

A Survey On UTM TESL Undergraduates' Reading Preference: Between Hypertexts And Books

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Abstract : This research uses a survey to investigate UTM TESL undergraduates' reading preference between Hypertexts and books. The study is very crucial as it will help to identify the strengths and also the weaknesses of the preferred type of text. Therefore, questionnaires have been distributed to UTM TESL undergraduates' session 2007/2008 (Refer Appendix A). From the research, it has been found that UTM TESL undergraduates preferred Hypertext as compared to books. The reasons why the students preferred Hypertext are encouragements from lecturers, cost and time saving, easier and faster access, interactive and interesting, up to date and more focused. However Hypertext has several weaknesses such as reliability low, has caused health problems and also technical problems. The findings suggest that the students must be taught, exposed and trained to select reliable reading materials, exposed and taught on how to overcome the technical problems and lastly they must be aware of how to prevent the Computer caused health problems.

Keywords : UTM TESL, reading preference, hypertext, books

Introduction

Reading is an important key or skill towards acquiring knowledge. Having this skill does give some impacts to our life either in positive or negative ways. With the advancement of technology, the main roles of books as the source of reading materials have changed. It is because we have moved on to a new environment of reading called hypertext environment. This text started as an idea in 1945 by Vannevar Bush who proposed the development of hypertext. Altun (2003) claims that as the result of the technology, we are moving towards digitized media on computer screens where this technology can be interpreted and shaped by a community of second language (L2) readers that are called Computer Assisted Language Learning. The way in which second language (L2) readers understand, interpret, and value hypertext-reading materials as a new medium, is worth exploration. Hence, the study is used to guide us in finding the real reasons why UTM TESL undergraduates preferred a particular type of text and suggest ways to improve the skills in accessing the preferred type of reading material or text.

Statement of problem:

Although research has been made on Hypertexts by foreign researchers, we are still lack of research on hypertexts in our educational system itself. Therefore, with all of the benefits that it brought into our educational life, we should pay more attention to Hypertexts especially on how to prepare the students with the rapidly changing technology. With the emergence of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) and wide range of second language reading materials either from the Internet, bookstores or the libraries, we cannot deny that the needs towards hypertext reading materials are significantly important. Different findings can be obtained by conducting the research in our local context so that we can specifically cater the local needs in accessing hypertext reading materials.

Significance of the Research

The study is to seek the significance of reading hypertext or books among the UTM TESL undergraduates especially when they are reading the preferred type of text. The results can be made as guides for us to identify the strengths and weaknesses that the students may probably encounter while they are reading the type of text. Hence with the results, we may also suggest ways on how to overcome the problems faced by the respondents when dealing with the preferred type of text.

The study is also used to identify the various factors that influence the students to choose preferred type of text. These factors can be used to introduce strategies and approaches in reading the text type. The outcome of the study can also be a valuable source of information to facilitate better understanding to the dilemma on preferred type of text.

Research Objective

The objectives of the research are to:

1. To investigate the students' preference towards the different types of reading 'text'.- either hypertext materials or books.
2. To examine the reasons why the students prefer a particular type of text.
3. To identify the difficulties that the students face while reading the preferred type of text.

Respondents of the study

The respondents of the study are the 4SPL-TESL students who have taken the subject SHL 3562 Computer Assisted Language Learning I (CALL I), SHL 4572 Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) and also SHL 4222 Teaching Macro Skills in Tesl as to ensure that they have the skills and prior knowledge in responding to Hypertext reading and books that are significant for the study. Forty three students will be involved in the study where their views on hypertext and books will be evaluated in the study.

Instrument

One of the biggest challenges in carry out the study is choosing the appropriate instruments for the data collection. The main instruments that were selected are the quantitative data and the qualitative data where the students will be given questionnaires that consist of three background information questions in section A, eighteen questions on hypertexts and books in section B and three open-ended questions in section C as to support the findings for the questions in section B.

Findings

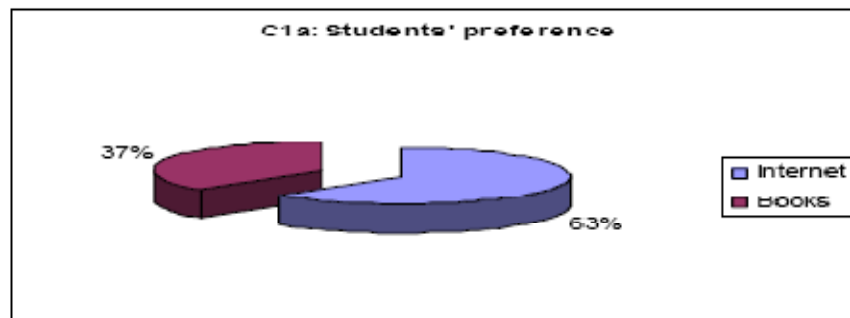


Figure 1: Students' preference

Figure 1 shows that the respondents preferred Hypertext more than books. The percentage of the students who preferred Hypertexts is sixty three percent (63%) while the percentage of the respondents who preferred books is thirty seven percent (37%). Here, we may imply that the respondents preferred Hypertext because it is much easier to find for information from Hypertext rather than books. This can be proof from the findings in the section B of the questionnaire whereby in question 9 and question 18, thirty percent (30%) of the respondents have agreed that finding information from Internet is much easier as compared to books while from question 18, twenty eight percent (28%) of the respondents have disagreed that finding information from books is much easier than Hypertext.

On the contrary to the finding for the less preferred type of text, thirty seven percent (37%) of the students have stated that they preferred books even though hypertexts are more popular and dominating the Information technology in today's life. The reason why the students may still preferred books is because of the reliability of the books is believed to be higher than hypertexts which can be supported by the finding from question 3 of the section B whereby sixty percent (60%) of the respondents have agreed that they need to be more careful when finding information from the Internet. This statement may indirectly tell us that high percentage of the students agreed to be more careful when finding information from the Internet because not all of the information from the banks of information is reliable. Hence, they need to be more careful when accessing information from the type of text.

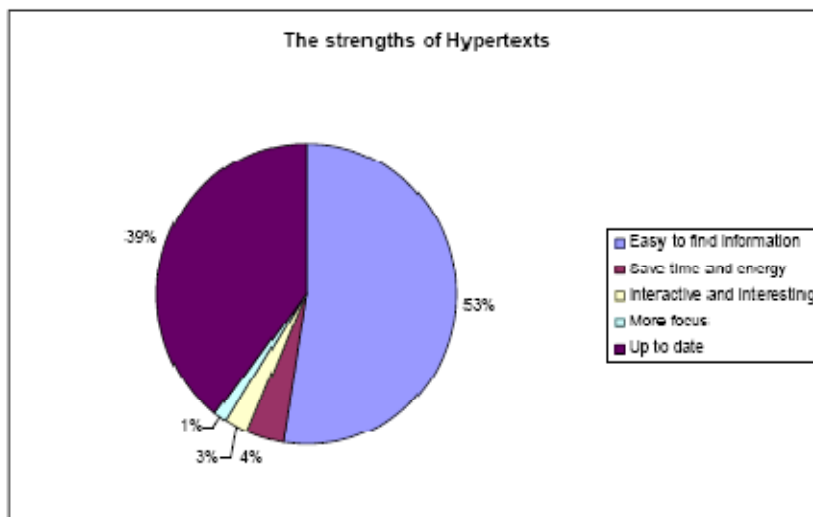


Figure 2: The strengths of the preferred text type.

From the figure 2, there are five strengths of hypertexts as has been stated by the respondents. The first strengths of Hypertext or in other words why the students preferred Hypertexts is because it is easier for them to find information from the hypertexts as compared to books with the percentage of fifty three percent (53%). It is because with hyperlinks, the task of finding information or reading materials will be faster. Secondly, thirty nine percent (39) of the respondents believed that the information is more up to date because updating information from the Internet is easier and cheaper as compared to books. Thirdly, four percent (4%) of the respondents believed that hypertexts are more time and energy saving because they do not have to flip through book by book in order to find for the information. Fourthly, three percent (3%) of the respondents also believed that hypertexts are more interactive and interesting. This is due to the multimedia application that has increasingly making hypertext to be more interactive and

interesting. Finally, the remaining one percent (1%) of the respondents believed that they were more focused when reading hypertexts as compared to books because hypertext has bring a lot of conveniences towards their life as Fisher (1998) claims that the students can access the fingertip information anytime they want and they may also browse through almost about every aspect of knowledge that they wanted to know.

The figure 3 shows some of the weaknesses that have been highlighted by the respondents. Among of the weaknesses are such as technical problems where sixty six percent (66%) of the respondents believed that technical problems bring some difficulties to them when reading Hypertexts. Among of the technical problems are such as low internet coverage and also less knowledge on how to deal with viruses that has affected their computer system. Next, twenty one percent (21%) of the respondents believed that Hypertexts has low reliability since anyone may publish reading materials in the Internet and lastly thirteen percent (13%) of the respondents believed that fatigue eyes and back pains are other weaknesses of Hypertexts. This may be due to wrong seating postures and also the respondents may have spent too much time focusing on the computer screen without taking some time to relax their eyes. Here, we can conclude that apart from many other weaknesses of hypertexts, these are among of the most popular category of the weaknesses as been encountered by the respondents.

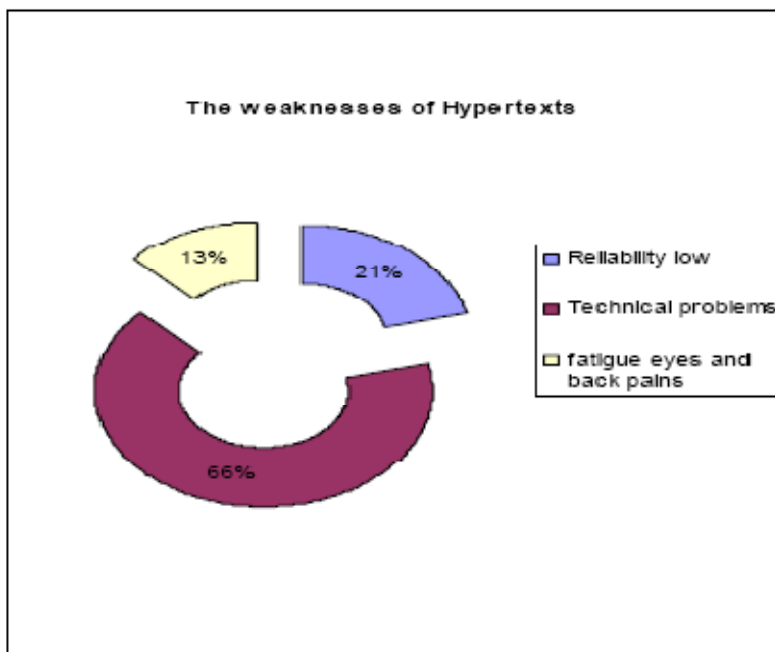


Figure 3: The weaknesses of Hypertexts

Discussions

The study aims to find out TESL undergraduates' reading preference between hypertexts and books. It is also aims to reveal the real reason why the students have chosen the particular type of text. From the distributed questionnaires, the finding shows that sixty three percent (63%) of the respondents preferred hypertexts as compared to books. The percentages of preference can be clearly seen in figure 4.3.1. The reasons why the students preferred the particular type of text are Internet or hypertext can save time and energy, interactive and interesting, easy to find information, up to date and the respondents have also stated that they were more focused when searching for information from the hypertexts as compared to books. Perhaps, the availability of

technology has provided them comfortable state when reading hypertexts. This indirectly motivates them to preferred Hypertext better as compared to books that demand them to find for the information by having to traditionally flip through all of the related readings which could be time and energy consuming. In this competitive edge, hypertext is like the accelerator machine for our reading task.

Even though Hypertext has brought a lot of benefits into our life, thirty seven percent (37%) of the respondents still preferred books. This is due to their beliefs that books are more reliable, having sentimental value and touchable where they can jot down their comments on books. Of course we cannot deny that books are still very important for us especially when the technology sometimes cannot be used due to the technical problems or the insufficient supply of the technology.

Essentially, the findings of this study goes parallel with Bush (1941) views that hypertexts offer a very powerful way of organizing and accessing information and hence has a potential role to play in the development of the Information Technology, which in turn is shaping the society in which we live. Even though there are people who still favor books rather than Internet, they cannot deny the truth that hypertexts are evolving drastically and logically with abundance of benefits that it offers, we should grasp this opportunity as Ted Nelson (1974) claims, "Intertwingularity is not generally acknowledge-People keep pretending they can make things hierarchical, categorizable and sequential when they can't. Everything is deeply intertwingularity." Here, "intertwingularity" is a term coined by Ted Nelson to express the complexity of interrelations in human knowledge (Nelson, 1974).Nelson (1987) also claims that it is an important sense there are no "subjects" at all; there is only all knowledge, since the cross-connections among the myriad topics of this world simply cannot be divided up neatly.

Apart from that, there are other explanations that might explain the findings. One of the answers is that today's generations are born with the existence of Information Technology. Hence, with the more conducive source of information as compared to books, hypertexts are not only time and energy saving but also have offered the respondents all of the information needed for their learning purposes. So, here we can say that hypertext has make our life to be more convenience that make us satisfied with all of the benefits that it has brought to us. Then, of course we could ask for more but not less than that, which is the reason why books are less preferred. This is based on the findings from the questionnaires where sixty percent (60%) of the respondents have agreed that Internet provides all of the information needed for their learning purposes.

In addition, the role of lecturers who encouraged the respondents to find information from the Internet has also increased the importance of Internet in today's educational life. Moreover from the findings, fifty one percent (51%) of the respondents have agreed that their lecturers always support them to search for the information from the Internet.

As to conclude the findings, it is undeniable that hypertext is the preferred source of information in today's life. It has brings us a lot of benefits. In addition, hypertext is actually a good form of channel to trained students to think in a more plural way as Beeman et al. (1987) claims that they see the goal of higher education as being "the acquisition of a pluralistic cognitive style, which has an important property-non-linearity. This cognitive style is largely synonymous with "critical thinking". A style of thinking which encourage students to see the world in inter-related relativistic terms rather than an isolated bit of information so that the students may see and combined the connections between one knowledge to another rather than

knowing it as different part of knowledge. In other words, Hypertext has made the students to think of knowledge in a wider and deeper way.

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