ISSN: 3107-6513

Paper or Pixel? Reading Habits in Printed and Digital Forms Among Student-Teachers

*Nafeesa Fathima, S, ** Lenin, S
*M.Ed Student, **Assistant Professor,
Department of Education, Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu.

Abstract
Reading is central to teacher preparation, yet the shift from printed books to screens has changed how student-teachers read. This thematic paper discusses reading habits in printed and digital forms among student-teachers. It explains the concept of reading habits, examines the reasons why some readers lean towards printed material, others towards digital material, and many towards a blend of both, and reviews the challenges linked with each form. The paper then outlines strategies to strengthen reading habits in both forms and draws out implications for teacher education institutions, teacher educators and curriculum planners. It argues that neither format is better for every reader or every purpose, and that teacher education should support print and digital reading together through well-stocked libraries, e-resources, reading clubs and training in critical reading.

Keywords: Reading Habits, Printed Reading, Digital Reading, Student-Teachers, Teacher Education, Digital Era.

Introduction
Reading is the foundation of learning and one of the most important habits a teacher can have. Student-teachers read to understand theory, prepare lessons, complete assignments and keep up with new ideas in education. A strong reading habit therefore shapes the quality of their professional preparation.

In the digital era, this habit has changed. Textbooks, journals and notes are now available as e-books, PDFs, websites and mobile apps, alongside printed books. Printed reading offers focus, easy annotation and less eye strain, while digital reading offers convenience, portability, quick search and low cost. Student-teachers move between the two formats, and their choices depend on purpose, access, comfort and habit.

Whether student-teachers prefer printed reading, digital reading or both is therefore worth studying. Understanding these preferences can help teacher education institutions plan libraries, resources and reading support that suit their learners. This thematic paper discusses the reading habits of student-teachers in printed and digital forms and the support that teacher education can offer for both.

Concept of Reading Habits in Printed and Digital Forms
A reading habit is a regular and settled pattern of reading, shaped by how often a person reads, how long, what they read, and why. For student-teachers, it includes reading textbooks, reference books, journals, newspapers and online material for academic and professional growth.

Printed reading means reading from books, journals, newspapers and handouts on paper. It allows deeper concentration, easy underlining and note-making, and a better sense of how much has been read. Many readers also find it more comfortable for long study sessions.

Digital reading means reading from screens, such as mobile phones, tablets, laptops and e-readers. The material may be e-books, PDFs, websites, online journals or learning apps. It offers portability, instant search, easy access to a large number of resources, and often lower cost. However, it can bring eye strain, distraction from notifications, and shallower reading if the reader skims.

The two forms are not rivals. A student-teacher may read a textbook in print and a journal article on a phone, depending on purpose, access and comfort. This is why reading habits are best understood through a reader's preferred format and purpose, not only through the amount of reading.

Preference for Printed Reading among Student-Teachers
Printed material remains a preferred choice for many readers, especially for serious academic study. Printed books and notes allow deeper concentration because there are no notifications, pop-ups or other apps competing for attention. Readers can underline key lines, write margin notes and flip back to earlier pages, which supports understanding and recall. A meta-analysis of studies comparing reading media also found that reading comprehension was better on paper than on screens (Delgado et al., 2018). A later systematic review and meta-analysis reported that reading from screens lowered performance compared with paper, mainly for expository texts, with no difference for narrative texts (Clinton, 2019). A more recent meta-analysis of handheld devices such as tablets and phones likewise found that readers tend

ISSN: 3107-6513

to understand texts slightly better on paper (Salmerón et al., 2024).

Surveys and diary studies of students point the same way. A survey of more than 10,000 students in 21 countries found that most preferred to read academic course materials in print (Mizrachi et al., 2018), and a diary-based study of college students found that they used print for academic and long-form reading and engaged with it more deeply (Foasberg, 2014).

Printed reading is also easier on the eyes during long study sessions. Student-teachers preparing for examinations, writing assignments or studying difficult theory often choose paper for these reasons. Textbooks, reference books and prescribed course material are typical printed sources for such study.

Preference for print can also depend on habit and background. Student-teachers who grew up reading from books, or who have limited access to devices and internet connectivity, may naturally lean toward printed material.

Preference for Digital Reading among Student-Teachers

Digital reading is preferred by many readers, including student-teachers, for its convenience. A single phone or tablet can hold hundreds of books, journals and notes, which makes studying easy while travelling, at home or in the college. Digital material can be searched instantly, so a keyword or reference can be found in seconds, and text size and brightness can be adjusted to suit the reader.

Cost and access also matter. Many e-books, PDFs, open-access journals and online lectures are free or cheaper than printed copies, which helps student-teachers who cannot buy every book. University students themselves have named easy searching, portability and lower cost as advantages of electronic study material (Pálsdóttir, 2019). Digital reading is also useful for quick reference, current affairs, online courses and updates in education, where information changes often. A study of universities in Kerala, India, likewise examined students' preference for print and digital resources and the need to build online reading skills (Divya & Haneefa, 2020).

Digital reading has limits too. Notifications and social media can break concentration, and long screen time can cause eye strain, so some readers skim instead of reading deeply. Preference for digital reading therefore often depends on purpose, such as quick reference or assignment preparation, and not on all kinds of study. Students themselves report that their approach to digital texts varies with the purpose of reading (Hargreaves et al., 2022). Reviews of the research also caution that the effect of the medium depends on the circumstances, and that format matters little when readers need only the gist of a text (Singer & Alexander, 2017).

Challenges Faced in Printed and Digital Reading

Both forms of reading come with difficulties, and student-teachers face different ones depending on the format.

Challenges in printed reading

- High cost of books and journals, and limited copies in the library
- Heavy to carry, which makes reading on the move difficult
- Slow to search for a specific point or reference
- Limited availability of recent and international material

Challenges in digital reading

- Eye strain and tiredness after long screen time
- Distraction from notifications, social media and other apps
- Poor internet connectivity and limited data, especially in rural areas
- Shallow reading, since many readers skim instead of reading carefully
- Lack of access to a good device or paid e-resources

Some challenges are common to both forms, such as lack of time, low motivation to read, and heavy academic workload. Because of these, even student-teachers with a clear preference may switch formats depending on the situation.

Strategies to Strengthen Reading Habits in Both Forms

Since student-teachers read in both formats, they need support in both, and this support can come from experts, teachers and seniors who guide, model and encourage good reading practices.

For printed reading

- Keep a fixed daily reading time and a simple reading time-table
- Make the library more useful with more copies, recent titles and longer opening hours
- Start book clubs or reading circles where students discuss what they read
- Encourage note-making, underlining and short summaries after each chapter

For digital reading

- Provide e-library access, open-access journals and reliable e-book platforms
- Reduce distraction by switching off notifications and using one app at a time
- Follow the 20-20-20 rule (every 20 minutes, look at something 20 feet away for 20 seconds) to ease eye strain
- Train student-teachers to read critically online and judge the quality of sources

ISSN: 3107-6513

For both forms

- Blend the two: use print for deep study and digital for quick reference and updates
- Set small reading goals, such as 20 pages or one article a day
- Include reading activities in the teacher education curriculum, such as seminars, book reviews and reading journals

Educational Implications for Teacher Education

The themes discussed in this paper have practical value for teacher education institutions, teacher educators and student-teachers.

For teacher education institutions

- Build libraries that offer both printed collections and digital resources such as e-books, e-journals and online databases.
- Provide reliable Wi-Fi and computer or tablet access on campus so that digital reading is open to all students, including those from rural areas.
- Set up reading rooms and quiet reading hours to support focused study.

For teacher educators

- Recommend both printed and digital sources when assigning readings, and avoid assuming that every student prefers the same format.
- Include reading tasks such as book reviews, article summaries and reading journals in regular coursework.
- Guide students on how to read online critically, check the quality of sources and avoid distraction.

For student-teachers

- Understand their own reading preference and use each format where it works best, with print for deep study and digital for quick reference.
- Develop a regular reading routine, since a student-teacher who reads widely is better prepared to guide future learners.

For curriculum planners

- Include digital literacy and reading skill development in the teacher education curriculum, so that student-teachers can model good reading habits in their own classrooms.

Conclusion

This paper discussed the reading habits of student-teachers in printed and digital forms. It highlights that reading preference is not one-sided. Some student-teachers prefer printed material for its focus, comfort and ease of note-making, others prefer digital material for its convenience, low cost and quick access, and many use both depending on the purpose of reading.

Each format also brings its own challenges. Printed reading is limited by cost, weight and availability, while digital reading is affected by eye strain, distraction and connectivity. Because of this, neither format can be called better for everyone (Singer & Alexander, 2017), and student-teachers benefit most when they know when to use each.

Teacher education institutions therefore have a role in supporting both. By offering rich printed collections along with e-resources, building regular reading routines, and training students to read critically in print and on screen, they can help future teachers become confident readers. Student-teachers who read well are better placed to inspire the same habit in their own students.

References

Clinton, V. (2019). Reading from paper compared to screens: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Research in Reading, 42*(2), 288–325. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9817.12269

Delgado, P., Vargas, C., Ackerman, R., & Salmerón, L. (2018). Don't throw away your printed books: A meta-analysis on the effects of reading media on reading comprehension. *Educational Research Review, 25*, 23–38. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2018.09.003

Divya, P., & Haneefa, K. M. (2020). Students' preference of reading print and digital resources: A study in universities in Kerala, India. *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*, Article 4469. https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/4469

Foasberg, N. M. (2014). Student reading practices in print and electronic media. *College & Research Libraries, 75*(5), 705–723.

Hargreaves, H., Robin, S., & Caldwell, E. (2022). Student perceptions of reading digital texts for university study. *Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education*, (24). https://doi.org/10.47408/jldhe.vi24.817

Mizrachi, D., Salaz, A. M., Kurbanoglu, S., Boustany, J., & ARFIS Research Group. (2018). Academic reading format preferences and behaviors among university students worldwide: A comparative survey analysis. *PLoS ONE, 13*(5), e0197444. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0197444

Pálsdóttir, Á. (2019). Advantages and disadvantages of printed and electronic study material: Perspectives of university students. *Information Research, 24*(2), Article paper828. http://InformationR.net/ir/24-2/paper828.html

Salmerón, L., Altamura, L., Delgado, P., Karagiorgi, A., & Vargas, C. (2024). Reading comprehension on handheld devices versus on paper: A narrative review and meta-analysis of the medium effect and its moderators. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 116*(2), 153–172. https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000830

ISSN: **3107-6513**

Singer, L. M., & Alexander, P. A. (2017). Reading on paper and digitally: What the past decades of empirical research reveal. *Review of Educational Research, 87*(6), 1007–1041. https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654317722961