

Abstract for
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E-Books Usability: Reading Time and Comprehension

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Electronic reading (Er) has been struggling its way into the consumer market against the traditional method of print reading (Pr). Although these two formats serve the same ultimate purpose, the remaining particularities have shown to result in different effects on the reader. Our hypothesis is that the relative advantage of one type of reading over the other one may depend on several variables, amongst which, the type of text may be the most significant. This study explores the reading speeds and levels of comprehension of Er and Pr with two types of text: fiction and non-fiction. The eInk Amazon Kindle Touch had been chosen to test Er and similarly formatted print-outs were chosen to test Pr; the experiment required half of our participants (8) to read a non-fiction article on paper and a fiction novel excerpt on the e-reader, and the other half of the participants to read the non-fiction article on the e-reader and the novel excerpt on paper. Each participant was timed during both readings and asked to answer a 12-question quiz on both texts after they had finished each reading. The results of the limited sample of sixteen participants confirm previous experiments suggesting that, compared to Pr, reading speeds are slower with Er. Surprisingly, the results also reveal that participants achieved a significantly better comprehension level for non-fiction texts read on the e-reader as compared to the non-fiction text read on paper. Although further research is required to confirm these results and analyse which other variables may play a role in these results, we speculate that Er is better suited for non-fiction texts and Pr is better suited for fiction texts.