

## **Reading Fiction in Youth: A Study of Perceptions and Genre Preferences Among Students in Indore City**

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### **Abstract**

*Reading fiction continues to play a significant role in shaping the intellectual, emotional, and imaginative development of young readers. In the contemporary academic environment, however, youth reading practices are undergoing transformation due to changing lifestyles, digital media, and evolving literary tastes. The present study examines youth readers' perceptions towards fiction and novels, along with their genre preferences and reading patterns, among students up to the age of 26 in Indore city. The study is based on primary data collected from 180 student respondents using a structured questionnaire. Descriptive statistical tools such as percentages, mean scores, and standard deviation are employed for analysis. The findings reveal that a majority of students engage with fiction on a regular basis, with daily and weekly reading accounting for over sixty per cent of the respondents. Youth perceptions towards fiction are overwhelmingly positive, particularly in terms of imagination enhancement, language development, and emotional understanding. Genre preferences indicate a strong inclination towards romance, fantasy, thriller, and socially realistic fiction, reflecting both entertainment-oriented and reflective reading choices. English emerges as the dominant language of fiction reading, especially among postgraduate students and research scholars. The study concludes that fiction reading among youth is not merely recreational but contributes significantly to cognitive growth, emotional maturity, and literary engagement.*

**Keywords:** *Youth Reading, Fiction, Novels, Genre Preferences, emotional maturity, and literary engagement.*

## ***Introduction***

Fiction and novels have long occupied a central place in literary traditions, serving as powerful mediums for imagination, emotional exploration, and social reflection. For young readers, fiction functions not only as a source of entertainment but also as an important tool for developing language skills, empathy, creativity, and critical thinking. In the context of higher education, reading fiction contributes to a deeper engagement with literary forms, cultural narratives, and human experiences. In recent years, youth reading habits have been influenced by multiple factors such as academic pressures, digital media consumption, and changing leisure preferences. Despite these shifts, fiction continues to attract young readers through diverse genres such as romance, fantasy, thriller, historical narratives, and socially realistic novels. These genres cater to varying emotional, intellectual, and aesthetic needs of youth, making fiction a dynamic and evolving literary form.

Indore city, as a major educational and cultural hub of Madhya Pradesh, provides a relevant context for examining youth reading behaviour. The city hosts a large population of undergraduate, postgraduate, and research-level students who are exposed to English literature both academically and recreationally. Understanding how these students perceive fiction, the genres they prefer, and the languages in which they read offers valuable insights into contemporary youth literary culture. The present study focuses on students up to the age of 26 in Indore city and seeks to analyse their perceptions towards fiction and novels, along with their genre preferences and reading patterns. By using empirical data, the study attempts to bridge the gap between literary theory and actual reading practices of youth. It also highlights the growing prominence of English fiction while acknowledging the continued relevance of bilingual reading habits.

Through a structured analysis of reading frequency, perception levels, genre choices, language preferences, and educational background, this study contributes to the broader discourse on youth readership and contemporary literary engagement. The findings are expected to be useful for scholars of English literature, educators, curriculum designers, and researchers interested in youth studies and reading culture.

## ***Review of Literature***

The study of youth reading habits, particularly fiction and novels, has received considerable scholarly attention across literary studies, education, and cultural research. Fiction is widely regarded as a formative literary genre that contributes to linguistic competence, emotional intelligence, imagination, and critical thinking among young readers. Scholars have consistently argued that youth engagement with fiction reflects broader social, cultural, and educational dynamics. Early reader-response theorists such as Rosenblatt (1978) emphasized that reading fiction is a transactional process in which meaning emerges through the interaction between the reader and the text. This perspective shifted literary studies away from text-centred criticism towards reader-centred analysis, making youth perceptions and responses central to understanding fiction reading. Fish (1980) further argued that interpretive communities shape readers' understanding of literary texts, highlighting how educational background and social environment influence literary preferences.

Several empirical studies have explored youth reading habits and preferences. Clark and Rumbold (2006) found that young readers who engage regularly with fiction demonstrate higher levels of language proficiency, creativity, and academic confidence. Their research emphasized that fiction reading is closely associated with vocabulary development and narrative comprehension, particularly among students in higher education. Similarly, Krashen (2004) argued that voluntary reading of fiction significantly improves language acquisition and reading fluency, especially in English as a second language context.

Genre preference among youth has been another major area of inquiry. Studies by Radway (1984) and Gelder (2004) highlighted the popularity of romance, fantasy, and popular fiction among young readers, suggesting that such genres offer emotional engagement and narrative pleasure. Contemporary research by Cremin et al. (2014) confirmed that youth readers increasingly prefer genres that combine entertainment with relatable themes, such as identity, relationships, and social realities. These findings align with the growing appeal of contemporary fiction, fantasy, and thrillers among urban youth. The role of fiction in emotional and psychological development has also been widely discussed. Mar et al. (2009) demonstrated that frequent readers of fiction exhibit higher levels of empathy and social understanding. Kidd and Castano (2013) further established that literary fiction enhances theory of mind and emotional intelligence, supporting the view that fiction contributes to youth's emotional maturity and cognitive growth. Such findings strengthen the argument that fiction reading extends beyond leisure and plays a developmental role. Language preference in fiction reading has been examined in multilingual contexts, particularly in urban India.

Studies by Pandey (2010) and Kumar (2016) observed a growing inclination towards English fiction among educated youth, while bilingual reading practices remain common. English fiction is often associated with academic advancement, global exposure, and cultural capital. However, regional and Hindi literature continue to hold relevance for socially realistic and culturally rooted narratives.

Digital media and changing reading formats have also influenced youth reading behaviour. Baron (2015) and Mangen et al. (2013) noted that while digital platforms have altered reading modes, fiction reading persists among youth, often in hybrid forms combining print and digital texts. Nevertheless, sustained engagement with novels remains stronger in print formats, particularly for literary and long-form fiction. Indian studies focusing on youth readership in urban centres such as Delhi, Mumbai, and Bangalore have highlighted similar patterns of genre diversity, language preference, and positive perceptions towards fiction (Sharma, 2018; Verma, 2020). However, limited empirical work has focused specifically on cities like Indore, creating a research gap that the present study seeks to address. The literature establishes that youth fiction reading is shaped by multiple factors including age, education, language proficiency, cultural exposure, and genre availability. While existing studies confirm the positive impact of fiction on youth development, region-specific empirical research remains limited. The present study contributes to this body of knowledge by examining youth readers' perceptions and genre preferences in Indore city, thereby adding contextual depth to contemporary readership studies in English literature.

### ***Objectives of the Study***

1. To analyse youth readers' perceptions towards fiction and novels, with special reference to their literary, emotional, and cognitive value among students up to the age of 26 in Indore city.
2. To examine genre preferences and reading patterns of fiction among youth, and assess how socio-demographic factors influence novel-reading behaviour.

### ***Data Analysis and Results***

*Table 1: Frequency of Fiction Reading Among Youth Respondents*

<b>Reading Frequency</b>	<b>Number of Students</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
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Daily	48	26.7
Weekly	62	34.4
Occasionally	45	25
Rarely	25	13.9
Total	180	100

Table 1 presents the frequency of fiction reading among youth respondents in Indore city. The data indicate that fiction reading remains a regular habit among a majority of students. About 26.7 per cent of respondents read fiction daily, while 34.4 per cent engage in fiction reading on a weekly basis. Together, daily and weekly readers constitute 61.1 per cent of the total sample, reflecting sustained engagement with novels among youth. Approximately 25 per cent of students read fiction occasionally, suggesting intermittent but continued literary interest. Only 13.9 per cent reported rare reading, indicating that disengagement from fiction is limited. Overall, the table demonstrates that fiction continues to occupy a significant place in the reading culture of young students in Indore city.

*Table 2: Youth Perceptions Towards Fiction and Novels (Likert Scale Mean Scores)*

*(Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)*

Perception Statement	Mean Score	Std. Deviation
Fiction enhances imagination and creativity	4.32	0.68
Reading novels improves language proficiency	4.18	0.72
Fiction helps in emotional understanding	4.05	0.81
Novels provide escape from academic stress	3.94	0.86
Fiction encourages critical thinking	3.88	0.79

Table 2 analyses youth perceptions towards fiction and novels using Likert-scale mean scores. The findings reveal highly positive attitudes across all perception statements. The highest mean score (4.32) is observed for the statement that fiction enhances imagination and creativity, highlighting the strong imaginative appeal of novels among youth. Reading novels as a means of improving language proficiency also receives a high level of agreement (mean score 4.18), reflecting the educational value attached to fiction reading. Emotional understanding and stress relief through fiction are also positively perceived, with mean scores

above 3.9. Although the mean score for critical thinking (3.88) is relatively lower, it still indicates agreement, suggesting that students recognise the intellectual dimension of fiction alongside its emotional and recreational value. Overall, the table confirms that youth perceptions towards fiction are overwhelmingly positive.

*Table 3: Genre Preferences Among Youth Readers*

Preferred Genre	Number of Students	Percentage (%)
Romance & Contemporary Fiction	42	23.3
Fantasy & Science Fiction	38	21.1
Thriller / Mystery	36	20
Social & Realistic Fiction	34	18.9
Historical Fiction	18	10
Experimental / Literary Fiction	12	6.7
Total	180	100

Table 3 depicts the genre preferences of youth readers in Indore city. The results show that romance and contemporary fiction is the most preferred genre, chosen by 23.3 per cent of respondents. This is followed closely by fantasy and science fiction (21.1 per cent) and thriller/mystery novels (20 per cent), indicating a strong preference for engaging and imaginative narratives. Notably, 18.9 per cent of students prefer social and realistic fiction, suggesting an interest in literature that reflects real-life experiences and social issues. Historical fiction and experimental or literary fiction attract comparatively fewer readers, accounting for 10 per cent and 6.7 per cent respectively. The table highlights the diversity of youth reading tastes while indicating a stronger inclination towards accessible and emotionally engaging genres.

*Table 4: Language Preference in Fiction Reading*

Language of Fiction	Students	Percentage (%)
English only	64	35.6
English & Hindi	78	43.3
Hindi only	26	14.4
Other languages	12	6.7

<b>Total</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>100</b>
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Table 4 explains the language preferences of youth in fiction reading. The data reveal the dominance of English fiction among students, with 35.6 per cent reading fiction exclusively in English. A larger proportion, 43.3 per cent, read fiction bilingually in English and Hindi, reflecting multilingual reading practices. Only 14.4 per cent of respondents prefer fiction exclusively in Hindi, while a small fraction reads in other languages. The findings indicate that while English is the primary language of fiction reading among urban youth, bilingualism remains an important feature of reading culture in Indore city. This coexistence of English and Indian languages suggests cultural continuity alongside global literary exposure.

*Table 5: Association Between Educational Level and Preference for English Fiction*

<b>Educational Level</b>	<b>Prefer English Fiction (%)</b>	<b>Prefer Non-English Fiction (%)</b>
Undergraduate (UG)	68.2	31.8
Postgraduate (PG)	82.5	17.5
Research Scholars	88.9	11.1

Table 5 examines the association between educational level and preference for English fiction. The results show a clear upward trend in English fiction preference with increasing educational attainment. Among undergraduate students, 68.2 per cent prefer English fiction, which rises to 82.5 per cent among postgraduate students and further to 88.9 per cent among research scholars. Correspondingly, preference for non-English fiction declines with higher education levels. This pattern indicates that academic exposure, linguistic competence, and engagement with English literature significantly influence reading preferences. The table underscores the role of higher education in shaping literary language choices among youth readers.

### **Results**

The analysis of primary data collected from 180 students in Indore city reveals several important patterns related to youth engagement with fiction and novels. The findings clearly demonstrate that fiction continues to hold a significant place in the reading lives of young readers, despite the growing influence of digital media and changing academic demands. The frequency analysis shows that a substantial proportion of youth read fiction regularly. Daily and weekly readers together constitute more than sixty per cent of the respondents, indicating

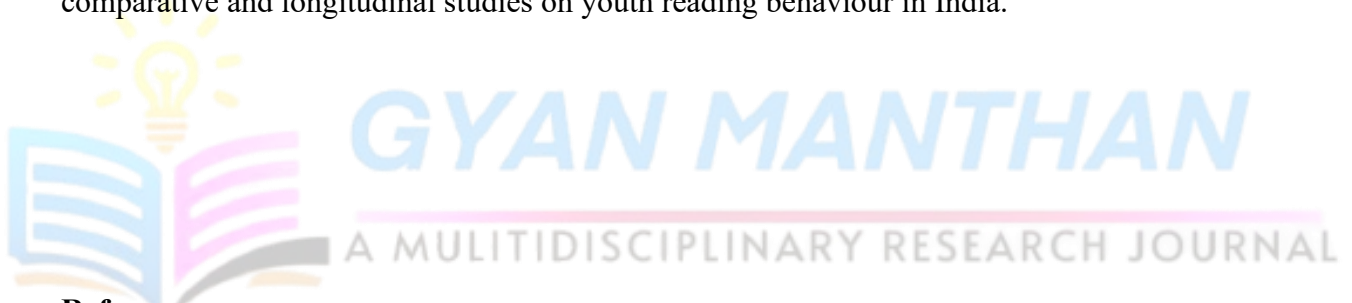
sustained engagement with novels among students up to the age of 26. Only a small segment of respondents reported rare reading, suggesting that fiction has not lost its relevance among urban youth.

The perception analysis further strengthens this observation. Mean scores for all perception statements remain well above the neutral point, reflecting overwhelmingly positive attitudes towards fiction. Students strongly agree that fiction enhances imagination and creativity, improves language proficiency, and supports emotional understanding. The relatively lower—but still positive—mean score for critical thinking suggests that while students primarily associate fiction with imagination and emotional engagement, they also recognise its intellectual value. Genre preference analysis reveals a diverse reading culture among youth. Romance and contemporary fiction emerge as the most preferred genres, closely followed by fantasy, science fiction, and thriller/mystery novels. Notably, a considerable proportion of students prefer social and realistic fiction, indicating an interest in narratives that reflect real-life issues, social concerns, and human relationships. Historical and experimental fiction attract comparatively fewer readers, suggesting that youth reading preferences are more inclined towards accessible and emotionally engaging narratives. Language preference results indicate the dominance of English fiction among students. A large majority read fiction either exclusively in English or bilingually in English and Hindi. This trend is particularly pronounced among postgraduate students and research scholars, where preference for English fiction exceeds eighty per cent. The findings highlight the role of education and academic exposure in shaping language choices in literary reading, while also acknowledging the continued relevance of Hindi and other languages. The results confirm that youth reading behaviour in Indore city is characterised by regular engagement with fiction, positive literary perceptions, diverse genre interests, and a strong inclination towards English-language novels.

### ***Conclusion***

The present study provides empirical insight into youth readers' perceptions and genre preferences towards fiction and novels among students up to the age of 26 in Indore city. The findings clearly establish that fiction reading among youth is not merely a recreational activity but a meaningful literary practice that contributes to imagination, emotional development, language enhancement, and cognitive growth. The study concludes that a majority of youth readers engage with fiction on a regular basis, reflecting the sustained

relevance of novels in contemporary student life. Positive perceptions towards fiction—particularly its role in enhancing creativity, emotional understanding, and linguistic competence—underscore the educational and developmental value of literary reading. Genre preferences reveal that youth readers balance entertainment-oriented fiction with socially reflective narratives, suggesting a nuanced engagement with literature rather than passive consumption. The dominance of English fiction, especially among higher educational groups, highlights the influence of academic environments and global literary exposure on youth reading choices. At the same time, bilingual reading practices indicate that regional and national literatures continue to coexist alongside English fiction in urban reading cultures. In conclusion, the study affirms that fiction remains a powerful medium for intellectual and emotional engagement among youth. It also highlights the need for educators, curriculum designers, and literary institutions to encourage reading practices that foster critical thinking, empathy, and cultural awareness. By focusing on a specific urban context, the study contributes to readership research in English literature and opens avenues for further comparative and longitudinal studies on youth reading behaviour in India.



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