

## INVESTIGATING EFL STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES OF ICT USE IN READING AND WRITING SKILLS



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### **Abstract:**

Modern technologies including Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have brought profound changes to higher education. Thus, this study investigates EFL students' perceptions of ICT use in reading and writing. Accordingly, these research questions have been raised: 1) Are EFL students aware of the potentials of ICT use in reading and writing? 2) How do they use ICTs to enhance these literacy skills? Then, an online questionnaire has been administered to 69 master one students from two universities- Annaba and Guelma. The obtained results have showed that these learners are aware of ICTs significance in developing reading and writing skills and they use different applications, sites and platforms to enhance these literacy skills.

**key words:** ICTs, reading skill, writing skill, Metaknowledge, Domain knowledge, procedural knowledge.

### **1. Introduction:**

As literacy skills, reading and writing represent the corner stone of any academic success as almost all the tests and exams are done in the written mode. Students need to read, understand, and then answer in the written form. Therefore, writing and reading are inseparable skills as a

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good reader is certainly a good writer. However, while various technologies have been successfully introduced into the teaching-learning process inside and outside classroom, students' writings still invoke their poor proficiency level in these literacy skills. This study is based on investigating the following research questions: 1) Are EFL students aware of the potentials of ICT use in enhancing the reading and the writing skills? 2) How do EFL students use ICTs to develop these literacy skills? A questionnaire was used as a research tool to test the hypotheses as in the age of technology where digital devices are in almost every house, students are aware of the significance of ICTs in developing the writing and the reading skills. In addition, students use different applications and sites to develop these skills.

This study is designed with the aim of investigating EFL students' awareness, practices, and perceptions towards ICTs use in their EFL learning; as well as, exploring ICTs potential role in promoting students' reading and writing skills.

This research work was conducted with the target sample of 69 master one students at Guelma and Annaba University. The online questionnaire has been used as the main research tool for the data collection process. The choice of such quantitative method fits best to answer the research questions and to achieve the research intended objectives.

### **1. Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)**

The concept "Information and Communication Technology" (abbreviated as ICT) should not be confused with "Information Technology" (IT). The latter, according to Galloway, & Norton (2011), refers to the equipment and the infrastructure, and ICT as what we do with it, the subject and the way it is used to support learning. Sometimes the term is pluralized, 'information and communication technologies'. It refers to the different tools, devices, functions and possibilities that ICT covers (p.22). Most recently, ICT term has become to be used as a substitution for information technology (IT).

Collis and Moonen (2001) have grouped ICT applications into three categories; namely, "learning resources" including educational software, online resources, and video resources, "instructional organization of learning" referring to software and technology tools for lecturing in the classroom, the course management system like *Moodle* and

“communication” consisting of email systems, and websites offering communication options.

In a related study, Mooij and Smeets (2001) have suggested five successive phases relevant to ICT implementation. These are:

- Incidental and isolated use of ICT by one or more instructors;
- Increasing awareness of ICT relevance for education, at all levels;
- Emphasis on ICT coordination and hardware;
- Emphasis on didactic innovation and ICT support;
- Use of ICT-integrated teaching and learning, independent of time and place

Additionally, Fu (2013) has pointed out for the merits that ICTs can offer for the educational process:

- helping students to access digital information efficiently and effectively,
- support student-centred and self-directed learning,
- building a creative environment for learning,
- fostering collaborative learning in an environment of distance learning,
- providing more opportunities to develop critical (higher-order) thinking skills, improving the quality of teaching and learning, and
- supporting teaching by facilitating access to course content.

## **2. Reading and Writing Skills**

In his work “*Reading is the practice of using text to create meaning*” (p. 3-7), Johnson (2008) attributes the following characteristics to reading:

- *Reading is a constantly developing skill.* Being better at reading depends on practicing.
- *Reading integrates visual and non-visual information.* During the act of reading, the visual information found on the page combines with the non-visual information contained in your head to create meaning. In that way, what is in your head is just as important as what is on the page in the process of creating meaning (reading).
- *Reading is the act of linking one idea to another.* Putting ideas together to create a sensible whole is the essential part of reading.
- *Reading helps students become better writers.* Through reading students have incidental contact with the rules of grammar. They

will develop a sense for the structure of the language and grammar and increase their vocabulary.

When shifting the focus to the writing skill, Coulmas (2003, p.1), has defined it in relation to six distinctive meanings:

- a system of recording language by means of visible or tactile marks,
- the activity of putting such a system to use,
- the result of such an activity,
- a text, the particular form of such a result,
- script style such as block letter writing, an artistic composition, and a professional occupation.

According to Cameron (2001), literacy skills include being able to read and write different texts for different purposes (p.124). Frankel, Becker, Rowe, and Pearson (2016) define literacy as “ the process of using reading, writing, and oral language to extract, construct, integrate, and critique meaning through interaction and involvement with multimodal texts in the context of socially situated practices” (p.7). For Bazerman (1980), “ The connection between what a person reads and what the person writes seems so obvious as to be truistic” (p.656). Besides, Elbow (1993) asserts that readers are the best writers. Hadis, Awang and Manvender (2015, p. 1117) see that meaning creation is the production of a close negotiation between reading on one hand and writing on the other. Fitzgerald & Shanahan (2000) recognize four shared knowledge in reading and writing (p. 40):

1. “**Metaknowledge**” (knowing about the functions and goals of reading and writing): Metaknowledge refers to several subcategories of knowledge, including knowing about the functions and purposes of reading and writing; knowing that readers and writers interact; monitoring one’s own meaning-making (metacomprehension) and monitoring word identification or production strategies; and monitoring one’s own knowledge. The metacognitive aspect of reading and writing includes motivational factors such as expectations for success.
2. “**Domain knowledge**” (world knowledge and prior knowledge about substance content): This category

includes what is often referred to as “world knowledge” or “prior knowledge” (the knowledge a reader brings to a text), but it also includes the knowledge that can result from a reading or writing interaction. Domain knowledge has to do with the subcategories of semantics or meaning, including word meanings and the meanings or ideas that are constructed through the context of connected text.

3. **“Knowledge about universal attributes”** (knowing about letter recognition and grammar or rules for sentence construction): Issues of shared text knowledge have generated the greatest research attention within studies of reading–writing relations. This area includes three subcategories, each with two or more kinds of knowledge.
  - a). First, there is graphophonics, or letter and word identification and generation, including phonological awareness, grapheme awareness, and morphology.
  - b). A second subcategory of text attributes is syntax: Readers and writers must learn to recognize and produce meaningful syntactic orderings of words and how to use punctuation.
  - c). The third subcategory of text attributes is another form of syntax that we call text format. This includes a wide range of information such as understanding of the relations between pictures and print, directionality, structural organization of text, or formatting features such as paragraphing, graphical structuring, and so on.
4. **“Procedural knowledge and skill to negotiate reading and writing”** (predicting, questioning, recalling, and trying to find analogies). This refers to knowing how to access, use, and generate knowledge in any of the areas previously mentioned, as well as the ability to instantiate smooth integration of various processes.

### **3. ICTs IN Reading and Writing Skills**

Topping and Mckenna (1999) has stated that the term electronic literacy refers to literacy activities (e.g., in reading, writing) that are delivered, supported, accessed, or assessed digitally through computers or other electronic means rather than on paper.

In this respect, Biancarosa and Griffiths (2012, p. 142-143) have claimed that “e-reading” can be used to refer to “the hardware and software used to display and interface with digital text”. They have further added that “hardware includes devices, such as e-readers and tablets that display digital text, while; Software includes a range of applications and programs that allow readers to interact with the text. In the same vein, Nygaard (2010, p.33) has viewed computer-based writing as “getting familiar with writing on a keyboard, using a mouse, text viewing software and operating systems in the writing process”.

Vacca and Vacca (1998) have noted for the benefits of ICT use in reading as:

- Interactivity: students are capable of manipulating text, and text is responsive to students’ interest, purposes, and needs.
- Communication: telecommunication networks enhance electronic text interaction with others throughout the world.
- Information search and retrieval: a wide range of information resources and search capabilities enhance students’ research and information gathering.
- Multimedia Environments: images, sound, and text are highly engaging and extend students’ understanding.
- Socially mediated learning: students collaboratively construct meaning as part of literacy learning.

Moreover, Harmer (2001, p. 261) assures that writing with the computer can be good and lists its main benefits as follows:

- Word processing package removes the problem of poor handwriting that some students suffer from.
- Word processing package allows the competent user to edit his or her material at great speed and with great facility.
- Spellcheckers can ease the task of achieving correct spelling.
- If students are working in groups, a computer screen can sometimes be far more visible to the whole group than a piece of paper might be.

Similarly, Graham (2008, p.6) has identified seven ways of enhancing writing through the use of word processing:

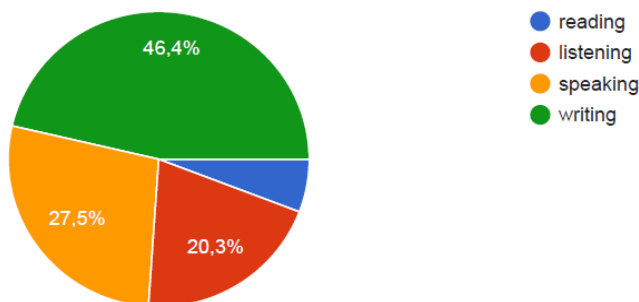
- Legibility of text,

- Potential for publishing in variety of formats,
- Ease of revision,
- Fluent production of text (while composing, not taking, etc.),
- Likelihood of supporting applications (for spelling, grammar, semantic mapping),
- Portable, easy to replicate electronic text (easy to share and provide feedback; hard to lose),
- Potential for links to electronic source material.

#### 4. Research Finding

88, 4 % of the students under investigation are between the age of 20 and 25. 88,4% have twelve years of studying English. The majority of the students 69,6% see that they have good level in English, 29% opted for average level. In answering the question on the most difficult skill for them, 46,4% opted for writing, 27,5% for speaking and 20, 3% listening.

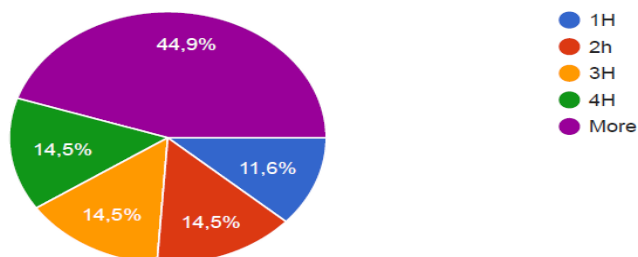
**Figure 1: The Most Difficult Skill**



**Source: Google Forms**

The frequency of using ICT per day differs per day differs as follows: 44.9% more than 4 hours, equally 14,5%, 2h, 3h, and 4hs. While, 11.5% opted for 1h as shown in Figure 2:

**Figure 2: The Frequency of Using ICTs per Day**



**Source: Google Forms**

Then the majority of the students are in constant connection with their technological devices. 68,17 % of the students affirm that they have been trained on using ICTs, while 33,33% confirm the opposite. They advance that types of ICTs they used in the classroom are as follows: Date-show, smart phones, Internet, Computer. The applications that students see helpful in facilitating writing inside and outside the classrooms are mainly social media.

To enhance their writing skills, they use these applications inside and outside the classroom:

- Social media: Facebook, Messenger, Instagram
- Microsoft Word
- Youtube
- E-dictionaries
- Grammarly, Himingway
- Emails
- Mendely
- Audio-books
- Writing apps in internet
- applications and blogs such as duelingo/ memrise/ beelngual
- reading apps
- apps that send you 5 words to learn per day, google traduction

One of the students sees that applications are with no effects on writing, “I do not think that applications could help in the writing

process , for me I think that *reading* is the only way to enrich any that complex skill”

Hence, students demonstrate awareness of the ICT applications that might be used to enhance their writing skills. Furthermore, the students suggest the following applications to facilitate reading inside and outside the classroom:

- Translation applications/ dictionaries
- Spritz speed reading app
- Adobe Acrobat
- Quora
- Wattpad, kindle
- e-documents and articles
- gmail or messenger
- British council english learning
- E book, freebooks, anybooks, scribd, are the famous applications that most of students download for free.
- Apple Books and Amazon Kindle
- Google
- INKredible application
- Oxford dictionary Scribd in which you will find a lot of audio books there, this will train you on both listening and reading skills.
- Audio books help a lot. In addition to Speed Reading App, Skimming and Scanning App
- Z-Lib, genesis, Media365reader,
- Good reader
- Google and Youtube
- Hello english
- wordpad, microsoft office word, note pad
- eBook Reader Application
- Mobiles book store ,Any book app ,the online documents
- Ebooks, audio story books
- wattpad an android applications

Then, students show great awareness of the applications used through ICTs promoting their reading skill and this is shown through the diversity of their answers.

In answering questions about ICTs importance and benefits in relation to both literacy skills reading and writing, the majority of the students agree with the following statements as shown in Table 1

**Table 1: Students' agreements on ICTs Benefits**

	agree	neutral	disagree
Nowadays, ICTs are essential tools for learning	92%	7%	1%
ICTs provide opportunities to contact my teachers and classmates through written language (emails/messenger/viber.....)	93%	4%	3%
ICTs allow me to do written assignments and homeworks (computer)	77%	14%	9%
ICTs offer a huge availability and accessibility of the reading material I need in my study	82%	14%	4%
ICTs help in my vocabulary building and grammar	77%	14%	9%
ICTs help in improving my writing and reading skills	83%	10%	7%
ICTs develop my writing skill and I become more autonomous.	60%	27%	13%
ICTs increases my interest in reading through e-documents	65%	19%	16%
ICTs increases my self confidence in writing	46%	20%	34%

Therefore, the majority of the students 92% agree that ICTs are essential tools in learning as they provide opportunities of contact with the teacher and classmates through written language. More than 93% agree that ICT allow students to do written assignments and offer availability and accessibility to reading materials need for study. Besides, it helps in vocabulary and grammar building and help in developing reading and writing skills. 60% agree that ICTs developed their writing skill and autonomy. 65% confirm that ICTs increases their interest in digital readings. Only 46% agree that ICTS increased their self-confidence in writing.

In asking them about ways ICTs can be better used to develop the reading skill, students' suggestions were as follows:

- By giving students the chances to access e-documents and installing useful apps that help enhancing the reading process
- Having more free applications for reading
- Through reading different e-books that are not available in bookstore
- For example the teacher has to provide learners with e-books to read them and he must train them on different types of reading.
- We should use them wisely, for instance downloading apps which provide free books, grammar apps, writing apps. Social media like facebook can also be used in a beneficial way; there exists some great pages which post amazing educational essays about various topics.
- The Internet always provides us with the documents and books to read it Through YouTube channels we will find many youtubers who talk about their experiences with reading skill and they give some tips or techniques, this will be beneficial for us and give us a look about that matter.
- By providing more resources and reading techniques and trainings
- Since ICTs platforms can be considered as "Knowledge dealer" especially concerning the reading skills, it provides fast access to information as there is no need to go library so, lot of written pieces can be easily read also I think with ICT a one is more motivated to read more things because it is easier, less expensive, comfortable and self-paced.
- No time limitation. No hurry. The comfort zone makes reading easy
- Reading pdf documents with the appropriate dictionary app would be of mere sufficiency.
- It helps me to download any book that I want to read. Besides that dictionaries and there is also applications of spelling.
- ICTs are able to help improve overall comprehension, evaluate general perspectives and raise awareness of the value of cooperation.
- To develop the reading skill, students should read more; ICTs provide them with a variety of choices to read and to improve their reading, from the pronunciation to the comprehension of ideas. E-books, studying blogs, youtube videos, and

pronunciation and stress apps... all can be used to improve the reading skill.

They further suggest that ICTs can be better used in improving the writing skill as follows:

- Writing becomes an easy process when you chat in English making mistakes and correct them.
- Since ICTs have direct link with reading so writing is also included. I can practice my writing using ICTs like computer and some applications. I can easily detect my errors and omit, add, modify whatever I want. I can easily use dictionary while I'm writing.
- By letting students practice their writings and by enhancing reading which will lead automatically to better writing style.
- Having more YouTube channel interested in writing
- By using word program
- Commenting on articles that publishes in platforms
- Through communication based on writing with colleagues, teacher, people from other parts of the world.
- As stated previously, writing is closely linked to reading. Whenever one reads, s(he) will be a good writer. ICT's provide a large variety of books to students and it motivates them for reading because it joins learning with entertainment. Therefore, learners will improve their style and background to become better writers.
- The student can apply to different apps and become a part of different groups and conversations especially with the native speakers. Moreover, using regularly the Microsoft Word on the computer will evaluate his writing skill.
- For instance, you can post your writings on social media and ask friends to peer review it for you.
- When you use it to write your emails, homework, and to search for writing strategies.
- It can if students use them frequently in writing.
- There are a lot of applications in the internet in which you can write whatever you want about any topic and there are professionals and teachers who will correct what you are going to write

- When we read, we can write, because we will build a mountain of vocabularies and expressions that can improve and develop our writings and we will find it easy to write.
- Using the application that correct your mistakes on the level of cohesion and coherence .
- you could use some applications while you are online like grammarly which helps to correct any grammar mistakes or punctuation when you are about to write a comments or paragraphs
- Checking new terms, words to improve the vocabulary. Checking the grammatical and lexical aspects before publishing. Sharing the pieces with everyone. Asking teachers for help or advices.
- By writing essays and send them to teachers and friends
- Writing in certain websites
- Its availability helps learner to use it more and more like the usage of viber or messenger helps readers to improve their writing skills by using new words
- You can search for some tips that help you to write, And to have enough knowledge about your topic to fully cover it, also you can use some apps like mendely to organize your ideas and color notes. Also you can use garmmarly to check your grammar, and you can search for samples to have clear vision about how you're going to write.

Students add the following comments:

- ICTs have a great role in helping us to improve our English, we just have to use them in the right way.
- I believe that technology is so beneficial in all domains, so we just need to use them wisely and correctly. I suggest to include ICTs more in classes since we just limited in using data shows. We should integrate more in this world and benefit as much as we can.
- If we try to use internet in the classroom , they would be great
- I think that both reading and writing are complementary skills that develop in a parallel way a good reader will automatically be a good writer.
- I hope that ICT is more used in education because it offers more knowledge

- In my humble opinion. I don't think It could work In algeria not all student have access to internet I mean most of them struggle from low network ( 3rd world issues ) I for example I'm from annaba City , I can use it normally but I know some who live outside ( taref besbes and so on .. ) anyways hope it will work out Sincerely
- The most important factor in learning especially when using ICTs is Continuity and not be afraid of making mistakes.
- In order to write and read effectively both the teacher and the learner must be autonomous. The learner must have an intrinsic motivation if he or she wants to improve her level in both skills. The teacher will play the role of a facilitator who guides learners and give them advice and instructions.
- I think our educational system should give us more opportunities to use ICT inside and out of the classroom because i think it's high time that we cope a bit with the modern world in way which benefits us and helps us improve and achieve better.
- We have to use ICTs smartly, we ought to benefit from it rather than being controlled by it.
- Reading and writing skills' improvement cannot be achieved unless students practice both of them intensively.
- Also YouTube channels have a major effect on my reading and writing techniques because there we find native speakers who help us through internet
- I think that we have to develop our ways of using ICTs and especially in this period because it is not sufficient enough. And also ask teachers to be in touch with their students especially when they give them homework and activities.
- ICT is important not only for the learners but also for the teachers also since it facilitates the teaching and learning for both.
- We are passing through a serious period, and I guess that using ICT's is the best solution to accomplish our studies without damage... Although that we all know that internet is not that good in our country but still the use of ICT's and teaching sites the most useful option...

- Use facebook in order to chat with English, download apps to improve the reading skills
- Concentration is really needed in these two skills or any other skill. So, developing the person's concentration is a first step to improve any of the other skills .
- ICTS is important it should be used more than it us used, institutions and universities should as well provide more helpful materials audiovisual books
- ICT is a powerful tool for transcending time as it has a beneficial motivational influence on everyone's learning.
- It helps reader to learn more to refresh their mind to use new ideas new words to improve their writing style
- Software applications and operating systems, web based information and applications such as distance learning.
- ICT it can be useful in improving both writing and reading skill through different tools and application like commonlit, Grammarly, New yourk times writing prompts.
- We use the Internet everyday and everywhere, students should just be motivated enough to use it to improve themselves not just their reading and writing skills.
- The integration of more apps like anybook that helps to have access to any available book online and the reading will be more developed.

### **5. Discussion of the Findings**

Students under investigation showed awareness of the potentials of ICTs in developing their literacy skills. One of the students highlighted that through ICTs the learning is “easier, less expensive, comfortable and self-paced”. They use different applications, web sites and platforms to enhance their reading and writing skills and the list they provided is very rich. They are as follows:

#### ***Applications:***

- Translation applications/ dictionaries (Oxford dictionary)
- duelingo
- Spritz speed reading app
- Wattpad ( E story appl read and write your own story)
- Amazon Kindle app ( reading books)

- E mails: Gmail
- messenger,
- E-book, free books-anybooks, Scibed
- INKredible Handwriting Note
- Apple Books
- Audiobooks
- Speed reading app
- Skimming and Scanning App
- Z-Library (free Ebooks)
- Media365reader
- Adobe reader
- Youtube
- Hello English: Learn English
- wordpad , microsoft office word, note pad
- Mobiles book store
- memrise ( learn languages with thousands of video clips of real native speakers)
- beelinguapp: Learn with audio books
- grammar apps
- Spelling applications:
- pronunciation and stress apps

***Platforms:***

- Quora ( question- answer platform and connect with people)
- British Council English Learning
- Google
- Grammarly,
- Himingway
- Mendely

***Web sites:*** Social media

- Facebook
- Messenger
- Instagram
- Blogs

However, despite this awareness of the significance of ICTs in enhancing the reading and the writing skills, these last are poorly developed for the great majority of the students. It becomes clear that

students do not use what they know and they lack training either on the personal level; that is, they need to train themselves by themselves using what ICTs provide as sites, application and platforms; or by others-under teacher's guidance or professional assistance.

Enhancing the writing skill is not automatic, but it is a whole process based on perseverance, patience and commitment from students' part and constant encouragement, guidance and training from teachers' part. As the majority of the students highlight reading is the doorway for a well written piece, " *I think that both reading and writing are complementary skills that develop in a parallel way; a good reader will automatically be a good writer.* These students show also awareness that ICT use should be controlled by the students for the best of their studies; "we ought to benefit from it rather than being controlled by it". They further pinpoint that teachers and learners alike should gain knowledge of how to use ICTs in order to develop these literacy skills. They also identify concentration and motivation as the keys for an effective learning through ICTs.

Consequently, the two hypotheses have been validated as students under investigation are highly aware of the potential of ICTs in developing and enhancing reading and writing. However, they need to practice what they are aware of through constant training. There is no good writer but a good rewriter, and there is no good writer without being a good reader.

## **6. Conclusion**

In the age of technology, using ICTs in learning becomes a necessity. In order to develop the two literacy skills- reading and writing, students developed awareness of its significance through using different applications, web sites and platforms. However, this awareness needs practice and commitment to be better one's skills. Both teachers and learners share responsibility in enhancing the literacy skills inside and outside the classroom through ICTs. Learners need training on reading techniques and writing strategies with the teacher and lots of practice by themselves. It is never enough to be aware without practices.

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