

## The Influence of School Factors on English Language Reading Habits among Jordanian EFL students in Al-Mafraq province

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### Abstract

The aim of this research is to investigate the social factors that affect the English language reading habits. The study was conducted in six secondary schools situated Al-Mafraq province. A questionnaire was used for the data collection. The data collected were analyzed quantitatively with the use of Co-Variance Based Structural Equation Modeling (CB-SEM) in AMOS 21.0 software. From the total of 275 copies of questionnaire distributed, 268 copies were filled and returned. The findings showed that the school library has an impact on English language reading habits. The results also revealed that English teacher and peers have no impact on the respondents' English language reading habits.

**Keywords:** Reading habits, School factors, School library, English teacher, Peer influence, EFL students.

### 1. Introduction

The process of reading is considered a habit when it is done frequently. Reading habits can be measured based on the amount of materials being read, the repetition of reading, and the extent of time spent on reading (Wagner, 2002) [32]. Sangkaeo (1999) [30] defined the reading habit as the behaviour in which individuals express the love for reading, types of reading, and tastes of reading. It can be regarded as a pattern which enables the individuals arrange his or her reading. Ambigapathy (1997:27-28) [5] defined reading habits as an action which an individual undertakes automatically within a situation where, books, magazines, newspapers, comics and journals are easily available and accessible to him or her. He also confirmed that the amount of time spent on reading in daily life would give an indication of his or her habit of reading.

The reading habit is seen as vital and significant in constructing a literate society. It also plays an important role in the formation of the reader's personality and it assists readers to develop the appropriate thinking methods and in order to produce new ideas (Palani, 2012) [28]. The reading habit is considered essential because it adds a quality to life and it provides access to culture and cultural heritage. It also empowers people and brings them together (Holte, 1998) [21]. The success and failure of children in schools rely to a large extent on their capacity for reading. Reading can be viewed as a basic skill which students acquire and therefore each attempt must be developed at an early age. Studies done on reading indicated that parents and friends significantly influence children more than schools and teachers. It is always helpful for children to interact with the people who popularize reading and learning as they spend the most amount of time with the individuals who control their thoughts and direction in life. Conversely, children may encounter some hindrances when growing up if they lack of reading habits (Chettri and Rout, 2013) [13]. Bignold (2003) [10] asserted that the habit of reading

can develop Children's reading skills. Thus, the habit of reading is essential for widening the experiences and knowledge of young people whether it is for pleasure or for the purpose of learning (Green, 2002) [18].

### School Factors Affecting Reading Habits

Recent studies have shown that school factors have had a great influence on the development of reading habits. For example, Adetunji and Oladeji (2007) [2] regarded the influence of environment, peer influence, school curriculum, and teacher influence as other factors which can either support or stand against better reading habits. Nathanson, Pruslow, and Levitt (2008) [27] proved through their study that school factors including library facilities, teacher influence, and peer influence were found to have a direct influence on the acquisition of reading habits (Ambigapathy, 1997b) [5]. It was also revealed that teacher influence, a vital school factor is predictive for children's performance (Adekola, 2012; Adetunji and Olagunju, 2014) [3]. The influence of peers and teachers is seen important in the socialization of children as they play a significant role in the engagement of children in the literacy occurrences.

### Statement of Problem

Jordanian EFL secondary school students do read but their reading is limited to the reading for school exams (Al Regeb, 2009; Haddadin, Dweik & Sheir, 2008) [4, 19]. They are reluctant to read for pleasure because they have never been taught how to love reading (Banihani & Abu-Ashour, 2015) [9].

### Research Objective

This study aims to investigate the relationship between school factors including school library influence, English teacher influence, peers influence and the respondents' English language reading habits.

## Research Questions

The current study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent do school libraries foster the respondents' English language reading habits?
2. To what extent do English teachers affect the respondents' English language reading habits?
3. To what extent does peer influence affect the respondents' English language reading habits?

## The Significance of the Study

Findings from this study may help the stakeholders in schools by providing appropriate plans to improve the students' reading habits through establishing a reading corner or library in each classroom that consists of books from various genres. This would be in addition to refurbishing and stocking existing language resource centres/libraries with good reading materials in all subject areas as well as with books for recreational or supportive reading. Library periods should be included in the timetable of primary and secondary schools. It should be carried out in such a way that a class would have at least one-and-a-half-hours per week for library use. This is an instrument of reading culture development.

## Literature Review

This section will shed light on the role and the impact of school factors such as the influence of the library, teachers and peers on a child's reading habits.

### School Library Influence

Ambigapathy (1997:34) [5] asserted that the availability of reading materials as well as adequate materials which students can borrow from the library will encourage the students to read for pleasure. Additionally, it is essential to provide an appropriate place in the library for the students to read. Thus, the availability of areas for reading in the library as well as time for reading increase exposure to English which has been viewed as the most important determinant of reading habits. Philip (2009) [29] has noted that reading habit is the link between libraries and literacy. Once students have developed the habit of reading, they will visit the libraries looking for books. Also, when students use the school and public libraries, they will consolidate their reading habit by discovering the new world that links within the library.

### Teacher Influence

The teacher is viewed as the key that unlocks the gate to the reading garden. The teacher is also the one who can influence the reluctant reader to read through persistent and dogged modeling (Loh, 2009) [24]. Devendran (2007) [14] has indicated that the more the students observe the reading of their teachers, the more they want to try it. The more the students listen to teachers read to them, the better they become in reading. McKool and Gespass (2009) [25] found that teachers who read for pleasure and who implement reading lessons, use literature circles, provide opportunities for reading discussions are more likely to encourage their students to engage in silent reading sessions, speak about their reading experiences, and recommend other books to students.

Teachers can promote the reading habit in their students through modeling the love of reading and by including course activities designed to support students in the development of a love of reading (Draper, Alice Barksdale-Ladd & Radencich,

2000) [15]. In relation to that, Morrison *et al* (2000) [26] mentioned that teachers who read are more likely to motivate their students to read. Teachers who read for enjoyment provide their students with recommended literacy practices to be used in their classrooms considerably more often than teachers who do not read. Campagna (2005) [12] stated that teachers can cultivate the love for reading among students by allocating 10 to 15 minutes of class time every day for reading books, magazines, and searching the internet for interesting articles.

### Peer Influence

The presence of peers is viewed as an important factor which influences students to read for pleasure. The influence of peer group can be seen as a powerful tool because the students may not select a particular book or article to read if the peer group does not read it (Ambigapathy, 1997:34) [5]. The relationship with peers through sharing books was found to be important in boosting reading in the classroom and furnish students with opportunities to support each other throughout the reading experience which will improve their reading overall (Andrea & Nelson-Royes, 2012) [7]. Hopper (2005) [22] stated that students who recommend books to each other are more likely to read more. Greel (2015) [17] confirmed that peers can encourage students to read throughout sharing books, modelling reading, and giving them opportunities to choose their books of interest.

## Methodology

### Research Design

This study uses a quantitative research approach. According to Sekaran (2003) [31], quantitative method can extract information from a larger number of subjects in a short period time and it is cost effective. Blaxter *et al.*, (2001) [11] have highlighted the advantages of the use of questionnaires in the social research method. Questionnaires are seen as one of the most commonly used designs in the social research method. The idea of creating accurate written questions, for those opinions or experiences in which you are interested appears as an evident strategy in order to find the answers to the matters that interest you.

### Research Instrument

The instrument used in this study is a questionnaire consisting of 12 items adapted from the work of Jaki (2006) [23]. The questionnaire has three sections. The first section (4 items) measures the influence of the school library on the respondents' reading habits. The second section (4 items) deals with the influence of English teacher on the respondents' reading habits. The last section (4 items) discusses the influence of peers on the respondents' reading habits.

### Sampling

275 Jordanian EFL school students from six secondary schools in the Al-Mafraq province participated in this study. They were randomly selected. The researcher administered the questionnaire to 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup> grades. The students in these classes can read in English as they are the most exposed group to English language (nearly 8-10 years) in Jordanian schools where they study English language from the first grade.

## Data Analysis

The data was carefully checked for errors before it was analyzed. The data was carefully screened for missing values because this is very important before the researcher can move to data analysis. From total data points of 275, 7 responses were discarded due to missing values. This resulted in 268 cases having complete data. The data for this study was analyzed by using the Covariance Based Structural Equation Modeling (CB-SEM) in AMOS 21.0.

## The Measurement Model

### Model Fit

Confirmatory factor analysis was performed to observe model fit, construct validity and reliability of the items. In the confirmatory factor model, all constructs were correlated and tested for model fit. The value of GFI = 0.923, CFI = 0.956, TLI = 0.947 and RMSEA = 0.046 confirm that the model is an adequate fit to the data.

## Convergent Validity

In the second step, the data was tested for convergent validity. Based on the concepts put forward by Hair *et al.* (2010) [20], the standardized regression estimates and average variance extracted (AVE) were observed for confirming convergent validity. The minimum threshold value for the standardized regression estimates and average variance extracted is 0.50 (Hair *et al.*, 2010) [20]. As shown in Table 1, the standardized regression estimate for all items was greater than 0.50 and average variance extracted for all constructs under investigation was greater than 0.50 which confirmed that the model has successfully achieved convergent validity. Moreover, the composite reliability for all construct was greater than 0.70 confirming that the items are reliable and the subsequent results generated through these items are trustworthy.

**Table 1:** Standardized Regression Weights, CR and AVE

Variables	Items Code	Items	Estimate	CR	AVE
School Library Influence	C1a	There is an appropriate place in my school library for reading	.560	0.745	0.524
	C1b	There are adequate English language materials available in my school library.	.722		
	C1c	There are different types of English language reading materials available in my school library.	.696		
	C1d	There is enough time set aside for reading in my school library.	.614		
English Teacher Influence	C2a	My English teacher encourages me to read English books	.573	0.709	0.519
	C2b	My English teacher reads English language books in the class.	.783		
	C2c	My English teacher allocates a special time for reading in the class.	.563		
Peer Influence	C3a	My peers read English language books for enjoyment.	.663	0.712	0.528
	C3b	My peers recommend English books to read	.645		
	C3c	My peers share popular English storybooks with me.	.655		

### 9.1.3 Discriminant Validity

The model was further tested for discriminant validity. Based on the ideas posited by Fornell and Larcker (1981) [16], the square root of AVE was calculated and compared with inter-construct correlation. According to Fornell and Larcker (1981) [16], the value of the square root of AVE for all constructs should be greater than inter-construct correlation of the constructs for predicting discriminant validity. As shown in Table 1, the square root of AVEs (shown in diagonal) was greater than inter construct correlation which confirmed that the model has achieved discriminant validity.

## 9.2 The Structural Model

According to Anderson and Gerbing (1988) [6], once the data fulfils all criteria of measurement mode, the second step is to run the structural model to test the hypotheses. For structural model, the independent variables namely school library, English teacher and peer influence shown regression for English language reading habits. The following hypotheses were tested in this model:

H<sub>7a</sub>: The school library has a significant positive influence on English language reading habits.

H<sub>7b</sub>: The English teacher has a significant positive influence on English language reading habits.

H<sub>7c</sub>: Peers have a significant positive influence on English language reading habits.

In this study, the school library, English teacher's impact and peer influence are exogenous variables and English language reading habits is the endogenous variable. In this phase, the model was tested to investigate the level of influence of school library, English teacher and peers on English language reading habits. The structural model indicated an adequate fit to the data. That is, GFI = 0.923, CFI = 0.955, TLI = 0.947 and RMSEA = 0.045. All values were within the range of recommended threshold level.

The researcher tested the effect of independent variables on the dependent variable as shown in table 2. The results indicate that the  $\beta$  coefficient for the direct path from school library to English language reading habits is 0.21;  $t = 1.779$  and  $p = 0.038 < 0.05$  which is significant at a 95% confidence level. This shows that the school library has a direct positive and significant influence on English language reading habits. Thus, hypothesis H<sub>7a</sub> is supported. Similarly, the  $\beta$  coefficient for the direct path from English Teacher to English language reading habits is 0.008;  $t = 0.08$  and  $p = 0.466 > 0.05$  which is insignificant. This shows that the English teacher has no direct influence on students' English language reading habits. Thus, hypothesis H<sub>7b</sub> is not supported. Finally, the  $\beta$  coefficient for the direct path from Peer Influence to English language reading habits is -0.026;  $t = -0.213$  and  $p = 0.584 > 0.05$  which is insignificant. This shows that Peer Influence has no direct influence on students' English language reading habits. Thus, hypothesis H<sub>7c</sub> is not supported. The cumulative R<sup>2</sup> for the model is 0.37.

**Table 2: Regression Estimates**

Hypotheses	Independent Variables	Path	Dependent Variables	Estimate	S.E.	t	p	Remarks
H <sub>7a</sub>	School Library	--->	English Reading Habits	0.21	0.118	1.779661	0.038*	Supported
H <sub>7b</sub>	English Teacher	--->	English Reading Habits	0.008	0.095	0.084211	0.466**	Not Supported
H <sub>7c</sub>	Peer Influence	--->	English Reading Habits	-0.026	0.122	-0.21311	0.584**	Not Supported

\*significant; \*\* not significant

## Discussion of Findings

### School Library Influence and English Language Reading Habits

In order to find out the role of school libraries in cultivating the English language reading habits of Jordanian EFL students, regression weights were applied in AMOS 21.0. The results revealed that the school library has a direct, positive and significant influence on English language reading habits. The results indicated that the  $\beta$  coefficient for the direct path from school library to English language reading habits was 0.21;  $t = 1.779$  and  $p = 0.038 < 0.05$  which significant at a 95% confidence level. Therefore, it can be said that the school library in this study is seen as a positive factor in fostering English language reading habits in students.

The result is consistent with previous researchers (Ambigapathy, 1997 & Philip, 2009) [5, 29] who found that the school library plays a central role in the cultivation of reading habits in students by providing adequate of reading materials which they can borrow and an appropriate area and time for reading in the library.

The reasons for the significant influence of the school library on students' reading habits is that the school library has materials pertaining to students' interests, such as sports, popular culture and celebrities and not merely books that are outdated and unwanted which are donations from other people.

### English Teacher Influence and English Language Reading Habits

In order to explore the influence of English teachers on the students' English language reading habits, regression weights were applied in AMOS 21.0. The results revealed that English teachers have no direct influence on students' English language reading habits. The  $\beta$  coefficient for the direct path from English Teacher to English language reading habits was 0.008;  $t = 0.08$  and  $p = 0.466 > 0.05$  which is insignificant. Thus, it can be established that the English teachers in this study did not play a significant role in providing encouragement and reading in English for the respondents.

Generally speaking, these findings were consistent with that of other studies in this area of research (Devendran, 2007; Adebayo, 2009 & Nathanson, 2008) [14, 27]. For instance, a study conducted by Devendran (2007) [14] showed a negative significant level of relationship with the English teacher and it shows that the English teachers are not contributing towards fostering the reading habit among the respondents. Another study conducted by Adebayo (2009) revealed that teachers do not assign a fixed time for reading and they read only when it is necessary. Nathanson, Pruslow and Levitt's study (2008) [27] showed that teachers acknowledged that reading is important; however, they do not read and were not enthusiastic as regards personal reading habits themselves. This in turn leads to a high prevalence of literacy.

The findings were also not in agreement with previous researchers (Devendran, 2007; McKool and Gespass, 2009; Draper *et al.*, 2000; Morrison *et al.*, 2000; Campagna, 2005) [14, 25, 15, 26, 12,] who found that teachers, who model the love of reading, recommend books for reading, and set aside a special time for reading in class are more likely to improve students' reading habits, have an enormous impact on students' progress and development.

This attributable to the fact that Jordanian English teachers do not place a high priority on reading in English. They were greatly concerned about preparing respondents for examinations and other school activities for the sake of getting excellent results. This has led to the neglect of reading in English among the respondents. This worrisome trend has been confirmed by the findings of Nathanson, Pruslow and Levitt's (2008) [27] study that many teachers do not consider reading as a priority especially during their leisure time. Banihani and Abu-Ashour (2015) [9] mentioned that Jordanian English teachers focus on school curriculum and homework to the extent they do not leave time for the students to read other textbooks.

### Peers Influence and English Language Reading Habits

In order to explore the influence of peers on the students' English language reading habits, regression weights were applied in AMOS 21.0. The results revealed that peer Influence has no direct influence on students' English language reading habits. The  $\beta$  coefficient for the direct path from peer Influence to English language reading habits was -0.026;  $t = -0.213$  and  $p = 0.584 > 0.05$  which is insignificant. As a result, it can be stated that the peers in this study did not play a significant role in encouraging the students to cultivate English among respondent.

The results of this study were in congruence with the findings of Arumugam's (2004) [8] study that revealed a negative relationship between peer influence and the students' English language reading habits. The interviews with the respondents also revealed that there was a lack of discussion of storybooks among the peers due to pressures associated with preparations for examinations. The result is further supported by the findings of Devendran (2007) [14] that showed a negative significant relationship existed between peers and reading habits confirming that peer influence is not a predictor for the cultivation of reading habits among the participants.

The findings of this study is inconsistent with the previous researchers (Ambigapathy, 1997; Andrea & Nelson-Royes, 2012; Hopper, 2005; Greel, 2015) [5, 7, 22, 17] who found that peers influence plays a highly influential role in the life of a student because they spend most of their time with friends. The influence of peers on reading habits can be achieved through modeling reading, sharing reading, and recommending books to their friends.

The justification for this insignificant result is that peers do not read materials beyond their textbooks as they are burned

out by homework and by the time they finish their homework, they will not have time to read.

### Conclusion

The current study has investigated the school factors including the school library, English teacher and peers that affect the English language reading habits of Jordanian EFL school secondary students. The findings have revealed that the school library was found to have had an influence on English language reading habits. As the school library provides the only access to reading materials, school administrators should pay more attention in improving the school's library. Libraries should not be seen as mere reference centres for revision books and examinations but should be made to play an important role in developing the reading interests of the students in the English language. More books which are of interest to students should be bought and displayed prominently in the library. Surprisingly, the findings also showed that school factors including English teacher influence and peer influence did not have an impact on English language reading habits. Besides the clarion call made by policy makers of the Ministry of Education in getting students to read for pleasure, the importance of students to read for pleasure, English language teachers should make reading for pleasure a top priority to encourage students to read for this purpose. Reading for pleasure also needs to be promoted among all students. The emphasis on reading only to pass public examinations ought to be toned down and the onus is on the English language teacher to come out with various techniques and strategies such as reading aloud in the classroom, silent reading, and reading a variety of story books, magazines, comics, carrying out hands on activities and playing language games to promote reading. The English language teacher is undoubtedly the best role model for instilling or implanting the reading habit among students so it is important for teachers to show their keenness in reading and to read extensively on a regular basis. English teachers have to understand the importance of peers influence and use whatever classroom and outside opportunities they have to encourage reading among the students. For example, peer participation can be encouraged through group work and reading tutorials.

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