

The Influence of Screen Time on Academic Achievement of EFL Students: A Study in Two Saudi Universities

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Abstract: The rapid development of technology in recent decades has led to the younger generation relying heavily on electronic devices. However, many people are increasingly concerned that the rise in screen time could negatively affect young learners' ability to learn. Therefore, this study measures the level of screen time activity among Saudi EFL students in both non-recreational and recreational contexts, assesses their academic productivity, and explores the relationship between active screen time and academic performance. A questionnaire based on the Likert Scale was distributed to 116 Saudi EFL students at Qassim University to collect data. Additionally, ten semi-structured interviews were conducted with undergraduate students at King Saud bin Abdulaziz University for Health Sciences (KSAU-HS) to provide context for the findings. Results showed that Saudi EFL students were "highly exposed" to screen activities on social media for non-recreational purposes ($M=3.55$), and moderately exposed for recreational use ($M=3.34$). The students also achieved satisfactory academic performance ($M=3.45$). Finally, the study reported a moderate correlation ($r = 0.53$) between students' screen time and their academic performance. The study recommends moderation, as excessive screen time might harm students' academic success. Educators are advised to assist students in maintaining a balanced relationship with technology, provide them with appropriate resources, and offer support for learning.

Keywords: Academic Performance, EFL Research, Qassim University, KSAU-HS for Health Sciences, Screen Time Activities, Screen Time Strategies, Teaching-Learning.

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1. Introduction

Recent studies indicate that in the contemporary digital era, there is increasing exposure of younger generations to advanced technologies, thereby highlighting their

growing reliance on these technologies (Fox & Connolly, 2018). Akulwar-Tajane et al. (2020) have addressed the growing concern about the duration of students' screen time and its potential repercussions. According to Granic, Morita and Scholten (2020), screen time refers to a range of activities individuals engage in front of a screen. These activities span from watching television to using digital devices such as smartphones, tablets, and computers. The issue of screen time is frequently linked to concerns regarding EFL students' academic performance. Recent research conducted by Caswell (2023) suggests that excessive screen time can have a negative impact on the cognitive development and academic performance of individuals.

Kumban, Ceththakrikul and Santiworakul (2025) investigated the correlation between youths' screen time and their academic achievement in Saudi Arabia. Dehmler (2010) has also demonstrated an association between spending more than seven hours daily in front of a screen and a decreased likelihood of academic achievement. The study also found that adolescents who used screens for two to four hours per day had higher academic achievement than those who did not. The findings offered valuable insights into the importance of employing a practical approach to regulate screen time.

1.1. Significance of the Study

While many studies have examined the negative impacts of screen time on EFL students' mental and physical health (Jaiswal & Sharma, 2024; Rehman et al., 2024), as well as their academic performance (Miller, 2022), there remains a scarcity of research investigating the direct influence of the various forms of screen time activities on students' academic outcomes. Therefore, the current research aims to address this gap by focusing on two types of screen time activity—non-recreational and recreational—and their effects on Saudi EFL students' academic performance. Previous studies often generalized the impact of screen time without differentiating between non-recreational and recreational media content consumed by students. By concentrating on these two distinct types of screen time activities, this study seeks to provide a nuanced analysis of how each type influences academic performance. It also aims to determine the relationship between screen time activity and academic performance.

1.2. Research Questions

The research was conducted in the context of EFL students at both Qassim and KSAU-HS-HS universities during the 2023-2024 academic year. It offers useful insights into the targeted interventions, specifically by addressing the following research questions:

1. What is the extent of Saudi EFL students' exposure to screen time in non-recreational and recreational screen time activities?
2. What is the level of academic performance of Saudi EFL students?
3. What is the relationship between screen time activity and academic performance among Saudi EFL students?

1.3. Theoretical background

This study is grounded on Burrhus Frederic Skinner's "Behavioral Learning Theory" (1938), which posits that learning is shaped by personal experience. According to Firmansyah and Saepuloh (2022), this theory emphasizes that external stimuli and responses drive learning; thus, it focuses primarily on observable and measurable aspects of human behavior. Baum, Bass and Christiansen (2024) further explain that

actions, rather than internal thoughts or emotions, are the primary subjects for analysis based on this theory.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Screen Time Activity

Given the growing concern about the significant amount of time EFL students spend in front of screens, it is essential to investigate the potential effects of screen time on their academic performance. According to Okika and Agbasi (2015), excessive time spent in front of screens is a contributing factor to students' poor academic performance. Over the last several years, researchers have identified two distinct categories of screen time: non-recreational and recreational (Miller, 2022). In this regard, "non-recreational screen time" refers to the time spent using electronic devices, such as computers, tablets, or phones, to get information or engage in productive activities (Gao et al., 2021). This type of screen time is not considered a form of leisure. According to Narsico and Flores (2023), time spent in front of a screen that is not employed for entertainment may benefit intellectual growth, creative expression, curiosity, and even physical health.

Shih and Huang (2020) argued that EFL students who engage with screens at college and as part of their homework assignments have enhanced proficiency in arithmetic problem-solving, essay writing, scientific research, and cultural understanding. Lei and Zhao (2007), on the other hand, confirmed that EFL students with access to technology for educational purposes tended to exhibit superior academic performance and showed a healthy pursuit of academics. Technology helps EFL students gain a better understanding of abstract concepts, enabling them to recall and apply the knowledge they have acquired to their classroom studies (Merç, 2015). This research aligns with the findings of other studies, such as AlGerafi et al. (2023), which suggest that providing students with access to educational programs, online databases, and virtual reality may enhance their learning abilities and critical thinking capacities.

On the other hand, *recreational screen time activities* refer to leisure time spent by students in front of a screen for non-instructional purposes (Stiglic & Viner, 2019). Using social networking platforms, engaging in cinematic experiences, and immersing oneself in the world of video games are examples of recreational screen time activities (Ahmed, Kausar, & Mohammed, 2023). According to Throuvala et al. (2021), prolonged screen time for recreational purposes is often associated with a sedentary lifestyle. Twenge and Campbell (2018) claimed that a decrease in psychological well-being is correlated with spending excessive time in front of a screen for recreation. Lieber (2024) claimed that recreational screen time might be detrimental to cognitive development. In other words, excessive use of electronic devices for recreational activities has been related to several adverse consequences, including obesity, behavioral problems, academic challenges, sleep disorders, and emotional instability. Accordingly, Stiglic and Viner (2019) recommended that parents should exercise high-level supervision over their children and limit the time their children spend in front of screens for recreational purposes.

2.2. Internal Factors Influencing Students' Academic Performance

2.2.1. Personal Background

Following an explanation of non-recreational and recreational screen time activities,

it is essential to highlight the impact of internal and external factors on students' academic performance. The first factor is the student's personal background. The environment where students learn their principles and values shapes their learning behaviors. It is influential, and students' academic achievement could be impacted. According to Bell, Carl and Swart (2016), a person's history may disclose certain family circumstances, such as learning difficulties and unwillingness to communicate. Alrabai (2016) indicated that EFL students from diverse backgrounds are often ridiculed for their ideas, which may impact their academic outcomes. Lee (2018) also mentioned that Chinese students who experience feelings of pressure to adhere to specific social or cultural standards ultimately experience a decline in their academic performance.

Sirin (2005) noted that the personal background component is a complex and multifaceted aspect that encompasses economic, cultural, and value-based aspects. A further point raised by Reyes et al. (2024) is that personal histories are fluid and alter as a consequence of changes in our living situations. This implies that it is even more challenging to ascertain the precise effect of these circumstances. The fact that external conditions may alter one's personal history makes it more complicated to predict how this will affect one's academic achievement.

2.2.2. Mental Health

In addition to the impact of screen time on a person's thoughts, feelings, and behavior, it also affects individuals' mental health, encompassing their psychological, emotional, and social well-being (Orben & Przybylski, 2019). For instance, Leufstadius, Erlandsson and Eklund (2006) have proposed that mental health has a significant impact on one's daily activities, relationships with others, and academic achievement. Individuals can face challenges in maintaining their mental health, which in turn may hinder their ability to focus and contribute effectively to academic work. When this occurs, individuals are likely to experience issues.

There has been a clear correlation established between poor mental health, which encompasses illnesses such as anxiety, stress, and depression, and decreased academic performance. According to Namaziandost, Behbahani and Naserpour (2024), the stress that EFL students experience in the classroom may exacerbate the deterioration in their mental health, thus making it more difficult for them to focus on their academic endeavors. As concluded by Andrews and Wilding (2004) and Pascoe, Hetrick and Parker (2020), mental health problems are often associated with a decline in academic accomplishment, reduced desire to study, and lower grades than what is acceptable. Furthermore, Eccles et al. (2003) found that youths who suffer from poor mental health are more likely to miss school, participate less actively in extracurricular activities, and have decreased social interactions. This was a recurring phenomenon among youths who were suffering from poor mental health. Indeed, these factors are associated with a decline in the quality of their relationships with others. The inability to cope with academic expectations leads to a decline in academic performance and overall well-being. These factors eventually create a negative feedback loop.

However, even though the influence of mental health on academic achievement is undeniable, accurate assessment of the effect of this influence continues to be complicated. Huggett et al. (2018) explained that the stigma that is often associated with problems related to mental health makes it more challenging to conduct such assessments. This includes the difficulty in having open conversations, which in turn

makes it more challenging to gather trustworthy data. Roderick (2006) stated that it is impossible to quantify mental health succinctly. Adding insult to injury, the stigma attached to it makes data collection on the issue far more challenging. Consequently, evaluating the real influence that a person's mental health has on their academic achievement is a process that is not only difficult but also highly opaque. This is because the relationship between the two is not always clear.

2.3. External Factors Influencing Students' Academic Performance

2.3.1. Housing Environment

Studies have shown that a student's family circumstances significantly influence their academic performance (Christenson, Rounds, & Gorney, 1992; Halawah, 2006; Uwaifo, 2012). A student's home environment can account for up to 25% of their overall academic success. Pascoe et al. (2020) suggested that inadequate living conditions might contribute to increased stress, reduced concentration, and lower motivation, all of which are associated with adverse outcomes in academic performance. Alternatively, Eyraud (2020) emphasized that a home setting that is both secure and appealing may enable EFL students to experience a greater sense of serenity and concentration, ultimately leading to an excellent atmosphere for study and academic success. Housing quality is often determined by a family's financial limitations, thus making it difficult to separate the direct influence of housing on students' academic performance (Kane, Riegg, & Staiger, 2006).

2.3.2. Classroom Environment

It is common for EFL students to encounter academic issues due to difficulties in the classroom, which serves as the primary learning environment. Memari and Gholamshahi (2020) claimed that the classroom atmosphere is influenced by a variety of elements, including the size of the class, the instructor's approach, and the institution's culture. Every component of these influences the dynamics of the classroom instruction. However, Moola (2015) explained that a student's dedication to learning is demonstrated by their regular attendance, as punctuality and preparation are indicators of a favorable attitude towards education. In contrast, chronic absenteeism or tardiness may indicate disengagement, which results in lowering their academic performance.

Humaeroah (2020) claimed that EFL students who avoid disruptive behaviors such as talking out of turn and daydreaming perform better academically. These researchers argued that students' focus in the classroom would enhance the process of learning and help them acquire new information efficiently and effectively. In addition, the adopted learning and teaching strategies by both students and instructors are key to creating an atmosphere that is favorable to them and providing an excellent learning experience. For example, embracing a student-centered learning approach could facilitate effective classroom discussions.

2.3.3. School Environment

To determine the level of academic output, it is essential to consider not only the institution's culture but also the departmental culture. Ghavifekr and Ibrahim (2014) concluded that the performance of school departments affects the process of teaching. Furthermore, Marhamah (2024) indicated that a shortage of academic materials poses a significant challenge to the performance of both teachers and EFL

students. Andrzejewski, Baggett and Askia (2018) also emphasized the importance of implementing anti-bullying, anti-hate, and anti-discrimination programs in educational institutions. Discrimination and bullying are disruptive to the learning process and may have a detrimental influence on academic progress. Indeed, evaluating the impact of the school environment on academic attainment is a complex and subjective task; however, it cannot be argued that a productive, clean, and motivated school environment is not essential to learning success and academic excellence.

2.4. EFL Students' Regular Study Habits

A consistent study routine is one of the most critical factors determining students' academic performance. According to Wani and Ismail (2024), EFL students who maintain regular study habits can better maintain their concentration and remain on track, ultimately leading to improved academic achievement. EFL students who have acquired good study habits are more equipped to perform well on tests and other assessments, which helps them realize their full academic potential (Magulod Jr, 2019). Because of these, EFL students can better retain and grasp the material they are learning. This is because these behaviors boost their capacity to focus and comprehend the subject matter. In addition, Astaneh Kaya and Ekşi (2024) emphasized that Turkish adults of EFL learners with established study habits are more likely to develop a sense of organization and discipline, which helps them remain motivated and productive throughout their academic careers. Li and Hu (2024) studied habits that can be quantified and measured accurately as they are primarily within the control of EFL students. Some factors that indicate a positive effect on students' studying habits, such as the amount of time spent studying, the number of materials reviewed, and the effort put into test preparation, may contribute to students' academic performance. By measuring these variables, EFL students can identify areas for improvement in their study habits and enhance their overall academic performance.

Dedication is a crucial trait that affects academic performance. Gao, Li and Liao (2024) stated that EFL students who demonstrate a firm commitment to their academic endeavors are more likely to devote the time and effort necessary to achieve academic success. Furthermore, Rahiem (2021) highlighted the relevance of a student's capacity to stay focused and motivated in their study despite social and technological hurdles and distractions as a sign of devotion. Kyllonen et al. (2014) indicated that devotion could be assessed through various indicators, such as course completion rates, level of effort exerted, and adherence to deadlines. This kind of devotion and focus supports students in achieving success in their academic pursuits.

2.5. Screen Time and EFL Learners' Performance

The relationship between screen time and the performance of EFL learners has attracted considerable attention in recent years, particularly in light of the growing integration of digital technologies in education (Haleem et al., 2022). Screen time, which encompasses the use of devices such as smartphones, tablets, and computers, presents both advantages and disadvantages for EFL learners in terms of language acquisition and academic achievement.

On the positive side, screen time offers EFL learners access to a wide range of authentic language resources, including videos, podcasts, e-books, and online articles (Procel et al., 2024). These materials provide learners with exposure to real-life language

use, thereby enhancing their English language skills and enabling them to engage with the language in meaningful and contextualized ways. Additionally, digital tools often incorporate interactive features such as quizzes, games, and simulations, which make the learning process more engaging (Clark et al., 2009; Haleem et al., 2022). These elements not only motivate learners but also encourage active participation and reinforce language concepts through repetition and practice.

Moreover, online platforms and social media create opportunities for EFL learners to practice their speaking and writing skills in real-time (Hafour, 2024). Tools such as virtual exchange, language forums, and video conferencing applications like Zoom or Skype enable learners to interact with native speakers and peers, fostering both communicative competence and cultural awareness. Such interactions are invaluable for developing practical language skills and broadening learners' understanding of diverse cultural contexts.

However, excessive screen time can also pose significant challenges (Akulwar-Tajane et al., 2020). It may lead to cognitive overload, where learners are besieged with excessive information, making it difficult to process and retain knowledge. The constant influx of notifications and the tendency to multitask on digital devices can further distract learners, thereby diminishing their ability to focus on language-related tasks (Alamry, 2024). The absence of nonverbal cues and immediate feedback in digital interactions can hinder the development of conversational fluency and pragmatic competence (Qi & Chen, 2025; Tian, Liu, & Wang, 2024). Additionally, the quality of digital content varies widely, and learners may encounter inaccurate or inappropriate materials, which could lead to the reinforcement of incorrect language usage. Therefore, proper guidance and oversight are essential to ensure that learners are exposed to reliable and high-quality resources.

To address these challenges, educators and parents should play a pivotal role in guiding EFL learners to use digital devices effectively. Strategies such as setting limits on screen time, encouraging regular breaks, and promoting a balanced mix of screen-based and traditional learning activities can help mitigate the adverse effects of excessive screen use. Furthermore, selecting age-appropriate, high-quality digital resources and integrating them into a structured learning plan can enhance the effectiveness of screen time in supporting language acquisition. By adopting a balanced and mindful approach, the potential benefits of digital technologies can be maximized while minimizing their drawbacks, ultimately contributing to improved language learning outcomes.

3. Methods

3.1. Research Design

The present study employed a mixed-method approach to collect data. On one hand, it utilized a descriptive-correlational research design with a quantitative approach, as descriptive research provides a comprehensive overview of current affairs, describing variables and examining their relationships (Polk, 2023). Therefore, this design was deemed appropriate for evaluating the relationship between screen time activity and the academic performance of the respondents. On the other hand, this research fits within the qualitative research framework, namely an instrumental case study, since it aims to explore the relationship between media consumption and academic achievement among EFL students. The researchers conducted ten semi-structured

interviews whose questions were designed to establish the relationship between students' screen time activities and their academic performance. The study was conducted at Qassim University and KSAU-HS during the academic year 2023-2024.

3.2. Setting and Participants

The research was conducted at Qassim University and KSAU-HS. Both university environments have a diverse student population suitable for examining the relationship between screen time activity and academic performance. The study focused on EFL students enrolled in various departments and university academic tracks. The respondents included 116 undergraduate EFL students from both universities. The study used convenience sampling considering accessibility for data collection. The population size was 200 EFL students, while the sample size was 116 EFL students aged 18-24 from different departments and academic programs. The margin of error is 5%, the confidence level is 90%, and the response distribution is 50%. With this formula, the sample size was sufficient to produce credible results, as determined by the Raosoft Sample Size Calculator. In addition to the survey, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 EFL undergraduate students for an in-depth analysis of the correlation between students' engagement in screen time activities and their academic achievement.

3.3. Research Instruments

A Likert Scale survey questionnaire was used to collect data on students' screen time activity and academic performance. The instrument was validated by 15 EFL instructors, expert review, and statistical analysis to ensure the validity and reliability of the results. The questionnaire consisted of two parts: Part 1 measured both non-recreational and recreational screen time activity, while Part 2 assessed the level of academic performance. The respondents rated each item on a 5-point Likert Scale, ranging from "strongly agree" (5) to "strongly disagree" (1). The questionnaire underwent pilot testing with 15 respondents from a local institution. Feedback from the pilot study was used to revise questions that were ambiguous or unclear. Statistical analysis verified consistent and accurate responses. These procedures strengthened the accuracy and reliability of the collected data. After receiving the responses, the researchers calculated Cronbach's Alpha to assess the reliability and internal consistency of the survey items.

In the data collection stage, the research objectives were clearly explained to the participants before distributing the survey forms and conducting the interviews. Once the respondents completed the survey, the data were collected, tallied, and tabulated for analysis.

To further understand issues surrounding media consumption and academic achievement in the context of this study, the researchers conducted ten interviews with EFL undergraduate participants. Yin (2009) stated that a careful case study could benefit from employing multiple data sources to ensure that this study was robust. Furthermore, Spolsky (2000) asserts that interviews afford qualitative researchers the "opportunity to explore in conversation and through stories and anecdotes the attitudes, identities, and ideologies of our subjects and to gather reports of language use in various domains and with various members of their social networks" (p. 162). Therefore, this study implemented a semi-structured interview with questions designed to identify the relationships between media consumption and academic achievement.

3.4. Data Analysis

The study employed descriptive statistics, including the weighted mean as well as correlative statistics (Pearson's r) for data analysis. The weighted mean provided an average measure of screen time activity and academic performance, while Pearson's r assessed the strength and direction of the correlation between these variables (Obilor & Amadi, 2018). In addition to the statistical data, the interviews were transcribed by Voice Recorder Version 21.5.42.06. Then, thematic coding was employed to analyze both data (surveys and interviews) in this descriptive study. Braun and Clarke (2006) clarified that this coding enables researchers to identify, analyze, and interpret themes that emerge from the data so that they could use those themes to answer the research questions.

4. Results and Discussion

The findings of the study are presented and discussed according to the research questions as follows:

RQ1: What is the extent of Saudi EFL students' exposure to screen time in non-recreational and recreational screen time activities?

To address this research question, Table 1 shows the level of EFL students' exposure to non-recreational screening activities. The results show that students scored an overall average of 3.55, which is considered "highly exposed." The highest number of responses was for statement No. 1, "I spend time on social media platforms," which obtained a mean value of 3.80. This score is considered "exposed". On the contrary, Statement No. 4, which states, "I browse the internet for non-academic content", shows that the students were fairly exposed.

Table 1: Level of Exposure of EFL Students to Screen Time Activity (Recreational).

Indicators	Mean	Interpretation
1. I spend time on social media platforms.	3.80	Exposed
2. I watch movies or TV shows online.	3.45	Exposed
3. I play video games on my devices.	3.55	Exposed
4. I browse the internet for non-academic content.	3.30	Moderately Exposed
5. I use my gadgets for chatting and messaging with friends.	3.65	Exposed
Overall Mean	3.55	Exposed

LEGEND: 1.0-1.79 (Slightly Exposed/Not at All); 1.8-2.59 (Fairly Exposed); 2.6-3.39 (Moderately Exposed); 3.40-4.19 (Highly Exposed); 4.20-5 (Very Highly Exposed)

The summarized data in Table 1 show a substantial degree of engagement in many leisure activities conducted on screens. To illustrate this point, the EFL students allocated a significant portion of their time to social media sites, as shown by an average score of 3.80. This result indicates substantial involvement of students with these platforms. This finding also highlights the extensive use of social media by EFL students, which is consistent with the observations made by Kim and Kim (2022) regarding the significant influence of social media on EFL students' daily lives and its potential effects on different areas, including academic performance.

Moreover, the EFL students who watch movies or television programs online had an average score of 3.45, placing them in the "exposed" group. They significantly emphasized the use of streaming services as part of their leisure activities. The results of this study are consistent with those of He (2013), which highlighted the considerable

use of online streaming platforms by various student populations.

The fact that EFL students have an overall mean score of 3.55 indicates that they consistently participate in this leisure activity, proving that video gaming is a popular hobby among these students. In an earlier study, the findings of Yücedağ and Çetin (2020) indicate that EFL students often participate in video games as a sort of leisure activity. This behavior may impact the EFL students' social connections and academic achievements.

Furthermore, the EFL students reported their use of the internet for reasons unrelated to their academic pursuits, at an average score of 3.30, indicating "moderate exposure." Even though it is not as frequent as other leisure activities, the results suggest that internet usage for purposes other than academics is widespread. Morales Reyes (2022) also found that EFL students displayed varied degrees of involvement in exploring the internet for non-academic purposes.

Based on the current findings, it can be stated that EFL students typically use their electronic devices to interact with their classmates and send messages (average score of 3.65), indicating a high level of engagement in digital communication. The fact that the overall average score is 3.55 would imply, generally, that they typically engage in activities that involve using screens for leisure purposes. Recent research by Habeb Al-Obaydi, Pikhart and Shakki (2023) shed light on the significant impact of recreational screen time, which encompasses activities such as social networking and entertainment, on the experiences of EFL students. EFL students who participate in leisure activities may experience an influence on their overall well-being as well as their academic performance, as shown by the results of several independent studies.

Table 2: Level of Exposure of EFL Students to Recreational Screen Time Activity.

Indicators	Mean	Interpretation
1. I use technological devices for streaming music.	3.25	Moderately Exposed
2. I frequently play online multiplayer games.	3.32	Moderately Exposed
3. I watch online video content such as vlogs.	3.54	Exposed
4. I engage in social media interactions, like sharing posts and comments.	3.58	Exposed
5. I spend time watching TV series and movies online.	3.41	Exposed
Overall Mean	3.34	Moderately Exposed

Table 2 offers valuable insights into how EFL students engage in recreational screen time activities. It may be concluded that these students are "moderately exposed" to screen time for recreational purposes, as shown by the total weighted mean score of 3.34. Streaming music has a mean value of 3.25 compared to the other activities, indicating moderate exposure. This implies that while streaming music is a prevalent activity, it does not consume most of the students' time using screens for recreational purposes. The average score for playing multiplayer games online is 3.32, indicating a relatively low interest level. EFL students who were "exposed" had a score of 3.54, which indicates that they used online videos. Social media engagement, on the other hand, reached an average of 3.58, indicating a significant level of involvement. This situation occurs relatively often. These high levels of exposure, as stated by Alshabeb and Almaqrn (2018), are evidence of the significance of social media in the day-to-day lives of EFL students.

An additional point for consideration is that the average score for online-streamed movies and television programs is 3.41, indicating a significant amount of publicity they receive. According to Habeb Al-Obaydi et al. (2023), online-streaming services

represent an essential component of the leisure activities enjoyed by EFL students. Although the participants engage in various screen-based recreational activities within this study, the majority of their time is devoted to streaming services, social networking, and online videos. This underscores the extent to which digital media infiltrates the leisure time of EFL students.

RQ2: What is the level of academic performance of Saudi EFL students?

Table 3: Level of Academic Performance of EFL Students.

Indicators	Mean	Interpretation
1. I often complete my homework before the due date.	3.29	Moderately
2. I actively participate in in-group discussions.	3.51	Productive
3. I regularly review my notes after class.	3.38	Productive
4. I consistently meet deadlines for all assignments.	3.42	Moderately Productive
5. I engage in extra reading related to my courses.	3.40	Productive
6. I put in extra effort for challenging subjects.	3.66	Productive
7. I effectively manage my time for studying and other tasks.	3.53	Productive
8. I sometimes find it difficult to balance academic work with other activities.	3.30	Productive
9. I seek help from teachers when I do not understand the material.	3.57	Productive
10. I actively participate in academic enrichment programs.	3.25	Moderately Productive
Overall Mean	3.45	Productive

Table 3 summarizes EFL students' academic performance across different indicators. Based on the overall weighted mean of 3.45, EFL students exhibited a satisfactory level of performance in their academic pursuits. With a mean score of 3.73, the "I listen actively to every discussion" indicator demonstrates that EFL students are actively engaged during class discussions. Active participation in the classroom is necessary for absorbing and retaining the information presented in the instructional setting. The statement "I exert more effort when I do performance tasks" obtained an average score of 3.67, indicating that EFL students put significant effort into their performance tasks, which positively affects their overall performance. This demonstrates that EFL students are more productive overall.

An important point that needs to be raised is the fact that there are some areas that students are likely to find challenging. For instance, the statement "I can easily complete academic tasks at school" had an average score of 3.21. However, the statement "I always finish my assignments at home" received a score of 3.34, which is somewhat higher than the average score in the previous statement. Based on the results, it can be concluded that EFL students, on average, complete the allocated tasks. On the other hand, they sometimes struggle to fulfil deadlines and maintain a healthy balance between their academic burden and other commitments.

The results are consistent with recent findings reported by Rajabalee, Santally and Rennie (2020), which indicate that academic achievement is closely correlated with active engagement and higher effort in performance tasks. Although EFL students demonstrate productive habits, they struggle to effectively manage their workload and maintain a consistently high level of performance throughout a wide range of activities. Typically, they exhibit a resolute commitment and unwavering dedication to their academic endeavors. Nevertheless, there is room for enhancement in meeting deadlines and efficiently managing their academic workload. Enhancing these aspects holds the promise of strengthening academic performance.

RQ3: What is the relationship between screen time activity and academic performance among Saudi EFL students?

Table 4: Correlation between Screen time Activity and Academic Performance of EFL Students.

Screen time Activity	r	Description
1. Non-recreational screen time activity	0.53	Moderate Positive Relationship
2. Recreational screen time activity	-0.03	Weak Negative Relationship

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The data shown in Table 4 provides substantial insights into the association between various forms of screen time activities and the academic output of undergraduate EFL students. There is a somewhat positive connection ($r = 0.53$) between academic performance and activities that do not include spending time in front of a computer for recreational purposes. These activities involve utilizing technology for academic assignments and viewing instructional films. Accordingly, EFL students who devote more of their screen time to educational activities tend to exhibit better levels of academic production. Leisure screen time, such as time spent on social media, online gaming, and non-instructional content, is not statistically significant ($r = -0.12$). This suggests a minor negative association between the time spent for relaxing in front of a screen and academic performance.

The consensus among all ten interviewees in this study was that their media consumption was associated with academic achievement, although they had individual differences. While some used it as a facilitator for academic materials, others engaged with it to gain exposure to English materials, practice their English with native English speakers, and interact with others in the same field and beyond their boundaries. For instance, Btn stated, “Watching YouTube educational channels helps me learn difficult topics in school” (Interview, 2024). Using media during breaks is a good strategy for recharging students’ energy. Suhib mentioned that using media, e.g., “watching recreational videos helped him release anxiety” (Interview, 2024). In addition, all interview participants admitted that social media helps them improve their English language skills, especially communicative language skills (Al-Ahdal & Aljafen, 2023). They use programs/platforms such as Duolingo, Flora, and Cambly to communicate with high-proficiency language users. This provides a vivid picture that screen time activities, whether recreational or non-recreational, have a significant influence and a strong relationship with academic performance.

On the other hand, some interviewees warned about the excessive use of media that could negatively affect their academic achievement. One often-cited perspective is that the media serves as a distraction that may hinder students’ academic success. In the interview, Jan stated that 80% of her media use is harmful because it is distracting. She believes that students can easily go astray from their academic focus. Bti is another participant who confirmed this when asked about managing time between using media and studying: “Yeah, media has distractions. Social media, for example, you scroll from one video to another, wasting your time” (Interview, 2024). Indeed, the interviewees seemed to be aware of the double-edged sword of utilizing media. In other words, they all agreed that effective time management and prudent use of media would foster a positive relationship between screen time and academic achievement.

5. Conclusion

This study examined the correlation between screen time and the academic performance of Saudi EFL learners. The research found no statistically or qualitatively significant association between academic achievement and non-recreational screen time activities like academic technology. The study participants confirmed that engaging in screen-based activities beyond entertainment might increase academic performance. However, it is essential to note that the overall impact is statistically insignificant. Based on the findings, the utilization of social media and online gaming did not have any significant impact on students' academic performance. Based on the current findings, this study concludes that screen time, whether recreational or non-recreational, may help students to be equipped with new tools that facilitate learning academic content and language skills.

5.1. Recommendations

EFL students should allocate a fixed duration for constructive activities, such as interacting with educational apps and conducting research. By adopting this approach, they can enhance their learning experience while prioritizing their overall holistic well-being. Furthermore, educators are advised to assist students in achieving a harmonious equilibrium with technology and provide appropriate resources. Indeed, students should prioritize education and non-recreational screen time activities and limit their recreational use of media. Another recommendation for the community and educational institutions is to standardize technology usage in educational institutions. Lastly, further research is needed to understand the impact of technology on EFL students' learning. Future research may replicate this study among a larger sample to improve reliability and generalizability.

5.2. Limitations

The study does not consider gender as a factor affecting students' screen time usage. Additionally, a larger sample in the qualitative data collection stage may yield a different set of findings.

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Not Applicable.

Author Contributions

Arif Ahmed Mohammed Hassan Al-Ahdal designed the study, conducted quantitative data collection and analysis, and drafted the literature review. Abdulelah Alkhateeb created the qualitative instrument and conducted five interviews with the research participants. He also contributed to the literature review and data transcription and interpretation. He contributed to the study design and revised the manuscript for critical intellectual content. He also conducted five interviews with female research participants and revised the manuscript and improved the quality of the paper.

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Availability of Data and Materials

The original contributions presented in this study are included in the article/supplementary material; further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Declarations

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

Ethical guidelines were followed by the research team when administering the questionnaire and conducting interviews. Before collecting data, ethical approval was obtained from King Saud bin Abdulaziz University for Health Sciences Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure all procedures respected participants' rights and privacy. The participants were reached out in person and provided a clear description of the study at the beginning of the questionnaire and interviews. They were informed about all aspects of the study and assured of the protection of the data as well, and that they could discontinue their participation at any time without any penalties. Their participation in the research study titled "*The Influence of Media Consumption on Academic Achievement Among EFL Students in Saudi Universities*" was totally voluntary. Data collected were used exclusively for research purposes. Strict measures were implemented to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of all responses.

Competing Interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

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