

**Title: Extracurricular Reading of Business English Majors in South China University of Technology: A Survey-Based Comparative Analysis**

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**Abstract:** The extracurricular reading situation of Chinese college students has always been unsatisfactory. However, extracurricular reading is one of the important ways to improve the quality of talent cultivation, especially conducive to the implementation of "whole-person" education in Chinese colleges and universities. Therefore, extracurricular reading situation of college students deserves attention. However, no relevant research has been carried out in the past two years, and up to now, there is not yet any research on the extracurricular reading status of business English majors. Through offline questionnaire survey and interview, one third (i.e.72) of students majoring in business English in South China University of Technology were surveyed, and 20 students were interviewed. At the same time, 836 undergraduates of all majors in South China University of Technology were surveyed and 120 were interviewed. By comparing the status of extracurricular reading of business English majors and all majors in South China University of Technology, it is found that business English majors and all majors in the university face the same problem and thus with similar characteristics in extracurricular reading, that is, they both bear heavy academic burdens, most of their extracurricular time is taken up by their professional study, and much of their remaining spare time is also used to surf internet for news or for entertainment. As a result, although they have extracurricular reading enthusiasm and ability, they have less extracurricular reading time, small amount of reading, and fragmented reading. Most students are dissatisfied with their extracurricular reading, but are unable to change. This reveals that for students in South China University of Technology, whether they are liberal arts students such as business English majors or students of other majors, same measures should be taken to improve extracurricular reading of all undergraduate students of the university. This research is the first study conducted by Chinese scholar on the extracurricular reading of business English majors, and it is also the first time to compare the extracurricular reading of business English majors and all majors in the university. The findings may have implications for other science and technology research universities in China in improving extracurricular reading of business English majors and all other majors.

**Key words:** Extracurricular reading; survey; comparative analysis

## 1. Introduction

At the beginning of the founding of the People's Republic of China 1949, all businesses were waiting to be rebuilt. The construction of New China urgently needed a large number of professional talents. Therefore, China's higher education mainly focused on cultivating practical professionals in all walks of life, and had achieved great success. However, by the 1990s, the bias and harm of professional-oriented education had become obvious to all, so China's higher education began to advocate general education, requiring students to take a certain number of general education courses other than their majors and obtain a certain amount of general education credits before they can graduate. Specifically speaking, students majoring in science and engineering need to take a certain number of general education courses of humanities, while students majoring in arts and humanities need to take a certain number of general education courses of science and engineering and obtain a certain number of credits. The purpose is to cultivate "whole person" who not only has a solid professional foundation, but also has good humanistic literacy. Up to now, general education has been implemented in Chinese colleges and universities for nearly 30 years (Zhou&Lin, 2016:71-76).

The approach to general education is not limited to taking general education courses, extracurricular reading is also a feasible way contributing to promoting general education. In other words, extracurricular reading is also an aspect that should not be ignored in the process of whole-person education in colleges and universities. Scholar Xie Jingfang once pointed out in article "Extracurricular Reading and the Cultivation of College Students' Quality and Ability" that "Cultivate students' enthusiasm for reading, guide students to learn to read, improve their own reading interest and management, until they form reading ability and habit. This is the most important step for students become high-quality talents. " (Xie, 2012: 61-64). At the National Seminar on "Reading and Talent Cultivation" held in Changsha on April 19, 2017, the participating experts and scholars agreed that "reading is the most important and effective way and means for students to improve their knowledge, develop their personality and enrich their spirit. As far as a school is concerned, whether the reading atmosphere and students' awareness of reading is strong, and whether the reading content is reasonable is also one of the important indicators to influence and measure the level of talent cultivation of a school" (Shao, 2017). It can be seen that extracurricular reading is related to all-round development of students and quality of talent cultivation of colleges and universities.

### 1.1 Problem Statement

Then, what is the current situation of Chinese college students' extracurricular reading? Previous studies have shown that current situation of extracurricular reading of Chinese college students is unsatisfactory, mainly manifested as "utilitarian and unitary reading purpose, low level of reading content, unreasonable reading structure, substandard reading quantity and less reading time" (Zou&Jin, 2016: 215-221). There are many reasons for this, including negative effects from external environment, such as popular culture (Li&Zhang, 2016: 199), consumerism culture (He, 2014: 44- 45), and the idea that reading is useless (Xu&Fu, 2010: 119-222) , etc. that have given birth to the entertainment, utilitarian and practical characteristics of college students'

extracurricular reading, while development of new media has a significant impact on college students' extracurricular reading habits, contributing to prominent characteristics of fragmented reading, shallow reading, and recreational reading of college students' extracurricular reading (Zhou, 2015: 52; Cui, Ke&Zhao, 2015: 5 -6; Cao, He&Guo, et al., 2016: 293-294; Li&Chen, 2016: 99-102). It can be seen that although extracurricular reading is related to the overall development of students and the quality of talent cultivation, current situation of college students' extracurricular reading is not as good as it should be and urgently needs to pay attention. The latest survey on college students' extracurricular reading is in 2020, and there is no new research in the past two years, and so far, no research has been conducted on the extracurricular reading status of business English majors.

Students' reading outside of class may or may not be related to their major. The real extracurricular reading refers to students' reading and learning outside of class those books and materials that they are interested in and are not directly related to their major, which is the focus of this study.

## 1.2 Research Question

This study focuses on the extracurricular reading problems of business English majors in South China University of Technology, since the author of this paper has previously conducted a questionnaire survey on extracurricular reading of undergraduates of South China University of Technology, and revealed extracurricular reading status of all majors, pointed out the importance of extracurricular reading to talent cultivation, and put forward suggestions for improvement (Zhou, 2022: 1-12). This study uses the same questionnaire to investigate the extracurricular reading situation of undergraduates majoring in business English in South China University of Technology, attempting to know: What are the current situation and characteristics of extracurricular reading of business English majors? What are the similarities and differences in extracurricular reading between business English majors and all majors of South China University of Technology? If the characteristics of the two are significantly different, the improvement measures should be different. If the characteristics of the two are similar, the improvement measures will be relatively close. Regardless of the results, the survey findings will inspire the improvement of extracurricular reading and thus the quality of talent cultivation. Therefore, it has research value.

Since South China University of Technology is a research university of science and technology, most of students of other majors who participated in the previous extracurricular reading questionnaire survey are science and technology students, while business English majors are liberal arts students. This study will compare the results of extracurricular reading questionnaires of students of all majors and business English majors of the university, and not only summarize the characteristics of extracurricular reading of business English majors, but also point out its similarities to and differences from the extracurricular reading characteristics of all majors in the university, and make suggestions.

## 1.3 Significance of the Study

South China University of Technology is a prestigious research university in China, which is one of the 39 key universities of the “985 project” universities group in China. It ranks 25th in the 2022 Ranking of Chinese Universities released by Shanghai Ranking (Shanghai Ranking[a], 2022). According to the 2022 Ranking of Business English Major in Chinese Universities released by Shanghai Ranking, of a total of 213 Chinese universities with business English major, the business English major of South China University of Technology ranks the third(Shanghai Ranking[b], 2022). It can be seen that South China University of Technology and its business English major are in a position of high visibility among Chinese universities. The characteristics and achievements of both will inspire other universities and their business English majors.

The latest research on college students’ extracurricular reading is only up to 2020, in other words, no researcher has paid attention to college students’ extracurricular reading in the past two years; on the other hand, with further development of China's economy, Chinese universities started to offer business English majors only from the beginning of the 21st century. So far, the research on extracurricular reading of business English majors is still blank.

This study is the first time in China to pay attention to the influence of business English majors’ extracurricular reading on talent growth, and it is also the first time to compare business English majors’ extracurricular reading with extracurricular reading of all majors in the university.

It is believed that the findings may inspire other Chinese universities not only to become aware of the role of extracurricular reading plays in talent cultivation, but also to pay attention to the current problems of college students' extracurricular reading, and to take effective measures to solve the problems.

As South China University of Technology is a research university of science and technology, the vast majority of students in the university are science and technology majors, though business English majors surveyed are liberal arts students. Therefore, the findings of this study on business English majors’ extracurricular reading, as well as the comparison of the extracurricular reading of business English majors and students of all majors of the university, are instructive not only to business English majors in other science and technology research universities, but also to other science and technology research universities themselves as well.

## 2. Literature Review

Previously, there have been some surveys on college students' extracurricular reading. Searching on China Knowledge Infrastructure, the China’s biggest database of academic publications, it is found that there are 87 published papers on the theme of "College Students' Extracurricular Reading Survey". This is of course not the total number of papers published by Chinese scholars, however, it basically reflects that there are not many surveys on Chinese college students’ extracurricular reading, among which there is no previous research on extracurricular reading of business English majors. The earliest surveys of college students' extracurricular reading began in the 1980s, and the most recent surveys appeared in 2020, and there are no relevant updated surveys in 2021-2022. Some of these surveys involve a single university, several universities, or multiple universities in a certain region; some target at public universities, private universities, or ordinary universities, or key universities; some focus on liberal arts universities or science and technology universities respectively. Some studies the influence of external factors on college students' extracurricular reading, while some explores the effect of students' internal

factors on extracurricular reading. According to past surveys, the situation of Chinese college students' extracurricular reading has never reached a satisfactory level.

Specifically, the situation of Chinese college students' extracurricular reading in the 1980s was "beyond people's expectation". In that era when the Internet was not yet popular, people's living standards were not high, and reading mainly depended on borrowing books from libraries, a survey of several universities in Hunan Province showed that 80% of students do not go or hardly go to library per week (Zhu, 1989: 44-46), and survey results of other universities in other regions of China are also disappointing (Fudan, 1989 ; Zhang, 1989). In the 1990s, a survey over more than 10 universities in Hubei Province showed that college students "lack due attention and necessary plans for extracurricular reading" (She&Liang, 1996: 10); Similar results were obtained from surveys conducted in Jiangsu Province (He, 1990: 33-34), Heilongjiang Province (Zhu, 1991: 69-70), Anhui Province (Zhao, 1991: 53-58), Jiangsu Province (Duan, 1997: 18-21), Beijing City (Li, 1998: 53-55) and other places.

In the more than 20 years since the 21st century, the situation of Chinese college students' extracurricular reading has not yet improved significantly, and even "extracurricular reading is declining" (Wang, 2013: 59-60). College students' extracurricular reading "still has great randomness and blindness" (Chen, 2001: 58-60; Ye, 2015: 263, 265); college students have "little reading time" (Shi, Gao & Shen, 2016: 23-26; She, 2014: 27-31), their "amount of reading is not ideal", "lack of depth in reading" (Zheng, 2005: 80-83; Ye&Huang, 2016: 65-69; Bi&Zeng, 2015: 134-140), and "reading with utilitarian intention" (Yu, 2007; Guo, 2019: 173-174). Recent survey results show that due to the rapid development of Internet and many other factors, current college students' extracurricular reading presents five major trends: decline of reading quantity, fragmentation of reading content, visualization of reading methods, networking of reading approaches, and entertaining of reading psychology (Lan, 2020:103-107; Zhang, et al., 2016:124-126). It can be seen that the problem of college students' extracurricular reading is a long-standing and unresolved problem, which deserves continuous attention.

In addition, the extracurricular reading of college students in different eras also retains the characteristics of their own eras. A national survey held in 1988 summarized some characteristics of college students' extracurricular reading in the 1980s, namely, that more than half of the students "believed in Marxism and concerned about current affairs and politics", and that more than half of the students' extracurricular reading was for professional study, and of the non-professional books reading after class, literature books account for the favorite of students. For students in 1980s, the main purposes of extracurricular reading is for learning, for practical use, and for entertainment (Zhang, 1989: 10-14). This characteristics is a reflection of the relatively closed Chinese society and the relatively simple thinking of college students in the 1980s.

In the 1990s, the most prominent feature of college students' extracurricular reading was that the number of students who read the works of Marx, Lenin, and Mao Zedong increased year by year, and the enthusiasm for reading books in foreign languages was relatively high. In their spare time, apart from reading books related to their majors, the most frequently read by college students are classic literary works, especially novels, and reading is the most important extracurricular pastime for college students (He, 1990: 33-34; Li&Guo, 1997: 62-63; Chen, 1998: 87-89), which reflects that after the student movement in June 1989, young college students are eager to learn more about politics and political works. At the same time, it has been more than a

decade since China implemented the reform and opening policy in 1978 to the 1990s. Young college students hope to learn about the world outside China by reading books in foreign languages. In addition, most parts of China in the 1990s were not wealthy, and there were not many ways of entertainment. For college students, reading after class was still their main pastime.

In the first decade of the 21st century, reading books related to majors in spare time is still a common behavior of many college students. In addition, literature books are still college students' favorite besides reading major-related books in their spare time. In this decade, although the Internet and mobile phone have become popular in China, books that college students read outside of class are still mainly printed books, though a small proportion of students have begun to read electronic books. In addition, the use of mobile phones to do fragmented reading on the Internet gradually became common during extracurricular time, and college students began to feel that their spare time was tight, which affected their extracurricular reading (Li&Jia, 2001: 39-40; Zhou, 2008:130-132; Tang&Sun, 2009:63-66).

In the second decade of the 21st century, college students generally have less spare time, and the pressure of professional study increases, which is a reflection of the then increasing social competition in China. Students need to study harder to improve their professional level to enhance their competitiveness in job market. As a result, students spend less time and read less amount in extracurricular reading outside of professional study in their spare time. However, what remains unchanged is that literary books, especially classic novels, are still the preferred type of books for college students to read outside of class. At the same time, college students still prefer to read paper books over e-books. However, it has become more common for students to read online through mobile phones. College students mainly read journals and research reports, online novels and entertainment news on the Internet (Wang, 2019: 249-251; Zhang, 2019, 5: 172-173; Yang, et. al. 2020: 86-87), these characteristics more or less reflect the reality of China's social and technological development in the 2010s.

It can be seen that the extracurricular reading of college students of different times reflects some characteristics of the times. Historically speaking, there are several characteristics worth noting, namely, that as time goes, college students have less and less spare time, and their academic pressure is increasing; college students' extracurricular reading is more and more affected by the development of the Internet and science and technology, and online reading and e-book reading are becoming more and more popular. However, one thing that remains unchanged is that literature, especially novels, is still the most popular extracurricular reading genre for college students. It is conceivable that the extracurricular reading characteristics of business English majors and all majors in South China University of Technology should to some degree reflect the characteristics of the major and of the university, and reflect the characteristics of the times as well.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

The business English major of South China University of Technology was founded in 2014 under the leadership of the author of this paper. Since its inception, the author of this paper has been concerned about the improvement of quality of talent cultivation in this major, and has

published a number of related research papers. The present study is one of the author's explorations to improve the cultivation quality of business English majors. This study aims to discover the characteristics of business English majors' extracurricular reading and their relationship with that of all majors of the university. Hence a quantitative descriptive approach is adopted to achieve the purpose, because quantitative research method is to figure out what is going on or exists under a certain context.

Questionnaires are distributed to and interviews are held with randomly chosen respondents of specific majors (i.e. business English majors and other majors in the university) in specific location (i.e. classrooms) and completed on-site to obtain real and reliable data. One of the values of this study is that it is the first investigation on the extracurricular reading characteristics of business English majors in China, and it is also the first time to compare the extracurricular reading status of business English majors and that of all majors of the university. The findings of the study will undoubtedly have reference value for the cultivation of business English professionals and other majors of the university.

### **3.2 Population and Sample**

The author of this paper organized a research team to randomly distribute 100 extracurricular reading questionnaires to undergraduates majoring in business English in South China University of Technology, of which 72 valid questionnaires were collected, and 20 students were interviewed at the same time. Among the questionnaire respondents, there are 37 male students (51.4%) and 35 female students (48.6%). The gender distribution is basically reasonable. The number of respondents from year 1 to year 3 is 24 (33.3%), 26 (36.1%), and 22 (30.6%), respectively. The number of respondents from each grade is evenly closed.

The number of students of year 1-3 of business English majors are 71, 67, and 76 respectively, with a total of 214 students. The number of respondents (i.e. 72) accounts for 33.64% of the total number of business English students (i.e. 214), which is more than one-third of the total. Therefore, the survey findings will have certain reference value. Year 4 business English students were not included in questionnaire survey since in the last year of their college career, most of year 4 students have left university campus for internships or social practice in companies, factories, institutions, etc.

### **3.3 Data Collection and Analysis**

The questionnaire consists of 28 questions, and asks questions about the respondents' personal information, extracurricular reading habits (time, place, method, etc.), extracurricular reading content, and factors affecting extracurricular reading, in order to find out students' extracurricular reading situation. The research team printed out all questionnaires in advance and brought them to classrooms of year 1-3 of business English majors. Students were asked to fill in the questionnaire on the spot, which were collected on the spot after completed. Respondents of each grade were randomly chosen by research team. After collecting the questionnaires, research team conducted manual statistics on the valid questionnaires to obtain statistical results.

In order to figure out difference in extracurricular reading between business English majors and all majors (including business English majors ) of South China University of Technology, the

research team also randomly distributed questionnaires to undergraduates of all majors (including business English majors ) of the university, most of which are science and technology students. 836 valid questionnaires were collected, 120 students were interviewed, and the survey results have been previously analyzed and published (Zhou, 2022: 1-12).

The statistical results of the extracurricular reading questionnaires for business English majors and all majors of the university are analyzed, and the characteristics of extracurricular reading of business English majors is summarized, as well as their similarities to and differences from the characteristics of extracurricular reading of all majors of the university.

#### 4. Extracurricular Reading of Business English Majors: Comparative Analysis

Comparing and analyzing the questionnaire survey results of business English majors and all majors in South China University of Technology, it is found that the extracurricular reading of business English majors has the following characteristics.

##### 4.1 Teachers play biggest role in promoting extracurricular reading, while professional learning and Internet surfing are biggest obstacles

Among factors that promote extracurricular reading, teachers rank the top, that is, 23.61% of students believe that teachers play the greatest role in promoting their extracurricular reading, the survey results of 836 undergraduates of all majors in the university show that the influence of classmates is the greatest, and teachers only ranks the third (see Table 1).

**Table 1. The biggest factor that promotes your extracurricular reading is ( )**

Options	All Majors		Business English Majors	
	Number of students	Ratio	Number of students	Ratio
A. Family	93	11.12%	7	9.72%
B. Classmates	151	18.06%	9	12.50%
C. Friends	101	12.08%	9	12.50%
D. Teachers	126	15.07%	17	23.61%
E. Social factors	113	13.52%	11	15.28%
F. Randomly chosen	143	17.11%	12	16.67%
G. Others	109	13.04%	7	9.72%
total	836	100%	72	100%

One evidence of teachers' influence can be seen in teachers' tendency to recommend extracurricular readings to students. The survey shows that teachers generally recommend extracurricular books to students. However, the extracurricular books recommended by teachers are often books that students are required to read outside of class, rather than real extracurricular readings that are not directly related to the content of the major. As the survey results show (see question 5 in Questionnaire), 69.44% of extracurricular books recommended by teachers are related to majors, while situation for all majors of the university is 53.47%. The teacher's influence value for business English majors is higher than that of all majors of the university. However,

although the ranking of teachers' influence in the two surveys is different, the influence of teachers on extracurricular reading of business English majors and all majors of the university is equally significant.

On the other hand, although there is a positive promoting role of teachers, the factors that hinder students' extracurricular reading are also obvious and play a huge role. The survey shows (see question 4 in Questionnaire) that professional study and internet surfing have the greatest negative impact on extracurricular reading, with 43.06% and 38.89% of students respectively admitting this, which is similar to that of all majors of the university (i.e. 40.43% and 40.91%, respectively). The survey results reveal that in South China University of Technology, no matter which major students study, they all bear heavy burden of professional learning and huge temptation of Internet charm. This feature reflects the impact of the developed Internet technology in the current era on people's life and learning.

#### 4.2 Mainly read foreign literary masterpieces and modern and contemporary Chinese novels, prefer works by writers of China, the US, Japan and the UK

In terms of reading content, about one third of students choose to read foreign literary masterpieces (i.e. 34.72%) and modern and contemporary Chinese literature (i.e. 30.56%), which are similar to the reading hobbies of students of all majors of the university (i.e. 28.35% and 37.44% respectively) (see Table 2). Compared with all majors of the university, business English students prefer to read foreign literary masterpieces and less modern and contemporary Chinese literature. This survey result reflects that reading interest of business English students is more Western-oriented, which is one of the professional characteristics of business English majors.

**Table 2. Which of the following books do you read most often? ( )**

Option	All Majors		Business English Majors	
	Number of students	Ratio	Number of students	Ratio
A. Ancient Chinese classics	81	9.69%	5	6.94%
B. Modern Chinese literature	313	37.44%	22	30.56%
C. Foreign literary masterpieces	237	28.35%	25	34.72%
D. Neither A, B, or C	113	13.52%	10	13.89%
E. Others	92	11.00%	10	13.89%
Total	836	100%	72	100%

In terms of source country of the works, 50% (cf. 55.02% all majors) students mainly choose to read works by Chinese writers, followed by American (20.83%), Japanese (15.28%) and British (11.11%) writers. The order is consistent with the choice of all majors of the university. However, the proportion of all majors in the university who read works by Chinese writers is higher, at 55.02%, 5 percentage points higher than that of business English majors, while the proportion of business English majors reading American and British writers is 5 percentage points and 3 percentage points higher than that of all majors of the university (i.e. 15.67% and 8.13%

respectively). This situation is in line with the characteristics of business English majors who are academically mainly Western-oriented and business-oriented (see Table 3).

**Table 3. Which country do you read most often? ( )**

Options	All Majors		Business English Majors	
	Number of students	Ratio	Number of students	Ratio
A. U.K.	68	8.13%	8	11.11%
B. France	16	1.91%	1	1.38%
C. U.S.A	131	15.67%	15	20.83%
D. Russia (Soviet Union)	18	2.15%	1	1.38%
E. Japan	117	14.00%	11	15.28%
F. China	460	55.02%	36	50.00%
G. Others	26	3.11%	0	0%
Total	836	100%	72	100%

In terms of reading genres, 58.33% (cf. 52.96% all majors) of students choose novels for extracurricular reading, followed by comics with 11.11% (cf. 11.01% all majors) of students choosing. Interestingly, the survey results of all majors of the university showed that poetry ranked third (i.e. 9.66%), but only 2.78% of business English students chose poetry, ranking sixth (see Table 4). It can be seen that business English students do not like to read poetry more than students of all majors of the university. It is a notable phenomenon that business English students as liberal arts students are less fond of reading poetry than students of all majors of the university, most of which majoring in science and technology.

**Table 4. Genres of extracurricular readings you generally choose are ( )**

Option	All Majors		Business English Majors	
	Number of students	Ratio	Number of students	Ratio
A. Novels	510	52.96%	42	58.33%
B. Poetry	93	9.66%	2	2.78%
C. Essays	71	7.37%	7	9.72%
D. Drama	16	1.66%	1	1.39%
E. Comics	106	11.01%	8	11.11%
F. Jokes	76	7.89%	5	6.94%
G. Others	91	9.45%	7	9.72%
Total	836	100%	72	100%

#### 4.3 Strong learning ability, willing to buy and read extracurricular paper books or e-books

There are 66.67% of students (cf. 69.49% all majors) think that the effect of reading professional-related books outside of class is better than or similar to listening to teacher's lecture in classroom, and only 33.33% of respondents (cf. 30.50% all majors) think that it is worse (see Table 5), indicating that business English majors, like all majors of the university, have strong

learning ability and are fully capable of self-directed extracurricular reading.

**Table 5. Compared with teacher's teaching in classroom, the effect of reading professional-related books outside of class is ( )**

Option	All Majors		Business English Majors	
	Number of students	Ratio	Number of students	Ratio
A. Better	176	21.05%	18	25.00%
B. Almost the same	405	48.44%	30	41.67%
C. Worse	151	18.06%	17	23.61%
D. Can't understand	104	12.44%	7	9.72%
Total	836	100%	72	100%

Similar to all majors of the university (i.e. 48.80%), about half of business English majors (i.e. 51.39%) choose to read paper books, and there are also many students choose to read e-books (34.72% business English majors; 40.43% all majors) (see question 10 in Questionnaire), which reflects the reading characteristics of young people in digital age (Chen, 2008). Compared with all majors of the university, the proportion of business English students who choose to read paper books is higher, and the proportion of reading e-books is lower. Correspondingly, when choosing to read paper materials, among magazines, newspapers, books, and other options, the proportion of business English majors (i.e. 79.16%) who choose books to read is higher than all majors of the university (i.e. 51.34%) (see question 9 in Questionnaire). The above two findings of the survey show that business English majors tend to be more traditional in their reading habits. The finding on their extracurricular reading tools also proves this (see question 11 in Questionnaire): compared with all majors of the university, the proportion of business English majors using mobile phones in extracurricular reading is relatively lower (i.e. 51.39% business English majors vs. 60.89% all majors). Most of business English majors' extracurricular books are purchased by themselves (69.44% business English majors vs. 62.32% all majors), only about 20% of students borrowed extracurricular books from the library (20.83% business English majors vs. 25.36% all majors), and less than 10% of students borrowed extracurricular books from classmates (6.94% business English majors vs. 8.73% all majors) (see question 19 in Questionnaire). It can be seen that business English students, like all majors of the university, are capable and willing to buy extracurricular books by themselves, and the survey results show that business English majors are more willing to buy extracurricular books than all majors of the university.

#### 4.4 Less extracurricular books, less reading time, and fragmented reading

Although students prefer to buy extracurricular books by themselves rather than borrowing them, they actually do not buy many. The survey shows (see question 24 in Questionnaire) that 72.23% (cf. 67.22% all majors) have no more than 10 extracurricular books outside their major, and they spend very little time for extracurricular reading every day, with 51.39% of students reading less than half an hour (cf. 43.06% all majors), and 36.11% of students between half an hour and one hour (cf. 39.35% all majors). In other words, 87.5% (cf. 82.41% all majors) students read no more than one hour outside of class every day (see question 17 in Questionnaire).

The time period when students do extracurricular reading (see question 23 in Questionnaire) is mainly in the evening (41.67%), followed by night (16.67%), weekend (12.50%), recess time or afternoon (both are 8.33%), which is close to the situation of all majors of the university whose extracurricular reading also take place mainly in the evening (39.59%), followed by weekend (13.16%), night (12.80%), recess time (11.72%) and afternoon (8.01%). The location of extracurricular reading is mainly in dormitory or at home (61.11%), followed by the library (13.89%), classroom (11.11%) and in class (8.33%). The situation of all majors of the university is similar, the main reading place for them is also in dormitory or at home (50.84%), followed by the library (18.30%), and bathroom (8.61%) (see Table 6).

**Table 6: Where do you usually do your extracurricular reading ( )**

Option	All Majors		Business English Majors	
	Number of students	Ratio	Number of students	Ratio
A. In class	36	4.31%	6	8.33%
B. Library	153	18.30%	10	13.89%
C. In classroom	54	6.46%	8	11.11%
D. Dormitory (home)	425	50.84%	44	61.11%
E. Outdoor	32	3.83%	1	1.38%
F. Bathroom	72	8.61%	1	1.38%
G. Others	64	7.66%	2	2.78%
Total	836	100%	72	100%

The fact that students mainly read extracurricular books in the evening and at night, weekends, and during recess time reveals that they have little time for extracurricular reading during the normal period of the day. At the same time, the location of students' extracurricular reading also has great restrictions on their long-term stable reading or deep reading. The students' extracurricular reading inevitably has the characteristics of shallow reading or fragmented reading. A survey of 8 universities in Northeast China also found that the primary place for students to do extracurricular reading is dormitory (Dai&Zhang, 2008: 61-63), which shows that this is a common phenomenon, not an isolated case.

#### **4.5 Professional study and online news browsing takes up spare time, students dissatisfied with their extracurricular reading**

According to the survey results (see question 16 in Questionnaire), 56.94% (cf. 48.92% all majors) students have less than 4 hours of free time per day; 34.72% (cf. 32.89% all majors) students have between 4 and 6 hours of free time per day. It can be seen that most business English majors, like most students of all majors in the university, have not much free time each day. As mentioned earlier, most students spend no more than half an hour in extracurricular reading every day, so what are students mainly reading in the limited spare time every day? According to the survey results (see Table 7), for 47.22% of business English majors, books they read the most after-class are completely unrelated to their majors. In other words, more than half of students mainly read books related to their majors in their spare time. For all majors of the university, most of the books that 52.51% of them read after-class are not related to their majors. It

can be seen that within the whole university, proportion of students reading books related to their majors after class is very large, which reveals that undergraduate students in South China University of Technology, no matter what majors they are, all bear heavy professional learning burden, and so they have to use their spare time to read professional books, thus squeezing out the time for real extracurricular reading. No wonder most students spend less than half an hour on extracurricular reading every day.

**Table7: Books you read the most outside of class is ( )**

Options	All Majors		Business English Majors	
	Number of students	Ratio	Number of students	Ratio
A. Related to major	133	15.91%	12	16.67%
B. Somewhat related to major	208	24.88%	20	27.78%
C. Completely unrelated to major	439	52.51%	34	47.22%
D. Others	56	6.70%	6	8.33%
Total	836	100%	72	100%

In addition to the burden of professional study, another reason for squeezing out extracurricular reading time is that students spend too much time surfing the Internet each day. Only 36.11% (cf. 38.04% all majors) of business English majors read novels the most every day, while 48.61% (cf. 50.83% all majors) read social and political news and entertainment news the most outside of class every day (see Table 8).

**Table 8: What do you read the most in extracurricular reading every day ( )**

Options	All Majors		Business English Majors	
	Number of students	Ratio	Number of students	Ratio
A. Social and political news	224	26.79%	18	25.00%
B. Entertainment news	201	24.04%	17	23.61%
C. Novels	318	38.04%	26	36.11%
D. Inspirational reading materials	28	3.35%	3	4.17%
E. Others	65	7.78%	8	11.11%
Total	836	100%	72	100%

It can be seen that although students prefer novels as extracurricular readings, because of their heavy professional study tasks every day and being attracted by news on the Internet, their main energy and time in their spare time is actually devoted to professional study and browsing news on the Internet, rather than using it for reading novels. As the survey results (see question 17 in Questionnaire) mentioned above, outside of professional book reading, most students spend no more than an hour in extracurricular reading every day. According to the survey results (see Table 8), 48.61% of business English majors mainly read news online outside of their professional study every day, and this has become their so-called extracurricular reading. It can be seen that students lack of extracurricular reading time, and how small amount of extracurricular reading they have, and thus how serious the occupation of extracurricular reading time is by professional learning.

As students study hard in class and spend a lot of time on professional study after class,

most students think the reading atmosphere around them is good, and only 16.67% of students think it is very bad (cf. 13.76% all majors) (see question 14 in Questionnaire). But this only refers to atmosphere of reading, or atmosphere of learning, not atmosphere of extracurricular reading. In fact, 75% (cf. 59.09% all majors) students expressed that they are not satisfied with their current extracurricular reading quantity (see question 15 in Questionnaire), 51.39% (cf. 48.33% all majors) students think (see question 20 in Questionnaire) that their reading scope is narrow, their knowledge is not broad, their thinking is not deep enough, and they are eager to read extracurricular readings, but not for professional examinations, for only 8.33% (cf. 10.29% all majors) of students expressed that they do extracurricular reading for professional examinations, rather, most students do extracurricular reading mainly to increase knowledge (30.56% business English majors vs. 28.83% all majors), cultivate sentiment and improve self-cultivation (23.61% business English majors vs. 26.67% all majors), and self-entertainment (26.39% business English majors vs. 21.29% all majors) (see Table 9), and 69.44% (cf. 66.15% all majors) of students also realized that extracurricular reading is indeed beneficial to their professional learning (see question 27 in Questionnaire), but these studious, capable and eager students are burdened with heavy load of professional learning, and fail to carry out real extracurricular reading freely and autonomously after class. On the contrary, they have very little free time after class and have little time to read extracurricular books after class every day, so that the proportion of students who can plan extracurricular reading is only 18.06% (cf. 23.33% all majors), and most of them are unable to plan their own extracurricular reading (see question 28 in Questionnaire).

**Table 9. The main purpose of your extracurricular reading is ( )**

Option	All Majors		Business English Majors	
	Number of students	Ratio	Number of students	Ratio
A. Need for professional exams	86	10.29%	6	8.33%
B. Increase my knowledge	241	28.83%	22	30.56%
C. Master a certain skill	47	5.62%	3	4.17%
D. Cultivate sentiment and improve self-cultivation	223	26.67%	17	23.61%
E. Self-entertainment	178	21.29%	19	26.39%
F. Killing time	56	6.70%	5	6.94%
G. Others	5	0.60%	0	0%
Total	836	100%	72	100%

## 5. Conclusion

Comparative analysis of survey results show that, firstly, business English majors maintain positive and eager attitude towards extracurricular reading, and are capable of doing extracurricular reading independently. However, due to high pressure and heavy burden of professional study, students have to use some spare time for professional study, and further, students spend most of their remaining spare time browsing the Internet for news and entertainment. Therefore, students lack the time and energy to conduct sufficient and effective extracurricular reading after class. Their extracurricular reading time is less, their reading quantity

is small, and their reading time period and location are not conducive to in-depth reading. Most of them can only do fragmented, shallow reading. Most students are dissatisfied with the status quo of their extracurricular reading, but are unable to change. Secondly, all of these characteristics and their reasons are almost identical to those found in the survey of all majors of the university, indicating that business English majors face the same academic pressure as all majors in the university, hence similar characteristics in extracurricular reading. Therefore, same countermeasures need to be taken for both business English majors and other majors of the university to improve their extracurricular reading.

The findings of extracurricular reading characteristics of business English majors and all majors of the university is not only instructive in working out specific and appropriate countermeasures, but also beneficial to business English majors of other universities across the country as well as other research universities, especially science and technology research universities.

Students can read books that are related or unrelated to their majors after class, but the real extracurricular reading refers to reading books outside their majors, especially reading books of liberal arts that students are interested in. Real extracurricular reading is an important approach to improve students' humanistic literacy. Lack of sufficient extracurricular reading may result in students' outstanding professional ability yet low humanistic quality, which is not the original intention of higher education.

The sample size of this study is not large, and so the findings may not necessarily fully summarize the overall situation of extracurricular reading of business English majors in China; at the same time, what this study reveals is the current situation of extracurricular reading of business English majors in South China University of Technology, a research-oriented university of science and technology, therefore, its findings may be more instructive to business English majors in other Chinese universities of the same type and at the same level as South China University of Technology.

### Consent

As per international standard or university standard, respondents' written consent has been collected and preserved by the author(s).

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## Appendix 1: Questionnaire Results of Business English Majors’ and All Majors’

## Extracurricular Reading in South China University of Technology

### 1. Your gender ( )

Options	All Majors		Business English Majors	
	Number of students	Ratio	Number of students	Ratio
A. Male	529	63.28%	37	51.4%
B. Female	307	36.72%	35	48.6%
Total	836	100%	72	100%

### 2. Your grade ( )

Options	All Majors		Business English Majors	
	Number of students	Ratio	Number of students	Ratio
A. Freshman	248	29.67%	24	33.3%
B. Sophomore	259	30.98%	26	36.1%
C. Junior	202	24.16%	22	30.6%
D. Senior	117	14.00%		
E. 5th Year	10	1.20%		
Total	836	100%	72	100%

### 3. The biggest factor that promotes your extracurricular reading is ( )

Options	All Majors		Business English Majors	
	Number of students	Ratio	Number of students	Ratio
A. Family	93	11.12%	7	9.72%
B. Classmates	151	18.06%	9	12.50%
C. Friends	101	12.08%	9	12.50%
D. Teachers	126	15.07%	17	23.61%
E. Social factors	113	13.52%	11	15.28%
F. Randomly chosen	143	17.11%	12	16.67%
G. Others	109	13.04%	7	9.72%
total	836	100%	72	100%

### 4. The biggest factor preventing you from doing extracurricular reading is ( )

Options	All Majors		Business English Majors	
	Number of students	Ratio	Number of students	Ratio
A. Professional study	338	40.43%	31	43.06%
B. Club activities	50	5.98%	6	8.33%
C. Surfing the Internet (watching TV series online, e-shopping)	342	40.91%	28	38.89%
D. Social Practice	11	1.32%	1	1.39%
E. Physical exercise	26	3.11%	2	2.78%

F. Others	69	8.25%	4	5.56%
Total	836	100%	72	100%

**5. Will the teacher introduce you to extracurricular readings in class? ( )**

Options	All Majors		Business English Majors	
	Number of students	Ratio	Number of students	Ratio
A. Related to major	447	53.47%	50	69.44%
B. Detective	38	4.54%	1	1.39%
C. Technology	48	5.74%	3	4.17%
D. Romance	21	2.51%	0	0%
E. Martial arts	15	1.79%	0	0%
F. Fantasy	8	0.96%	1	1.39%
G. Science fiction&history	62	7.42%	5	6.94%
H. News	33	3.95%	4	5.56%
I. Others	33	3.95%	2	2.78%
Total	131	15.67%	6	8.33%
Options	836	100%	72	100%

**6. Compared with teacher's teaching in classroom, the effect of reading professional-related books outside of class is ( )**

Option	All Majors		Business English Majors	
	Number of students	Ratio	Number of students	Ratio
A. Better	176	21.05%	18	25.00%
B. Almost the same	405	48.44%	30	41.67%
C. Worse	151	18.06%	17	23.61%
D. Can't understand	104	12.44%	7	9.72%
Total	836	100%	72	100%

**7. Genres of extracurricular readings you generally choose are ( )**

Option	All Majors		Business English Majors	
	Number of students	Ratio	Number of students	Ratio
A. Novels	510	52.96%	42	58.33%
B. Poetry	93	9.66%	2	2.78%
C. Essays	71	7.37%	7	9.72%
D. Drama	16	1.66%	1	1.39%
E. Comics	106	11.01%	8	11.11%
F. Jokes	76	7.89%	5	6.94%
G. Others	91	9.45%	7	9.72%
Total	836	100%	72	100%

**8. Books you read the most outside of class is ( )**

Option	All Majors	Business English Majors
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	Number of students	Ratio	Number of students	Ratio
A. Related to major	133	15.91%	12	16.67%
B. Somewhat related to major	208	24.88%	20	27.78%
C. Completely unrelated to major	439	52.51%	34	47.22%
D. Others	56	6.70%	6	8.33%
Total	836	100%	72	100%

**9. Which of the following types do you most often choose for extracurricular reading? ( )**

Option	All Majors		Business English Majors	
	Number of students	Ratio	Number of students	Ratio
A. Magazines	71	7.59%	4	5.56%
B. Newspaper	121	12.94%	1	1.38%
C. Book	480	51.34%	57	79.16%
D. Others	263	28.13%	10	13.89%
Total	836	100%	72	100%

**10. Which of the following reading media do you mainly rely on for extracurricular reading? ( )**

Option	All Majors		Business English Majors	
	Number of students	Ratio	Number of students	Ratio
A. Paper books	408	48.80%	37	51.39%
B. E-books	338	40.43%	25	34.72%
C. Audio books	13	1.56%	1	1.38%
D. Others	77	9.21%	9	12.50%
Total	836	100%	72	100%

**11. Which of the following tools do you mainly use for extracurricular reading? ( )**

Option	All Majors		Business English Majors	
	Number of students	Ratio	Number of students	Ratio
A. Mobile phone	509	60.89%	37	51.39%
B. Tablet	62	7.42%	3	4.17%
C. E-reader	112	13.40%	13	18.06%
D. Computer	47	5.62%	7	9.72%
E. Others	106	12.68%	12	16.67%
Total	836	100%	72	100%

**12. Where do you usually do your extracurricular reading? ( )**

Option	All Majors		Business English Majors	
	Number of students	Ratio	Number of students	Ratio
A. In class	36	4.31%	6	8.33%
B. Library	153	18.30%	10	13.89%
C. In classroom	54	6.46%	8	11.11%

D. Dormitory (home)	425	50.84%	44	61.11%
E. Outdoor	32	3.83%	1	1.38%
F. Bathroom	72	8.61%	1	1.38%
G. Others	64	7.66%	2	2.78%
Total	836	100%	72	100%

**13. The main purpose of your extracurricular reading is ( )**

Option	All Majors		Business English Majors	
	Number of students	Ratio	Number of students	Ratio
A. Need for professional exams	86	10.29%	6	8.33%
B. Increase my knowledge	241	28.83%	22	30.56%
C. Master a certain skill	47	5.62%	3	4.17%
D. Cultivate sentiment and improve self-cultivation	223	26.67%	17	23.61%
E. Self-entertainment	178	21.29%	19	26.39%
F. Killing time	56	6.70%	5	6.94%
G. Others	5	0.60%	0	0%
Total	836	100%	72	100%

**14. As a college student, what do you think of the reading atmosphere around you? ( )**

Option	All Majors		Business English Majors	
	Number of students	Ratio	Number of students	Ratio
A. Very strong	38	4.55%	1	1.38%
B. It's okay	314	37.56%	35	48.61%
C. So so	369	44.14%	24	33.33%
D. Very poor	115	13.76%	12	16.67%
Total	836	100%	72	100%

**15. Are you satisfied with your current amount of extracurricular reading? ( )**

Option	All Majors		Business English Majors	
	Number of students	Ratio	Number of students	Ratio
A. Satisfied	58	6.94%	3	4.17%
B. Acceptable	209	25.00%	14	19.44%
C. Dissatisfied	494	59.09%	54	75.00%
D. Not sure	75	8.97%	1	1.38%
Total	836	100%	72	100%

**16. How much free time do you have on average per day? ( )**

Option	All Majors		Business English Majors	
	Number of students	Ratio	Number of students	Ratio
A. Less than 4 hours	409	48.92%	41	56.94%
B. 4-6 hours	275	32.89%	25	34.72%

C. 6-8 hours	79	9.45%	5	6.94%
D. 8-10 hours	27	3.23%	0	0%
E. More than 10 hours	46	5.50%	1	1.38%
Total	836	100%	72	100%

**17. Your average daily extracurricular reading time is about ( )**

Option	All Majors		Business English Majors	
	Number of students	Ratio	Number of students	Ratio
A. Less than 30 minutes	360	43.06%	37	51.39%
B. 30-60 minutes	329	39.35%	26	36.11%
C. 1-2 hours	99	11.84%	9	12.50%
D. 2-3 hours	23	2.75%	0	0%
E. 3-4 hours	15	1.79%	0	0%
F. More than 4 hours	10	1.20%	0	0%
Total	836	100%	72	100%

**18. What do you read the most in extracurricular reading every day ( )**

Option	All Majors		Business English Majors	
	Number of students	Ratio	Number of students	Ratio
A. Social and political news	224	26.79%	18	25.00%
B. Entertainment news	201	24.04%	17	23.61%
C. Novels	318	38.04%	26	36.11%
D. Inspirational reading materials	28	3.35%	3	4.17%
E. Others	65	7.78%	8	11.11%
Total	836	100%	72	100%

**19. The most common way you get paper books is ( )**

Option	All Majors		Business English Majors	
	Number of students	Ratio	Number of students	Ratio
A. Buy by yourself	512	62.32%	50	69.44%
B. Borrow from library	212	25.36%	15	20.83%
C. Borrow from classmates	73	8.73%	5	6.94%
D. Donate from others	18	2.15%	2	2.78%
E. Others	12	1.44%	0	0%
Total	836	100%	72	100%

**20. Which of the following do you think you have reached by doing extracurricular reading ? ( )**

Option	All Majors		Business English Majors	
	Number of students	Ratio	Number of students	Ratio
A. Reading scope is narrow,	404	48.33%	37	51.39%

knowledge not broad enough, and thinking is not deep				
B. Reading scope is wide, knowledge is broad, and a little thoughtful	281	33.61%	21	29.17%
C. Widely read, knowledgeable, and profound thinking	42	5.02%	5	6.94%
D. I don't know	109	13.04%	9	12.50%
Total	836	100%	72	100%

**21. Your primary reason for choosing a book is ( )**

Option	All Majors		Business English Majors	
	Number of students	Ratio	Number of students	Ratio
A. Like the author	128	15.31%	11	15.28%
B. Attractive introduction or subject matter	459	54.90%	37	51.39%
C. Recommended by others	145	17.34%	16	22.22%
D. Based on online ranking	48	5.74%	6	8.33%
E. Cheap	9	1.08%	0	0%
F. Others	47	5.62%	2	2.77%
Total	836	100%	72	100%

**22. Your reading habit is ( )**

Option	All Majors		Business English Majors	
	Number of students	Ratio	Number of students	Ratio
A. Read carefully and think deeply	186	22.25%	17	23.61%
B. Only read carefully	165	19.74%	12	16.66%
C. Read lightly and casually	155	18.54%	4	5.56%
D. Read quickly	179	21.41%	24	33.33%
E. Depending on the situation	151	18.06%	15	20.83%
Total	836	100%	72	100%

**23. When do you usually do extracurricular reading? ( )**

Option	All Majors		Business English Majors	
	Number of students	Ratio	Number of students	Ratio
A. Early morning	15	1.79%	1	1.38%
B. Morning	26	3.11%	2	2.78%
C. Class break time	98	11.72%	6	8.33%
D. Lunch break	62	7.42%	2	2.78%
E. Afternoon	67	8.01%	6	8.33%
F. Evening	331	39.59%	30	41.67%

G. Night	107	12.80%	12	16.67%
H. Class time	20	2.39%	4	5.56%
I. Weekend	110	13.16%	9	12.50%
Total	836	100%	72	100%

**24. How many non-professional extracurricular paper books do you have around you? ( )**

Option	All Majors		Business English Majors	
	Number of students	Ratio	Number of students	Ratio
A. None	32	3.83%	3	4.17%
B. Less than 5 copies	231	27.63%	21	29.17%
C. 5-10 copies	331	39.59%	31	43.06%
D. 10-15 copies	101	12.08%	8	11.11%
E. 15-20 copies	70	8.37%	7	9.72%
F. 20-25 copies	22	2.63%	2	2.78%
G. 25-30 copies	14	1.67%	0	0%
E. More than 30 copies	35	4.19%	0	0%
Total	836	100%	72	100%

**25. Which country do you read most often? ( )**

Option	All Majors		Business English Majors	
	Number of students	Ratio	Number of students	Ratio
A. U.K.	68	8.13%	8	11.11%
B. France	16	1.91%	1	1.38%
C. U.S.A	131	15.67%	15	20.83%
D. Russia (Soviet Union)	18	2.15%	1	1.38%
E. Japan	117	14.00%	11	15.28%
F. China	460	55.02%	36	50.00%
G. Others	26	3.11%	0	0%
Total	836	100%	72	100%

**26. Which of the following books do you read most often? ( )**

Option	All Majors		Business English Majors	
	Number of students	Ratio	Number of students	Ratio
A. Ancient Chinese classics	81	9.69%	5	6.94%
B. Modern Chinese literature	313	37.44%	22	30.56%
C. Foreign literary masterpieces	237	28.35%	25	34.72%
D. Neither A, B, or C	113	13.52%	10	13.89%
E. Others	92	11.00%	10	13.89%
Total	836	100%	72	100%

**27. The impact of your extracurricular reading on your professional learning is ( )**

Option	All Majors		Business English Majors	
	Number of students	Ratio	Number of students	Ratio
A. Beneficial	553	66.15%	50	69.44%
B. Harmful	23	2.75%	3	4.17%
C. No effect	180	21.53%	15	20.83%
D. Don't know	80	9.57%	4	5.56%
Total	836	100%	72	100%

**28. Do you plan your extracurricular reading? ( )**

Option	All Majors		Business English Majors	
	Number of students	Ratio	Number of students	Ratio
A. There is a long-term plan	62	7.42%	3	4.17%
B. There is a phased plan	133	15.91%	10	13.89%
C. No plan, will read at any time according to actual needs	348	41.63%	36	50.00%
D. No plan, read whatever I like	241	28.83%	20	27.78%
E. Have no idea at all, just read randomly	52	6.22%	3	4.17%
Total	836	100%	72	100%