple beverage. The British, of course, could not disagree more. An individual's particular tea preference is a lifelong commitment. Sharp lines are drawn. "How do you take your tea?" is perhaps the most loaded question in the British language. Milk or no milk? Sugar or no sugar? Unless you're ready for a war, don't even think about asking whether the milk should be added before or after the water because you'll be dragged into a bitter dispute drawn along age-old lines of class and region.

The true importance of the tea ritual didn't fully hit home for me until one visit to my husband's parents in the north of England. My British in-laws are the most polite, kind, and hospitable people in the entire world. They tried their best to make me feel welcome. I never heard them say a word against me. That was, until three years ago, on Christmas Day, when I first made them tea.

On that day, after being offered tea several times, I saw that it was time for the final cup of the day. Being the dutiful daughter-in-law that I am, I took it upon

myself to prepare this round. I boiled the kettle, stewed the teabags, added the milk, and triumphantly placed two cups in front of my in-laws.

They both glanced at their mugs and hesitated.

"Bit milky, huh?" my mother-in-law said.

Her words went straight through my heart like a dagger. "Bit milky" is the American way of saying "This is the worst thing I've ever tasted." I was very embarrassed.

I didn't make tea again for a year, which basically labeled me as an outsider, because drinking tea is part of British society at every level. Everyone from the men on building sites to the queen herself in Buckingham Palace drinks tea. Upper-class, middle-class, and working-class people are united in their love of this national beverage. It's a way of life and a sacred tradition, and one that carries over into the workplace, as I so discovered.

No meeting in Britain shall begin without someone "popping the kettle on." Don't even think about attempting to work on something unpleasant without making a brew first to help you through. A tough client call, a tedious data entry job, or a long presentation? Tea first, always.

Tea is such an ingrained part of work life in the UK that some offices have actual tea trolleys. Some kitchens even have a board on the wall where each employee has noted their personal tea preference, sometimes accompanied by an illustrated chart.

In an effort to really understand how much tea is being consumed on this island, I polled various British people on how many cups they drink daily. The most common answer was four. Even in summer. But why?

Yes, tea can be a gesture of kindness, but for many people, it's mostly a ritual of comfort. My friend who drinks seven cups a day said tea reminds her of her mom. For many British people, it seems tea wraps them in the memories of childhood and home.

In that case, maybe people who live in Britain should all embrace this tradition. The next time you're feeling blue, just deal with it like the British: Boil the kettle and prepare tea for yourself, and maybe your colleagues. After a few years here, I've even discovered my own tea preference, which you're welcome to borrow: Stew for one minute, add some milk, and drink with a generous slice of cake while you escape the world for five minutes. (722 words)

(Adapted from *What Americans can learn from the soothing British ritual of tea time* at https://theweek.com/articles/699010/what-americans-learn-from-soothing-british-ritual-tea-time)

1: What would happen after the author rejected her colleague's offer for a cup of tea several times? Her colleagues would…

(Type: making inferences)

A: feel offended and not make friends with her.

B: consistently invite her for a cup of tea.

C: be upset and then even isolate her.

D: never invite her for a cup of tea.

2: What can be concluded about the significance of tea in Great Britain?
(Type: draw conclusion)
A: Having a cup of tea before work is a social tradition in Great Britain.
B: Having tea everyday is a way of life and a sacred tradition in Great Britain.
C: Tea is very cheap which can be afforded by people from every walk of life.
D: Tea has the power of comforting people and reminding them of sweet memories.

3: Why did her mother-in-law say "Bit milky" instead of another British expression? Because she…
(Type: making inferences)
A: thought the tea was too bad to describe in British English.
B: didn't know how to describe it appropriately in British English.
C: wanted to embarrass the author on purpose with American English.
D: did not appreciate her daughter-in-law nor the tea she made.

4: Why do meetings in Britain begin with someone "popping the kettle on"? Because…
(Type: draw conclusion)
A: tea gives people strength to do hard work.
B: the caffeine in tea can make people energetic.
C: the process of making tea can comfort people.
D: the smell of tea can give people new inspiration.

5: Who will embrace the tradition of having tea the most in Britain?
(Type: make inferences)
A: Stay-at-home moms.
B: British teenagers.
C: White-collar class.
D: College students.