

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS FOR IMPROVING ENGLISH READING COMPREHENSION AMONG CHINESE STUDENTS CATION



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ABSTRACT

Reading comprehension remains a central challenge for Chinese students learning English as a Foreign Language, particularly when limited analytical ability, weak self-management, and ineffective learning strategies restrict them. These issues highlight the need to examine the cognitive and behavioral factors that shape reading comprehension. This study investigates the role of critical reading skills in predicting reading comprehension. It explores how teachers' perceived role, student self-management, and student learning strategies contribute to this relationship. Survey data were collected from 395 Chinese EFL students enrolled in colleges in Shanghai and Beijing using validated instruments. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS 29 and Smart PLS 4 to assess measurement reliability, structural relationships, and mediating effects within a PLS-SEM framework. The results show that critical reading skills significantly influence student self-management ($\beta = 0.319, t = 6.624$), student learning strategies ($\beta = 0.322, t = 7.101$), and reading comprehension ($\beta = 0.218, t = 4.721$), but do not significantly affect the perceived role of teachers ($\beta = 0.097, t = 1.723$). Reading comprehension is significantly influenced by the perceived role of teachers ($\beta = 0.165, t = 3.588$), student self-management ($\beta = 0.183, t = 3.760$), and student learning strategies ($\beta = 0.249, t = 5.007$). Mediation analysis indicates significant indirect effects of critical reading skills on reading comprehension through student self-management ($\beta = 0.058, t = 3.434$) and student learning strategies ($\beta = 0.080, t = 4.323$). In contrast, the mediating effect of teachers' perceived role is not significant.

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INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is critical for people to enrich their knowledge and understanding of a changing environment (Amoah & Yeboah, 2021). It helps to develop concepts after reading and proper understanding, which is necessary for critical thinking. Similarly, reading comprehension is also significant for students to improve their knowledge and learning (Anqi et al., 2024). It is a way forward to conclude proper reading and development of understanding. While students need to develop appropriate knowledge through reading comprehension, it becomes challenging for them to read effectively when the material is not in their language (Asif et al., 2020). Hence, the students must read the material in their native language. If they are reading any material in a foreign language, they should develop the skills to understand its content and context better. Due to advances in knowledge of the English language, it has become essential for students to have appropriate reading and comprehension skills (Bai & Chen, 2024). It is important to survive in the workplace and to deal with people from diverse cultures using English. Similarly, Chinese students are shifting their interest toward reading in English (Barnhart et al., 2022); however, they face difficulties at the initial stage of English reading comprehension.

Reading comprehension in English can be easy for Chinese students learning English at any institute (Borisova et al., 2025). Students need to improve their reading skills to understand concepts better and think critically while reading. For Chinese students, understanding the contextual meaning of English is problematic at the initial stage of learning (Cai & Yu, 2024). Therefore, the role of teachers for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is necessary to support the students. Teachers' motivation can be a significant factor in students' improvement of their reading skills (Cai, 2020). However, students who have intrinsic motivation to learn a new language, such as English, are highly concerned about getting assistance from

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teachers. Reading in English is effective for students and can foster their reading comprehension skills (Carolan, 2022). While some students are less motivated and less capable of self-management, they struggle to deal with the challenges in their learning and effective performance (Carolan & Devlin, 2024). A sense of self-management is required for students to advance their language learning, which is critical for improving their reading comprehension.

Scholars have reported that students' reading comprehension improves when they follow appropriate guidelines (Cecen & Peker, 2021). Students learn most effectively when they work with the support of self-management skills. The need for self-management fosters discipline among students, enabling them to work and refine their strategies (Chan, 2023). However, scholars also noted that the perceived role of teachers should not be neglected alongside the learning strategies needed to advance reading skills (Chen et al., 2025). In previous studies, it has also been reported that EFL learning becomes more effective for students when they have strategies to follow (G. Chen, 2023). Students must develop an effective attitude for their learning and overall performance. Meanwhile, those students who lack self-management and effective strategy development struggle with reading comprehension while learning a second language (Chen & Shu, 2024). Previous studies have critically argued that reading comprehension for EFL learners is not easy; they face various challenges. Furthermore, previous studies also highlighted gaps in the literature regarding the role of critical reading skills, the perceived role of the teacher, student self-management, and learning strategies for reading comprehension (Chen & Jiang, 2025; Pande et al., 2024; Chen & Kim, 2023).

This research is important because reading comprehension in English directly influences students' academic progress, access to global knowledge, and long-term participation in an internationally connected workforce. As English remains the dominant language of higher education, scientific publication, and digital information, Chinese EFL learners require strong comprehension skills to keep pace with global developments. Limited ability to analyse, interpret, and evaluate English texts restricts their learning outcomes and reduces their competitiveness in academic and professional settings. Therefore, understanding the factors that shape English reading comprehension is necessary to address persistent learning challenges among Chinese students and ensure their successful engagement in English-medium education. To address literature gaps and provide insight into improving reading comprehension among Chinese EFL students, this study investigated the roles of critical reading skills, the perceived role of the teacher, student self-management, and student learning strategies in reading comprehension. Furthermore, the mediating roles of perceived teacher role, student self-management, and student learning strategies were also investigated. The study collected a sample of 395 Chinese EFL students enrolled in colleges in Shanghai and Beijing. Data analysis was performed using SPSS 29 and SmartPLS 4. The study found that critical reading skills have no impact on teachers' perceived role, but they do significantly affect student self-management, student learning strategies, and reading comprehension. The study also found that the perceived role of the teacher, student self-management, and student learning strategies have a significant impact on reading comprehension. The mediating roles of perceived teacher role, student self-management, and student learning strategies were found to be significant in the relationship between critical reading skills and reading comprehension. The study makes a novel contribution to the literature by investigating the relationship between variables. The study has practical value for practitioners and Chinese EFL students for improving their reading comprehension. The study is based on the literature review, methods, results, discussion, and conclusion. The remainder of this paper is based on a literature review, methodology, data analysis, discussion, implications, and future directions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Students' critical reading skills are important for their understanding of teachers' roles in learning (Chen et al., 2023). Students who are closely associated with their teachers perceive them as a source of support (L. Chen, 2023). It creates a significant learning environment for students, which influences and improves their performance (M. Chen et al., 2022). When learners critically assess information, they seek guidance from teachers to refine their analytical skills rather than rely on them for direct answers (M. P. Chen et al., 2022). Therefore, students must develop a meaningful relationship with their teachers that supports their learning.

Students must develop self-management skills, as these skills improve their performance (X. Chen et al., 2022). When students are highly motivated and critical learners, their performance improves with the availability of facilities (Chen et al., 2024). Students must engage critically with the discussion to develop a positive approach to their learning and self-management (Y. Chen, 2022). Furthermore, self-management strategies can help students improve their learning abilities when learning a foreign language. While self-management also helps students grow mentally and perform well, it is influenced by appropriate reading skills (Y. Chen, 2023a). Self-management helps students understand their abilities and reflect on their EFL learning.

Reading skills are necessary for students to improve their personalities and learning (Y. Chen, 2023b). When students are deeply engaged in critical learning, they develop personalized learning strategies. In addition, these strategies help students grow mentally and perform better in their learning. Furthermore, the students have strategies such as summarization, note-taking, and questioning to deepen their understanding (Chen & Chew, 2021). Critical readers actively seek connections among concepts, thereby improving their ability to retain and apply knowledge across contexts (Chen & Zhao, 2022). While students have effective learning strategies, it is imperative to support them in their learning (Y. M. Chen, 2022).

Critical reading skills significantly influence reading comprehension by enabling students to actively engage with texts rather than passively absorb information (Chen, 2024; Hasan & Surjamokhey, 2022). Critical readers question content, analyze arguments, and evaluate evidence, thereby deepening their understanding. These skills allow students to distinguish

between main ideas and supporting details, improving their ability to construct meaning from complex texts. Moreover, critical reading fosters inferencing skills, enabling students to read between the lines and grasp implicit meanings (Deng et al., 2024). This leads to a more nuanced understanding of material, enhancing both literal and inferential comprehension (Derakhshan & Bai, 2025). As students practice critical reading, they also develop the ability to assess the credibility and reliability of information, thereby strengthening their comprehension skills.

The way students perceive their teachers plays a crucial role in their reading comprehension (Du & Zhang, 2022). When students view teachers as supportive facilitators, they are more likely to seek guidance and engage in meaningful discussions about texts (Fan & Xie, 2025). Teachers who provide structured support, encourage questioning, and promote critical thinking help students navigate complex readings with greater confidence (Cheong et al., 2023). A teacher's role in modeling effective reading strategies, such as annotation and summarization, also contributes to improved comprehension. Furthermore, a positive teacher-student relationship fosters motivation, making students more inclined to invest effort in their reading tasks (Ding et al., 2024). If students perceive their teachers as authoritative figures who merely transmit knowledge, they may struggle with comprehension due to a lack of active engagement.

Self-management skills are essential for adequate reading comprehension, as they help students regulate their study habits and learning processes (Dan & Li, 2024). Students who can set goals, manage time effectively, and monitor their own progress are better equipped to tackle complex reading materials. Self-regulated learners are proactive in identifying areas of difficulty and seeking strategies to improve their understanding (Feng et al., 2023a). Furthermore, students who manage their learning well are more likely to take notes, summarize key points, and review content systematically (Fu & Zhang, 2025). Moreover, self-management reduces reliance on external help, encouraging students to develop problem-solving skills that enhance comprehension (Deng, 2024). When students take responsibility for their learning, they become more engaged and persistent in overcoming reading challenges.

Effective learning strategies directly improve reading comprehension by helping students process and retain information systematically (Dewaele & Li, 2021). Students who employ strategies such as summarization, note-taking, questioning, and visualization develop a structured approach to understanding texts (Feng et al., 2023b). For instance, summarization allows students to distill essential information, while questioning techniques encourage deeper engagement with the material (Feng, 2024). Additionally, strategies such as concept mapping help students organize and relate ideas, making complex texts more straightforward to comprehend. Learning strategies also facilitate metacognition, enabling students to assess their comprehension and adjust their reading techniques accordingly (Du et al., 2024). Without effective learning strategies, students may struggle to extract meaning from texts, leading to shallow or fragmented understanding. When students critically analyze texts, they rely on their teachers to guide them in refining their understanding and developing effective strategies (Derakhshan & Gao, 2025). If a teacher fosters a classroom environment that encourages inquiry and discussion, students are more likely to engage deeply with texts, thereby improving comprehension (Chicherina et al., 2020). Conversely, if a teacher's role is perceived as passive or authoritarian, students may struggle to fully develop their critical reading skills, which in turn affects their comprehension (Cong et al., 2024). Therefore, a teacher's perceived role acts as a bridge between critical reading and comprehension, shaping how students apply analytical skills to their reading (Dai & Liu, 2024). A supportive teacher can provide the necessary guidance to help students transition from merely identifying textual details to interpreting and evaluating content meaningfully.

While critical reading equips students to evaluate texts, self-management ensures these skills are consistently applied in learning (Dan et al., 2024). Students who regulate their learning effectively can set goals, monitor progress, and adapt their reading strategies, leading to better comprehension (Chen & Zhang, 2022). Without self-management, students may struggle to organize their reading, leading to superficial engagement with texts (Chiang, 2024). Thus, self-management serves as a crucial intermediary between critical reading and comprehension, ensuring that students actively apply their analytical skills in a structured, disciplined manner (Ding, 2024). When students take ownership of their learning, they enhance their ability to critically engage with texts and extract more profound meaning, ultimately improving comprehension. While critical reading skills enable students to analyze and evaluate texts, learning strategies help them organize and retain this information effectively (Derakhshan et al., 2023). Strategies such as summarization, annotation, and self-questioning ensure that students apply critical thinking systematically, leading to better comprehension (Cheng & Zhang, 2025). Without effective strategies, students may struggle to translate their analytical skills into meaningful understanding (Dai & Wu, 2022). Therefore, learning strategies serve as a bridge, connecting critical reading skills to deeper comprehension by ensuring that students process texts in a structured and effective manner (Cui et al., 2023). A well-developed set of learning strategies enables students to engage actively with texts, thereby enhancing their ability to grasp and retain complex ideas.

Based on the above literature, inconsistencies were found in the body of literature. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to test the following hypotheses to advance knowledge and the literature.

- H₁:** Critical reading skills have an impact on the perceived role of the teacher.
- H₂:** Critical reading skills have an impact on student self-management.
- H₃:** Critical reading skills have an impact on student learning strategies.
- H₄:** Critical reading skills have an impact on reading comprehension.
- H₅:** The perceived role of the teacher has an impact on reading comprehension.
- H₆:** Student self-management has an impact on reading comprehension.
- H₇:** Student learning strategies have an impact on reading comprehension.
- H₈:** Perceived role of teacher mediates between critical reading skills and reading comprehension.

H₉: Student self-management mediates between critical reading skills and reading comprehension.

H₁₀: Student learning strategies mediate between critical reading skills and reading comprehension.

The study model is shown in Figure 1.

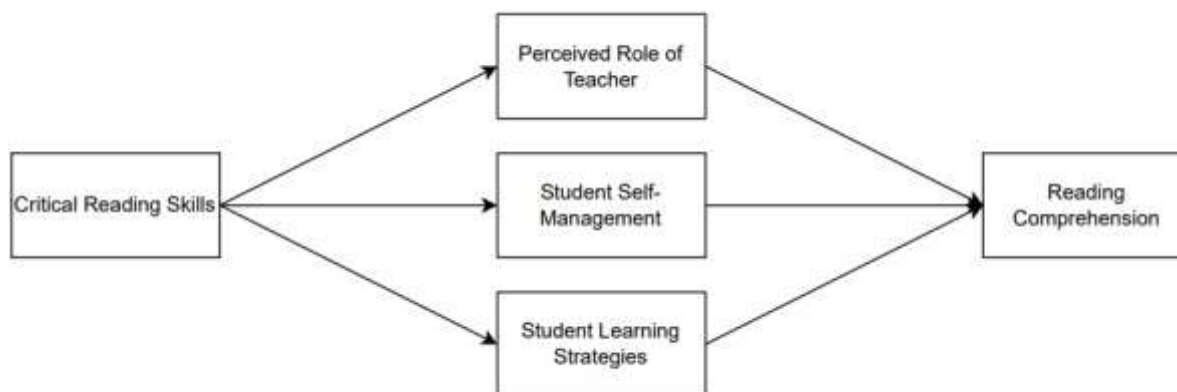


Figure 1. Research Model

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The population of this study was college students in China involved in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning. However, this study targeted Shanghai and Beijing only to collect data. This geography was selected because a diverse group of students representing different cultures and learning abilities was found. The study used a purposive sampling method to select respondents for data collection. However, a detailed introduction of the survey was given to the respondents before data collection. Oral consent from the respondents was obtained before data collection, and they were assured that any third party would not use their personal information.

The instruments used in this study were taken from previous studies and reported in Appendix A. The instruments used in this study were reliable, as their validity had been established in previous studies. Furthermore, these instruments were in English, as Chinese EFL learners had a significant understanding of the questions. This study used a printed version of the questionnaires, targeting 500 respondents initially. However, all the respondents' concerns were addressed before data collection. Efforts were made to improve the smoothness of data collection. Each respondent was given approximately 35-40 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

In response, 421 respondents completed the questionnaire and returned it. The remaining respondents did not return the questionnaire with complete data. However, the pre-analysis of the data was conducted to investigate whether the respondents provided biased responses. Therefore, 26 inappropriate responses were deleted from the final questionnaire. The study considered a valuable sample of 395 for analysis. However, two different tools, SPSS 29 and Smart PLS 4, were used to analyze the data for this research.

RESULTS

The demographic analysis of the participants helps interpret the findings more effectively. This study analyzed the demographic data using SPSS 29, as shown in Table 1. According to the analysis, 51% of participants were male, while 49% were female. While analyzing the field of study, it is found that 31% study humanities, 22% study social science, 23% study science and technology, while 16% study business and economics. However, 8% of the respondents were on other subjects.

According to the years of learning English data, 10% of participants reported less than 3 years, 15% reported 3-5 years, 34% reported 6-8 years, and 40% reported more than 8 years. When analyzing the frequency of reading in English, 8% reported less than once a month, 17% reported 1-3 times per month, 44% reported 1-3 times per week, and 32% reported daily. Regarding preferred learning mode, 15% preferred online learning, 54% preferred in-person learning, and 31% preferred hybrid learning.

Table 1. Demographics

Variable	Level	Frequency	Proportion
Gender	Male	202	51%
	Female	193	49%
Field of Study	Humanities	124	31%
	Social Sciences	85	22%
	Science & Technology	90	23%
	Business & Economics	64	16%
	Other subjects	32	8%
Years of Learning English	Less than 3 years	40	10%
	3 – 5 years	60	15%

	6 – 8 years	136	34%
	More than 8 years	159	40%
Frequency of Reading in English	Less than once a month	30	8%
	1–3 times per month	67	17%
	1–3 times per week	173	44%
Preferred Learning Mode	Daily	125	32%
	Online Learning	59	15%
	In-person Learning	215	54%
	Hybrid	121	31%

The study used SmartPLS 4 to analyze the data collected for hypothesis testing. Firstly, the measurement model analysis was performed and is displayed in Figure 2. The reliability of each item was assessed using its factor loading. According to Hair et al. (2011), factor loadings above 0.70 indicate that the instruments are good and reliable at representing the variable. The study's scale items achieved the minimum factor loadings and were confirmed as reliable. Furthermore, this study used Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability to assess the instruments' reliability in measuring the variables. The findings of both were above 0.70 (Hair et al., 2011) and considered significant for measuring the variables. The average variance extracted was also used to assess the instruments' variance. The results above 0.50 indicated a significant level of variance in the data. To sum up, the data were considered reliable for further analysis (see Table 2).

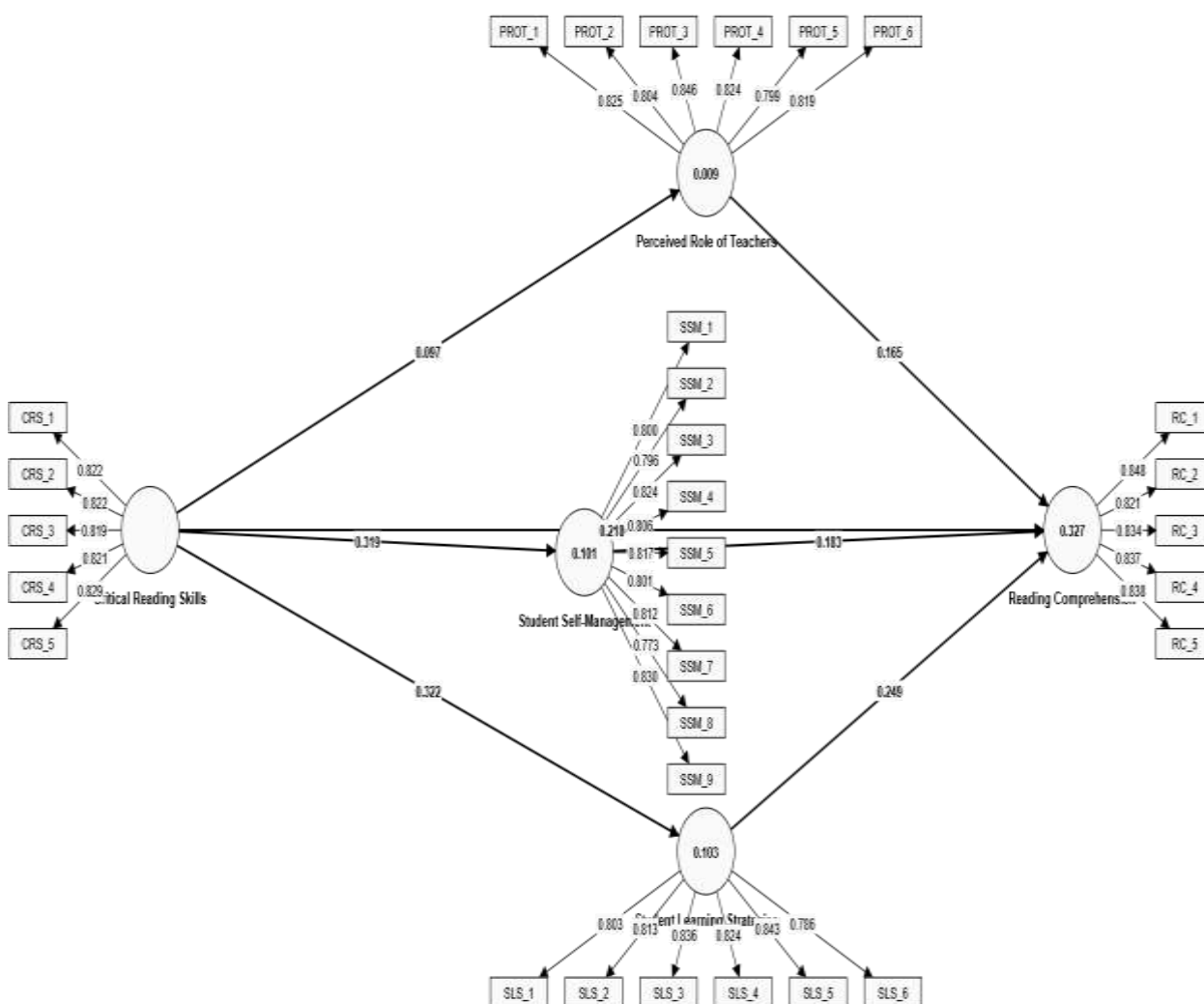


Figure 2. Measurement Model

Table 2. Convergent Validity

Construct	Items	Factor Loadings	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted
Critical Reading Skills	CRS_1	0.822	0.881	0.913	0.677
	CRS_2	0.822			
	CRS_3	0.819			
	CRS_4	0.821			
	CRS_5	0.829			

Perceived Role of Teachers	PROT_1	0.825	0.902	0.925	0.671
	PROT_2	0.804			
	PROT_3	0.846			
	PROT_4	0.824			
	PROT_5	0.799			
	PROT_6	0.819			
Reading Comprehension	RC_1	0.848	0.892	0.920	0.698
	RC_2	0.821			
	RC_3	0.834			
	RC_4	0.837			
	RC_5	0.838			
Student Learning Strategies	SLS_1	0.803	0.901	0.924	0.669
	SLS_2	0.813			
	SLS_3	0.836			
	SLS_4	0.824			
	SLS_5	0.843			
	SLS_6	0.786			
Student Self-Management	SSM_1	0.800	0.933	0.944	0.651
	SSM_2	0.796			
	SSM_3	0.824			
	SSM_4	0.806			
	SSM_5	0.817			
	SSM_6	0.801			
	SSM_7	0.812			
	SSM_8	0.773			
	SSM_9	0.830			

The next test was performed to measure discriminant validity. It is used to check whether instruments for different variables measure different aspects. It is to ensure that the instruments for different variables are not the same, both theoretically and numerically. This study used the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) method for investigating discriminant validity (see Table 3). According to Hair et al. (2011), the HTMT value should be less than 0.90 to indicate significant discriminant validity among the constructs. The results confirmed that the recommended threshold was achieved, and discriminant validity was established.

Table 3. Discriminant Validity

Construct	Critical Reading Skills	Perceived Role of Teachers	Reading Comprehension	Student Learning Strategies	Student Self-Management
Critical Reading Skills					
Perceived Role of Teachers	0.108				
Reading Comprehension	0.419	0.378			
Student Learning Strategies	0.360	0.399	0.506		
Student Self-Management	0.348	0.381	0.450	0.448	

The next step was to test for collinearity among the independent variables. This test is performed to check whether the independent variables are highly correlated with the dependent variable. This study used variance inflation factor (VIF) values to assess collinearity in the data (see Table 4). According to Hair et al. (2011), a variance inflation factor (VIF) of less than 5 indicates the absence of collinearity in the data. The study found no collinearity issues, as all values were less than 5.

Table 4. Collinearity Assessment

Construct	Perceived Role of Teachers	Reading Comprehension	Student Learning Strategies	Student Self-Management
Critical Reading Skills	1	1.177	1	1
Perceived Role of Teachers		1.225		
Reading Comprehension				
Student Learning Strategies		1.361		
Student Self-Management		1.345		

The second step was to evaluate the hypotheses' findings. It was checked by performing the structural model. In Smart PLS, the structural model is analyzed with PLS Bootstrapping. This study used a sub-sample of 5000 to test the hypotheses at the 0.05 significance level. The structural model is displayed in Figure 3.

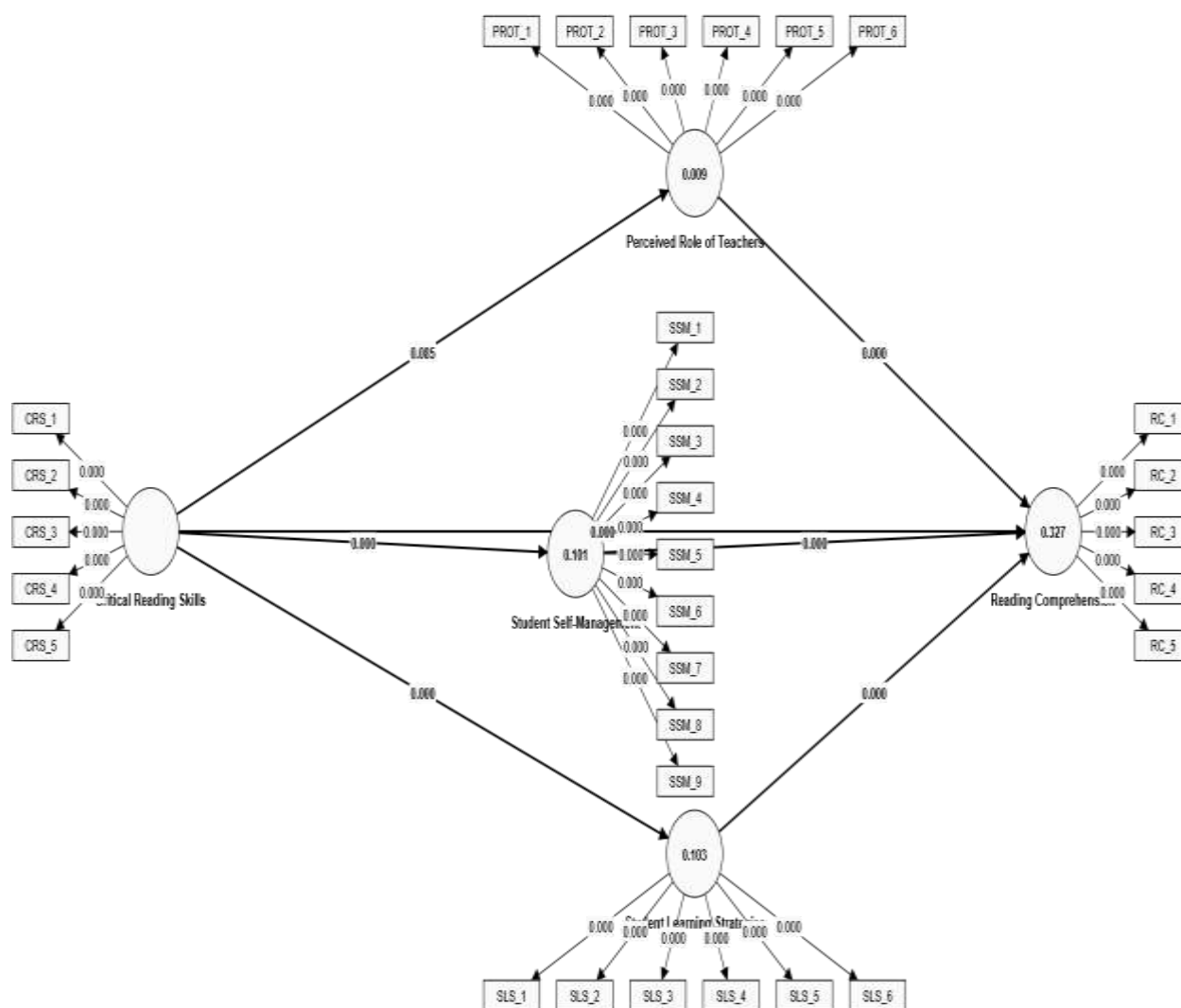


Figure 3. Structural Model

While analyzing the data, the study found that H_1 was rejected, and critical reading skills had no impact on the perceived role of the teacher. On the other hand, H_2 was accepted, and it was found that critical reading skills affect student self-management. H_3 was also accepted in this study, which found that critical reading skills affect student learning strategies. The study also confirmed H_4 , reporting that critical reading skills affect reading comprehension. Moreover, H_5 found that the perceived role of the teacher affects reading comprehension. H_6 was also accepted, confirming that student self-management affects reading comprehension. Finally, the study confirmed H_7 and found that student learning strategies affect reading comprehension. The results of direct path analysis using the structural model are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Direct Paths

Relationships	Original sample	Standard deviation	T statistics	P values
Critical Reading Skills -> Perceived Role of Teachers	0.097	0.056	1.723	0.085
Critical Reading Skills -> Reading Comprehension	0.218	0.046	4.721	0.000
Critical Reading Skills -> Student Learning Strategies	0.322	0.045	7.101	0.000
Critical Reading Skills -> Student Self-Management	0.319	0.048	6.624	0.000
Perceived Role of Teachers -> Reading Comprehension	0.165	0.046	3.588	0.000
Student Learning Strategies -> Reading Comprehension	0.249	0.050	5.007	0.000
Student Self-Management -> Reading Comprehension	0.183	0.049	3.760	0.000

The findings of the mediating analysis were also tested and reported in Table 6. H_8 was confirmed, and the perceived teacher role was found to mediate between critical reading skills and reading comprehension. Furthermore, the study confirmed H_9 and reported that student self-management mediates the relationship between critical reading skills and reading comprehension. Finally, the study confirmed H_{10} , finding that student learning strategies mediate the relationship between critical reading skills and reading comprehension.

Table 6. Mediating Paths

Relationships	Original sample	Standard deviation	T statistics	P values
Critical Reading Skills -> Perceived Role of Teachers -> Reading Comprehension	0.016	0.011	1.486	0.137
Critical Reading Skills -> Student Self-Management -> Reading Comprehension	0.058	0.017	3.434	0.001
Critical Reading Skills -> Student Learning Strategies -> Reading Comprehension	0.080	0.019	4.323	0.000

In the final section of the analysis, the study tested the model's predictive relevance. It was tested with the PLS Blindfolding assessment (see Figure 4). According to Hair et al. (2011), the Q² value, which represents predictive relevance, should be above 0. The findings of this study confirmed that the model has significant predictive relevance as the recommended threshold was achieved (see Table 7). Therefore, the model in this study was considered significant and predictive.

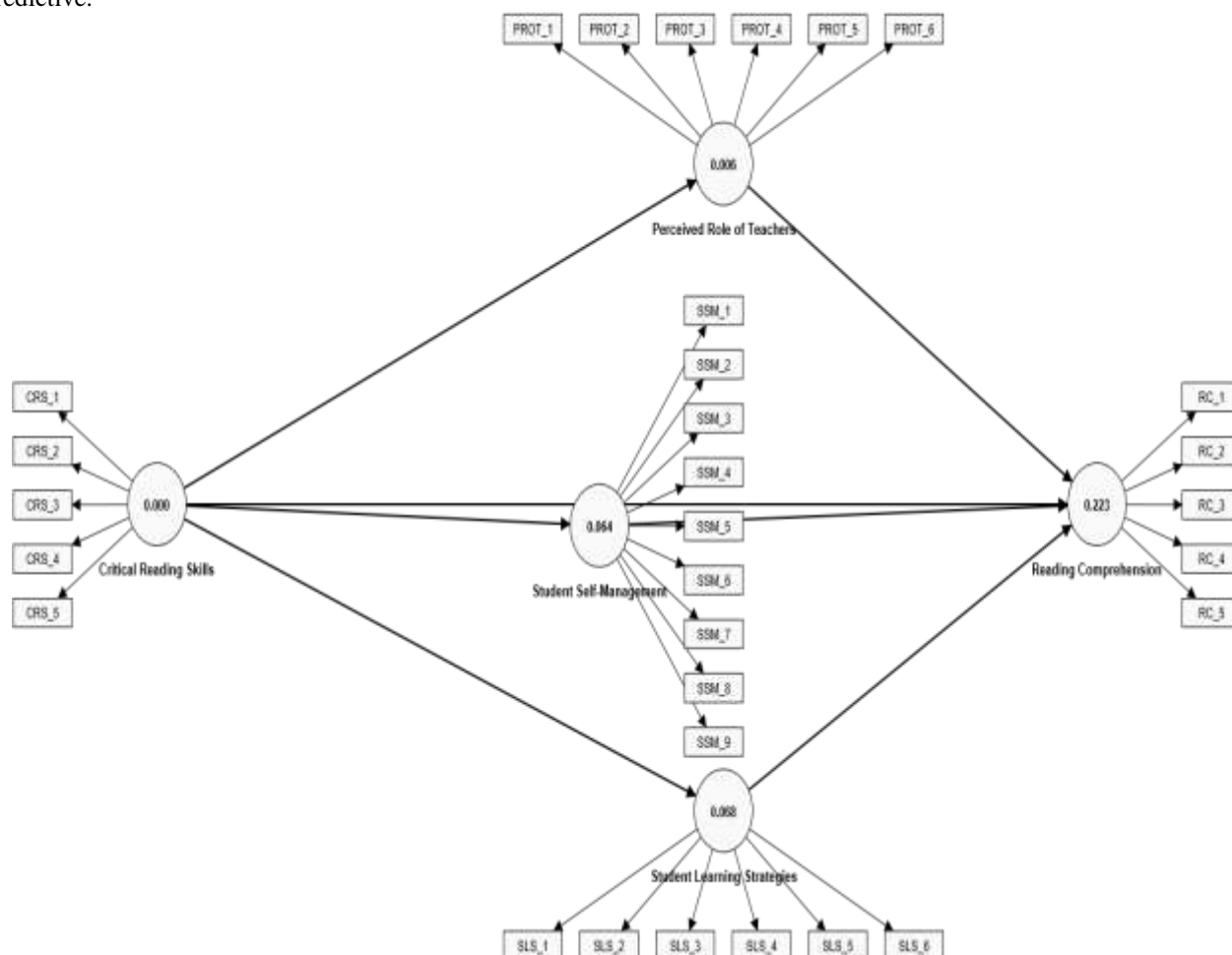


Figure 4. Blindfolding

Table 7. Predictive Relevance

Construct	SSO	SSE	Q ² (=1-SSE/SSO)
Critical Reading Skills	1975	1975	0
Perceived Role of Teachers	2370	2356.882	0.006
Reading Comprehension	1975	1535.05	0.223
Student Learning Strategies	2370	2209.764	0.068
Student Self-Management	3555	3327.054	0.064

DISCUSSIONS

This study contributes to the newly developed relationships in the literature, previously ignored by scholars. The findings of this study are compared with those of previous studies. At first, the study found that H₁ was rejected and that critical reading skills had no impact on the perceived role of the teacher. Although this relationship is new in the literature, a comparison with previous studies was conducted. According to Cong et al. (2024), critical reading ability is related to how students view the role of their teacher in the learning process. When students engage with text analytically and critically, they come to view their teachers more as facilitators of information than as providers (Ding et al., 2024). The study by Dai and Liu (2024) discussed how it creates a learning experience that is more dynamic and learner-centered, where learners

become owners of their own education. Therefore, when learners critically assess information, they look to teachers for help sharpening the analytical process, not for the answers themselves (Feng et al., 2023a). As a result, students are more independent in their learning but also regard their teachers as mentors and facilitators.

On the other hand, H_2 was accepted, and it was found that critical reading skills affect student self-management. Although this relationship is new in the literature, a comparison with previous studies was conducted. The study by Cheng and Zhang (2025) found that learners with well-developed critical reading skills are better able to be in charge of their education. Furthermore, Dai and Wu (2022) noted that developing critical reading skills, such as analyzing and interpreting, requires students to practice self-discipline, goal-setting, and time management. At the same time, Chiang (2024) highlighted that analyzing texts encourages students to be more autonomous learners, capable of self-regulating their study skills. Therefore, this allows them to create learning objectives, review their own process to assess how well they are doing, and, if necessary, pivot their approach (Ding, 2024).

H_3 was also accepted in this study, which found that critical reading skills affect student learning strategies. Although this relationship is new in the literature, a comparison with previous studies was conducted. According to Derakhshan and Gao (2025), students learn effective learning strategies that contribute to their academic success through this critical reading process. The study by Dan et al. (2024) found that reading skills enable them to use strategies such as summarizing, taking notes, and asking questions to enhance their understanding. While it is up to critical readers to connect the dots and forge relationships between ideas, thus enhancing their ability to retain and generalize across contexts (Feng et al., 2023b). As a result, this ensures that students are much more strategic in their approach to their studies, helping them digest information more effectively and perform better (Cheong et al., 2023).

The study also confirmed H_4 , reporting that critical reading skills affect reading comprehension. Although this relationship is new in the literature, a comparison with previous studies was conducted. While Derakhshan and Bai (2025) argued that critical reading skills significantly impact students' reading comprehension by helping them read with a purpose rather than simply accepting the content presented. Furthermore, Du et al. (2024) noted that critical readers interrogate content, scrutinize arguments, and evaluate evidence, thereby enhancing their understanding. Additionally, Gao and Shen (2021) discussed that critical reading nurtures inferencing, the ability to read between the lines and comprehend underlying meanings (Fu & Zhang, 2025). Furthermore, these skills make their comprehension academic and reliable, as students practice critical reading, which enables them to assess the credibility of information.

Moreover, H_5 found that the perceived role of the teacher affects reading comprehension. Although this relationship is new in the literature, a comparison with previous studies was conducted. According to Fan and Xie (2025), when students see teachers as supportive guides, they are more likely to ask for help and have meaningful conversations about texts. Moreover, Gan et al. (2022) noted that providing structured support, including questioning and critical thinking, helps teachers help students approach complex readings with more confidence. In addition, a good teacher-student relationship, as Dan and Li (2024) discussed, creates motivation, making students more willing to put in work on their reading assignments. In contrast, Chicherina et al. (2020) reported that an instructor who promotes analytical discussion and nurtures independent thought enables students to examine reading materials with greater autonomy and confidence, thereby accelerating their understanding.

H_6 was also accepted, confirming that student self-management affects reading comprehension. Although this relationship is new in the literature, a comparison with previous studies was conducted. The study by Cui et al. (2023) found that reading comprehension requires self-management skills and the ability to monitor and control how you study and learn. Learners who can self-regulate are better able to deal with very complex reading materials (Derakhshan et al., 2023). Deng (2024) highlighted that self-regulated learners take the initiative to recognize their challenges and pursue tactics to enhance their learning. According to Feng (2024), engagement increases when students take responsibility for their learning as they work through reading challenges. To sum up, students become more engaged with the text, develop a more analytical approach to understanding, and improve their self-management skills.

The study found that H_7 is confirmed and that student learning strategies affect reading comprehension. Although this relationship is new in the literature, a comparison with previous studies was conducted. According to Dewaele and Li (2021), effective learning strategies help students think about and retain information, thereby improving reading comprehension. However, Deng et al. (2024) highlighted that this structured approach to reading teaches students to summarize, take structured notes, question the text, and visualize what they are reading. Furthermore, Du and Zhang (2022) reported that techniques such as concept mapping also help outline and connect ideas, making complex texts progressively more digestible. According to Feng et al. (2023a), without learning strategies, students will struggle to derive meaning from texts.

H_8 was confirmed, and the perceived teacher role was found to mediate between critical reading skills and reading comprehension. Although this relationship is new in the literature, a comparison with previous studies was conducted. The study by Gao and Tay (2023) found that when students critically engage with texts, they use their teachers to refine their conceptualizations and approaches. Moreover, Gao (2024) reported that when a teacher creates a classroom environment conducive to asking questions and discussing texts, students are significantly more likely to read meaningfully. Therefore, a teacher can bridge critical reading and comprehension and shape how analytical skills are applied to reading. According to Gao and Tay (2023), a good teacher can guide students from merely listing textual details to making meaningful interpretations and evaluations of the content.

Furthermore, the study confirmed H_9 and reported that student self-management mediates the relationship between critical reading skills and reading comprehension. Although this relationship is new in the literature, a comparison with

previous studies was conducted. According to Fu and Zhang (2025), through critical reading, students learn the critical power of being thoughtful about the written word. Furthermore, Gan et al. (2022) noted that self-management helps students apply that critical power routinely as learning occurs. At the same time, Gao and Shen (2021) reported that students who do not self-manage their reading efforts may read superficially, avoiding deeper engagement with texts. Therefore, owning their learning enables students to think about texts critically and draw out additional meaning, leading to better comprehension (Chen & Zhang, 2022).

Finally, the study confirmed H₁₀, finding that student learning strategies mediate the relationship between critical reading skills and reading comprehension. Although this relationship is new in the literature, a comparison with previous studies was conducted. According to Feng (2024), critical reading skills enable students to analyze and evaluate texts, while learning strategies help them categorize and retain this information effectively. Gao (2024) noted that students have a range of analytical skills, but without effective strategies, they may not be able to turn that analysis into meaning. Consequently, learning strategies provide a link between critical reading skills and deeper comprehension by helping students approach texts in an organized, productive way (Chen, 2024). According to Feng et al. (2023b), a rich arsenal of learning strategies enables students to engage with texts in active, meaningful ways, making it easier for them to learn and retain complex ideas.

CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed to investigate the role of critical reading skills in predicting reading comprehension and examine how the perceived role of teachers, student self-management, and student learning strategies contribute to this relationship. To conclude, the study addresses the gaps in the literature and achieves its objective while testing the hypothesis. The research contributes to knowledge that critical reading skills have no impact on the teachers' perceived role. In contrast, they have a significant impact on student self-management, student learning strategies, and reading comprehension. Furthermore, the study found that perceived teacher role, student self-management, and student learning strategies significantly impact reading comprehension. In addition, the mediating roles of perceived teacher role, student self-management, and student learning strategies were found to be significant in the relationship between critical reading skills and reading comprehension. The study has practical value for stakeholders, practitioners, teachers, and students in understanding the roles of critical reading skills, the perceived role of the teacher, student self-management, and student learning strategies, which are necessary for improving the reading comprehension of Chinese students. In a nutshell, the findings of this study are noteworthy for Chinese EFL students seeking to improve their English reading comprehension.

The contributions of this research are significant in the body of knowledge, but it also has some limitations. The study added to the knowledge that critical reading skills are important for student self-management and learning strategies. However, the previous studies paid no attention to these relationships. Therefore, the contributions to literature are significant based on these study findings. In addition, the study contributes to the literature by showing that critical reading skills are unrelated to teachers' perceived roles. Although the hypothesis in this study was rejected, the study has significant contributions to the literature. Moreover, the study advanced the literature by reporting that the perceived role of the teacher, student self-management, and learning strategies have a significant influence on reading comprehension. Previous studies in the literature did not discuss these relationships. Significantly, the study contributes to understanding the mediating roles of the perceived teacher role, student self-management, and learning strategies. Based on these contributions, the study significantly enriched the body of knowledge.

The study at first collected data only from Beijing and Shanghai. Although it has representation from China, collecting data from rural areas could yield different findings. Therefore, researchers are advised to target different geographic locations for data collection. Furthermore, the study found that critical reading skills do not affect teachers' perceived role. Future studies are recommended to investigate this relationship with the mediating role of student learning self-efficacy. Hence, the new understanding would be incorporated into the body of knowledge through future studies. Finally, this research collected cross-sectional data due to time limitations. At the same time, the scholars are motivated to collect longitudinal data in the future to understand the mediating roles of the perceived teacher role, student self-management, and student learning strategies. Hence, working in these directions would help scholars interpret the findings more effectively.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Questionnaire

Perceived Role of Teacher	Items
	I like it when the teacher tells me what to do.
	I like the teacher to tell me what my difficulties are.
	I like the teacher to be more of a facilitator.
	I can learn without the teacher's direct support.
	If given the opportunity, I would like to negotiate which activities to do in class.
	I feel worried about learning on my own as I need a teacher to tell me if I am doing well.
Student Self-Management	
	I can learn English successfully.
	I am confident in my learning ability.
	I can learn well.
	I am willing to take responsibility for my learning.
	Making mistakes is part of my learning.
	I encourage myself to participate in class, even if I am afraid I will make mistakes.

	When I feel stressed about my learning, I know what to do.
	I create the best conditions for learning.
	I am resilient, not easily discouraged, and I persevere.
Student Learning Strategies	I have my own ways of testing how much I have learned.
	I can identify my learning strengths and weaknesses.
	I evaluate how well I can use English.
	I know how to organize my learning time more effectively.
	I know how to choose the strategy of learning that suits Me best and use it.
	I can describe the learning strategies that I use.
Critical Reading Skills	I can identify the author's main argument and supporting details in a reading passage.
	I critically evaluate the credibility of sources when reading academic texts.
	I analyze different perspectives and biases in the texts I read.
	I can distinguish between fact and opinion in complex reading materials.
	I question and reflect on the deeper meaning of texts rather than accepting information at face value.
Reading Comprehension	I can understand the main idea of an English passage without difficulty.
	I accurately infer the meanings of unfamiliar words from context.
	I can summarize key points of a reading passage in my own words.
	I understand implicit meanings and hidden messages in English texts.
	I can follow complex sentence structures and long passages without confusion.

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