

Research on Reading Promotion Strategies for Primary and Secondary School Students in Public Libraries under the “Double Reduction” Policy: A Dual Perspective Based on Cognitive Development and Social-Emotional Learning

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Abstract: *Against the backdrop of the deepening “Double Reduction” policy, public libraries have been entrusted with new after-school educational responsibilities. Yet empirical surveys reveal that primary and secondary school students remain overwhelmingly test-oriented (65 %) and confined to supplementary workbooks (62 %). Sixty percent read intensively for less than 30 minutes a day, a pattern that significantly constrains social-emotional learning (SEL). Integrating Piaget’s cognitive-development theory with the CASEL SEL framework, we employed stratified random sampling to administer questionnaires and rating scales to 500 pupils across six primary and secondary schools in Tai’an. Results show that literary reading, science reading and intrinsic motivation positively predict SEL ($\beta = 0.25, 0.18, 0.31, p < 0.01$), whereas test-oriented motivation exerts a negative effect ($\beta = -0.14, p < 0.05$). Grounded in these findings, we propose a “cognitive-affective” dual-pathway reading-promotion strategy: (1) a staged and leveled reading system (concrete reading kits for primary students and critical interdisciplinary booklists for junior-high students); (2) SEL-themed bibliographies coupled with emotion-driven experiential activities; (3) a three-way “library-school-family” linkage for the “3:30 p.m. classroom”; and (4) digital empowerment via intelligent recommendation and virtual communities. The study offers an evidence-based framework for targeted public-library interventions under the “Double Reduction” policy and contributes both theoretical insight and practical guidance for fostering the synergistic development of cognitive advancement and social-emotional competence in primary and secondary school students.*

Keywords: *Double Reduction Policy; Public Libraries; Reading Promotion; Cognitive Development; Social-Emotional Learning; Primary and Secondary School Students*

1. Introduction

With the in-depth implementation of the *Opinions on Further Reducing the Homework Burden and Off-Campus Tutoring Burden for Students in Compulsory Education*(2021), public libraries have been explicitly assigned the responsibility of providing “after-school services”^[1]. However, the 2024 *China Youth Reading Report* indicates that over 70% of primary and secondary school students nationwide still devote their extracurricular reading time to supplementary educational materials^[2], revealing a significant gap between reading quality and policy objectives. Existing research predominantly focuses on quantitative metrics such as per capita borrowing rates^[3], while largely overlooking the synergistic role of reading in promoting cognitive development and emotional competencies. Based on Piaget’s theory of cognitive development, reading promotion for primary and secondary students should be designed in stages: the primary school phase (ages 7–12, concrete operational stage) should emphasize concrete reading materials (e.g., science picture books combined with experimental toolkits) to enhance comprehension through interactive experiences; the junior high phase (ages 12–15, formal operational stage) should incorporate critical thinking training, such as debate-style book clubs exemplified by the “Critical Reading and Writing Camp” at Nanjing Jinling Library. Simultaneously, the Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) framework demonstrates that reading can targeted develop core competencies—biographical reading (e.g., *Madame Curie*) enhances self-management, while multicultural books (e.g., *The Kite Runner*) strengthen social awareness. This study integrates the “interpersonal skills” framework of SEL^[4] with Piaget’s critical thinking theory of the “formal operational stage”^[5], aiming to develop an actionable dual-path “cognitive-emotional” reading

promotion strategy framework. Empirical research will be conducted to validate its effectiveness, providing theoretical support and practical solutions for library-school collaborative education under the "Double Reduction" policy context.

2. Research Methods

A stratified random sampling method was employed to select 500 students (from third grade in primary school to third grade in junior high school) across six primary and secondary schools in Tai'an City as the study subjects. The questionnaire design included behavioral variables such as daily average reading time, reading types (literary/science/supplementary educational/others), and reading motivation (interest/exam preparation/parental requirement). We used the abbreviated CASEL (2020) scale to measure SEL competencies across five dimensions, including self-awareness and social awareness (using a Likert 5-point scoring system). Table 1 presents the structure and scoring details of the SEL Competency Scale. SPSS 26.0 was utilized for correlation analysis and regression analysis.

Table 1: SEL Competency Scale

Dimension	Measurement Items
Self-Awareness	I can accurately describe my strengths and weaknesses
Self-Management	When facing difficulties, I can remain calm and find solutions
Social Awareness	I can understand others' feelings and think from their perspective
Interpersonal Skills	I am willing to proactively collaborate with classmates to complete group tasks
Responsible Decision-Making	When making decisions, I consider the impact on others and society

3. Results and Analysis

3.1 Analysis of Reading Behaviors among Primary and Secondary School Students

3.1.1 Student Reading Motivation

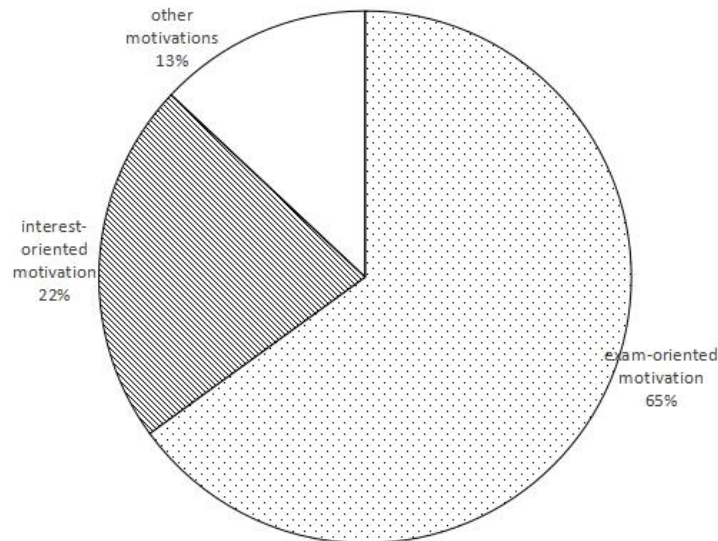


Figure 1 Students' Reading Motivations

Figure 1 shows that 65% of the students in the sample reported "exam-oriented motivation" for reading, 22% cited "interest-oriented motivation," and the remaining 13% were categorized as "other motivations." Following the implementation of the "Double Reduction" policy, although extracurricular tutoring time has been compressed, the in-school evaluation mechanism remains heavily focused on academic performance, leading to a characteristic dominance of "instrumental rationality" over "value rationality" in students' reading behaviors. The high proportion of exam-oriented motivation (65%) suggests that when public libraries intervene in reading promotion for primary and secondary students, merely emphasizing "interest stimulation" while neglecting alignment with curriculum standards and assessment systems may yield limited practical impact. Meanwhile, the 22% interest-oriented group

provides a scalable "seed user" base for libraries to develop services such as graded in-depth reading and thematic study programs. Although the 13% "other motivations" represent a smaller share, they may encompass diverse driving factors such as social interaction, parent-child engagement, and digital media experiences.

3.1.2 Allocation of Students' Reading Time

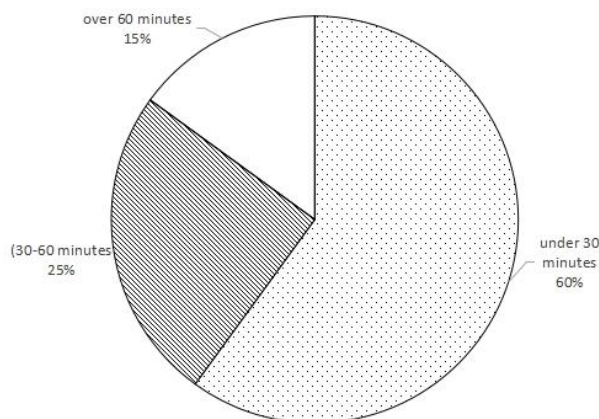


Figure 2 Students' Reading Time

Figure 2 shows the distribution of reading time: deep reading (over 60 minutes) accounts for only 15%, moderate reading (30-60 minutes) for 25%, and fragmented reading (under 30 minutes) as high as 60%, forming a distinct "pyramid" structure. This result aligns with the reality that while extracurricular tutoring time has been reduced under the "Double Reduction" policy, academic tasks within schools remain heavy. It indicates that although students' discretionary time for independent reading may have increased in total, factors such as homework and distractions from digital media limit the proportion actually devoted to sustained deep reading to less than 20%. The 60% short-duration reading group suggests that public libraries urgently need to bridge the gap between time investment and quality improvement through a "micro-reading to deep-reading" gradient design (e.g., 15-minute guided micro-lessons + 60-minute immersive group reading). Meanwhile, the mere 15% deep reading segment holds the potential to become "opinion leaders" in reading promotion and should be prioritized as key targets for library-school collaborative cultivation.

3.1.3 Distribution of Students' Reading Types

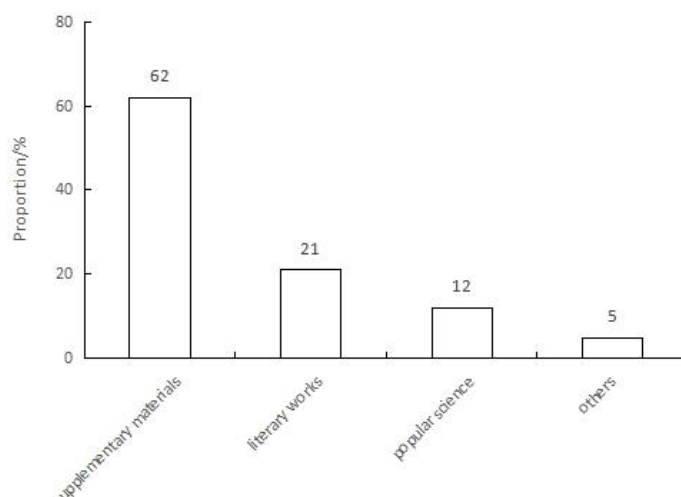


Figure 3 Types of Students' Reading

Figure 3 shows a clear pattern of "dominance by supplementary educational materials" in students' reading types: supplementary materials account for 62%, far exceeding literary works (21%), popular science (12%), and others (5%). This distribution aligns with the 65% exam-oriented motivation in Figure 1 and the 60% fragmented reading duration in Figure 2, further revealing that despite the "Double Reduction" policy, in-school evaluations remain heavily focused on academic performance, leading

students to prioritize limited reading time for supplementary texts. Notably, the combined proportion of literary and popular science works is less than one-third, significantly diverging from the "balanced reading" ratio recommended by the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS 2021) (literary 40%, informational 35%, supplementary $\leq 25\%$). Public libraries can accordingly implement a "1+N" booklist intervention strategy: using core academic competencies as an anchor, curating literary and popular science extension readings around supplementary material themes, and gradually increasing the proportion of non-supplementary texts through task-driven reading lists and interdisciplinary thematic book boxes. This approach aims to alleviate type imbalance and promote simultaneous growth in reading depth and breadth.

3.2 Correlation Analysis between SEL Competencies and Reading Behaviors among Primary and Secondary School Students

Table 2 Correlation Coefficients between SEL Competencies and Reading Behaviors of Primary and Secondary School Students (n=500)

Variables	Self-Awareness	Self-Management	Social Awareness	Interpersonal Skills	Responsible Decision-Making
Daily average reading duration	0.18*	0.22**	0.15*	0.12	0.20**
Literary reading	0.25**	0.19*	0.30**	0.22**	0.27**
Popular science reading	0.20**	0.24**	0.18*	0.15*	0.23**
Supplementary educational materials reading	-0.10	-0.05	-0.08	-0.12	-0.07
Interest-oriented motivation	0.32**	0.28**	0.35**	0.30**	0.29**
Exam-oriented motivation	-0.15*	-0.11	-0.18*	-0.14*	-0.16*

Note: * indicates $p < 0.05$; **indicates $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed test).

Table 2 Pearson correlation analysis (n=500) shows that there are significant and directional correlations between the five dimensions of social and emotional learning (SEL) competencies and reading behaviors among primary and secondary school students: First, daily average reading duration has the strongest correlation with self-management ($r=0.22$, $p<0.01$), and also shows moderate positive correlations with self-awareness and responsible decision-making, suggesting that cumulative reading time may have potential benefits for promoting self-regulation and responsibility awareness; second, literary reading shows significant positive correlations with all SEL dimensions ($0.19 \leq r \leq 0.30$, $p<0.05$ or 0.01), with the highest correlation with social awareness ($r=0.30$), while popular science reading is most closely related to self-management ($r=0.24$) and responsible decision-making ($r=0.23$), indicating that different text types have content-specific effects on promoting SEL; third, supplementary educational materials reading shows weak negative correlations with all five SEL dimensions ($-0.12 \leq r \leq -0.05$), although not reaching statistical significance, the consistent direction suggests that over-reliance on supplementary texts may have an inhibitory effect on SEL development; fourth, in terms of reading motivation, interest motivation shows moderately strong positive correlations with all SEL dimensions ($0.28 \leq r \leq 0.35$, $p<0.01$), while exam motivation shows significant negative correlations ($-0.18 \leq r \leq -0.11$, $p<0.05$ or 0.01). In summary, reading duration, text type, and motivation orientation together constitute key behavioral variables affecting students' SEL development, providing empirical evidence and strategic leverage for public libraries and schools to carry out reading interventions aimed at cultivating SEL under the "double reduction" policy background.

3.3 Regression analysis of factors influencing SEL competencies in primary and secondary school students

3.3.1 Analysis of regression coefficients of factors influencing SEL competencies

Table 3 Regression Coefficients of SEL Competencies in Primary and Secondary School Students

Predictor Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Standard Error(SE)	Standardized Coefficients (β)	t-value	p-value	VIF
Constant	2.15	0.32	-	6.72	<0.001	-
Literary reading	0.28	0.07	0.25	3.82	0.001	1.12
Popular science reading	0.21	0.08	0.18	2.75	0.006	1.08
Interest motivation	0.34	0.08	0.31	4.50	<0.001	1.05
Exam motivation	-0.16	0.07	-0.14	-2.10	0.036	1.10
Daily average reading duration	0.13	0.06	0.12	1.98	0.048	1.15
Control Variables						
Grade level	-0.05	0.04	-0.06	-1.25	0.212	1.07
Gender	0.08	0.05	0.07	1.60	0.110	1.03

Table 3 shows that multiple linear regression results indicate that, after controlling for demographic

variables such as grade level and gender, reading behaviors have a significant predictive power on the SEL competencies of primary and secondary school students. Specifically: literary reading ($\beta=0.25$, $p<0.001$) and popular science reading ($\beta=0.18$, $p=0.006$) both positively predict SEL, with literary reading having the largest standardized coefficient, suggesting that narrative texts play a more prominent role in promoting emotional resonance and social cognition; interest motivation has the strongest predictive effect on SEL ($\beta=0.31$, $p<0.001$), once again confirming the fundamental value of intrinsic motivation for the development of emotional and social competencies; exam motivation shows a significant negative prediction ($\beta=-0.14$, $p=0.036$), meaning that for every one standard deviation increase in exam-oriented motivation, SEL scores decrease by 0.14 standard deviations, further supporting that excessive utilitarian reading may inhibit students' social-emotional growth; daily average reading duration also shows an independent but weaker positive effect ($\beta=0.12$, $p=0.048$). The VIF for all predictor variables ranges between 1.03–1.15, far less than 5, indicating no multicollinearity in the model. In summary, reading content (balancing literary and popular science), reading motivation (prioritizing interest), and reading duration together constitute key behavioral pathways for enhancing students' SEL, providing precise empirical evidence for public libraries and schools to collaboratively design reading intervention programs aimed at cultivating SEL under the "double reduction" policy background.

3.3.2 Analysis of regression models for factors influencing SEL competencies

Table 4 Regression Model of SEL Competencies in Primary and Secondary School Students

Model	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F-valu	Significance(p)
SEL Total Score = 0.25 × Literary Reading + 0.18 × Popular Science Reading + 0.31 × Interest Motivation – 0.14 × Exam Motivation + 0.12 × Daily Average Reading Duration + Constant	0.29	0.27	12.36	<0.001

Table 4 shows that the constructed regression model has significant overall explanatory power, with $F(5, 494) = 12.36$, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.29$, and adjusted $R^2 = 0.27$, indicating that reading behavior variables explain 27% of the variance in SEL competencies among primary and secondary school students. The model coefficients reveal that interest motivation has the strongest positive predictive effect on SEL ($\beta=0.31$), followed by literary reading ($\beta=0.25$) and popular science reading ($\beta=0.18$), while exam motivation shows a significant negative prediction ($\beta=-0.14$). Daily average reading duration also contributes independently but to a lesser extent ($\beta=0.12$). These results remain robust after controlling for variables such as grade level and gender, suggesting that public libraries and schools should prioritize creating an interest-driven reading environment, increase the supply of high-quality literary and popular science resources, and collaboratively enhance students' social and emotional learning competencies by extending effective reading duration and reducing exam-oriented emphasis.

4. Cognitive Development and Social Emotional Learning Dual-Perspective Reading Promotion Strategies for Primary and Secondary Students

4.1 Optimization of Reading Resources Based on Cognitive Development Theory

4.1.1 Construction of a Phased and Graded Reading System

To address the dual challenges of fragmented reading time and imbalanced text structure under the "Double Reduction" policy, public libraries can leverage the dual perspectives of cognitive development and Social Emotional Learning (SEL) to construct a phased and graded reading system for "primary to junior high" stages [6]. The primary school stage (ages 7–12) focuses on concrete and experiential materials: using science picture books (e.g., *The Story of Insects*) as core texts, paired with microscope observation kits, to activate working memory and causal reasoning through the "reading-experimentation-recording" cycle; mathematical storybooks (e.g., *Math Adventures*) supplemented with logic puzzles to cultivate numeracy and goal-setting skills in self-management. The junior high stage (ages 12–15) shifts to critical and interdisciplinary reading: establishing a "classic text debate mechanism" around dystopian works like *1984*, setting value-conflict topics to promote higher-order thinking and social awareness through debate competitions; simultaneously developing thematic booklists such as "AI Ethics," integrating resources from information technology, moral philosophy, and sociology to guide students in responsible decision-making and perspective-taking in real-world contexts. The text gradients and activity designs for both stages embed the five SEL dimensions, achieving

progressive cognitive load and spiral advancement of social-emotional competencies, providing public libraries with an operable and replicable structured pathway for precise intervention.

4.1.2 Activity Design Oriented Towards Cognitive Ability Development

To simultaneously promote cognitive load optimization and higher-order thinking transfer, public libraries systematically embed a "reading+" extension model and digital cognitive tools in reading activities. Post-literary reading sessions are followed by drama performances, leveraging role-playing and plot reconstruction to enhance language expression, discourse integration, and working memory updating. Historical theme reading incorporates scenario simulations (e.g., virtual caravan decision-making on the "Silk Road") to activate causal reasoning and historical thinking, enabling students to construct knowledge schemas through contextual tasks^[7]. Concurrently, libraries are equipped with AR books and immersive reading spaces, utilizing 3D visualization to lower the cognitive threshold for concrete texts. Additionally, reading mind map training systems are provided to visually display conceptual hierarchies and logical relationships in real-time, assisting students in monitoring reading progress and regulating cognitive strategies. This design follows a three-stage model of "experience-representation-transfer," organically integrating text input, contextual interaction, and tool scaffolding. It offers a replicable technology-activity integration paradigm for enhancing deep reading abilities among primary and secondary students under the "Double Reduction" policy context.

4.2 Integrating SEL Framework for Reading Emotional Cultivation

4.2.1 Construction of SEL-Themed Booklist System

To precisely align with the CASEL five-dimensional framework, public libraries construct an "SEL-themed booklist matrix," selecting texts based on dual indicators of graded readability (Lexile 300–900L) and emotional complexity. This forms a vertical booklist spanning primary to junior high schools^[8]: the Self-Awareness Dimension centers on *Totto-chan: The Little Girl at the Window*, using the protagonist's growth narrative to guide readers aged 7–12 in self-acceptance and personality development; the Social Awareness Dimension introduces *The Kite Runner*, addressing cross-cultural trauma and redemption themes to cultivate intercultural understanding and empathy in students aged 12–15; the Interpersonal Skills Dimension selects *Charlotte's Web*, using animal fables to reinforce friendship, cooperation, and altruistic behaviors. Each book is accompanied by an "emotional keyword index + role empathy task sheet + family dialogue card," and a "tripartite" sharing mechanism is implemented in libraries, featuring themed shelf displays, rotating classroom book boxes in schools, and guided family reading sessions. This ensures synchronization between SEL goals and reading practices, providing a replicable booklist paradigm for cultivating social-emotional competencies under the "Double Reduction" policy context.

4.2.2 Design of Emotional Experiential Reading Activities

To effectively translate reading into embodied experiences that foster social-emotional learning (SEL), public libraries are encouraged to design a closed-loop system of emotionally immersive reading activities. This system centers on empathy-based reading workshops that address high-frequency SEL themes such as school bullying. Through techniques drawn from bibliotherapy and role-playing, students are guided to assume the roles of perpetrator, victim, and bystander within narrative contexts. Real-time emotion labeling and role-switching exercises are incorporated to strengthen perspective-taking and emotion regulation skills^[9]. Following the role-playing sessions, participants engage in structured emotional diary writing. In this activity, students extend emotional episodes from the story in the first-person voice of a chosen character, followed by guided reflection on differences between their own emotions and those of the character. This process promotes the dual development of self-awareness and self-management. At the environmental level, libraries can create "emotional tree hole" reading corners—safe, semi-private spaces furnished with soft seating, adjustable lighting, and noise-cancelling headphones to facilitate emotional openness and release. Complementing the physical space, a digital "emotional book tagging" system can be introduced, using RFID and mini-program technologies to assign each book an emotional rating (e.g., on an "anxiety-calm" continuum). Students can scan codes to record their emotional states before and after reading, enabling them to track emotional shifts and increases in self-awareness over time. By integrating experiential engagement, cognitive reflection, and environmental support, this multi-layered approach establishes a reproducible "situation – reflection – support" intervention model. It offers an evidence-based, programmatically feasible paradigm for public libraries to systematically advance SEL among primary and secondary students within the context of the "Double Reduction" policy.

4.3 Construction of a Library-School-Home Collaborative Reading Ecosystem

4.3.1 Service Connection Mechanism under the Double Reduction Policy

To effectively address the post-"Double Reduction" time gap occurring after school hours—commonly referred to as the "3:30 p.m. void"—public libraries are positioned to construct an integrated "library-school-home" service chain^[10]. This model ensures a seamless transition from structured school learning to family-led reading activities, fostering continuous cognitive and emotional development outside the classroom. The service chain operates through two complementary mechanisms. First, during after-school care periods, libraries introduce "3:30 p.m. literacy classes" led by certified reading tutors. These sessions are structured around small-group instruction, tailored to students' Lexile reading levels and aligned with the five core SEL competencies. Following these classes, weekend "Family Reading Challenge" events extend learning beyond the library. Using a points-based incentive system, these events encourage parent-child participation and reinforce engagement through shared reading tasks derived from classroom booklists. Second, leveraging regional education big-data platforms, libraries develop a "Reading-Ability Growth Portfolio" for each student. This portfolio aggregates multi-dimensional data per semester—including reading duration, text types, cognitive assessment results, and SEL scale outcomes. Through algorithmic analysis, the system generates a "personalized reading prescription" that automatically delivers matched book recommendations, emotion-aware activity guides, and parent-child discussion prompts. This facilitates a closed-loop process of intervention, assessment, and follow-up adjustment. By utilizing the policy-created time window as an entry point and the growth portfolio as a regulating tool, this integrated approach not only alleviates the burden on school-based aftercare programs but also ensures that public libraries serve as active, sustainable spaces for holistic student development.

4.3.2 Construction of a Multi-dimensional Linkage Support System

To consolidate the sustainability of reading promotion under the "Double Reduction" context, public libraries build a multi-dimensional "home-teacher-library" linkage support system: for parents, implement the "Parent Empowerment Program," compile an evidence-based Parent-Child SEL Reading Guide, and launch a "Parent Reading Tutor" certification training (12-hour workshop + 20-hour practicum) to enhance family scaffolding and emotional co-talk capacities; for teachers, jointly establish a "Subject-Integrated Reading Lesson-Plan Repository" with normal universities, aligning literary and informational texts with Chinese, mathematics, and science curriculum standards, and reinforce teachers' leveled-reading guidance and SEL assessment skills through periodic "Reading Pedagogy Workshops." Both sets of resources are open-shared via the library cloud platform, forming a closed loop of training-practice-feedback to ensure cognitive development and emotional education resonate in sync across settings.

4.4 Innovative Services in the Digital Context

4.4.1 Development of an Intelligent Reading Recommendation System

Drawing on empirical findings from a dual "cognition-affect" perspective, public libraries can develop an intelligent reading recommendation system that integrates dual-pathway algorithms: on the cognitive dimension, the system dynamically matches text difficulty with student reading levels via the Lexile leveling model; on the affective dimension, it employs the CASEL five-dimensional SEL need tags to construct an emotional portrait through student mood check-ins and SEL scale data^[11]. The system generates personalized booklists via dual-pathway collaborative filtering and instantly renders an "Individual Reading-Ability Radar Chart" and a "Class Reading-Development Heat Map" through visualization technologies, providing real-time intervention and instructional decision-making support for librarians, teachers, and students.

4.4.2 Construction of a Virtual Reading Community

In response to the dual-dimension intervention needs of "cognition-affect," public libraries partner with tech companies to co-build a decentralized virtual reading community, centering on the "Metaverse Book Club" scene: students, through customizable avatars, join cross-school collective reading of classics; within real-time voice and text interactions, AI reading companions—drawing on CASEL five-dimensional SEL indicators and Lexile-leveling data—deliver affective prompts and cognitive scaffolds^[12]. The community operates a dual-track achievement system of "Cognition Medals + Emotion Badges"; the former honors higher-order cognitive acts such as information integration and critical thinking, while the latter rewards social-emotional performances like empathetic expression and peer support. Points can

be redeemed, within the cross-school reading alliance, for physical resources and study-tour opportunities, forging a sustained reading-incentive loop that integrates online and offline experiences.

5. Conclusions and Prospects

5.1 Conclusions

Based on empirical data from 500 primary and secondary school students in Tai'an, this study verifies the intrinsic mechanism linking reading behavior with cognitive-affective co-development under the "Double Reduction" policy. Results show that, after controlling for demographic variables, literary reading ($\beta = 0.25$), informational reading ($\beta = 0.18$), and interest motivation ($\beta = 0.31$) significantly and positively predict SEL five-dimensional competencies, whereas test-oriented motivation exerts a significant negative effect ($\beta = -0.14$); the overall explanatory power of the model reaches 27%, confirming the scientific validity and necessity of a dual-pathway "cognition-affect" reading-promotion strategy. Accordingly, the four-dimensional framework comprising a "phased & leveled reading system—SEL-themed booklists—library-school-home collaborative mechanism—digital innovative services" not only provides an evidence-based, precision-intervention plan for public libraries, but also offers a practical and replicable collaborative paradigm for after-school services in schools and family education.

5.2 Prospects

Future research should expand sample regions and grade spans and adopt longitudinal tracking designs to test the long-term effects and causal mechanisms of the strategy; meanwhile, classroom observations, interviews, and physiological measures should be introduced to delineate the boundary conditions of reading activities on different cognitive loads and emotional arousal levels. At the practical level, it is recommended that educational administrations incorporate "Reading—SEL" into the quality monitoring system of holistic education, continuously optimize intelligent recommendation algorithms and virtual community scenarios, and propel public libraries to transform from a "resource center" into a "cognition-affect collaborative education center," thereby contributing a more universally applicable Chinese solution for the deepening implementation of the "Double Reduction" policy.

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