

Investigation of Extramural English Activities Practices among Chinese EFL High School Students with Different English Proficiency Levels

Yuhan Meng^{1*} / Sumalee Chinokul^{2*}

¹M.Ed. (Bilingual Education and English Language Teaching), Suryadhep Teachers College, Rangsit University, Thailand

E-mail: 1045516947@qq.com

²Assoc. Prof. Dr., Suryadhep Teachers College, Rangsit University, Thailand

Corresponding Author: sumalee.c@rsu.ac.th

Received: May 14, 2025

Revised: July 7, 2025

Accepted: July 21, 2025

Abstract

This study explores the participation of Chinese high school EFL students in extramural English activities, emphasizing their preferences and attitudes across different English proficiency levels. The research was carried out at Guolong Foreign Language School in Guilin, Guangxi, involving 192 students who were grouped into high, medium, and low English proficiency based on their recent English examination scores. A mixed-methods approach, combining questionnaire data and follow-up interview, was employed to gather comprehensive insights. Findings indicate that students predominantly engage in passive learning activities, such as watching English movies and listening to English music, while participation in interactive activities, like English corners or online conversations, remains notably low. High-English proficiency students displayed greater confidence and independently utilized a variety of resources to enhance their learning. Conversely, low-English proficiency students struggled with comprehension difficulties and showed limited motivation to participate actively. The study suggests that providing more accessible, engaging, and student-centered interactive activities could significantly support second language acquisition and boost students' engagement across all English proficiency levels, fostering improved English learning outcomes.

Keywords: extramural English activities practices, different English proficiency level, second language acquisition, Chinese high school EFL students

Introduction

It has been well admitted that only engaging in studying English inside the classroom may not be sufficient for students to cope with global English and the issues of intercultural understanding. EFL scholars; therefore, focus on students' self-initiated, out-of-class efforts like autonomous, extramural, informal, naturalistic, non-formal, out-of-school, and self-directed language learning (Sundqvist & Uztosun, 2023). Extramural English activities are informal and interest-driven practices. Unlike classroom learning, where students often have limited choices, these activities allow students to pursue what they genuinely enjoy (Peters, 2018; Sundqvist, 2009).

Sundqvist and Uztosun (2023) argue that this model is rooted in L2 sociocultural theory. According to Lantolf and Thorne (2006), the theory comprises three interrelated levels: activity, action, and operation. At the activity level, tasks demand varied skills; at the action level, motives drive goal-directed behavior; and at the operational level, autonomy emerges through “automatized and habituated actions that respond to the immediate social-material conditions at hand” (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006), enhancing confidence and willingness to communicate (Lai, Zhu & Gong, 2015; Lee & Drajati, 2020).

Building on this theoretical foundation, scholars have also paid attention to the tools and contexts that facilitate extramural English learning. Internet platforms such as streaming services, social media, online games, Duolingo, BBC Learning English, Coursera, Rosetta Stone, HelloTalk, Zoom, Skype, VR, AR, and community-based forums like Facebook groups and Reddit provide flexible, immersive learning environments (Mao, 2023). In China, policy changes have created more room for such practices. The Double-Reduction Policy, issued by the General Office of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council in July 2021, reduces homework burdens, while the Quality Education policy shifts the focus from exam-oriented learning to holistic learning development. These initiatives have freed up time for students to engage in extramural English activities such as reading, movies, music, English corners, and online courses, fostering greater autonomy and diverse skill development (Cao, 2023). Yet, Chinese high school students still struggle to adapt from test-focused English learning to more communicative and interest-driven approaches, highlighting the growing importance of extramural learning in improving both language proficiency and motivation.

This research article examines the role of extramural English learning on Chinese high school EFL students with varying English proficiency levels at Guolong Foreign Language School in Guilin, China, and explores their views on these activities. Theoretically, it enriches second language acquisition frameworks by extending the focus beyond classroom strategies (Sundqvist & Uztosun, 2023). Practically, it helps teachers tailor instructional methods—for example, by recommending suitable activities—and informs policymakers on how to better integrate real-world resources based on the evidence presented. Socially, it contributes to enhancing students’ English literacy and competitiveness in a globalized context, filling gaps in the current understanding of how extramural English affects EFL learners and aligning with the broader goals of educational reform.

The research objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To examine the types of extramural English activities that Chinese high school students with different English proficiency levels engage in
2. To investigate the perceptions and motivations of Chinese high school students with different English proficiency levels regarding extramural English learning

This study reveals the diverse ways in which Chinese high school students are exposed to English outside the classroom, which is crucial for understanding their language learning processes and outcomes. The findings can provide valuable insights for educators and policymakers to develop effective strategies that support students’ autonomous learning. In addition, the results may inform the design of more targeted

and engaging English teaching programs that align with students' interests and needs, thereby enhancing their language proficiency and learning motivation.

Literature Review

1. The concepts of extramural activities

Extramural English, coined by Sundqvist (Sundqvist, 2009), refers to English exposure outside classroom walls, suggesting distinct from educational settings. Etymologically, “extra” means outside and “mural” means wall, implying activities beyond school boundaries. Sundqvist and Sylvén (2016) differentiate it from extracurricular activities, which are school-organized efforts like film clubs aimed at improving language proficiency. Extramural activities, however, occur outside institutions without a teaching focus, driven by learners' interests and recreational pursuits. While extracurricular activities involve planned language goals, extramural ones may unintentionally boost skills through enjoyment (Nunan-Richards, 2015). Both accelerate second language acquisition by enabling functional practice (Bialystok, 1981), highlighting their role in students' self-directed language development.

2. Support of Second Language Acquisition Theory for Extramural English Activities

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theories offer strong support for the effectiveness of extramural English activities in promoting language development across different proficiency levels. Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1982) emphasizes the importance of comprehensible input ($i+1$) in language acquisition, which can be naturally provided through activities such as watching English movies or reading novels (Ellis, 2008). Swain's Output Hypothesis (1995) complements this view by highlighting the role of meaningful language output in developing accuracy and fluency, often observed in communicative settings like English corners or online discussions (DeKeyser, 2007; Gass & Mackey, 2007). From a sociocultural perspective, Vygotsky's theory (1978) and the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) illustrate how learners benefit from guided participation and interaction, which are common in extramural environments such as gaming communities or social media exchanges (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Meanwhile, Dörnyei's (2005) motivation theory underscores the power of personally meaningful and interest-driven activities in sustaining learner engagement, especially when students are able to select materials aligned with their goals and preferences (Gardner, 2010; Ushioda, 2013). Together, these theoretical perspectives frame this study's dual focus: first, on the types of extramural English activities students with varying English proficiency levels engage in; and second, on their perceptions and motivations in relation to these experiences.

3. Students' views on extramural English activities

Students' engagement with extramural English is shaped by a range of affective and contextual factors, including interest, motivation, support systems, and anxiety. Research consistently shows that most students hold positive attitudes toward extramural activities such as movies and games, which can improve vocabulary and listening skills in a relaxed and enjoyable way (Lai, Zhu & Gong, 2015; Peters, 2018; Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016). However, the extent of benefit often depends on the

student's level of autonomy; more self-directed students tend to make greater use of digital tools like Duolingo, while lower-proficiency students often require more structured support (Little, 1991; Sockett, 2014). External support from family and schools can also influence participation, as encouragement and access to resources to create a more enabling environment (Lamb, 2017). Conversely, anxiety and low self-confidence, particularly in speaking-focused settings like English corners, can hinder active participation (Dewaele, 2018; Horwitz, 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). Teachers may reduce these negative effects by creating low-risk, collaborative learning spaces such as small-group discussions (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002). These findings collectively inform the present study's second research objective by identifying how students' perceptions—specifically their attitudes, motivations, and anxieties—vary across different levels of English proficiency, and how these differences shape their engagement with extramural English.

4. The importance of extramural activities

Limited classroom time hinders comprehensive English learning, making extramural activities vital (Lin & Li, 2021). China's Double-Reduction and Quality Education policies emphasize their role in reducing burdens and fostering holistic growth (Fei, 2022; Pan, 2013; Wu, 2024; Yu, 2024). Classroom constraints—few hours and exam focus—limit skill development (Wang, 2024; Wu, 2021). Extramural activities extend exposure via movies, songs, and apps like Duolingo, enhancing proficiency and interest (Hong & Yufang, 2021; Zhao, 2024). Technology amplifies this with flexible, personalized resources (Deng, Wu & Chen, 2024; Jones & Raees, 2023; Wei, Sulaiman, & Ismail, 2024), meeting diverse needs and boosting autonomy (Chen, Guo & Kuai, 2022; Wang, 2023; Xiang, 2023).

5. Extramural English learning mode

The Extramural English learning model benefits Chinese high school students by increasing input (e.g., English corners, movies) and output (e.g., teacher interactions), enhancing comprehension, speaking, and confidence (Lazaro & Mascuñana, 2022; Wu & Peng, 2022). Social media fosters collective learning, integrating students into English communities (Cao, 2022). Language communication activities, like local exchanges, boost oral skills and cultural adaptability (Chen, 2025; Liu & Han, 2022; Wu, 2021). This model significantly improves proficiency, particularly in speaking and listening (Li & Wang, 2017; Pan, 2013), and subject performance by deepening language knowledge and self-discipline (Yaman & Sahin, 2019). Technology, including platforms and apps, offers flexible, gamified learning, while virtual tools like video chats break geographical barriers, aided by AI for personalized support (Li & Wang, 2020; Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2021). It complements classroom learning by enriching resources, experiences, and motivation, creating a synergistic effect that enhances overall English development (Signe, 2023).

6. Research Methodology

Considering the research context of Chinese high school EFL students with different English proficiency levels, the authors adopted a descriptive statistics research method and integrated quantitative and qualitative data to comprehensively respond to and elicit more in-depth data to achieve research objectives.

7. Research design

This mixed-methods study investigates extramural English activities and students' views across English proficiency levels, using questionnaires for quantitative data and semi-structured interviews for qualitative depth (Creswell, 2013). Questionnaires gather primary data, while interviews explore more insights from the participants. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze patterns and opinions on extramural learning. Thematic analysis was applied to analyze the interview data to supplement the research objectives.

8. Population and Sample

The research population comprises 369 high school EFL students from Guolong Foreign Language School in Guilin City, Guangxi Province, China. The study exclusively recruited second-year students with no grade retention to ensure homogeneity in age distribution with an average age of approximately 17 years, and selected students from six classes for diversity. The selection of this private institution was deliberate to ensure that most students have experience with extramural English language learning activities. The school emphasizes English learning with two teachers per class and offers regular English-related activities. The Taro Yamane formula ($n = \frac{N}{1+Ne^2}$), where n is the sample size, N is the population (369), and e is the error (0.05), yielded a sample of 192 respondents for representativeness and reliability (Creswell, 2013). Quantitative data were collected through questionnaires, while qualitative opinions came from semi-structured interviews with 12 volunteers, aligning with Creswell, who discussed key points of mixed methods research designs, noting that the qualitative component typically includes a smaller sample (e.g., 8-12 participants) for deep understanding and high-quality data, and Guest (Guest, 2006), who explores "data saturation" in qualitative research, suggesting 12 interviews suffice for representative analysis results with wide impact on social science sample size discussions. Table 1 shows gender balance (49.48% female, 50.52% male), age distribution (35.94% 16, 23.96% 17, 27.08% 18, 6.25% over 18, 6.77% undisclosed), English learning years (43.23% 9 years, 24.48% 10 years, 26.56% 11 years, 5.73% 12+ years), and English exam scores mostly 91-110, indicating moderate proficiency. Students were grouped by three mock exam averages from the Chinese Academy of Examinations: 11.46% below 90 (low), 61.98% 91-110 (mid), 26.56% 111-150 (high), with most in the mid-range (Guest, 2006).

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics of Basic Information

Basic Demographic Information		N	Percent
Gender	Male	97	50.52%
	Female	95	49.48%
Age range	16 years old	69	35.94%
	17 years old	46	23.96%
	18 years old	52	27.08%
	Over 18 years old	12	6.25%
	Prefer not to say	13	6.77%
Years of studying English	9 years	83	43.23%
	10 years	47	24.48%
	11 years	51	26.56%
	12 years+	11	5.73%
English proficiency level group	Low English proficiency level group	22	11.46%
	Medium English proficiency level group	119	61.98%
	High English proficiency level group	51	26.56%

Research Instruments

Two research instruments, a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview, were employed in this study. A questionnaire was designed into three parts: 1) basic information (gender, age, duration of English learning), 2) extramural learning situations (methods and habits), and 3) self-assessment contain detail practices and perceptions across proficiency levels. A semi-structured interviews using a five-item protocol in Chinese was conducted to explore favorite methods and opinions towards extramural English activities practices to complement questionnaire data (Creswell, 2013).

Validity and Reliability of the Questionnaire and Interview Protocols

1. Content validity check

All items were first written in Chinese, translated into English, and then back-translated to confirm semantic equivalence. For content validity check, three specialists in extramural learning evaluated the bilingual versions for clarity and relevance. Using the item-objective-congruence (IOC) index, any item scoring below 0.67 was reworded or deleted; four questionnaire items were simplified for clarity or rephrased to better align with learning outcomes, such as changing abstract wording to more concrete examples. Two interview prompts were narrowed in scope to ensure focus and avoid overlapping themes.

2. Pilot testing to establish the initial reliability check

A small trial with 55 students of similar age and background identified confusing wording. Three questionnaire items were simplified, one double-barrelled item was split, and Likert-scale anchors were adjusted. The interview guide was shortened and follow-up prompts were added to improve the flow of the content.

3. Internal-consistency analysis to check reliability of the research instruments

After revisions, the 30-item questionnaire was piloted with a separate group of 30 students to check for reliability of the questionnaire. Cronbach's alpha reached 0.92, indicating excellent internal consistency; no further items needed removal. For the interview data, intercoder was applied. Two independent coders reached 87 % agreement on initial themes, confirming coding reliability.

This integrated approach-expert judgement, bilingual verification, piloting, and a single round of statistical checks-streamlined the methodology while ensuring that every item was both conceptually sound and statistically dependable.

Data Collection

Questionnaire was delivered online via Wenjuanxing on October 5, 2024. During data collection, questionnaires included a one-minute reminder reading to ensure accurate responses, emphasizing authenticity. Semi-structured interviews were conducted online via Tencent Meeting on October 10, 2024. The interview was conducted in Chinese allowed comfortable expression, with responses recorded and preserved. Ethical considerations were strictly adhered to, obtaining participant consent after explaining the study's purpose and process, assuring anonymity and confidentiality for research use only, prioritizing participant well-being and research integrity (Creswell, 2013). The Research Ethics approval was granted by the Research Ethics Committee Board of Rangsit University before data collection.

Method of Data Analysis

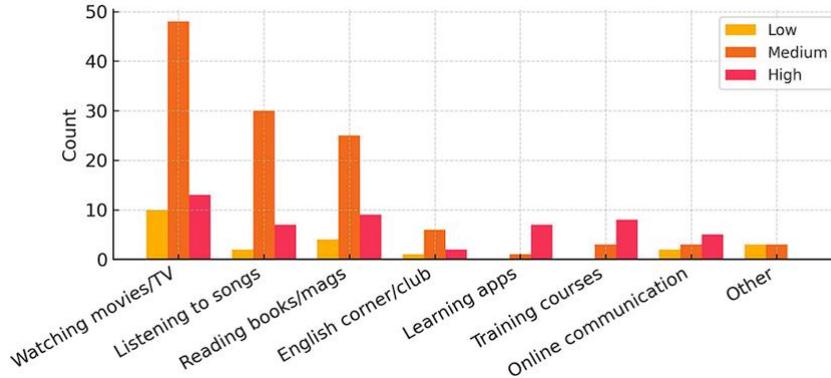
Descriptive analysis was applied to present the findings from the quantitative analysis data. Thematic analysis was applied for the interview data analysis. The researcher transcribed Chinese interviews into English, following familiarization, initial coding (e.g., "I enjoy watching English movies because they help me learn new words and expressions" → Learning through entertainment), and then the researcher categorized grouping into seven themes-learning through entertainment, reading, social interaction, listening/speaking methods, expression/critical thinking, reading/writing, and digital tools (e.g., "Using Duolingo and watching TED Talks has been helpful" → Digital tools) using NVIVO for systematic, reliable theme identification, capturing diverse experiences (Guest, 2006).

Results

1. Results for research objective 1: To examine the types of extramural English activities that Chinese high school students with different English proficiency levels engage in. Extramural activities practices among students with different proficiency levels are displayed in Figure 1. Figure 2 presents reasons students with different English proficiency levels participate in Extramural English activities. The time, devices and platforms the students of different English proficiency levels participating in their extramural English activities are reported in Table 2.

Figure 1

Extramural Activities Practices among Students with Different Proficiency Levels

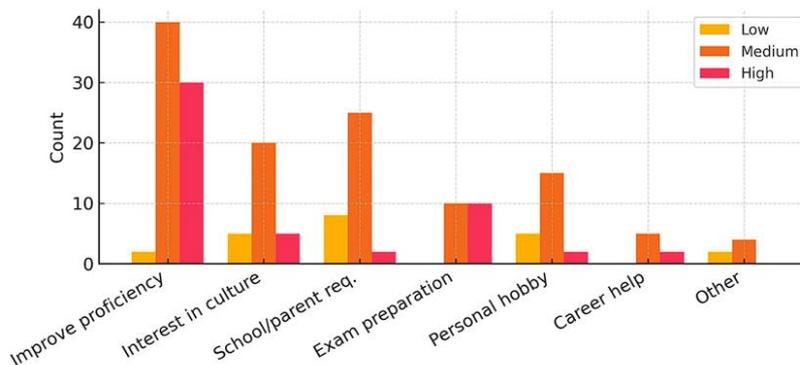


Questionnaire findings show that students’ preferred extramural English activities are shaped by both their language proficiency and personal interests. Lower-English proficiency level students tend to engage in passive, input-focused activities such as watching English movies or listening to songs, which offer comfort and accessibility. In contrast, higher- English proficiency level students seem to participate more frequently in interactive, output-driven tasks like using language apps, attending training courses, or joining speech-based activities with foreign teachers, which demand active language use.

Chi-square analysis confirmed these patterns with statistically significant differences in activity choice across proficiency groups ($\chi^2 = 48.15$, $df = 14$, $p < .001$; see Figure 1). Although watching English movies/TV shows remains the most common activity across all levels, the distribution of other activity types diverges notably. Mid-English proficiency level students show a blend of input and output activities, suggesting a shift toward more autonomous and purposeful learning. Overall, the findings seem to reveal clear evidence of Extramural English activities preferences among different English proficiency level group. Students’ English proficiency level can predict the way they participate in activities from passive exposure toward more challenging and communicative forms of extramural engagement.

Figure 2

Reasons Students with Different English Proficiency Levels Participate in EE Activities



Students' motivations for engaging in extramural English activities varied significantly across proficiency levels. Chi-square analysis revealed a marked difference in motivational patterns ($\chi^2 = 40.55$, $df = 12$, $p < .001$; see Figure 2). High-English proficiency level students were largely driven by intrinsic goals, such as improving language proficiency and personal interest, reflecting greater autonomy and long-term commitment. In contrast, low-English proficiency level students were more influenced by external expectations, particularly from schools or parents, suggesting a more passive approach. Medium-English proficiency level students exhibited a transitional profile, combining emerging self-driven goals with residual external pressures. These findings may support the idea that as proficiency increases, learners are more likely to engage in extramural activities out of genuine interest and personal development rather than obligation.

Table 2

The Time, Devices and Platforms for Students of Different English Proficiency Levels to Participate in EE Activities

		Low-level group	Medium-level group	High-level group
1. Time you spend per week participating in the extramural English activities	1) Less than 1 hour	15 (68.18%)	40 (33.61%)	5 (9.80%)
	2) 1-2 hours	5 (22.73%)	45 (37.82%)	10 (19.61%)
	3) 3-5 hours	2 (9.09%)	25 (21.01%)	20 (39.22%)
	4) Over 5 hours	0 (0%)	9 (7.56%)	16 (31.37%)
2. Tools or resources you most commonly use for extramural English learning	1) Online Dictionary	2 (9.09%)	30 (25.21%)	20 (39.22%)
	2) English learning website	0 (0%)	20 (16.81%)	15 (29.41%)
	3) English learning application	0 (0%)	25 (21.01%)	10 (19.61%)
	4) English books/textbooks	0 (0%)	10 (8.40%)	5 (9.80%)
	5) Video and audio resources (such as YouTube, Podcast)	18 (81.82%)	30 (25.21%)	1 (1.96%)
	6) Other (please specify)	2 (9.09%)	4 (3.36%)	0 (0%)
3. Devices you usually watch English movies/TV shows	1) Television	2 (9.09%)	10 (8.40%)	5 (9.80%)
	2) Computer	2 (9.09%)	20 (16.81%)	15 (29.41%)
	3) Mobile phone	15 (68.18%)	70 (58.82%)	25 (49.02%)
	4) Tablets	3 (13.64%)	15 (12.61%)	5 (9.80%)
	5) Other (please specify)	0 (0%)	4 (3.36%)	1 (1.96%)

Table 2 (Continued)

		Low-level group	Medium-level group	High-level group
4.The English learning applications you are using	1) Duolingo	0 (0%)	30 (25.21%)	25 (49.02%)
	2) Babbel	0 (0%)	20 (16.81%)	10 (19.61%)
	3) HelloTalk	0 (0%)	15 (12.61%)	10 (19.61%)
	4) Other (please specify)	2 (9.09%)	10 (8.40%)	5 (9.80%)
	5) No application used	20 (90.91%)	44 (36.97%)	1 (1.96%)
5.The main platform you use for online English communication	1) WeChat	10 (45.45%)	50 (42.02%)	10 (19.61%)
	2) QQ	5 (22.73%)	20 (16.81%)	5 (9.80%)
	3) Skype	0 (0%)	15 (12.61%)	15 (29.41%)
	4) Zoom	0 (0%)	20 (16.81%)	20 (39.22%)
	5) Other (please specify)	7 (31.82%)	14 (11.76%)	1 (1.96%)

Weekly time, resource choice, and technology use all varied systematically with proficiency. Most low-English proficiency level learners spent little more than a casual glance at English each week and relied almost entirely on entertainment-oriented videos or songs streamed on mobile phones. Medium-English proficiency level students invested roughly double that amount of time and began to supplement entertainment with purpose-built tools-online dictionaries, learning websites, and a modest uptake of apps. High-English proficiency level students, by contrast, treated extramural learning as a sustained practice: the majority logged several hours a week, split time across multiple devices, and preferred structured, output-oriented resources such as language apps and online courses.

A similar progression was evident in communication platforms. Students at the lower end confined interaction to familiar domestic apps like WeChat or QQ, whereas high-English proficiency peers gravitated toward global, real-time channels such as Zoom and Skype-platforms that demand more fluent, spontaneous output. Taken together, the data trace a clear developmental trajectory: as proficiency rises, students move from brief, passive exposure toward longer, more diversified and interactive engagement with English beyond the classroom.

2. Results for research objective 2: To investigate the perceptions and motivations of Chinese high school students with different English proficiency levels regarding extramural English learning.

Table 3 reveals the views of Chinese high school students with different English proficiency levels on Extramural activities. Thematic analysis was displayed in Table 4.

Table 3

Views of Chinese High School Students with Different English Proficiency Levels on Extramural Activities

Views about extramural activities	Level of Agreement	Low-Level Group	Medium-Level Group	High-Level Group
1. Extramural English activities have helped improve your English learning methods	Strongly Agree	6 (27.27%)	32 (26.89%)	40 (78.43%)
	Agree	3 (13.64%)	35 (29.41%)	7 (13.73%)
	Uncertain	8 (36.36%)	37 (31.09%)	3 (5.88%)
	Disagree	2 (9.09%)	9 (7.56%)	1 (1.96%)
	Strongly disagree	3 (13.64%)	6 (5.04%)	0 (0%)
2. Extramural English learning has improved your English grades	Strongly Agree	2 (9.09%)	31 (26.05%)	40 (78.43%)
	Agree	2 (9.09%)	30 (25.21%)	4 (7.84%)
	Uncertain	1 (4.55%)	25 (21.01%)	3 (5.88%)
	Disagree	7 (31.82%)	15 (12.61%)	2 (3.92%)
	Strongly disagree	10 (45.45%)	18 (15.13%)	2 (3.92%)
3. Extramural English learning enhanced your motivation to learn English	Strongly Agree	2 (9.09%)	31 (26.05%)	40 (78.43%)
	Agree	2 (9.09%)	30 (25.21%)	4 (7.84%)
	Uncertain	1 (4.55%)	25 (21.01%)	3 (5.88%)
	Disagree	7 (31.82%)	15 (12.61%)	2 (3.92%)
	Strongly disagree	10 (45.45%)	18 (15.13%)	2 (3.92%)
4. Extramural learning helps to enhance your confidence in learning English	Strongly Agree	3 (13.64%)	30 (25.21%)	40 (78.43%)
	Agree	3 (13.64%)	36 (30.25%)	5 (9.80%)
	Uncertain	1 (4.55%)	44 (36.97%)	2 (3.92%)
	Disagree	7 (31.82%)	6 (5.04%)	3 (5.88%)
	Strongly disagree	8 (36.36%)	3 (2.52%)	1 (1.96%)
5. Your willingness to continue increasing your extramural study time to improve your English proficiency	Strongly Agree	3 (13.64%)	33 (27.73%)	40 (78.43%)
	Agree	2 (9.09%)	30 (25.21%)	5 (9.80%)
	Uncertain	4 (18.18%)	48 (40.34%)	3 (5.88%)
	Disagree	6 (27.27%)	4 (3.36%)	2 (3.92%)
	Strongly disagree	7 (31.82%)	4 (3.36%)	1 (1.96%)

Student perceptions of extramural English learning showed notable differences across proficiency levels. High-level students overwhelmingly recognized the benefits, with over 78% strongly agreeing that these activities enhanced their learning methods, academic performance, motivation, and confidence. This suggests a reinforcing cycle where higher proficiency encourages greater engagement and positive outcomes. In contrast, low-level students were more doubtful; nearly half strongly disagreed that extramural learning improved their grades or motivation, and many were uncertain about dedicating more time to such activities. This may be due to comprehension difficulties, lower self-efficacy, or a mismatch between the activities and their skill level. Medium-level students displayed a mixed response, with some

beginning to appreciate the value of autonomous learning while others remained hesitant. Overall, the results indicate a clear correlation between English proficiency and perceived benefits of extramural learning, emphasizing the importance of adapting strategies and providing appropriate support to lower-level learners to help bridge this gap.

Table 4

Theme Analysis of Semi-structured Interviews

Key coding words	Categories	Themes
Watching English movies with subtitles Listening to English songs Playing English games	Learning through entertainment (9 or 52.9%)	Favourite extramural learning methods used
Reading English novels Reading English magazines and news Reading English comics	Learning through reading (5 or 29.4%)	
Participating in English corners Taking part in English drama performances Group activities with foreign teachers	Social interaction activities (3 or 17.6%)	
	17(100%)	
Immersive learning through summer camps One-on-one practice with an English tutor Participating in English debate competitions	Effective methods for improving listening and speaking skills (3 or 16.7%) Effective methods to enhance comprehensive expression and critical thinking abilities (2 or 11.1%)	Opinions on extramural learning activities
Recite English song lyrics Imitate English movie lines and memorize them Play English version games Using Duolingo to improve grammar skills Watching English learning channels Practicing intensive listening with TED Talks	Effective methods for improving reading and writing skills (8 or 44.4%) Digital tools can effectively assist learning (5 or 27.8%)	
	18 (100%)	

Interview coding shows a clear hierarchy in how students approach extramural English. For favourite extramural learning methods used, learning through entertainment account for 52.9%. Enjoyment, such as watching subtitled films, listening to songs, or gaming, remains the primary entry point for informal learning. A smaller but still substantial group (29.4%) prefers reading-oriented activities (novels, magazines, comics), suggesting that print input is the next most attractive option once basic interest is established. Face-to-face social interaction-English corners, drama, or group work with foreign teachers-comes third, valued by roughly one student in six.

When asked which activities most effectively build specific skills, students again organized their experiences along functional lines. Immersive contexts such as summer camps or one-to-one tutoring were singled out for improving listening and speaking, while debate contests were viewed as the best route to critical thinking and comprehensive expression. For reading and writing, many cited text-based memorization strategies (e.g., reciting song lyrics or imitating film dialogue). Finally, about a quarter of respondents highlighted digital tools-Duolingo, YouTube learning channels, TED Talks-as efficient supplements rather than primary modes. Together, these patterns paint a picture of learners moving from low-pressure entertainment toward progressively more demanding and skill-specific practices as their confidence and needs grow.

Discussion

This study shows Chinese high school students engage in various extramural English activities, with clear differences by their English proficiency level. Watching English movies and TV remains most popular, while interactive activities like English corners and online communication have low participation. Mid-level students exhibit mixed patterns, suggesting a transitional learning phase.

Socioeconomic and technological factors may limit access to interactive resources, especially for lower-English proficiency level learners who also face confidence issues. High- English proficiency students report greater benefits in learning strategies, motivation, and confidence, while lower-English proficiency level students struggle with comprehension and independent learning. Interviews confirm high-English proficiency level students actively use diverse resources and engage confidently, whereas low-English proficiency level students are more hesitant.

These findings suggest educators should promote interactive, communicative activities and improve access to digital tools, alongside providing structured support to boost motivation and self-efficacy. However, the study is limited by its focus on one school and reliance on self-reports, which may affect generalizability and accuracy. Future research should include broader samples and longitudinal data.

Recommendation

To optimize extramural English learning, all stakeholders must take responsibility-and establish clear mechanisms to evaluate the effectiveness of their efforts.

Schools should enrich activity content by offering diverse programs such as English corners, drama performances, and debates, and improve activity quality through professional guidance. To evaluate success, they can track student participation rates, collect regular feedback, and monitor progress using formative assessments or English performance indicators.

Policymakers should promote equitable access to learning resources, support cross-cultural exchange programs, and develop balanced study schedules that encourage participation without adding academic stress. Their interventions can be evaluated through large-scale surveys, school-level outcome tracking, and program review reports.

Extramural training institutions need to provide interactive, level-specific courses such as movie dubbing or gamified speaking tasks, and integrate AI-assisted learning platforms. Evaluation can include pre- and post-course language assessments, learner satisfaction ratings, and retention or improvement in key skills.

Parents play a vital supporting role by encouraging engagement, providing quality resources, and creating English-friendly environments at home. Their influence can be assessed through student reflections, parent-teacher discussions, and changes in learners' motivation and confidence levels.

Students should take initiative by engaging actively, selecting appropriate tools, and maintaining long-term interest through enjoyable methods like English movies and podcasts. Their progress can be evaluated using self-monitoring tools such as learning journals, goal-tracking apps, or teacher feedback.

Through coordinated action and continuous evaluation, these stakeholders can together enhance the effectiveness, inclusiveness, and sustainability of extramural English learning.

References

- Bialystok. (1981). The role of conscious strategies in second language proficiency. *The Modern Language Journal*, 65(1), 24-35.
- Cao Guoqiang. (2023). *Research on the current situation and management strategies of extramural learning for middle school students under the background of school family social collaborative education*. Ludong University.
- Cao Fang. (2022). Discussing the teaching innovation of English extramural reading under the background of double reduction policy. *Anhui Educational Research*, 15(29), 38-40.
- Chen M. (2025). A comparative study of lexical richness in English writing by Chinese senior high school students. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 45(1), 227-242.
- Chen Z, Guo J., & Kuai L. (2022). *Exploring English writing anxiety in Chinese high school students*. East China Normal University.

- Chen W. (2025). *Happy but not happy: The correlation between Chinese high school students' grades and their level of happiness*. Eliwise Academy.
- Cui Cencen. (2022). An analysis of layered guidance strategies for primary school English extramural reading. *Humanities and Science Navigation*, 22(08), 31-33.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Sage Publications.
- David, Y. (2005). Contextual influences on the formation and behaviour of out-of-class study groups. *Curriculum and Teaching*, 20(2), 59-79.
- Deng X, Wu Z., & Chen A. (2024). The effect of English songs on Chinese students' acquisition of word stress in a rural junior high school. *International Journal of Languages, Literature and Linguistics*, 10(2).
- DeKeyser, R. M. (2007). *Practice in a second language: Perspectives from applied linguistics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Dewaele, J. M. (2018). The relationship between multilingualism and trait emotional intelligence. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 15(1), 1-15.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14790718.2017.1315807>
- Dörnyei, Z. (2005). *The psychology of the language learner: Individual differences in second language acquisition*. Routledge.
- Ellis, R. (2008). *The study of second language acquisition*. Oxford University Press.
- Gardner, R. C. (2010). *Motivation and second language acquisition: The socio-educational model*. Peter Lang.
- Gass, S. M., & Mackey, A. (2007). *Input, interaction, and output in second language acquisition*. Routledge.
- Gregersen, T., & Horwitz, E. K. (2002). Language learning and perfectionism: Anxious and non-anxious language learners' reactions to their own oral performance. *The Modern Language Journal*, 86(4), 562-570.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/1540-4781.00161>
- Horwitz, E. K. (1986). Preliminary evidence for the reliability and validity of a foreign language anxiety scale. *TESOL Quarterly*, 20(3), 559-562.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/3586302>
- Fei Yuhua. (2022). An exploration of the teaching design path for primary school English extramural reading based on the concept of English learning activities. *Primary School Teaching Design*, 22(9), 57-60.
- Glaser, B. G., Strauss, A. L., & Strutzel, E. (1968). The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research. *Nursing Research*, 17(4), 364.
- Guest, G. (2006). How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field Methods*, 18(1), 59-82.
- Halstead M. J. (2009). Autonomy as an element in Chinese educational reform: A Case study of English lessons in a senior high school in Beijing. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 29(4), 443-456.
- Hong, Z., & Yufang F. (2021). A survey study of English speaking strategies use: Evidence from Chinese high school students of international department. *Journal of Education and Learning*, 10(6), 54-61.
<https://doi.org/10.5539/jel.v10n6p54>

- Jones, A. R., & Raees C. (2023) Exploring the relationship between extramural English, self-efficacy, gender, and learning outcomes: A mixed-methods study in a Norwegian upper-secondary school. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 79.
- Krashen, S. D. (1982). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. Pergamon.
- Lai, C., Zhu, W., & Gong, G. (2015). Understanding the quality of out-of-class English learning. *TESOL Quarterly*, 49(2), 278-308.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.171>
- Lantolf, J. P., & Thorne, S. L. (2006). *Ciocultural theory and the genesis of second language development*. Oxford University Press.
- Lamb, M. (2017). The motivational dimension of language teaching. *Language Teaching*, 50(3), 301-346.
- Lazaro, S. J. C., & Mascuñana, G. C. (2022). Learning behavior towards modular instruction, sex, and academic performance in English of grade 7 public high school students. *Asian Journal of Education and Social Studies*, 37-58.
- Lee, J. S., & Drajeti, N. A. (2020). Willingness to communicate in digital and nondigital EFL contexts: Scale development and psychometric testing. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 33(7), 688-707.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2019.1588330>
- Little, D. (1991). *Learner autonomy: Definitions, issues, and problems*. Authentik.
- Liu Honggang, & Han Xueke. (2022). Empirical study on the English academic resilience of Chinese high school students. *Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 45(1), 49-68+150-151.
- Lin, B., & Li S. (2022). Speaking anxiety in English classes among Chinese senior high school students. *Journal of Educational Research and Policies*, 3(4).
- MacIntyre, P. D., & Gardner, R. C. (1994). The subtle effects of language anxiety on cognitive processing in the second language. *Language Learning*, 44(2), 283-305.
- Nunan, D., & Richards, C. (2015). *Language learning beyond the classroom*. Routledge.
- Pan Min. (2013). *A study on the correlation between Chinese high school students' English academic performance and family background*. Shandong Normal University.
- Peters, E. (2018). The effect of out-of-class exposure to English language media on learners' vocabulary knowledge. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 169(1), 142-168.
- Sundqvist, P. (2009). *Extramural English matters: Out of school English and its impact on Swedish ninth graders' oral proficiency and vocabulary*. Karlstad University.
- Sundqvist, P., & Sylvén, L. K. (2016). *Extramural English in teaching and learning: From theory and research to practice*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Sundqvist & Uztosun. (2023). *Extramural English in Scandinavia and Asia: Scale development, learner engagement, and perceived speaking ability*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Socket, G. (2014). *The online informal learning of English*. Palgrave Macmillan.

- Swain, M. (1995). *Three functions of output in second language learning*. Oxford University Press.
- Signe J. H. (2023). Extramural English for early language learning. *Language Teaching for Young Learners*, 2023, 5(1), 85-109.
- Ushioda, E. (2013). *Motivation and ELT: Global issues and local concerns*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.
- Wang Min. (2023). *Research on the influence factors of high school students' English academic performance from the perspective of control value theory*. Hunan University.
- Wang Ling. (2024). Research on the teaching practice of integrating English reading and writing in junior high school. *Campus English*, 16(5), 11-14.
- Wang Jun. (2020). *Research on the correlation between high school students' English learning motivation and academic performance*. Suzhou University.
- Wei, Y., Sulaiman, A. N., & Ismail H. (2024). Overcoming academic writing challenges: English language learning strategies for Chinese international high school students in blended learning environments. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 14(10), 3285-3294.
- Wu, Y., & Peng M. (2022). A correlative study on English listening beliefs and strategies of Chinese high school students: A case in Fujian province. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 13(3), 659-669.
- Wu, A. (2024). A comparative study of frame construction in Chinese and western English news headline. *English Language Teaching and Linguistics Studies*, 6(6).
- Xiang, X. (2023). *English speaking anxiety in Chinese international high school students*. Northumbria University.
- Yu Sijia. (2024). Research on English extramural reading teaching focused on deep learning. *English Teacher*, 24(20), 129-131.

Authors

Yuhan Meng is a postgraduate student in bilingual education at Suryadhep Teachers College, Rangsit University, Thailand.

Sumalee Chinokul is an associate professor at Suryadhep Teachers College, Rangsit University, Thailand