

Constructing the Formation Mechanism for Group Reading Participation Motivation: A Case Study of the German “Reading Scouts” Program (Postprint)

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Date: 2023-08-27T00:00:00+00:00

Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] This study conducts a case study on the German “Reading Scouts” program, constructs an observational framework based on relevant theories, explores the formation mechanism of group reading participation motivation through case analysis, and provides theoretical guidance for group reading promotion activities. [Method/Process] Employing the case study method, this research conducts online and documentary investigation of the “Reading Scouts” program, summarizes factors influencing public participation in group reading, clarifies logical relationships among these factors, and establishes a model of the group reading participation motivation system. [Results/Conclusion] The study develops a group reading participation motivation system primarily composed of four subsystems: a needs system, an intermediary system, an attraction system, and a support system, wherein the needs system constitutes endogenous driving elements, while the intermediary system, attraction system, and support system constitute exogenous driving factors. By integrating the successful experience of the “Reading Scouts” program with the participation motivation system model, recommendations are proposed for developing group reading activities in China from both endogenous and exogenous driving perspectives.

Full Text

Preamble

Construction and Formation Mechanism of Participation Motivation in Group Reading: A Case Study of Germany’s “Reading Scouts” Program

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Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] This study conducts a case analysis of Germany’s “Reading Scouts” program, constructing an observational framework grounded in relevant theories to explore the formation mechanism of participation motivation in group reading, thereby providing theoretical guidance for group reading promotion activities. **[Method/Process]** Using case study methodology, this research investigates the “Reading Scouts” program through web and literature surveys, identifies factors influencing public participation in group reading, clarifies the logical relationships among these factors, and establishes a motivation system model for group reading participation. **[Result/Conclusion]** The study develops a group reading participation motivation system composed primarily of four subsystems: demand system, mediation system, gravitational system, and support system. The demand system represents endogenous driving elements, while the mediation, gravitational, and support systems constitute exogenous driving factors. Drawing on the successful experience of the “Reading Scouts” program and the participation motivation system model, recommendations are proposed for developing group reading activities in China from both endogenous and exogenous motivation perspectives.

Keywords: group reading; participation motivation; Reading Scouts; reading promotion; Germany; case study

2. Related Research on Group Reading

Reading is not only an individual behavior but also a social activity or experience, and can thus manifest as a form of socialized behavior. In fact, group reading has become an important component of contemporary reading culture. Unlike the private and closed nature of individual reading, group reading is an interactive, collective, and public behavior occurring in shared spaces. As a crucial pathway to promoting nationwide reading, group reading has received widespread attention in developed countries. China’s “13th Five-Year Plan for Nationwide Reading” also lists “holding major nationwide reading events” as its primary task. The foremost evaluation criterion for successful group reading lies in the scale of participation, making the promotion of participant engagement the top priority for organizing group reading activities. This study focuses on the formation of participation motivation among group reading participants, employing case study methodology to analyze factors influencing public participation in group reading, clarify the logical relationships among these elements, and establish a motivation system model to provide theoretical guidance for group reading promotion initiatives.

Currently, research on group reading primarily concentrates on library science, education, and psychology. Most studies focus on specific populations—such as university students, adolescents, and vulnerable groups—as research subjects, examining reading behaviors, reading services, and reading promotion. Few studies systematically investigate group reading from the perspective of indi-

vidual participation. Concepts directly related to group reading include team reading, joint reading, and mass reading. Team reading generally refers to the reading behavior of members within the same organization who read the same literature simultaneously, emphasizing consistency in reading motivation, behavior, objects, and environment. Participants include not only schools but also enterprises, public institutions, associations, and political parties as learning organizations, with organizers often treating team reading as a goal-oriented learning guidance strategy. Relevant practices include reading courses in schools and collective reading activities organized by libraries.

Joint reading emphasizes that two or more readers in the same space or time read the same book. Participants may be formal groups or informal groups such as virtual reading communities and the general public without fixed relationships. Organizational forms include parent-child reading, classroom reading, teacher-student reading, reader reading circles, author-reader sessions, and celebrity reading events. Given the broad participation and social value of joint reading, such activities have become important reading promotion brands worldwide, exemplified by the “Common Reading Program for Freshmen” in American universities and the “Dad Reads to Me” initiative by the German Reading Foundation.

Mass reading typically refers to mass reading events (MRE), which are single or annual reading promotion activities conducted on a large scale using new technologies to facilitate reading sharing, with participants being undifferentiated social groups regardless of age, gender, occupation, or class. Examples include Russia’s “Reading Marathon” organized by the Federal Agency for Press and Mass Communication, Singapore’s “Read! Singapore” by the National Library Board, and the “Big Read” public reading program by the U.S. National Endowment for the Arts.

This paper uses “group reading” as an umbrella term encompassing all these reading activities, referring to group behavior where readers with common reading needs or goals participate in reading activities within the same field, following shared behavioral norms and interacting with one another.

3. Research Design

3.1 Application of Case Study Methodology

This study primarily draws on the German Reading Foundation’s website and reading promotion websites of various German states, using case study methodology to explore the formation mechanism of participation motivation in group reading, with Germany’s “Reading Scouts” (LESESCOUTS) program as the research object.

The “Reading Scouts” program was selected for several reasons. First, it attracts numerous participants, including students and teachers. By 2016, over 110 schools in Germany had participated in the training [6]. Taking Rhineland-

Palatinate as an example, as a pioneer region, its operational model has become exemplary for other states. By 2017, approximately 2,000 students had been trained as “scouts,” serving as special reading promoters among their peers [7]. Additionally, the program had attracted about 300 teachers actively involved in training and organizing activities. Second, the program has been running for 17 years with expanding influence. Launched in 2002 to promote and strengthen children’s and adolescents’ reading abilities and language skills, it originated as part of the “Reading Pleasure in Rhineland-Palatinate” initiative by the state’s Ministry of Education and the German Reading Foundation. After success in the state, it was gradually promoted to other German states such as Baden-Württemberg and Lower Saxony, emerging as an important reading promotion brand for children and youth. Third, the program exemplifies group reading activities based on peer group effects.

The basic process involves recruiting a group of students of similar age and interests, providing them with intensive training on reading abilities and sharing skills. These trained individuals become “scouts” who then leverage peer group effects to communicate and share with peers in various reading activities, gradually expanding reading influence [8].

3.2 Construction of Observational Framework

This study establishes an observational framework from both endogenous and exogenous driving factors, examining participation motivation elements across four main components: demand system, mediation system, gravitational system, and support system.

From a philosophical perspective, the movement and development of all things result from the combined action of internal and external forces, and group reading participation motivation is no exception. Endogenous driving factors refer to internal propelling forces generated when participants’ needs are met, while exogenous driving factors refer to objective environments that directly or indirectly influence participation willingness and behavior.

Drawing on Peng Hua’s dynamic system model [9], this study explores unique constituent elements of group reading participation motivation from four aspects. Generally, individual internal drive produces individual motivation, leading to individual behavior, while group behavior requires group motivation. Therefore, endogenous driving elements are divided into individual internal drive and group internal drive. According to behavioral motivation theory, needs determine motivation, and motivation leads to behavior [10], making needs the source of behavioral power. Thus, endogenous driving factors correspond to the demand system. Based on Herzberg’s two-factor theory [11], this study categorizes exogenous driving factors into motivational and hygiene elements. Motivational elements focus on organizers’ capabilities and activity quality, corresponding to the mediation and gravitational systems, while hygiene elements refer to hardware and software conditions ensuring long-term operation, corre-

sponding to the support system.

Based on this analysis, the study establishes a case observation framework (Figure 1) [Figure 1: see original paper], which will guide the investigation and analysis of the “Reading Scouts” program using theories such as peer group effect, Herzberg’s two-factor theory, conformity theory, Collins’ interaction ritual chain theory, and Vroom’s expectancy theory.

4. German “Reading Scouts” Case Analysis

4.1 Composition of Group Reading Participation Demand System

The demand system directly reflects participants’ willingness to engage. This study observes and analyzes participants in the “Reading Scouts” program to explore individual and group internal drive.

4.1.1 Formation of Individual Internal Drive The program’s greatest highlight is using youth to influence peers, generating aspiration and interest in reading among more adolescents and diffusing reading influence from the small scout group to the larger peer group. For instance, Baden-Württemberg’s program operates on the principle that “who knows better what teenagers like to read than teenagers themselves” [12]. Under this guidance, they organize book parties, reading nights, and lectures where adolescents act as facilitators, sharing reading experiences with friends and classmates to transmit reading enjoyment and envision reading rewards.

Individual participation in group reading leverages group power to stimulate internal drive, with the program fully considering peer group effects. Research shows that the vast majority of children and adolescents belong to peer groups [13], which serve as important sources of belonging and security [14] and enhance happiness [15-16]. With peer support, reading subjects’ self-efficacy increases. Compared to “authorities” like parents and teachers, peers with shared or similar reading interests and needs are more receptive to each other’s opinions and guidance, and their pursuit of shared experiences can become a driving force for autonomous reading.

Thus, the program promotes individual internal drive formation by focusing on participants’ reading interest, reading needs, and self-efficacy.

4.1.2 Formation of Group Internal Drive As a collective behavior, group reading formation relies on both individual and group motivation, with group motivation manifesting as group internal drive in the demand system. The program fully considers group motivation’s impact on group behavior. Activities are typically organized by class or school, forming formal groups with fixed relationships, unified rules, and organizational discipline that facilitate group cohesion. Competition among “Reading Scouts” from different regions, combined

with members' sense of belonging and instinctive in-group favoritism, fosters common goals and generates group motivation, forming group internal drive.

The main factors influencing group internal drive in the program are group cohesion and group goals.

4.2 Composition of Group Reading Participation Mediation System

The mediation system comprises group reading activity organizers, with driving behavior occurring during planning and organization. Investigation reveals three constituent elements: authoritative initiators, professional organizational systems, and dedicated teams.

4.2.1 Authoritative Initiators The German Reading Foundation, established in 1988 and headquartered in Mainz, serves as a key initiator. Sponsored by the Federal President and supported by numerous prominent readers, it is a crucial social force and non-governmental organization promoting nationwide reading in Germany. The foundation collaborates closely with federal and state ministries, scientific institutions, associations, and companies to conduct research and implement reading promotion activities and demonstration projects [17]. Additionally, state government departments, schools, and libraries provide authoritative support.

4.2.2 Professional Organizational System The foundation conducts surveys and research on Germany's reading status, analyzing how lack of reading interest and skills may adversely affect education and social development, thereby urging government attention to reading promotion [18]. To enhance scientific rigor, it established a Quality Advisory Committee and a Scientific Advisory Group—the former advises on project material development, while the latter identifies new trends in reading and media literacy [19]. In 2004, the foundation launched the “Academy for Reading Promotion” at the Leibniz Library to train professional reading promoters through expert meetings, lectures, seminars, and workshops [20]. For promotion, the foundation employs a multi-dimensional publicity model, leveraging school influence alongside internet, television, radio, and newspapers.

4.2.3 Dedicated Teams Saxony attaches great importance to the program, investing €23,500 in 2017. Schools recruit teachers to form “Reading Scouts” teams focused on training scouts to promote children's and adolescents' reading abilities and language skills. State Minister of Culture B. Kurth personally participates in activities and expresses gratitude to teachers via letters [21].

4.3 Composition of Group Reading Participation Gravitational System

The gravitational system's driving force stems from attractive elements in reading activities. Investigation of various activities reveals four constituent elements: organizational methods, tools/technologies, activity forms, and incentive mechanisms.

4.3.1 Methods The program innovates traditional reading promotion methods. Saxony leverages celebrity effects by inviting the Minister of Culture to participate, while the foundation invites celebrities as reading ambassadors. The program also maximizes peer group effects—members develop conforming behaviors to maintain consistency with peers. As adolescent participants have stronger conformity tendencies than adults, they more easily imitate peers, generating similar reading tendencies that diffuse reading behavior throughout the group. Thus, method selection should consider both traditional approaches (intervention, bibliography, activities, celebrities, evaluation) and psychological factors when participants act as group members.

4.3.2 Tools or Technologies The program's success relies on technological support. As CEO Dr. J.F. Maas notes, "Passion for reading among adolescents needs not only books but also digital media." In reading seminars, instructors teach scouts not only rhetorical and physical expression skills for sharing but also how to make short films and use various applications to enhance media literacy. For adolescents who dislike reading, integrating digital media can better stimulate interest [22]. Tools and technologies include not only devices but also activity platforms, reading resources, and venues, serving as important props and intuitive materials to attract participants.

4.3.3 Activity Forms The program organizes diverse, engaging activities tailored to adolescents' needs, integrating them with reading, such as reading nights, reading journeys, and reading parties [23]. Creative activities include the "Book Slalom" in Hude, Lower Saxony, designed to familiarize 150 new fifth-grade students with classmates, teachers, the library, and school. Students are divided into four groups, given book photos, and tasked with finding target books in the library with "dead ends" increasing difficulty [24]. Members cooperate under competition, aligning with Collins' interaction ritual chain theory, which includes four elements: bodily co-presence, barriers to outsiders, mutual focus of attention, and shared mood [25]. The activity perfectly matches this theory—participants gather in the library (co-presence), have clear boundaries (fifth graders), share focus (searching for books), and experience shared emotions (familiarity and competitive spirit).

4.3.4 Incentive Mechanisms Various incentives are designed for participants. As part of the "Reading Scouts" series, Rhineland-Palatinate has held

the “Reading Journey” (Mit Leselust auf Klassenfahrt) competition since 2017. This reading literacy test requires class-based registration, with each class selecting one book from a recommended list for collective reading. Finals follow the “Who Wants to Be a Millionaire” TV show format, with winning classes receiving €500 for class trips [26]. Collective rewards stimulate individual motivation while enhancing group cohesion.

According to Vroom’s expectancy theory [27], motivation stems from the relationship between performance, reward expectations, and personal satisfaction. Organizers should establish scientific, effective incentive mechanisms that work on both individuals and groups to enhance achievement and sustained participation.

4.4 Composition of Group Reading Participation Support System

The support system provides essential foundational support through macro-level observation of the program’s operation and Germany’s social environment, revealing four constituent elements: institutional norms, funding/equipment investment, cultural environment, and policies/regulations.

4.4.1 Institutional Norms The program’s success relies on institutional guidance. Organizational units are mostly formal groups operating under well-developed institutional frameworks. Scouts receive centralized training to form orderly collectives. The foundation has clear project guidelines that staff follow strictly. Institutional norms, including rules for maintaining activity order and team management systems, provide institutional support for effective organization and long-term operation.

4.4.2 Funding and Equipment Investment As a large-scale reading promotion program, “Reading Scouts” requires substantial funding. The German Reading Foundation’s organizational structure includes a Joint Committee comprising institutions, associations, enterprises, and individuals providing one-time or annual financial support, enabling many reading promotion projects [28]. Funding sources can be diversified, including government public cultural expenditures and support from enterprises and non-profit organizations.

4.4.3 Cultural Environment Germans’ love for reading is evident, with reading habits cultivated from childhood and reading facilities ubiquitous, making reading a prevailing social practice. From families to communities to the entire nation, a strong reading atmosphere permeates society, facilitating reading consciousness. Cultural environment construction depends on improving national quality and fostering social cultural atmosphere, along with deepening the concept of nationwide reading.

4.4.4 Policies and Regulations Germany’s nationwide reading promotion serves as a global model, elevating reading to a national strategic level. As a

key implementing institution, the foundation compiled the “Charter of the German Reading Foundation,” clarifying strategic objectives, top-level measures, and organizational tasks [29]. Policies and regulations, including fundamental public cultural laws and specific nationwide reading regulations, are essential guarantees for citizens’ reading rights.

5. Construction of Group Reading Participation Motivation Mechanism

Based on the above analysis, this study develops a group reading participation motivation system model (Figure 2) [Figure 2: see original paper]:

In this model, the demand system is the primary source of endogenous driving factors, while the mediation, support, and gravitational systems correspond to exogenous driving factors. Well-developed exogenous systems can trigger participants’ endogenous driving forces, ultimately forming participation motivation.

The demand system directly reflects participants’ motivation, influencing willingness through individual and group internal drive. Individual internal drive mainly refers to reading subjects’ self-efficacy, strong personal needs, interest, and positive response to reading effectiveness [11]. Group internal drive primarily stems from group cohesion and goals, acting on all members to promote group reading behavior.

The mediation system organizes and guides, corresponding to organizers. Motivation activation requires trust as a mediating factor—participants’ trust in organizers, influenced by organizers’ authority, professionalism, and dedication, determines the mediation system’s driving force.

The gravitational system corresponds to reading activities, whose methods, tools/technologies, forms, and incentive mechanisms most directly influence participation willingness and behavior, determining both promotion effectiveness and sustained participation.

The support system relates to 保障性 conditions, with driving elements including institutional norms, funding/equipment, cultural environment, and policies/regulations, providing foundational conditions and long-term operation guarantees.

6. Implications for Group Reading Activities in China

Based on the motivation system model and “Reading Scouts” experience, China’s group reading activities should develop from both endogenous and exogenous motivation perspectives.

Endogenous motivation activation should proceed in three aspects: First, cultivate public reading interest, stimulate reading needs, enhance self-efficacy, and improve reading literacy. Second, creatively leverage “peer group effects” to stimulate reading interest and enthusiasm, establishing autonomous reading

consciousness. Peer effects apply not only to children and adolescents but also to communities and enterprises, making them valuable for school-, community-, and enterprise-based reading promotion.

Exogenous motivation promotion should develop in six aspects: First, establish professional, authoritative, and dedicated reading promotion teams to ensure scientific and effective activities in all stages. Second, strengthen innovation and personalization/differentiation in activity forms, tailoring activities to participants' characteristics and interests while creating high-quality interaction rituals that satisfy both reading and social needs. Third, fully utilize online tools, leveraging digital platforms for pre-activity publicity and integrating them into activities to enhance attraction and provide convenient interaction media. Fourth, design sound incentive strategies combining individual and collective incentives to transform and mutually influence individual and group motivations under common goals, enhancing achievement and sustained participation. Fifth, systematically promote activity diffusion, setting boundaries for participant scope to spread reading influence from groups to the public gradually. Sixth, mobilize social forces from all sectors, emphasizing cooperation and division of labor among government, industry associations, schools, libraries, enterprises, and citizens to leverage respective advantages and ensure sustainable development.

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Author Contributions

Qian Qing: Drafted and revised the paper.

Li Guihua: Proposed research direction, outlined key points, and revised the paper.

A Research on Construction and Formation Mechanism of Participation Motivation in Group Reading: A Case Study of Germany's "Reading Scouts" Program

Abstract: [Purpose/significance] Based on a case study of Germany's "Reading Scouts" program, and combining relevant theories to construct an observational framework, this paper explored the mechanism of group reading participation dynamics through case analysis, and provided theoretical guidance for group reading promotion activities. [Method/process] By using case study method, this paper investigated and analyzed the "Reading Scouts" program with literature and network, and summarized the factors that influence the public's participation in group reading, sorted out the logical relationship among the various factors, and established a motivation system model of participation in group reading. [Result/conclusion] The model consists of four subsystems, namely demand system, mediation system, gravitational system and support system, in which demand system belongs to the internal driving factors, and mediation system, gravitational system and support system belong to the external driving factors. According to the successful experience of the "Reading Scouts" program and motivation system model of participation in group reading, this paper provided some suggestions for the organization and development of group reading promotion activities from endogenous and external motivation.

Keywords: group reading; participation motivations; reading scouts; reading promotion; Germany; case study

Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

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