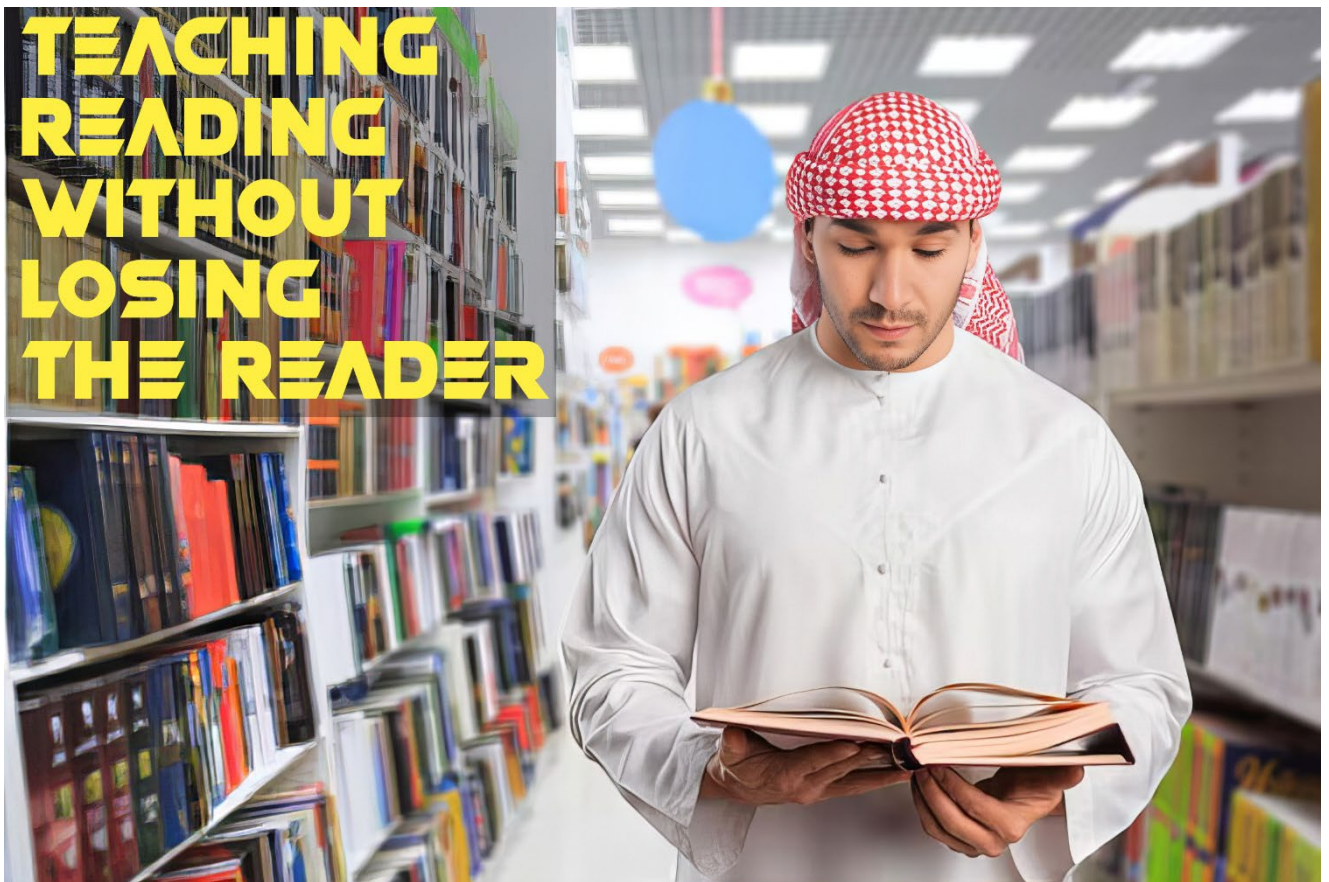




WHY JOY, CHOICE, AND READER IDENTITY STILL MATTER

There is a particular kind of educational success that should trouble us.

A student can decode accurately, identify the main idea, locate evidence, answer comprehension questions, and achieve an acceptable reading score—and still leave school with almost no desire to read when nobody requires it. Technically, the student has learned to read. Educationally, something remains unfinished.

Schools are right to invest heavily in reading proficiency. Literacy underpins almost every form of academic participation, and the consequences of weak reading are profound. But reading education can become so preoccupied with what is measurable—fluency rates, vocabulary targets, benchmark levels, comprehension scores, intervention data—that it overlooks another educational achievement: developing people who voluntarily return to reading for knowledge, curiosity, pleasure, argument, imagination, discovery, or the experience of entering another mind.

That distinction matters because **reading proficiency and reading desire are related, but they are not the same educational achievement.**

A child may long to read but lack the decoding or language skills to do so independently. Another may read proficiently yet rarely choose to. The first needs instruction that builds competence. The second needs reasons for reading to become personally, socially, or intellectually worthwhile. Most learners need both.

A child who can read but rarely chooses to read has acquired a capacity without yet acquiring a reading life.

The challenge, then, is not to choose between rigor and pleasure, the science of reading and the joy of reading, or explicit instruction and student choice. These are false oppositions. The more important task is to understand how **competence, motivation, agency, belonging, access, and intellectual appetite can reinforce one another.**

And globally, that task has become increasingly urgent.

THE READING PROBLEM IS GLOBAL—EVEN IF IT DOES NOT LOOK THE SAME EVERYWHERE

The literacy challenge is global, but its causes and consequences vary sharply across contexts.

In low- and middle-income countries, the World Bank estimates that roughly **70 percent of 10-year-olds cannot read and understand an age-appropriate text**, a condition described as *learning poverty*. In many settings, the problem begins with access itself: too few books, limited materials in familiar languages, high costs, and weak distribution systems.

Yet wealth does not eliminate the problem. PISA 2022 reported a **10-point decline in average reading performance across OECD countries between 2018 and 2022**, with 26 percent of students performing below baseline Level 2 proficiency. In the United States, the 2024 National Assessment of Educational Progress found that **40 percent of fourth-graders performed below the NAEP Basic level**. PIRLS 2021 likewise showed declining reading achievement across many participating systems.

These statistics should not be collapsed into a single diagnosis. A child who lacks access to books in a familiar language faces a fundamentally different problem from an adolescent in a well-resourced school who can read adequately but rarely chooses to. Treating both as the same “literacy crisis” obscures the different barriers involved.

Still, a common concern remains:

Too many children are either unable, unwilling, or insufficiently supported to build sustained relationships with text.

Policy responses understandably emphasize instruction, intervention, assessment, and accountability. All matter. But measurement can tell us whether students can read; it cannot, by itself, make reading meaningful enough to return to voluntarily.

That requires a broader conception of literacy—one that attends not only to reading performance, but also to the conditions under which readers are formed.

THE FALSE CHOICE BETWEEN THE SKILL AND THE WILL

Any serious argument about reading pleasure must begin with one important correction: **joy cannot substitute for instruction.**

Beginning readers need systematic support in learning how written language works. Evidence-based guidance emphasizes phonological awareness, decoding and word recognition, vocabulary and

academic language, and regular opportunities to read connected text. Systematic phonics matters, but as part of a broader literacy programme rather than as a complete account of reading.

A child who cannot reliably decode the words on a page is unlikely to experience sustained pleasure simply because the text is attractive or personally relevant. Repeated difficulty can become motivationally corrosive. **Competence matters.**

But the reverse is equally important: **competence does not automatically produce desire.**

The OECD's definition of reading literacy extends beyond decoding and comprehension to include understanding, using, evaluating, reflecting on, and **engaging with texts**. That final element matters because literacy is not only a technical capacity; it is also a relationship with reading.

Research consistently finds links among reading motivation, reading frequency, and achievement, although the relationship is reciprocal rather than one-directional. Students who enjoy reading often read more. More reading creates further opportunities to develop vocabulary, fluency, knowledge, and comprehension. Greater competence can then make future reading less effortful and more rewarding.

PIRLS 2021 reflects this pattern: students who reported that they **very much liked reading** achieved higher average reading scores than those who liked it less. That association does not prove that enjoyment alone causes stronger achievement, but it does reinforce the importance of treating motivation as part of literacy development rather than as an optional extra.

The familiar opposition between *teaching children how to read* and *teaching them to love reading* is therefore badly framed.

Joy is not an alternative to competence. Competence helps make joy possible; joy gives competence somewhere to grow.

WHAT DO WE ACTUALLY MEAN BY THE JOY OF READING?

The word *joy* can make an educational argument sound softer than it is. Yet joy in reading does not mean constant entertainment, decorative classrooms, or removing difficulty from the learning experience.

Some of the most powerful reading experiences are demanding. A novel may unsettle rather than comfort. A historical account may challenge prior assumptions. Poetry may require rereading before meaning begins to emerge. A student may become absorbed not because a text is easy, but because it makes something intellectually or emotionally significant difficult to ignore.

The more useful distinction is between **pleasure as constant entertainment** and **reading as an intrinsically worthwhile experience**.

Louise Rosenblatt's transactional theory helps clarify this. Reading is not simply the extraction of information from a text; meaning emerges through the interaction between reader and text, shaped by prior knowledge, experience, attention, and purpose. The reader is not passive. Reading is an act of participation.

Motivation theory adds another layer. Ryan and Deci's **Self-Determination Theory** identifies autonomy, competence, and relatedness as important conditions for more internally motivated engagement. Applied to reading, this suggests that students need some meaningful influence over what they read, enough competence to experience success, and opportunities to encounter reading as socially and intellectually connected.

Hidi and Renninger's work on interest development is equally important. Interest is not fixed. Curiosity can be triggered, supported, and gradually deepened. Students do not have to arrive already interested in the texts schools value; good teaching can help interest grow.

John Guthrie and Allan Wigfield's work on reading engagement, including **Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction (CORI)**, brings these ideas together by combining comprehension strategy instruction with meaningful topics, student direction, collaboration, and inquiry. Research in this tradition suggests that motivation and comprehension need not compete; under the right conditions, they can strengthen one another.

A 2023 meta-analysis of reading-motivation interventions reinforces this broader pattern, highlighting recurring mechanisms such as **interest, competence, relatedness, autonomy, and mastery-oriented goals**.

Joy, then, is not pedagogical decoration.

It sits at the intersection of competence, interest, agency, relationship, and meaning.



READER IDENTITY: THE OUTCOME WE RARELY MEASURE

Reading scores capture important aspects of performance, but they struggle to capture something equally consequential: **who students believe they are as readers.**

Over time, learners develop quiet conclusions about themselves. *Am I a reader? Do books contain people, languages, histories, and ideas that feel connected to my world? Am I capable of understanding difficult texts? Is reading something I do only because school requires it, or something that belongs to my life?*

These conclusions form part of **reader identity**, and they are built cumulatively. They emerge from successful and frustrating experiences, from the texts students encounter, from whether teachers know their interests, from whether reading groups make them feel capable or exposed, and from whether the adults and peers around them treat reading as socially and intellectually meaningful.

Repeated difficulty can gradually become identity. A child may stop saying, *This book is difficult*, and begin saying, *I am not a reader*. Likewise, a student who rarely encounters texts that reflect recognizable languages, communities, questions, or experiences may conclude that reading belongs to someone else's world.

The reverse is also possible. Sometimes one book, one author, or one successful reading experience can alter the trajectory of a student's relationship with text.

This is why apparently minor instructional decisions can carry identity consequences. Grouping, intervention, and reading levels may be pedagogically necessary, but when they become public labels, temporary instructional needs can harden into personal judgments. Choice can create a different problem when it is offered without guidance, leaving inexperienced readers surrounded by possibilities they do not yet know how to navigate.

Reader agency is not abandonment.

Students need choice, but they also need teachers who know enough about books—and about them as readers—to help that choice become meaningful.

HOW SCHOOLS CAN TEACH READING—AND ACCIDENTALLY MAKE STUDENTS AVOID IT

The paradox is uncomfortable: schools can weaken reading motivation through practices designed to improve reading.

One common example is the conversion of almost every text into an assessment event. Students read a chapter and answer questions, annotate another, complete a log, finish a novel and produce a worksheet, or borrow a book and then prove they have read it. Over time, the implicit message becomes clear:

Reading is something you do so that something else can be submitted afterward.

Comprehension questions, annotation, and written responses all have legitimate purposes. The problem begins when they become reading's permanent companions. If every encounter with a text ends in accountability, students may have too few opportunities to read simply to wonder, imagine, disagree, discover, or become absorbed.

But the opposite extreme is equally weak. Twenty minutes of “free reading” does not automatically create readers. Reluctant or struggling students may repeatedly choose unsuitable books, switch texts without settling, or experience independent reading as prolonged failure.

Recent evidence complicates the idea that completely unrestricted reading is always best. A 2025 meta-analysis of extensive reading in second- and foreign-language contexts found positive effects across comprehension, vocabulary, fluency, and motivation, while also suggesting that some learners benefited when choice was **bounded rather than unlimited** and when light accountability was present.

The implication is not to remove guidance, but to improve it.

Choice needs architecture. Accountability needs restraint.

Teachers should guide reading. The critical question is whether that guidance expands a student's reading life—or gradually replaces it.

WHAT STRONG READING CULTURES CONSISTENTLY GET RIGHT

Across very different educational traditions, several recurring principles appear.

In England, Teresa Cremin and colleagues' *Teachers as Readers* work emphasizes reading aloud, informal book talk, meaningful choice, social reading environments, strong teacher knowledge of children's literature, and teachers themselves acting as authentic readers.

PIRLS-informed guidance from New Zealand points in a similar direction: students benefit from opportunities to choose texts, discuss what they read, encounter relevant material, and build confidence. In PIRLS 2021, New Zealand teachers reported particularly high levels of self-selected reading time and discussion around texts.

Warwick Elley's earlier **book-flood** research in South Pacific second-language contexts adds another important lesson. Children given abundant access to engaging books and encouraged to read and share them showed stronger language development and more positive attitudes toward reading than peers in more tightly structured programmes. The historical context matters, but the principle remains powerful:

Children need abundant encounters with meaningful text, not merely exercises about language.

More recent work on literature circles reinforces the social dimension. A 2025 meta-analysis involving L2 English learners found promising effects on reading comprehension, while also cautioning that the evidence base was concentrated in particular contexts. The implication is not that literature circles are



universally superior, but that interpretation, discussion, and peer exchange can make reading more cognitively and socially consequential.

Across these traditions, the pattern is remarkably consistent:

Readers grow where they have access, increasing competence, informed choice, meaningful texts, social relationships around reading, and adults who treat books as more than assessment material.

CHOICE MATTERS—BUT NOT ALL CHOICE IS EQUALLY USEFUL

“Give students choice” has become common advice in literacy education. The principle is sound, but it is often applied too simplistically. Choice can support autonomy, a central need in Self-Determination Theory, and reading-motivation research consistently identifies autonomy support as important. Yet unlimited choice can become another burden when students lack the knowledge needed to choose well.

An experienced reader entering a library draws on genre knowledge, familiarity with authors, awareness of personal preferences, and strategies for judging whether a text is likely to be rewarding. A twelve-year-old who has read very little may possess few of these resources. Placing both in front of thousands of books and calling the situation “equal choice” overlooks a crucial difference in expertise.

The stronger pedagogical approach is **curated autonomy**. Teachers learn students’ interests and reading histories, develop strong knowledge of children’s and young-adult literature, and offer possibilities rather than prescriptions. They help students move from familiar genres toward new ones and make recommendations specific enough to communicate, *I know something about you as a reader*. Choice then becomes relational rather than merely procedural.

This is one reason teacher knowledge matters so much. Cremin’s *Teachers as Readers* research highlights the importance of teachers knowing both children’s literature and children as readers in building stronger reading-for-pleasure cultures. Meaningful choice depends partly on having an adult who can open doors students may not yet know exist.

*Choice without guidance can become abandonment;
guidance without choice can become control.*

The aim is neither unrestricted choice nor teacher prescription, but increasing independence supported by informed recommendation.

READING MUST BECOME SOCIAL AGAIN

School sometimes treats reading as strangely antisocial. Students sit individually, read silently, answer questions privately, and are often discouraged from talking while they read. Yet outside school, people who care deeply about books frequently do the opposite: they recommend them, argue about endings, quote passages, compare interpretations, join book clubs, exchange articles, and give books as gifts. Reading may occur privately, but **reader identity often develops socially**.

This matters especially for reluctant readers. A peer recommendation can carry a kind of motivational force that a teacher assignment may not. When students are able to exchange opinions about books informally, reading begins to function as part of the social life of the classroom rather than as another isolated academic task. PIRLS-informed guidance similarly identifies collaborative reading and discussion as important ways of strengthening connectedness and positive attitudes toward reading.

This does not mean that every text requires a formal literature circle or structured discussion protocol. Sometimes the most powerful social reading moment is much simpler: one student turns to another and says, *You have to read this*. That sentence may accomplish motivational work no worksheet can reproduce.

ACCESS COMES BEFORE CHOICE

There is an equity problem hidden inside many conversations about reading for pleasure: **choice is meaningless when students have almost nothing worth choosing**.

In well-resourced schools, autonomy can appear primarily motivational because books are already abundant. In many other contexts, the challenge is infrastructural. The World Bank's Read@Home work highlights persistent barriers including limited availability of books in languages children know, high costs, weak procurement systems, and failures of distribution.

A global reading-for-joy agenda therefore cannot simply advise teachers to "give students more choice." It must also ask whether meaningful choices actually exist: Are books available? Can students take them home? Do texts reflect relevant languages and cultures? Is there enough circulation for reading to become habitual rather than occasional?

This is where the logic of book-flood approaches remains useful. **Before children can develop preferences, they need encounters**. Students cannot discover genres, authors, topics, or forms they enjoy if they have rarely had access to them.

Schools with limited resources can still expand those encounters through rotating classroom libraries, bilingual collections, community lending systems, printed short-story sets, family borrowing boxes,

mobile libraries, book-donation partnerships, and shared digital libraries where connectivity allows. The specific strategy will vary by context, but the principle should not.

*Access is not a preliminary condition for a reading culture.
It is part of the reading culture itself.*

DO NOT TURN JOY INTO ANOTHER METRIC

Once schools decide that reading enjoyment matters, there is an understandable temptation to measure it aggressively. Minutes read, books completed, pages logged, quizzes passed, points accumulated, badges earned, and leaderboards displayed can all create the appearance of a strong reading culture. Yet the very act of measuring enjoyment too closely can begin to change the meaning of reading itself.

Some structure and accountability can be useful, particularly for helping students establish routines and sustain independent reading. Recent extensive-reading research also cautions against assuming that complete freedom from structure is always ideal. The problem begins when accountability becomes so constant that reading is experienced primarily as something to document, prove, or convert into points.

A student who begins asking, *How many points is this worth?* has learned something important about the purpose of reading, even if it is not what the school intended to teach. External incentives can support participation, but when they become the dominant logic of the reading environment, students may begin to orient toward completion rather than engagement.

The solution is not to eliminate assessment. Teachers need evidence about decoding, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, stamina, confidence, and reading growth. But schools should distinguish **assessment of reading development from surveillance of every reading experience**. Not every book needs a quiz, not every chapter needs a worksheet, and not every independent reading period needs to produce a visible artifact.

Some of the most meaningful evidence can be gathered through short reading conferences, informal book conversations, student recommendations, observation, occasional reflection, and the patterns teachers notice over time: students choosing more thoughtfully, expanding the range of texts they read, persisting for longer, contributing more confidently to discussion, or voluntarily returning to reading.

The critical issue is whether accountability supports the reading life or gradually crowds it out.

*Good accountability should help readers grow without
making them feel that every encounter with a book must
be converted into evidence.*

THE TEACHER IS PART OF THE READING ENVIRONMENT

One of the most underestimated literacy resources in any classroom is the teacher's own relationship with reading. Students do not only learn what teachers formally teach about books; they also notice

how teachers inhabit reading themselves. They notice whether books are discussed with genuine curiosity or only as assignments, whether recommendations extend beyond the prescribed class text, and whether the teacher's language suggests that reading is a living intellectual practice rather than another school requirement.

This modelling matters because enthusiasm is difficult to manufacture convincingly. Students can usually tell the difference between a teacher performing excitement for pedagogical effect and one who has genuinely been surprised, challenged, amused, or moved by something they have read. A teacher who says, *I changed my mind about this character, I abandoned this book halfway through, or I read something last night that made me think differently* communicates something more powerful than a slogan about the importance of literacy. They demonstrate what an adult reading life actually looks like.



The Open University and UK Literacy Association research tradition captures this idea in the concept of the **“Reading Teacher”**: **a teacher who reads and a reader who teaches**. The significance of this identity lies not in expecting every teacher to become a literary expert, but in recognizing that reading cultures are built partly through social modelling. Students are more likely to perceive books as intellectually and personally worthwhile when the adults around them treat reading as something they voluntarily return to, discuss, question, recommend, and sometimes disagree with.

This has practical consequences. Teachers who read widely are better positioned to match books to individual students, introduce unfamiliar genres, connect texts across subjects, and respond when a student says, *I don't know what to read*. They can recommend with specificity rather than simply directing learners toward a shelf. In doing so, they communicate a subtle but important message: *I know enough about books, and enough about you, to help you find something that may matter*.

A reading culture, then, is not created only through timetabled reading periods, library displays, or literacy programmes. It is also created through the habits and dispositions students repeatedly witness.

Students are more likely to believe that reading matters when the adults teaching them behave as though it genuinely matters in their own lives.

A CLASSROOM REPERTOIRE FOR BUILDING READING JOY

The following activities draw from those research traditions but are designed as adaptable classroom practices rather than a new branded framework. They can be used across age groups, languages and curricula with appropriate modification.

1. **The Three-Book Match.**

Instead of telling a student simply to “choose a book,” the teacher offers three deliberately selected possibilities based on the student's interests, current reading capacity and previous reading experiences. The student samples each and chooses. This preserves autonomy while supplying the expertise that novice or reluctant readers often lack. It turns choice from a test of library-navigation skill into guided agency.

2. **The First-Page Encounter.**

Place several books around the room and allow students to read only the opening page or two of each. Their task is not to summarize. They simply record what made them curious, confused, amused, unsettled or eager to continue. The activity teaches an important reader behaviour: choosing a text involves noticing one's own response to it.

3. **The Five-Minute Book Talk.**

Once or twice a week, the teacher briefly talks about something they have genuinely read—not a book selected because it teaches a prescribed moral, but something that generated authentic interest. Students gradually do the same. OECD PISA 2018 found teacher enthusiasm and teachers' stimulation of reading engagement to be among the teaching practices most strongly associated with students' reading enjoyment across participating systems.

4. **Reading Café: Read, Then Recommend.**

Students receive a protected period for sustained reading followed by a short social exchange. Instead of completing a comprehension sheet, they recommend—or decline to recommend—the text to a peer and explain why. This introduces light accountability without converting the reading experience into surveillance.

5. **Literature Circles Without Worksheet Domination.**

Small groups read a shared text and arrive prepared with something genuinely worth discussing. Roles can initially scaffold participation—a connector, evidence finder, questioner or challenger—but the eventual goal is authentic conversation rather than completing role sheets. The teacher listens for interpretation, disagreement, evidence and curiosity. The purpose is to make reading socially generative.

6. **One Passage, Many Meanings.** After reading, students each choose one sentence, image, idea or moment they consider significant. They then explain why. Another student may challenge the interpretation or select a different passage. This shifts comprehension away

from the assumption that every worthwhile reading experience culminates in identical answers while still requiring textual justification.

7. **The Global Shelf.** Organize short text sets around a common human or disciplinary question—belonging, migration, courage, water, justice, invention, family, identity, the environment—but deliberately include authors, genres and perspectives from different countries and communities. Students compare not merely *what the texts say* but *how perspective changes what becomes visible*. Reading becomes simultaneously literary, informational and critically comparative.
8. **Permission to Abandon—With Reader Judgment.** Experienced adult readers abandon books. Students should sometimes be allowed to do so as well, provided they can articulate the mismatch: difficulty, pacing, topic, style, prior knowledge, or simply lack of connection. The objective is not to normalize giving up whenever reading becomes demanding. It is to teach the difference between **productive difficulty and a poor reader–text match**.
9. **Read Aloud Above the Independent Level.** Teachers can expose students to language, ideas and literary complexity beyond what some can yet decode independently. Reading aloud for pleasure creates a shared textual repertoire and allows less fluent readers to participate in sophisticated meaning-making while foundational instruction continues separately. For younger children and multilingual learners in particular, shared book reading has a substantial research base, although effect sizes vary according to implementation and comparison conditions.
10. **The Reading Life Map.** Periodically invite students to map what has actually constituted reading in their lives: stories, informational books, comics, poetry, subtitles, websites, family texts, magazines, texts in different languages, digital reading and books they remember being read aloud. They then identify what they want their reading life to contain next. This is not a points chart. It is a conversation about identity—one that allows teachers to know students as readers rather than only as reading levels.

These activities differ considerably, but they share one principle: **they return some intellectual and personal ownership of reading to the reader without withdrawing the teacher's expertise.**

LITERACY IMPROVEMENT NEEDS MORE THAN MORE LITERACY TASKS

When reading outcomes decline, schools often respond by adding more instructional minutes, assessments, intervention programmes, practice passages, and test preparation, yet **more literacy activity is not necessarily the same as more meaningful reading**. A school can increase the time labelled “literacy” while reducing the time students spend absorbed in coherent texts; it can strengthen progress monitoring while allowing the library to stagnate; it can teach increasingly sophisticated strategies while leaving little room for choice, interpretation, curiosity, or sustained engagement. This is where critical thinking must enter literacy reform, because the question is not only whether individual practices such as decoding instruction, vocabulary teaching, comprehension work, and assessment are evidence-based, but what kind of reading culture emerges when they accumulate without balance. Each may be defensible in isolation, yet none guarantees that students will come to see themselves as readers. Effective literacy education must therefore protect something alongside instruction and measurement: **the development of a reading life**.

CONCLUSION: WE NEED READERS, NOT ONLY READING SCORES

The global literacy challenge is too serious for romantic solutions. Books alone will not teach every child to decode, choice cannot repair weak comprehension, and motivation cannot compensate indefinitely for texts students cannot access. Foundational instruction, vocabulary, knowledge, fluency, comprehension, and intervention all matter. But the opposite reduction is equally dangerous, because reading is more than the accurate processing of print. It is one of the principal ways human beings encounter knowledge across time, enter lives they have not lived, test unfamiliar ideas, construct arguments, experience language aesthetically, imagine alternatives, and participate in cultural and civic life.

Schools should therefore reject the false choice between producing **competent readers** and producing **willing readers**. Students need explicit instruction when the code is difficult, scaffolding when texts exceed their current capacity, and guidance when comprehension is fragile. They also need abundance, recommendation, conversation, cultural recognition, agency, curiosity, and time enough to become absorbed. They need teachers who know them as readers, books worth reading, and occasional opportunities to finish a page without immediately having to prove what they understood.

Reading literacy will not improve simply because students enjoy books. Yet a system that repeatedly strips reading of interest, ownership, and meaning should not be surprised when students become technically capable readers who rarely choose to exercise that capability.

The deepest achievement of reading education is not that students read when we tell them to. It is that, increasingly, they understand what reading can give them—and choose to return.

Teaching children to read is foundational. **Teaching them without losing the reader is the greater educational art.**



FURTHER READING

John T. Guthrie, Allan Wigfield, and colleagues

Reading Motivation, Engagement, and Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction. This body of scholarship is valuable for understanding how motivation, self-efficacy, engagement, cognitive strategies, and reading achievement interact. CORI research is especially relevant because it combines rigorous comprehension instruction with motivational supports including choice, relevance, collaboration, and competence rather than treating motivation as separate from learning.

Edward Deci and Richard Ryan

Self-Determination Theory. Their work on autonomy, competence, and relatedness provides an important theoretical foundation for understanding why reading choice alone is insufficient. More internally motivated engagement is more likely when learners experience genuine agency while also developing competence and connection with others.

Louise Rosenblatt

The Reader, the Text, the Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work. Rosenblatt's work remains foundational for understanding reading as an active transaction between reader and text rather than the passive extraction of predetermined meaning. It is particularly valuable for preserving interpretation, experience, and the reader's role in meaning-making.

Teresa Cremin, Helen Hendry, Lucy Rodriguez Leon, and Natalia Kucirkova

Reading Teachers: Nurturing Reading for Pleasure. This 2023 volume provides an especially strong bridge between research and classroom practice, with chapters on reader identity, reading aloud, informal book talk, independent reading time, social reading environments, libraries, families, and teachers themselves as readers. It is probably the single most directly aligned book with this article.

Jennifer Serravallo

The Reading Strategies Book 2.0: Your Research-Based Guide to Developing Skilled Readers. This is an excellent practical companion for K–8 educators. The 2023 edition contains hundreds of classroom-ready strategies for comprehension, fluency, vocabulary, engagement, conferring, small-group instruction, and differentiation, with explicit links to research. It is particularly useful for teachers who want to translate reading theory into concrete instructional moves.

Doug Lemov, Colleen Driggs, and Erica Woolway

Reading Reconsidered: A Practical Guide to Rigorous Literacy Instruction. This book complements the reading-for-pleasure literature by concentrating on rigorous classroom practice, including complex texts, vocabulary development, close reading, and approaches that strengthen students' ability to engage successfully with demanding material. It helps preserve an important balance in this article: cultivating willing readers should never require lowering the intellectual ambition of reading instruction.

IEA — PIRLS 2021 International Results in Reading

Published in 2023, this major international study provides comparative evidence on fourth-grade reading achievement alongside students' attitudes, confidence, reading habits, and home and school literacy environments. Its findings are particularly useful because they show that stronger reading achievement and more positive attitudes toward reading tend to exist in mutually reinforcing relationships rather than as entirely separate outcomes.

OECD — PISA Reading Literacy Research

PISA defines reading literacy as understanding, using, evaluating, reflecting on, and engaging with texts in order to achieve goals, develop knowledge and potential, and participate in society. That definition is particularly relevant to this article because it situates engagement inside literacy itself rather than treating it as an optional motivational addition.

Nina L. Sangers and colleagues

Learning a Language Through Reading: A Meta-analysis of Studies on the Effects of Extensive Reading on Second and Foreign Language Learning (2025). This synthesis supports extensive reading in second- and foreign-language learning while also complicating simplistic assumptions about unrestricted choice. Effects were stronger in studies where text choice was appropriately bounded and some accountability was included. These findings should be interpreted within the study's context, particularly because foreign-language and university learners were heavily represented.

Lei Ma

Effects of Literature Circles Activity on Reading Comprehension of L2 English Learners: A Meta-analysis (2025). This synthesis of 15 samples found a substantial positive effect of literature circles on reading comprehension among L2 English learners. It provides useful support for the social-reading dimension of this article, while its specific population means the findings should not be treated as universal evidence for all readers and contexts.

World Bank

Foundational Learning and Read@Home. These resources place reading motivation within the global realities of access, language, affordability, book supply, and learning poverty. Read@Home is particularly valuable for reminding educators that choice and reading culture depend first on children having meaningful access to varied books in languages they understand.



Future-Ready Schools is an exclusive feature by Javeria Rana on The Worthy Educator. Check back regularly for new insights on education transformed!