

## **The effect of online tools on reading habits among teenage students.**

### **Model of chances and dangers**

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#### **Abstract**

The notion of reading in the 21st century networked society has changed recently. Adolescents are no longer confined only to the print reading, but its scope has broadened to the Internet resources. The wide spread usage of the ICT tools changed the traditional reading culture of the readers. Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) adopted to teach EFL reading occupy complete attention of researchers and teachers.

The survey method was employed to conduct the study and a questionnaire was used as a data collection tool. It aims primarily at investigating EFL adolescents' attitudes to applying new technologies into reading process as well as seeking to shed light on the relevance and benefits of engaging ICT in the EFL reading classroom. In order to achieve the goal, a total of 40 lower secondary students were chosen to apply ICT tools in the process of reading. This quantitative research was used to ascertain students' practices while using ICT in teaching ESL reading. It is hoped that the findings of the pilot study provide the researchers and teachers with more accurate view of pros and cons of ICTs implemented in the EFL reading practice.

**Keywords:** English as a Second Language, reading, online reading, Internet use habits, Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

#### **1. Introduction**

Reading has always been regarded as one of the oldest features of human advancement. It is said that reading is a crucial factor affecting intellectual and emotional growth. Today's education has changed drastically and there is much more emphasis put on reading than it was in the past. As far as reading is concerned, it seems that it is the most single study tool. It is believed that there are two principal factors determining pupil's success at school; these are the teachers and the text books. Reading is often regarded as a vehicle for collecting ideas which can't be spread verbally. When students read well they are widening their mental horizons and multiply their opportunities (Satija, 2002).

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The impact of Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) on the development of students reading practices constitutes a significant point of current discussions. This dialogue tends to take various forms, starting from highlighting the dangers of ICT tools or concentrating only their advantages. The application of ICT tools in any teaching environment requires consideration of numerous aspects which lead to the improvement of the teaching process as well as its failure. Educational success tends to be presented in terms of actual learning outcomes, student motivation, their engagement and adapting proper strategies in the process of learning. It is, therefore, crucial to employ ICT tools in the process of teaching reading. Numerous ICT researchers claim that ICT tools improve education and support teachers and learners in the process of ELT. (Westera & Sloep, 2001; Young, 2003; Salehi & Salehi, 2012). ICTs cover a broad range of technologies, that is they refer to technological resources and tools which enable users to communicate, generate, disperse and manage information (Thierer, 2001). What is more, they can be defined as “anything which allows us to get information, to communicate with each other, or to have an effect on the environment using electronic or digital equipment” (Siraj-Blatchford & Siraj-Blatchford, 2003).

Undoubtedly, introducing ICT improves instructional process and facilitates students' learning process. Gent Ilter (2009) perceives ICT tools as a good opportunity to generate numerous divergent and enjoyable tasks in the EFL classroom (Genc Ilter, 2009). Harmer (2007) claims that giving students the computer-based instruction while teaching constitutes the possibility of elusive and appealing activities that motivate them. The use of ICT in any setting requires consideration of the many factors which can improve its success as well as those which can lead to its failure. In the educational setting, success is measured in terms of actual learning outcomes, student engagement, critical thinking and meta-cognition, amongst others. It is, therefore, important that ICT is used in education only when it can target these aspects. Further advantages of using ICT devices are being addressed by Considine, Horton & Moorman (2009) as new multimedia such as editorial cartoons or video clips engage learners in the process of teaching. There are more and more online activities, including media literacy ones, which intensify the whole process of teaching reading comprehension.

The article aims to discuss issues concerning the teens' habits of the usage of ICT tools in the process of teaching reading to adolescents, pinpointing distinctive factors which determine whether their application brings benefits or drawbacks.

## **2. Literature review**

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There has been a number of studies conducted on reading habits among teenagers and researchers are still searching for changes in reading patterns concerning the broad usage of various reading resources particularly ICT tools and hypertexts (Liu, 2005). In the view of emergence of the new digital world people, especially 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). Moreover, Graham & Kingsley (2005) in their study estimated that on average, young people spend 3.51 hours a day watching TV and videos, 1.44 hours listening to music, 1.02 hours using computers (0.48 online, 0.14 offline), 0.49 hours playing video games, 0.43 hours reading, and 0.25 hours watching movies.

However, it is not always that way. In Nigeria, a research conducted by Henry (2004), presents that reading practices are not so common. For instance, the average Nigerian reads less than one non-fiction book per year, not to mention the fact that only 1 % of successful women or men engage themselves in reading such a book once a month. Furthermore, Pandian (2000) expressed his major concerns through the research conducted among Malaysian readers. According to the collected data, only 20% of the Malaysian populations are 'regular readers' and the rest are 'reluctant readers'. Students spent their time on reading various materials only when they were preparing for exams. Additionally, they remained reluctant to reading both for information and pleasure.

The introduction of CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning) into the EFL classroom is becoming a common feature of most schools nowadays. Although the subject of integrating ICT tools in the foreign language classroom is underlying constant debate, a number of research findings reveal promising results about the usage of information and communication technology in teaching EFL reading.

A research study which was conducted by Blachowicz et al. (2009) aimed to investigate various changes appearing in the classroom when ICT tools are introduced. The findings of study show that the dynamics of the classroom change, and students become more motivated and attentive while working on their literacy tasks. The management of the teaching process requires less attention from teachers and students can establish independent work habits. Moreover, there is a greater possibility for students to expand skills and certainty about developing reading skill. Analyses of student performance also demonstrate that their abilities improved greatly, and they became more motivated, focused and confident about reading process (Blachowicz et al., 2009).

Furthermore, it is claimed that computer and the Internet boost students' sight word vocabulary, fluency and comprehension. It was proved that the development of vocabulary knowledge influenced significantly students reading comprehension (Yuksel & Tanriverdi, 2009). In addition, Pérez Correa et al (2004) present guidance for fortunate computer-reading instruction. They indicate that computer instruction should focus on meaning and reading comprehension, stimulate thinking and involvement and be interdisciplinary at the same time. For LeLoup & Ponterio, 2004, ICT tools stimulate various exercises in EFL reading classroom, for instance online-reading texts "prepare students to become life-long users of the language". Leu (2000) pinpointed that "Literacy is rapidly and continuously changing as new technologies for information and communication repeatedly appear and new environments for exploring these technologies are continuously changing". Starting from early years of schooling, teachers and students worldwide battle with literacy development. It highlights that there are fundamental barriers to teaching reading and that they are extremely difficult to overcome.

Traditional methods and instructions to EFL reading seem to be insufficient. With recent and evolving new multimedia, there appear new possibilities of supporting the process of teaching EFL reading (Leu, 2000). Furthermore, ground-breaking research has broadened the understanding of literacy development. Access to new ICT tools enables teachers to create the most suitable conditions for acquiring and improving reading skills. It's teacher's crucial role to integrate the new multimedia into the classroom and provide students with exercises based on the application of ICT tools.. For AlKahtani (1999) the notion of computer-based instruction significantly facilitates students' reading comprehension. It functions as a stimulus which increases concentration of certain texts. In another related study on the integration of ICT in the reading process specifically, the authors presented the effects of facilitating reading process through movie clips. What is more, Case and Truscott (1999) particularly emphasize the significance of ICT tools in expanding readings skills. They claim that computer-based reading influences at least three aspects of teaching and learning reading, namely interaction with text, attention to personal needs and autonomy through an ability to comprehend texts. What is more, ICT tools bring authentic environment into the classroom and integrate varied language skills and usage (Warschauer & Healey, 1998).

In the process of reading particularly, new multimedia such as electronic books and stories enrich students' interest and help them be prolific readers (Leu & Leu, 1997). According to the presented studies the amount of ICT tools is broad, but how do they actually influence

the reading habits' of students. Is there any connection between teaching reading and using ICT tools?

### **3. Setting of the study**

#### **3.1 Research purpose**

The aim of the present study is to examine:

- 1) The influence of online tools on students' reading habits.
- 2) Students' engagement in the reading practices with the use of ICT tools.
- 3) Students' benefits from the implementation of technologies in the reading classroom.

Moreover, the author aims to determine the advantages and drawbacks of online tools integrated in reading process and to establish whether there is a direct connection between using ICT tools and teaching reading skill.

#### **3.2 Research participants**

This study is a quantitative research, engaging a total of 40 lower secondary school students. The researched group comprised of students from 14 till 16 years old. The second and third year students attend English classes on regular basis, three hours weekly. This study was an exploratory pilot study to investigate the effect of ICT tools on adolescents' reading habits as well as the advantages and disadvantages of the integrating ICT devices in teaching reading on adolescent ESL students.

#### **3.3 Research instruments**

As the main research instrument, the author used a questionnaire to elicit data from the students constantly developing their reading skills. The adopted research instrument provides a large number of informants in a relatively short period of time anonymously (Wallace, 1998). One questionnaire comprising of 14 questions was carefully prepared in order to elicit students' reading habits and attitudes towards ICT devices in the process of developing reading comprehension. The questionnaire comprised of open-ended questions.

### **4. Results and discussions**

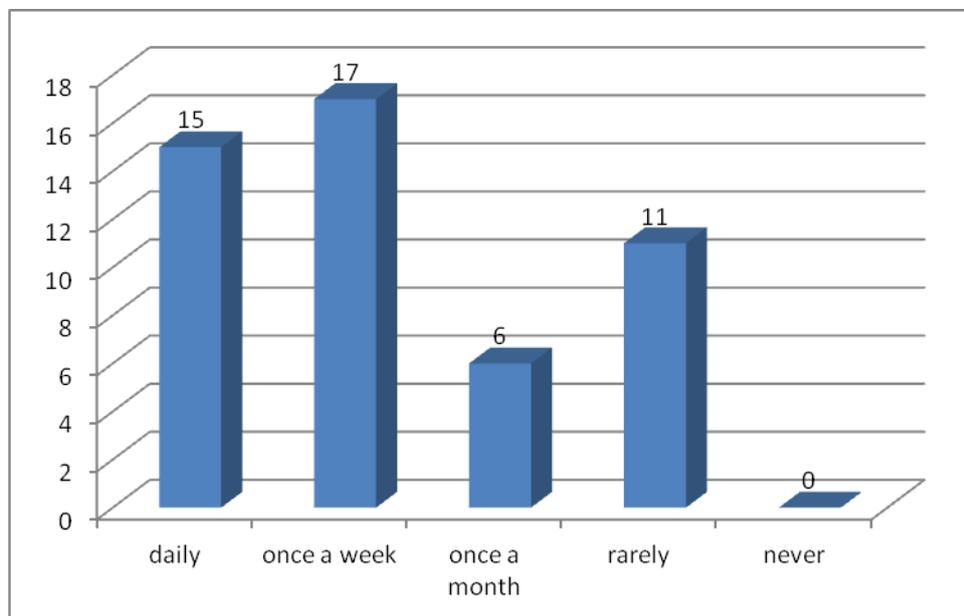
Most of the researched students showed positive attitude to reading in general, almost 43% of them read books or different texts once a week, 38% read daily, 15% once a month

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while 27% rarely engage in the process of reading. The collected data show that fifteen-year-olds are the most eager to read almost 58 % them devote their time to reading daily or once a week. The least fond of reading are 14-year-old teens only 13 % engage in reading every day or once a week.



**Figure 1. How often do you read books/texts/other materials?**

The conducted research not only shows that most students read in general but also eagerly indulge themselves in reading in English. Almost 68% of the examined learners refer to books and other materials written in English. As it can be noticed from the collected data, 15 year-olds are eager in reading in a foreign language.

In one of the questions he researched students were also asked to indicate their preferences in choosing the materials they read. The opinions seem to be quite divided. The comedies are ranked first with the result of almost 58%. Sensational books and fantasy amount to 53 % . On the third place we can notice biographies and journals (48%) followed by the adventure books (45%) . Further positions belong to psychological books (38%), professional journals (35%), non-fiction (28%), literature (25%) and historical (20%). (See Figure 2 below)

Type of material	Frequency %
Comedies	58
Fantasy	53
Sensational	53
Biography, journals	48
Adventure	45
Psychological books	38

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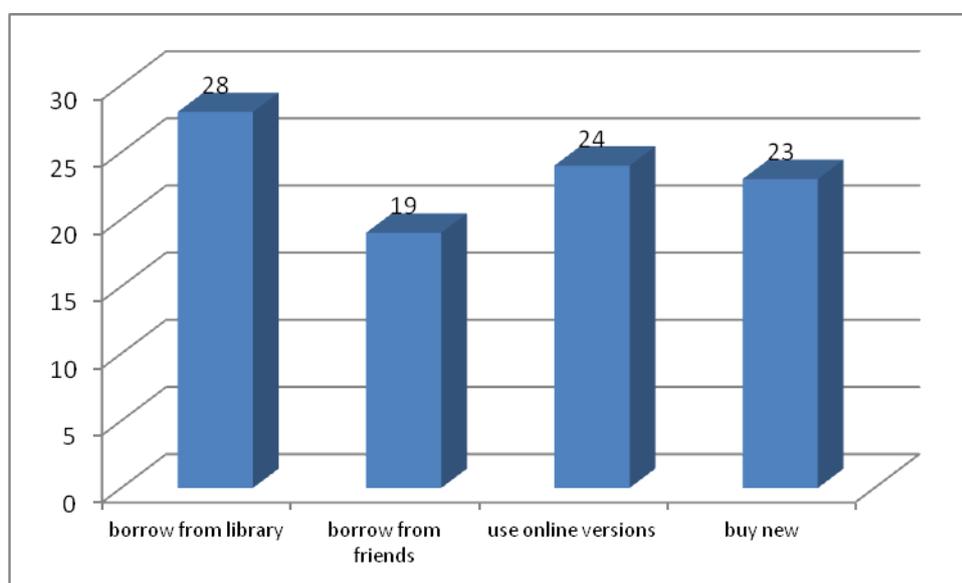
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Professional journals	35
Non-fiction	28
Literature	25
Historical	20

**Figure 2. What kind of books/texts do you read most often?**

Furthermore, students' task was to present how they usually purchase books or materials they read. The results seem to be quite diversified; there is no distinctive way of obtaining the texts. As much as 70% of all respondents prefer to borrow materials from the library. About 60% and 57% respectively opt of using online versions and buying new ones. There are also students who borrow their books/materials from friends (48%). (Chart 4)



**Figure 3. How do you purchase books/materials you read?**

Another research question asks whether students read books or materials for pleasure, excluding school required books or other materials, almost 58% said yes whilst 43% denied. Further research question aimed to find out what reading strategies students adopt when they encounter words/fragments they do not understand while reading. Most of the researched students (85%) try to get the meaning out of the context. Other students prefer using previous knowledge (68%) or checking the meaning with the help of ICT tools (63%). Some of the examined learners opt for asking other people for help (53%) and underling the word/fragment and checking in the dictionary (48%). The least favoured options are underlining and checking after reading (28%) and skipping and reading further (28%). On this basis it is important to point out that reading context and background knowledge play vital role in the process of reading comprehension. (See Figure 4)

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Type of strategy	Frequency %
Get the meaning out of the context	85
Use previous knowledge	68
Check using online tools	63
Ask other people for help	53
Underline and check	48
Underline and check after reading	28
Skip and read further	28

**Figure 4. What reading strategies do you adopt when you encounter unfamiliar words while reading?**

The research shows that straight majority of examined students make use of information and communication technologies while reading books/materials. As much as 80% of the researched students refer to ICT devices. This shows that they are familiar with current ICT tools and find them useful. Further research question concerning the usage of the Internet resources while reading in a foreign language shows that the most favourite and beneficial are various kinds of foreign online dictionaries, namely Polish-English dictionary (78%), English-Polish dictionary (75%) and other foreign online dictionaries (75%). Students find database (53%), news web portals (50%), online encyclopedias (43%) and phraseological dictionaries (43%) less useful. Further there are digital magazines (35%), thematic portals (35%) and educational webpages (35%). Students find also online libraries (28%), synonym online dictionaries (28%) and database (28%) less vital in the process of foreign language reading. The least crucial are thematic dictionaries (23%) and illustrated dictionaries (10%). (See Figure 5)

Internet resources	Frequency %
Online libraries	28
Digital magazines	35
Foreign online dictionaries	75
Synonym online dictionaries	28
Polish-English dictionary	78
English-Polish dictionary	75
Thematic portals	35
Online encyclopedias	43
Phraseological dictionaries	43
Thematic dictionaries	23
Illustrated dictionaries	10
Educational webpages	35

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Database	28
News and portals	50

Figure 5. Which of the Internet resources do you use when reading in a foreign language?

The conducted research shows that using ICT devices while doing homework is quite popular. At this point we can see that decisive majority of the students apply websites (88%). Less popular seem to be students' portals (65%), networking sites (48%), e-books (43%), tablets (30%) and chats (25%). The researched students find blogs (15%), video films (13%) and e-mails (8%) the least important. (See Chart 9)

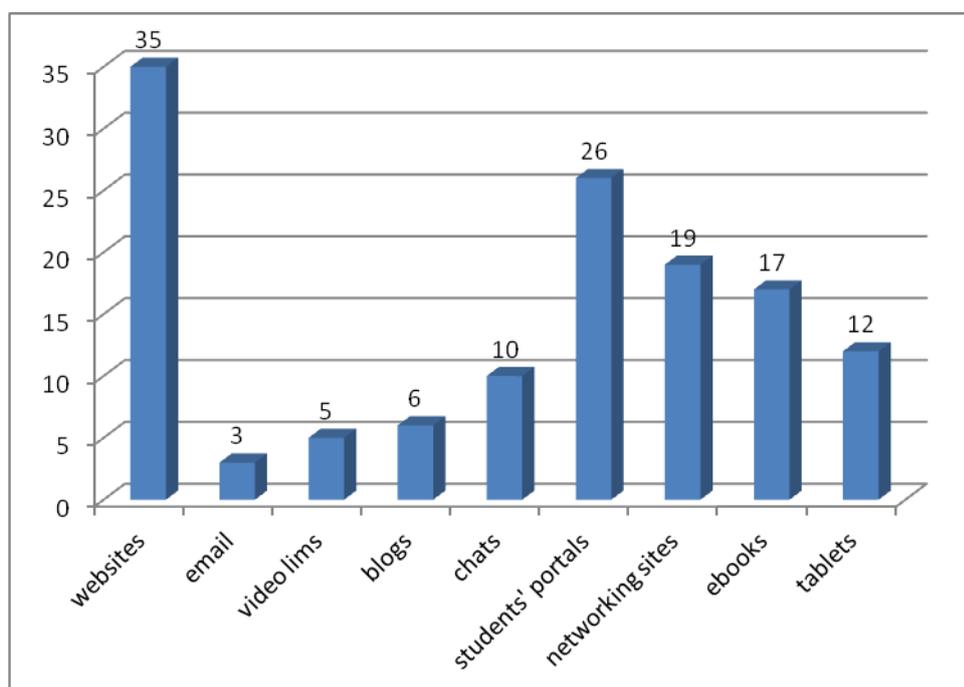


Figure 6. Which ICT tools do you use while doing homework?

As far as the drawbacks of adopting ICT tools are concerned, students mentioned two most often. These are health problems (73%) and no sufficient security (58%). Problems with availability (45%) and cyber violence (40%) constitute less vital factors. Only 18 % of the researched perceive ICT devices as useless.

One of the open questions in the questionnaire aimed to ask students about their personal opinion about ICT tools while reading books/materials. Below are some suggested answers:

- 1) I think ICT devices are useful and beneficial while learning.
- 2) ICT tools help to understand better the text of foreign books, you can use dictionaries.
- 3) They (ICT tools) are important. They help us develop. We have quicker access to all materials.

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- 4) New technology is convenient. You do not have to buy or borrow books. You can find everything. It's simply easier.
- 5) It's better to read books without computer because it ruins your eyesight.
- 6) ICT tools are useful, you do not have to buy paper versions of books, you do not have to carry them. They are easier to find.
- 7) ICT tools are a bit distracting, but if someone is able to concentrate on many things at the same time why not.
- 8) I mostly use them to find dictionaries to understand books.
- 9) ICT tools help use to acquire materials that are hard to access but I prefer reading paper books. When we touch books we remember them better.
- 10) ICT devices enable us to a greater amount of materials, Internet resources.

The results of the conducted study confirm that students apply online tools eagerly in their reading practices, almost 80% of the researched use ICT devices. Moreover, adolescents devote most of their time to reading online resources, and websites are most favorite (88%). Furthermore, students confirm that online tools are beneficial while learning, and they help to understand content of the written materials. However, as the research shows adolescents prefer borrowing books form libraries (70%) to reading online versions (60%).

The findings of the present study show that the usage of ICT devices is quite popular among adolescents. They use technology in the process of reading regularly. The study shows the great benefits that the technology-enhanced reading classroom can offer to its students, particularly in helping to understand texts. We hope this study will help both teachers and students to be more innovative in the reading classroom and cooperate to introduce ICT in the extensive reading classroom

## 5. Conclusions

Numerous studies have been conducted to examine the change of teenage students' habits while integrating ICT tools in teaching and learning English as a Second Language (ESL). This study investigates the reading and the Internet using habits of teenage students in a selected Lower Secondary school in Lublin Voivodeship. The present study was conducted to identify the impact of the Internet surfing on reading habits of the net generation teenage students. As the ICT tools constitute a sign of progress in various spheres of education and a decisive factor to pursue demands of changing world, it is vital to engage them in the reading development at Polish schools.

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