

Examining how undergraduate students view reading and its significance

**Author:**Madoda P. Cekiso¹ **Affiliation:**

¹Department of Applied Languages, Faculty of Humanities, Tshwane University of Technology, Pretoria, South Africa

Corresponding author:Madoda Cekiso,
cekisomp@tut.ac.za**Dates:**

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Background: Low literacy levels have been demonstrated by several university students, which has impacted their academic achievement. To solve this issue, prior research indicates that a positive attitude typically translates into better academic performance, whereas a negative attitude towards reading will have the opposite effect. Research shows that low reading proficiency from school, a lack of intrinsic motivation, restricted access to reading resources, and a lack of a reading culture at home are the root causes of South African university students' negative attitudes towards reading.

Objectives: Thus, the goal of the current study was to determine how students felt about reading and its importance in their academic lives.

Method: The study used a case study design and was qualitative in nature. Twenty-four students who were conveniently chosen were given an open-ended questionnaire. The data were analysed using content analysis.

Results: Depending on whether the reading material was relevant to their interests, students' responses varied. The reading material's cognitive demands had an impact on students' attitudes towards reading as well. The findings also demonstrated that all students believed that reading was an essential component of their academic careers and a life skill.

Conclusion: Literacy practitioners must create inclusive learning environments and select a range of resources to fit their students' interests, to foster a positive attitude and enhance academic performance.

Contribution: The study contributes to the body of research on how one's attitude towards reading affects behaviours such as reading intention and determination.

Keywords: reading; reading attitude; academic performance; correlation; reading interest.

Introduction

In higher education settings where English is the official language of instruction, students worldwide are expected to read, understand, and learn from an increasing number of English-language texts (Erikson 2023). However, according to Boakye and Adika (2020), several university students have demonstrated low literacy levels, which have negatively impacted their academic performance. Students must understand the importance of reading and their own potential as readers to be engaged readers, according to McGeown and Smith (2024). The authors go on to say that readers who are engaged are those who have interests, aspirations, and beliefs that motivate them to put in the effort necessary to become literate. Pilgrim and Martinez (2013) define literacy as the ability to read and write well in a range of situations. According to Rintaningrum (2009), literacy not only promotes learning and personal growth, but also results in success in both school and life for the individual. Since the current study solely focuses on reading, literacy in this context refers to the capacity to read successfully in a variety of settings. Therefore, it is essential to better understand how students feel about the reading process. Previous research shows that there is a correlation between attitudes and academic achievement, with a positive attitude typically translating into better academic performance (Abdullah et al. 2015; Dagnev 2017; Diez-Palomar et al. 2020; Mao et al. 2021; Maseka, Hong & Wang 2024). Subsequently, lecturers are increasingly concerned with students' attitudes towards reading. For instance, McGeown and Smith (2024) state that one of the primary goals of any classroom reading lesson is to foster a positive attitude towards reading. Furthermore, Muchtar (2015) notes that lecturers should understand that enhancing students' attitudes towards reading is just as crucial as enhancing their reading comprehension. Rafi, Islam and Cahyani (2021), who carried out a study to ascertain whether there is a significant correlation between students' attitudes and their reading

comprehension results, support this viewpoint. The findings of their study indicate a positive relationship between students' reading attitudes and their reading comprehension. Another similar study was conducted by Baba and Affendiz (2020), who studied how students feel about reading. The goal of the article was to learn more about the reading attitudes of the Faculty of Education students at the Universiti Teknologi MARA in Malaysia. The results of the study indicate that, in terms of student preference and accessibility, digital resources are preferred over printed texts. Researchers have distinguished positive and negative attitudes towards reading. A positive attitude towards reading serves as a motivating stimulus that promotes and facilitates learning, whereas a negative attitude towards reading has the opposite effect (Akhmetova, Imambayeva & Csapo 2022; Moneba & Lovitos 2024).

Lecturers frequently overlook the part that student attitudes play in the literacy process, despite evidence that attitudes are important in increasing students' interest in reading (Davis & Bernadowski 2024). Muchtar (2015) supports this viewpoint by pointing out that, despite lecturers' frequent recognition of the importance of students' attitudes towards reading, universities spend little time cultivating positive reading attitudes. This is a regrettable circumstance, because in countries such as South Africa, there is widespread indignation regarding university students who lack the ability to read for meaning (Andrianatos 2019; Bharuthram 2012; Cekiso 2024; Cekiso, Boakye & Olifant 2025). The results of studies that sought to explore university students' attitudes towards reading are mixed. For example, some studies showed that students demonstrated positive attitudes towards reading (Divya & Mohamed 2020; Octavianti, Retnaningdyah & Munir 2023), while other studies revealed that students have negative attitudes towards reading (Mumba & Sultana-Muchindu 2024). All the above-mentioned studies were conducted outside of South Africa's boundaries. For example, Octavianti et al. (2023) study was conducted at the Universitas Negeri Surabaya in Indonesia. Divya and Mohamed's (2020) study was conducted at the University of Calicut in India. Even though reading attitudes, especially if they are positive, play a facilitating role regarding reading comprehension, the research results on the issue are mixed. For instance, a study by Sur and Unal (2023) aimed to investigate how reading attitudes and engagement affect the success of reading skills, as well as how reading attitude functions as a mediator in the relationship between reading engagement and reading comprehension skills. According to the study, reading attitude has no discernible impact on reading comprehension, but reading engagement has a significant and positive impact.

Although there is some literature on the reading habits of undergraduate students in South Africa, there is notably little that focuses on how students feel about reading in general and its significance in their lives. More generally, research tends to concentrate on reading habits and strategies (Bharuthram 2017; Cekiso et al. 2025; Soliba et al. 2020) and

the effects of reading programmes (Chimenya 2025; Livingstone et al. 2015). As a result, research is required to understand how students view reading, and to create interventions that strengthen the reading culture in higher education institutions. The study aimed to address the following two research questions to accomplish this goal:

- How does the selected group of students feel about reading in English?
- What role does reading play in the students' academic lives?

Literature review

Muchtar (2015) defined attitudes as a predisposition or a tendency to react favourably or unfavourably to a particular concept, item, individual, or circumstance. The author went on to say that a person's attitude affects their decision-making and how they react to obstacles, rewards, and incentives. The phrase 'reading attitudes' refers to the emotional disposition, perceptions and beliefs individuals hold about reading and its related activities (Soliba et al. 2020). Similarly, Sur and Unal (2023) define reading attitude as a mental status accompanied by feelings about reading, leading a student to embrace or avoid the act of reading. This perspective supports Muchtar's (2015) assertion that students' attitudes towards reading have a significant impact on how much they read, whether positively or negatively. Similar findings on the influence of students' attitudes towards reading were obtained by Sukarni (2019). The article investigates the level of the students' reading attitude and examine its influence on their reading comprehension in an undergraduate programme of English at Muhammadiyah Purworejo University in Indonesia. The findings reveal that reading attitude influences reading comprehension.

Positive attitudes towards reading are a strong predictor of students' success in language acquisition and general academic achievement, according to recent studies (Buterbaugh 2021; Hasam 2024; Nureldeen et al. 2024). According to these studies, a favourable attitude towards reading encourages more participation in reading-related activities, results in more reading time, and eventually enhances vocabulary, reading comprehension, and other general skills.

First, through influencing factors such as practice and engagement, attitude affects the level of skill that a person eventually achieves. Second, a bad attitude can lead someone, regardless of whether they are a fluent reader or a struggling reader, to decide not to read when other options are available. Since reading attitudes can change over time due to various factors (Nootens 2019), creating students' awareness about the connection between reading habits and academic success is the key. Moreover, students should be motivated and challenged to read.

Recent research on encouraging university students to read suggests emphasising intrinsic motivation by making

reading engaging, relevant, and personalised, as well as by providing text selection and chances for autonomous problem-solving (Bergman 2024; Kheang & Em 2025).

According to Muchtar (2015), attitudes towards reading can be divided into three facets. The first characteristic of an attitude is its focus, which refers to opinions on subjects or problems. Second, direct or indirect experience with a subject shapes attitude. Third, opinions generally lie on a spectrum that ranges from completely positive at one end to completely negative at the other. Since positive reading attitudes can be a result of reading skills rather than a cause of them, or because other factors such as engagement, reading strategies, and background knowledge play a crucial role, it is not always the case that they improve comprehension, as was already mentioned in the introduction (Bergman 2024; Yengusie, Endale & Akele 2025).

Similar results were obtained by Boshoff (2023), who examined the reading habits and attitudes of pre-service teachers who oversee early literacy development. The purpose of the study was to ascertain the attitudes and reading habits of pre-service teachers. The English Reading Attitudes Survey (ERAS) was created as the data collection tool to investigate the reading habits and attitudes of pre-service teachers. The results show that while most pre-service teachers had positive attitudes towards reading, they do not engage in extensive or leisure reading, and their attitudes did not correspond with their reading practices.

Van den Branden (2012) notes that attitudes towards reading are influenced by several factors. The author states that the child's upbringing is one of the contributing factors. Reading attitude is another factor that influences reading ability, Van den Branden continues. According to the author, when students fall behind and stop reading at grade level, they find assignments more difficult, frustrating, and overwhelming.

Reading consistently throughout life has been linked to the development of a positive attitude towards reading (Akhmetova et al. 2022; Kush & Watkins 1996; Nonte, Hartwich & Willems 2018; Walberg 2015). According to Alqahtari (2024), students must acknowledge the importance of reading and their own potential as readers if they are to become engaged readers. The author defines engaged readers as those who have values, aspirations, and passions that motivate the effort required to become literate. According to the literature mentioned above, students are more likely to succeed academically if they cultivate a positive attitude towards reading.

Rimensberger (2014) declares that little research has been conducted on South African universities students' reading attitudes. Research conducted in South Africa on university students' reading attitudes has frequently shown low reading literacy, especially among students starting university (Boakye & Southey 2021; Cekiso et al. 2025). Although many

students demonstrated a positive attitude towards reading, the findings of these studies have shown that improving home environments to promote reading is necessary, that students only read for tests and exams, and that teaching reading strategies is important to improving reading competency and engagement. There is a dearth of literature in the South African context regarding undergraduate students' attitudes towards reading attitude and its significance in their academic lives, so the current study is likely to contribute to filling that gap.

Theoretical framework

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) served as the foundation for the investigation. According to Ajzen (1991), broadly speaking, the theory is found to have strong empirical support. Attitudes towards the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control can all be used to predict intentions to perform various types of behaviours with high accuracy. It has been demonstrated that appropriate sets of salient behavioural, normative, and control beliefs about behaviour are related to attitudes (Ajzen 1991).

For instance, behavioural beliefs influence a person's attitude towards a behaviour by highlighting the potential consequences of the behaviour. Normative factors influence the subjective norm, which is the perceived social pressure from important people to engage in or abstain from the behaviour. Ajzen (1991) goes on to say that control beliefs are personal convictions regarding the existence of elements that can help or hurt a behaviour's performance. They serve to create perceived behavioural control, which is a person's assessment of how easy or difficult a behaviour is to carry out.

Ajzen (1991) further points out that the intention of the individual to carry out a specific behaviour is a key component of TPB, just as it was in the original theory of reasoned action. As indicators of how hard people are willing to try and how much effort they plan to put forth to perform the behaviour, intentions are thought to capture the motivational factors that influence a behaviour. In general, the likelihood that a behaviour will be performed increases with the strength of the intention to engage in it (Ajzen 1991).

Perceived behavioural control, which is in line with a focus on elements that are directly related to a specific behaviour, is people's assessment of how easy or difficult it is to carry out the behaviour of interest. According to Ajzen (1991), a person may therefore feel that his actions generally determine his results (internal locus of control), but he may also feel that there has little chance of achieving a particular goal (low perceived behavioural control). Moreover, TPB states that intentions and perceived behavioural control work together to determine how a behaviour is performed. This is made possible by numerous requirements that must be fulfilled for an accurate prediction. According to Ajzen and Fishbein (1980), the intention and perceived behavioural control measures need to match the behaviour that needs to be

predicted or be compatible with it. Therefore, the context must be the same as the one in which the behaviour is expected to occur, and the behaviour of interest must be assessed considering intentions and perceptions of control (Ajzen 1988). In the context of university students' reading attitudes, perceived behavioural control (their perceived ability and resources to read), subjective norms (perceived social pressure from important people to read or not), and attitudes towards reading (liking or disliking it) all influence their intentions to read, according to TPB.

Research methods and design

Research approach

This article's research methodology was qualitative. According to Tenny, Brannan and Brannan (2022), qualitative research is a type of study that investigates and provides a deeper understanding of real-world issues. The authors also state that it collects information on participant experiences, perceptions, and behaviour and aids in the generation of hypotheses for further research and comprehension of qualitative data. Since concepts such as experiences, perceptions, and behaviour are pertinent to explaining students' attitudes towards reading, this research approach was deemed appropriate for the current study.

A case study design was chosen in accordance with the qualitative research methodology because the data for this study came from students' perceptions of their attitudes towards reading. Crowe et al. (2011) define a case study as a type of research design that aims to generate a comprehensive, multidimensional understanding of a complex issue within its actual context. A researcher can examine the data in depth in a specific context by using a case study research design. The case study design was deemed suitable for the current investigation since it allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the students' attitudes towards reading.

Data collection

An open-ended questionnaire was used to collect data. Open-ended questionnaires are those that let respondents respond in their own words and can be used to collect qualitative information about people's thoughts, feelings, and experiences (Barnard 2023). It was determined that the open-ended questionnaire was suitable for the current study because it provided respondents with the opportunity to elaborate on details, offer longer responses, express their thoughts, and share their opinions on their attitudes towards reading. Between February and May 2004, the researcher developed an open-ended questionnaire (see Appendix 1) that aligned with the research questions, and sent it to one of the lecturers responsible for the module. The open-ended questionnaire was handed out in class by one of the lecturers teaching the module (Introduction to the study of language and teaching literature). This module's objective is to give students the analytical and critical abilities necessary for a perceptive reading of plays, novels, and poetry. This module was chosen because the researcher had previously taught it

while he was employed at the organisation where the study was carried out. A convenience sample was used to collect data. Golzar, Noor and Tajik (2022) declare convenience sampling, as used in qualitative research, chooses participants who are easily accessible, available, and recruitable rather than using predetermined criteria or random selection.

Research sample

Based on whether they were first-year English majors at the selected university, 65 participants were identified. Out of the 65 participants, 24 voluntarily agreed to participate. McKenna and Kear (2025) defines voluntary participation in research as a situation when people choose to participate in a study voluntarily, free from coercion or pressure, and aware that they can leave at any time without incurring any fees. The principle of informed consent, which requires participants to receive and understand all relevant information about the study to make an entirely independent decision, upholds this fundamental aspect of research ethics. The sample consisted of 9 male and 15 female participants, with ages ranging from 19–34-years-old. Fifteen participants were between 19–20-years-old, six participants were between 26–34-years-old, and three participants were between 26–34-years-old. All of the participants were Black; 17 of them had a rural background, while seven participants had an urban background. Twenty participants were isiXhosa speakers and four were Sesotho speakers. The lecturers who were responsible for the module were isiXhosa and isiZulu language speakers.

Data analysis

Assarroudi et al. (2018) define content analysis as a technique used in qualitative research to systematically interpret and characterise text or other communication data, finding themes, patterns, and meanings to produce a succinct synopsis of the main findings of the data. To comprehend the underlying meanings and contextual significance, it entails systematically coding the data (such as interviews, texts, or media) by segmenting it into smaller parts, assigning 'codes', and then putting related codes into larger categories and, eventually, themes (Nicmanis 2024). To obtain a general grasp of the content and key points of the current study, the author went over the completed questionnaires. Descriptive codes were assigned after the data were divided into smaller units. To create broader categories based on content similarities, related codes were grouped together. To find overarching themes that summarise the data, categories were further grouped. Lastly, illustrative quotes were used to summarise the findings and bolster the themes. All the respondents had done English First Additional Language at high school.

Ethical considerations

An application for full ethical approval was made to the Inter-Faculty Research Ethics Committee, University of Fort Hare and ethics consent was received on 03 November 2023. The ethics approval number is REC-270710-028-RA Level 01.

The goal of the study was explained to the students, and they were informed of their freedom to withdraw from the study at any time. Students were given a consent form to complete, which ensured respondents' confidentiality and anonymity. Students were asked to reveal their age, gender, race, home background (rural or urban), while remaining anonymous.

Results

Based on the themes that emerged from the students' answers to the open-ended questions, the results are presented in this section. The respondents' exact quotes serve as evidence for the author's narratives. This article only includes responses that were insightful and demonstrated how important students thought about their attitudes towards reading. The code 'S' in the data stands for student, and it was used to hide the respondents' identities. Thus, codes such as S1, S2, S3, and so on were used.

Theme 1: Relevance to students' interests

The purpose of the first research question was to find out how the students felt about the reading process. The author departed from the idea that attitudes and feelings are intimately connected. In essence, attitudes are collections of sentiments, convictions, and actions regarding a particular subject. Students' attitudes towards reading were thus reflected in their answers to the question about how they felt about reading. Responding to the question on their feelings towards reading, students demonstrated mixed reactions. Depending on whether the reading material related to their interests, some students showed positive attitudes while others showed negative attitudes. Twelve of the eighteen students said they had a positive attitude towards reading, while six said they had a negative attitude. The students who hold negative attitude towards reading referred to the challenges imposed by a lack of English vocabulary, a lack of interest in the topic at hand, those who feel that the reading process demands too much effort, mental translation from isiXhosa (mother tongue) to English and a lack of love for reading.

Responding to the question on his attitudes towards reading, S4 said:

'Reading is boring if the topic discussed does not interest me. For example, political books, solely about politics, do not interest me, and therefore, I find it boring to read them.' (female, 20-years-old)

S2 expressed a similar sentiment when she indicated:

'Reading is boring because it takes me too much effort to get anything out of the reading process.' (female, 26-years-old)

Responding to the same question, S7 revealed:

'For me, reading is boring in the sense that I do not love reading, and therefore, to me, reading is a waste of time, and it gives me no interest. In other words, reading challenges my mind.' (male, 21-years-old)

As already mentioned above, most students indicated a positive attitude towards reading. To this end, S14 said:

'I enjoy reading. I just have to find the type of readings I love. The type of readings I love is romance and life.'

Responding to the same question, S1 said:

'Reading is really fun if you find a genre you enjoy. It becomes boring to those who do not have a culture of reading developed at a younger age. The more you read, the more you become a better reader, and reading exposes you to new vocabulary and experience.' (female, 27-years-old)

Theme 2: Cognitive demand

Regarding theme 2, students were divided as in theme 1. Again, six students out of eighteen felt that reading was hard, while twelve students indicated that reading was not hard. Those who felt that reading is hard cited the complexity of the English vocabulary, which demands a lot of concentration, and because English is a second language. This view could be linked to the objectives of the module mentioned under methodology that the goal of the module is to equip students with the critical thinking and analytical skills required for a perceptive reading of plays, novels, and poetry. Because the critical thinking and analytical skills require sophisticated cognitive processes that go beyond simple observation and memorisation, such as analysing, synthesising, evaluating, and problem-solving, these skills are considered high-order thinking skills. These sophisticated skills enable the application of knowledge to novel circumstances and the capacity for adaptation in a world that is rich in information. Responding to the question about her feelings on the reading process, S11 revealed:

'Reading is hard because sometimes I fail to think outside of the box, and I let my imagination to go wild. Sometimes, I find it difficult to grasp the written word.' (female, 19-years-old)

S3 said:

'It takes a lot of concentration to read every line and make perfect sense out of the idea the author is trying to convey. Also, reading can be hard if the language used is too advanced, and I need to look up most of the words from the dictionary. This activity delays reading, and sometimes I lose interest in reading further.' (male, 23-years-old)

Expressing a similar response, S6 said:

'It is hard to read in English because it is a second or third language.' (male, 25-years-old)

Theme 3: Reading as a necessity for intellectual growth and advancement

To answer the second research question, which aimed to ascertain how students perceived the role that reading played in their academic lives, the data gathered indicated that all students (24) who participated in the study felt that reading was important to their academic lives. The students emphasised the significance of reading in their academic lives.

They indicated that reading is essential for intellectual development because it improves critical thinking and problem-solving abilities, increases vocabulary and background knowledge, and engages the brain, all of which are critical for learning and career advancement. Additionally, students revealed that reading enhances focus and creativity, cultivates fresh viewpoints and emotional intelligence, and transforms both personal and professional lives. Responding to the question on the role played by reading in his academic life, S18 said:

'Reading is important because it develops our thoughts, gives us endless knowledge and lessons to read while keeping our minds active. Reading books can help us learn, understand, and make us smarter.' (male, 33-years-old)

Responding to the same question, S8 indicated:

'I think reading is very important as it is informative and gives an opportunity to learn new words and gain new knowledge. As a result of this, reading is something I want to practi[s]e more so that even my children would be encouraged to read and excel at school.' (male, 23-years-old)

Expressing a similar sentiment, S13 indicated:

'It is important to read as it expands our knowledge of the world and helps us to know new things. Reading is also important because it is both challenging and motivating.' (female, 32-years-old)

Theme 4: Reading as a skill for acquiring new knowledge

Regarding theme 4, students indicated that reading is a skill for life. This sentiment was expressed by all students (24) who were involved in the study. They emphasised the importance of reading for their future careers, noting that reading in the contemporary world is a pathway to future academic success and broadens one's intellectual capacity. Students reported that reading a text while actively constructing their knowledge boosts their interest and intrinsic motivation to read, which in turn fosters deeper comprehension. Responding to the question on reading as a skill for life, S17 said:

'Life is about expression [*being who you are and by doing the right thing all the time*] and analysing [*observing and then making the right choice on people's decisions and everything*]. Reading provides those two skills, so a person who reads makes it in life by applying these main skills gained from reading.' (female, 34-years-old)

S4 expressed a similar response:

'Reading is an essential skill in life because almost everything around us requires one to be able to read, for example, filling application forms, reading advertisements, etc. In addition, reading is important because it develops our thoughts, gives us endless knowledge and lessons to read while keeping our minds active.' (female, 20-years-old)

Similarly, S1 indicated:

'Reading will help us go far, as it will help us to understand complex documents. It is also a skill for life because it is the only way to understand the world that we live in.' (female, 27-years-old)

Theme 5: Reading as essential for students' academic future

Students revealed that they have a better chance of succeeding academically the more they read. Reading regularly is likely to help students not only to do well academically, but also increase their vocabulary, write better, and develop their critical thinking skills. Responding to the question on reading as a skill for life, S15 said:

'Reading helps me with critical thinking skills and a wealth of vocabulary. It helps us to learn new information that we can utilise in the future I various contexts. If you can read, you can easily understand and be able to communicate orally or in writing.' (female, 24-years-old)

In similar vein, S19 indicated that:

'Reading is important as it expands our knowledge of the world and helps us to know new things. Reading broadens ones' [sic] intellectual capacity.' (male, 22-years-old)

Discussion

The purpose of the study was to investigate how undergraduate students felt about reading and how important it was to their academic lives. The findings showed that students' opinions on the reading process varied. While a minority of students exhibited negative attitudes, most students demonstrated positive attitudes. Some students displayed positive attitudes, while others displayed negative attitudes, depending on how closely the reading material matched their interests. Yulmiati, Zaim and Atmazaki (2021) declare that reading material that is pertinent to students' interests boosts motivation and engagement, resulting in a more thorough and successful educational process. The authors further state that by relating what they are learning to their own experiences and the larger world, students who engage in relevant reading can improve their communication skills, develop empathy, expand their vocabulary, and think critically. This finding is also linked to TPB which was used as a theoretical framework for the current study. This theory stipulates that by positively reinforcing desired behaviours, lecturers can motivate students and increase the likelihood of those behaviours being repeated. At the heart of TPB is the role of attitudes. However, research shows that attitudes do not always translate directly into actions. This view is supported by Yengusie et al. (2025), Bergman (2024) and Boshoff (2023). These authors show that while most students may demonstrate positive attitudes towards reading, they do not engage in extensive or leisure reading, and their attitudes do not correspond with their reading practices. This calls for the consideration of other factors like engagement, reading strategies, background knowledge and other similar factors.

Additionally, the results showed that students varied in how well they responded to cognitive demands. In the context of the current study cognitive demand refers to the level of mental effort, skill and complexity required to engage with a task of reading. As already stated above, the module demanded critical and analytical reading skills. Analytical skills concentrate on methodically dissecting complex data into its constituent parts to comprehend relationships and patterns, whereas critical skills entail evaluating and judging information to form well-reasoned opinions. While analytical thinking concentrates on obtaining, organising, and interpreting data to arrive at logical conclusions, critical thinking aids in challenging presumptions and biases. When combined, these cognitive skills are essential for solving problems, making decisions, and reaching well-informed conclusions in a variety of academic and professional settings. Parrish and Bryd (2022) declare that the consistent implementation of cognitively demanding tasks has been shown to improve students' conceptual understanding of text. Since some students find it difficult to cope with the complexity of certain tasks, the subjective norm which is a crucial part of TPB shows us how our decisions are often influenced by the expectations and opinions of those around us. This theory further points out that if we think that others approve of a behaviour, we are more likely to engage in it, even if we do not feel strongly about it. This is important to encourage those students who do not believe that they can cope with some reading materials as they should be motivated to follow the students who cope.

The study findings also showed that reading is a necessity for intellectual growth and advancement. The results of a similar study by Hicks (2023) indicate that regular reading practices are closely linked to university students' increased intellectual development and academic success, developing critical thinking, vocabulary, and writing skills, all of which are critical for academic success (Hicks 2023).

The findings further showed that reading is a skill for acquiring new knowledge. According to Cornerstone University (2019), reading as a skill for learning new information entails actively and critically interacting with written material to comprehend, interpret, and retain information. Cornerstone University further points out that this helps one expand their vocabulary, broaden their understanding of the world, and improve their capacity for critical thought and reasoning about novel ideas.

Finally, the results revealed that reading is essential for students' future careers. This result is consistent with research findings by Scott and Saaman (2016). The study investigated the attitudes and reading habits of students enrolled in a tertiary institution's intermediate programme as well as any apparent shifts in those attitudes or habits. The study's conclusions demonstrate that students recognise the academic value of reading and that reading instruction seems to be extremely beneficial at the post-secondary level.

Conclusion

To inform lecturers and students about undergraduate students' attitudes towards reading in English, the current study aimed to investigate how undergraduate students perceive the reading process. This relates to the idea that attitudes towards reading are dynamic rather than fixed. Consequently, lecturers would have the chance to identify strategies for fostering a positive reading culture if they had knowledge about students' attitudes towards reading. The study's findings showed that students' attitudes towards reading were generally positive. Few students showed a negative attitude towards reading. Additionally, the results demonstrated that students believed reading was essential to their future academic careers. The findings of the study also showed that students believed reading to be a lifelong skill.

Interest-based reading is a key component of successful learning experiences, as the results of the study show a critical relationship between a student's interest in reading material and their ensuing attitudes, motivation, and engagement. Therefore, to promote a positive attitude and improve academic results, lecturers must design inclusive learning environments and choose a variety of materials to suit the interests of their students. This situation emphasises how crucial affective components such as motivation and attitude are to the learning process.

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Author's contribution

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Data availability

The data that support this study are available from the corresponding author, M.P.C., on reasonable request.

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Appendix 1

Open-ended questionnaire

1. How do you feel about reading in English?
2. What motivates you to read?
3. Do you know why reading is important?
4. Do you know why reading is important for your career?
5. Do you prefer reading texts from certain cultures or backgrounds?
6. How do you feel when you do not understand what you are reading?