

# EFL Students' Reading Habits: A Study Towards the Use of Digital Tools Trends

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**Abstract.** The study's goal is to learn about the present reading habits of students in the English Language and Education Study Program at Unika Santu Paulus Ruteng using digital-based methods. It also intends to see what effect using the Internet and other alternative multimedia resources has on reading habits. The researchers used a questionnaire adapted from Akarzu and Daryemez (2014), which included five main categories: frequency of items read, contents of online reading, online activities, content first clicked when online, and techniques to develop reading habits. The questionnaire was then distributed to 187 participants. The findings revealed that most students are highly habituated to using the Internet for online reading habits and are hooked to using a gadget or smartphone with an Internet connection. They devoted a significant amount of time to internet reading. When they were reading online, they engaged in a variety of activities. Almost every aspect of a student's life is reliant on the Internet. Their reading habits were also influenced by the reading they found on the Internet, which was based on interest content that was relevant to their interests.

**Keywords:** reading habits, EFL students, digital era

## 1 Introduction

Reading can sharpen the brain because the brain will work when we read. Therefore, reading should become a habit for everyone, especially students, because this can be one factor that shapes their academic character. They become more creative and broad-minded as a result of reading [1] because reading is a mechanical activity involving the brain and other body organs that, if done frequently enough, becomes a habit [2].

The habit itself is a repetitive action performed by a person frequently and regularly. Sometimes, because it has become a habit, this action is not realized when people do it. Lone asserts that a good reading habit is a healthy addiction because it can improve vocabulary mastery and analytical skills, increase concentration, and acquire new words, which in turn affects one's learning achievement [3], [4]. This assertion is backed up by [5], who claims that reading habits impact a person's personal growth and societal advancement in general. That is, there is a symbiotic link between reading habits and their outcomes.

It is critical to be literate and technology in the digital age in order to compete in a very complicated society [6], [7]. Its significance is underscored by the fact that illiterate youngsters would struggle to play a role in the classroom, society, and the wider world. Literacy is developing and adapting to new technology and methods of engaging in a world that has grown much more international, just as modern society is. At this stage, communication takes a variety of digital media such as telephone, email, fax, text messaging,

and various digital media platforms. Letters, books, postcards, and manual communication media have begun to shift.

Furthermore, digital reading can stimulate students' reading habits. Digital media is seen as one of today's means of reading, making access to reading materials more affordable [3]. In addition, students find it easier to find information on the Internet than looking for information available in the library regarding effectiveness and efficiency. Digital-based reading allows students to access more reading materials.

Previous research studies have proven that reading habits can stimulate students' academic initiatives and, then, at the next level, shape students' reading culture. First, research conducted by [8] states that individual reading habits are increasingly digital in line with technological advances. Media and technology influence a person's reading habits. Second, research done by [9] also reported that kids daily choose to read information on their devices. This idea is backed by the amount of time they spend on the Internet each day, which ranges from one to three hours. In addition, the results of a literature study based on an analysis of the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) conducted by the organization of countries in the world for economic cooperation and development released by [10], [11] reveal that there are discrepancies in the standards for teaching reading in Indonesian schools and the criteria used by various international organizations to assess students' reading abilities. According to the findings of their analysis, there are several factors influencing students' low ability and reading culture in Indonesia, including the fact that the learning process still does not use various models, methods, and learning strategies suitable for learning reading comprehension and the facilities and infrastructure of the school library as a center for skill development are inadequate and the reading culture of students.

However, some recent study findings do not support digital literacy-based reading habits. The gap between reading interest and reading culture that has transitioned to the digital sphere is discussed in this research. Previous studies have shown that digital-based reading habits can boost students' academic endeavors; for example, they will choose to read online if the accessible platforms give information that meets their academic demands. This will pique their interest in exploring and learning at the same time [12], [13]; hence, this study aims to examine the reading habits of students using digital devices at the Indonesian Catholic University of Santu Paulus Ruteng.

Habit is a mental process that is obtained from the way of thinking. This includes a more concrete will or feeling that is obtained through continuous action from one's mental practice or way of thinking. Reading habits refer to behaviors that express reading affinities and reading tastes. Reading habits are also defined as the way a person organizes his understanding [5], [9], [13]. As a result, reading is an activity-oriented skill that requires brain processes and various other organs prior to understanding. When this practice is repeated regularly, it develops into a habit.

A habit itself is a repeating behavior that a person undertakes often and routinely, sometimes without even recognizing it. Reading becomes a habit when it is done on a regular basis. Reading increases a person's personal growth and social advancement in general. Because reading habits are cultivated by repeating reading behavior, which is frequently done such that it becomes a new trait for students, this habit is generally examined in connection to the amount of reading content, the frequency of reading, and the average time spent reading; repetition is its key [14], [15].

Furthermore, good reading habits are indicated by continuity, fluency, accuracy, very enjoyable reading practice, reading frequency, good language skills, positive attitude towards language, being aware of and diligent in reading, having teachers who share a love of reading,

and most importantly the motivation to read [16], [17]. On the other hand, bad reading habits can be considered as bad mental habits, which are identified as passive reading, aimless reading, and a decline in cultivating a reading culture.

In short, repeated activities become habits. This occurs as a mental process. Reading becomes a habit because someone does it repeatedly. This condition has a positive impact on one's reading goals; for example, a student of the English Education Study Program who has the habit of reading, of course, will have good English skills related to vocabulary mastery, speaking fluency, and the content of the topics discussed in the course.

Today, technology is heavily ingrained in our daily lives. The information transfer process, which continues to increase, demonstrates technology's most powerful influence. This is obvious in people's access to information in the twenty-first century via using available computers and mobile devices. The conventional mode of information sharing is through printed papers; however, owing to technological advancements, this approach has been supplanted with online data. As these developments unavoidably alter how people read, especially the reading habits of students who have changed from paper-based reading to Internet-based reading, digital displays give considerable savings. Karim, Abdul, and Hasan<sup>[17]</sup> also found that the evolution of information and entertainment in the digital age format is becoming increasingly popular, particularly among young people.

Meanwhile, there is evidence that the abundance of digital information available influences new reading behaviors, and there is a rise in the amount of time individuals spend reading electronic media. Furthermore, the prices of online copies of books, periodicals, and newspapers are often lower than the pricing of printed editions, and it is also simpler for individuals to access the Internet if they wish to read anywhere and at any time. Over time, advances in information technology and media have resulted in fewer pupils reading books and increased involvement in watching television, conversing online, and engaging in other intriguing social media activities [18], [19].

In addition, the impact of technology on various areas of life has become greater. Technological advancements have resulted in a new reading trend known as digital reading, which includes reading digital magazines and newspapers. Because reading materials are available online and in digital format, the types of information can be easily changed, added to, and updated. The numerous application platforms are very simple to download via cell phones, allowing the news provided in the application to be viewed at any time and from any location. Furthermore, these programs provide e-books. Thousands of e-books can be saved for readers and simply transported. Some applications even have a text-to-speech capability that turns text into audio, allowing the reader to listen and read.

Basically, there are three skills in digital literacy, namely information literacy skills, media literacy, and ICT literacy skills [20]–[22]. Information literacy is characterized by the capacity to obtain, analyze, use, and manage information in connection to learning themes. These abilities also assist students in evaluating and contextualizing information sources, promoting them as makers and contributors of academic knowledge [23]; so it can be said that information literacy is needed by students in the academic world and their daily learning tasks. Furthermore, media literacy focuses on analyzing and creating media products to support someone's reading access [24], [25]. Students use and utilize the most appropriate means to present their thoughts at this level because readers utilize many online and offline media in today's digital society. Old media are increasingly becoming digital and multimedia [7], [26]. Some media exist both in print and online, and some only exist in electronic format, such as online newspapers, internet radio directories, digital television, and film episodes. On the other hand, ICT literacy focuses on the effective application of technology (WhatsApp,

Facebook, Line, Proquest, Youtube, TeacherTube, Skype, Vlog, Podcast, Tablet, Zoom, Webex, and many more) in the learning process [27], [28]. These technological tools are much more attractive to help students improve their language learning, especially in reading.

## 2 Method

This research was a quantitative descriptive study with a cross-sectional survey design, which was conducted from March to July 2021 at the English Language Education Study Program, Universitas Katolik Indonesia Santu Paulus Ruteng. The respondents of this study were 187 students consisting of 59 males and 128 females.

Table 1. Demographic Information of the Participants

Gender		Age				Hours/days Online			
P	L	< 20	20-22	23-25	> 25	0-2	3-5	6-8	> 8 hours
128	59	60	116	10	1	29	47	50	61

Based on the data collected, 128 female and 59 male students participated in this study. They are predominantly aged 20-22 years. As shown in Table 1, the number of participants who spent the duration of time online per day ranged from 0-2 hours/day (29 participants), 3-5 hours (47 participants), 6-8 hours (50 participants). Most participants spent more than 8 hours online every day (61 participants).

Furthermore, the data in this study have been collected using a questionnaire adapted from the Reading Habits Questionnaire research instrument [29]. The questionnaire was launched in Indonesian and revised numerous times to fit the suitable translation of the original version. This is part of considering the diverse study backgrounds of the participants in this study.

Technically, first, the researchers gave the participants 3 days to complete the questionnaire given to them. Second, the respondents answered the questionnaire based on the items given. Third, the researchers calculated a percentage based on the respondents' answers, which was then followed by a qualitative interpretation. In analyzing the data, the researchers used Excel data series software, where each data was entered into Excel format to calculate the percentage trend of respondents' answers. Based on the percentage, the researchers began to present the results of the study.

## 3 Findings

The research questionnaire contains five categories: that is the frequency of the item read, the content of reading online, online activities, the first content clicked while online, and techniques to develop the habit of reading. The following is a presentation of each category:

### Item Read Frequency

This category attempts to collect general information about participants' reading habits, such as the amount of newspapers, periodicals, English textbooks, novels, emails, and internet information they read.

Table 2. Frequency of Items Read

Items	Frequency (%)				
	<i>Never</i>	<i>Seldom</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Very often</i>
Newspaper	13.4	18.7	49.2	15.0	3.7
Magazine	17.6	24.6	41.7	13.4	2.7
English Textbooks	8.6	13.9	41.2	31.6	4.8
Novel	11,	13.9	43.3	19.8	11.2
Email	29.9	23.5	34.2	11.2	1.1
Online Information	2.7	3.7	25.1	44.4	24.1

As shown in Table 2, generally, for each item, the frequency of "sometimes" gets a higher response. The result shows that the percentage of newspapers (49.2 %), magazines (41.7%), English textbooks (41.2%), novels (43.3%), and email (34.2%), while online information (44.4%) is read more often. They chose internet information as the item they frequently read as students. Furthermore, students prefer to study Internet materials for quick and up-to-date information.

### Contents of Online Reading

Online news, online magazines, e-books, tales and novels, emails, journal articles, online sales, film reviews, weather reports, health information, humor, fashion, sports, employment information, and food/nutrition are among the reading materials investigated.

Table 3. Contents of Online Reading

Contents	Frequency (%)				
	<i>Never</i>	<i>Seldom</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Very often</i>
Online News	5.3	8.6	35.3	39.0	11.8
Online Magazine	18.2	24.1	35.3	16.0	6.4
E-Books	18.7	23.0	33.7	19.8	4.8
Stories and Novels	7.5	10.7	43.9	23.5	14.4
Email	32.1	23.0	31.6	11.8	1.6
Journal article	13.4	17.1	31.0	28.3	10.2
Online Sales	26.7	24.6	26.7	17.1	4.8
Movie Reviews	9.6	20.9	35.3	24.6	9.6
Weather report	24.1	24.1	35.8	12.8	3.2
Health information	11.2	9.1	40.6	31.0	8.0
Joke	17.1	12.3	27.8	27.3	15.5
Fashion	18.2	21.4	28.3	20.9	11.2
Sport	15.5	17.6	24.1	21.9	20.9

Contents	Frequency (%)				
	<i>Never</i>	<i>Seldom</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Very often</i>
Job Information	23.5	15.5	34.2	18.2	8.6
Food / Nutrition	5.3	15.5	30.5	32.6	16.0

According to Table 3, the most popular reading materials among participants were online news (39.0 percent), food nutrition (32.6 percent), health information (31.0 percent), journal articles (28.3 percent), and so on. These findings imply that many people read geographic information (online news). In this respect, students are more likely to read for pleasure/entertainment or to get rich knowledge for their own sake (the top three priorities are connected to their everyday life difficulties) than for academic goals (reading journals or e-books).

These findings also suggest that popular subjects that students read online may be raised in terms of both number and availability; less popular topics can be made more attractive by adjusting their content, allowing students to spend more time reading on the Internet. Furthermore, informing them about the availability of websites with information relevant to their interests would improve their interest in reading on the Internet.

### Online Activities

This component of the questionnaire investigates the numerous activities that students engage in when they are online. Listening to music, playing games, reading various types of information, online shopping, utilizing FB messenger, watching YouTube, checking email, chatting with friends, and downloading books for their English studies are all options.

Table 4. Online Activities

Activity	Frequency (%)	
	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
i listen to music	95.2	4.8
I play games	48.1	51.9
I read all kinds of information	71.7	28.3
I shop online	31.0	69.0
I use <i>FB</i> messenger	57.2	42.8
I watch <i>youtube</i>	67.4	32.6
I check Email	55.1	44.9
I chat with friends	95.7	4.3
I download the books	84.0	16.0

According to the table above, students use the Internet for various reasons, including listening to music, playing games, reading various types of information, buying online, using social media, checking email, communicating with friends, and downloading English literature. Furthermore, some adjustments to the appearance and content of these categories

can make reading and other learning activities easier. A game, for example, may feature additional language subtitles, a music area may contain song lyrics, and an online shopping site may include a full description of the things on offer.

### First Content Clicked Online

The initial issues of interest to online participants are also investigated. Among the fifteen categories available to participants are arts and humanities, business and economics, computers and the Internet, education, entertainment, government, health, news and media, recreation and sports, reference, regional, science, social science, society and culture, and social media.

Table 5. First Content Clicked Online

Category	Frequency	
	Checked	%
Arts and Humanities	48	25.7
Business and Economics	5	2.7
Computer and Internet	35	18.7
Education	62	33.2
Entertainment	57	30.5
Government	10	5.3
Health	40	21.4
News and Media	80	42.8
Recreation and Sports	39	20.9
Reference	36	19.3
Regional	9	4.8
Knowledge	42	22.5
Social science	29	15.5
Society and culture	53	28.3
Social media	127	67.9

As demonstrated in Table 5, the majority of students (67.9 percent) picked social media as the first online material they clicked on. This is followed by information and media (42.8 percent). Finally, social networking platforms such as Facebook and Whatsapp, as well as news and media, are the top two categories that students visit first when they go online. Teachers or students can start groups for their classrooms on sites like WhatsApp and post fascinating news and other material relating to their teachings there to promote students' reading habits. Because virtually all students now have smartphones, they might be encouraged to download and use new applications on their phones, tablets, or PCs.

### Techniques for Developing Reading Habits

The section of the questionnaire focused on tactics for developing participants' reading habits, and provided them with nine distinct approaches to do so. They were asked to choose from the categories of parental guidance and encouragement, motivation from the lecturer, reading materials about their hobbies and interests, consistent use of a dictionary, daily newspaper reading, reading a book, visiting the library, reading material prepared, and learning to improve their English vocabulary knowledge.

Table 6. Techniques for Developing Reading Habits

Technique	Frequency (%)	
	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Not</i>
Parental guidance and encouragement	50.3	49.7
Motivation by lecturer	74.3	25.7
Reading material about hobbies and interests	81.8	18.2
Consistent use of dictionaries	64.2	35.8
Reading the daily newspaper	51.9	48.1
Reading book	81.8	18.2
Visit the library	56.1	43.9
Well-prepared reading material	61.0	39.0
Learn to improve English vocabulary knowledge	81.8	18.2

The three strategies received the same number of replies from participants: reading materials on hobbies and interests (81.8 percent), reading books (81.8 percent), and studying to expand English vocabulary knowledge (81.8 percent) (74.3 percent). Furthermore, 64.2 percent of respondents believe that using dictionaries on a regular basis is useful in boosting reading abilities. 56.1 percent of participants believe that visiting the library may enhance reading habits; 51.9 percent of students believe that reading the daily newspaper is one approach to creating reading habits; and 50.3 percent of respondents picked the final mechanical technique efficiently is the guidance and encouragement of parents to develop their reading habits.

## 4. Discussion

According to the research, there are three main points related to early trends in habits of reading students in the digital age, the tendency of major interest in reading students, the influence of the Internet on the students' reading habits, and some possible recommendations to improve the reading habits of digital age students.

The general conclusion of this study is that EFL students at Universitas Katolik Indonesia Santu Paulus Ruteng love reading online, especially when it is directly related to the usage of smartphones to get the newest online news. Furthermore, the usage of smartphones gives various benefits, such as the ability to access online information at any time and from any



location. The range of assumptions on the questionnaire also demonstrates that people love internet information since its accessibility and usefulness make it popular among respondents. [6] Internet users may also readily obtain the most recent news via their mobile phones and PCs. Furthermore, as students, they frequently read textbooks. Participants responded positively to not only textbooks but also journal papers that were pretty good. This demonstrates that pupils are reading on purpose. They prefer reading items relevant to their daily academic demands [30], [31].

On the other hand, online news is the most chosen material when reading online, followed by food nutrition and health information, which is directly tied to the COVID-19 epidemic, and jokes are the most preferred content. Following that, kids frequently read about food nutrition and short stories or novels. This demonstrates that most individuals read for pleasure, indicating that their reading habits have become mechanical. [2] In conclusion, the research findings show that the EFL students of Universitas Katolik Indonesia Santu Paulus Ruteng have developed reading habits to a certain degree. There is a tendency to read information online, which is supported by the time they spend online. This conclusion was also stated by [29], [31] in their research.

Then, how does the Internet affect a person's reading habits? The study's findings reveal that most pupils spend their time online. As a result, this activity cannot be isolated from using an internet connection. The Internet, which is commonly used for talking with friends, listening to music, browsing images, and downloading movies, influences their reading habits. Recent technical advancements have enhanced the availability of digital information. Thus, online information, a wide category, encompasses all forms of texts accessible via the Internet. The majority of respondents acknowledged reading internet material regularly. Furthermore, reading Internet news is the most common among the various activities. Finally, the Internet, which is utilized for a variety of reasons, is the essence of digital reading [32], [33].

As a result, several recommendations for improving pupils' reading habits in digital languages may be made. Previous research suggested that students should be directed in their use of the Internet [34], but the outcomes of this study revealed that they do not require more information about the numerous platforms digitally available through the use of the Internet. They are already aware of it, and nearly all pupils now own cell phones.

On the same side, reading stuff about their hobbies and interests, reading books, and learning to improve their English vocabulary are dominant selected items from online participants. If we pay attention to these three points, the items are connected. Students need to improve their vocabulary knowledge through reading. This means they must spend more time reading and develop a reading attitude. It is nice if the type of reading is also very close to their interests and hobbies.

Among the different methods to develop reading habits in the digital era, one of the most potent ways to enhance them is to use technology. At this stage, instructors' or lecturers' roles in integrating technology into classes and lectures must be strengthened because online reading practices may be carried out in accordance with participants' interests. This advice can be utilized to address the issue of poor reading interest among Indonesian pupils [35] because technology is evolving at an unprecedented rate, and readers must respond by continually adjusting.

## **5. Conclusion and Suggestion**

This study examines pupils' reading habits in a digitally-based environment. The findings revealed that the usage of devices like smartphones with internet connections had a significant

impact on their reading habits. They spend a lot of time reading online and doing a lot of things while reading online. Their reading habits are also impacted by the sort of reading they encounter on the Internet that is centered on material interests that correspond to their hobbies. Furthermore, many online information and social media platforms might aid in the development of digital reading habits. This study also adds empirical evidence that information technology has an effect on one's reading habits and then suggests policy implications that might enhance students' reading habits through digital media interventions.

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