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### EFFECT OF DIGITAL READING ON COMPREHENSION OF ENGLISH PROSE TEXTS IN EFL/ESL CONTEXTS



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#### ABSTRACT

*This study examines the effect of digital reading on reading comprehension of English short prose texts of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL) college students. 60 ESL participants with 30 students in the experimental group and 30 students in the control group plus 60 EFL participants with 30 students in the experimental group and 30 students in the control group participated in this study. They were asked to read 10 short literary prose texts to check their reading comprehension. The findings revealed the experimental group which used two methods of print and digital reading had a significantly better reading comprehension on print reading. To triangulate the findings, the qualitative interviews from the respondents confirms the findings from the statistical results. Therefore, integrating digital reading program to literature programs helps students to improve reading comprehension. The conclusion can show that this study adds to our understanding of the effectiveness of print reading on literary reading comprehension.*

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#### Contribution/ Originality

The study uses the modern technology in reading literary prose texts by EFL and ESL students. It compares how their achievements in reading comprehension are different with each other with or without using digital screen in reading. The results show that using digital reading is significantly more effective in reading.

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

In today's post-modern era of language teaching, researchers prefer to emphasis on the role of digital technologies on teaching and learning (Ebrahimi, 2013). Since computer had entered into the life of human being, it also found the way into the educational system as well . The area of language teaching and learning was one of the very first areas that got effects of this modernization before many other areas in education. The change that came into the reading process and method can never be ignored as the first alters in this field. This change is so drastic and tangible that we can say it even changed the understanding of the students of the written discourse. This can be the reason that the print reading is getting less and less every day in comparison to digital reading.

Digital reading allows the students to choose materials based on their level of proficiency and interests. In addition, it involves reading literature for understanding with the purpose of having pleasure, and includes individualised and independent reading, which gives students the chance to select the materials without being discussed in the classroom.

The purpose of this paper is to make a report on the effect of digital reading on the comprehension of short English prose texts on both EFL and ESL audience. In the next part of this paper, first there is a short related review of literature on the significance of computer assisted language learning (CALL) and digital reading in language learning and teaching. Then, the method that was used to develop this study is explained throughly. Then, the discussion of the findings and conclusions follows in which some pedagogical implications are suggested for the teachers how to get the most benefit of technologies in teaching literature reading.

## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Technology developments provides a wider range of resources for utilizing such facilities in teaching and learning . Many studies found out that using digital technologies are useful in language learning and teaching . Such conclusions are found out not only by help of surveys and questionnaires but also the students; and teachers' perceptions and observations show the same results .

Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) mainly aims to utilize computers for the purpose of language teaching and learning . CALL leads to the belief that the interactive and lively nature of digital reading that basically contains multimedia elements as well as animated content is not possible to be shown on print (Maynard and Cheyne, 2005; Korat, 2010). Research shows that it can evoke better reading comprehension than print reading.

Since the emergence of computers in the field of language learning and teaching, it was recognized that computers could improve reading comprehension in at least three ways by: 1. controlling what and how long readers saw something digitally to develop reading strategies, 2. providing comprehension exercises, and 3. offering comprehension aids . However, more research has to be done on digital reading since reading has got shifts from the paper form to digital form because of the widespread usage of digital facilities day by day.

Digital reading is reading the texts from the technological apparatus such as the screen of smart phones, tablets, or computers either online or offline . Digital reading helps reading comprehension of literature because of the vast exposure to interesting readings (Kirin *et al.*, 2012). For example, showed that using digital reading is a powerful tool in teaching of reading to EFL/ESL students. It has also been shown that digital reading helps learning the language and literature by reading more actively for pleasure.

In recent research some models of reading comprehension with the main role of digital reading is suggested. Although there are some very similarities in the process of reading in both methods of digital and print reading, digital instruments change the dynamic relationship between reader, text, and factors influencing the reading process and hence the comprehension .

Therefore, digital reading program is useful for literacy, language and literature teaching or learning . The emphatic effect of digital reading on language and literature EFL/ESL learners has also been proven. For instance, examined the effect of using alternative learning strategy on improving students' reading. Participants of this study were 40 Taiwanese EFL college students who did both digital and print reading. The conclusion was that this activity improves reading. used 16 articles of a digital English magazine to construct an online English reading program. In their study, 38 ESL college students participated in the study for a semester. The results from the pretest and the post-test were that learners improve their reading after the program.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

There is not many studies on digital reading of literature by EFL/ESL learners; therefore, this study examines the effect of digital reading on the reading comprehension of short prose literary texts by EFL/ESL students, which aims to find out if digital reading can help the students' reading comprehension of literary texts. In this regard,

In this study four classes of 30 students were examined, in total. Two of these classes consist of EFL English major college students (35 female and 25 male) with upper intermediate level of proficiency. The other two ESL classes also consist of 30 English major college students (34 female and 26 male) with upper intermediate level of proficiency who participated in this study. One class in the two sets was the experimental group and the other was the control group.

This study took place at exactly the same time in 2015 in Iran as an EFL context and in Malaysia as an ESL context with the control groups being taught in the way of teaching literature via on print reading; however, the experimental groups enjoyed another method of teaching literature as well which is digital reading. These students were free to choose any English literary prose work to read on the basis of their own interest after the pretest. There was no time limit to read the literary prose texts and it was up to them to read as much as they felt like to read.

At the beginning of the semester, a pre-test was taken to measure the students' reading comprehension of short English literary prose texts. There were three different short English prose texts in the pre-test as the reading comprehension texts with few comprehension questions after each prose. The proeses were selected in a way that they were at the same length and level of difficulty in terms of vocabulary and structure usage so that they can suit the upper intermediate level of proficiency of the students. In addition, the three proeses were written by authentic English native authors in different times in the history. This pretest showed that the groups are homogenous in terms of reading proficiency and literary literacy of the students.

At the end of the program, a post-test was taken to check if there is any significant difference in reading comprehension of literary texts of the four groups of EFL and ESL students. In the post-test three other English prose texts were given to the students with the similar qualities of the pre-test prose texts.

Both the pre-test and the post-test were in the same format of open ended comprehension questions from the literary prose works that the students have read and which would need only very short answers.

For triangulation, a qualitative interview from the respondents had been done to support the results from the statistical findings after the post-test.

To answer the research question, an independent and a paired sample t-tests were taken to study the differences between the employment of the digital reading program in students' reading comprehension of English short prose texts before and after the program. ANCOVA analysis with pretest as a covariate was also employed to check if there is any significant difference in the comprehension pretest and post-test of the EFL and ESL readers of the two groups.

### 4. DISCUSSION

An independent sample t-test was taken to examine the differences of the English short prose reading comprehension of the four groups. Significant difference with  $p < .001$  was recognized in the performance of EFL and ESL experimental and control groups of the two sets of students in their short literary prose comprehension pre- and post-tests. The comparison between these groups is shown in Table 1.

A comparison has been done to examine the differences of the prose reading comprehension of the four groups of EFL and ESL pre- and post-tests.

**Table-1.** Comparison of Pre- and Post-Test Prose Comprehension of EFL and ESL Experimental and Control Groups

Groups			Mean	SD	F-value	p-value	Effect size
Experimental	EFL	Pre-test	46.02	19.17	44.63	.000	0.95 (large)
		Post-test	51.91	20.01	47.82	.000	0.97 (large)
	ESL	Pre-test	48.59	19.67	42.86	.000	0.95 (large)
		Post-test	53.29	21.72	45.41	.000	0.97 (large)
Control	EFL	Pre-test	37.18	10.43	46.15	.000	0.96 (large)
		Post-test	40.11	11.27	48.28	.000	0.98 (large)
	ESL	Pre-test	40.22	12.56	45.39	.000	0.96 (large)
		Post-test	41.65	13.43	47.68	.000	0.98 (large)

The significant difference was recognised in the performance of EFL and ESL experimental and control groups of the two sets of students in their prose comprehension in pre- and post-tests. The comparison between these groups is shown in the table below. This table makes the comparison by using the mean score and standard deviation of the four groups.

The findings as are shown in Table 1 say the same thing as other research also found out . The table show that digital reading is effective in reading comprehension of the literary texts by both EFL and ESL readers as the mean score of post-tests with the treatment of exposure to digital reading is higher in all cases; however, ESL readers perform only a bit better than EFL counterparts with the mean score of 53.29 and standard deviation of 21.72 over the mean score of their EFL counterparts which is equal to 51.91 and the standard deviation of 20.01. It happened probably because of their exposure to English language in the context that they live. Moreover, as the Table 1 above shows the exploratory, one-way ANOVA that was conducted for the four groups found a statistically significant difference between the groups in their responses

The experimental groups of both EFL and ESL students who received the extra digital reading method in teaching literature were significantly better than the control group who received only the traditional method of teaching literature via print reading. The reason is that the experimental group have more comprehensible input through multimedia elements as well as animated content in a reading session of pleasure rather than pressure in comparison to the control group.

The qualitative interview from the respondents after the post-test revealed that most of the EFL or ESL students preferred to read on their screens digitally rather than old fashioned print reading. It was interesting that English as their foreign or second language had no role in their choice to prefer reading digitally rather than reading on print.

In total, %83 of EFL college. students and %82 of ESL college students preferred digital reading to print reading. Such a similarity in the percentage confirms that today's generation, no matter what their native language is, tend to use modern technologies and get up to date all the time rather than the traditional method of teaching and learning by the use of papers. These students mentioned the same reasons for their choice such as being able to search online with no difficulty in shortest time if they find difficulty in understanding any word or even the whole text, being equipped with audio or visual elements in the written text, or even the exciting pleasure of using the technology itself.

However, the little percentage of the rest of the respondents who preferred print reading mentioned that they can understand better if they use pen in their hand and take some notes, underline, circle, or highlight any parts that they think they need to pay more attention to them. Few of them also mentioned that they are able to read and understand in both methods but because for years they were trained to use print texts they just prefer to have the text physically on the paper.

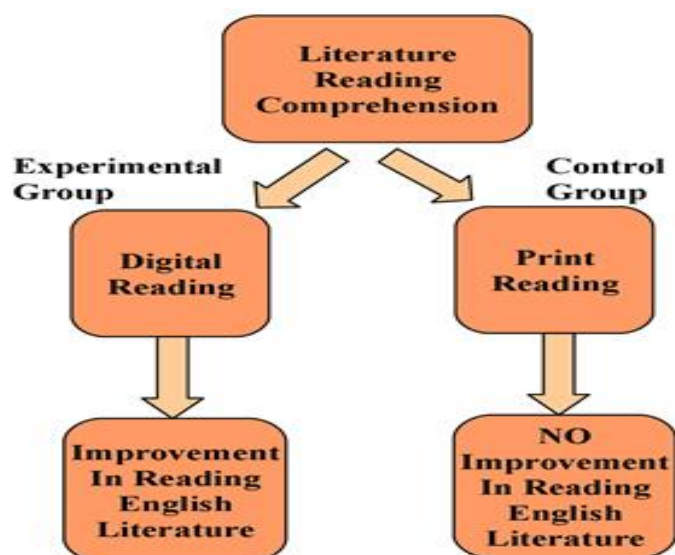


Figure-1. Procedure and Conclusions

## 5. CONCLUSION

The findings of qualitative as well as quantitative data of this study prove that the digital reading of English short literary prose texts effects the reading comprehension of such texts by EFL/ESL readers significantly in a positive sense. The successful performance of the experimental groups demonstrates that the digital reading of short literary prose texts improves the EFL/ESL readers' language and literature learning due to the great comprehensible input. The experimental groups improve in reading comprehension of literary works of the EFL/ESL readers. The other finding is that ESL readers perform just a bit better than EFL readers in reading literature using digital reading. Moreover, both groups of EFL and ESL readers prefer to read digitally rather than on print.

A pedagogical implication that can be drawn from this study is that the language and literature teachers and course developers can provide more interactive and convenient learning environment for the students by help of digital resources that can motivate the students to learn in the way that they are more interested in and have fun in their learning process. Although the significance of digital reading comprehension of English literary prose texts is confirmed in this study in both EFL and ESL contexts, it is still a long way for this method to be used in practice in the world.

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