

# Reading Books Other Than Textbooks by The Honors and Masters Level Students of Rajshahi College

## Authors

S. M. Razanul Islam Maruf<sup>1\*</sup>, Khandokar Galib Mahmud Hasan<sup>1</sup>, Md. A. Awal<sup>2</sup>

## Supervisor

Dr. Wasim Md. Mazbahul Haque<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Honours, Mathematics, Rajshahi College

<sup>2</sup> Honours, Philosophy, Rajshahi College

<sup>3</sup> Professor, Economics, Rajshahi College

\* Contact

01521-710951

s.m.r.i.maruf@gmail.com

## Abstract

This study investigates the prevalence, reading habits, and perceived impacts of non-textbook reading among students of Rajshahi College. Using a survey-based descriptive design, data were collected from 307 students. The analysis focuses on response subsets where detailed counts were available. The objectives were to determine students' current reading rates, preferred genres, methods of book acquisition, and the perceived benefits of leisure reading.

Findings indicate that a substantial proportion of students read fewer than one non-textbook per month. However, most students reported strong family encouragement and acknowledged diverse benefits of reading, particularly for intellectual enrichment and psychological well-being. The college library emerged as a crucial resource, though limited time and exam preparation pressures were major

barriers to regular reading. The study concludes with recommendations for fostering a sustainable reading culture through coordinated efforts by the college administration, library, students, and families.

**Keywords:** Non-textbook reading, Rajshahi College, reading habits, student development, leisure reading

## Introduction

### Significance of Reading Books other than Textbook

Reading beyond prescribed academic texts is widely recognized as an essential component of holistic personal and intellectual growth. As Descartes (1637) observed, "The reading of all good books is like a conversation with the finest minds of past centuries." Textbooks provide discipline-specific knowledge, yet non-textbook materials—spanning literature, history, philosophy, and science—nurture creativity, empathy, and critical reasoning (Grayling, 2003).

A.C. Grayling poetically described reading as a form of intellectual elevation: "To read is to fly: it is to soar to a point of vantage which gives a view over wide terrains of history, human variety, ideas, shared experience, and the fruits of many inquiries." Engaging with diverse narratives enhances analytical reasoning, vocabulary, and communication skills, while also fostering emotional intelligence through exposure to varied perspectives (Steele, 1710).

Beyond its cognitive advantages, reading serves as a restorative and reflective activity. Alan Bennett (1994) emphasized this affective dimension, noting that "A book is a device to ignite the imagination." Similarly, George R. R. Martin (1996) likened reading to intellectual

sharpening, stating, “A mind needs books as a sword needs a whetstone, if it is to keep its edge.”

This study posits that formal academic structures often neglect these broader intellectual and emotional benefits, focusing narrowly on curriculum-driven learning. As Jim Rohn (1985) asserted, “Reading is essential for those who seek to rise above the ordinary.” Hence, by analyzing the non-textbook reading behaviors of Rajshahi College students, this research underscores the importance of cultivating a reading culture that complements traditional education and enriches overall student development.

### **Context of Rajshahi College and the Study’s Relevance**

Rajshahi College, one of the most prestigious higher education institutions in Bangladesh, plays a pivotal role in shaping both academic and personal trajectories of its students. Recognizing the interconnection between reading and leadership, Harry S. Truman (1950) once remarked, “Not all readers are leaders, but all leaders are readers.”

In this context, understanding the current landscape of non-textbook reading among Rajshahi College students is vital. As Lyndon B. Johnson (1965) observed, “A book is the most effective weapon against intolerance and ignorance.” Therefore, examining students’ reading preferences, barriers, and motivations provides actionable insights for enhancing educational engagement and intellectual diversity within the college community.

Furthermore, as David Bailey (2002) aptly stated, “The best advice I ever got was that knowledge is power and to keep reading.” The findings of this study can inform college authorities and library management in designing

targeted programs and allocating resources to strengthen the reading ecosystem, thereby fostering lifelong learning habits among students.

### **Research Objectives**

The primary objectives of this research are to:

- Determine the current rate of non-textbook reading among Rajshahi College students.
- Identify the types and genres of non-textbook materials students most enjoy.
- Explore the methods through which students acquire non-textbook books.
- Assess the perceived positive impacts of non-textbook reading on students’ personal and academic lives.
- Identify key barriers that hinder students’ engagement with non-textbook reading.
- Evaluate students’ perceptions of the Rajshahi College Library’s role in promoting such reading practices.

### **Literature Review**

Hazel Rochman (1995) insightfully remarked that “Reading takes us away from home, but more important, it finds homes for us everywhere.” This sentiment encapsulates the transformative and empathetic power of reading. Existing literature consistently highlights that leisure reading enhances comprehension, memory, creativity, and analytical thinking (Clark & Rumbold, 2006).

Scholars have also established strong links between non-academic reading and emotional development. Engaging with diverse human experiences through literature promotes empathy and social understanding (Mar et al., 2009). J. Oswald Sanders (1967) underscored the need for reflective reading, warning that “Unless our

reading includes serious thinking, it is wasted time.”

Furthermore, reading for pleasure is associated with stress reduction and mental resilience (Billington, 2015). Students who read widely tend to demonstrate superior vocabulary, broader knowledge, and stronger writing abilities—all contributing positively to academic achievement (Krashen, 2004). Kathleen Norris (1998) reinforced the emotional satisfaction of reading: “Just the knowledge that a good book is awaiting one at the end of a long day makes that day happier.”

The literature thus provides a theoretical basis for this study by establishing the multifaceted benefits of non-textbook reading and the contextual factors—such as family environment, peer influence, and access to resources—that shape reading habits. The present research extends these insights to the local context of Rajshahi College, offering data-driven evidence relevant to Bangladeshi higher education.

## Methodology

### Study Design

A descriptive survey design was employed, chosen for its suitability in capturing both quantitative and qualitative dimensions of students’ reading behaviors. This approach enables the systematic collection of current trends and attitudes without implying causality.

### Participants

The target population included currently enrolled undergraduate and postgraduate students of Rajshahi College. Data were collected from 307 students using a structured questionnaire. It

is important to note that the detailed quantitative analyses presented in the results section are based on subsets of this total sample, reflecting the available processed data. Thus, while the study offers meaningful insights, specific percentages and frequencies apply to these subsets rather than the entire cohort.

### Data Collection Instrument

A structured questionnaire served as the main instrument, comprising items on:

- Family literacy environment and encouragement
- Reading frequency and preferred genres
- Sources and acquisition methods of books
- Perceived personal and academic impacts of reading
- Reasons for limited engagement with non-textbook materials
- Opinions on the Rajshahi College Library’s contribution to reading culture

### Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, to summarize the quantitative findings. Qualitative data, such as open-ended responses regarding preferred genres and perceived benefits, were examined through thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and underlying themes. This mixed descriptive approach offers a nuanced understanding of students’ reading practices and perspectives.

## Results

### Family Influence on Reading Habits

**Table 1**

*Family Influence on Student Reading (N=307)*

Question	Response	Number of Responses	Percentage (%)
Does anyone in your family read books other than textbooks? (N=307)	Yes	162	52.7
	No	145	47.3
Does anyone in your family encourage you to read books other than textbooks?	Yes	202	65.8
	No	105	34.2

The findings indicate that familial factors substantially contribute to students' engagement with non-textbook reading. Of the 307 respondents, 52.7% reported that at least one family member reads books beyond textbooks, while 47.3% indicated otherwise. Furthermore, 65.8% of respondents stated that their families encourage them to read non-textbook materials, whereas 34.2% did not receive such encouragement.

These results underscore the pivotal role of both family reading practices and encouragement in cultivating students' broader reading habits.

### Prevalence of Non-Textbook Reading

**Table 2**

*Non-Textbook Reading Habits (N=307)*

	Response	Number of Responses	Percentage (%)
Do you read books other than textbooks?	Yes	221	71.9
	No	86	28.1
If Yes: How many books do you read monthly?	Less than one	86	38.9
	One	70	31.7
	More than one	65	29.4

The survey results indicate that non-textbook reading is a common practice at Rajshahi College, with nearly three-quarters of respondents (71.9%) reporting engagement in such reading. However, among these students, reading frequency varies considerably: 38.9% read fewer than one book per month, 31.7% read one book per month, and 29.4% read more than one. These findings suggest that while interest in non-textbook reading is widespread, sustained and frequent engagement remains limited for a substantial portion of students.

### Preferred genre of reading

**Table 3:**

*Types of books Students Read (N=221)*

Types of Books	Number of Responses	Percentage (%)
Story	101	45.7
Poetry	61	27.6
History	66	29.8
Novel	97	43.9
Religious	74	33.5
Job Related	93	42.1
Motivational	69	31.2
Science Fiction	63	28.5
Self-Development	76	34.4
Science Non-Fiction	42	19.0
Biography/Auto-Biography	44	19.9
Others	57	25.8

Students were asked about the types of non-textbook books they currently read. The

responses, summarized in Table 3, indicate a diverse range of preferences, underscoring the heterogeneity of student reading interests. The most frequently reported genres include stories (45.7%), novels (43.9%), and job-related books (42.1%), followed closely by self-development (34.4%) and religious texts (33.5%). Other genres such as history (29.8%), motivational books (31.2%), poetry (27.6%), and science fiction (28.5%) also attracted substantial readership, while smaller but notable proportions reported reading biographies/autobiographies (19.9%) and science non-fiction (19.0%).

The breadth of these preferences suggests that student reading habits cannot be effectively addressed through a narrow focus on a few popular genres. Rather, a comprehensive strategy that ensures access to a wide variety of genres is more likely to sustain and expand student engagement with non-textbook literature.

### Book Acquisition Methods

**Table 4:**

*Acquisition of books on Student Reading(N=221)*

Types of Acquisition	Number of Responses	Percentage (%)
Self-financing	178	80.5
Borrowing from friends or relatives	43	19.4
Using public or college library	94	42.5
Others	60	27.1

Students at Rajshahi College employ diverse strategies to obtain non-textbook reading materials. As shown in Table 4, the most common method is self-financing, reported by 178 students (80.5%). In addition, 94 students (42.5%) utilize public or college libraries, 60 (27.1%) obtain books through other means, and 43 (19.4%) borrow from friends or relatives.

These findings suggest that while institutional resources such as libraries play a role, personal financial investment remains the dominant mode of access. The reliance on self-financing, supplemented by borrowing and informal sharing networks, highlights both the limitations of library provisions and the importance of social and financial accessibility. Consequently, initiatives that enhance affordable access—such as book exchange programs, digital resources, or subsidized book schemes—may prove particularly effective in supporting students’ non-textbook reading practices.

### Perceived Impact of Non-Textbook Reading

**Table 5.1:**

*Impact of Reading books on Student(N=221)*

Question	Response	Number of Responses	Percentage (%)
Has reading books other than textbooks positively influenced or impacted on your life in any way?	Yes	213	96.4
	No	8	3.6

Students were asked whether reading non-textbook books had positively influenced their lives. As shown in Table 5.1, the responses indicate a strongly positive perception. Of the 221 students surveyed, 213 (96.4%) reported that such reading had a beneficial impact, while only 8 students (3.6%) indicated otherwise.

**Table 5.2:***Types of Impact on Student (N=213)*

Types of Books	Number of Responses	Percentage (%)
Enhances Knowledge	177	83.1
Overcomes from depression	89	41.8
Removes narrow-mindedness	104	48.8
Cultivates generous attitude	72	33.8
Makes optimistic about future	92	43.2
Mentally Invigorates	112	52.6
Others	45	21.1

Students who reported a positive influence of non-textbook reading (n = 213) identified a wide range of benefits. As presented in Table 5.2, the most frequently cited impact was “enhances knowledge” (83.1%), followed by “mentally invigorates” (52.6%) and “removes narrow-mindedness” (48.8%). Other notable impacts included fostering optimism about the future (43.2%), overcoming depression (41.8%), cultivating a generous attitude (33.8%), and various other effects (21.1%).

The data reveal that students overwhelmingly recognize the value of non-textbook reading. While “enhances knowledge” emerged as the most prominent benefit, students also emphasized significant emotional and psychological outcomes, including overcoming despair, fostering mental rejuvenation, and cultivating optimism about the future. These findings suggest that non-textbook reading not only complements formal education by strengthening intellectual growth but also plays a vital role in supporting students’ emotional resilience and well-being within the demanding context of college life.

**Prevalence of non-textbook interest****Table 6:***Summary of books of interest (N=86)*

Question	Response	Number of Responses	Percentage (%)
Are you interested in reading books other than textbooks?	Yes	48	55.8
	No	38	44.2

Students who reported not reading books other than textbooks (n = 86) were asked whether they would be interested in doing so. As shown in Table 6, 48 students (55.8%) expressed interest, while 38 students (44.2%) indicated no interest.

These findings suggest that more than half of the non-readers demonstrate a willingness to engage in non-textbook reading, highlighting a potential opportunity for interventions aimed at fostering reading interest and expanding participation.

**Preferred genre of interest****Table 7:***Types of Books of Student Interest (N=86)*

Types of Books	Number of Responses	Percentage (%)
Story	24	50.0
Poetry	11	22.9
History	16	33.3
Novel	19	39.6
Religious	20	41.7
Job Related	20	41.7
Motivational	21	43.8
Science Fiction	9	18.8
Self-Development	18	37.5
Science Non-Fiction	12	25.0
Biography/Auto-Biography	12	25.0
Others	14	29.2

Students who expressed an interest in reading non-textbook books (n = 86) were asked about the types of books they would like to read. As shown in Table 7, their responses reflect a diverse range of preferences. The most frequently

cited genres were motivational (43.8%), religious (41.7%), job-related (41.7%), novels (39.6%), and self-development (37.5%). Other categories such as history (33.3%), stories (50.0%), poetry (22.9%), biographies/autobiographies (25.0%), science non-fiction (25.0%), and science fiction (18.8%) also received notable interest.

The diversity of interests highlights that student reading preferences are far from uniform. This suggests that strategies to promote non-textbook reading should ensure access to a wide variety of genres, rather than focusing narrowly on a few popular categories. Providing broad exposure is more likely to sustain and expand student engagement with reading.

### Role of Rajshahi College Library

**Table 8:**

*Playing Role of Rajshahi College Library  
Helping to the Students(N=307)*

Question	Response	Number of Responses	Percentage (%)
Do you think that Rajshahi College Library plays an important role in helping Rajshahi College students to read books other than textbooks?	Yes	239	77.9
	No	68	22.1

The study examined students’ perceptions of the Rajshahi College Library in facilitating non-textbook reading. In response to the question, “*Do you think that Rajshahi College Library plays an important role in helping students to read books other than textbooks?*” a substantial majority of students expressed agreement. As shown in Table 8, 239 respondents (77.9%) answered “Yes,” while 68 respondents (22.1%) answered “No.”

These findings indicate that the Rajshahi College Library is widely recognized as a significant resource in promoting non-textbook reading. The strong positive perception highlights the library’s existing role as a central component of the college’s reading environment and suggests considerable potential for further strengthening its contribution to students’ broader reading practices.

### Barriers to Reading and Interest

The study also explored the factors that inhibit students’ engagement in non-textbook reading. Time-related constraints emerged as the most frequently cited barriers, with students repeatedly mentioning “lack of time” or “shortage of time.” This finding suggests that academic workload and challenges in time management are primary impediments to broader reading practices.

Additionally, several students identified “job preparation” as a reason for not engaging in non-textbook reading. This reflects a pragmatic, career-oriented approach in which activities perceived as directly beneficial for immediate employment prospects are prioritized over leisure or personal development reading. Such responses highlight a potential tension between short-term, career-focused priorities and the longer-term intellectual and personal benefits that non-textbook reading can provide.

## Discussion

### Interpretation of Findings

This study highlights both promising patterns and barriers in non-textbook reading among Rajshahi College students. While some students engage in regular reading, 38.9% reported reading fewer than one book per month,

indicating that sustained leisure reading is not yet a widespread habit.

Family influence is notable, with 65.8% of students receiving encouragement. However, only 52.7% reported that family members themselves engage in non-textbook reading. This gap suggests that while verbal encouragement exists, the absence of modeled behavior may weaken its impact.

Students expressed broad genre preferences, ranging from stories and novels to science fiction, motivational, and job-related books. This diversity underscores the need for varied and accessible collections rather than a narrow focus on a few genres. Acquisition methods also varied, with self-financing, borrowing, and library use being common, reflecting both student resourcefulness and the importance of institutional support.

The perceived benefits of reading extend beyond academics. Students reported outcomes such as knowledge enhancement, emotional resilience, and broadening of perspectives. These findings affirm that non-textbook reading contributes to both intellectual growth and psychological well-being, particularly valuable in a demanding academic environment.

Nevertheless, practical barriers remain. Time constraints and job preparation were the most frequently cited obstacles, reflecting competing academic and career priorities. While students recognize the benefits of reading, they often view it as secondary to immediate goals. Addressing this requires systemic support, including time management initiatives, integration of reading into career counseling, and improved access to diverse materials.

The Rajshahi College Library was widely valued, despite many students also relying on personal and social networks for books. This highlights its continued role as a central resource, with scope for further development through expanding collections and enhancing accessibility.

### ***Patterns and Relationships***

The mismatch between family encouragement and lower family reading activity indicates the importance of role modeling in shaping student habits. Similarly, the contrast between recognized benefits and reported barriers suggests that students undervalue the long-term relevance of reading for employability skills. The college can address this by explicitly linking reading to transferable skills such as critical thinking and communication.

### ***Implications***

Non-textbook reading contributes significantly to student development, offering intellectual enrichment, emotional resilience, and broader perspectives. Encouraging a reading culture can support the production of graduates who are academically capable, emotionally intelligent, and socially engaged.

## **Conclusion**

The study found that while non-textbook reading is valued, many students read infrequently due to time pressures and job preparation demands. Family encouragement is strong but not always modeled through practice. Students demonstrate diverse reading interests and employ multiple methods of accessing books, with the college library playing a central role. Reported benefits include both cognitive and

psychological gains, reinforcing the importance of non-textbook reading for holistic development.

### **Limitations**

Findings are based on self-reported data, which may be subject to recall or social desirability bias. Additionally, the quantitative analysis used varying subsets of the total sample (N=307), limiting the generalizability of some figures. The descriptive design also identifies correlations rather than causal relationships.

### **Future Research**

Longitudinal studies could track changes in reading habits over time, while qualitative methods may uncover deeper motivations and barriers. Comparative research across institutions would broaden insights into regional reading cultures. Further analysis of the “Other” categories for genres and acquisition methods could provide additional detail. A complete dataset covering all respondents would enhance generalizability.

## **References**

- Bailey, D. (2002). *David Bailey: If we shadows have offended*. London, England: Thames & Hudson.
- Bennett, A. (1994). *Writing home*. London, England: Faber and Faber.
- Billington, J. (2015). *Reading for life: The impact of literature on mental health*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
- Clark, C., & Rumbold, K. (2006). *Reading for pleasure: A research overview*. London, England: National Literacy Trust.
- Descartes, R. (1637). *Discourse on the method of rightly conducting one's reason and seeking truth in the sciences*. Leiden, Netherlands: Jan Maire.
- Grayling, A. C. (2003). *The meaning of things: Applying philosophy to life*. London, England: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.
- Johnson, L. B. (1965). *Remarks at the National Book Awards*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Krashen, S. D. (2004). *The power of reading: Insights from the research* (2nd ed.). Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited.
- Mar, R. A., Oatley, K., & Peterson, J. B. (2009). Exploring the link between reading fiction and empathy: Ruling out individual differences and examining outcomes. *Communications*, 34(4), 407–428. <https://doi.org/10.1515/COMM.2009.025>
- Martin, G. R. R. (1996). *A Game of Thrones*. New York, NY: Bantam Books.
- Norris, K. (1998). *The cloister walks*. New York, NY: Riverhead Books.
- Rochman, H. (1995). *Against borders: Promoting books for a multicultural world*. Chicago, IL: American Library Association.
- Rohn, J. (1985). *Seven strategies for wealth and happiness*. Los Angeles, CA: Simon & Schuster.
- Sanders, J. O. (1967). *Spiritual leadership: Principles of excellence for every believer*. Chicago, IL: Moody Press.
- Steele, R. (1710). *The Tatler* (Vol. 3). London, England: Jacob Tonson.
- Truman, H. S. (1950). *Address at the White House Conference on Children and Youth*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.