



## An Analysis of EFL Students' Online Reading Habits

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### ABSTRACT

With the fact that current EFL students are digital natives and go online frequently, conducting online-based English skill learning activities is encouraged. As reading is one of the fundamental skills to be developed in the early stage of EFL learning, preparing online-based reading activities for the students can be a good move. This study identifies EFL students' reading habits, which specifically investigates their source of online reading, their online reading frequency, and factors that influence that habit. The study was conducted in an Islamic state university with a class of 30 English department students as the subject. Questionnaires and interviews were used to gather the data. The study found that students majorly read online from English learning websites and social media, with reading from social media happening more frequently than the other, placing fulfilling college tasks and entertainment purposes as the primary motives of their online reading habits.



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## INTRODUCTION

Reading is an essential cognitive skill for both EFL learners and teachers, especially in engaging with written texts. To grasp the issues presented, one must comprehend the content through careful reading. According to Flynn and Stainthorp (2006), reading is the product of decoding and comprehension which means that reading is a result of an ability to decode the print words and to comprehend the language. Reading skill serves as the basis of all learning that in turn produces a knowledgeable society." (Bussière & Gluszynski, 2004). Therefore, it is unquestionable that reading in English is perhaps the most

important of the four language skills needed by students of any major and by future professionals" (Cheng & Good, 2009).

In this world of technology, reading from digital devices has become one of the highlights of our modernized English education (Zulianti et al. 2024). Reading online is an activity that can be done with the help of digital tools and the Internet. Shen (2006) found that students prioritize the internet as the information medium and they go online mainly to get information, send and receive emails, download music, and use chat rooms. By simply searching for keywords and reading them online, students can analyze the information and then understand it easily. Furthermore, Ögeyik and Akyay (2009) stated that reading habit is an important tool for the development of educational personalities and mental capacities of individuals. Thus, EFL students' reading habits in general and their online reading habits need to be improved as they can be a bridge for students to improve their knowledge, boost individual creativity, and grow a universal mindset through existing digital media content. It is relieving that, with the growing amount of digital information available, people particularly young adults are found spending more time reading electronic materials (Liu, 2005). Also, the COVID-19 pandemic that happened a few years ago have elevated English teachers' and students' intensity to read online more and more (Hasbi, 2020; Ginting et al., 2022). The question remains, "Does these situation impact on the growing number of students' online reading activity?" If so, can we take these potentials further into pedagogical practices now?

In order to dive deeper into the young students' online reading involvement, researchers conducted an analytical study on university students' online reading habits, which is based in the English education department of an Indonesian state university. Here are the three questions investigated throughout the study:

1. What kinds of online media platforms are regularly accessed by Indonesian EFL students?
2. How is the frequency of online English reading activities of the Indonesian EFL students?
3. What factors influence the online English reading frequency of the Indonesian EFL students?

Three related previous studies were being used to refer to and compare for carrying out our research. The first study was conducted by Rimi (2019) aimed to determine the effects that would occur if the ESL class was conducted by implementing an online reading-based learning system for students. Through observation, a questionnaire-based survey, and an assessment of students' written composition, it was found that as many as 80 students in Bangladesh argued that online reading habits should be accustomed since childhood so that it helps establish young learners' potential during their English language development as well as develop a fun reading habit. Another study by Tanjung et al. (2017) on students' reading habits in Borneo universities found that the widespread use of the internet and other online media increases students'

interest and reading ability, underlining that they have different reading source preferences either online via gadgets or printed reading materials such as handbooks and newspapers. The third study by Yuliani and Barokah (2017) on the influence of students' online reading habits found a strong relationship between students' online reading habits and their level of learning achievement, emphasizing that students find it easier to understand the content of the reading they are learning thanks to the habit.

## **METHOD**

### **Research Design**

This research was conducted with a qualitative research design, as it deals with data that are in the form of words or pictures rather than numbers and statistics (Ary et al., 2010). Here, the researchers used the descriptive qualitative research method, which explores the opinions of subject students related to the source and frequency of their online reading habits and how it can be a factor that encourages them to improve their English reading skills. The study involves a class of 30 English education department students in an Indonesian state university which poses as the primary subjects. Meanwhile, information gathered from books, journal articles, and websites poses as the secondary data provider in this study.

### **Instruments and Procedures**

#### ***Questionnaire***

This study employed a questionnaire, a set of questions with multiple choice to collect the data answered by the respondents which provides information about their thoughts, feelings, attitudes, beliefs, values, perceptions, personality, and behavioural intentions (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). More specifically, it is a closed-ended type of questionnaire containing fifteen statements in which the first five statements investigate the kinds of online media platforms regularly accessed by Indonesian EFL students (*Research Question 1*), the second five statements investigate the frequency of online English reading activities of the Indonesian EFL students (*Research Question 2*), and the remaining five statements determine factors that influence the online English reading frequency of the Indonesian EFL students (*Research Question 3*). Respondents gave answers by opting out on either *strongly agree*, *agree*, *disagree*, or *strongly disagree* on the given space.

#### ***Interview***

Researchers also used the instrument of interview, a meeting of two persons to exchange information and ideas through responses, resulting in communication and joint construction of meaning about a particular topic (Sugiyono, 2016). To get deeper insight, interviews with six subject students (three students with the highest scores and three lowest scorers on the questionnaire result) were conducted. The interview consisted of six questions, in which each of the two

questions explores a deeper investigation of the answers to one research question.

### Data Analysis Procedures

Miles & Hubberman's three concurrent flows of data analysis (1994) including data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusion/ verification were used to analyze the data. The data reduction was carried out by simplifying answers from thirty participants who answered the questionnaire and six participants who answered interview questions as research objects. With participants' answers that are complex and comprehensive, the researcher shortened the answers of all participants so that they are more effective and become the only information relevant to be analyzed in this study. Then, the reduced data were displayed using tables and also effective explanations in the form of essays containing an explanation of how online reading habits for students can help improve the development of students' reading skills. Lastly, in conclusion drawing, the researchers concluded the results of research conducted related to online reading habits carried out by students and the influencing and challenging factors by summarizing what are exposed in the data display.

## FINDINGS

### Questionnaire Result

The following table showcases the percentages of students' responses toward all statements in the questionnaire.

Table 1. Students' Responses to the Questionnaire

Focus	Statements	SA	A	D	SD	Total
Research Question 1	1. I often open online news websites (BBC, CNN, The Jakarta Post, etc.) to get updated with recent news.	3,3%	60%	36,7%	0%	100%
	2. I often open news/daily update accounts on social media platforms (Instagram, Facebook, X, etc.).	13,3%	80%	6,7%	0%	100%
	3. I often open English learning websites (BBC English, VOA Learning English, Storynory, etc.) for personal learning.	10%	63,3%	26,7%	0%	100%
	4. I often read online for pleasure (Webtoon, Wattpad, etc).	46,7%	23,3%	23,3%	6,7%	100%
	5. I join online reading communities (on websites or social media).	10%	23,3%	60%	6,7%	100%
Research Question 2	6. I often read English news/updates online.	3,4%	63,3%	33,3%	0%	100%
	7. I often read English comments from netizens on YouTube, Instagram, and other online media.	53,3%	40%	6,7%	0%	100%
	8. I subscribe/follow many English channels and accounts on YouTube, Instagram, and other online media.	36,7%	60%	3,3%	0%	100%

	9. I often read English academic texts (journal articles, academic papers, English materials, etc) online.	13.3 %	40%	46,7 %	0%	100 %
	10. I often watch English videos from YouTube, Instagram, and other media.	60%	36,7 %	3,3%	0%	100 %
Research Question 3	11. I have the access of internet on my smartphone daily.	80%	20%	0%	0%	100 %
	12. I know many English language accounts/channels in online media.	26,7 %	56,7 %	16,7 %	0%	100 %
	13. I understand easily English contents and comments in online media.	20%	70%	10%	0%	100 %
	14. I have good ability to give comments in online media using English.	10%	73,3 %	16,7 %	0%	100 %
	15. I have the habit of using English for daily online activities (chatting with other people, reading for news, etc).	13,3 %	50%	36,7 %	0%	100 %

### Interview Result

The following is the six interview questions followed by the excerpts of the answers by the six interviewed students. Some answers are simplified for the efficiency purpose or even omitted whenever irrelevant or repeating the other students' responses. The questions are represented by the code of Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4, Q5, Q6, while R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, 56 represent the respondents.

*Q1: What kinds of information do you usually read online (news/entertainment/academic writing/English learning contents, etc.)? Why do you like reading in the genre?*

R1: I prefer to read information about entertainment and the news.

R2: Entertainment news and English learning material attract me the most.

R3: When I'm bored, I read news or entertainment on Instagram or X. I also study English through Instagram or blogs as it is more fun than books.

R4: Personally, I read entertainment or news just randomly and particularly what is trending on Instagram or X. I rarely open websites on Google.

R5: I usually read news and academic writings (such as journal articles for reference) written in English and which are interesting.

R6: News or kind of information I usually read online is entertainment because the purpose of social media is usually more for entertainment.

*Q2: Which one do you read online more: English language information or Indonesian language information? Can you give some examples of the channel/account names where you often read online from?*

R1: I like, because I also like reading. For Indonesian content I usually read on Wattpad and for English content or news I read it on CNN International.

- R2: I prefer Indonesian content from BBC, CNN, Kompas News, Wattpad, etc. For English content, I only read on social media like Instagram, YouTube.
- R3: I mostly read information in Indonesian on X, but sometimes I read English news on CNN or Jakarta Post to improve my reading skills and vocabulary.
- R4: It can be in English or Indonesian based on what are posted by the channels I follow on social media. So, it is random and uncertain.
- R5: I mostly read online in Indonesian, such as from Virto.id and CNN Indonesia. I read few contents in English, like the ones on Badminton Talk.
- R6: I usually read in Indonesian as they majorly appear on my social media. I also follow several accounts that provide information in English.

*Q3: Do you like reading academic contents online like journal articles, learning strategies, English grammar/vocabulary and other skills? And do you do it only for completing assignment or for personal learning as well?*

- R1: Honestly. I don't like it, but sometimes if I have a task that requires me to read articles or learning strategies like that.
- R2: I read academic texts for doing tasks. I learn vocabulary and grammar from social media, where I read English content more often than news.
- R3: I read academic content to complete assignments. For personal purposes, I rarely do because my interest is due to the obligation to read journals.
- R4: No. I don't like reading academic content, I just read like that when there are assignments.
- R5: Yes, I like reading online academic content such as journal articles. It helps complete the assignments given on college.
- R6: Yes, I read journal articles to do some assignments from lecturers because some information is obtained from several journal articles.

*Q4: Do you often read and give English comments on online media? If any, what was your last English comment/reply? In which channel or account, it was?*

- R1: I usually comment on Instagram accounts like Kampung Inggris to thank them or answer quizzes and sometimes on celebrity accounts with praises like "Good job, my queen."
- R2: I enjoy reading English comments on YouTube but rarely write them. My last English comment was on Alfy Rev's "Wonderland Indonesia" video.
- R3: I mostly read English comments on X and rarely reply on social media, except to respond to friends' comments on my posts, like "Thank you."
- R4: It depends; I reply in English to comments on my Instagram captions and also for lecturer-assigned YouTube comments.
- R5: I rarely comment in English on channels or online reading accounts.

- R6: I really comment on posts or news on social media to avoid unpleasant things, so I usually write the words “nice”, or “good” only as appreciation.
- Q5: Which online activities do you do more often: read/watch/listen/write/speak online? What is your reason? What are some examples of those activities?
- R1: primarily watching and listening, such as, watching movies or videos on YouTube with English subtitles. Then reading English posts on Instagram.
- R2: Mostly reading online, because it is very easy to do anywhere and anytime, followed with watching and listening to English videos, songs or dramas.
- R3: Watching videos on YouTube and listening to English songs.
- R4: I rarely read English online except for assignments, but I watch movies, sometimes listen to podcasts, never write, and rarely talk online.
- R5: I usually watch movies with English subtitles or listen to English conversations online.
- R6: I enjoy watching and listening online because visuals help understanding. On YouTube, I watch English channels to grasp unfamiliar words.
- Q6: In general, do you like reading English language content online? Why?
- R1: I like online and offline reading but not very much. I want to speak fluently, and it looks like it will come true if I read more.
- R2: I like reading English content online because it practical and economical. It improves my reading, comprehension, and vocabulary skills.
- R3: I like reading English content because it is accessible, and many resources are available. It has improved my reading skills and enrich my vocabulary.
- R4: Since I major in English, I have to read English content even if I don't like it. Finding unfamiliar words makes me feel lazy and dislike reading.
- R5: I don't like reading English because I struggle to understand it and often need to look up words first.
- R6: I like reading English content to improve my knowledge, and if I find unfamiliar words, I search them on Google to understand the meaning.

## DISCUSSION

### ***The kinds of online media platforms regularly accessed by Indonesian EFL students***

This study which involved thirty Indonesian EFL students showed that students agree that media platforms make it easier to access the latest news and information. Popular platforms like BBC, CNN, Detik.com, and Compass News provide global news and knowledge in both English and Indonesian, depending on student needs. However, students mainly access media in Indonesian. The study also

found that students use online English learning websites, like BBC English and VOA Learning English, for personal learning. Students typically read academic content like journal articles and learning strategies only for assignments or as requested by lecturers. Students also use social media platforms like X, Instagram, Facebook, Wattpad, and Webtoon to access current events and for entertainment. These platforms help develop reading skills by providing broad information and improving English comprehension (Hasbi, 2021; Hasbi et al., 2024). However, students often prefer reading in Indonesian, as it is easier to understand, using everyday language. Mikulecky and Jeffries (2007) and Sari (2024) note that reading comprehension involves understanding the text and connecting it with prior knowledge.

### ***The frequency of online English reading activities of the Indonesian EFL students***

Online English reading activities are important for developing students' English skills and practicing them regularly improves language development. These activities, especially joining an online English reading community, positively impact students' reading and language skills. However, not all students in this study are interested in joining such communities. A questionnaire revealed that 76.7% of students disagreed with joining online reading communities. Despite this, most students are active on social media, engaging in activities like commenting and watching videos in English on platforms such as Instagram, X, Facebook, and YouTube. Based on questionnaire results and interviews, 53.3% of students read online articles, journals, and English learning materials daily for various reasons, such as gathering information, completing assignments, or practicing English skills like grammar and vocabulary. Shen (2006) noted that students use the internet primarily for information, emails, music, and chat rooms. In conclusion, students frequently access social media on their phones to have fun, obtain information, and read English materials to support their assignments (Hasbi, 2024). As students tend to have higher interest in getting involved in fun online reading activities, teachers may try to design principally heavy reading activities, such as journal article reading-based activities, in fun and engaging way instead of in a serious manner (Hasbi, 2017).

### ***Factors influencing the online English reading frequency of the Indonesian EFL students***

Students primarily access the internet on their mobile phones for convenience, as it allows learning anytime and anywhere (Hasbi, 2021). Bell et al. (2017) state that online learning enables interaction via the web, even across distances (Arzayeva et al., 2015). Some students also use English in communication and other activities, benefiting their daily English proficiency. The students involved



in this study frequently use media platforms for online learning in foreign languages because social media provides up-to-date global information efficiently. This helps improve their English skills, including reading comprehension, vocabulary, and grammar (Hasbi, 2025). Students access various foreign language sources based on their needs, allowing them to engage with diverse online content and better understand information. They also participate in English activities on social media, such as commenting, watching videos, and gathering information from platforms like Instagram, X, Facebook, and YouTube. However, some students avoid media platforms for learning, as difficulty understanding English discourages them from reading (Nurchurifiani et al., 2025).. In such situation, teachers are advised to be able to create a comfortable and supportive classroom atmosphere so that it stimulates students' learning interest more (Sari, 2024).

## CONCLUSION

Indonesian EFL students commonly use social media platforms such as Instagram, X, and Facebook for both information and entertainment. While they also access English learning sites like BBC English and VOA Learning English to support their college assignments, their engagement in English reading beyond academic tasks remains limited. Most prefer reading in Indonesian as it is easier to understand, leading to minimal participation in online English reading communities. However, many students actively comment in English on social media, and research shows that 81.32% regularly access English online media. The main reasons for engaging with online media include staying updated and improving English skills, but language barriers often discourage students from reading English content. To address this, students should utilize English online media to enhance their reading skills while managing their content consumption. Lecturers can integrate online reading into learning, guiding students toward appropriate content to support English literacy and critical thinking.

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