

**THE INFLUENCE OF JORDANIAN EFL
UNDERGRADUATES' ONLINE READING
HABITS ON THEIR ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT**

by

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DEDICATION

To the soul and memory of my beloved father, may Allah have mercy on him, whose loving, care, sacrifice, and encouragement during his life were my source of inspiration to complete this work. I wish he was here to share this moment with me, a moment he would have wanted.

To my dearest mother who has to bear my father's departure and my absence during the time of my study and who her endless love, patience and prayers have never stopped supporting me during my journey. Thank you mom.

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**PENGARUH TABIAT MEMBACA ATAS TALIANDALAM KALANGAN
PELJAR IJAZAH PERTAMA (EFL) JORDAN TERHADAP PENCAPAIAN
AKADEMIK**

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bersifat deskriptif. Kajian ini bermatlamat mengkaji pengaruh pembacaan dalam-talian terhadap pencapaian akademik pelajar ijazah pertama Jordan yang membuat pengkhususan dalam EFL. Di samping itu, kajian ini juga meneroka tujuan dan bahasa yang menjadi pilihan semasa pembacaan dalam-talian. Kajian ini juga turut mengkaji sama ada tabiat membaca berbeza semasa membaca dalam-talian dengan membaca teks bercetak. Kajian ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dan kualitatif. Pemboleh ubah atau variabel bebas dalam kajian ini adalah pembacaan dalam-talian. Sementara itu, variabel penyederhana (moderat variables) adalah gender, umur, tahap pendidikan, kebiasaan dengan komputer dan internet, masa (jam) yang diluangkan untuk pembacaan dalam-talian, dan pekerjaan. Variabel bersandar pula adalah tabiat dan tujuan pelajar membaca, bahasa yang menjadi pilihan, dan pencapaian akademik. Sejumlah 258 (Lelaki = 146, Perempuan = 112) orang pelajar dari Universiti Yarmouk di Jordan, pengkhususan Inggeris dan Literatur telah dipilih secara rawak. Soal selidik yang mengandungi sejumlah 84 item, yang disesuaikan dan diubah suai daripada Shen (2006), digunakan untuk mengkaji tabiat dan tujuan pembacaan dalam-talian. Temu bual separa struktur juga dijalankan. Data yang diperolehi daripada kedua-dua instrumen tersebut dianalisis secara kuantitatif dan kualitatif. Dapatan berstatistik dan inferens menunjukkan bahawa para pelajar membaca dalam-talian dan meluangkan masa yang berpatutan (moderate) tetapi bagi tujuan yang berbeza. Dapatan utama menunjukkan terdapat

pekali korelasi yang signifikan di antara tabiat pembacaan dalam-talian dan pencapaian akademik. Didapati responden meluangkan masa yang berpatutan dalam-talian (1-3 jam sehari) membaca bahan yang berbeza, dengan tujuan yang juga berbeza. Didapati juga ~~tabiat~~ tabiat pembacaan dalam-talian adalah berbeza daripada pembacaan teks bercetak. Pembacaan dalam-talian yang biasa adalah e-mel, berita, cerpen dan novel. Sebaliknya, tabiat pembacaan teks bercetak, antaranya buku teks, novel dan komik. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan responden melakukan pembacaan dalam-talian bagi tujuan sosial dan santai. Dapatan utama lain, responden menggunakan bahasa Inggeris dan bahasa Arab semasa pembacaan dalam-talian. Dapatan kualitatif daripada temu bual selaras dengan dapatan kuantitatif. Kajian ini mencadangkan tabiat pembacaan dalam-talian yang positif boleh membantu pelajar ijazah pertama menjadi pembaca yang lebih baik, namun demikian terdapat kesan yang ketara daripada amalan dan tabiat pembacaan dalam-talian terhadap kehidupan akademik mereka.

THE INFLUENCE OF JORDANIAN EFL UNDERGRADUATES' ONLINE READING HABITS ON THEIR ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

ABSTRACT

This study is descriptive and exploratory in nature. The aim of this study was to investigate the influence of online reading habits on Jordanian EFL undergraduates' academic achievement. Besides, this study aimed at exploring students' online reading purposes and their language preference while reading online. It also attempted to find out whether their reading habits differ when reading online from those of printed text. This study employed a mixed-method (quantitative and qualitative) approach. The independent variable was online reading, while the moderate variables were students' gender, age, educational level, computer and internet familiarity, hours spent online, and employment. The dependent variables were students' reading habits and purposes, their language preference, and academic achievement. A total of 258 (M = 145, F = 113) students from Yarmouk University in Jordan, majoring in English Language and Literature were randomly selected. A 86-item questionnaire adapted and modified from Shen (2006) was used to investigate the online reading habits and purposes of Jordanian EFL undergraduates. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted. The data gathered from both instruments were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. Statistical and inferential findings showed that Jordanian EFL students do read online and spend a moderate amount of time online but for different purposes. The major findings revealed that there is a significant correlation coefficients between online reading habits and students' academic achievement (GPA). The major findings revealed that the relationship between students' online reading habits proved to be positively and

statistically significant in favor of higher academic achievement. That is to say, students who were reported to perform higher levels of reading habits were among those who scored high grades. Respondents' found to be allocating a moderate amount of time online (1 to 3 hours daily) reading different reading materials and for different purposes. It also revealed that their online reading habits differ from those of printed text. Their most common online reading habits were reading e-mails, news, and short stories and novels. While, their traditional reading habits are text books, novels, and comics. The findings also revealed that respondents go online for leisure and social purposes. Another major finding, respondents found out to use a mixture of English and Arabic languages as their preferred languages while reading online. Qualitative findings from the interviews with students seem to correspond with the findings from the quantitative part of the study. This study does suggest, however, that despite the noticeable effect of online practices and habits on students' academic life, positive online reading habits can help undergraduate students become engaged readers and better achievers.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The acquisition of English as a foreign or a second language is a matter of concern for many people and countries around the world, especially with the emergence of globalization and technological revolution. As a result, English is elevated to be the international means of communication for the population of the global village. The world's population is becoming more and more digital in their everyday life (International ICT Literacy Panel, 2007). New technologies have encompassed every aspect of our lives and almost everyone in the world has had a contact with computers in one way or another. The vast majority of them have been using the World Wide Web (also known as WWW hereafter) or the Internet. Today, the Internet is linked to millions of computers around the world. Not surprisingly, the Internet is widely used for almost everything in our everyday life for e. g., shopping, entertainment, and communication. Education is no exception. In fact, the 21st century is not only distinctively digital in nature but also the century of new literacies. The emergence of the Internet drastically revolutionized and changed the ideas, behaviors of human society. Indeed, its powerful impact has influenced every aspect of life.

According to the World Internet Usage and Population Statistics, the world population as of 30th June, 2012 was 7,017,846,922. About two and a half billion (2,405,518,376) people around the world are Internet users, with an increase of 566.4 %

compared to the year of 2000 when there were only 360,985,492. The percentage of the world Internet penetration in 2012 was 34.3 %. Comparatively, the population of Jordan was 6,508,887 in 2012 and the number of Internet users as of 30th June, 2012 was 2,481,940, a growth of 1,268.3% from the year 2000 when there were only 127,300 users (World Internet Usage and Population Statistics 2013). The percentage of Internet penetration was 38.1% of the population. Research has shown that the most obvious users of the Internet are adolescents and undergraduates. (Kausar & Zobia, 2006; Omotayo, 2006; Ofodu, 2012).

Technology has changed the environment of learning a language and paved the way for a greater demand on modern technologies in teaching languages worldwide over the past decades (e.g., Chen, Belkada, & Okamoto, 2004; O'Dowd, 2003; Toyoda and Harrison, 2002). According to Belz (2003), O'Dowd (2003), and Thorne (2003) the creation of the World Wide Web has made the effective use of instructional materials in teaching language and culture possible and feasible. Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL hereafter) is a convenient example of ICT in which new learning environments were implemented e.g., multimedia with video, sound, graphics, and text, which allow learners to be exposed to the target language and the culture. (Chun & Plass, 1997; Verdugo & Belmonte, 2007).

The online learning environment has become more and more popular for educators and learners due to its multiple visual and audio representations. Online learning is a trend that has the potential to enhance learning and increases the importance of knowledge of new teaching methods which apply to new learning

environments (Jung, 2001; Romero, Berger, Healy & Aberson, 2000). According to previous studies, some learners encounter difficulties learning online, since they have difficulty changing their learning habits to accept reading electronic texts (Aragon, 2004; Steinhauer & Friederici, 2001). Learners feel doubtful about their learning abilities and believe that they are not as skilled as readers who can overcome the changes in the learning process. Some learners, contrarily, always try their hardest to adapt to the current learning environment since they believe that they will eventually become comfortable with reading electronic materials (Ehrlich, Kurtz-Costes & Loridant, 1993; Ferguson, 1999; Schommer- Aikins & Easte, 2006). The question remains: What is the best way to employ a text-based reading strategy in an online environment, so that the learners can maintain their confidence for learning?

As one of the oldest habits of human civilization, reading has been the passion of the greatest personalities of all times. With the emergence of manuscripts, which represented the first documentary reading resources at that time accessibility was restricted to the first-class society members only. Subsequently, the advent of the Gutenberg printing press made the printed word omnipresent and brought such discrimination to an end. Cardinal changes to the fundamentals of the oral society of day were brought by the Gutenberg printing press that marked a quantum leap to the reading society. The manifestation of the Internet has forged a phenomenal change in the reading perception and behavior. For the time being, reading is no longer confined to print reading. The Internet revolution has drastically widened the purview of reading resources to comprise web sites, web pages, e-books, e-journals, e-papers, e-mail,

discussion boards, chat rooms, instant messaging, blogs, wikis, and other multimedia documents. Today the potential reader can penetrate and browse online information using his/her personal terminal anywhere and anytime.

With this in mind, reading as a habit is a healthy behavior in the learning disciplines and a key to knowledge, creativity and success. Reading is also a profuse recourse for new knowledge, information and continued education. Mokatsi (2005) refers to reading as a basic tool of education and as a very important issue not only for enjoyment but as a necessity. Respectively, reading is at the core of acquiring or learning the first and foreign/second language. According to Anderson (2003a), mastering the reading skill in ESL/EFL context can help learners' success in English learning as well as in different content-based classes whereas English reading proficiency is considered a requirement. Likewise, Brewster and Ellis (2002) also state that the development of proficient reading skills in early years of education is the foundation key underpinning language learning skills.

Due to the overwhelming globalization and new literacies, reading online has been transformed into new learning environments, styles and trends. With multiple visual and audio presentations, online learning has become more popular for educators and learners. (Jung, 2001; Romero, Berger, Healy & Aberson, 2000). Levy & Stockwell, 2006 state that online reading activities in Second Language Acquisition (SLA hereafter) are beneficial for their bigger accessibility which provides authentic language materials on the Internet. It also provides access to grammatical and vocabulary

explanations, the association of multimedia representations and plain text and access to self-paced reading. Computers and the Internet are two influential tools that play an increasingly vital and vigorous role in learning the skills of reading in the foreign /second language. Simultaneously online reading function is a main source of input for L2 readers. Leu (2002) points out that “the Internet has entered our classrooms faster than books, television, computers, the telephone, or any other technology for information and communication” (p. 311)

As a powerful tool, the Internet contributes to the acquisition of English as a second or a foreign language. Using the Internet by ESL/EFL enhances their reading and writing skills since English is the preeminent language used in the Internet. As Moras (2001) points out that English is not only the language of international communication but it is also the dominant language in the Internet.

1.2 Background of the Study

To achieve a better understanding of the context of this study, a brief sketch about English as the language of the globe, the status of English to the Arab World and the educational background of Jordanian educational context is provided here. It is preferable to be acquainted with the educational policy of the country, educational reform efforts and the status of teaching English in the primary, secondary, tertiary education and general academic standards of Jordanian students. In addition to that, a look into ICTs in accordance to education and language teaching is needed at this stage of the study.

English as a global language, especially with the advent of Internet and ICT, has raised the priority of acquiring it for citizens of many countries worldwide. Griffith (1999) estimated that more than 300 million people are learning English at that time. Similarly, Crystal (2001) attests that English is recognized as a more desirable “lingua franca” in many countries around the world than any other language as it is now spoken by more people as a first, second, or foreign language.

Al-Khatib (2000) also spotlights and emphasizes the importance of learning English language for Arab students:

Teaching English and other European languages as foreign or second languages in the Arab world can be traced back to 1920s, when different parts of the region came under the British and French mandates. With the increase in the use of English as a lingua franca, most Arab governments began to recognize its importance by introducing the teaching of English into the school curriculum. At present, in most Arab countries, all students who finish the public secondary school education must have had at least eight years of instruction in English as a school subject. It is also worth noting that formal training was and is still compulsory in most elementary, preparatory, and secondary Arab private schooling. So, because the widespread use of English as a second language, the subject of language teaching in general, and teaching of English as a foreign or second language in particular, has become the focus of attention of most Arab researchers. (p. 122)

English attains an eminent position in the Arab countries, because the acquisition of English is regarded as a desirable end since it is viewed as the language of wider international communication for business and technology. Still, the need for English

differs from one Arab state to another. In the UAE for example, it appears that the UAE learners of English enjoy an advantage over many of their fellow Arabs in the Arabic speaking world. One Jordanian writer opines that the majority of Arab learners have limited opportunities to experience or use English outside the classroom. However, “The situation is different in the United Arab Emirates, for example, where people use English in their daily lives because of the multilingual nature of the residents.” (Rababah 2003: 15)

Zughoul (2003) characterizes English as the “language of globalization,” particularly in the Arab world. Crystal (1997, cited in Zughoul, 2003) has listed twelve international “domains” from which English derived its privileged status as a global language throughout the world. These domains account for the dominance of English because it is:

- the working language of international organizations and conferences...85% of international organizations use English, 49% use French, and less than 10% use Arabic, Spanish, or German.
- the “international currency of science and technology” (p.10).
- the language of international banking, economic affairs, and trade.
- the language of advertising for global brands.
- the language of audio-visual/cultural products.
- the language of international tourism.
- the language of tertiary education.
- the language of international safety (e.g. airplane).

- the language of international law.
- a “relay language” in interpretation and translation.
- the language of technology transfer.
- the language of Internet communication (Zughoul, 2003, p.10).

Interest in the teaching of English as a global language as well as a means of international communication of commerce, media and education has been growing throughout the Arab World, Jordan in particular. Likewise, most Arab governments began to introduce the teaching of English as compulsory subject into their school curriculum, and Jordan is no exception. Today, in the modern Jordanian educational system, all students who finish the public secondary school education must have had at least eight years of instruction in English as a school subject.

With regards to English at tertiary level in the Arab World, Zughoul (2003) & Sultana (2001) state that in the field of higher education teaching through the medium of English is obvious with the exception of Syria which maintained teaching through the medium of Arabic. In this respect, to shed more light about the present status of English in the Arab world, Zughoul attests: "despite the hegemonic and imperialistic nature of English, it is still badly needed in the Arab world for the purposes of communicating with the world, education, acquisition of technology and development at large".

Hence, the JMOE considered the acquisition of English by Jordanian students vital and integral to the process of educational and economic development in Jordan.

Jordanian educational system preformed an ample effort in implementing English as a foreign language in its educational and curriculum reform to cope with the globalization changes. For this reason, in the year 1999 a royal decree was sanctioned to teach English in all Jordanian public and private schools beginning in first grade (JMOE, 1999). Hence English became the language of instruction in the colleges of science, engineering, medicine, and nursing in Jordanian higher education institutions.

Countries all over the world have pointed out the substantial role of ICTs in the advancement of education (Kozma and Anderson 2002; Pelgrum 2001; Hennessy et al. 2005; Goodison 2003; Kangro and Kangro 2004), as well as having invested densely in the networking of classrooms and supplying schools with more computers (Pelgrum 2001). In fact, Jordan has realized that the primary engine of growth and development in the global economy relies on knowledge whereas information and communication technology plays a fundamental role in it (Salaberry R., 2000). Consistent with these efforts, the initiative of King Abdullah II of Jordan in 1999 who launched the installation of ICT in all schools throughout the kingdom is an attempt to make the country the "IT hub" of the Middle East (Jordanian Ministry of Education, 2003, p. 1). This initiative manifested recognition of human capital development, especially through professional development for teachers and better education for students, by the Jordanian Ministry of Education (JMOE). This was a basic step towards preparing Jordan to participate in future knowledge-based world economies (JMOE, 2002).

Like most parts of the world and as a response to recent changes and challenges, the government of Jordan implemented a major Educational Reform for a Knowledge Economy program (ERfKE hereafter) with the assistance of the World Bank International and international donors to establish the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed for the global market. The program's main objectives included the adoption of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as an enabler of learning, upgrading school ICT infrastructure, curriculum reform and teacher training. As a result, an immense investment in constituting a solid infrastructure for ICT in public schools and staff development through ICDL certificate program has been made by the Jordanian Ministry of Education.

In consistent with early mentioned reform, the ICDL course focused on improving teachers' ICT skills, including word-processing, spreadsheets, and surfing the Internet. Together with the *Intel Teach to the Future* program which aimed to train teachers and students to use technology effectively in the classroom, (Intel Corporation, 2005; Jordanian Ministry of Education, 2002) World Links focused on preparing students, teachers and the educational system to enter the information age through providing schools and teachers with skills and educational resources to harness ICT (World Links, 2002). CADER was also offering a Higher Education Diploma in ICT, which specializes in training teachers to use modern pedagogies and integrate them with ICT. Similarly, the iEARN course has been adopted in early 2004 to empower teachers and young people to work together online using the Internet and other new communications technologies.

At the tertiary level, all Jordanian universities' undergraduate syllabus designs implement two to four computer courses in their programs. Students are therefore required to study and pass two computer courses offered by the Faculty of Computer Sciences to match the university and college requirements for graduation. The purpose of these courses is to create computer and technologically literate tertiary university students. Consequently, conducting such courses during the undergraduate level will assist students to be more acquainted and motivated towards the new era of electronic education.

1.3 Problem Statement

Besides the discipline or course of study by undergraduate students of Jordanian EFL, as it is elsewhere, English Language is the official medium of communication, in which all academic activities are transacted. Still, there is little knowledge about the everyday reading practices of tertiary education students and how these practices affect their academic achievement. A corollary can thus be established between the online reading habits of students and their academic performance to the extent that a positive relationship is suggested.

However, based on the researcher's observation and experience as an EFL teacher for more than fourteen years and according to several studies (see Philip 2009; Shabi and Udofia 2009; Sonaike 2004; Ganguly 2004). The researcher noticed that many students read for examination purposes only; as they hardly read beyond their examinations or their course of study. This implies that such students do not enjoy

reading voluntarily, a situation that can have a negative influence on their academic achievement. This view was clearly stated by Palani (2012) who considers effective reading as a significant agent of effective learning whereas reading is interrelated with the entire educational process and therefore, educational success needs successful reading habit. With this background the study investigates the influence of online reading habits amongst undergraduate English language students of the Jordanian universities, with a view to examining their reading patterns in relation with their academic achievement.

In the Arab world, an assertion was made during the past twenty years that people generally do not read anymore and particularly students of all levels, (Kechichian, 2012; Al-Yacoub, 2012; Hanna, 2011; Bendriss & Golkowska, 2011; Jraissati, 2010; Gamal, 2007; Al-Subaei, 2004; Al-Huwaider, 2002). Even though those who do read, they do not possess a fixed reading ritual such as reading in libraries, parks or at cafes or even before bed time (Darwish, 2006). Despite this assertion has been lately combated by many researchers (Kamhieh, Al Hameli et. al. 2011; Rajakumar, 2014), a sizable number of teachers worldwide still believe that students do not read conveniently and/or sufficiently which can affect their academic success negatively.

In reality, Arabs in general are poor readers and they hardly read. A recent survey that was conducted by the United Nations reported that Middle Eastern Arabs read only an average of four pages per year (The United Nations Development Programme Literacy Report for 2007-2008). Another survey done by Yahoo Maktoob Research

(2011) showed that a quarter of the Arab people hardly ever or never read for personal enjoyment. In fact, the same survey which was conducted to synchronize with World Book Day (2011) states that people in Jordan, Lebanon and Algeria read the least; whilst, Americans read an average of 11 books annually and other Westerners read more than a book.

Accordingly, most of the reading done by Jordanian students seems to be restricted to examination objectives as well as there is a lack of supplementary reading materials, reading for pleasure and knowledge (Book Aid International, 2003; Shannon 2003). Appraising the importance of reading as a long life learning tool, it is indispensable to designate what are the students' reading habits and the ways of improving reading habits and interests amongst students in Jordan.

The incoherent levels of language proficiency reflect the effects of such insufficiency particularly in the tertiary level. The aim of reading is to gather information besides acquiring knowledge that exists in the written text. Alexander (2005) asserts that today's reading is more important than it ever was because it is crucial for students to succeed in their career since most of the information is communicated in the written format. He added that reading is a significant and integral key to academic success since most learning throughout school age is gained through reading. Accordingly, reading is the most central skill to be acquired by a student (Alexander, 2005). Likewise, Beare (2005) pointed out that developing students'

academic reading skills is required because academic reading may be more demanding and concepts are generally difficult to understand.

With this in mind, the Internet and ICTs, the World Wide Web, and new digital technologies admittedly became a gigantic source of reading text input which is now processed on computer screens and other digital devices e.g., iPods, mobiles, e-books, etc. Plainly, literacy is promptly fluctuating (transcending) from page to screen, therefore, making reading an achievement doubly challenging. As the Internet becomes a central aspect of daily life (Dede, 2007), any approach seeking to improve students' reading ability must recognize that the nature of reading comprehension has expanded in the 21st century (International Reading Association, 2009). To participate in a global information age, students must now be able to read and comprehend information on the Internet at high levels (International Reading Association, 2009; Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, n.d.).

The fact that Arab policymakers believe in ICT as a backbone for the improvement and advancement of their educational systems and that of the individuals' life in general in developing countries and Jordan is no exception. Yet, there is a dearth of research in this respect since it is a nascent area of research in the Arab region. In terms of understanding and determining the extent in which this phenomenon exists in tertiary students' perspective needs to be examined amongst the Jordanian EFL context.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

Reading is a major and essential skill for ESL and EFL learners. How often, how much, and what Jordanian EFL undergraduates' read online are factors that can affect the language learning of these students. As a result, the researcher believes that it is worthwhile to study such cases. The purpose of the present study is an attempt to probe into the online reading habits and purpose(s) amongst Jordanian EFL learners who are undergraduates' in Jordan's universities and its relation to their academic performance. Towards this end, the objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To investigate if Jordanian EFL online reading habits affect their academic achievement.
2. To identify common online reading habits among Jordanian EFL students.
3. To identify the purpose(s) of online reading among Jordanian EFL students.
4. To identify whether English is the preferred language used by Jordanian EFL students whilst reading online.
5. To investigate if their online reading habits differ from those they use when reading a printed text.
6. To determine whether there is any significant effect due to certain variables such as, gender, age, education, computer/internet familiarity, and online hours.

1.5 Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to explore and investigate the common online reading habits and purpose(s) of Jordanian EFL undergraduate students. The six research questions guiding the study are:

1. What is the influence of online reading habits on students' academic achievement?
2. What are common online reading habits among Jordanian EFL students?
3. What are the purpose(s) of online reading among Jordanian EFL students?
4. Is English the preferred language used by Jordanian EFL students while reading online?
5. Do students' reading habits differ when reading online from reading printed text?
6. Is there any statistical significant effect due to certain variables such as, gender, age, education, computer/internet familiarity, and online hours?
 - 6.1 Is there any statistical significant effect in online reading habits due to gender?
 - 6.2 Is there any statistical significant effect in online reading habits due to age?
 - 6.3 Is there any statistical significant effect in online reading habits due to education level?
 - 6.4 Is there any statistical significant effect in online reading habits due to computer and Internet familiarity?
 - 6.5 Is there any statistical significant effect in online reading habits due to online hours spent on the internet?

1.6 Research Hypotheses

A general hypothesis and six sub-hypotheses are derived from these questions. For the purpose of this study, it was assumed that:

There is no significant effect of Jordanian EFL students' reading habits on their overall academic success.

Related sub-hypotheses:

H₀₁: There is no relationship between online reading habits and students' academic achievement.

H_{02.1}: There is no significant difference in online reading habits due to gender.

H_{02.2}: There is no significant difference in online reading habits due to age.

H_{02.3}: There is no significant difference in online reading habits due to education.

H_{02.4}: There is no significant difference in online reading habits due to online hours.

1.7 Significance of the Study

The current study is inspired by the fact that reading is an essential long life learning tool as well as a gate for all success. Based on Cassel (2004), Jordan (2000) and Snow & Porsche (2000) the ability to read and write can be viewed as a foundation for education, a basis for all academic disciplines and a paramount for success throughout life from kindergarten to future employment(s) of adults. In addition, reading as a habit is a cardinal factor which constitutes jointly with reading comprehension, the key segments of skilled reading. Furthermore, not to read, slow reading and non-fluent reading are conceived by EFL educators as major hindrances for EFL students. Narangoda (2000) states that, in favor of facing the 21st century, education has to prepare children to be able to adapt to social and technological changes that are emerging at an unpredictable pace. Under these circumstances, education depends largely on language competency. Reading is a fundamental resource for continued education besides the acquisition of

new knowledge and skills, gaining information through media such as, books, newspapers, radio, television, and computers. Therefore, to attain the best education it is obvious that reading and information skills need to be improved.

The dearth of studies on reading habits and attitudes in the specific context of EFL instruction in higher education indicates that considerably more research is warranted (Crawford Camiciottoli, 2001, p.149).

An influential aspect of the significance of this study resides in the scarcity of studies on EFL students' reading habits in general and online reading habits in particular amongst Arab EFL students. Online reading habits research and practice are essential for ESL and EFL learning, since it seems to be marginal in the Arab world in general and the Jordanian context in particular. However, the majority of research studies on reading were conducted either in English native language (L1) context, English second language (L2) or English foreign language contexts apart from the Arab world.

All things considered, there is an overwhelming popularity of ICTs as well as a striking allotment of Internet penetration especially amongst the youth faction in the Arab countries. This has become a national mandatory requirement to research such phenomenon and to provide more insight about this population. Likewise, a meager research has addressed the online reading habits and purposes among the EFL learners in the Middle East, where reading habits have remarkable implications for national development, intellectual and educational reform. Therefore, the significance of this research contributes to the larger knowledge ground in this concern and it can serve as a

preliminary guideline for further research. Additionally, it provides an empirical data to fill in the vacancy in the international literature as well as contribute to more knowledge that may be significant to other researchers in a local and international base.

The findings of this study are also beneficial to educators and scholars in the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) as well as in the field of online learning and learning through new literacies and especially ICTs. Little is known about EFL online or e-Learning in the Middle East or technology integration in EFL instruction in public universities in the region. This lack of research creates obstacles to the improvement of English curricula and teaching practices that incorporate the modern tools of instructional technology. Therefore, this study is needed to pinpoint the dynamics of reading habits and to exploit them in positively changing students' literacy perceptions and improving their reading quality.

1.8 Limitations of the Study

This section condenses some of the aspects that are believed to have affected the quality of this research. The limitations of the present study primarily included problems regarding its instrumentation and generalizability. Taking into account that an attempt was made to compare the findings regarding the study's main construct to the students' grade point average (GPA), the researcher conducted his study towards the end of the first semester of the academic year 2013-2014.

Another limitation for the current study is that the researcher feels reluctant to claim that the study's findings can be generalized to all Jordanian EFL student community as only university students from one of the Jordanian universities constituted the sample of the study. Moreover, the findings might not represent Jordanian EFL students from other Jordanian universities as students from Yarmouk University were selected to form the population of the study. Perhaps future researchers in the field of second/foreign language acquisition might want to highlight this concern.

Finally, the scope of this study is restricted to investigate online reading habits and purposes of Jordanian EFL undergraduate students only. Other traditional reading habits such as newspaper, magazine, comic, etc. are not within the scope.

1.9 Operational Terms

This section discusses the operational terms in this research study to provide clarity and understanding of the current research throughout its different phases.

Academic Achievement: Academic achievement is the outcome of education-the extent to which a student, teacher or institution has achieved their educational goals (Wikipedia, 2012). In this study academic achievement will be characterized by the Grade Point Average (GPA) the student obtained from his/her university English Language Programme.

Arabeez: An alphabet with an unspecified rules which was created unofficially and appeared concurrently with the emergence of mobiles a few years ago. It is used by some people especially young adults to communicate while chatting on the Internet, writing online, or sending mobile messages in Arabic or its

different dialects whereas they pronounce this language in Arabic, but the characters used in writing is Latin letters (English) and numbers are resembling a code.

Extensive reading: For the purpose of this study, the term extensive reading will be used synonymously and interchangeably with terms such as recreational reading, leisure reading, out-of-school reading, extra reading, free voluntary reading, and pleasure reading. According to Hedge (2000:202), extensive reading is: reading large quantities of material, whether short stories and novel, newspaper and magazine articles, or professional reading; reading consistently over time on a frequent and regular basis; reading longer texts (more than a few paragraphs in length) of the types listed in the first point above; reading for general meaning, primarily for pleasure, curiosity, or professional interest; reading longer texts during class time but also engaging in individual, independent reading at home, ideally of self-selected material.

Leisure Reading (also referred to as extensive reading): Another operational term that is central to this study is 'leisure reading'. It is defined as reading that can be done in or out of the classroom, for pleasure purposes as opposed to teacher/lecturer prescribed reading for academic purposes (Day & Bamford, 1998). It carries with it the notion of "reading in quantity", as Richards and Schmidt state, in order "to gain a general understanding of what is read [and] ...to develop good reading habits, to build up knowledge of vocabulary and structure, and to encourage a liking for reading" (Richards & Schmidt, 2002: 193-194).

New Literacies: For the purpose of this study, the “new literacies perspective” will refer to Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, and Cammack’s (2004) definition as follows: The new literacies of the Internet and other ICTs include the skills, strategies, and dispositions necessary to successfully use and adapt to the rapidly changing information and communication technologies and contexts that continuously emerge in our world and influence all areas of our personal and professional lives. These new literacies allow us to use the Internet and other ICTs to identify important questions, locate information, critically evaluate the usefulness of that information, synthesize information to answer those questions, and then communicate the answers to others (p.1572).

Online Reading: According to the this study it means any reading activity that take place on the World Wide Web or any other ICT application.

Purpose: According to the current study it means the intention or the aim of getting online and using the Internet.

Reading Habit: It refers to the regularity (how often) of reading material read, and the quantity (how much) of the reading undertaken, and the different kinds of reading materials (what) such as: books, magazines, journal articles, ... etc in any language that were read by the respondent before the collection of the data. It also refers to the frequency of reading and time spent on reading in an average week.

Reading Preference: In this context it is studied from the point of view of selective awareness of a consistent preference for a particular type of reading matter in books or periodicals and for particular items of information in newspapers.

Reading: As defined by the position statement of the National Council of Teachers of English Commission on Reading, is the “complex, purposeful, social, and cognitive process in which readers simultaneously use their knowledge of the topic of the text, and their knowledge of their culture to construct meaning (Coutant & Perchemlides, 2005, p. 42).

Recreational Reading (also referred to as pleasure or extensive reading): An operational term that is central to this study . According to Richardson and Eccles (2007) recreational reading does not enclose any assessment to the reader, contrariwise, it is absolutely associated with the reader's preference of what, when, and where to read.

The Knowledge Economy: "The knowledge economy is about how the new technologies have transformed the way we think and act. To thrive in the global knowledge economy, it is going to be important to change the whole educational system to ensure a wide base of knowledge workers who understand and use information technologies.” (Riley, 2003, p 8-10)

1.10 Summary

This chapter provided a preliminary introduction to the issues of globalization, ICTs and new literacies in general. In addition, it included a background of the study, statement of the problem; the research questions guided the study and the significance of the study. And lastly, the definition of most commonly used terms throughout the study and the limitation that might confront and challenge the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter aims at providing an overview of the existing pertinent literature to online reading. It will start with the theoretical framework of the study and successively construct the related literature. The chapter is divided into two main parts. Firstly, it highlights the issue of globalization and ICT revolution and their revolutionary influence on our lives. This part also discusses the status of English as a global language since it is currently the dominant language on the internet. The second part is devoted to reading as a basic skill for EFL learners in general, reading in the digital age, reading as a habit, reading at tertiary level and academic reading.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

Reading on the Internet is prevalent and the use of digital reading resources is pervasive nowadays especially hypertexts. Concurrently, the use of hypertexts has brought about a radical change in the reading behaviours and practices (Liu, 2005). With the abundance amount of digital information obtainable, people notably young adults are found allocating much of their time reading electronic materials (Ramirez, 2003).

The digital reading theory provides a conceptual framework for the foundation of this study. First, the digital reading theory provides insight into how hypertexts or