

# The Role of School Teachers in Forming Reading Habits Among Secondary Education Students

**Zannatul Ferdous**

Assistant professor, English, Rajshahi College

**Mobile:** +8801715673794 | **Email:** Zannat.eng@gmail.com

## Abstract

Reading is not only an important literary skill but also a primary source of gaining knowledge and information. In this age of modern technology, although alternative sources of information exist, students still rely heavily on reading for learning. Therefore, to be successful, the development of a reading habit is essential. Since school is the first institution where children begin formal education, school teachers play a vital role in cultivating this habit. A person's cognitive development occurs gradually from early life. If a fondness for reading develops alongside intellectual growth, it can lead to a lifelong habit.

This study, focusing on secondary education students in Bangladesh, investigates the role of school teachers in enhancing reading habits. It follows a quantitative methodology using two separate questionnaires—for teachers and students. Data were collected from four schools involving 39 teachers and 147 students. Responses were analyzed using IBM SPSS 20.0 and presented with descriptive statistics. The findings reveal discrepancies between teachers' and students' preferences for reading materials, assignment types, and mutual understanding. Only 36.2% of students read for pleasure, and 68.1% spend less than three hours per week reading. These results have important implications for educators and policymakers striving to strengthen the reading culture among students in Bangladesh.

**Keywords:** school teachers, adolescents, reading habit, secondary school students

## Introduction

In today's world of rapid technological advancement and intense intellectual activity, individuals must adapt to their fast-paced surroundings. To remain relevant and competitive, one must stay informed and develop critical thinking skills. Mere hearsay is insufficient for knowledge acquisition. Reading—whether from printed materials or digital platforms—is a crucial tool for accessing social, economic, and civic life, in addition to promoting personal and mental development (Holden, 2004).

The Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines a habit as “something you do often and regularly, sometimes without knowing that you are doing it.” When reading is practiced consistently, it forms a habit. Individuals with reading habits often choose books or articles voluntarily during their leisure time. The UK Department for Culture, Media and Sport (2003) emphasizes that people cannot be active or informed citizens without the ability to read. Reading is a prerequisite for nearly all cultural and social engagement. Although one can learn through television, games, or videos, learning through reading is more effective and impactful (Shabi & Udofia, 2009).

The development of digital technologies has provided students with abundant sources of information—such as browsing the internet, using Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, or chatting online. However, these platforms often pose physical and mental health risks. Excessive smartphone use has been linked to addiction, which manifests as constant device engagement, even during meals, walks, or while driving. This behavior contributes to physical inactivity, insomnia, and obesity. A recent online survey (Ratan et al., 2022) conducted from July 2021 to February 2022 found that 60.5% of Bangladeshi young adults are addicted to smartphones. Another study (Monika & Rahman, 2021) showed that 82.37% of secondary school students use phones primarily for social interaction and entertainment, while only a small percentage use them for educational purposes. As a result, digital distractions discourage students—especially those less motivated—from engaging in serious reading. Many prefer spending time in cyber cafés playing games, browsing, or chatting, which negatively affects their reading habits (Ikpaahindi, 2008).

Considering their developmental stage and lack of maturity, adolescents should not be left to navigate the vast digital world alone. Book reading offers a safer and healthier alternative. It not only prevents mental and physical harm but also enriches the reader with profound insights and wisdom (Som, 2020). Reading enhances creativity, sharpens critical thinking, and improves analytical problem-solving abilities. These intellectual benefits contribute to an individual's overall cognitive development (Winter, 2023).

Recognizing the foundational role of reading, many countries have made primary education compulsory to ensure universal literacy. Global competitiveness is now increasingly tied to literacy rates, which in turn support economic growth and development. In Bangladesh, primary education up to Grade 5 is compulsory under the Primary Education (Compulsory) Act of 1990 and Article 17 of the Constitution. Although the government has proposed extending compulsory education up to Grade 8 in accordance with the National Education Policy 2010, this initiative remains experimental. According to the Bangladesh Education Statistics 2022 (BANBEIS), the dropout rate in primary education is approximately 14%. For secondary education, the dropout rate rises to 36% overall—and 41% among girls. Furthermore, a 2023 BANBEIS report revealed a decline of one million students in secondary education from 2019 to 2023, with 55% of the dropouts being girls.

The 2023 Bangladesh Sample Vital Statistics (BSVS) survey by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) found that 41% of young women are married before the age of 18. Alarming, this trend of child marriage has been increasing over the last three years. The same survey reported that more than 25% of pregnant women were aged between 15 and 19. Teenage pregnancies often force girls to abandon their education, resulting in a less educated generation. These realities demand urgent attention from educational policymakers. When adolescents are removed from the education system prematurely, the country risks losing an educated workforce and may face long-term setbacks in social, cultural, and economic development.

If adolescents can develop lifelong reading habits, these can continue to benefit them even after formal education ends. Secondary education, in particular, serves as a bridge to higher education and vocational readiness. In Bangladesh, a significant portion of the working class has attained secondary-level education. Research shows that much of the country's exported labor

comes from this education bracket, often categorized as semi-skilled workers (Rahman, Khan, & Howlader, 2018). Thus, strengthening secondary education and promoting reading habits at this stage are essential for turning human resources into valuable human capital.

Secondary education in Bangladesh spans seven years, divided into three sub-cycles: three years of junior secondary (Grades VI–VIII, ages 11–13+), two years of secondary (Grades IX–X, ages 14–15+), and two years of higher secondary (Grades XI–XII, ages 16–17+). This study focuses on students from Grades 6 to 10, covering both junior secondary and secondary levels. Students in this age group represent the transition from childhood to adulthood. With their minds highly receptive and impressionable, this stage is ideal for instilling strong reading habits.

According to Jean Piaget’s theory of cognitive development, adolescents enter the formal operational stage, characterized by the ability to think abstractly, reason logically, and grapple with complex ideas. This developmental milestone makes it easier for students to appreciate deeper meanings in texts, engage with diverse perspectives, and cultivate critical thinking skills through reading.

Reading significantly shapes human personality. BookTrust, a UK-based children’s literacy charity, asserts that children who read are more likely to: (i) overcome disadvantages caused by inequality, (ii) enjoy better mental well-being and self-esteem, (iii) achieve greater academic success, and (iv) develop empathy and creativity—traits essential for thriving both personally and socially. Empathy promotes community engagement and contributes to broader social development. Thus, cultivating a reading habit has far-reaching benefits for both individuals and society.

Why should our adolescents adopt a reading habit? The International Reading Association (Moore et al., 1999, p. 3) states:

Adolescents entering the adult world in the 21st century will read and write more than at any other time in human history. They will need advanced levels of literacy to perform their jobs, run their households, and act as citizens and conduct their personal lives. They will need literacy to cope with the flood of information they will find everywhere they

turn. They will need literacy to feed their imaginations so they can create the world of the future. In a complex and sometimes even dangerous world, their ability to read will be crucial.

Claire Watts (2023) has noted that individuals who possess even basic reading skills are more likely to be stress-free and mentally healthy compared to those who cannot read. Supporting this, British neuropsychologist Dr. David Lewis (2009) found that reading for just six minutes a day can reduce stress levels by up to 60%.

A culture of reading also fosters national prosperity. Sipiwo Mahala emphasizes the clear connection between illiteracy and poverty, and conversely, between literacy and economic progress. She believes that building a culture of reading is fundamental to nation-building. Likewise, Dr. K.K. Palani argues that a nation's success is intricately linked to its education system, which in turn depends heavily on the culture of reading. An effective reading habit enables students to acquire knowledge from diverse sources, ultimately shaping the country's future.

### **Objective of the Research**

Reading habits are closely linked to the educational and socioeconomic development of a nation. Therefore, it is essential for students to cultivate reading habits from an early age. According to the preliminary report of the Population and Housing Census 2022, the literacy rate in Bangladesh stands at 74.66%. However, data from the Literacy Assessment Survey 2023 by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) reveals that the functional literacy rate for individuals aged 7 and above is only 62.92%, and 73.69% among those aged 11 to 45. Alarmingly, only 60.77% of individuals aged 15 and above are functionally literate, implying that approximately 40% of adults in Bangladesh are still functionally illiterate.

BBS defines a functionally literate person as someone who can read, understand, interpret, communicate, and perform basic arithmetic both verbally and in writing. This discrepancy suggests that while a significant proportion of the population may have received

primary education, many have not developed lasting literacy skills—likely due to a lack of regular reading habits.

This finding raises an important question: what roles do teachers play in fostering these habits, and how have policymakers supported teachers in promoting reading among students? To address this gap, the present study was conducted with the following objectives:

- To assess the role of secondary education teachers in developing reading habits among adolescents.
- To explore students' perceptions of reading and their own reading habits.

### **Methodology**

This research employed a quantitative approach and applied descriptive statistical methods to analyze the data collected from participants. The study was conducted between January and February—a time when many schools were engaged in sports events, making it challenging to ensure the simultaneous availability of both teachers and students. Nevertheless, responses were successfully gathered from 39 teachers and 141 students across four urban schools. These schools were located in the central part of the city to provide insight into reading practices within an urban educational context. Participants were randomly selected to ensure a representative sample.

Two separate questionnaires were developed for the study—one for teachers comprising 11 questions, and another for students containing 12 questions. The questionnaires were carefully designed to allow for cross-referencing between student and teacher responses. This alignment enabled a comparative analysis of perceptions and practices related to reading habits. Given the quantitative nature of the study, the collected data required numerical interpretation and were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 20.

## Results

Data analysis was performed using IBM SPSS Statistics 20. Two sets of questionnaires were distributed: one for teachers and one for students. The teacher questionnaire explored four key areas:

- Teaching Experience
- Strategies for Promoting Reading
- Teachers' Influence on Students' Reading Habits
- Teachers' Perception of Reading

### Teaching Experience of Teachers

**Table 1**

*Teaching Experience*

<b>Experience Level</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Less than 1 year	7.7
1–3 years	30.8
4–7 years	7.7
More than 7 years	53.8

Most teachers (53.8%) reported having more than seven years of teaching experience, indicating a high level of professional maturity among the respondents.

### Strategies for Promoting Reading

**Table 2**

*Most Effective Method for Developing Reading Habits*

<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Daily	56.4
Weekly	33.3
Monthly	5.1
Rarely	5.1

Most teachers (56.4%) promote reading daily in the classroom.

**Table 3**

*How Often Teachers Assign Reading Tasks*

<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Daily	56.4
Weekly	33.3
Monthly	5.1
Rarely	5.1

Most teachers (56.4%) assign reading tasks daily.

**Table 4**

*Types of Reading Tasks Assigned (Multiple Response Question)*

<b>Type</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Fictional Books	37.8
Non-Fictional Books	40.5
Newspapers/Magazines	21.6

40.5% of teachers assign non- fictional books, on the other hand 37.8% suggest fictional.

**Table 5**

*Frequency of Class Discussions About Reading*

<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Frequently	84.6
Occasionally	7.7
Rarely	7.7

A large majority (84.6%) frequently hold reading discussions in class.

**Table 6**

*Activities Used to Promote Reading*

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Assign Book Reports	43.6
Organize Reading Competitions	38.5
Recommend Books	5.1
Read Aloud in Class	12.8

Most teachers (43.6%) assign writing-tasks on books they recommend and 38.5% teachers arrange competition on book reading . Reading aloud or direct recommendations of books are not popular.

**Teachers’ Influence on Students’ Reading Habits**

**Table 7**

*How Important is Their Role?*

<b>Response</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Very Important	92.3
Somewhat Important	7.7

Almost all teachers (92.3%) consider their role crucial in shaping reading habits.

**Table 8**

*Do Teachers Share Their Own Reading Habits?*

<b>Response</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Frequently	38.5
Occasionally	57.9
Rarely	2.6

Most of the teachers are not interested in sharing their book reading habit with the students. 57.9% teachers share their reading topic with the students occasionally and 38.5% teachers exchange their views with students frequently.

**Table 9**

*Do Teachers Think Their Reading Assignments Increase Student Interest?*

<b>Response</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Yes, Significantly	66.7%
Somewhat	33.3%

Two-thirds of teachers believe their assignments significantly raise student interest in reading.

**Table 10**

*Challenges Teachers Face in Promoting Reading*

<b>Challenge</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Lack of Time	17.9%
Students’ Disinterest	74.4%
Lack of Resources	7.7%

Teachers complain that students are not Interested in forming reading habit. 74.4% of students are not interested in reading.

## Teachers' Perception on Reading

**Table 11**

*Does Reading Improve Language Skill?*

<b>Response</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Yes	97.4
No	2.6

Nearly all teachers (97.4%) agree that reading enhances language skills.

## Student Responses

Student questionnaires focused on:

- Time Spent on Reading
- Purpose of Reading
- Teacher Involvement
- Institutional Support
- Perceived Benefits

**Table 12**

*How Much Time Do Students Spend Reading Outside Schoolwork?*

<b>Time Spent Reading</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Less than 1 hour	28.4
1-3 hours	39.7
4-6 hours	13.5
More than 6 hours	18.4

The majority of students (68.1%) spend less than 3 hours per week on reading beyond their school assignments. This suggests that reading outside school is not a frequent activity for most students.

**Table 13***How Often Do Students Read for Pleasure?*

<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Daily	29.8
Weekly	27.0
Monthly	7.1
Rarely	36.2

While 56.8% of students read at least weekly, a significant portion (36.2%) rarely read for pleasure.

**Table 14***What Types of Reading Materials Do Students Prefer?*

<b>Type of Reading Material</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Fiction (Novels, Stories)	49.6
Non-Fiction (Biographies, History)	14.2
Magazines/Newspapers	6.4
Online Articles	7.8
Comics/Graphic Novels	22.0

Fiction is the most popular (49.6%), followed by comics/graphic novels (22%). Non-fiction and newspaper/magazine reading are significantly lower.

### **Teachers' Role in Students' Reading**

**Table 15***How Often Do Teachers Assign Extra Reading?*

<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Frequently (Weekly)	13.5
Occasionally (Monthly)	13.5
Rarely	32.6
Never	40.4

73% of students reported rarely or never receiving extra reading assignments.

**Table 16**

*Do Students Enjoy the Reading Assignments Given by Teachers?*

<b>Enjoyment Level</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Very Much	23.4
Somewhat	48.2
Not Much	20.6
Not at All	7.8

71.6% enjoy reading assignments to some extent, only 23.4% find them very enjoyable.

**Table 17**

*Do Teachers Discuss Reading with Students?*

<b>Response</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Yes, Regularly	25.5
Sometimes	49.6
No	24.1

Only 25.5% of students have regular discussions with their teachers about reading, while nearly 25% never discuss their reading materials.

**Table-18**

*Do Teachers Encourage Students to Read Beyond Assignments?*

<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Yes, Often	25.5
Sometimes	39.7
Rarely	24.8
Never	9.9

Although 65.2% of students receive some encouragement, a large group (34.7%) report that teachers rarely or never encourage extra reading.

**Table 19**

*How Much Influence Do Teachers Have on Student's Interest in Reading?*

<b>Level of Influence</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Yes, Significantly	21.3
Somewhat	54.6
Not at All	23.4

While most students (75.9%) acknowledge some teacher influence on reading habits, only 21.3% feel strongly motivated.

**School Support for Reading**

**Table 20**

*Does the School Have a Book Club?*

<b>Response</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Yes	53.2
No	45.4

Over half of students (53.2%) report having access to a book club, which could be used more effectively to encourage reading.

**Table 21**

*What Would Make Reading More Enjoyable?*

<b>Improvement Idea</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
More book recommendations from teachers	17.7
Classroom reading competitions	19.1
Group discussions on books	29.1
More variety in reading materials	17.7
Other	16.3

Group discussions (29.1%) are the most preferred way to make reading more enjoyable, showing that students prefer collaborative learning.

**Student Perception of Reading’s Benefits**

**Table 22**

*Does Reading Help Improve Education and Creativity?*

<b>Response</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Yes	75.2%
No	6.4%
To Some Extent	18.4%

75.2% of students strongly believe reading improves education and creativity.

**Discussion**

This study set out to evaluate the role of teachers in fostering reading habits among secondary education students in Bangladesh. The data highlighted both strengths and shortcomings in current practices and perceptions.

### **Section A: Teachers' Practices and Challenges**

Most teachers (92.3%) recognize their vital role in shaping students' reading behavior. Many promote reading through daily tasks (56.4%) and frequent class discussions (84.6%). However, students often do not perceive this support. While 66.7% of teachers believe assignments improve student interest, such tasks may be completed out of obligation rather than genuine curiosity.

Teachers rarely share their own reading experiences—only 38.5% do so frequently. This limits the opportunity to inspire students through role modeling. Though fiction and non-fiction are commonly assigned, no teacher reported assigning online articles—possibly due to concerns about digital addiction following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Challenges remain significant. A majority (74.4%) identified student disinterest as the main barrier. This may be linked to foundational literacy gaps identified in earlier stages of education. According to the 2023 National Student Assessment, large percentages of third- and fifth-graders in Bangladesh lack proficiency in core subjects like Bangla and mathematics—suggesting that students may struggle with advanced reading tasks in secondary school.

### **Section B: Students' Perspectives**

Student responses present a more concerning picture. A significant majority (68.1%) read less than three hours per week outside school, and 36.2% rarely read for pleasure. Students also reported low engagement from teachers. 73% said they rarely or never received extra reading tasks, and 24.1% never discussed reading with a teacher.

Students expressed a clear preference for peer-centered and interactive activities such as group discussions and reading competitions, yet these methods are underutilized in classrooms. Additionally, 45.4% of students said their schools lacked reading clubs.

Despite these challenges, 75.2% of students recognized the value of reading for academic success and creativity. This indicates a potential for positive change if more engaging and supportive structures are implemented.

### Cross-Analysis Insights

- **Discrepancy in Perception:** Teachers believe they actively promote reading, but student feedback suggests a gap in communication or implementation.
- **Mismatch in Material Preference:** Students favor fiction, while teachers tend to assign non-fiction. A better understanding of student interests could improve engagement.
- **Lack of Interactivity:** Students desire more interactive reading experiences—something largely missing from current teacher strategies.
- **Need for Emotional and Academic Support:** Teachers must be attentive to students' comprehension levels and personal engagement, tailoring assignments to their needs.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

Reading is fundamental to developing literacy skills. It broadens educational horizons and equips individuals with the competencies needed to participate in the modern, digitally driven workforce. In today's knowledge-based economy, young people must be informed and literate to remain competitive. Without strong reading habits, students are unlikely to absorb complex content from academic texts, which are crucial for higher education. If adolescents fail to develop a reading culture early on, universities will struggle to produce high-quality graduates capable of thriving in the global job market. The result may be an increase in unemployment, deepening the cycle of poverty (Makotsi, 2005).

In Bangladesh, the high dropout rate at the secondary level must be addressed urgently. According to UNICEF, each additional year of schooling raises a country's annual GDP by 0.4%, boosts individual earnings by up to 10%, and reduces the poverty rate by 9%. While the economic benefits of education are substantial, the value of education also lies in its ability to reduce inequality and foster human development. As stated in the Human Development Report 2023 by the UNDP, education plays a crucial role in promoting equity and social progress.

The findings of this research highlight that secondary education in Bangladesh is severely neglected and in need of systemic reform. Immediate and unified efforts from policymakers and educationists are essential to identify and resolve the structural flaws within this segment of the

education system. Based on the data collected from teachers and students, the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen the role of school teachers in fostering reading habits among secondary education students:

### **Recommendations:**

1. **Teacher Training:** Equip teachers with knowledge of adolescent psychology and strategies to inspire reading.
2. **Participatory Assignments:** Design assignments based on student interests to enhance motivation.
3. **Extra Reading Classes:** Include weekly reading sessions where different teachers narrate stories to stimulate curiosity.
4. **Reading Competitions:** Organize monthly or weekly contests to foster enthusiasm and creativity.
5. **Book Clubs:** Facilitate peer-to-peer reading circles for discussion, sharing, and journaling.
6. **Policy Support:** Government and education boards should provide training, resources, and guidelines for reading promotion.
7. **Parental Involvement:** Educate parents on how to support reading habits at home.

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