

**A STUDY ON ESL LEARNERS' READING PREFERENCES BETWEEN
PRINTED TEXT AND ONSCREEN TEXT**

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To my beloved

Father, Jamil bin Mangon,
Mother, Masrina Mariko Kono binti Abdullah,
My sister, Haslinda Kono binti Jamil and her family,
My brother, Mohd. Ismahazli bin Jamil and his family,
And all my in-laws,

To my dearest

Husband, Mohd. Hadaffi bin Jamaludin,

All of you

Are the loves of my heart.

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ABSTRACT

Since the growth of information technology, books do not hold the exclusive rights as the only knowledge contributor. Readers have more choices of materials for reading activity since reading text is now available in digital format. In order to ensure readers' will select the most effective reading materials, teacher has to be aware of the benefits and drawback of reading onscreen and in print. Thus, this research is done to identify factors influencing readers' choice between reading onscreen and in print. This research will also investigate the readers' preference between reading onscreen and in print. In addition, respondents in this study were also asked on possible problems encountered when reading either of the formats mentioned above. The research was carried out on 30 post-graduate TESL students from UTM Skudai. Data for this research was collected from questionnaire and interview. The research findings indicated that regardless of the technology advancement, in print reading seems to be in favour among the language practitioner. Readers also indicated that engagement towards content in the text is the most influential factor determining their choice of reading format. This research is hoped to be used in improving teachers' understanding of current language learners reading trend. It is also can be used as a basis for improvement in teachers' training syllabus in identifying the most effective format for L2 reading comprehension.

ABSTRAK

Semenjak ledakan teknologi maklumat, buku tidak lagi menjadi satu-satunya sumber pengetahuan. Pembaca mempunyai lebih banyak pilihan bahan bacaan untuk dibaca disebabkan teks bacaan juga boleh diperolehi dalam bentuk digital. Bagi memastikan pembaca memilih teks yang bermanfaat, para pendidik perlu mengenalpasti kelebihan dan kekurangan membaca di skrin komputer dan juga di atas kertas. Oleh itu, kajian ini dilaksanakan untuk mengenalpasti faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi pembacaan di skrin komputer dan juga di atas kertas. Kajian ini juga diadakan untuk mengenalpasti kecenderungan pilihan pembaca diantara skrin dan kertas. Selain itu, permasalahan yang timbul apabila membaca di skrin dan kertas juga dikenal pasti. Kajian ini melibatkan 30 orang pelajar Kursus Sarjana Pengajaran Bahasa Inggeris sebagai Bahasa Kedua di UTM Skudai. Data kajian diperolehi daripada borang soal selidik dan temuramah yang diadakan. Hasil kajian mendapati perkembangan teknologi tidak memberi impak terhadap pembacaan apabila kertas menjadi bahan bacaan yang popular dikalangan pembaca. Selain itu, pembaca juga menyatakan isi kandungan teks memainkan peranan penting dalam pemilihan bahan bacaan. Kajian ini diharapkan agar dapat meningkatkan kefahaman guru tentang trend membaca yang terkini. Tambahan lagi, hasil kajian ini juga diharapkan agar dapat dimanfaatkan untuk penambahbaikan sukatan pelajaran guru pelatih dalam mengenalpasti medium yang paling efektif untuk pembacaan.

TABLE OF CONTENT

CHAPTER	TITLE	PAGE
	RESEARCHER’S DECLARATION	ii
	SUPERVISOR’S DECLARATION	iii
	DEDICATION	iv
	ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	v
	ABSTRACT	vi
	ABSTRAK	vii
	TABLE OF CONTENTS	viii-xi
	LIST OF TABLES	xii
	LIST OF APPENDICES	xiii
1	INTRODUCTION	
	1.1 Introduction	1
	1.2 Background of the study	1
	1.3 Statement of Problem	4
	1.4 Purpose of the Study	5
	1.5 Objectives of the Study	5
	1.6 Research Questions	6
	1.7 Significance of the Study	6
	1.8 Scope of the Study	7
	1.9 Definition of the Terms	7-8

CHAPTER	TITLE	PAGE
2	LITERATURE REVIEW	
2.1	Introduction	9
2.2	The Theory of Reading	9-11
	2.2.1 Schema Theory	11-13
2.3	Models of Reading	13
	2.3.1 The Bottom-Up Reading Proc	14
	2.3.2 The Top-Down Reading Proce	15-16
2.4	Metacognitive Theory	16-18
2.5	Reading Materials	18-19
2.6	Previous Research Related to Reading Onscreen and Printed Text	19-22
3	METHODOLOGY	
3.1	Introduction	23
3.2	Research Design	24-25
3.3	Respondents of the Study	25-26
3.4	Research Instruments of the Study	26
	3.4.1 Questionnaire	26-27
	3.4.2 Interview	28
3.5	Research Procedure	28-29
3.6	Data Analysis	29-30
4	FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION	
4.1	Introduction	30
4.2	Respondents' Demographic Information	30
	4.2.1 Age Range of the Respondents	31
	4.2.2 Race of the Respondents	31

4.3	Findings and Discussion from the Questionnaire	32
4.3.1	Types of Reading Materials Preferred	32-35
4.3.2	Reading Preference between Printed and Onscreen Materials	35-38
4.4	Factors Determining Students' Reading Preference	38
4.4.1	Attitude towards the Medium	38-39
4.4.2	Engagement with the Content	39-41
4.4.3	Affordances of the Reading Materials	42-44
4.4.4	Physical Factors	44-45
4.4.5	Economic Factors	45-47
4.5	Printed and Onscreen Reading Problem	47
4.5.1	Onscreen Reading Problem	47-49
4.5.2	Printed reading Problem	49-50
4.6	Findings and Discussion from the Interview	51
4.6.1	Types of Reading Materials Preferred	51-53
4.6.2	Students' Reading Preference Between Printed and Onscreen Materials	54-55
4.6.3	Factors Determining Students' Reading Preference	55-60
4.6.4	Printed and Onscreen Reading Problem	60-62

5

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1	Introduction	63
5.2	Overview of the Study	63-64
5.2.1	ESL Learners' Preference for Printed Text and Onscreen Text	64
5.2.2	Factors for ESL Learners' Preference towards Printed Text and Onscreen Text	65

5.2.3	Problems ESL Learners' Encounter while choosing for Printed and Onscreen Text	65-66
5.3	Pedagogical Implications	66
5.4	Recommendations for Future Research	67
5.5	Limitation of the Study	67-68
5.6	Conclusions	68-69
	REFERENCES	70-72
	APPENDIX A	73-77
	APPENDIX B	78
	APPENDIX C	79-108

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE NO.	TITLE	PAGE
4.1	Age range of the respondents	30
4.2	Race of the respondents	31
4.3	Types of reading materials preferred to be read onscreen	32
4.4	Types of reading materials preferred to be read on paper	33
4.5	Respondents' preference of reading onscreen	35
4.6	Respondents' preference of reading in print	36
4.7	Onscreen and in print reading preference	36
4.8	Respondents' reading attitude	38
4.9	Respondents' engagement with content of the materials	40
4.10	Respondents' affordance of the reading materials	42
4.11	Respondents' physical factor	45
4.12	Respondents' economic factor	46
4.13	Factors influencing the reader's choice of onscreen and in print reading	47
4.14	Onscreen reading problems	48
4.15	In print reading problem	50

LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDICES	TITLE	PAGE
A	Questionnaire	73-77
B	Interview Questions	78
C	Interview Transcript	79-108

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This study aims to investigate students' reading preference between printed materials and onscreen materials. Possible factors that explain the students' choice of reading materials will also be identified. Finally, students were also requested to highlight any problems when reading both of the materials. Hence, this chapter will discuss the background of the study, the statement of problem, the purpose of the study, the objectives of the study, the research questions, the significance of the study, scope of the study and definition of terms related to the study.

1.2 Background of the Study

Reading has long been a crucial skill in knowledge gaining process regardless of education level. It is even more important in higher learning institution when

knowledge is raised independently. Thus, it is crucial for university students to master reading skill as it enables the students to create better understanding of their field of study. The ability to read an academic text in various forms is considered as one of the most important skills that university students need to acquire. In doing so, students will discover various reading materials available in printed and digital form.

Hence, students have to decide on which reading text is likeable for their reading activity, printed text or onscreen text. In doing so, students have to refer to elements that may support or oppose their choices of reading text.

It is no doubt that the invention of computer has made our life easier in several ways. Looking at a bigger context, people tend to perform much of their daily activity using computer such as sending e-mails, watching online video, reading online news, transmitting instant messages and photos, interacting in virtual social networking system as well as searching for information available in the World Wide Web. This shows that people nowadays depend very much on computer and Internet to perform their daily activity. Students in higher learning institution are not to be missed being affected by this evolution.

Since most of the reading materials are now being made available in the digital world, most students resort to computer to find text related to their study. With the help of key word search, students tend to look for reading text from digital resources rather than looking through bundles of printed journals and books. Once the student has located the text either a journal or electronic book, they will print it for further reading.

Nevertheless, some may also read the text through computer screen or other portable devices such as smart phone due to its compatibility to be read at any time or any place. This is one of the features that cause reading onscreen to be increasingly popular trend.

Other factor for students to read onscreen is it is cost efficient. Students are able to store thousands of text in portable devices without complaining about the weight of the text if it is being printed. It is convenient and easy. Reading onscreen

using certain software also enable readers to locate the key word and read only related information needed. Usually, readers reading printed text will have to at least scan every page before getting the right part in the text. This is time consuming and readers tend to get bored after a few text. Reading from computer screen has been in trend with the advancement of computer technology.

However, it is noted that demand for printed text does not decrease. Book is still considered relevant in higher level institution. Not to mention journal collection in universities library. Both texts are still highly required by university students. Due to some of its advantages, some students prefer to read from a printed text rather than from computer screen. Just as electronic journal has made some students' life easy, printed text enable reader to do note-taking easily. Readers may easily write notes on the paper for further reference.

Other than that, reading from printed text is less eyes straining then reading from a computer screen. Those with health issues like back strain and eye sore may choose to read printed text as they do not have to sit behind the screen for a long time causing their body to ache. As a result, reading from paper is still relevant in higher education.

Due to these factors, students have larger choices of reading text to choose from. Based on their need and preferences, they will choose either to read printed text or onscreen text. It is the matter of which text is more dominant than the other and why is it so.

This study, therefore, aims to investigate students' reading preferences between printed text and onscreen text. The reasons behind their choice of reading text will also be identified. Another focus is looking at problems (if any) when the students read printed text and onscreen text.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

University students reading trend have indeed changed especially to those exposed to sophisticated technologies and gadget that assist in reading. With such resources at their fingertips, Malaysians could no longer hide behind the excuse of 'not having the time' to read (The Sun Daily, 2012). Students are able to read whatever information from the Internet at any their own time and wherever they want to read it. This is the advantages of getting information from the World Wide Web.

However, prior to choose materials for reading, students have to consider a few factors that may influence their reading. Printed or onscreen materials have their own advantages and disadvantages for reading comprehension. Types of reading materials to be chosen for reading will be very much determined by students' reading purposes. Whether it is for leisure reading or in-depth reading, students have their own reasons for opting one material over another. Ease of reading and ability to annotate are a few of the reasons for students to choose materials for reading.

In contrast, students may avoid reading from certain materials as there are features that may restrain them from reading it. For example, students may avoid reading long text on a computer screen due to eye strain or other health factor. Thus, they tend to read printed materials to avoid these problems. In short, printed and onscreen reading materials have their own advantages and disadvantages for different reading purposes. The reason to choose one over another will help students in comprehending the text read.

Therefore, this study was conducted to investigate the students' preferred reading materials as well as factors influencing their choice of reading materials. The reasons for choosing format for reading materials were also explored. The focus of this research is to identify choice of reading materials among students when reading in academic context. Some issues related to reading form printed and onscreen materials will be discussed in the later part in this research.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to find out which type of reading text is preferred among ESL learners. The materials for this study are printed text and onscreen text. Due to technological advancement ESL learners reading activity do not stop at books and printed journal. They would be likely to face more reading materials found in the virtual world, opening for choices to read it from a computer screen or printed form. Thus, this research would attempt to find out which reading text is preferred to be read by ESL learners.

In addition, factors for choosing reading text will also be explored in this study. Finally, issues related to reading preference will be address in the later part of this study.

1.5 Objectives of the Study

This study is aimed to achieve the following objectives:

- i. To investigate ESL learners' reading preference between printed text and onscreen text.
- ii. To identify factors for the ESL learners' preferences towards printed text and onscreen text.
- iii. To examine problems (if any) while choosing for printed text and onscreen text.

1.6 Research Questions

In order to achieve the above objectives, the following research questions have to be answered:

- i. What is the ESL learners' reading preference between printed materials and onscreen materials?
- ii. What are the factors contributing to the ESL learners' reading preferences between printed materials and onscreen materials?
- iii. Are there any problems that ESL learners' encounter while reading printed materials and onscreen materials?

1.7 Significance of the Study

The issue regarding format of the reading text is very important in determining the students' comprehension of the text. This study is seen significant to highlight the format of text that is suitable for certain reading strategies. By identifying suitable reading strategy, readers will be able to understand its contents easily.

The study is also important to help the students to choose the most effective reading text for reading comprehension. Students are able to identify the effectiveness of the text by recognizing the advantages of the one text over another. This can help the students to focus on the content and reduce distractions in interpreting the meaning in the text read. If onscreen reading materials could improve the participants' reading comprehension, it should be implemented widely in classroom as part of their learning effort to acquire information based on their study field.

The findings of this study is hoped to give a clear picture on how to design suitable reading text for different media format. Teachers as a material designer has a bigger role in ensuring the text developed for either medium will be fully utilised by the students. For example, if the texts are to be displayed on a screen, it should be written and formatted for a screen reading environment, not for a printed text format. In contrast, different way of writing should be used for printed text as readers may attempt the text in different ways. Thus, it is important for teachers as materials developer to understand the factors that lead to learners reading preferences of both printed and onscreen text.

1.8 Scope of the Study

Approximately 30 ESL learners participated in this study. The respondents were selected from undergraduate or post-graduate students in Universiti Teknologi Malaysia.

As for the data, a questionnaire containing 36 items was used to gather feedback on the respondents' preferences in reading printed text and onscreen text. The factors for reading when attempting printed and onscreen text were also be investigated in the questionnaire.

1.9 Definition of the Terms

There are a few terms defined in this research which are reading, printed text, onscreen text, preference and reading materials

1.9.1 Reading: An active process involving triangular relationship between reader, author and text (Lunzer, 1971) in creating meaning and understanding the text.

1.9.2 Printed text: Books, journal and all reading text that is printed on paper for reading activity.

1.9.3 Onscreen text: Books, journal and all reading text that is made available in a digital format to be read onscreen or downloaded to portable electronic devices for reading activity (Annand, 2008).

1.9.4 Preference: The act of choosing text to be read over another. In this study context, the choices of text are printed text and onscreen text.

1.9.5 Reading material: Reading materials in this study are text that are available in both format or may be printed out (journals, Internet articles, books, news, dictionary, e-mails, novels, magazine, report and instructional materials)

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