



## ARTICLE

# Exploring the Impact of Mastery Goals on Foreign Language Reading Enjoyment via Control and Value Appraisals

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## ABSTRACT

Existing studies show that foreign language reading enjoyment plays a vital role in language learning. However, few studies have investigated its antecedents. With reference to control-value theory, this research addressed how mastery goals contribute to foreign language reading enjoyment, considering control and value appraisals as mediating variables among undergraduate EFL learners in China. 618 EFL undergraduate learners from three universities across China participated in this investigation. A composite questionnaire was administered, including demographics and the completed scales of mastery goals, control appraisal, value appraisal, and foreign language reading enjoyment. Pearson correlation analysis illustrated the positive influence of mastery goals on the two appraisals and foreign language reading enjoyment. Then, a parallel mediation analysis was conducted, assessing the extent to which control and value appraisals mediated the link between mastery goals and foreign language reading enjoyment. With gender and academic achievement being controlled, the analysis yielded a total direct effect ( $\beta = 0.447$ ), together with the indirect effect ( $\beta = 0.434$ ), suggesting that control and value appraisal work in parallel to fully mediate the relationship. Moreover, value appraisal played a more dominant role, accounting for 77% of the total indirect effects. The findings lent support to control-value theory and broadened its scope to encompass specific subdomains within EFL learning contexts. It is expected to benefit EFL instructors, learners, and policymakers.

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## Highlights:

- This study investigates the contribution of mastery goals to foreign language reading enjoyment among Chinese EFL undergraduates.
- Control and value appraisals are identified as full mediators linking mastery goals to reading enjoyment.
- Value appraisal exerts a more dominant mediating effect than control appraisal, accounting for 77% of the indirect effects.
- The findings provide empirical support for the control-value theory in the subdomain of foreign language reading.
- Results offer practical implications for fostering positive reading emotions through mastery-oriented instruction in test-oriented EFL contexts.

**Keywords:** The Control-Value Theory; EFL; Mastery Goals; Parallel Mediation Analysis; Foreign Language Reading Enjoyment

## 1. Introduction

Enjoyment, as a typical and prevailing classroom emotion, has been considered vital to language learning achievement<sup>[1,2]</sup>. It is identified to be able to predict motivation and interest<sup>[2]</sup>, encourage learners to creatively and flexibly overcome difficulties<sup>[3]</sup>, enhance efficiency and engagement<sup>[4]</sup>, and strengthen the inclination to engage in communication through the target language<sup>[5]</sup>. Also, many studies of emotions are specific to the subdomains of language learning and identified the significance of foreign language reading enjoyment. Learners with high foreign language reading enjoyment exhibit more engagement in reading activities, which reinforces the formation of their mental situational models<sup>[6]</sup>. Besides, it can contribute to higher reading fluency and knowledge base<sup>[7]</sup>, counterbalance the effects of negative emotions, and ultimately improve their reading comprehension<sup>[6,8]</sup>. Whereas multiple studies focused on its contribution, the antecedents and formation of such emotion have rarely been explored.

Chinese EFL learners were constantly reported to have lower levels of enjoyment in their learning. They have long been exposed to English language education. In China, English is a mandatory component of the curriculum being studied from primary school until university and is a core component of the college entrance examination<sup>[9]</sup>. At the university level, students must enroll in English courses for at least four semesters and pass various proficiency tests, represented by two national examinations called College English Test Band 4 or 6<sup>[10–12]</sup>. Whereas long-term educational exposure, many studies have reported that Chinese EFL learners

show relatively lower levels of enjoyment in comparison with learners from Europe, North America, and South America<sup>[13]</sup> and learners from multiple cultural backgrounds<sup>[14]</sup>. One possible explanation for this phenomenon lies in the dominance of test-oriented learning contexts, as learners in China are forced to participate in an intense competition<sup>[14]</sup>. Moreover, the limited availability of authentic English reading contexts in China could diminish learners' motivation and enjoyment in reading English, as it functions merely as a foreign language rather than being part of their daily communication. Such a context points to the necessity of examining the antecedents of positive emotional experiences.

Drawing on the control-value theory (CVT)<sup>[15–17]</sup>, achievement goals can indirectly influence learners' specific emotions via control and value appraisals. Prior literature has empirically confirmed that these two appraisals are positively related to enjoyment<sup>[3,18,19]</sup>, together with the positive impact of mastery goals on enjoyment<sup>[15,20–22]</sup>. However, empirical findings regarding the mediating role of these appraisals remain inconsistent<sup>[23–25]</sup>. Moreover, the extent to which these dynamics operate in the domain of foreign language reading remains underexplored. To bridge this gap, the links among mastery goals, control-value appraisals, and foreign language reading enjoyment were investigated in Chinese EFL contexts.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Mastery Goals

Over the past few decades, achievement goal theory has served as a central framework for research on motiva-

tion within educational contexts. It elaborates on what, why, and how learners are motivated across various educational settings<sup>[26]</sup>. The achievement goals were originally categorized into mastery and performance goals<sup>[27]</sup>, with constant development in the subsequent research to further distinguish performance-approach from performance-avoidance goals<sup>[28]</sup>. Such a categorization is derived from two underlying dimensions that define the structure of achievement goals, namely competence and valence. Competence, related to the standard or referent to evaluate one's achievement, determines whether goals are mastery or performance-oriented. Mastery goals follow the absolute standard that focuses on whether learners master the tasks or the intrapersonal standard oriented toward advancing one's understanding, abilities, and personal improvement. The performance goals assess the goal-satisfaction based on a normative stand, which highlights the comparison with peers. In addition, valence discriminates the goals to be the approach of positive, desirable results from the goals to avoid negative, undesirable consequences.

Later, the  $2 \times 2$  model further incorporates mastery-avoidance into the model<sup>[29]</sup>. However, this research will only employ the definition of mastery goals from the trichotomous models without including mastery-avoidance goals, for it has been more frequently observed in the elderly populations with a decline mentally and physically, the outstanding athletes or learners considering their capability has been fully developed, and the perfectionists with little tolerance to any mistakes<sup>[30,31]</sup>.

Mastery goals denote the pursuit of complete task and skill mastery, acquiring knowledge, and developing abilities in educational contexts<sup>[32]</sup>. They are positively influenced by learners' striving for achievement, pursuit of mastery, autonomous motivation, appreciation of competence, and active participation in classroom learning<sup>[29]</sup>. Additionally, achievement motivation and high competence expectancies<sup>[28]</sup>, implicit theory of intelligence<sup>[33,34]</sup>, the previous academic performance<sup>[35]</sup>, and perceptions of classroom environment<sup>[36]</sup>, are also identified to be predictors of mastery goals. For consequences, existing studies have found that mastery goals can lead to a positive and adaptive range of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral patterns, thereby leading to favorable learning outcomes<sup>[37]</sup>. They can contribute to higher self-efficacy, optimism, and flexibility in learn-

ing<sup>[38]</sup>, creativity<sup>[39]</sup>, and stability in motivation<sup>[40]</sup>. They maintain positive relationships with deep processing and the tendency to pursue mastery-approach goals in the following learning stage, while negative relationships with subsequent performance-avoidance goals and indicators of physical or psychological distress<sup>[32]</sup>.

## 2.2. Foreign Language Reading Enjoyment

The positive psychology movement intends to distract the research attention in psychology from the diagnosis of pathology and deficits to building up the strengths in life<sup>[41]</sup>. Resonating with the positive psychology movement, Lake<sup>[42]</sup> laid the groundwork for its application to the second language self-system. Subsequently, Dewaele and MacIntyre<sup>[13]</sup> emphasized the pervasive influence of positive emotions throughout the foreign language learning process. Contrary to the long-standing research tradition that focused on negative emotions, their work advanced the concept of foreign language enjoyment. Recent studies have further investigated its contribution to language learning achievement<sup>[1,43–46]</sup>. They have connected foreign language enjoyment with multiple constructs, including willingness to communicate<sup>[20,21,47]</sup>, emotional intelligence<sup>[1,48]</sup>, achievement goals<sup>[20]</sup>, and engagement<sup>[49]</sup>.

In addition to the flourishing in the studies of foreign language enjoyment, some scholars began to posit the importance of focusing on the emotions specific to the micro level of language learning that learners could experience different emotions across the diverse subdomains<sup>[50–54]</sup>.

Reading could naturally prompt emotions, and these emotions could reciprocally influence further reading. In foreign language reading contexts, enjoyment has become a focus of research as a significant classroom emotion. Foreign language reading enjoyment is considered a relatively consistent interest in reading a foreign language<sup>[52]</sup>. Its arousal can be accompanied by a complex of other emotions, including excitement, happiness, and desire with motivational impulse, cognitive involvement, and expressive facial responses<sup>[55]</sup>. It is conducive to reading comprehension in boosting reading engagement<sup>[6,56]</sup>, reading motivation, and influencing learners' employment of learning strategies<sup>[52]</sup>. Meanwhile, growth mindsets was identified to be the predictor of foreign language reading enjoyment<sup>[57]</sup>. However, research on this topic remains underdeveloped.

### 2.3. The Control-Value Theory

Informed by CVT, an emotional response stemming from achievement activities or the subsequent success or failure experienced can be defined as achievement emotions<sup>[58]</sup>. A three-dimensional framework is used to categorize these emotions, including object focus, valence, and activation. Object focus defines process-related emotions, such as boredom, as activity emotions and discriminates them from result-related emotions represented by shame as outcome emotions. Activity emotions arise from the immediate learning task, while outcome emotions are linked to the anticipation or evaluation of achievement results, whether in the past or future<sup>[59]</sup>. Valence distinguishes positive emotions from negative ones exemplified by enjoyment and anxiety. As for activation, activating emotions such as hope are documented in contrast to deactivating emotions like hopelessness<sup>[60]</sup>. The activation of these emotions can be reflected by individuals' feelings of energy and mobilization, and assessed through physiological parameters such as heart rate<sup>[59]</sup>.

With achievement emotions being the center, the control-value theory demonstrates its antecedents, context-specific characteristics, functions, regulation, and universality in certain aspects<sup>[58]</sup>. An important tenet of CVT is that achievement emotions originate from two key factors: a learner's perceived control over both the process and outcomes of learning, as well as the subjective value they attach to the learning activity itself<sup>[4]</sup>. Based on such a proposition, control-value appraisals function as direct determinants of achievement emotions. Additionally, the theoretical framework involves other distal antecedents, including achievement goals, beliefs, and gender, as well as contextual elements, including tasks and environments. These factors can indirectly influence emotions through control and value appraisals as mediators<sup>[58]</sup>.

Furthermore, this theoretical framework explores how achievement emotions operate both in the course of learning activities and in relation to learning results. These emotions are assumed to influence learners' success through diverse cognitive and motivational mechanisms. For example, positive emotions foster learning through their roles in facilitating goal-setting, and learners experiencing positive emotions tend to solve problems creatively and flexibly in challenging projects and regulate themselves<sup>[61]</sup>.

In addition, the control-value theory highlights the prin-

ciples of reciprocal causation. It illustrates a dynamic system where antecedents, emotions, and performances maintain a mutual causation relationship. Factors such as achievement goals can influence control and value appraisals, thereby further impacting emotions. Conversely, emotions can feed back into the appraisal process and contribute to the development of achievement goals<sup>[15]</sup>.

### 2.4. The Connections among Mastery Goals, Control-Value Appraisals, and Foreign Language Reading Enjoyment

The reviewed literature highlights the importance of considering these four variables not as isolated constructs but as interdependent components of learners' motivational and emotional experiences. Theoretically, emotions are assumed to arise directly from learners' perceptions of control and value, while distal motivational factors, such as achievement goals, can exert an indirect influence by shaping these appraisals<sup>[15]</sup>. Specifically, mastery goals orient students toward developing competence and knowledge, which are likely to foster a greater sense of control and a higher valuation of the achievement tasks themselves. The enhancement of the two appraisals can, in turn, lead to positive emotions represented by enjoyment.

Empirical studies provide partial support for this framework. Many studies have shown that mastery goals can give rise to enjoyment in educational contexts and even long-term well-being<sup>[22,62-64]</sup>. In addition, control and value appraisals have consistently been identified as significant predictors of enjoyment across different educational domains<sup>[3,18,19]</sup>.

However, when examining whether these two appraisals mediate the link between mastery goals and enjoyment, findings have been inconsistent. According to Hall et al.<sup>[23]</sup>, neither appraisal demonstrated a mediating effect, though mastery goals directly affected enjoyment and the two appraisals. Believing that the study of Hall et al. could be inconclusive, Dryden et al.<sup>[24]</sup> replicated and extended the study. In the latter one, value has been identified as the mediator, while the mediating effect of control has not yet been observed. In contrast, B. Li and C. Li<sup>[25]</sup> has identified that both appraisals served as mediators in their recent study. Given the inconsistencies in the literature, investigations into the mediating mechanisms of the two appraisals when connecting achievement goals with emotions remain

underdeveloped, thus requiring further exploration to clarify their relationships.

In addition, these studies were conducted in general educational settings or within broader EFL contexts, without a specific focus on the domain of foreign language reading. Given that reading is a central yet demanding component of EFL learning, understanding how mastery goals and control-value appraisals interact to shape reading enjoyment is an important but largely unexplored research area.

## 2.5. Research Objectives and Questions

Informed by the control-value theory and earlier empirical findings, the current research concentrated on foreign language reading in Chinese tertiary educational contexts and investigated the relationships between mastery goals and foreign language reading enjoyment with the mediation of control and value appraisals.

### 2.5.1. Research Objectives

This study aimed to elucidate the interconnections among mastery goals, control-value appraisals, and foreign language reading enjoyment among Chinese EFL undergraduates, with a specific focus on the underlying mechanism of parallel mediation exerted by the two appraisals.

### 2.5.2. Research Questions

Guided by these objectives, the study addressed the following research questions:

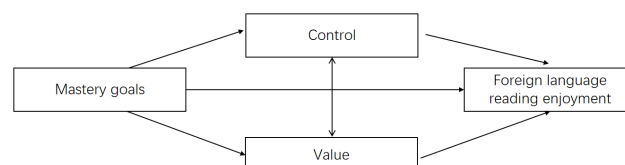
1. How are mastery goals, control appraisal, and value appraisal associated with foreign language reading enjoyment among Chinese EFL undergraduates?
2. To what extent do control and value appraisals operate in parallel to mediate the relationship between mastery goals and foreign language reading enjoyment among Chinese EFL undergraduates?

## 3. Methods

### 3.1. Research Design

This investigation was conducted within a correlational research design, a type of non-experimental form of quantitative research to illustrate and evaluate the strength or relationships among variables through correlational statistics<sup>[65]</sup>. As shown in **Figure 1**, this study investigated the

relationships between mastery goals as the independent variable, foreign language reading enjoyment as the dependent variable, with control and value appraisals being mediating variables.



**Figure 1.** Research Design.

### 3.2. Participants

The investigation comprised 618 Chinese EFL undergraduate learners with 270 males and 372 females aged from 18 to 22 years old. Stratified sampling was employed to ensure representativeness by considering regional distribution and institutional type. The study sample was drawn from three universities in different provinces of China: one affiliated with the Project 985 initiative, one under Project 211, and one not included in either program. Project 985 and Project 211 are national initiatives launched by the Ministry of Education to promote globally competitive high-level universities, with Project 985 institutions generally regarded as the most prestigious, followed by those in Project 211. This institutional diversity allowed for a broader representation of students across academic levels<sup>[66]</sup>.

The participants were drawn from diverse majors, including business and management, medicine, and engineering, and shared the common requirement of taking compulsory English courses. In addition, the sample excluded freshmen to ensure all the participants had enrolled in university English courses for at least two semesters.

### 3.3. Data Collection Tools

A composite questionnaire including five parts was employed for data collection. The first section was for the demographic information, followed by the scales to investigate the four variables on a 5-point Likert scale. To guarantee conceptual clarity and accuracy for the participants, the items were translated into Chinese. This initial translation was verified by the experts, back-translated into English, and compared with the original version. These strategies could ensure the Chinese questionnaire was consistent in meaning

while culturally appropriate. The detailed descriptions of the scales were introduced in the following chapter, and the adapted sample questionnaire was attached in **Appendix A**.

### 3.3.1. Mastery Goals Measures

The current study employed the scale from Elliot and McGregor<sup>[29]</sup> as the measurement of learners' mastery goals. Such a questionnaire was used in multiple subsequent studies, and many of them were conducted in Chinese educational contexts<sup>[67,68]</sup>. These four goals were validated to be statistically independent, and the current study selected 3 items related to mastery-approach goals and adapted these items to the English reading learning contexts. The Cronbach's alpha is 0.902 in this study, which shows good reliability.

### 3.3.2. Control Appraisal Measures

The scale evaluating participants' control appraisals was adapted from the self-description Questionnaire II<sup>[69]</sup>. The original one intends to assess the 11 aspects of individuals' self-concept based on 102 items, 4 items have been utilized to measure the control appraisals in the study of Putwain et al.<sup>[70]</sup>. Also, these items for control appraisals have been applied in the study of control appraisals in Chinese EFL learning contexts with good validity and reliability<sup>[71-73]</sup>. The Cronbach's alpha for this scale is 0.96, showing good reliability.

### 3.3.3. Value Appraisal Measures

The questionnaire evaluating learners' value appraisals was adapted from the scale of Shao and Parkinson<sup>[73]</sup>. This scale includes a total of 8 items. It has been widely utilized in the study value appraisals with good validity and reliability<sup>[60,74]</sup>. In the current study, the Cronbach's alpha is 0.812, showing good reliability.

### 3.3.4. Foreign Language Reading Enjoyment Measures

The items evaluating foreign language reading enjoyment were adopted from the English Reading Enjoyment Scale<sup>[55]</sup>. With 11 items, the scale covers a broad range of emotions associated with enjoyment, including "happiness, interest, sense of accomplishment, mood changes, satisfaction, excitement, and relaxation"<sup>[55]</sup> (p. 8). This scale could perfectly match the current study as its development was rooted in Chinese university-level EFL settings. One sample item is "I feel happy in reading English". A high Cronbach's

alpha coefficient ( $\alpha = 0.976$ ) confirmed an excellent reliability in this research.

## 3.4. Data Collection Procedures

Three teachers from different universities in China were contacted to facilitate the distribution of the link to online questionnaires to their students. Consent was requested from the participants before the data collection. The process lasted for about one week starting from 10th October 2024 to 16th October 2024. Potential common method bias was addressed by explicitly informing participants that their responses would be collected and handled with strict anonymity and confidentiality, along with encouragement from teachers to provide honest feedback. Harman's single-factor test showed that the variance explained by the first unrotated factor was 43.037%, without exceeding half of the total variance explained<sup>[75]</sup>, thus indicating that the dataset does not suffer from severe common method bias.

## 3.5. Data Analysis

The Social Sciences (SPSS) and PROCESS 4.1 were employed for data analysis. The initial phase involved data screening, which included an assessment of the variables' distributions to check for normality. Second, an examination of variable relationships was conducted utilizing Pearson correlation analysis. Third, the parallel mediating effects of the two appraisals were examined. Gender and language levels were controlled to minimize potential confounding effects.

## 4. Results

The following chapters provide an overview of the key results derived from the analytical procedures.

### 4.1. Descriptive Statistics

The study employed a 5-point Likert-type scale, with all variable scores thus falling within a range of 1 to 5. A summary of these descriptive statistics is provided in **Table 1**. Overall, the mean for mastery goals was 4.11, suggesting a high level of mastery goals. In addition, the data illustrated a moderate level of control appraisal (Mean = 2.95, SD = 1.06), value appraisal (Mean = 3.54, SD = 0.83), and foreign

language reading enjoyment (Mean = 3.30, SD = 0.90). The assumption of normality was supported, as the skewness and kurtosis values show consistency with the recommended thresholds.

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
1 Mastery Goals	618	1.00	5.00	4.1176	0.61868	-0.670	0.098	0.267	0.196
2 Control Appraisals	618	1.00	5.00	2.9158	1.06328	0.077	0.098	-0.460	0.196
3 Value Appraisals	618	1.00	5.00	3.5413	0.83186	-0.044	0.098	0.107	0.196
4 Foreign language reading enjoyment	618	1.00	5.00	3.3046	0.89983	0.069	0.098	0.182	0.196

#### 4.2. The Correlations among Mastery Goals, Control-Value Appraisals and Foreign Language Reading Enjoyment

Pearson correlation analysis indicated significant positive correlations between mastery goals and other factors:

foreign language reading enjoyment ( $r = 0.449, p < 0.01$ ), control appraisal ( $r = 0.286, p < 0.01$ ), value appraisal ( $r = 0.549, p < 0.01$ ), as detailed in **Table 2**. In addition, control and value appraisal have positive relationships with foreign language reading enjoyment, with  $r = 0.729$  and  $r = 0.832$  respectively.

**Table 2.** Pearson Correlation Matrix among Mastery Goals, Control Appraisal, Value Appraisal, and Foreign Language Reading Enjoyment.

	1	2	3	4
1 Mastery Goals	1			
2 Control Appraisals	0.286**	1		
3 Value Appraisals	0.549**	0.649**	1	
4 Foreign language reading enjoyment	0.449**	0.729**	0.832**	1

Note: \*\* $p < 0.01$ .

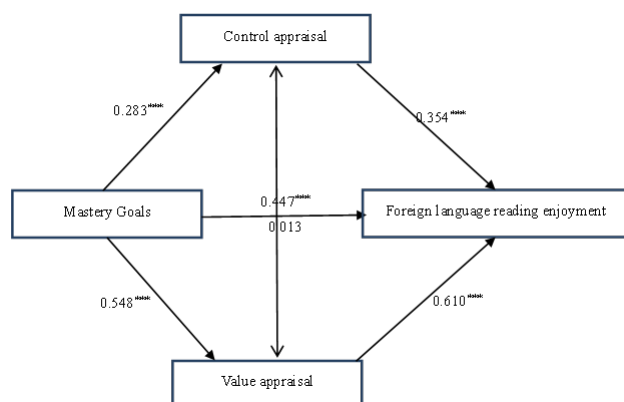
#### 4.3. The Parallel Mediating Effects of Control-Value Appraisals

The parallel mediation analysis allows for a more profound insight into the mediation model by evaluating how different mediators collaboratively contribute to the mediating process and illustrating whether any individual mediator has more significant mediating effects than others. In this study, PROCESS 4.1 and the bootstrap method were employed to test the parallel mediating roles and how control and value appraisals work together when linking mastery goals and foreign language reading enjoyment. For the assessment of the mediation effects, the analysis utilized 5000 bootstrapped samples with a 95% confidence interval (CI). The model included mastery goals as the independent variable, control-value appraisals as the parallel mediators, and foreign language reading enjoyment as the dependent variable, with gender and English scores controlled. According to the results, a significant total effect was observed for the influence of mastery goals on foreign language reading en-

joyment ( $\beta = 0.447, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.382, 0.512]$ ). However, when the mediators were included, the direct effect  $\beta = 0.013$ , with a 95% CI of  $[-0.035, 0.061]$ , straddling zero, which confirms the insignificant direct effect. The indirect effect  $\beta = 0.434 (95\% \text{ CI } [0.369, 0.500])$ , and the pathways through the two mediators were further examined. A significant indirect effect through control appraisal was observed ( $\beta = 0.100, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.070, 0.133]$ ), accounting for 23% of the total indirect effect. Besides, the pathway through value appraisal demonstrated a more substantial mediating effect ( $\beta = 0.334, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.275, 0.396]$ ), accounting for 77% of the total effect. The disparity in the mediating effect of the two variables (Ind1-Ind2) was  $-0.234$ , with a 95% CI of  $[-0.307, -0.163]$ , excluding zero. These suggested a significant difference in the mediating effects. Overall, according to the parallel mediation analysis, control and value appraisal collectively accounted for the full mediation of the relationship, and value appraisal played a more dominant role. The detailed statistics can be found in **Table 3**, with **Figure 2** summarizing the parallel multiple mediator model.

**Table 3.** The Parallel Mediation Analysis.

Effect	Value ( $\beta$ )	Boot SE	95%CI		The Proportion of Indirect Effects
			LLCI	ULCI	
Total Effect	0.447	0.033	0.382	0.512	-
Direct Effect	0.013	0.025	-0.035	0.061	-
Total Indirect Effect	0.434	0.034	0.369	0.500	-
Ind 1: Mastery Goals $\rightarrow$ Control appraisal $\rightarrow$ Foreign language reading enjoyment	0.100	0.016	0.070	0.133	23.0%
Ind2: Mastery Goals $\rightarrow$ Value appraisal $\rightarrow$ Foreign language reading enjoyment	0.334	0.032	0.275	0.396	77.0%
Ind1-Ind2	-0.234	0.037	-0.307	-0.163	-



**Figure 2.** The Statistical Diagram of the Parallel Mediator Model.  
Note: \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

## 5. Discussion

The first research question focuses on the interactions among mastery goals, control-value appraisals, and foreign language reading enjoyment. Pearson correlation analysis was employed. As the results indicate, mastery goals exert a positive influence on foreign language reading enjoyment. In addition, mastery goals were found to foster more positive control and value appraisals, and these enhanced appraisals were associated with greater foreign language reading enjoyment. These correlations suggest that learners who focus on the mastery of English reading competence tend to feel in control of the learning process as well as recognize the value of English reading, and thereby be more likely to enjoy English reading. These findings echo multiple empirical studies conducted in different educational contexts<sup>[5,18,20,76]</sup>. They strongly support the theoretical assumptions outlined in the control-value theory: mastery-oriented learners prioritize task mastery and pay attention to the value of learning activities, thereby enhancing their positive activity emotions represented by enjoyment<sup>[15]</sup>.

Furthermore, the outcomes from the present research

show partial alignment with many theoretical positions and empirical studies. This alignment can be seen in the expectancy-value theory, which underscores how goals shape emotions from the perspective of intrinsic motivation. According to the theory, learners who aspire to accomplish learning activities tend to have intrinsic motivation to participate in these activities and thereby gain enjoyment during the activities<sup>[77]</sup>. This can help to explain how mastery goals, the learning purposes related to the learning activities themselves, can lead to enjoyment. Moreover, previous studies linked mastery goals to a growth mindset, the belief that intelligence is malleable. Therefore, learners with mastery goals tend to regard the difficulties in their learning as opportunities for improving their abilities<sup>[78]</sup>. This can also help explain the mechanisms observed in our data, as learners with mastery goals in foreign language reading are more inclined to confront task-related difficulties optimistically and gain enjoyment in the reading process.

The second research question was examined by employing a parallel mediation analysis. As the findings demonstrated, control and value appraisals are full mediators. That is to say, mastery goals can only influence foreign language reading enjoyment through control and value appraisals without a direct effect. Learners' purposes of mastering the reading skills cannot directly result in their enjoyment of their reading of foreign languages, but directly increase their control of their learning of the reading process and their subjective judgment on the value of reading activities, thereby indirectly fostering positive reading experiences. This has strongly supported the assertion of the CVT in terms of the proximal predictive role of control and value appraisals on emotions, while other distal predictors, like achievement goals, can only influence emotions by first impacting these appraisals<sup>[58]</sup>. Meanwhile, this is slightly different from the findings of Dryden et al.<sup>[24]</sup>, who have confirmed only



value appraisal as a mediator, as well as Hall et al.<sup>[23]</sup> who have proved the direct impact of mastery goals on control, value, and enjoyment but found no mediating effects for either appraisal. These discrepancies may stem from differences in domains, as the current study is specific to foreign language reading, while the prior research focuses on the general learning process and psychology course learning. Whereas the theory supplies a universal framework to understand what determines the occurrence of emotions, its applicability to foreign language reading highlights how the specific dynamics of control-value relationships can differ in domain-specific contexts. The domain of foreign language reading can elicit learning experiences that are distinct from those in other disciplines, as the content of reading itself can prompt intense emotions that profoundly impact the learning process<sup>[79]</sup>.

Moreover, the mediating effect of the two appraisals has been observed in both the current study and that of B. Li and Li<sup>[25]</sup>. The two studies shared the important contextual factor of a Chinese EFL learning environment, which serves as a likely explanation for the consistency observed in the findings. However, the present research found that the two mediators fully mediate the goal-emotion relationship, whereas they partially mediate such a relationship in B. Li and Li's research. Such differences in the strength of the two mediators could likewise be interpreted by the control-value theory, as the mediating effect can be non-reflective when the achievement tasks are constantly repeated over time. As a result, emotions may automatically appear. However, the appraisals may come into play again if there are changes taking place in the situation or learners' emotional statements<sup>[58]</sup>. In China, learners have been consistently learning English as a compulsory subject since elementary school<sup>[10]</sup>. Therefore, their enjoyment of EFL learning can be routinized without the conscious mediation of control and value appraisals. Meanwhile, the attention specific to English reading is limited. It was reported that only 3% of non-English major learners read English after class every day, and 66.6% of learners complained about not having enough time to read English because they were overwhelmed by their busy schoolwork<sup>[80]</sup>. As a result, the mediating effect of the two appraisals becomes significant in this current study when investigating how mastery goals impact foreign language reading enjoyment in EFL learning contexts in China.

In addition, the analysis indicates that value appraisal carried greater relative weight within the mediating pathway. It is indicated that the goal of mastering a foreign language reading can enhance enjoyment in the reading process due to its significance and interest. Mastery goals cannot directly generate positive emotions in reading, but can foster such emotions by enhancing learners' recognition of the significance and interest in reading tasks, which is crucial in linking mastery goals to enjoyment. The literature has also observed a relatively stronger mediating strength of value appraisal than control appraisal<sup>[24,25]</sup>. This aligns with the previous research targeting the EFL educational contexts that activity-focused emotions represented by enjoyment are closely associated with intrinsic value-related appraisal<sup>[74]</sup>. In addition, it resonates with the conclusions of C. Li et al.<sup>[81]</sup> that value appraisal predicts enjoyment more than control appraisal, while control appraisal was more closely related to anxiety.

The qualitative research of Y. Wang and Abd Halim<sup>[76]</sup> provided a contextual explanation of how value appraisal linked mastery goals and foreign language reading enjoyment, as the respondent reflected that her mastery goals of acquiring English reading ability could be driven by her interest in reading some authentic English reading materials. Such goals, in turn, directed her attention to the intrinsic value of reading materials and brought her a sense of satisfaction during the reading.

Control appraisal also shows a mediating effect, but the relatively weak mediating effect suggests that solely strong control on the reading activities cannot make learners who want to master reading skills gain enjoyment in the reading. The contributions of control appraisal in students' emotional experiences have also been discussed by the study of C. Li<sup>[71]</sup> which posits that whereas control appraisal can enhance positive emotions, a very high level of control may also trigger negative emotions, such as boredom, and such a conclusion resonates with the study of L. Wu and Halim<sup>[53]</sup>. Learners who find reading activities lack challenges may experience decreased enjoyment. Therefore, it is better to keep learners' control at a moderate level. In addition, some studies interpret control appraisal as a facilitator to value appraisal in the mediating process. For instance, Putwain et al.<sup>[82]</sup> observed that control can amplify the contribution of a low perceived value on enjoyment. In addition, C. Li et al.<sup>[81]</sup> highlighted

control as a significant contributor, pointing out that a lack of subjective judgment on the ability to accomplish a task may, in turn, lower the learners' judgment on the value of the tasks, thus leading to lower enjoyment as well as triggering negative emotions. In conclusion, even though control does not play a dominant role in transforming mastery goals into enjoyment, its contribution cannot be neglected.

Furthermore, the finding that value appraisal exerted a stronger mediating effect can be understood in light of the characteristics of foreign language reading when compared with other subskills of language learning. Productive activities such as speaking typically occur in social settings, requiring real-time responses and exposing learners to potential public evaluation. Reading, on the other hand, is a more private, self-regulated, and recursive process that allows readers to proceed at their own pace without the immediate social pressure or face-threatening consequences of performance<sup>[32,83]</sup>. These features reduce the significance of control. In addition, within the Chinese EFL contexts where English is rarely used in social life outside the classroom, reading serves as the principal source of linguistic input and provides a platform for learners to access global cultures and knowledge<sup>[84]</sup>. Therefore, students tend to derive enjoyment from acknowledging the usefulness, relevance, and cultural enrichment of reading activities. This finding refines the control–value theory by suggesting that, in the domain of foreign language reading, the emotional effects of mastery goals rely more heavily on value recognition than on perceived controllability. It also highlights the domain-specific variability of control–value relationships, implying that the relative importance of value and control appraisals may shift according to the social and cognitive nature of the learning task.

## 6. Conclusions

The literature provides only limited insights into the antecedents of foreign language reading enjoyment. Furthermore, few studies have examined the position of CVT in the foreign language reading domain. In response to these gaps, the current research has investigated the mechanisms underlying mastery goals, control-value appraisals, and foreign language reading enjoyment. The findings have confirmed the positive contribution of mastery goals to foreign language

reading enjoyment, which aligns with previous studies. Additionally, it further revealed that these two appraisals served as full mediators in linking mastery goals to foreign language reading enjoyment, which strongly supported the CVT and expanded it to the foreign language reading domain. In addition, value appraisal was identified to perform a dominant role in the mediating mechanism, which can provide a nuanced understanding of the mechanism under these variables.

In light of these findings, EFL teachers can intentionally apply the intervention on learners' mastery goals, control-value appraisals to enhance foreign language reading enjoyment. Three classroom-based strategies are recommended.

Firstly, teachers can intentionally shape classroom goal structures and the students' attitudes through communicative strategies. For example, teachers can design instructional strategies that direct students' attention to understanding and improving reading skills rather than comparing with peers, thereby fostering mastery goals. Praise that emphasizes efforts and progress can also strengthen learners' perceived value of reading activities<sup>[85]</sup>. Moreover, as recommended by the literature, attributional retaining can be employed to foster learners' control appraisals<sup>[58]</sup>. Teachers can lead students to attribute difficulties in reading comprehension to controllable reasons, such as insufficient effort, instead of uncontrollable factors.

Secondly, scaffolded reading support can enhance learners' perceived control over reading activities<sup>[7]</sup>. Such scaffolding may come from both instruction and materials. Instructional scaffolding can include providing background information, pre-reading questions, and teacher modeling to clarify task demands, while reading texts can include explanatory notes, glossaries, or bilingual versions to reduce cognitive load.

Thirdly, value-enhanced reading tasks are recommended. Tasks can either cater to learners' personal interests to enhance their intrinsic value or emphasize the practical usefulness of reading materials to strengthen perceived utility value. Central to this pedagogical suggestion is the principle of choice-based text selection, evidenced by prior studies which show that giving learners a choice in reading material selection can increase satisfaction and persistence when encountering difficulties<sup>[86]</sup>.

While the current study offers critical insights, several limitations warrant mention. Firstly, the variables in this

research were assessed through the self-reported method, and this may introduce biases such as inaccuracies in self-perception. Future studies are suggested to combine multiple measures, such as classroom observation and interviews, for a more holistic understanding. Secondly, the present study focused exclusively on mastery goals from the achievement goal framework and enjoyment as a typical achievement emotion in classrooms and explored the goal-emotion relationships. While this can help to clarify the specific influence of mastery goals on enjoyment, it does not account for the interrelationships across various kinds of achievement goals or a broader range of classroom emotions. This narrow focus may result in an incomplete understanding of the complex goal-emotion dynamics. Future research can incorporate performance-based goals as well as other emotions into the studies.

## Author Contributions

H.A.H. took the lead in conceptualizing and designing the study, supervised all stages of the research process, and contributed to data interpretation and manuscript revision. Y.W. assisted in data collection, analysis, and manuscript drafting. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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## Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable.

## Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

## Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are not publicly available due to participant privacy and ethical restrictions, but may be made available upon reasonable request in accordance with institutional guidelines.

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## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## Appendix A. The Sample Questionnaire

### Section 1: Background Information

1. Your age:  
年龄
2. Gender: A. Male B. Female  
性别    A. 男    B. 女
3. School Name:  
学校名称
4. School Year:  
年级  
A. Freshman    B. Sophomore  
大一            大二  
C. Junior        D. Senior

大三                  大四

### 5. English Level

Your English score for the college entrance examination:

你的高考英语成绩:

Your score for College English Test (fill in "0" if you haven't participated in the exam):

你的全国大学生英语考试成绩 (如果你没有参加过考试请填写 "0")

TEM 4:                  TEM 6:

四级成绩                  六级成绩

### 6. Your email address:

你的电子邮箱

## Section 2: Questionnaire for Mastery Goals

### Instructions:

#### 填写说明:

Please use the following scale to answer the following statements. Circle the number that best describes your level of agreement.

请对每道题目进行回答。圈出最能描述你同意程度的数字。

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_\_\_

Strongly Disagree      Disagree                  Neutral                  Agree                  Strongly Agree

完全不同意                  不同意                  不确定                  有些同意                  完全同意

1. In our English reading class, I want to learn as much as possible.				
我想在英语阅读课上尽可能的多去学习。				
1	2	3	4	5
2. In our English reading class, it is important for me to understand the content of this course as thoroughly as possible.				
在英语阅读课上, 尽可能彻底地理解这门课的内容对我来说很重要。				
1	2	3	4	5
3. In our English reading class, I desire to completely master the reading material presented.				
我渴望在英语阅读课上完全掌握所提供的英语学习资料。				
1	2	3	4	5

### Section 3: Questionnaire for Control Appraisals

1. English reading is one of my best subjects. 英语阅读是我最擅长的科目之一。				
1	2	3	4	5
2. I have the confidence to get good marks in English reading. 我有信心可以在英语阅读中获得很好的分数。				
1	2	3	4	5
3. Reading in English is easy for me. 阅读英语对我来说比较简单。				
1	2	3	4	5
4. I have always done well in English Reading. 我英语阅读一直很好。				
1	2	3	4	5
5. I learn things quickly in English Reading classes. 我在英语阅读课上学东西很快。				
1	2	3	4	5

### Section 4: Questionnaire for Value Appraisals

1. I find English reading is very interesting. 我觉得英语阅读很有趣。				
1	2	3	4	5
2. I think English reading is very useful for me. 我认为英语阅读很有用。				
1	2	3	4	5
3. I like reading English texts. 我喜欢阅读英文。				
1	2	3	4	5
4. English reading is useful for my life. 英语阅读对我的生活很有用。				
1	2	3	4	5

### Section 5: Questionnaire for Foreign Language Reading Enjoyment

1. I want to continue during reading. 英语阅读过程中, 我想持续读下去。				
1	2	3	4	5
2. I feel happy in reading English. 英语阅读过程中, 我觉得开心。				
1	2	3	4	5
3. I immerse myself in reading. 英语阅读过程中, 我沉浸其中。				
1	2	3	4	5
4. I have a smile on my face during reading English. 英语阅读过程中, 我会面露笑容				
1	2	3	4	5
5. I remain interested in reading English. 英语阅读过程中, 我怀有兴趣。				
1	2	3	4	5
6. I am active in mind in reading English. 英语阅读过程中, 我思维活跃。				
1	2	3	4	5
7. I feel a sense of accomplishment in reading English. 英语阅读过程中, 我觉得有成就感。				
1	2	3	4	5
8. My mood changes with what I read during reading English. 英语阅读过程中, 我的心情随阅读内容而变化。				

1	2	3	4	5
9. I feel satisfied in reading English. 英语阅读过程中,我感到满足。				
1	2	3	4	5
10. I feel excited in reading English. 英语阅读过程中,我感到兴奋。				
1	2	3	4	5
11. I feel relaxed in reading English. 英语阅读过程中,我感到轻松。				
1	2	3	4	5

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