



## READING HABITS OF THE UNDERGRADUATE LEVEL EFL LEARNERS: A SURVEY

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**ABSTRACT:** *The importance of reading in learning a new language is unquestionable. Someone who wants to master a new language, s/he must read a lot in that language as reading is one of the two means of language input; the other one is listening. Reading not only helps the students to learn new words and expressions of the target language but also makes them familiar with the varieties of sentence structures and their uses in various contexts. Unfortunately, the EFL learners in Bangladesh do not usually read non-academic texts written in English like English newspapers, magazines, novels, and stories, among others. This hinders their lexical and syntactic development of the target language and consequently hampers their overall language learning process. The current study attempts to explore the reading habits of the undergraduate level EFL learners through a five-point Likert-scale survey. Ten different types of questions are set to investigate what the learners read or what they like to read in English, how much time they spend on reading English, and how much importance they give to improve their reading skills. The study finds that most of the students do not regularly read non-academic English texts. The majority of the students read them occasionally. Moreover, a considerable number of students are fond of reading non-academic English texts. Many do not even like to read their institutional textbooks in English. This indicates that the students are not really sincere about improving their reading skills. Although many different types of reading materials are available around, they do not read them to develop their reading skills. As a result, they fail to develop good reading habits in their daily lives.*

**KEYWORDS:** Reading skills; Reading habits; EFL learners; Undergraduate level.



## INTRODUCTION

Among the four language skills, sequentially reading comes at the third position after listening and speaking. Reading is the second of the two receptive skills of a language; the first one is listening. Reading, like listening, serves as the means of language input for the language learners. It is the gateway to a better understanding of how a language functions. It is also the key to the development of other language skills as well as overall language competence.

Reading helps a language learner in many ways. Expanding vocabulary is one of the most important tasks for a language learner. Reading is the best way to learn and expand vocabulary power. According to Nation (1995, p.7), stated in Mart (2012, p.93), "Reading has long been seen as a major source of vocabulary growth." According to Kondra (2023, p.156), "When learners read, they come across a lot of new words and expressions in different contexts." He further mentioned (p.156), "The more and better we read, the richer our vocabulary becomes." Several studies, for example, Saragi et al. (1978), Krashen (1989), Kyongho and Nation (1989), Grabe and Stoller (1997), Gardner (2004), Pigada and Schmitt (2006), Kweon and Kim (2008), Al-Homoud and Schmidt (2009), Guo (2012), Suk (2016), and Alsaif and Masrai (2019), among others, showed that there is a significant correlation between reading and vocabulary learning. According to Eskey (2005, p.567), affirmed in Mart (2012, p.93), "the relationship between reading and vocabulary is well documented and reciprocal." Reading provides the opportunity to encounter the same word several times in several contexts/situations. Repeated words are easily memorized by the learners. Moreover, good language learners always try to use the words that they encounter while reading in their speaking and writing. That also increases their memorization of the new words and consequently develops their vocabulary stock.

Reading also helps in learning grammar naturally. When someone reads, s/he sees how different types of words combine to construct a complete sentence, how words change their forms and meanings in different contexts, how verbs change according to tense, etc. If someone wants to understand past tenses, s/he might read tales or novels. By reading interviews, one can develop his/her knowledge of making interrogative sentences. Reading conversations may help in understanding different sentence patterns. As Goctu (2016, p.74) mentioned, "Through a significant amount of reading, learners see the relationship between words and sentences and understand how words work in sentences. Realizing this relationship will enable learners to use the language effectively."

Reading helps in developing other language skills as well. According to Krashen and Terrell (1983, p.131), cited in Fakazli (2021, p.499), "reading may ... contribute significantly to competence in a second language. There is good reason, in fact, to hypothesize that reading makes a contribution to overall competence, to all four skills." As Sadiku (2015, p.30) asserted, "Reading offers a productive approach to improving language vocabulary and word power, for example. When you possess rich vocabulary, you listen better as you understand more; then, you can write better with more words to choose from. Obviously, you can speak better because of your intense word power." Numerous research works, for example, Vivaline and Njoroge (2023), Heo (2017), Ansarey (2016), Goctu (2016), Habibi et al. (2015), Al Kalbi (2015), Al-Nafisah (2015), Mart (2012), Zainal and Husin (2011), Kirin (2010), Krishnan et al. (2009), Hafiz and Tudor (1989), and Elley and Mangubhai (1983), among others, revealed that reading is a great activity to develop all language skills as well as overall language proficiency. Bright



and McGregor (1970, p.52) rightly stated, as cited in Celik (2019, p.208), “Where there is little reading, there will be little language learning.”

### **Research Rationale**

In Bangladesh, general students start their formal education with two basic language courses: Bangla and English. They study these two language courses side by side till the intermediate level but stop studying Bangla and continue only English as a compulsory subject usually in the first year at the undergraduate level. Starting from their academic lives till the end of intermediate level, the mainstream students read all their textbooks for all subjects in Bangla except English. But as soon as they step into the tertiary level, they start reading all the textbooks in English. In Bangladesh, the primary, secondary and intermediate level of education generally consist of twelve years. After twelve years of studying almost all the textbooks in Bangla, when the students all of a sudden start reading all the textbooks in English, the majority of them find it very difficult to comprehend the textbooks and understand the subject matters. This is not only because the subjects they are studying are new to them but also because their reading skills are very weak. This twelve years of long and continuous English language study could neither build their strong reading skills nor develop their extensive reading habits because, until the intermediate level, they read only one textbook in English. Moreover, most educational institutions in Bangladesh neither incorporate nor encourage non-academic English texts like English newspapers, magazines, novels, stories, etc. to be read in the academic curricula. Therefore, the students do not usually get exposed to extensive reading of English and cannot strengthen their English reading skills. Since the importance of extensive reading in learning and mastering a new language is undeniable, it becomes crucial to know whether or not the undergraduate level students are well aware of its significance. The main purpose of the present study is to identify how much time the students spend on reading English, what they read or what they like to read in English other than their textbooks, how much importance they give to improving their reading skills in their language learning process, and how sincere they are to develop their reading habits in their daily lives.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### ***Participants***

The total number of the people who participated in the survey was 210. All the participants were the undergraduate level students pursuing their four-year BSc (honors) courses in different faculties of Bangladesh Agricultural University. Most of the students were in level-1, semester-1 of their study. There were only a few who were in level-1, semester-2. Among the 210 participants, 92 belonged to the faculty of Fishery, 78 belonged to the Faculty of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology, and the rest (40) belonged to the Faculty of Agricultural Engineering and Technology.

### ***Data Collection***

All the participants had English as a compulsory subject in the first year of their four-year BSc (honors) courses. This researcher took their English classes and thus got the opportunity to conduct the survey directly in the classroom. Before conducting the survey, the researcher had a primary discussion with the participants about the study. The researcher informed the



participants about the purpose and scope of the study, how to participate in the survey, and also explained to them all the survey questions. The researcher requested the participants to honestly and anonymously participate in the survey. A 5-point Likert-scale survey sheet (see the Appendix) was used to collect the data for the study. The survey sheet comprised ten (10) questions concerning the participants' daily habits of reading English. The participants understood the questions first, then put tick marks on appropriate options, and accordingly exposed their daily English reading habits through the survey sheets.

### ***Data Presentation***

**Table 1: English Reading Habits of the Learners (Data in Figures with Percentage)**

	<b>Reading Habits</b>	<b>Always</b>	<b>Very Often</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Rarely</b>	<b>Never</b>
1.	Do you read English newspapers/magazines?	8 (3.81%)	12 (5.71%)	72 (34.29%)	64 (30.48%)	54 (25.71%)
2.	Do you read English novels, stories, essays, poems, etc.?	6 (2.86%)	9 (4.29%)	81 (38.57%)	59 (28.10%)	55 (26.19%)
3.	Do you read the English translation of your religious books?	2 (0.95%)	5 (2.38%)	39 (18.57%)	54 (25.71%)	110 (52.38%)
4.	Many websites have both Bangla and English language options. Do you read them in English?	9 (4.29%)	11 (5.24%)	83 (39.52%)	60 (28.57%)	47 (22.38%)
5.	Do you read any English texts that appear on social media?	22 (10.48%)	24 (11.43%)	87 (41.43%)	42 (20.00%)	35 (16.67%)
6.	Do you read labels on products/ user manuals written in English after purchasing products?	30 (14.29%)	36 (17.14%)	91 (43.33%)	40 (19.05%)	13 (6.19%)
7.	Do you read ads, posters, flyers, billboards, etc. written in English?	31 (14.76%)	37 (17.62%)	90 (42.86%)	42 (20.00%)	10 (4.76%)
8.	Do you like to read various notices or instructions in English that appear at different places?	10 (4.76%)	13 (6.19%)	78 (37.14%)	62 (29.52%)	47 (22.38%)
9.	Do you like to read personal letters/emails in English?	7 (3.33%)	8 (3.81%)	33 (15.71%)	61 (29.05%)	101 (48.10%)
10.	Do you like to read your textbooks in English?	12 (5.71%)	10 (4.76%)	95 (45.24%)	68 (32.38%)	25 (11.90%)



## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the survey results, we see that the majority of the participants have marked 'sometimes' on each occasion except reading English translation of religious books and reading personal letters/emails in English. This means that most of the students do not have the regular habits of reading non-academic texts written in English like English newspapers, magazines, novels, stories, etc. They occasionally read them. But concerning reading English translation of religious books and reading personal letters/emails in English, they do not even read them occasionally. Most of them either never or rarely read them. Basically, the students who have the daily habit of reading their religious books either read them in the original languages the books were written for divine reward or in their native languages for better understanding. None wants to take the trouble to understand them in English when there is no need to do so. On the other hand, like everyone, the students also do not want to write or read personal letters/emails in a foreign language as sharing personal feelings and emotions is sometimes very difficult.

However, looking at the survey results, firstly, we find that the number of students who read English newspapers/magazines regularly is very negligible. The number of students who regularly read English literature like novels, stories, poems, etc. is also very insignificant. The majority of the students read them irregularly. On the other hand, a considerable number of the students either rarely or never read them. Actually, due to lack of adequate and genre-specific vocabulary, reading and understanding English literature as well as English newspapers/magazines is often very challenging. Again, when a lot of Bangla newspapers and literary books are available around, students do not feel the need to read them in English. Similarly, when there is an option to choose between Bangla and English, the students will ultimately choose Bangla. This is what we notice in the category where the majority of the students responded that if there is a language option, they pick the Bangla language to read the websites that have both Bangla and English language options.

Regarding the texts that appear on social media in English, the number of students who always and very often read them has slightly increased. But the number of students who rarely and never read them is larger, and the number of students who sometimes read them is the largest. Actually, on social media, people like to share their thoughts and opinions in their native languages for better communication. People also like to read others' thoughts and opinions in their native languages for better understanding. The students are no exception. They also like to write their ideas and read others' in their native languages.

Concerning the next two categories, i.e., reading labels on products or user manuals written in English and reading ads, posters, flyers, billboards, etc. written in English, both of the categories have a bit more and almost similar number of students who always and very often read them. Usually, labels on products, ads of products, posters, billboards, etc. have less words to read. That might be a reason for some students to read them always and very often. However, both the categories have the largest number of students who sometimes read them, and almost a parallel number of students who rarely and never read them.

Finally, regarding reading various notices or instructions in English, and reading textbooks in English, the participants were asked whether or not they like to read them. As usual, very few students like to read them always and very often. The largest number of participants sometimes like to read them, and a considerable number of participants rarely and never like to read them.





Actually, notices or instructions written in English that appear at different places, like on the notice board of the faculty or hall, instructions given on exam-scripts, etc., must be read by the students if the notices or instructions are mandatory to be read. Similarly, since the medium of instruction at this university is English and all the textbooks are written in English, the students have no other option than to read them in English. That means, the students are forced to read them in English but most of them really do not like to read them in English.

## CONCLUSION

The present study tried to discover the reading habits of the undergraduate level EFL learners in their daily lives. The survey results revealed that in spite of having many different types of non-academic English reading materials available around, the students seem to be uninterested in reading them on a regular basis. They also seem to be unaware of the importance of reading and care less about improving their reading skills, which has gradually contributed to the formation of their poor reading habits. The study, however, has some shortcomings. First of all, the number of people who participated in the survey was very small. Although they belonged to three different faculties, they all had almost the same educational background. On the other hand, the study might not have integrated all possible reading materials to survey whether the participants would read them or not. Therefore, to get the complete picture of the undergraduate level EFL learners' reading habits, more studies should be conducted, integrating more non-academic English reading materials and engaging more diverse participants with diverse backgrounds and in a large setting. The findings of the present study, however, will help not only the prospective researchers but also the students to discover their limitations, change their reading habits, and improve their overall reading skills as well as overall language competence.

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**APPENDIX**

	<b>Reading Habit</b>	<b>Always</b>	<b>Very Often</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Rarely</b>	<b>Never</b>
1.	Do you read English newspapers/magazines?					
2.	Do you read English novels, stories, essays, poems, etc.?					
3.	Do you read the English translation of your religious books?					
4.	Many websites have both Bangla and English language options. Do you read them in English?					
5.	Do you read any English texts that appear on social media?					
6.	Do you read labels on products/ user manuals written in English after purchasing products?					
7.	Do you read ads, posters, flyers, billboards, etc. written in English?					
8.	Do you like to read various notices or instructions in English that appear at different places?					
9.	Do you like to read personal letters/emails in English?					
10.	Do you like to read your textbooks in English?					