



## EFL Student's Reading Habits in The Digital Era

Dayang Nurfaizah<sup>1\*</sup>, Yelni Erniyati<sup>2</sup>, Ogi Danika Pranata<sup>3</sup>

*Department of English Education (IAIN Kerinci Sungai Penuh, Indonesia)<sup>1\*</sup>*

*Department of English Education (IAIN Kerinci, Sungai Penuh, Indonesia)<sup>2</sup>*

*Physics Education Department (IAIN Kerinci, Sungai Penuh, Indonesia)<sup>3</sup>*

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### Correspondence

E-mail: [dayangnurfaizah111@gmail.com](mailto:dayangnurfaizah111@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

In this modern era, easy access to digital media and the internet is a big challenge in reading habits. This research investigates internet usage patterns and reading habits among English students in contemporary educational settings. Drawing on data from a questionnaire survey administered to 53 students at an Islamic college in Jambi, Indonesia, the study explores students' online activities, reading preferences, and perceptions of digital reading materials. The findings show a significant reliance on the Internet for academic and leisure activities, with online news being the main driver of students' reading interest. Despite concerns about content relevance and readability, digital reading materials, especially e-books, and online platforms, have the potential to foster reading engagement and literacy skills. The study also highlights the diverse nature of students' online activities, emphasizing the need for tailored approaches to promote reading habits in the digital age. By adopting innovative teaching methods and utilizing digital resources, educators can create immersive reading experiences that help students navigate and critically evaluate digital information effectively. This research contributes valuable insights into the evolving landscape of reading preferences and the role of technology in shaping literacy practices, informing evidence-based strategies for promoting reading engagement and lifelong learning in educational contexts.

## INTRODUCTION

In this modern era, easy access to digital media and the internet is a big challenge in reading habits. This provides comfort for everyone without exception. When learning English as a second language, reading is one of the most important skills to develop (Erlina et al., 2019). Advances in mass media continue to influence readers' interest in books, magazines, journals, and other materials (Suhana & Haryudin, 2017). It is easier for students to watch videos and participate in other online activities when they use websites such as Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and others, so they neglect reading (Rahman & Obaidullah, 2018). As a result, more and more students feel negatively about academic reading. These factors have led to a

surprising decline in the percentage of students who read for pleasure outside of class (Balan et al., 2019).

Indeed, students need technology in the form of the Internet to exchange, discuss, and process information simultaneously (Tanjung et al., 2017). Added by Surwanto et al. (2023), one important component in learning activities is the use of media in the classroom. However, unfortunately, people's preference for social media and technology compared to reading during their free time has shifted (Rahman & Obaidullah, 2018). Most readers think that developing a reading habit is not easy. A habit is the result of learning, and a reading habit is a regular, deliberate, and directed reading practice (Iftanti, 2012). Reading is currently very important for the development of human progress as a whole (Bana, 2020). In fact, reading is said to be the foundation of education (Florence et al., 2017) and a fundamental way to learn (Erdem, 2015). As a result, readers are able to understand what is written and then remember the parts they find interesting. Chettri & Rout (2013), on the other hand, consider reading as a voluntary act carried out by individuals to evaluate various subjects included in a reading and state that reading is a learning tool that allows people to understand the world more deeply.

Reading habits are behaviors that represent the characteristics of a person's preferences and type of reading (Ms. Kushmeeta Chettri & Rout, 2013). A person organizes his reading according to his tastes (Florence et al., 2017), one of which is technology. In particular, student motivation and preferences play a role in the transition from paper-based to internet-based reading. If they utilize digital resources, they can easily access information sources. For example, books are very important for students to have (Tanjung et al., 2017). But nowadays, there are other ways to acquire knowledge besides physical copies: "They can access electronic books that they can keep and easily carry wherever they go (Oktay Akarsu A & Tefvik Dariyemez B, 2014). In addition, individuals can obtain new information quickly and expect to be presented clearly, and easily read, thanks to the internet (Verma & Malviya, 2014)

Achieving educational goals still requires reading, which is done through printed texts in books, magazines, pamphlets, and journals over a long period of time. This implies that the use of printed materials as a resource and other teaching methods are closely related

(Horton-Ramos, 2020). It is well-known that printed books have a large role in education (Margolin et al., 2013). Simpson et al. (2013) claim that today's students see the benefits of using technology and that this aligns with their tendencies. Shen's (2006) research supports this, which shows that people should prefer the Internet as a source of information.

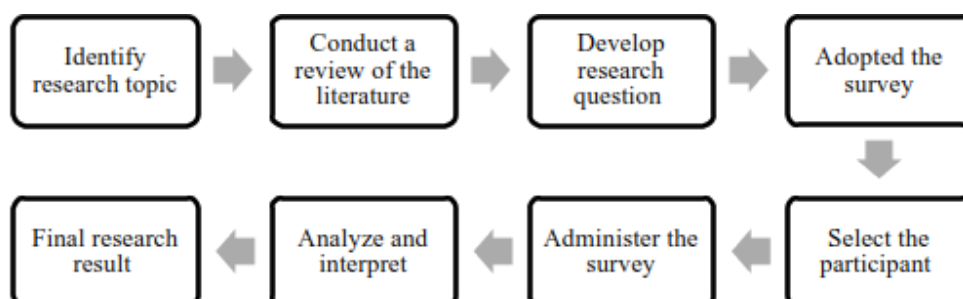
Nowadays, new media has become a barrier for everyone who wants to read. Media such as radio, television, cell phones, computers, and the internet have taken up a lot of time. Based on previous research, there is something unique in this research, namely, knowing effective ways to improve students' reading habits in the digital era, especially at the student level. Therefore, by considering these explanations, this research focuses on answering the following research question: what are the main trends in students' reading interest and reading media? How much influence does digital media have on students' reading habits?

## RESEARCH METHOD

One of the most popular techniques for gathering data in L2 research is the use of questionnaires. According to Dörnyei & Taguchi (2010), questionnaires are immensely popular due to their ease of construction, remarkable versatility, and ability to swiftly and easily handle enormous amounts of data. This research design uses quantitative data by following the steps in descriptive survey research shown in Figure 1. Researchers can obtain information by collecting numerical data, which is evaluated to provide precise and reliable results.

**Figure 1**

*Steps in Descriptive Survey Research*



Note: Adapted from Lodico (2010)

The questionnaire was developed and adapted based on the skills framework by Chauhan & Lal (2012) titled 'Impact of information technology on reading habits of college students.' The population of this study were first, third, fifth, and seventh-semester students majoring in English from the education and teacher training faculty of an Islamic college in Jambi, Indonesia. There were 53 students who responded to fill out the questionnaire. The number of participants was determined based on their age, which ranged from 20 to 25 years. Therefore, this research uses a Google form survey questionnaire to obtain important data from students. Students were asked to rate their attitudes towards reading, how often they read, what they read for, why they read, how much time they spend reading, and demographic data, including age, gender, were also collected.

This research utilized a Google Form survey questionnaire to obtain important data from students. Students were asked to rate their attitudes towards reading, how often they read, what they read for, why they read, how much time they spent reading, and demographic data, including age and gender. The online questionnaire format allowed students to easily respond from any location at any time. Data collection took place in mid-December 2023. The questionnaire included 15 questions, with the last 5 using a Likert scale to assess techniques for developing reading habits. The Likert scale options were: never (5), rarely (4), sometimes (3), often (2), and always (1).

## FINDING AND DISCUSSION

### *Findings*

**Table 1**

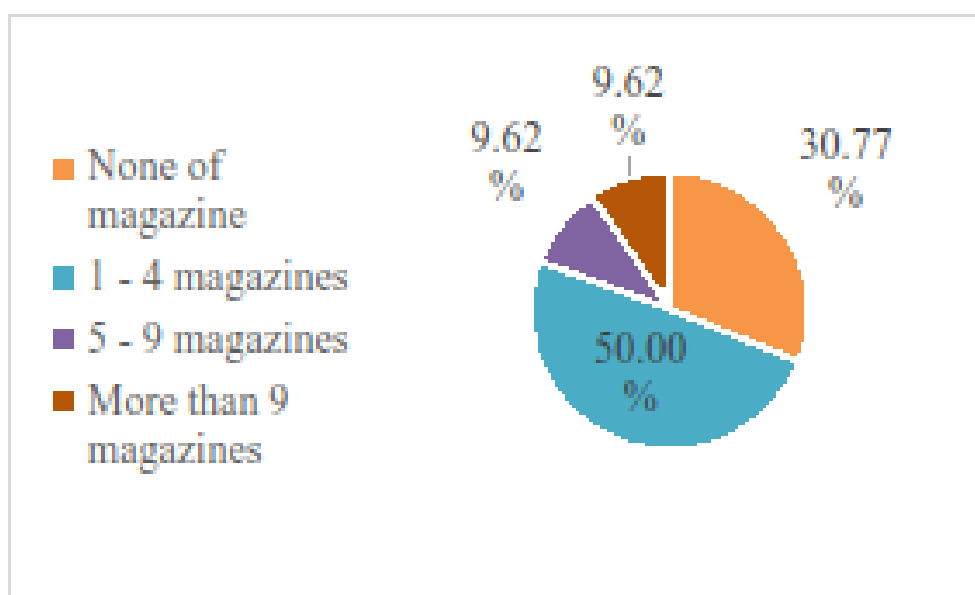
*Demography of Respondents*

Demographic information		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	16	30,2
	Female	37	69,8
Semester	One	21	39,6
	Three	6	11,3
	Five	24	45,3
	Seven	2	3,8
Age	<20	38	71,7
	20-23	15	28,3
	24-25	-	-

The demographic data of the respondents are displayed in Table 1. The respondents in the study population were divided between men (30.2%) and women (69.8%). Additionally, 45.3% of the respondents were from the fifth semester, compared to 39.6% from the first semester, and 11.3% from the third semester. Apart from that, the results of this research show that they were dominantly in the age of under 20 years old (71,1%).

**Figure 2**

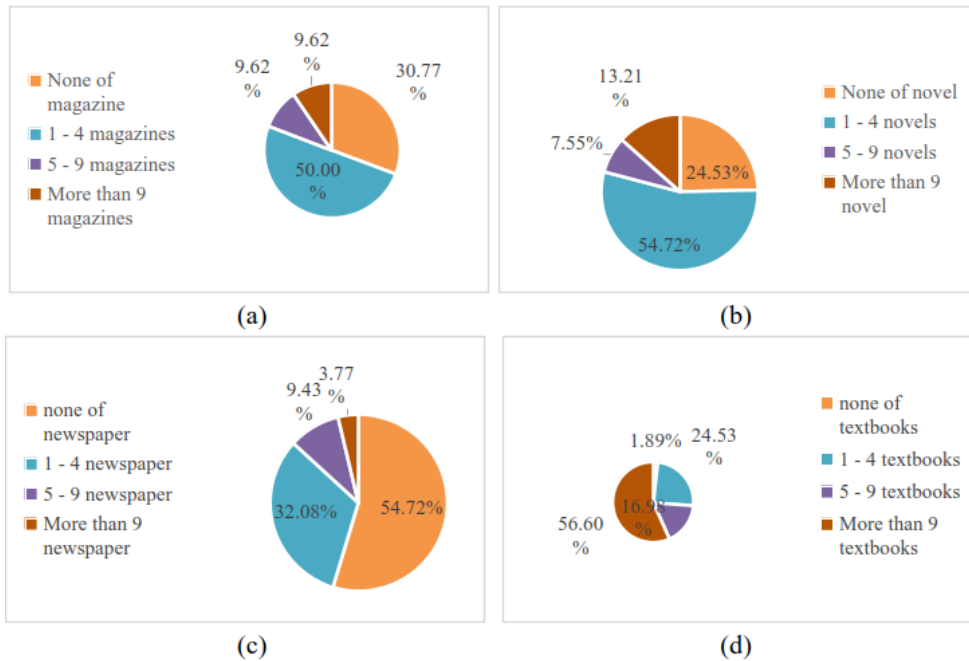
*Time Spent Accessing the Internet Every Day*



According to the research, the majority of students use the Internet daily for more than six hours (39.62%) and for three to six hours (37.74%) to learn more quickly, cheaply, and conveniently. They naturally do not like to go too long without discovering their interests. Consequently, using the internet is seen as one of the quickest ways to learn new information without wasting a lot of time on things that do not interest them.

**Figure 3**

*Reading Frequency in a Year*



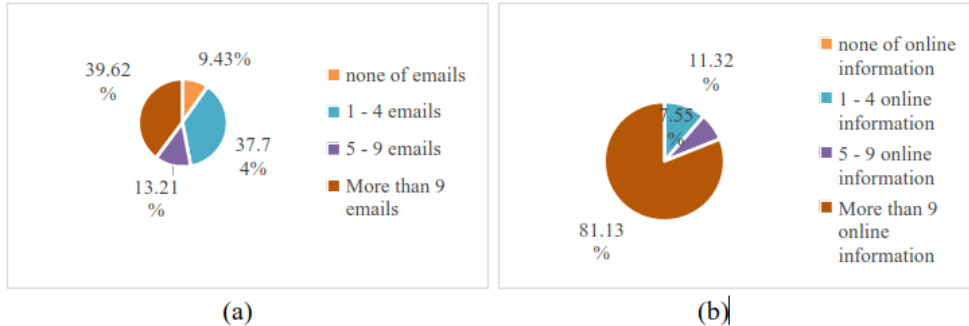
Note: (a) Magazines, (b) Novel, (c) Newspaper, and (d) Textbooks

Figure 3(a) shows that 50.0% of all students read one to four magazines, 9.62% read five to nine magazines, and more than nine magazines. Notably, 30.7% do not read magazines at all for specific reasons, such as a lack of interest in reading magazines. Figure 3(b) shows that the majority of students (54.7%) read one to four novels. Meanwhile, 24.5% of the students do not enjoy reading novels for various reasons, such as the absence of new novels, lack of awareness, or a general dislike of reading novels. Additionally, 7.5% of students read five to nine novels, and 13% read more than nine novels.

The findings presented in Figure 3(c) demonstrate that the majority of students (54.7%) do not read newspapers for reasons including lack of awareness, experience, or personal preference. Conversely, 32% of students read one to four newspapers, and 9.4% read five to nine newspapers. According to Figure 3(d), the majority of students (56.6%) read more than nine textbooks during a class. Only 1.89% do not read textbooks for various reasons, such as laziness, lack of interest, or personal preferences. Additionally, 16.9% read one to four textbooks.

**Figure 4**

*Reading Frequency in a Year (2)*

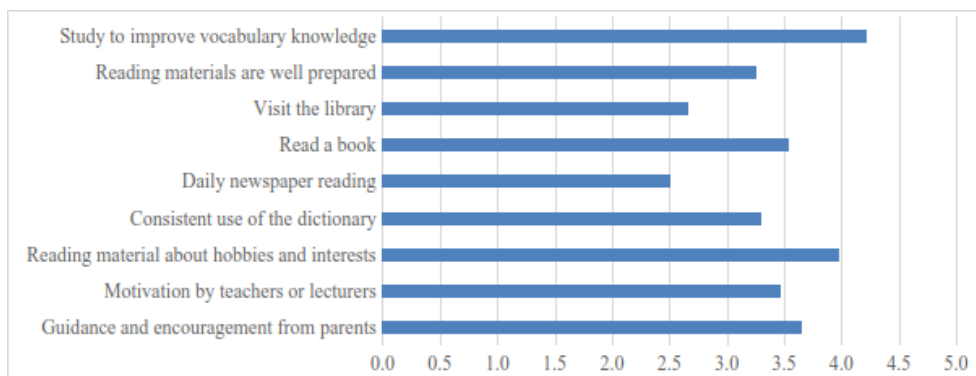


Note: (a) Number of emails and (b) Online Information Read in A Year

Figure 4(a) illustrates that most students read more than nine emails (39.6%) and one to four emails (37.7%). Only 9.4% of the students do not read emails, possibly due to a lack of knowledge on how to use email or a lack of interest. Meanwhile, 13.2% of the students read five to nine emails. According to the data in Figure 4(b), the majority of students (81.1%) viewed more than nine pieces of online information. Additionally, 11.3% of the students read one to four pieces of online information, while 7.5% read five to nine pieces of online information. It's interesting to note that every student reads material from the internet, as mobile phones make it easy to access information in this day and age.

**Figure 4**

*Priority Reading Material Read Online*



Online news is the top priority reading content that respondents most frequently select (75.5%), followed by jokes or comedy (64.2%), and movie reviews (60.4%). This outcome

indicates a high degree of reading general information. It suggests that students typically read for enjoyment, amusement, or to gain general knowledge rather than for academic purposes (such as reading e-books). However, journal articles rank sixth, indicating that a significant number of students also read for academic objectives. Despite this, they prioritize meeting academic demands over personal daily needs.

**Table 2**

*Table of Online Activities*

Online activities	frequency	Percentage
I listen to music	47	88,7
I play games	37	69,8
I look at photos	34	64,2
I read all kinds of information	34	64,2
I shop online	32	60,4
I use MSN messenger	14	26,4
I check my email	26	49,1
I chat with friends	41	77,4
I downloaded movies	32	60,4

When using the internet, the activity that respondents most often engage in is listening to music (88.7%), followed by conversations with friends (77.4%) and playing games (69.8%). Consequently, students can receive advice on various activities related to improving reading skills through the diverse online activities available. These activities include reading various learning materials, summarizing knowledge, checking and answering emails regarding assignments, and much more. Additionally, these activities can help students develop their writing skills.

**Table 3**

*Content First Clicked When Online*

Category	Percentage
Art and Humanities	3,8



Business and Economy	0
Computers and Internet	15,1
Education	17
Entertainment	41,5
Government	0
Health	0
News and Media	11,3
Recreation and Sports	3,8
Regional	0
Science	1,9
Social Science	0
Society and Culture	1,9
Facebook	3,8

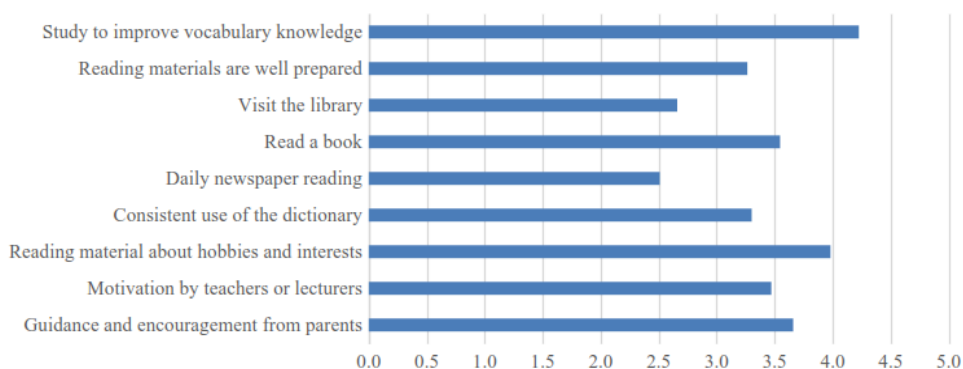
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It is noteworthy that 41.5% of respondents often prioritize clicking on entertainment items when online, followed by education (17%) and familiarity with computers and the internet (15.1%). This finding is surprising as most respondents, who are students, do not prioritize education when accessing online content. Hence, it is crucial to encourage respondents to explore a broader range of information beyond entertainment, given that education is closely intertwined with their daily lives as students.

The most commonly utilized strategy for improving vocabulary knowledge is studying (4.23%). Therefore, providing respondents with ample reading material aimed at expanding students' vocabulary in a university setting could enhance the likelihood of fostering good reading habits, such as using a dictionary in the library. The next most popular method is reading about interests and hobbies (3.98%). To boost respondents' motivation and interest in cultivating reading habits, it is imperative to offer reading material related to their interests and hobbies within the student context.

#### **Figure 6**

*Techniques for Developing Reading Habits*



It is intriguing to observe that only 2.66% of respondents suggested using the library as a means to enhance their reading habits. Compared to other methods, this figure is notably low. In essence, respondents seemed uncertain about the effectiveness of this approach in fostering better reading habits. This ambiguity may stem from considerations regarding the convenience and accessibility of library resources. Furthermore, reading daily newspapers emerged as the least favored method among respondents (2.51%), potentially due to limited access to newspapers at present. These findings align with the results of Shen's (2006) survey results, indicating a shift in the reading preferences of EFL students from traditional paper-based reading to internet-based reading.

### ***Discussion***

The discussion commenced with an exploration of the extensive time English students spend on internet usage, with over 39.6% reporting an average of more than six hours daily. This prevalence of internet usage among students aligns with similar findings in studies conducted at Malaysian institutions (Ahmed, 2016), contradicting earlier notions that younger individuals primarily access online content for entertainment rather than educational purposes (Hussein et al., 2007). Moreover, the significant variance in daily mobile phone usage, as revealed by Das et al. (2019), underscores the need for educators to leverage internet platforms to cultivate students' reading habits effectively.

Teachers play a pivotal role in utilizing Internet resources to facilitate students' reading habits, particularly given the current norm of extensive Internet usage among students. By

encouraging students to create educational materials and engage with online learning platforms, educators can integrate technology seamlessly into classroom activities (Ferdiansah et al., 2024). Notably, accessing online news emerges as the primary driver of students' reading interests, reflecting a broader trend observed by Tanjung et al. (2017), wherein online information consumption surpassed other reading materials.

The findings also highlight students' inclination toward academic content, with a significant proportion engaging in online information consumption and textbook reading. This preference aligns with students' reliance on technological devices, predominantly computers and smartphones, for accessing internet resources. Notably, the diverse online activities undertaken by students, such as gaming, socializing, and listening to music, present educators with opportunities to tailor reading enhancement strategies to individual preferences.

Research findings show that 81.13% of respondents stated that they often read online information and read textbooks (56.50%). This is closely related to the way students utilize devices such as computers and smartphones, which they mainly use to get the latest internet news. In addition, research (Tanjung et al., 2017) revealed that students deliberately read textbooks and enjoy online information. As students, they have a preference to read content that is relevant to their daily academic needs. In addition, people engage in other activities when they browse the internet, such as playing games (69.8%), conversing with friends (77.4%), and listening to music (88.7%). By using the tasks completed by participants, teachers can suggest websites that help students enhance their reading abilities based on their individual reading preferences. As a result, students utilize the internet for purposes other than simply getting daily information from the same sources.

It was also observed that the respondents were uninterested in reading periodicals, newspapers, or books. Erdem (2015) discovered that his participants read books, newspapers, and periodicals during their leisure time. while research conducted by (Noor, 2011) found that the majority of postgraduate students used the Internet as their main source of reading material. According to Abidin et al. (2011), there has been a remarkable surge in the use of electronic media as a source of entertainment and information. Mohamed et al. (2012) also found that students read far more on digital media than they did on printed materials, whether

they were non-academic or unrelated to the course. According to Virgiyanti & Wahyu (2023) Previously, students used print media; they found that students are reading more literature online nowadays. However, as technology develops, reading materials such as textbooks, novels, and even news sources have migrated to the online world. Convenience, location, and time efficiency, as well as students' dependence on these technological gadgets, are often used as justifications (Helingo, 2021). The reason for this is that people may simply access it on their laptop or smartphone by utilizing online reading platforms. As a result, they choose to read from electronic books or internet sources (Virgiyanti & Wahyu, 2023).

The usage of e-books is the subject of several recent studies (Jeong, 2012; Lim & Hew, 2014) that look at how instructors and students perceive digital reading. In general, the results show that more than 50% of e-book users are happy with their experience. According to Pardede (2019) pre-service English instructors had a favorable opinion on the usage of digital modules in blended learning. They do, however, anticipate that the modules will include pertinent films and be written in an "easier" style. Jeong (2012) demonstrates that e-books are well-liked by Korean students. Students are also aware of the modern benefits of e-books. According to research by Lim & Hew (2014), most students expressed favorable opinions toward e-books. They have different ways of communicating with their peers at first. One way they accomplish this is by using live chat features on websites like WhatsApp or other platforms. Depending on their interests, the subjects they must talk about with their friends may change. The results are consistent with Tiwari's (2022) findings, which indicate that younger generation students occasionally prefer reading online. These activities might be seen as useful tools for promoting reading habits. According to Hymavathi & Surendra Babu (2018), the majority of students rely on electronic resources for knowledge and believe that printed materials are more expensive than e-books.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, this research highlights the relationship between internet usage patterns and reading habits among English students. The findings reveal the significant impact of internet platforms on students' daily routines, with many dedicating substantial time to online

activities. Despite concerns about non-academic internet usage, educators can harness digital resources to cultivate students' reading interests and skills.

The prominence of online news consumption underscores the importance of integrating relevant and engaging content into educational curricula. By leveraging online platforms for educational materials and interactive learning, educators can align students' digital habits with academic goals. The rise of e-books and digital reading platforms offers promising avenues for promoting reading habits, with considerations for content relevance and readability. The increased reliance on digital platforms for peer interactions highlights technology's role in shaping students' reading behaviors. By fostering collaborative learning environments and providing diverse online resources, educators can help students engage critically with digital content and develop lifelong reading habits.

Overall, this research emphasizes the need to adapt to the changing dynamics of reading in the digital age. Embracing technology as a catalyst for literacy development and promoting active engagement with online resources will equip students with the skills to navigate an increasingly complex information landscape.

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