

## International Journal of English Studies and Literature

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# The reading habits of university students studying English language and literature in the digital age<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

The present reading habits and attitudes of Atatürk University English Language and Literature students are the focus of this research. In addition, it seeks to ascertain how reading habits have been impacted by the extensive use of the internet and other alternative multimedia resources. We administered a survey to seventy-six college students at random in order to get a feel for their present reading habits. Demographic information, reading frequency, online reading material, online activities, first click content, and reading habit development approaches were the six parts of the questionnaire. The data was analysed using the SPSS Statistics 20 software. Researchers sought to understand students' reading habits generally and offered recommendations on how to encourage reading among today's tech-dependent college students.

*Keywords:*readinghabits;e-book;technologyassistedreading;importanceofreading;developingreadinghabits

## 1. Introduction

The last two decades have seen a meteoric rise in the pervasiveness of technology in our daily lives. Perhaps the most consequential effect of technology is on the dissemination of knowledge. Information formerly conveyed mostly via paper documents is gradually giving way to digital records stored online. The way individuals read has been impacted by this development. The reading habits of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students have changed from paper to online reading, according to a study by Shen (2006). Teachers shouldn't look the other way at this change in reading habits since reading is fundamental to learning how to write, listen, and talk effectively. The growing quantity of digital information and entertainment is also gaining popularity among the younger generation, according to Karim, Hasan, and Shahriza (2006). Additional evidence from Liu (2005) suggests that the exponential expansion of

digital information available and there is an increase in the amount of time people spend reading electronic media. These findings show that the digital age has already engulfed people's reading habits.

### *1.1. Literature review*

Online version of books, magazines and newspaper are available at relatively low prices compared to their printed counterparts. It is easy to access online documents via internet and readers gain the opportunity to read anywhere, anytime. Despite its benefits, some educators may have some concerns that the entertainment ability of technology surpasses the educational role. The overall impact of technology on reading habits was discussed in this study.

#### *1.1.1. Importance of Reading*

Noor (2011) claims that in any higher learning environment, reading is valued as the most important academic language skill for all second and foreign language learners. Students learn new information and become more competent in their subject matters through reading. Loan (2009), moreover, stresses the importance of reading by claiming that individuals with good reading habits have the chance to widen their mental horizons and to multiply their opportunities. Noor (2011) supports Loan's idea and adds that reading is essential in teaching individuals how to cope with new knowledge in the technologically changing and developing world of today.

Holte (1998) emphasizes the importance of reading in that it increases quality of life as well as creating culture and making cultural heritage available; moreover, he claims that it both strengthens and brings people together (as cited in Akanda, Hoq and Hasan, 2013). The importance of reading is obviously high, so the question becomes what is to be done to facilitate reading? Since technology affects how we read by changing the medium from printed to electronic, methods to foster new reading habits should be studied.

#### *1.1.2. Technology Assisted Reading*

Amplification of technology's influence on people's lives has occurred with the widespread availability of electronic media such as radios, TVs, computers, and smartphones. Thanks to these technological developments, a new reading trend has emerged: digital reading. A large portion of the widely used technology-assisted reading materials include online periodicals, electronic books, and audio books. Publications such as newspapers and magazines that are published and distributed online are known as online periodicals. They are digital and accessible online, so adding, editing, and updating their data is a breeze. Applications may now be simply downloaded to mobile phones or tablet computers thanks to recent improvements in portable devices. No internet connection is necessary to read the news that is provided in the programs. Users are not limited to reading online news; these programs also allow them to view movies and listen to news. Electronic books are the primary focus of e-book readers like the Kindle and the Nook. Any reader may carry thousands of electronic books on their person at all times. Word definitions and page translations are both made possible by them. Some of their functions, including changing the font size, highlighting and underlining sentences, and so on, might be useful to readers. Some of them even let you listen as you read by using a text-to-speech function that turns written text into audible sounds. Audiobooks are another kind of book that is rapidly growing in popularity. Listening to audiobooks opens up other worlds of reading, according to Thurrott (2011). This includes

while driving, doing housework, and doing yard work. They are especially useful for those who have too poor of eyesight to read and for language learners who want to improve their pronunciation skills.

To sum up, the integration of technology into people's lives has affected the mediums from which they read. In addition to printed books, online periodicals, audio books, and e-books have begun to be used widely. The digital formats of the texts provide more than what printed formats do as they have various features which make reading a fun activity. The dull image of reading, especially for those who read less but spend much time online, could be eliminated by these recent developments in reading mediums.

### *1.2. Research questions*

The three research questions answered by the researcher in this study were: 1) What are the major trends of reading interests and reading mediums of university students studying English Language and Literature, 2) How influential is the internet on the reading habits of students? and 3) What are some possible recommendations to improve reading habits of students in the digital age?

## **2. Methodology**

### *2.1. Participants*

The participants of the questionnaire were composed of university students studying in English Language and Literature department at Ataturk University in Turkey. They were composed of 76 respondents, 23 of whom were male and 53 of whom were female. They were sophomores, so their ages were generally in the twenties. As they studied in English Language and Literature department, they were quite competent in English language.

### *2.2. Data collection procedures*

The information about reading habits among university students was gathered through a questionnaire. The students were not asked to give their real names so that they would feel comfortable to answer the questions frankly. Having collected the questionnaire from respondents, the researcher analyzed them through using SPSS Statistics 20 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) program and found the distribution of responses

### *2.3. Questionnaire*

The questionnaire of this study was based on the study of Chauhan and Lal (2012), titled 'Impact of information technology on reading habits of college students'. After some changes, the questionnaire was conducted among university students and their general reading habits were explored. As the participants were composed of university students, the 'qualification' section was omitted from the first part of the original questionnaire. In the fifth part of the questionnaire that dealt with the topics clicked first by the respondents, 'Facebook' was added to the bottom of the list. The seventh and the last part of the questionnaire was fully omitted as it mostly provided information like the participants' favorite writers, which was unnecessary for answering the research questions. The Cronach's alpha of the questionnaire was found 0,99 in SPSS Statistics 20.

## **3. Results**

The analysis of the questionnaire was done under six main categories: demographic information, frequency of items read, contents of online reading, online activities, content first clicked when online, and techniques to develop reading habits. Each of these categories was placed in the questionnaire to assess the current reading habits of participants and to find plausible answers to the research questions. SPSS Statistics 20 program was used to synthesize information about the percentages of the responses.

3.1. Demographic Information

This part of the questionnaire focused on gathering information about the duration of internet use per day, and the total number of magazines and novels read by the respondents in a year as well as their personal details. How much time a regular student spends online was explored. The findings are provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Hours spent online every day

	0-1 hours	1-3 hours	4-6 hours	Over 6 hours
Hours spent online	19.7%	65.8%	13.2%	1.3%

As seen in Table 1, the great majority of the participants (65.8%) spend 1 to 3 hours online every day. Based upon this finding, it can be concluded that students do not exaggerate their internet use. Only 1.3% of the respondents spend more than 6 hours online. What they do in these periods of time is discussed in the following parts of the questionnaire.

The average number of magazines and novels read by the respondents in a year is 9.4. Even though the average is almost 10, some students reported that they read about 30 novels and magazines a year, while some others claimed none.

3.2. Frequency of Items Read

This part of the questionnaire aimed at gathering general information about the reading habits of participants. How frequently they read newspapers, magazines, textbooks, novels, emails, and online information was determined.

Table 2. Frequency of items read

Reading	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Participation Level
Newspapers	75	3,25	,97	Sometimes
Magazines	76	2,55	1,00	Rarely
Textbooks	76	3,24	1,08	Often
Novels	76	3,35	1,14	Often
E-mails	76	2,99	1,25	Sometimes
Online Information	76	3,33	1,19	Often

Table 2 showed that mean values ranged from 2,55 to 3,35. According to the results of the most frequent number of the items, while reading novels, textbooks, and online information were the most

popular activities among the respondents, reading magazines, with the least mean, was rarely practiced. Moreover, the respondents stated that they sometimes read newspapers and emails.

On the other hand, the findings of this part of the questionnaire indicated that most of the participants avoided selecting extreme responses such as ‘never’ and ‘very often’. Instead, most participants’ responses were gathered around ‘often’ and ‘sometimes’, which showed that though not very intense, most of the respondents developed a certain level of reading habits.

3.3. Contents of online reading

The contents of reading studied included online news, online magazines, e-books, stories and novels, emails, journal articles, sales information, movie reviews, horoscopes, weather reports, health information, comic strips, jokes, fashion, sports, job information, and food/nutrition.

Table 3. Contents of online reading

Read items	N	Mean	Std.Deviation	Participation Level
Online news	76	3,60	1,07	Often
Online magazines	76	2,68	1,08	Rarely
e-books	76	2,55	1,15	Sometimes
Stories and novels	75	2,64	1,33	Never
Emails	76	3,05	1,30	Often
Journal articles	76	2,62	1,16	Rarely
Sales information	76	2,49	1,27	Never
Movie reviews	76	3,05	1,20	Sometimes
Horoscopes	75	2,95	1,42	Sometimes
Weather reports	76	3,26	1,17	Often
Health information	76	3,28	1,06	Sometimes
Comic strips	76	3,17	1,24	Often
Jokes	76	3,21	1,24	Sometimes
Fashion	76	2,88	1,43	Never
Sports	76	2,53	1,48	Never
Job information	76	3,06	1,17	Sometimes
Food/nutrition	76	3,06	1,20	Sometimes

As is indicated in Table 3, mean values ranged from 2.49 to 3.60. According to the results of the most frequent number of the items, online news was the most frequently read item on the internet. Emails, weather reports, comic strips were also followed online often by the respondents.

The majority of the respondents reported that they sometimes read e-books, movie reviews, horoscopes, health information, jokes, job information, and food/nutrition. The least popular items read online were stories and novels, sales information, fashion and sports.

The popular topics students read when online can be increased in terms of both number and availability, the less popular topics can become more attractive through some alterations in their content, so that university students could spend more time reading on the internet. Moreover, informing students about the availability of the websites that provide information about their interests will boost the amount of reading on the internet.

### 3.4. Onlineactivities

Thispartofthequestionnairewasappliedtodeterminethethingsdonebytheparticipantswhenthey areonline.Theactivitiesprovidedtothestudenttochoosefromwere:listeningtomusic,playinggames, looking at photos, reading, shopping online, using MSN and Yahoo messenger, checking e-mails, chatting with friends and downloading all types of movies.

**Table5.**Onlineactivities

Activities	Yes(%)	No(%)	Missing(%)
Ilistentomusic	93.4	6.6	0
Iplaygames	51.3	48.7	0
Ilookat photos	82.9	17.1	0
Iread allkindsofinformation	74.7	24.0	1.3
Ishop online	48.0	50.7	1.3
IuseMSNmessenger	52.7	45.9	1.4
IuseYahoo Messenger	5.4	93.2	1.4
Icheckemail	76.3	23.7	0
Ichatwith friends	84.2	15.8	0
Idownloadmovies	63.2	31.6	5.3

The most common activity done online by the participants was listening to music (93.4 %). It was followed by chatting with friends (84.2%) and looking at photos (82.9 %). Moreover, most of the participantsstatedthattheycheckedtheiremails(76.3%)andreadallkindsofinformation(74.7%),and 63.2% of the respondents downloaded movies.

SlightlymorethanhalfoftheparticipantsusedMSNmessenger(52.7%).Theleastcommonpurpose of using internet chosen by the participants was using Yahoo messenger (5.4%). Playing games online was popular among 51.3%of the respondents. Almost half ofthe respondents mentioned they shopped online (48 %).

Though in different amounts, the internet was used for many purposes among university students suchaslisteningtomusic,playinggames,lookingatphotos,readingallkindsofinformation,shopping online,usingMSNandYahoomessenger,checkinge-mails,chattingwithfriendsanddownloadingall types of movies.

Some alterations in the design and content of these categories can facilitate reading and other learning processes. The games may involve more language texts, music sections may involve lyrics of the songs, and online shopping sites may include a detailed explanation of items presented.

### 3.5. Contentfirstclickedwhenonline

The very first topics that caught the interest of participants when online were explored. The fifteen categories made available to participants were; art and humanities, business and economy, computers and internet, education, entertainment, government, health, news and media, recreation and sports, reference, regional, science, social science, society and culture, and Facebook.

**Table6.** Content first clicked when online

Category	Percentage(%)
Art and Humanities	2.6
Business and Economy	0
Computers and Internet	14.5
Education	2.6
Entertainment	11.8
Government	1.3
Health	1.3
News and Media	23.7
Recreation and Sports	6.6
Reference	1.3
Regional	0
Science	1.3
Social science	0
Society and Culture	5.3
Facebook	27.6

When asked students which content they clicked first when they were online, out of fifteen different ones, majority of them put 'Facebook' (27.6%) in the first place. Facebook was followed by news and media (23.7%). Following news on the internet is quite popular among people since online news is easily updated and can be accessed anywhere any time as long as there is a technological device such as a tablet computer or mobile phone with an internet connection.

14.5% of the participants chose to know about computer and internet first while 11.8% of them chose entertainment. Recreation and sports constituted 6.6% of the answers and society and culture accounted for 5.3%. The rest of the categories, which were business and economy, education, government, health, reference regional, science and social science, attracted little to no attention from the respondents.

In conclusion, Facebook (27.6%) and News and Media (23.7%) were the top two categories clicked first by the respondents when online. In order to develop the reading habits learners, teachers or students can create groups for their classes on sites such as Facebook and share interesting news and other information related to their lessons there. As almost all students have smartphones these days, they can be encouraged to download and follow news applications of such popular sites as BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) onto their phones and tablet computers.

### 3.6. Techniques to develop reading habits

This part of the questionnaire focused on the techniques to develop reading habits. Participants were provided with nine different ways to develop reading habits. They chose from the categories of parental guidance and encouragement, motivation by teachers, reading materials about hobbies and interests, consistent use of dictionary, daily newspaper reading, book reading, visiting libraries, well-prepared reading material, studying to improve vocabulary and knowledge.

**Table 7.**Techniques to develop reading habits

Techniques	Yes(%)	No(%)
Parental guidance and encouragement	54.1	45.9
Motivation by teachers	86.7	13.3
Reading materials about hobbies and interests	83.8	16.2
Consistent use of dictionary	68.9	31.1
Daily newspaper reading	77.0	23.0
Book reading	88.0	12.0
Visiting libraries	68.0	32.0
Well-prepared reading material	80.0	20.0
Studying to improve vocabulary knowledge	87.8	12.2

The majority of the participants (88%) thought that 'book reading' was the most effective method in developing reading skills, which was closely followed by 'studying to improve vocabulary knowledge' (87.8%). Motivation by teachers (86.7%) was considered by many as influential in developing reading skills. For the great majority of the respondents, teachers played a critical role in developing reading habits. Besides the motivational aspect, 83.8% of the participants had confidence in the effectiveness of reading materials about hobbies and interests. For this reason, the availability of texts related to people's interests and hobbies can trigger the development of reading habits.

Well-prepared reading material was envisaged effective in developing reading skills by 80% of the respondents. 77% of the participants thought that reading newspapers daily improved reading habits. 68% of the respondents were of the idea that visiting libraries was one way to develop reading habits. The least effective method selected by 54.1% of the participants was parental guidance and encouragement. Almost half of the respondents did not believe in the effectiveness of parental guidance in developing reading skills.

#### 4. Discussion

In this part of the study, the three research questions were discussed. Answers to these questions were given within the light of the questionnaire responses.

##### 4.1. What are the major trends of reading interests and reading mediums of university students studying English language and literature?

One of the major goals of this study was to explore the reading habits of university students, studying English Language and Literature at Atatürk University. The questionnaire responses indicated that respondents enjoyed reading novels, text books, and online information often. The majority of them reported that they rarely read magazines. Newspapers and emails were found to be read sometimes for the majority.

The contents of online information were also explored. Out of the given topics, 'online news' was chosen as the most widely read topic. The availability and practicality of online news makes it popular among respondents. Internet users can easily access the latest online news via their mobile phones and

computers. Almost all of the well-known newspapers have websites and applications for operating systems such as Android and iOS to deliver the latest news to their readers.

Respondents claimed that they followed e-mails, weather reports, and comic strips often while they sometimes read e-books, movie reviews, horoscopes, health information, jokes, job information, and food/nutrition. The least popular items read online by the respondents were stories and novels, sales information, fashion and sports.

In conclusion, the overall findings of the study showed that university students, studying English Language and Literature had developed a certain level of reading habits. There has been a tendency towards reading online information. However, this tendency is not seen in all texts available online to the students. For instance, though the majority of the students read printed novels, a great many of them never read novels online.

#### *4.2. How influential is the internet on the reading habits of students?*

The internet, which was reported to be mostly used for listening to music (93.4%), chatting with friends (84.2%), and looking at photos (82.9%) by the respondents of the questionnaire, has some impacts on their reading habits. The recent developments in technology have increased the availability of information in digital formats. People can obtain information from television, radio, and online sources.

The great majority of the respondents (65.8%) claimed that they spent between one to three hours online everyday. The average amount of time that the participants spend online may not seem a lot; however, how they pass it is important for educators. The topics, categories and websites that attract the attention of the students should be determined in order to use the internet as a reading tool.

Online information, which is a broad category, involves any kind of text made available on the internet. The increasing availability of digitalized texts promotes digital reading. The majority of the respondents reported that they often read online information. Moreover, out of various items, reading online news was found to be the most common activity among the learners.

In conclusion, the internet, used for various purposes from chatting with friends to buying items, is the core of digital reading. The respondents did not remain indifferent to the reading opportunities of the digital age, as the majority of them read online information. They read texts about relatively diverse topics such as sales information, online news, stories and novels, jokes, food & nutrition, and health information.

#### *4.3. What are some possible recommendations to improve reading habits of students in the digital age?*

Although the importance of reading is universally acknowledged, how to develop reading habits have long been discussed by experts. Noor (2011) thinks that the current education system should encourage learners to become familiar with the social and technological changes happening at a tremendous rate. Liu (2005) estimates that understanding changes in reading behavior, due to the evolution of electronic documents, would help in designing more sophisticated digital libraries and encourage users to gain benefits from this digital environment.

While adapting the education system to the constantly developing technological advancements, the training of educators is of great importance. If a technological device such as a smart board is to be placed in a classroom, the first thing to be done is to teach educators about how to integrate such devices into classroom activities. As well as the teachers, students should be informed about the latest reading opportunities available via internet. It is a part of the teachers' responsibility to inform and encourage

encourage educators to make use of digital texts. Teachers' encouragement is a powerful tool for fostering lifelong readers, according to 86.7% of respondents. The opportunities presented by the internet should be made known to students. These days, almost every student has a smartphone. Since most people like reading the news, it might be a good idea to have students download news apps on their phones. Additionally, there are websites that may help pupils improve their reading habits via translation. With accurate translations accessible in a number of languages, these websites provide students with excellent reading material from which to improve their reading and translation skills. The ability to read is fundamental because it provides access to a universe of possibilities, both real and imagined. Holte (1998) argues that, first and foremost, reading has to shed its drab reputation. To change people's perceptions and encourage reading, organisations may host reading competitions and other enjoyable reading activities (Akanda, Hoq, Hasan, 2013). And to get people, especially kids, interested in reading, prominent persons may attend the activities. Games, reading contests, and set reading times each day are all examples of what may fall under this category of activities. In order to pique students' interest in reading, more books and reading resources should be made accessible to them, according to Akanda, Hoq, and Hasan (2013). In addition, they assert that the design and presentation have a significant role in capturing students' attention, alongside the substance of the reading materials. Furthermore, they argue that young people's preoccupation with the Internet, social media, blogs, etc. makes it imperative that engaging and informative reading materials be made available online. It is important to launch reading initiatives like reading hour and reading week. Such pursuits are amenable to both traditional classroom settings and online learning environments. Researchers and teachers of reading should include digital and online literacy into their work since these skills are now ubiquitous in our everyday lives (Hagood, 2003). The growth of reading habits will undoubtedly be aided by this literary study. Some linguists advocate for reorganising educational systems using optimum technology, while others argue against their use. According to Loan (2009), current technological devices including TV, movies, mobile phones, computers, and the internet have evolved into "time eating machines," calling for prompt intervention. Librarians and teachers need to entice a new generation to read if we are to keep the use of both traditional reading and new technologies in check. Finally, in today's environment, there are many options for helping children develop good reading habits. When it comes to improving reading habits, technology-assisted reading is a powerful tool. Reading becomes more engaging when technology is included into reading habits. The first step in improving students' reading habits via the use of technology in the classroom should be training for teachers. It is important for students to know how to take use of new technology as it becomes available. It is possible to pursue respondents' interests with their online reading habits. Readers must continually adjust themselves to keep up with the ever-increasing pace of technological change.

## 5. Conclusions

In the ever changing world of today, reading habits of individuals have started to become more digitalized in accordance with the advances in technology. As well as those who read from printed word, there seems to be an increase in the amount of people who use technological devices such as e-book readers, tablet computers, computers, and mobile phones to satisfy their reading interests. The majority of the respondents, for example, stated that they often followed online information.

The findings of the survey showed that reading habits of respondents were affected by the media and technology. Most of the participants spend hours and hours in front of their computer screens.

Respondents mentioned they first checked their 'Facebook' account when online. They enjoy listening to music, playing games, and doing many other things. The majority of the respondents claimed that they often read online news, check their emails, view the weather report and read comic strips.

Based on the survey findings, some valuable advice was given in the discussion part. The educators should work on some applicable methods to develop not only the students reading habits, but also the language skills such as reading, writing, speaking and listening.

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**Appendix A. Reading Habits Questionnaire**

**I. Demographic:** (Please check (x) your answer. Thank you)

Gender: Male  Female

Age: Under 20 , 20-21 , 22-23 , 24-25 , 26-27 , over 27

Hours spent online everyday: 0-1 hours , 1-3 , 4-6 , Over 6

The total number of magazines and novels you read in a year.....

**How often do you read each of the following in a general week?** (Please check (x) your answer. Thank you)

Reading	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often
Newspaper					
Magazines					
Textbooks					
Novels					
E-mails					
Online information					

What do you usually read on the internet?

(Please check(x) your answer. Thank you)

Reading	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often
Online news					
Online magazines					
E-books					
Stories and novels					
Emails					
Journal articles					
Sales information					
Movie reviews					
Horoscopes					
Weather reports					
Health information					
Comic strips					
Jokes					
Fashion					
Sports					
Job information					
Food/nutrition					

What do you do when you surf on the internet?

(Please check(x) your answer. Thank you)

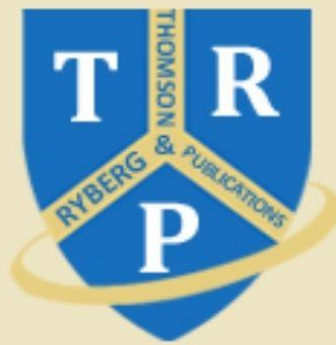
Online Activities	Yes	No
I listen to music		
I play game		
I look at photos		
I read all kinds of information		
I shop online		
I use MSN messenger		
I use Yahoo Messenger		
I check email		
I chat with friends		
I download movies		

**II. Which category do you click first when you surf on the internet?**  
 (Please check (x) your answer. Thank you)

Category	Check
Art and Humanities	
Business and Economy	
Computers and Internet	
Education	
Entertainment	
Government	
Health	
News and Media	
Recreation and Sports	
Reference	
Regional	
Science	
Social science	
Society and Culture	
Facebook	

**III. What techniques do you develop to improve your reading abilities?**  
 (Please check (x) your answer)

Techniques	Yes	No
Parental guidance and encouragement		
Motivation by teachers		
Reading materials about hobbies and interests		
Consistent use of dictionary		
Daily newspaper reading		
Book reading		
Visiting libraries		
Well-prepared reading material		
Studying to improve vocabulary and knowledge		



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