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READING RESEARCH ARTICLES AND REPORTS AMONG UNDERGRADUATES AT TWO UNIVERSITIES IN HANOI CITY, VIETNAM

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how often undergraduates read textbooks or course materials and how often the same students read research articles or reports. It reanalyses a June 2026 survey of 239 undergraduates in two university settings in Hanoi, Vietnam. Frequent course reading was reported by 121 students (50.6%), compared with 61 (25.5%) for research reading. Seventy-two students reported frequent course reading only, and 12 reported frequent research reading only (exact McNemar $p < 0.001$). Among frequent readers of course materials, 59.5% did not report frequent research reading. The overall difference remained 25.1 percentage points when occasional reading was included, although 67.4% then reported reading research articles or reports. In a supplementary adjusted model, frequent searching beyond lecturers' reading lists was positively associated with frequent research reading, but this association was sensitive to the reading threshold. The paired findings distinguish occasional contact with research from regular engagement and provide a baseline for assessing coursework that incorporates the reading and discussion of research.

Keywords - academic reading, higher education, independent information seeking, research engagement, Vietnam

1.0 INTRODUCTION

A textbook can introduce students to the concepts they need for a course. A research article or report makes it possible to examine how a claim was investigated, what evidence supports it and what limits the conclusions. Both forms can appear on the same syllabus. A survey that combines them into a single measure of academic reading can obscure the extent to which students regularly encounter each.

Healey [1] argues that linking research and teaching involves engaging students in inquiry as well as communicating research findings. This distinction is relevant to reading. Encountering research in a course creates an opportunity for inquiry if students are asked to examine questions, methods or evidence. In an undergraduate science setting, Hoskins et al. [2] report changes in students' self-assessed readiness to read and analyse articles following structured work with primary literature. Such instructional research motivates asking how often students encounter research texts in other settings. It does not establish the frequency or quality of such reading in Vietnamese programmes.

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Survey evidence from biological sciences shows that readers at different career stages report different difficulties and use different strategies when reading research papers [3]. Reading frequency also deserves separate treatment from comprehension. In a study of first-year university students, Hoeft [4] compared reported completion of assigned readings with evidence of basic comprehension. This distinction informs our choice to interpret frequency as reported engagement with a type of text. In Vietnam, research on students at Hue University has examined reading culture in the context of digital change [5]. The present study complements that line of work by comparing two kinds of academic reading within the same students.

The institutional project from which these data are drawn describes how often students report reading multiple genres [6]. That report provides a baseline for comparing genres across the sample. The present analysis adds two steps: it identifies which reading practices coexist within students and tests whether the difference persists under a broader frequency definition. It asks how often course reading and research reading diverge within the same respondent, and whether frequent searching outside lecturers' lists is associated with frequent research reading after accounting for course reading and student characteristics. It also tests whether the observed pattern depends on the threshold used to define reading frequency.

2.0 ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The texts can shape students' access to research a course assigns, the ease of finding additional sources and the tasks for which those texts are needed. A student may locate a relevant article independently and read it, or may read an article supplied directly by a lecturer. Another student may search extensively for study materials and choose summaries or reference books. Independent searching and research reading are therefore related practices with different content.

The primary contrast compares frequency across genres within the same student. The questionnaire measures textbooks or materials directly serving a course in one item and research articles or research reports in another. The categories can overlap in practice when a lecturer assigns a research report. The comparison concerns which of the two survey items students endorse and how frequently. It cannot identify whether a text was prescribed, whether students understood it, or whether it presented original empirical findings.

3.0 DATA AND METHODS

3.1 Sample and measures

This is a secondary analysis of 239 online survey responses collected in June 2026 as part of a research project led by Le Thi Hoa and administered by the Institute of Sociology and Psychology [6]. The sample consisted of 114 Tourism Culture students at Hanoi University of Culture and 125 students in the Faculty of Sociology and Sustainable Development at Trade Union University. It included 173 women and 66 men. Four students formally in year three who attended classes alongside the second-year cohort were included with that cohort (n = 129). The remaining 110 were in year four. Each university contributed one programme or faculty, so institution and discipline are inseparable in this design.

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The two reading items use the same five frequency categories, from never to very frequently. The main threshold combines frequent and very frequent responses. The research item combines scientific articles and research reports as a single category. Independent searching means frequent or very frequent searching outside lecturers' lists. The model also includes self-rated ability to find material using Google Scholar or academic databases, classified as fairly or very proficient versus lower ratings, and indicators for university setting, gender and year group.

3.2 Analysis

We cross-tabulate the paired reading items and use a two-sided exact McNemar test to compare the proportions. For each threshold, we estimated the paired percentage-point difference and a 95% normal-approximation interval from the standard error of the student-level differences in binary indicators. We also repeated the paired comparison within each university as an exploratory check of whether the pooled pattern appeared in both settings. We fit a logistic regression for frequent research reading with the above covariates and report average adjusted probability differences. These were calculated by changing each binary predictor in turn and averaging the predicted differences across the sample. Confidence intervals use HC1 robust covariance and the delta method. In a sensitivity analysis, the outcome and course-reading comparison both include occasional reading, while the definitions of the searching and proficiency indicators remain fixed. The models use all 239 cases. Inference describes associations within the observed settings and does not account for variation across universities.

4.0 RESULTS

4.1 Paired reading frequencies

Frequent course reading was reported by 121 students (50.6%) and frequent research reading by 61 (25.5%), a paired difference of 25.1 percentage points (95% CI 18.3 to 31.9). Among respondents who met the threshold for only one item, 72 met it for course reading and 12 for research reading (exact McNemar $p < 0.001$). Table 1 shows that 49 students frequently read both. In the group that frequently read course materials, 72 of 121 (59.5%) did not report frequent research reading.

Table 1. Paired frequencies of course reading and research reading

Course reading	Research reading: frequent (n)	Research reading: frequent (%)	Research reading: below threshold (n)	Research reading: below threshold (%)	Total (n)
Frequent	49	40.5	72	59.5	121
Below threshold	12	10.2	106	89.8	118
Total	61	25.5	178	74.5	239

Note. Percentages are calculated within rows. Frequent combines frequent and very frequent responses.

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When occasional reading counted, 221 students (92.5%) reported course reading and 161 (67.4%) reported reading articles or reports. At this threshold, 65 students met it for course reading only and five for research reading only (exact McNemar $p < 0.001$). Thus, the numerical gap in marginal proportions was 25.1 percentage points at both thresholds (95% CI 19.0 to 31.2 at the broader threshold). The absolute level of research engagement differed substantially by threshold. About two-thirds reported at least occasional research reading, while about one-quarter reported frequent research reading.

4.2 Frequency distributions and comparisons by university setting

Table 2 shows where the difference is concentrated. Seventy-eight students (32.6%) reported never or rarely reading research articles or reports, compared with 18 (7.5%) for course materials. The occasional category was identical in size (100 students, 41.8%) for both items. The largest difference was at the frequent category (108 versus 52 students), while 13 and nine students selected the very frequent category.

Table 2. Full distributions of reading frequency

Frequency	Course n	Course %	Research n	Research %
Never	4	1.7	16	6.7
Rarely	14	5.9	62	25.9
Occasionally	100	41.8	100	41.8
Frequently	108	45.2	52	21.8
Very frequently	13	5.4	9	3.8

Note. Percentages use the full sample (N = 239) for each reading item.

At Hanoi University of Culture, 36 of 114 students (31.6%) reported frequent course reading and 12 (10.5%) reported frequent research reading, a difference of 21.1 percentage points. Among discordant pairs, 30 reported frequent course reading alone and six reported frequent research reading alone (exact McNemar $p < 0.001$). At Trade Union University, the corresponding proportions were 68.0% (85/125) and 39.2% (49/125), a difference of 28.8 points. The discordant counts were 42 and six ($p < 0.001$). The direction was consistent across the two surveyed settings. These within-setting tests do not assess whether the size of the gap differs between settings.

4.3 Adjusted correlates of frequent research reading

In Table 3, frequent course reading was associated with a 21.9-percentage-point higher predicted probability of frequent research reading (95% CI 11.5 to 32.4). Frequent independent searching was associated with an 11.1-point higher probability (0.7 to 21.5). The estimate for self-rated searching proficiency was 0.5 points (-9.9 to 10.9). The model also showed differences between the two university settings (20.1 points, 9.8 to 30.5), which may reflect differences in programme, coursework, student selection or other factors.

Table 3. Adjusted probability differences for research reading

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Predictor	Frequent (pp)	95% CI	At least occasional (pp)	95% CI
Course reading at corresponding threshold	21.9	11.5 to 32.4	20.1	-2.1 to 42.4
Frequent independent searching	11.1	0.7 to 21.5	-8.9	-20.1 to 2.4
Higher self-rated search proficiency	0.5	-9.9 to 10.9	10.7	-0.9 to 22.3
Trade Union University setting	20.1	9.8 to 30.5	34.8	23.4 to 46.2
Women	2.2	-8.5 to 12.9	-3.2	-16.3 to 9.8
Fourth-year group	-7.4	-17.2 to 2.3	-9.1	-20.1 to 1.9

Note. N = 239 in both models. Each model includes all predictors shown. Reference categories are the lower-frequency or proficiency group, Hanoi University of Culture, men and the second-year group. pp = percentage points.

When occasional reading was included, the course-reading association remained positive at 20.1 points, with a wide interval (-2.1 to 42.4). Only 18 respondents fell below the broadened course-reading threshold. The independent searching estimate was -8.9 points (-20.1 to 2.4) at this threshold. This sensitivity result limits the interpretation of the main association to frequent research reading in the primary specification. Differences between coefficients across thresholds were not formally tested.

5.0 DISCUSSION

The paired data show that regular course reading and regular research reading can coexist, but that many students report the former alone. The result adds to the descriptive project report [6] by identifying which practices coexist within respondents. The broader threshold also indicates that occasional contact with research is more common than the main classification alone might suggest. For teaching, this distinction separates the question of introducing research texts from that of making reading them a recurring activity.

Independent searching may give students opportunities to encounter research, while students already familiar with reading articles may be more likely to look for additional materials. Course assignments and curriculum can influence both behaviours. The primary model cannot distinguish these explanations. Moreover, the estimate is sensitive to how reading frequency is defined. Self-rated search proficiency also has an imprecise association. These results give little basis for treating search instruction alone as sufficient for more regular research reading. One practical implication is to make repeated encounters with research visible in course design. A course could start by pairing a textbook passage with a short research report on the same question. Students could identify the research question, describe how the evidence was produced and discuss one limitation. A subsequent assignment could ask students to locate and compare a second study. This connects source discovery to the active engagement emphasised by Healey [1] and structured work with articles illustrated by Hoskins et al. [2]. An evaluation could separately track reading frequency and students' ability to interpret evidence [4]. Given the variation in strategies reported across stages of academic experience [3], course teams could also record which parts of a paper students find difficult before choosing how to guide them.

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The sample was purposively drawn from two settings, and all reading measures are self-reported. The design does not identify assignment requirements, prior experience, language of reading, or whether a particular text is primary research. It also cannot establish temporal ordering. Future studies could link student responses to assigned reading lists, observe changes over a semester and include multiple programmes per university to separate discipline from institutional context.

6.0 CONCLUSION

In both surveyed university settings in Hanoi, students reported reading textbooks or course materials more often than research articles or reports. The paired comparisons supported the expectation that course reading was more prevalent than research reading at both frequency thresholds. Many regular readers of course materials did not read research texts regularly, although occasional engagement with research was common.

The evidence for the expected positive association between independent searching and research reading depended on the reading threshold. After adjustment for course reading and student characteristics, students who frequently searched beyond lecturers' reading lists were more likely to report frequent research reading. When occasional reading was included in the outcome, the analysis did not provide clear evidence of a positive association. The findings apply to self-reported reading in the two surveyed settings, and the cross-sectional design leaves the direction of the association unresolved.

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