

The influence of social media on English language reading habits among Jordanian EFL students in Al-Mafraq province

¹ Aabdalla Nahar Al harafsheh, ² Ambigapathy Pandian

¹ Ph.D. Candidate School of Languages, Literacies and Translation University Science Malaysia (USM), Malaysia.

² School of Languages, Literacies and Translation University Science Malaysia (USM), Malaysia

Abstract

The aim of this research is to investigate the influence of social media including surfing the internet and reading on the internet on the English language reading habits of Jordanian EFL students. The study was conducted in six secondary schools situated in Al-Mafraq province. A questionnaire was used for the data collection. The data collected were analyzed quantitatively with the use of Co-Variance Based Structural Equation Modelling (CB-SEM) in AMOS 21.0 software. From the total of 275 copies of questionnaire distributed, 268 copies were filled and returned. The findings revealed that surfing the internet did not have a direct impact on the respondents' English language reading habits. The results also showed that reading on the internet was found to have a direct impact on the respondents' English language reading habits.

Keywords: Reading habit, Social media, Surfing the internet, Reading on the internet, EFL students

Introduction

Reading habit is an important aspect for children to improve their language skills. (Reyene, 1998) ^[11]. Bignold (2003) ^[3] asserted that the habit of reading can develop Children's reading skills. Thus, the habit of reading is essential for widening the experiences and knowledge of young people whether it is for pleasure or for the purpose of learning (Green, 2002) ^[12]. Grabe & Stoller (1997) ^[13] confirmed that a good reading habit is significant for individuals to develop their personalities and mental abilities. It plays a fundamental role in enabling an individual to acquire the proficiency of language. Reading books on a consistent basis as well as having a good reading habit enable the individuals to analyze the ideas of the others, which will develop the critical thinking skills of readers. Furthermore, the amount of reading within and without the school significantly influences reading in terms of fluency, speed, verbal capacity, overall knowledge and academic achievements (Cunningham & Stanovich, 2001) ^[14].

Statement of the problem

There has been a number of studies carried out on reading habits amongst teenagers and researchers are still searching for changes in reading patterns pertaining to the wide usage of different reading resources specifically ICT tools and hypertexts (Liu, 2005) ^[15]. With the emergence of digital society, most people particularly adolescents are devoting much more time to reading electronic resources. They spend their time on skimming, downloading and browsing information on the Internet (Liu, 2005) ^[15].

In Jordanian context, most of students are able to read efficiently after completing their secondary stage, roughly of twelve years in formal education. However, even equipped with literacy skills particularly reading skills, the reading habits of students are still at an unsatisfactory level (OECD, 2010) ^[18]. Reading habits among Jordanians recently surprised the former prime minister, who is the current president of the

University of Petra, when he confirmed that "reading is not popular in Jordanian society" and stated that Jordanian educational system is responsible for the unpopularity of reading (The Jordan Times, 2014) ^[10].

The Objective of the Study

This study aims to: Identify the level of influence of social media including surfing the internet and reading on the internet on the respondents' English language reading habits.

Research Questions

The current study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What activities do the respondents carry out when they surf the internet and what is its influence on their English language reading habits?
2. What do students read on the internet and what is its influence on their English language reading habits?

Literature Review

Surfing the Internet

The study conducted by Akarsu and Dariyemez (2014) ^[11] to identify the effects of the internet use and other alternative multimedia resources in reading habits showed that 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 participants stated that they checked their emails (76.3%), read all kinds of information (74.7%) and downloaded movies (63.2%). Slightly more than half of the participants used MSN messenger (52.7%). It is interesting to note that the least common purpose of using internet was using Yahoo messenger (5.4%). Playing games online was popular among 51.3% of the respondents. Almost half of the respondents mentioned that they shopped online (48%).

Zainol Abidin Pourmohammadi, Varasingam and Lean (2014) conducted a study to determine the differences in online reading habits between genders and examined the relationship

between socio-economic status and online reading habits. The findings revealed that 83.7% of the participants went online every day while only 16.3% did not go online. Based on the results, respondents often spend more than an hour online. They go online mainly to communicate through social networking tools such as Facebook and MSN. This includes viewing photos, chatting, and checking and sending e-mails. A number of participants also pointed out that they go online to play games, watch movies, and listen to music. Some of the participants do go online for learning purposes and to read the news but their percentage is low.

Based on the discussion above, it can be seen that new technological developments have had a great influence on the students' reading habits as they offer a huge amount of electronic reading sources such as books, stories, magazines and newspapers. This has encouraged students to spend as much time as possible on reading. This has led to an upsurge of the students' engagement with the written word which in turn has improved their reading habits by leaps and bounds.

Reading on the Internet

Reading on the Internet was found to change readers' behaviour through an increase in browsing and scanning and a surge in-time reading (Liu, 2005) ^[15]. The emergence of the networked environment has helped the new generation readers to develop new reading behaviours and change their traditional reading practices in a drastic, positive and dynamic manner. The students considered surfing the Internet as significant in increasing interactive reading, superficial reading and extensive reading (Ioan, 2012) ^[16].

Saa'id and Abd Wahab (2014) ^[21] conducted a study to observe if digital-based materials have an impact on students' reading habits. The results revealed that most respondents agreed with the fact that their reading habits changed and interest in reading saw a dramatic increase with the advent of digital publications including online newspapers, magazines, and books. More than half of the respondents stated that online reading assisted them in mastering the subjects. According to the OECD annual report (2010) ^[18], students who read a wide range of materials attain better achievement levels in reading. Furthermore, students who engage extensively in online reading activities, for example reading e-mails, online chatting, reading online news, using an online dictionary for picking up vocabulary, joining online group discussions and looking for online information, are more likely to become good readers than students who do little online reading (OECD, 2010) ^[18]. Maynard (2010) ^[17] reported that students who read e-books are more likely to increase their reading engagement. Typically students, who completely engage and interact with a text at hand, will develop their critical and deep thinking as a result of the connections with the reading material. Moreover, she found that students who read e-books are more likely to be enthusiastic readers.

The study conducted by Chauhan and Lal (2012) ^[5] to ascertain the veracity of the influence of technology on reading habits, found out that 98% of respondents read E-books, 81% read magazines, 44% read sports, 33% read health information, 28% read fashion information, 25% read sales information, 24% read e-mails, 23% read comic stories and 21% perused stories and novels. In response to the question as to what students usually read when they surf on the internet, it was revealed that 100% of respondents tended to check

emails, 96.8% listened to music, 88.7% read information, 85.5% viewed photo albums, 76.7% used Yahoo Messenger, 54% shopped online, and 50% played online games.

The aim of another study conducted by Zainol Abidin, Pourmohammadi, and Jesmin (2011) ^[25], was to determine the influence of online reading on Malaysian rural secondary school students' reading habits. The findings revealed that the most preferred online materials are reading e-mails (8.5%) and comic strips or jokes (8.5%) followed by reading movie reviews (6.5%). Respondents often read e-mails (19.5%), watch movie reviews (15.5%) and read stories or novels (15%). However, the percentage in the rarely read column showed alarming results where 39.5% rarely read online magazines, 37% rarely read online news and 35% rarely read e-books. Akarsu and Dariyemez's (2014) ^[1] study showed that the majority of the respondents 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.

Findings from the National Literacy Trust's annual survey revealed that children who look at storybooks on a touch screen are more likely to enjoy reading and the students who read storybooks almost daily achieve better grades in reading than those who read once a week. The findings also revealed that the proportion of students who read e-books increased from 25% to 46% between 2010 and 2012 (Picton, 2014) ^[19]. Students who engage extensively in online reading will generally make great progress in their reading skills compared to students who do little online reading (OECD, 2010) ^[18].

Methodology

Research Design

This study has adopted a quantitative research approach. According to Sekaran (2003) ^[22], quantitative method can elicit information from a larger number of subjects in a short period time and it is cost effective. Blaxter *et al.*, (2001) ^[4] have highlighted the advantages of the use of questionnaires in the social research method. Questionnaires are seen as one of the most commonly used designs in the social research method. The idea of creating accurate written questions, for those opinions or experiences in which you are interested appears as an evident strategy in order to find the answers to the matters that interest you.

Research Instrument

The instrument used in this study is a questionnaire consisting of 12 items adapted from the work of Chauhan and Lal (2012) ^[5]. The questionnaire has two sections. The first section (8 items) measures the influence of surfing the internet on the respondents' reading habits. The second section (8 items) deals with the influence of reading on the internet on the respondents' reading habits.

Sampling

275 Jordanian EFL school students from six secondary schools in the Al-Mafraq province were randomly selected to participate in this study. The researcher administered the questionnaire to 9th, 10th, and 11th grades. The students in these classes can read in English as they are the most exposed group to English language (nearly 8-10 years) in Jordanian

schools where they study English language from the first grade.

Data Analysis

The data was carefully checked for errors before it was analyzed. The data was carefully screened for missing values because this is very important before the researcher can move to data analysis. From total data points of 275, 7 responses were discarded due to missing values. This resulted in 268 cases having complete data. The data for research questions 1 and 2 in this study was analyzed by using the Covariance Based Structural Equation Modelling (CB-SEM) in AMOS 21.0.

The Measurements Model

Model fit

Confirmatory factor analysis was performed to detect model fit, construct validity and reliability of the items. In the confirmatory factor model, the exogenous constructs and endogenous construct were correlated and tested for model fit.

The value of GFI = 0.893, CFI = 0.933, TLI = 0.921 and RMSEA = 0.059 confirm that the model is an adequate fit to the data.

Convergent Validity and Reliability

The data was further tested for convergent validity and reliability by putting into practice the recommendations posited by Hair *et al.* (2010) [7]. As suggested, the accepted value for the standardized regression estimates and average variance extracted is 0.50 (Hair *et al.*, 2010) [7]. It can be seen that the data collected by this researcher has successfully fulfilled the acceptable criteria. As shown in Table 1, the standardized regression estimate for all items is greater than 0.50. The average variance extracted for English language reading habits are slightly lower (0.492) while all other constructs achieved the threshold level of 0.50. Thus, it is confirmed that the model has convergent validity. The composite reliability for all constructs is > 0.70 suggesting the reliability of the items.

Table 1 Convergent Validity and Reliability

Variables	Items Code	Items	Factor Loadings	CR	AVE
Reading On The Internet	D2b	I Read Online News	.683	0.865	0.504
	D2c	I Read Online Magazines	.698		
	D2d	I Read E-Book	.767		
	D2e	I Read Stories	.742		
	D2f	I Read E-Email	.645		
	D2g	I Read Sports	.670		
	D2h	I Read Movie Review	.625		
Surfing The Internet	D3a	I Check E-Mails	.608	0.668	0.501
	D3c	I Listen To Music	.512		
	D3d	I Chat With Friends	.560		
	D3e	I Play Games	.632		

Discriminant Validity

The model was tested further for discriminant validity. By using the suggestion made by Fornell and Larcker (1981), the square root of AVE was calculated and compared with the inter-construct correlation. As shown in table 2, the square root of AVEs (shown diagonally) is greater than the inter construct correlation which confirmed that the model has achieved discriminant validity.

The Structural Model

After fulfilling all recommended criteria of the measurement model, the tasks associated with the structural model was performed. For the structural model, the independent variables were surfing the internet and reading on the internet and the dependent variable was English language reading habits. In this phase, the model was tested to investigate the level of influence of surfing the internet and reading on the internet on students' English language reading habits. The structural model indicated an adequate fit to the data. That is, GFI =

0.893, CFI = 0.933, TLI = 0.921 and RMSEA = 0.059. The following hypotheses were tested in this model:

H_{1a}: Surfing the internet has a significant positive influence on English language reading habits. H_{1b}: Reading on the internet has a significant positive influence on English language reading habits. The researcher tested the direct effect of independent variables on the dependent variable as shown in Table 2. First, the β coefficient for the direct path from surfing the internet to English language reading habits is -0.019; t = -0.026 and p = 0.603 > 0.05 which is insignificant. This shows that surfing the internet does not have a direct influence on English language reading habits. Thus, hypothesis H_{1a} is not supported. Second, The β coefficient for the direct path from reading on the internet to English language reading habits is 0.271; t = 3.712 and p = 0.001 < 0.05 which is significant at a 99% confidence level. This shows that reading on the internet had a significant direct influence on English language reading habits. Thus, hypothesis H_{1b} is supported. The cumulative R² for the model is 0.42.

Table 2: Regression Weights

Hypothesis	Independent Variables	Path	Dependent Variables	Estimate	S.E.	t	p	Remarks
H _{8d}	Surfing the Internet	--->	English language reading habits	-0.019	0.073	-0.260	0.603**	Not Supported
H _{8e}	Reading on the Internet	--->	English language reading habits	0.271	0.073	3.712	0.001*	Supported

*significant; ** not significant

Discussion of Findings

Surfing the Internet and English Language Reading Habits

In order to identify whether surfing the internet has enhanced and increased the students' English language reading habits, regression weights were applied in AMOS 21.0 and were validated by the semi-structured interview. The results revealed that surfing the internet do not have a direct influence on the respondents' English language reading habits. The β coefficient for the direct path from surfing on internet to English language reading habits was -0.019; $t = -0.026$ and $p = 0.603 > 0.05$ which is insignificant. Therefore, it can be said that surfing the internet in this study was found insignificant in enhancing English language reading habits of students.

The results obtained from the interviews confirmed these findings. The majority of the respondents pointed out that when they surfed the internet, they performed the activities that fulfil their needs such as checking emails, playing games, listening to music and chatting with friends. They also indicated that they spent a great length of time doing these activities instead of using the internet for the purpose of reading habits.

The results of this study appear to be in line with that of other studies in this area of research. For example, Liu (2005) [15] and Ramirez (2003) [20] found that the growth of the social media has had a negative impact on reading to the extent that students became less engaged in extensive reading and do not have the ability to read deeply and to sustain a prolonged engagement in reading. Zhu and He (2002) [27] confirmed that the respondents spent an average of 104 minutes per week on the internet, searching for personal information and not for free voluntary reading. According to a study conducted by Wang, Chen & Liang (2011) [24], the results showed that the use of social media influenced the academic performance of the students in a negative manner. They indicated that two-thirds of the respondents used the social media during class times and while doing homework. Shehu and Shehu (2014) [23] indicated that the social media has distracted students in the classroom which has caused a reduction in time spent on reading habits. Jacobsen and Forste (2011) [9] found that the use of the social media is linked negatively with low achievement in school.

The results were also in agreement with previous researchers (Ezeji, 2012; Ikpaahindi, 2008) [6, 8] who found that students prefer to spend most of their time on the internet, chatting with friends, playing games instead of using the internet for the sake of reading habits. This has distracted students which have caused a reduction in time spent on reading habits.

The results of this study were not in line with Akarsu and Darlyemez (2014) [1] and Zainol Abidin, *et al.* (2014) who found that new technological developments have had a great influence on the students' reading habits as they offer a huge amount of electronic reading sources such as books, stories, magazines and newspapers. This has encouraged students to spend as much time as possible on reading. This has led to an upsurge of the students' engagement with the written word which in turn has improved their reading habits by leaps and bounds.

The justification of the insignificant result is that Jordanian EFL students spend most of their time on surfing the internet and this distracted them from reading. The great length of time given to internet surfing has diverted them from reading. In

their perspective, surfing the internet is a kind of entertainment and not a medium for reading. In addition, they state that reading is associated with school purposes and is not an interesting activity. Banihani and Abu-Ashour (2015) [2] confirmed that Jordanians use the internet to entertain themselves and not for reading and this is evinced by the emergence of numerous coffee shops for people to surf the internet but not places for reading.

Reading on the Internet and English Language Reading Habits

In order to identify whether reading on the internet has developed and has made a lasting change on the students' English language reading habits, regression weights were applied in AMOS 21.0 and were validated by the semi-structured interview. The results revealed that reading on internet had a significant and direct influence on English language reading habits. The β coefficient for the direct path from reading on internet to English language reading habits was 0.271; $t = 3.712$ and $p = 0.001 < 0.05$ which was significant at a 99% confidence level. Therefore, it can be said that reading on the internet in this study was found to be significant in developing the students' English language reading habits.

The interviews results obtained were in tandem with the findings of the quantitative study. The majority of the interviewees indicated that they like to read online materials specifically e-newspapers and e-magazines and they tend to spend a great amount of time on the internet without feeling bored. That is because the internet provides free access to different types of reading materials and books which suit their interests. Consequently, this means that they will not need to buy expensive books; they do not have to carry heavy books and books will be easier to find.

These findings were supported by studies in this area of research. For instance, Akarsu and Darlyemez (2014) [1] found that technology assisted reading is considered one the most influential ways in improving reading habits. The boring image of reading was overcome with the incorporation of technology into the reading process. A study carried out by Saaid and Abd Wahab (2014) [21], discovered that most respondents agreed with the fact that their reading habits changed as well as the interests in reading increased with the advent of digital publications including online newspapers, magazines, and books. Another study was conducted by Loan (2012) [16], showed that the internet is seen as an essential tool for developing the new reading behaviour as it has been changing traditional reading practices by increasing interactive, superficial and extensive reading. The results are also in agreement with Maynard (2010) [17] and Chauhan and Lal (2012) [5] who found that students who read e-books are more likely to increase their reading engagement and become enthusiastic readers.

Conclusion

The current study has investigated the influence of social media including surfing the internet and reading on the internet on the English language reading habits of Jordanian EFL school secondary students. The findings have revealed that surfing the internet do not have a direct influence on the respondents' English language reading habits. The findings also showed that reading on internet had a significant and

direct influence on English language reading habits. Therefore, it can be said that reading on the internet in this study was found to be significant in developing the students' English language reading habits. Based on these results, the Ministry of Education should adopt policies for all school levels in both public and private schools to encourage reading from printed books and digital devices. This could be carried out by intervention of relevant programs such as reading websites as a curriculum to be used by the students. Parents also should participate in activities with their children in locating interesting and funny books via the social media. They should also create a successful reading environment to cultivate reading habits in English among their children. Online reading could provide adequate reading materials to suit varied interests, and could motivate students. A much more interesting way of providing free reading materials is to use the electronic-book (eBook). Teachers and parents have to play an important role in informing students of the free availability of eBooks. The availability of this facility would enable more students to use the social media for the purpose of reading.

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