

Digital Reading Habits of EFL Learners: Did Online Learning during the Pandemic Covid-19 Enhance the Digital Reading Habit?

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ABSTRACT

Since the pandemic has been over, a question come asking 'Did online learning during the pandemic of Covid-19 enhance digital reading habits?' Answering that inquiry, this study focuses on two questions (1) how are digital reading habits (preference and frequency) of EFL learners? And (2) Why does digital reading habit of EFL learners in that way? This is a qualitative descriptive study. This study collected data by administering written interviews via Google form to 24 informants. There are 15 questions asked to the 24 informants and after analyzing the data, the following findings are found. First, all EFL learners prefer reading digitally either for college assignments, articles, books, or novels. However, due to their preference, EFL learners are reading viral news on social media much more than other reading material. Related to the frequency, the highest frequency of reading is at the level of 'seldom' for all of the reading material. So, the digital reading habits of EFL learners are still in poor condition since their preference and frequency are far from accessing scientific articles and books digitally. Answering the second question of the reason for the EFL digital reading habit in that condition, the data analysis comes to the conclusion of learners' bad digital literacy in accessing scientific articles and books digitally. From the interview questions and the informants' responses, there were found that even though the online learners had been for more than two years, the EFL learners' digital literacy was in bad condition and so affected the reading preference and frequency in digital.

KEYWORDS

reading; habit; preference; frequency.

INTRODUCTION

The habit of reading encompasses readers' manners in reading; the frequency or the duration and the preferences or readers' choices due to the reading material. Reading habit is also defined as when and how long you read, then what and how much you read (M. Marpaung, 2022; Prakaash et al., 2021). Reading is a complex process viewed widely either from its process cognitively or readers' and text characteristics (M. B. Marpaung et al., 2022). Readers are defined by their attitude toward reading, motivation, and reading habits. Reading attitude is the perception towards reading, a confession that reading is a positive activity (M. Marpaung & Sihombing, 2022), while reading motivation is the reason someone does reading either intrinsic or extrinsic.

In its complexity, reading now served printed and digitally. Along with the use of gadgets; smartphones and notebooks, reading digitally can't be avoided. There is no

gadget usage without reading activity (Al-Amrani, 2022). Furthermore, covid-19 turned reading mostly into digital either for academic purposes or updating information. The use of social media such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and others slightly guides people especially students enrolled in digital reading. Compared to printed reading, digital reading is presented as picturesque and communicative (Bethany, 2021), the existence of pictures and a communicative system built into digital reading for sure beneficial to EFL learners. Through the communicative systems built by any website in digital reading, EFL learners can enhance their vocabulary and any English language skills. However, printed reading is mostly presented plainly, but prioritized by its availability and readily. Though the digital source of reading provides huge cues to support L2 learners in English, due to its efficacy, many adult learners defined digital reading as not as efficient as printed reading. So, many adult learners still prefer printed reading to digital reading.

Furthermore, the system of online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic has greatly changed learners in many aspects, especially in reading. Compared to the time before the pandemic, students had a lot of access to the library for reading and borrowing books from the bookstore. Since, the pandemic of Covid-19, students have been asked to stay at home and access their studies through the Internet, this situation has totally limited students' access to the hardcopy reading material. Balancing the needs of reading as a college student, the pandemic of Covid-19 is supposed to dramatically direct students to accomplish their studying with good digital literacy such as understanding or skill in accessing digital scientific articles and books or novels.

To that condition, a question comes to this study, did online learning during the pandemic of Covid-19 enhance digital reading habits? Answering that question, this study will describe the digital reading habit by answering the following question (1) how is the digital reading habit of EFL learners after the pandemic of Covid-19? (2) did online learning during the pandemic of Covid-19 enhance EFL learners' digital reading habits? The second question will be answered by simultaneously describing the EFL learners' digital literacy by identifying their ability to access sources of digital reading for both of scientific articles and books or novels.

Reading habit is defined as a repetition of reading and choices of reading material. A good reading habit scientifically impacts a critical thinking process, healthy intellectual growth, cognitive development, academic life success, and others (B.V Chalukya, 2021). The following are review of literature explaining reading habits and digital reading habits from the year of 2015 to the latest of 2022. This literature review will also explain not only about preference and frequency of digital reading but also the readers and also factors that affect it.

This literature review begins with a research in 2015 that defined (1) the process of digital reading cognitively, by accessing the mode of either simultaneous or sequential digital presentation in readers' minds; which gave more cues in learning English, then (2) also by investigating what kind of cues most beneficial the L2 learners in their digital reading. Answering the curiosity of the study, findings explained that a simultaneous presentation in digital reading is better in attracting L2 learners' interest which turned to comprehension, while the most beneficial cue in the digital reading to the L2 learners is the existence of pictures (Liu, 2015).

A comparison of readers' intention to printed and digital reading had been proved a research in Singapore. The finding spoke about the percentage of adult readers accessing their reading material such as 46,2% from public libraries, then 43,5% from bookstores, and 10,03% from online sources. This finding explains digitalization, even though a high-technology country as Singapore, is unable to extremely drive readers' cognitive habits

in reading digitally (Loh & Sun, 2019). Moreover, overall, 93% of adult Singaporeans at least reading book in 12 months book, e-book, audiobook, printed/online newspaper, article, social media, and website, 80% of them even read at least several times a week. Due to the age, 87% of respondents are university students, while due to the frequency, 79% of the respondents read 30 minutes a day (Lee, 2018).

In Indonesia, 87% of respondents (156) defined having a low reading habit; either for their reading frequency or preferences. Of 156 respondents 75% of them are actively involved in the Internet source of reading and 79,1% of them access the Internet for social media, newspapers, and any other academic information for summarizing theories. Furthermore, the study also explained that online access to the reading material promoted a good reading habit by the indication of additional duration in reading from 1-2 pages in 30 minutes into 4-5 pages in 30 minutes, it was also proved by the indication of ability in making summary (Satriani, 2019). Due to the benefits of digital reading, findings spoke that 72,4% readers accepted a positive impact of digital reading in considering knowledge focus. Internet and any online sources are proven to provide a wide range of data on course subjects' information for further studying (post-graduate school), while 46,7% of respondents get a positive impact of digital reading to Excel examinations (Prakaash et al., 2021).

However, a decline in digital reading impacts scientifically proposed by findings which mentioned digital distraction while reading by its performance or display presentation. Digital reading is minimized by cutting the book expenditure, furthermore, digital reading is also considered by its short passage which supports readers' impatience and less time spent for reading (Sridhar, 2021). One of the best parts of digital reading defined by its readers is the navigational function in the searching button (Al-Amrani, 2022).

In conclusion, digital reading is highly functional for students in the internet era. The existence of digitalization and the internet have massively guided students to be digital readers. Digital reading by research findings is defined as effective as a source of material, simultaneous display presentation, time and expenditures consumed, and mobile access. Otherwise, digital reading is not proven correlated to academic success, digital reading is not correlated to the changing of reading material choice but strongly supports frequency or duration in reading.

RESEARCH METHODS

The purpose of this study is to describe the characteristics of EFL learners' digital reading habits at University of Darma Agung Medan. The findings of this study will be described phenomenologically (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Soegiyono, 2011). The data was taken by administering the instrument of interview. The interview is composed based on the theory of digital reading habits due to the previous related researchers from the year of 2015 to 2022.

Table 1. The Questions Distribution in the G-Form Questionnaire

Theories Scope	Indicators	Number of Questions
Digital Accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gadget availability (mobile phone, notebook, tablet, etc) - The ability to operate the internet and gadgets for digitalization - Accessibility to websites of books, journals, article providers, social media, newspapers, magazines, and blogs. 	1,2,3,4,5,6

Reading Frequency	- Frequency of accessing the internet for reading (short messages, email, articles, books, news, social media, etc) - Tendency to download reading material.	11,12,13,14,15
Reading Preference	- Short message & email (tools of distance communication) - News - Journals/ articles - Books - Social media	7,8,9,10

The interview is administered indirectly with the help of Google Forms with 15 questions. The interview is administered on 30th September 2022 and was responded to by 24 informants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following data analysis answers the study questions of (1) the EFL learners' digital reading habit and (2) the reason for the digital reading habit condition. However, due to the order of the data submission, the analysis will be initiated by (1) informing the digital availability of the EFL learners, (2) the preference of EFL learners' digital reading habits, and (3) the frequency of EFL learners' digital reading habits.

In answering the questions of digital reading preference and frequency of EFL learners at the University of Darma Agung Medan, the basic information needed to find out is the availability of digital instruments owned by the EFL learners and their degree of ability to do reading such as accessing platform, website of scientific article, and downloading books. Regarding the availability of digital instruments of the EFL learners, all of them are accomplished with digital instruments by the percentage of 66,7% having both of smartphone and laptop, and 33,3% having only a smartphone. Furthermore, due to their ability to access scientific articles and books, 58,3% of them don't know how to access scientific articles and 41,7% of them know how to access them. Moreover, 52,2% of them don't know about how to access books and read them digitally, and 47,8% of them know about how to access the books and read them digitally.

Table 2. Information on digital instruments availability and digital access for reading
 Digital instruments availability and their access to reading

Indicators	Conditions
Digital instruments availability	66,7% for both smartphones & laptops, 33,3% only smartphone
Accessing the scientific articles	58,3% don't know and 41,7% know it
Accessing the books legally	52,2% don't know and 47,8% know it

The data above explained the possibility of digital reading habits to be acquired. Due to the instruments' availability, students of Darma Agung University are able to acquire digital reading habits since most of them have smartphones even some of them are completed with laptops. However, the student's ability to access the digital world for reading speaks differently. More than 50% of the students even don't know how to access the digital world to read either articles or books, the data clearly explained the truth of EFL learners are still very poor in digital literacy, sure this is a bad condition.

Related to reading preferences, overall 66,7% of them use digital access to search the viral news through social media such as Instagram, Meta, Twitter, including YouTube. Then, 20,8% of them use digital access to have an explanation related to their college

material in class such as accessing Wikipedia or any personal blogs. Next, 8,3% of them use digital access to have news through either Google or any other news websites. And last, 4,2% of them, use digital access to have a soft reading of wise words and religious content either through social media or blogs and websites.

10. Bahan bacaan yang paling sering saya akses dengan jaringan internet adalah....

24 responses



Source: Original questioner in Indonesia language

Figure 1. Reading preferences due to Internet accessibility

The data displayed above is supported by the result of other questions in the interview session. Question number 7 asks about students' preference in doing college assignments 82,6% of students prefer to do college assignments digitally and only 17,4% of students prefer to do it manually. Next, question number 8 asks about students' preference for reading newspapers, as a result, 95,7% of students prefer to read newspapers digitally and only 4,2% of them prefer to have the hardcopy newspaper. Next, question number 9 asks about students' preference in reading books or novels, as a result, 65,2% of the EFL learners prefer to have it digitally while 34,8% of them still prefer to have it from the library manually. The following table summarizes the answer to the interview session for questions 7,8, and 9.

Table 3. Information on digital instruments availability and digital access for reading 7,8, and 9

Reading Material	Mode (%)	
	Digitally	Manually
College Assignment	82,6	17,4
Newspaper	95,7	4,2
Books or Novels	65,2	34,8

Now, due to the reading frequency which is asked in the interview questions 11,12,13, and 14. The interview answers stated that 4,2% of EFL learners said often read books digitally and 8,3% of them said never did it. While 54,2% of them said never read books digitally and 33,3% said seldom did it. Furthermore, due to the digital reading frequency in reading articles, there is 4,2% said always read articles digitally and again 4,2% said often read articles digitally, then 50% of them said ever read articles digitally and 41,7% said seldom read articles digitally. Due to the news reading, 4,2% of 24 informants said always read news digitally and 37,5% of informants said often read news digitally. Then, 41,7% of them are never reading news digitally and 16,7% of the informants are seldom reading

news digitally. However, the frequency of digital reading for wise words is 8,3% of them are always reading it digitally, then 45,8% are often reading it digitally, 25% of them are ever reading it digitally and 20,8% are seldom reading it digitally.

Table 4. Reading Preferences

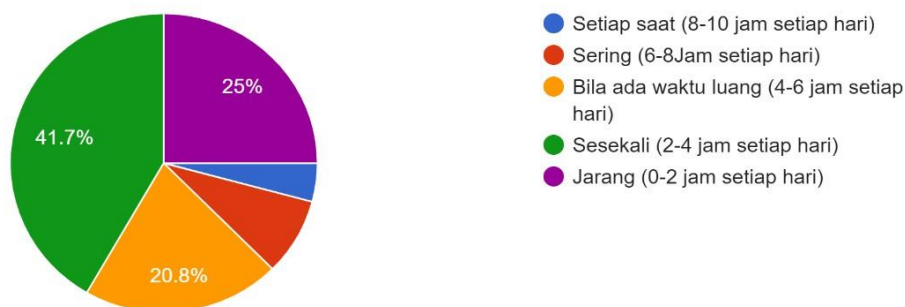
Reading Material	Degree Preferences (%)				
	Always	Often	Seldom	Ever	Never
Book/Novel	-	4,2	33,3	54,2	8,3
Articles	4,2	4,2	41,7	50	-
News	4,2	37,5	16,7	41,7	-
Wise words	8,3	45,8	20,8	25	-

Similar to the previous data display of reading frequency percentage while connected to the internet system, the above data explains the condition of reading frequency percentage viewed from the reading material choices. Due to the data above, there are only below 10% of students who always read digitally for articles, news, and wise words, dramatically there are no students who always read books/novels. Viewed from the highest percentage, students often read wise words and religious content then followed by reading articles for some time, and books or novels once or twice. Tragically, there are 8,3% of students are never reading books or novels digitally. This is clearly a serious condition in the digital era.

The data displayed above is also supported by the results of interview question number 15 which spoke as follows:

15. Akumulasi durasi saya membaca (berita, artikel, novel, buku, ungkapan mutiara) melalui handphone secara online adalah...

24 responses



Source: Original questioner in Indonesia language

Figure 2. EFL Learners' Digital Reading Frequency

The chart above explains the accumulation of EFL learners' time spending on digital access either for newspapers, articles, novels, books, or wise words and religious content, and it has resulted in only 1 student (4,2%) who always accessed reading digitally, then 2 students (8,3%) were often accessed reading digitally, next 5 students (20,8%) were accessed reading digitally when it is available, next 10 students (41,7%) were accessed reading digitally for several times, and last 6 students (25%) were accessed reading digitally for once or twice.

The data which was taken by the interview questions 11,12,13,14, and 15 supported each other. Interview questions number 11 to 14 asked the students' frequency for each of college importance, news reading, and books or novels, while interview question number 15 asked

the duration of EFL learners operating their digital utilities and reading. Moreover, due to the digital reading frequency, the data explained that the highest percentage of accumulation is in the part of 'seldom' in reading for all reading material, while the lowest percentage of accumulation is in the part of never for reading book or novel. This reality is supported by data from question number 15 which is

given information that most EFL learners spend their time reading through digital utilities for 2 to 4 hours per day.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Due to the questions of the study, the following are the findings of this study

How are the EFL learners' digital reading habits?

After administering written interviews with the help of Google form, the 24 informants responded and a conclusion stated that EFL learners' digital reading habits are by the condition of (1) even EFL learners prefer completing college assignments, reading newspapers, and reading books or novels digitally, but they mostly prefer reading viral news by visiting social media platform of Instagram, Meta, Twitter, and YouTube in a percentage of 66,7%. Then, related to the frequency of digital reading, the data analysis found that EFL learners' frequency is mainly in the status of 'seldom' for newspapers, articles, books, and wise words. Moreover, due to the time duration in accessing reading material, the data analysis also found that the highest percentage is in the duration of 2 to 4 hours in a day. The combination of reading preference for visiting social media platforms of Instagram, Meta, Twitter, and YouTube, and then reading frequency in a level of 'seldom' for all types of reading material, including time duration in 2 to 4 hours per day for accessing reading activity, it is clearly and easily to be stated that the EFL learners digital reading habit is not in a good condition.

Did online learning during the pandemic of Covid-19 enhance digital reading habits?

By administering the interview question number 4,5, and 6, it was found that EFL learners at the University of Darma Agung Medan don't have any digital literacy since they didn't know how to access the source of scientific articles and books digitally. Related to this condition, it can be assumed that online learning during the pandemic of Covid-19 didn't enhance the digital reading habits of EFL learners.

CONCLUSION

Digital reading habit is the digital preference and frequency of reading. Many works of literature have been published due to the digital reading habit strengthen the importance of observing digital reading habit. Furthermore, due to the pandemic of Covid-19, online learning has been activated, this condition is similarly assumed to enhance the reading habit digitally through digital literacy. After administering a written interview supported with Google form, 24 informants responded and the following data were found.

1. The EFL learners are all accomplished with digital utilities of smartphone and laptop or notebook, by the condition of (1) 58,3% of students don't know how to access scientific articles digitally and (2) 52,2% of students don't know how to access books or novel digitally, this is also a picture of a poor digital literacy by the EFL learners.
2. Related to the previous finding, the poor ability of EFL learners to access digital sources of reading determined that online learning during the pandemic of Covid-19 was unable to enhance the digital reading habits of EFL learners. The poor ability to

access sources of digital reading habits is one of the main indicators of poor preference and frequency of reading habits. Because the preference and frequency of reading only happen when readers have access to do reading itself.

3. Due to their reading preference, most EFL learners prefer to read digitally for college assignments, newspapers, and books or novels. However, when they were asked about their preferences out of those three choices, the EFL learners informed the following orders of choices (1) accessing viral news through social media, (2) theoretical explanation through Wikipedia, personal blogs, and other educational website, (3) online newspaper, and (4) personality content of wise words, proverbs, and any religious material.
4. Due to the reading frequency, more than 65% of students prefer to read digitally for college assignments, newspapers, and books or novels. However, related to their time spent reading through digital utilities, the highest time spending percentage is 41,7% for 2 to 4 hours per day.

From the 4 explanations above, it can be concluded that the digital reading of EFL learners at Darma Agung University is still in a bad condition. Furthermore, online learning during the pandemic of Covid-19 didn't enhance the digital reading habit since it even didn't affect the digital literacy of the EFL learners themselves.

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