



The reading habits of university students studying English language and literature in the digital age¹

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to explore the current reading habits and attitudes of university students studying English Language and Literature at Atatürk University. Moreover, it aims to determine the effects of widespread use of the internet and other alternative multimedia resources in reading habits. In order to have a broad overview of the current reading habits, a questionnaire was conducted among 76 randomly selected university students. The questionnaire involved six categories: demographic information, frequency of items read, contents of online reading, online activities, content first clicked when online, and techniques to develop reading habits. SPSS Statistics 20 program was used to analyse the data. Conducting research to gain a broad overview of the reading habits of learners, the researcher made suggestions to foster reading habits among university students in the constantly technology dominated world of today.

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Keywords: reading habits; e-book; technology assisted reading; importance of reading; developing reading habits

1. Introduction

Over the past couple of decades, technology has been integrated into our lives greatly. The most influential impact of technology is arguably on the transfer of information. The traditional way of transferring information, that is, through printed documents, has begun to be replaced by online data. This change has inevitably affected how people read. The results of a survey, conducted by Shen (2006), showed that English as Foreign Language (EFL) students' reading habits have shifted from paper-based to internet-based reading. Since reading is a must in developing other critical language skills such as writing, listening and speaking, this shift in reading habits should not be ignored by educators.

Moreover, Karim, Hasan and Shahriza (2006) state that the increasing amount of information and entertainment in a digital format are becoming more and more popular among younger people. Liu (2005) further supports that the new reading behaviors are influenced by the mushrooming growth of

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digital information available and there is an increase in the amount of time people spend reading electronic media. These findings show that the digital age has already engulfed people's reading habits.

1.1. Literature review

Online version of books, magazines and newspaper are available at relatively low prices compared to their printed counterparts. It is easy to access online documents via internet and readers gain the opportunity to read anywhere, anytime. Despite its benefits, some educators may have some concerns that the entertainment ability of technology surpasses the educational role. The overall impact of technology on reading habits was discussed in this study.

1.1.1. Importance of Reading

Noor (2011) claims that in any higher learning environment, reading is valued as the most important academic language skill for all second and foreign language learners. Students learn new information and become more competent in their subject matters through reading. Loan (2009), moreover, stresses the importance of reading by claiming that individuals with good reading habits have the chance to widen their mental horizons and to multiply their opportunities. Noor (2011) supports Loan's idea and adds that reading is essential in teaching individuals how to cope with new knowledge in the technologically changing and developing world of today.

Holte (1998) emphasizes the importance of reading in that it increases quality of life as well as creating culture and making cultural heritage available; moreover, he claims that it both strengthens and brings people together (as cited in Akanda, Hoq and Hasan, 2013). The importance of reading is obviously high, so the question becomes what is to be done to facilitate reading? Since technology affects how we read by changing the medium from printed to electronic, methods to foster new reading habits should be studied.

1.1.2. Technology Assisted Reading

With the mass production of radios, televisions, computers, smart phones and similar devices, the impact of technology on people's lives has become even greater. These advancements in technology have brought about a new trend in reading, called digital reading. Online periodicals, electronic books, and audio books constitute much of the widespread technology assisted reading sources.

Online periodicals are magazines and newspapers that are made available online for their readers. Since they are online and in a digital format, it is easy to change, add and update their data. With the recent developments in portable devices, applications can easily be downloaded to a mobile phone or tablet computer in order to access them. The news available in the applications can be read anytime, anywhere without an internet connection. Besides reading online news, users can watch videos and listen to the news available through these applications.

E-book readers such as Kindle and Nook are designed primarily for electronic books. Thousands of electronic books can be saved to the reader and can be taken anywhere with ease. They allow us to look up words and translate pages. Readers can gain benefits from some of their features such as adjusting font size, underlining and highlighting texts. Some of them have a text to speech feature which transforms text into audio, thus enabling their readers to listen as well as read.

Another type of book that is becoming more and more popular among people is called audio books. Thurrott (2011) emphasizes that audio books provide reading opportunities in new situations such as

while driving, doing housework, and doing yard work. They are especially useful for those who have too poor of eyesight to read and for language learners who want to improve their pronunciation skills.

To sum up, the integration of technology into people's lives has affected the mediums from which they read. In addition to printed books, online periodicals, audio books, and e-books have begun to be used widely. The digital formats of the texts provide more than what printed formats do as they have various features which make reading a fun activity. The dull image of reading, especially for those who read less but spend much time online, could be eliminated by these recent developments in reading mediums.

1.2. Research questions

The three research questions answered by the researcher in this study were: 1) What are the major trends of reading interests and reading mediums of university students studying English Language and Literature, 2) How influential is the internet on the reading habits of students? and 3) What are some possible recommendations to improve reading habits of students in the digital age?

2. Methodology

2.1. Participants

The participants of the questionnaire were composed of university students studying in English Language and Literature department at Ataturk University in Turkey. They were composed of 76 respondents, 23 of whom were male and 53 of whom were female. They were sophomores, so their ages were generally in the twenties. As they studied in English Language and Literature department, they were quite competent in English language.

2.2. Data collection procedures

The information about reading habits among university students was gathered through a questionnaire. The students were not asked to give their real names so that they would feel comfortable to answer the questions frankly. Having collected the questionnaire from respondents, the researcher analyzed them through using SPSS Statistics 20 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) program and found the distribution of responses

2.3. Questionnaire

The questionnaire of this study was based on the study of Chauhan and Lal (2012), titled 'Impact of information technology on reading habits of college students'. After some changes, the questionnaire was conducted among university students and their general reading habits were explored. As the participants were composed of university students, the 'qualification' section was omitted from the first part of the original questionnaire. In the fifth part of the questionnaire that dealt with the topics clicked first by the respondents, 'Facebook' was added to the bottom of the list. The seventh and the last part of the questionnaire was fully omitted as it mostly provided information like the participants' favorite writers, which was unnecessary for answering the research questions. The Cronach's alpha of the questionnaire was found 0,99 in SPSS Statistics 20.

3. Results

The analysis of the questionnaire was done under six main categories: demographic information, frequency of items read, contents of online reading, online activities, content first clicked when online, and techniques to develop reading habits. Each of these categories was placed in the questionnaire to assess the current reading habits of participants and to find plausible answers to the research questions. SPSS Statistics 20 program was used to synthesize information about the percentages of the responses.

3.1. Demographic Information

This part of the questionnaire focused on gathering information about the duration of internet use per day, and the total number of magazines and novels read by the respondents in a year as well as their personal details. How much time a regular student spends online was explored. The findings are provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Hours spent online everyday

	0-1 hours	1-3 hours	4-6 hours	Over 6 hours
Hours spent online	19.7%	65.8%	13.2%	1.3%

As seen in Table 1, the great majority of the participants (65.8%) spend 1 to 3 hours online everyday. Based upon this finding, it can be concluded that students do not exaggerate their internet use. Only 1.3% of the respondents spend more than 6 hours online. What they do in these periods of time is discussed in the following parts of the questionnaire.

The average number of magazines and novels read by the respondents in a year is 9.4. Even though the average is almost 10, some students reported that they read about 30 novels and magazines a year, while some others claimed none.

3.2. Frequency of Items Read

This part of the questionnaire aimed at gathering general information about the reading habits of participants. How frequently they read newspapers, magazines, textbooks, novels, emails, and online information was determined.

Table 2. Frequency of items read

Reading	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Participation Level
Newspapers	75	3,25	,97	Sometimes
Magazines	76	2,55	1,00	Rarely
Text books	76	3,24	1,08	Often
Novels	76	3,35	1,14	Often
E-mails	76	2,99	1,25	Sometimes
Online Information	76	3,33	1,19	Often

Table 2 showed that mean values ranged from 2,55 to 3.35. According to the results of the most frequent number of the items, while reading novels, text books, and online information were the most

popular activities among the respondents, reading magazines, with the least mean, was rarely practiced. Moreover, the respondents stated that they sometimes read newspapers and emails.

On the other hand, the findings of this part of the questionnaire indicated that most of the participants avoided selecting extreme responses such as ‘never’ and ‘very often’. Instead, most participants’ responses were gathered around ‘often’ and ‘sometimes’, which showed that though not very intense, most of the respondents developed a certain level of reading habits.

3.3. Contents of online reading

The contents of reading studied included online news, online magazines, e-books, stories and novels, emails, journal articles, sales information, movie reviews, horoscopes, weather reports, health information, comic strips, jokes, fashion, sports, job information, and food/nutrition.

Table 3. Contents of online reading

Read items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Participation Level
Online news	76	3,60	1,07	Often
Online magazines	76	2,68	1,08	Rarely
e-books	76	2,55	1,15	Sometimes
Stories and novels	75	2,64	1,33	Never
Emails	76	3,05	1,30	Often
Journal articles	76	2,62	1,16	Rarely
Sales information	76	2,49	1,27	Never
Movie reviews	76	3,05	1,20	Sometimes
Horoscopes	75	2,95	1,42	Sometimes
Weather reports	76	3,26	1,17	Often
Health information	76	3,28	1,06	Sometimes
Comic strips	76	3,17	1,24	Often
Jokes	76	3,21	1,24	Sometimes
Fashion	76	2,88	1,43	Never
Sports	76	2,53	1,48	Never
Job information	76	3,06	1,17	Sometimes
Food/nutrition	76	3,06	1,20	Sometimes

As is indicated in Table 3, mean values ranged from 2.49 to 3.60. According to the results of the most frequent number of the items, online news was the most frequently read item on the internet. Emails, weather reports, comic strips were also followed online often by the respondents.

The majority of the respondents reported that they sometimes read e-books, movie reviews, horoscopes, health information, jokes, job information, and food/nutrition. The least popular items read online were stories and novels, sales information, fashion and sports.

The popular topics students read when online can be increased in terms of both number and availability, the less popular topics can become more attractive through some alterations in their content, so that university students could spend more time reading on the internet. Moreover, informing students about the availability of the websites that provide information about their interests will boost the amount of reading on the internet.

3.4. Online activities

This part of the questionnaire was applied to determine the things done by the participants when they are online. The activities provided to the student to choose from were: listening to music, playing games, looking at photos, reading, shopping online, using MSN and Yahoo messenger, checking e-mails, chatting with friends and downloading all types of movies.

Table 5. Online activities

Activities	Yes (%)	No (%)	Missing (%)
I listen to music	93.4	6.6	0
I play games	51.3	48.7	0
I look at photos	82.9	17.1	0
I read all kinds of information	74.7	24.0	1.3
I shop online	48.0	50.7	1.3
I use MSN messenger	52.7	45.9	1.4
I use Yahoo Messenger	5.4	93.2	1.4
I check email	76.3	23.7	0
I chat with friends	84.2	15.8	0
I download movies	63.2	31.6	5.3

The most common activity done online by the participants was listening to music (93.4 %). It was followed by chatting with friends (84.2%) and looking at photos (82.9 %). Moreover, most of the participants stated that they checked their emails (76.3%) and read all kinds of information (74.7%), and 63.2% of the respondents downloaded movies.

Slightly more than half of the participants used MSN messenger (52.7%). The least common purpose of using internet chosen by the participants was using Yahoo messenger (5.4%). Playing games online was popular among 51.3% of the respondents. Almost half of the respondents mentioned they shopped online (48 %).

Though in different amounts, the internet was used for many purposes among university students such as listening to music, playing games, looking at photos, reading all kinds of information, shopping online, using MSN and Yahoo messenger, checking e-mails, chatting with friends and downloading all types of movies.

Some alterations in the design and content of these categories can facilitate reading and other learning processes. The games may involve more language texts, music sections may involve lyrics of the songs, and online shopping sites may include a detailed explanation of items presented.

3.5. Content first clicked when online

The very first topics that caught the interest of participants when online were explored. The fifteen categories made available to participants were; art and humanities, business and economy, computers and internet, education, entertainment, government, health, news and media, recreation and sports, reference, regional, science, social science, society and culture, and Facebook.

Table 6. Content first clicked when online

Category	Percentage (%)
Art and Humanities	2.6
Business and Economy	0
Computers and Internet	14.5
Education	2.6
Entertainment	11.8
Government	1.3
Health	1.3
News and Media	23.7
Recreation and Sports	6.6
Reference	1.3
Regional	0
Science	1.3
Social science	0
Society and Culture	5.3
Facebook	27.6

When asked students which content they clicked first when they were online, out of fifteen different ones, majority of them put ‘Facebook’ (27.6%) in the first place. Facebook was followed by news and media (23.7%). Following news on the internet is quite popular among people since online news is easily updated and can be accessed anywhere anytime as long as there is a technological device such as tablet computer or mobile phone with an internet connection.

14.5% of the participants chose to know about computer and internet first while 11.8% of them chose entertainment. Recreation and sports constituted 6.6% of the answers and society and culture accounted for 5.3%. The rest of the categories, which were business and economy, education, government, health, reference regional, science and social science, attracted little to no attention from the respondents.

In conclusion, Facebook (27.6%) and News and Media (23.7%) were the top two categories clicked first by the respondents when online. In order to develop the reading habits learners, teachers or students can create groups for their classes on sites such as Facebook and share interesting news and other information related to their lessons there. As almost all students have smart phones these days, they can be encouraged to download and follow news applications of such popular sites as BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) onto their phones and tablet computers.

3.6. Techniques to develop reading habits

This part of the questionnaire focused on the techniques to develop reading habits. Participants were provided with nine different ways to develop reading habits. They chose from the categories of parental guidance and encouragement, motivation by teachers, reading materials about hobbies and interests, consistent use of dictionary, daily newspaper reading, book reading, visiting libraries, well-prepared reading material, studying to improve vocabulary and knowledge.

Table 7. Techniques to develop reading habits

Techniques	Yes (%)	No (%)
Parental guidance and encouragement	54.1	45.9
Motivation by teachers	86.7	13.3
Reading materials about hobbies and interests	83.8	16.2
Consistent use of dictionary	68.9	31.1
Daily newspaper reading	77.0	23.0
Book reading	88.0	12.0
Visiting libraries	68.0	32.0
Well-prepared reading material	80.0	20.0
Studying to improve vocabulary knowledge	87.8	12.2

The majority of the participants (88%) thought that ‘book reading’ was the most effective method in developing reading skills, which was closely followed by ‘studying to improve vocabulary knowledge’ (87.8 %). Motivation by teachers (86.7%) was considered by many as influential in developing reading skills. For the great majority of the respondents, teachers played a critical role in developing reading habits. Besides the motivational aspect, 83.8% of the participants had confidence in the effectiveness of reading materials about hobbies and interests. For this reason, the availability of texts related to people’s interests and hobbies can trigger the development of reading habits.

Well-prepared reading material was envisaged effective in developing reading skills by 80% of the respondents. 77% of the participants thought that reading newspapers daily improved reading habits. 68% of the respondents were of the idea that visiting libraries was one way to develop reading habits. The least effective method selected by 54.1% of the participants was parental guidance and encouragement. Almost half of the respondents did not believe in the effectiveness of parental guidance in developing reading skills.

4. Discussion

In this part of the study, the three research questions were discussed. Answers to these questions were given within the light of the questionnaire responses.

4.1. *What are the major trends of reading interests and reading mediums of university students studying English language and literature?*

One of the major goals of this study was to explore the reading habits of university students, studying English Language and Literature at Atatürk University. The questionnaire responses indicated that respondents enjoyed reading novels, text books, and online information often. The majority of them reported that they rarely read magazines. Newspapers and emails were found to be read sometimes for the majority.

The contents of online information were also explored. Out of the given topics, ‘online news’ was chosen as the most widely read topic. The availability and practicality of online news makes it popular among respondents. Internet users can easily access the latest online news via their mobile phones and

computers. Almost all of the well-known newspapers have websites and applications for operating systems such as Android and iOS to deliver the latest news to their readers.

Respondents claimed that they followed e-mails, weather reports, and comic strips often while they sometimes read e-books, movie reviews, horoscopes, health information, jokes, job information, and food/nutrition. The least popular items read online by the respondents were stories and novels, sales information, fashion and sports.

In conclusion, the overall findings of the study showed that university students, studying English Language and Literature had developed a certain level of reading habits. There has been a tendency towards reading online information. However, this tendency is not seen in all texts available online to the students. For instance, though the majority of the students read printed novels, a great many of them never read novels online.

4.2. How influential is the internet on the reading habits of students?

The internet, which was reported to be mostly used for listening to music (93.4%), chatting with friends (84.2%), and looking at photos (82.9%) by the respondents of the questionnaire, has some impacts on their reading habits. The recent developments in technology have increased the availability of information in digital formats. People can obtain information from television, radio, and online sources.

The great majority of the respondents (65.8%) claimed that they spent between one to three hours online everyday. The average amount of time that the participants spend online may not seem a lot; however, how they pass it is important for educators. The topics, categories and websites that attract the attention of the students should be determined in order to use the internet as a reading tool.

Online information, which is a broad category, involves any kind of text made available on the internet. The increasing availability of digitalized texts promotes digital reading. The majority of the respondents reported that they often read online information. Moreover, out of various items, reading online news was found to be the most common activity among the learners.

In conclusion, the internet, used for various purposes from chatting with friends to buying items, is the core of digital reading. The respondents did not remain indifferent to the reading opportunities of the digital age, as the majority of them read online information. They read texts about relatively diverse topics such as sales information, online news, stories and novels, jokes, food & nutrition, and health information.

4.3. What are some possible recommendations to improve reading habits of students in the digital age?

Although the importance of reading is universally acknowledged, how to develop reading habits have long been discussed by experts. Noor (2011) thinks that the current education systems should encourage learners to become familiar with the social and technological changes happening at a tremendous rate. Liu (2005) estimates that understanding changes in reading behavior, due to the evolution of electronic documents, would help in designing more sophisticated digital libraries and encourage users to gain benefits from this digital environment.

While adapting the education systems to the constantly developing technological advancements, the training of educators is of great importance. If a technological device such as a smart board is to be placed in a classroom, the first thing to be done is to teach educators about how to integrate such devices into classroom activities. As well as the teachers, students should be informed about the latest reading opportunities available via internet. It is a part of the teachers' responsibility to inform and encourage

teachers to utilize online texts. 86.7% of the respondents also stated that motivation by teachers is effective in developing reading habits.

Students should be informed about the possibilities which are made available through the use of the internet. Almost all of the students have smart phones today. As the great majority of the respondents stated that they enjoy reading news, students can be encouraged to download and use news applications on their smart phones. There are also some websites that can enhance the reading habits of students in accordance with translation. Such websites are good sources for learners to read and enhance their reading and translating abilities as the news is available in various languages with precise translation.

As books are the main tool for exploring both real and fantasy worlds, reading is essential. Holte (1998) suggests that firstly, the dull image of reading should be lifted. Reading contests and fun reading events can be organized to remove its dull image and to improve reading habits (as cited in Akanda, Hoq, Hasan, 2013). Moreover, famous figures can participate in the events to attract people's particularly youngsters' attention towards reading. These events can include reading competitions, games and pre-determined daily reading hours.

Akanda, Hoq and Hasan (2013) state that more and more books and reading materials should be made available to students to increase their interest in reading. Moreover, they claim that as well as the content of the reading materials, the design and presentation are also of great importance in keeping the students' interest. They also state that interesting and useful reading materials should be accessible online as young people are mostly interested in the World Wide Web, social networking, blogging, etc.

Reading campaigns should be undertaken such as reading week, reading hour. These activities can be done in a class as well as via distance education. As new media and online literacies have become a part of our daily lives, reading researchers and educators should include them in their literary research (Hagood, 2003). This literary research will surely contribute to the development of reading habits.

While some linguists think that the education systems should be reorganized with optimal technology, some others suggest not using these devices at all. Loan (2009) claims that the new gadgets of technology such as television, cinema, cell phone, computer and internet have become 'time eating machines', which necessitates immediate action. To create and maintain balance in the use of traditional reading and new technology, educators and librarians have to attract a new generation towards reading.

To sum up, there are various ways to develop reading habits in modern world. Technology assisted reading is one of the most influential ways to improve reading habits. The dull image of reading can be overcome with the integration of technology into reading habits. First of all, educators should be instructed about how to integrate technology into their courses to boost reading habits. Students should be informed about how to gain benefits from the latest developments in technology. Online reading practices can be conducted in parallel with the interests of the respondents. Technology keeps developing at an unprecedented rate, so the readers must respond to these developments by adapting themselves constantly.

5. Conclusions

In the ever changing world of today, reading habits of individuals have started to become more digitalized in accordance with the advances in technology. As well as those who read from printed word, there seems to be an increase in the amount of people who use technological devices such as e-book readers, tablet computers, computers, and mobile phones to satisfy their reading interests. The majority of the respondents, for example, stated that they often followed online information.

The findings of the survey showed that reading habits of respondents were affected by the media and technology. Most of the participants spend hours and hours in front of their computer screens.

Respondents mentioned they first checked their ‘Facebook’ account when online. They enjoy listening to music, playing games, and doing many other things. The majority of the respondents claimed that they often read online news, check their emails, view the weather report and read comic strips.

Based on the survey findings, some valuable advice was given in the discussion part. The educators should work on some applicable methods to develop not only the students reading habits, but also the language skills such as reading, writing, speaking and listening.

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Appendix A. Reading Habits Questionnaire

I. Demographic: (Please check (x) your answer. Thank you)

Gender: Male () Female ()

Age: Under 20 (), 20-21 (), 22-23 (), 24-25 (), 26-27 (), over 27 ()

Hours spent online everyday: 0-1 hours (), 1-3 (), 4-6 (), Over 6 ()

The total number of magazines and novels you read in a year.....

How often do you read each of the following in a general week?

(Please check (x) your answer. Thank you)

Reading	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often
Newspaper					
Magazines					
Text books					
Novels					
E-mails					
Online information					

What do you usually read on the internet?

(Please check (x) your answer. Thank you)

Reading	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often
Online news					
Online magazines					
E-books					
Stories and novels					
Emails					
Journal articles					
Sales information					
Movie reviews					
Horoscopes					
Weather reports					
Health information					
Comic strips					
Jokes					
Fashion					
Sports					
Job information					
Food /nutrition					

What do you do when you surf on the internet?

(Please check (x) your answer. Thank you)

Online Activities	Yes	No
I listen to music		
I play game		
I look at photos		
I read all kinds of information		
I shop online		
I use MSN messenger		
I use Yahoo Messenger		
I check email		
I chat with friends		
I download movies		

II. Which category do you click first when you surf on the internet?

(Please check (x) your answer. Thank you)

Category	Check
Art and Humanities	
Business and Economy	
Computers and Internet	
Education	
Entertainment	
Government	
Health	
News and Media	
Recreation and Sports	
Reference	
Regional	
Science	
Social science	
Society and Culture	
Facebook	

III. What techniques to develop the reading abilities:

(Please check (x) your answer)

Techniques	Yes	No
Parental guidance and encouragement		
Motivation by teachers		
Reading materials about hobbies and interests		
Consistent use of dictionary		
Daily newspaper reading		
Book reading		
Visiting libraries		
Well-prepared reading material		
Studying to improve vocabulary and knowledge		

Dijital çağda İngiliz dili ve edebiyatı okuyan üniversite öğrencilerinin okuma alışkanlıkları

Öz

Bu çalışmanın amacı, Atatürk Üniversitesi, İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı bölümünde okuyan öğrencilerin günümüzdeki okuma alışkanlıklarını incelemektir. Ayrıca, bu çalışma yaygınlaşan internet kullanımı ve diğer alternatif multimedya kaynaklarının okuma alışkanlıklarına etkilerini ortaya koymayı amaç edinmektedir. Bugünkü okuma alışkanlıkları hakkında genel bir bilgi edinmek için rastgele seçilmiş 76 üniversite öğrencisi arasında bir anket uygulanmıştır. Anket altı bölüme ayrılmıştır: demografik bilgi, öğelerin okunma sıklığı, internetten okunanların içeriği, çevrimiçi aktiviteler, internetten ilk tıklanan içerik ve okuma alışkanlıklarını geliştirme teknikleri. Verileri analiz etmek için SPSS Statistics 20 programı kullanılmıştır. Öğrencilerin okuma alışkanlıklarına yönelik genel bir bilgi edinmek için çalışma yapıldıktan sonra araştırmacı, teknolojinin hüküm sürdüğü bugünün dünyasında okuma alışkanlıklarını geliştirmek için tavsiyelerde bulunmuştur.

Anahtar sözcükler: okuma alışkanlıkları, elektronik kitaplar, teknoloji destekli okuma, okumanın önemi, okuma alışkanlıklarının geliştirilmesi

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