

## Investigating reading habits and their impact on reading performance among Indian undergraduate students

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigates the reading habits, genre preferences, and reading behaviors of undergraduate students and examines how these factors influence their reading performance. A total of 342 responses were directly collected from students through a structured questionnaire. Descriptive statistics revealed strong inclinations toward analytical genres such as mystery/thriller, science fiction, and true crime, while newspaper reading frequency remained low. Hypothesis testing showed no significant differences in reading scores across gender or academic departments. A significant positive correlation emerged between daily reading duration and newspaper reading frequency. Most notably, students who preferred analytical genres demonstrated significantly higher reading scores (Cohen's  $d=1.36$ ). Regression analysis further confirmed genre preference as the strongest predictor of reading performance. These findings highlight the importance of genre engagement and daily reading routines in enhancing reading comprehension and literacy development. The study offers meaningful implications for educators, curriculum designers, and reading intervention programs.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Reading is a foundational academic skill that contributes significantly to language development, cognitive growth, and academic achievement [1]. At the undergraduate level, reading competence supports higher-order thinking, comprehension, and analytical reasoning, enabling students to engage effectively with academic texts, solve problems, and communicate ideas clearly. Accordingly, reading literacy remains a critical determinant of academic success across disciplines in contemporary higher education [2]. However, students' reading practices have shifted markedly with the expansion of digital media, social networking platforms, and short-form content [3]. Sustained, long-form reading has declined as digital distractions increase, raising concerns about comprehension depth, attention span, and critical engagement with texts [4]. At the same time, genre preferences have evolved under the influence of popular culture and multimedia storytelling.

Previous research shows a strong relationship between reading habits and reading proficiency, with regular reading enhancing vocabulary, comprehension, and background knowledge [5]–[8]. Increasing attention has also focused on genre as a determinant of comprehension outcomes [9]. Analytically demanding genres—such as mystery/thriller, true crime, and science fiction—may promote deeper cognitive engagement and critical thinking, whereas entertainment-oriented genres may involve more surface-level processing. Nevertheless, empirical evidence linking genre preference to measurable reading performance, particularly in Indian higher education, remains limited. Understanding undergraduate reading patterns is therefore essential for developing effective literacy interventions and curriculum strategies that foster meaningful engagement and academic literacy [10].

Despite extensive literature on reading habits and genre engagement, important gaps persist. Prior studies often emphasize general reading frequency or attitudes rather than examining how specific behaviors—such as genre preference, daily reading duration, and newspaper engagement—jointly predict measurable performance. Multivariate statistical evidence from Indian undergraduate contexts is also scarce. Consequently, a data-driven investigation connecting reading behaviors to standardized comprehension outcomes is required. Addressing these gaps, this study systematically investigates undergraduate students' reading habits, genre preferences, and reading performance in an Indian higher-education context. The objectives are to analyze reading patterns, examine demographic influences, evaluate relationships among reading behaviors, assess genre effects on performance, and identify key behavioral predictors using inferential statistical modeling.

## 2. RELATED WORK

Research on reading habits, literacy development, and reading motivation consistently highlights the central role of reading in academic success and intellectual growth. Regular reading strengthens vocabulary, comprehension, inferencing ability, and background knowledge, thereby enhancing overall literacy competence [11]. Extensive and voluntary reading—particularly self-selected reading—significantly supports language development and may be more effective than direct instruction for long-term proficiency gains [12].

A substantial body of research links reading habits with academic achievement in tertiary education. Studies conducted in Thailand, Cambodia, Namibia, and other contexts show that students who read more frequently and engage with both academic and non-academic materials tend to achieve higher academic performance and demonstrate stronger critical thinking and verbal skills [13]. Similar patterns appear across Asia-Pacific and Western universities, where positive reading habits correlate with improved grades and achievement [14]. Evidence from India and related contexts likewise indicates that strong reading habits and positive reading attitudes significantly predict academic outcomes at secondary and tertiary levels [15]. Reading motivation and engagement are also central to comprehension development. Guthrie and Wigfield's engagement model emphasize intrinsic motivation, perceived value of reading, self-efficacy, and social interaction around texts as major influences on reading frequency and comprehension growth [16]. Students who read for enjoyment typically engage more deeply with texts and demonstrate stronger comprehension over time [17].

Within this literature, genre preference has emerged as an important yet underexplored factor. Rosenblatt's transactional theory proposes that meaning is constructed through interactions shaped by experience, emotion, and genre expectations [18]. Analytically demanding genres—such as mystery, crime, and science fiction—encourage inferencing, prediction, and evaluation, promoting deeper cognitive engagement [19]. Empirical findings indicate that genre affects inference effort, comprehension processes, and perceived literary quality, although direct links between genre preference and measurable undergraduate reading performance remain limited [20], [21]. Globally, reading behaviors are shifting toward reduced leisure reading and increased reliance on digital media [22]. Indian undergraduates similarly face time pressure, exam-oriented cultures, and digital distractions that constrain sustained reading [23], [24]. Screen-based reading characterized by skimming and multitasking may weaken deep comprehension [25], [26], while newspaper reading is declining despite its benefits for awareness and critical thinking [27]. Although prior research underscores the importance of reading habits and motivation, empirical evidence connecting daily reading duration, newspaper engagement, and genre preference to measurable undergraduate reading performance—particularly in India—remains scarce. The present study addresses this gap through quantitative analysis, contributing evidence to literacy development and higher-education pedagogy.

## 3. METHOD

### 3.1. Research design

This study employed a quantitative, survey-based, non-experimental correlational design to examine relationships among reading habits, genre preferences, and reading performance. Such designs effectively

identify measurable trends and associations in large samples [28], [29]. A structured questionnaire enabled consistent data collection, supporting demographic comparisons, behavioral analysis, and prediction of reading performance.

### 3.2. Participants

Participants were undergraduate students from multiple departments at the researcher's institution during the 2024–2025 academic year, including engineering, computer science, arts, and technology, ensuring multidisciplinary representation of reading behaviors and literacy demands. A total of 342 students completed the structured questionnaire, and all available respondents were included using availability (convenience) sampling, appropriate for accessible and sufficiently large populations [30]. The single institution was selected for contextual relevance, reflecting a typical Indian higher-education setting where English-medium instruction, discipline-specific texts, and comprehension-focused assessments are standard. Routine evaluations indicate moderate but variable reading proficiency, supporting analysis of behavioral predictors. The study is context-focused, and broader validation requires future multi-institutional research.

### 3.3. Instruments for data collection

This study used a structured questionnaire and a reading performance assessment as primary data collection instruments. The questionnaire gathered demographic information (gender, academic department, and medium of instruction), reading habits (daily reading duration and newspaper-reading frequency), reading attitudes through Likert-type items, and genre preferences (e.g., mystery/thriller, romance, true crime, and science fiction). These measures enabled systematic analysis of reading behaviors and supported comparisons across demographic and behavioral groups.

A 25-item reading performance test was developed to assess comprehension aligned with the study's definition of reading performance. Items represented three levels: literal understanding, inferential comprehension, and analytical interpretation of vocabulary and textual relationships. Passages and question difficulty were calibrated to undergraduate academic reading demands, ensuring moderate score variability without ceiling or floor effects. All items were objective, enabling uniform scoring and comparability. The total score (0–25) served as a standardized quantitative indicator for hypothesis testing, correlation analysis, and multiple regression modeling.

### 3.4. Procedures of the study

The study used a structured procedure to collect reliable data on reading habits, genre preferences, and performance. After briefing participants on purpose, voluntariness, and confidentiality, a classroom-administered questionnaire and 25-item reading test were conducted under supervision. Responses were coded, verified for completeness, and prepared for statistical analysis, ensuring consistency and ethical compliance.

### 3.5. Data analysis

A quantitative analysis examined relationships among reading habits, genre preferences, and performance. Descriptive statistics summarized behaviors and scores, while t-tests, ANOVA, Spearman correlation, and Welch's t-test assessed group differences and associations. Multiple regression identified key predictors of reading performance. All analyses were conducted using Python-based statistical libraries to ensure accuracy and replicability.

### 3.6. Validity and reliability

The study ensured instrument accuracy through systematic reliability and validity evaluation. Internal consistency was confirmed via a pilot test with students outside the main sample: questionnaire items showed acceptable reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha=0.84$ ) and the 25-item reading performance test demonstrated good reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha=0.81$ ). Standardized administration, uniform instructions, and controlled testing conditions further minimized procedural variation. Validity was established through expert review by English and Education Faculty (face validity) and alignment of test items with recognized comprehension domains—literal understanding, inference, and vocabulary interpretation (content validity). Participant anonymity and voluntary participation reduced response bias. Together, these procedures indicate that the instruments provided valid and reliable measures supporting robust statistical analysis.

**4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**4.1. Descriptive statistics**

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize undergraduate students’ reading behaviors, genre preferences, and reading performance, providing a foundational overview of literacy patterns within the sample and informing subsequent inferential analyses. Reading performance scores ranged from 5 to 25, with a mean of 20.52 (SD=4.71), indicating generally moderate to high proficiency. Quartile values (Q1=20, median=22, Q3=24) showed limited variability, with most students scoring in the higher range. Few participants demonstrated low reading performance, as shown in Table 1.

Analysis of reading habits showed variation in daily reading duration, with most students reading only 10 minutes to 1 hour per day, indicating limited sustained engagement. This reflects digital-age reading patterns characterized by brief reading intervals, which may affect comprehension depth and long-term literacy development. Figure 1 illustrates genre preference distribution and the overall score distribution appears in Figure 2.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of reading performance

Statistic	Value	Statistic	Value
N	342	25th percentile	20
Mean	20.52	Median	22
SD	4.71	75th percentile	24
Minimum	5	Maximum	25

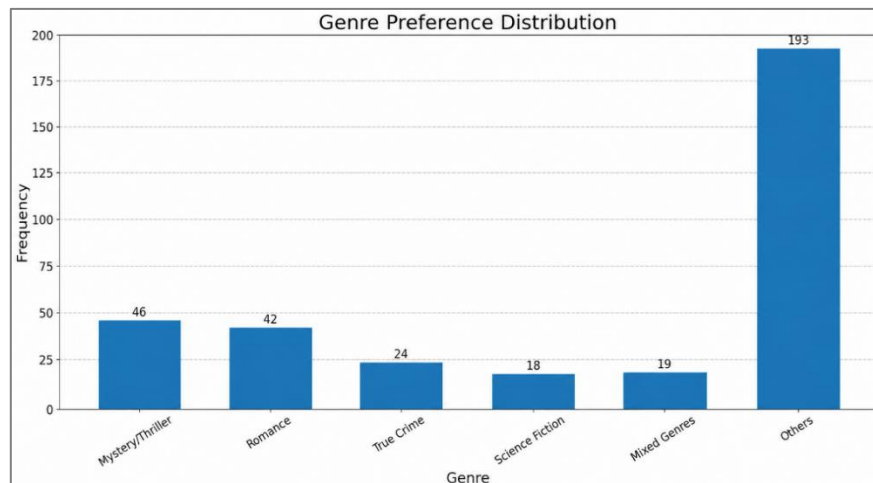


Figure 1. Distribution of genre preferences

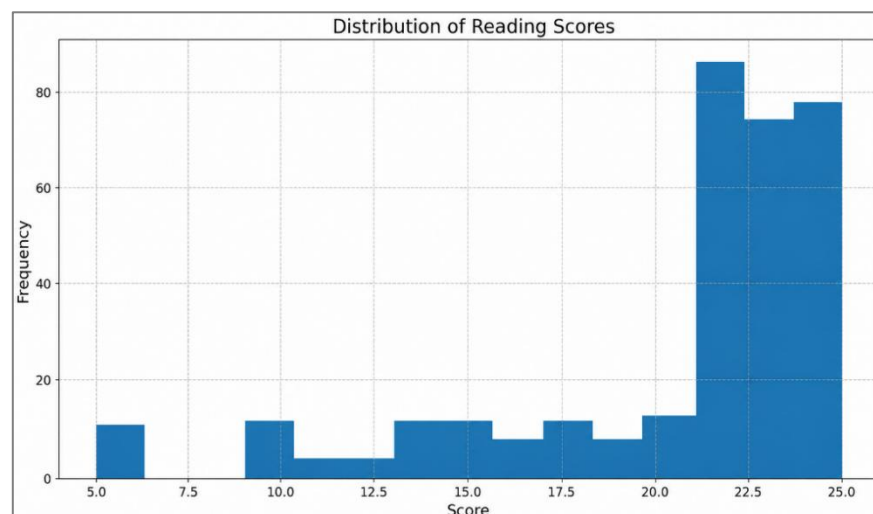


Figure 2. Distribution of reading performance scores

Newspaper reading was low, with 71.3% reporting rarely, 22.5% none, and 6.1% daily, as shown in Table 2. Preference favored cognitively engaging genres—especially mystery/thriller, followed by romance, true crime, and science fiction—forming a key comparison variable. These patterns indicate limited informational reading alongside selective genre engagement. This expanded descriptive overview provides a clear foundation for the hypothesis testing and regression analyses that follow. It outlines key behavioral trends and highlights the diversity in students' reading practices, offering insight into how these factors may contribute to variations in reading performance across the undergraduate population.

Table 2. Newspaper reading frequency

Response	Count	Percentage (%)
Rarely	244	71.3
No	77	22.5
Daily	21	6.1

## 4.2. Hypothesis testing

A series of inferential tests were conducted to evaluate the study's hypotheses regarding demographic differences and behavioral relationships.

### 4.2.1. H1: gender differences in reading performance

An independent samples t-test revealed no statistically significant difference between male and female students' reading scores ( $p=0.44$ ). Although females scored slightly higher on average, the effect size (Cohen's  $d=0.43$ ) indicated a small-to-medium practical difference. Thus, H1 was not supported.

### 4.2.2. H2: medium of instruction and reading performance

Due to the extremely uneven distribution of participants—nearly all students were English-medium educated—statistical comparisons could not be meaningfully conducted. Thus, H2 was not tested.

### 4.2.3. H3: department-wise differences

A one-way ANOVA was used to determine whether academic department influenced reading scores. The results showed no significant differences among students from different departments ( $p=0.56$ ). Thus, H3 was not supported.

### 4.2.4. H4: daily reading duration and newspaper reading relationship

A Spearman's correlation analysis revealed a small but significant positive association between daily reading duration and newspaper-reading frequency ( $\rho=0.146$ ,  $p=0.0068$ ). Students who read for longer durations tended to engage slightly more with newspapers. Thus, H4 was supported.

### 4.2.5. H5: genre preference and reading performance

Using Welch's t-test, the study found a highly significant difference between analytic-genre readers and entertainment-genre readers ( $t=7.98$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). Students who preferred analytic genres demonstrated substantially higher performance, with a very large effect size (Cohen's  $d=1.36$ ). Thus, H5 was strongly supported.

Table 3 presents the results of the hypothesis tests conducted to examine the influence of demographic and behavioral factors on students' reading performance. Figure 3 compares reading scores between analytic-genre and entertainment-genre readers, showing significantly higher performance among students who prefer analytic genres such as mystery/thriller, true crime, and science fiction. These genres demand inference, prediction, synthesis, and critical reasoning, which likely enhance comprehension. In contrast, entertainment genres require less analytical processing. The visual difference highlights the strong influence of genre preference and underscores the value of promoting cognitively engaging reading materials in higher education.

Table 3. Summary of hypothesis test results

Hypothesis	Statistical test	Result	Interpretation
H1	t-test	$p=0.44$	Not supported
H2	—	—	Not tested (unequal groups)
H3	ANOVA	$p=0.56$	Not supported
H4	Spearman's $\rho$	$0.146$ , $p=0.0068$	Supported
H5	Welch's t-test	$t=7.98$ , $p<0.001$	Strongly supported

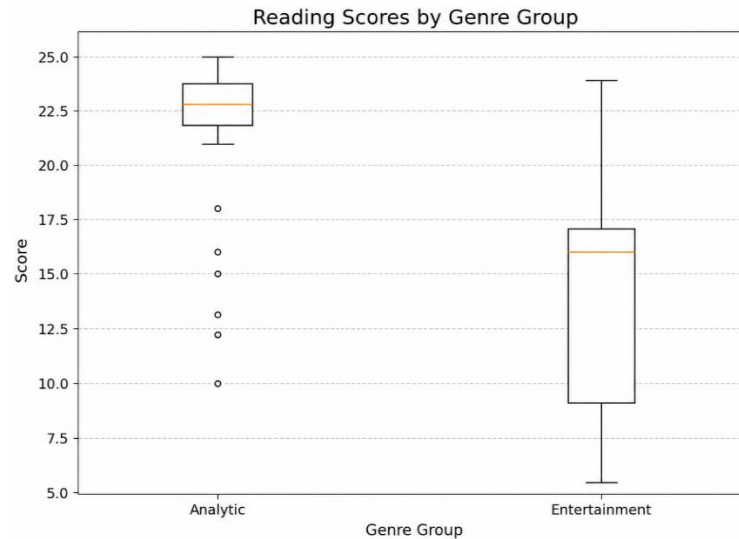


Figure 3. Comparison of reading scores between analytic-genre and entertainment-genre readers

**4.3. Regression analysis**

Multiple regression analysis identified genre preference as the strongest predictor of reading performance ( $p < 0.001$ ). Daily reading duration showed a small positive effect, while newspaper reading had minimal influence. Overall, the model highlights that behavioral factors—especially genre choice—play a key role in undergraduate reading performance. Table 4 presents the unstandardized regression coefficients for predictors of reading performance. The intercept ( $B = 12.80$ ) indicates baseline moderate proficiency. Genre preference was the strongest predictor ( $B = 7.05$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), followed by daily reading duration ( $B = 0.90$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Newspaper reading was not significant ( $B = -0.27$ ,  $p = 0.531$ ), suggesting limited influence on comprehension in this context.

Table 5 summarizes the model’s explanatory strength. The correlation coefficient ( $R = 0.572$ ) indicates a moderate relationship between predictors and reading performance, while  $R^2 = 0.327$  shows that 32.7% of performance variance is explained. The adjusted  $R^2$  of 0.321 confirms sustained explanatory power after correcting for predictors, highlighting genre preference and reading duration as meaningful determinants of reading achievement. Table 6 presents the ANOVA summary assessing overall model significance. Genre preference is highly significant ( $F = 143.08$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and contributes most to explained variance, while daily reading duration is also significant ( $F = 18.29$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Newspaper reading is not significant ( $F = 0.39$ ,  $p = 0.531$ ). The residual variance (5094.31) indicates remaining unexplained individual differences, typical in social science research.

Table 4. Regression coefficients

Predictor	B (unstandardized coefficient)	Std. Error	t-value	p-value	95% CI lower	95% CI upper
Constant	12.80	0.73	17.53	<0.001	11.36	14.23
Genre code (1=analytic, 0=entertainment)	7.05	0.59	11.96	<0.001	5.89	8.21
Daily reading duration	0.90	0.21	4.28	<0.001	0.48	1.31
Newspaper reading	-0.27	0.44	-0.63	0.531	-1.14	0.59

Table 5. Model summary

Model statistic	Value
R	0.572
R <sup>2</sup>	0.327
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.321

Table 6. ANOVA summary for the regression model

Source	Sum of squares	df	F-value	p-value
Genre preference (genre_code)	2156.53	1	143.08	<0.001
Daily reading duration (read_num)	275.60	1	18.29	<0.001
Newspaper reading (news_num)	5.92	1	0.39	0.531
Residual	5094.31	338	—	—

Figure 4 shows a clear upward shift in reading scores for analytic-genre readers compared to entertainment-genre readers. The regression line confirms a strong positive relationship ( $B=7.05$ ), highlighting the practical impact of genre preference on comprehension. Table 7 presents bivariate correlations among key variables. Reading score shows a strong positive correlation with genre preference ( $r=0.539$ ) and weak positive correlations with daily reading ( $r=0.155$ ) and newspaper reading ( $r=0.159$ ). Low inter-predictor correlations confirm absence of multicollinearity and support regression inclusion.

The variance inflation factor (VIF) values reported in Table 8 are all well below typical cutoffs ( $VIF < 5$ ), confirming that multicollinearity is not a concern in this regression analysis. Genre preference ( $VIF=1.10$ ), daily reading ( $VIF=1.05$ ), and newspaper reading ( $VIF=1.13$ ) operate independently in predicting reading performance. Figure 5 reveals no funneling or curvature, confirming adequate model fit and absence of heteroscedasticity or nonlinearity, supporting reliable interpretation.

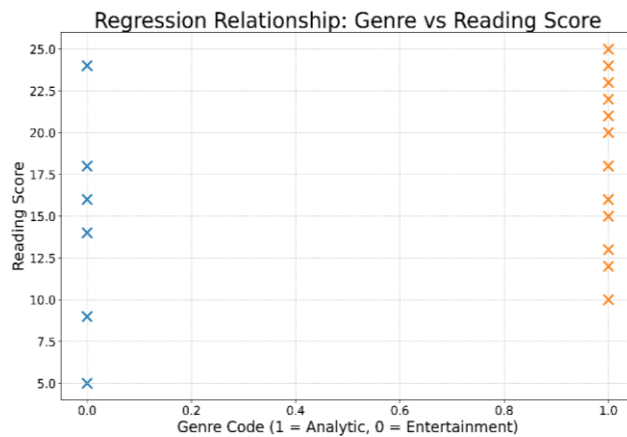


Figure 4. Scatterplot illustrating the relationship between genre preference (analytic vs. entertainment) and reading performance, with regression line indicating predictive strength

Table 7. Correlation matrix

Variable	Score	Genre code	Daily reading (read_num)	Newspaper reading (news_num)
Score	1.000	0.539	0.155	0.159
Genre code	0.539	1.000	-0.062	0.272
Daily reading	0.155	-0.062	1.000	0.188
Newspaper reading	0.159	0.272	0.188	1.000

Table 8. Multicollinearity diagnostics

Variable	VIF
Constant	12.09
Genre Code	1.10
Daily Reading (read_num)	1.05
Newspaper Reading (news_num)	1.13

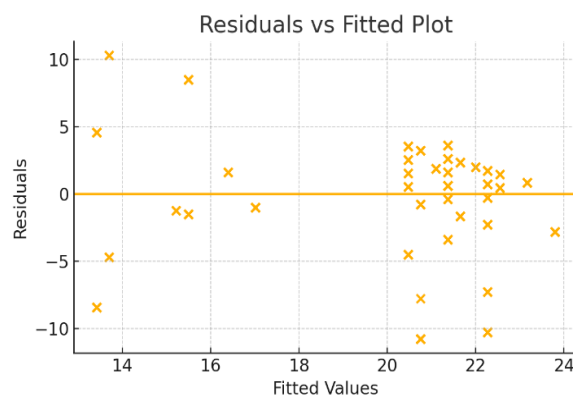


Figure 5. Residuals vs. fitted values plot

#### 4.4. Discussion

This study provides empirical evidence on how reading habits, genre preferences, and behavioral engagement shape undergraduate reading performance. The findings extend prior scholarship emphasizing the role of sustained reading practices in literacy development and academic success [1], [2], while also responding to concerns regarding changing digital-age reading behaviors [3], [4]. First, the strong association between regular reading engagement and comprehension performance supports earlier work demonstrating that consistent reading enhances vocabulary, inferencing ability, and academic achievement [5]–[8], [13]–[15]. This confirms that reading frequency remains a central determinant of literacy outcomes across educational contexts. Second, the dominant predictive role of genre preference aligns with cognitive and transactional theories of reading [9], [31], which propose that meaning construction depends on active interaction with text structures. Students who preferred analytically demanding genres achieved significantly higher comprehension scores, consistent with evidence that complex narrative genres stimulate inferential reasoning and deeper processing [19], [20]. This finding also complements motivation-based perspectives showing that engagement with meaningful texts strengthens comprehension growth [16], [17].

Third, the positive influence of daily reading duration reinforces Krashen's exposure-based model [12] and empirical findings linking sustained reading routines to academic success [13], [14]. Although smaller than genre effects, this relationship highlights the cumulative role of reading consistency in literacy development. Fourth, the non-significant effect of newspaper reading reflects global shifts toward digital and short-form reading practices [22], [24], [32], [33], where informational reading may occur in fragmented formats that limit deep comprehension. Similar declines in traditional reading engagement among students have been reported across regions [23], [27]. Fifth, the absence of demographic differences supports evidence that reading motivation and behavioral engagement outweigh structural factors such as gender or discipline [25], [34]. This indicates that literacy development is primarily shaped by students' reading practices rather than demographic background. Collectively, the moderate explanatory power of the regression model confirms that reading performance is multidimensional, influenced by behavioral, motivational, and contextual variables [26], [35].

##### 4.4.1. Contributions and practical implications

**Practical contribution:** the findings highlight the value of promoting analytically rich genres and sustained reading routines within higher education curricula to strengthen comprehension and academic literacy. **Theoretical contribution:** the study integrates cognitive-genre theory, motivation-engagement frameworks, and behavioral literacy models into a unified empirical explanation of undergraduate reading performance. By combining descriptive statistics, inferential testing, and regression modeling within a single institutional dataset, the research demonstrates a replicable quantitative framework for analyzing literacy behaviors in higher education.

The findings suggest important implications for higher education. Integrating cognitively demanding texts, structured reading programs, and guided discussions can enhance comprehension and critical thinking. Promoting consistent reading habits through dedicated time and diverse resources is essential. As demographic effects were minimal, behavior-focused literacy interventions and coordinated evidence-based policies are key to improving undergraduate reading engagement and success.

#### 4.5. Limitations

This study has several limitations. Its cross-sectional design limits causal interpretation of the observed relationships. The use of a single institutional sample may restrict generalizability to broader undergraduate populations. Key reading behaviors were self-reported, introducing potential response bias. Genre classification into analytic and entertainment categories may oversimplify individual preferences. Additionally, the absence of longitudinal data prevents assessment of changes in reading habits and performance over time.

### 5. CONCLUSION

This study examined undergraduate students' reading habits, genre preferences, and reading performance, highlighting key behavioral factors influencing literacy development in higher education. Findings revealed that genre preference was the strongest predictor of reading performance, with students favoring analytically demanding genres—such as mystery/thriller, true crime, and science fiction—achieving significantly higher comprehension scores. Daily reading duration also contributed positively, underscoring the value of consistent reading routines, though its effect was smaller. Newspaper-reading frequency showed no significant influence, likely reflecting limited engagement with informational texts.

No significant differences emerged across gender or academic departments, indicating that behavioral engagement rather than demographic factors shapes reading outcomes. These results emphasize the importance of promoting cognitively rich genres and sustained reading practices in curricula. Future

research should incorporate qualitative approaches and broader, multi-institutional samples to deepen understanding of reading motivation and literacy development in higher education.

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This journal uses the Contributor Roles Taxonomy (CRediT) to recognize individual author contributions, reduce authorship disputes, and facilitate collaboration.

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C : Conceptualization

M : Methodology

So : Software

Va : Validation

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Vi : Visualization

Su : Supervision

P : Project administration

Fu : Funding acquisition

### CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

Authors state no conflict of interest.

### INFORMED CONSENT

We have obtained informed consent from all individuals included in this study.

### DATA AVAILABILITY

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, [KKN], upon reasonable request.




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


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