

# Exploring a Literacy Development in Young Korean ELLs with Online E-books

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**Abstract**—The purpose of this study is to explore ELL students' improvement of reading comprehension and vocabulary after using online animated e-books, and to investigate the change of students' attitudes and interests in the use of e-books. Total 78 Korean elementary ELL students participated in this study for 12 weeks of instruction, and online animated e-books were provided as a main reading material in an after-school reading class. To assess the change of students' reading comprehension and vocabulary, pre- and post-tests were conducted with 25 questions. Also, a pre- and post-survey, and students' written comments were used in order to measure the changes of affective factors. The major findings of this study can be summarized as follows: 1) to use online animated e-books in the class improved students' reading and vocabulary ability, 2) the affective factors such as motivation and interest on further reading have increased. This study suggests that to make use of an e-book in an EFL reading class, or to teach English with an e-based material can be of benefit to enhance interest and motivation of ELL learners.

**Index Terms**—literacy development, reading education, e-book, teaching vocabulary

## I. INTRODUCTION

The current trends in teaching English to young learners in an ESL/EFL situation have placed an emphasis on learning English for a communicative purpose. And much research has already revealed that most of the ELL learners can expand to productive use of language which includes speaking and writing after starting with receptive understanding of the new information (Ashworth & Wakefield, 2004; Cappellini, 2005; Parker & Paradini, 2006). In this regard, reading competence to ELL learners is considered to be one of the most important skills to acquire, and how to teach reading to ELLs can be the first step in order for them to achieve the ultimate goal of acquiring communicative skills in the process of learning English. According to Nutall (1996), one of the best ways to learn English, other than living among its speakers, is reading a lot in it, and that reading is the most important factor in language learning (Grabe, 1991; Grabe & Stoller, 2002). DEST (2005) stressed that "the development of reading serves the major foundational academic ability for language learning". In the end, the opportunities for academic success in learning a foreign language are limited without the ability to read. However, despite this recognition of the importance of reading, reading itself has been regarded as a boring process and task to elementary ELL students in Korea. Although there is a need for teaching various reading skills and strategies using multiple reading resources in order for ELL learners to develop their reading abilities, to teach reading still concentrates on acquiring merely linguistic competence and most of reading materials used in the English class are based on the paper-based textbooks.

Therefore, the majority of English teachers and ELL students have agreed that there must be another way of teaching and learning reading with multiple authentic reading materials, such as English newspapers, online stories and cartoons based on the Internet. This is probably because they think that, unlike the textbooks, the materials are flexible, interesting, and entertaining. Teachers also agree that for effective reading, learners need to be actively involved in an interesting and entertaining way in the reading process (Cromley & Azevedo, 2007; Nation & Angell, 2006; Snow, 1991; Stauffer, 1970).

Taking this into account, this paper is designed to examine elementary school students' response who are beginning to learn English as a foreign language. Based on the previous researches on the reading effect using the Internet stories, this study explores an effect of an e-book reading. The primary purpose of this study is to ascertain that an e-book reading contributes to leading to comprehension of the given texts and the vocabulary increase. The second purpose is to survey the extent an e-book reading can influence on ELLs' affective factors, like motivation and attitude toward reading and English learning.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Importance of Reading

It has been perceived as a fact that when electronic devices like computers, or DVDs were not in existence, reading was a premier spare time activity. Many of the people would spend hours reading books and feel excited and thrilled, or happy and sad. With passion and interest in reading, it offers a productive approach to improving vocabulary and word

power (Coiro, 2011; Fry & Kress, 2006; Hiebert, 2005; Lapp, et al., 2008). It is well-known that to indulge in at least half an hour of reading per day will keep the reader abreast of the various styles of writing and new vocabulary.

It is examined by many researchers that children with an interest in reading have, comparatively, both a higher intelligence quotient (IQ) and a higher emotional quotient (EQ). Teale (1984) reported that young children are more creative and do better in school, so that it is recommended that parents need to inculcate the importance of reading to their children in the early years. Reading is said to be remarkable in assisting in the development of vocabulary, and reading-aloud techniques help to build a strong emotional bond between parents and children. Besides, this fact is observed that children who start reading from an early age have good language skills, and they grasp the variances in phonics for better (Harrison, 2004; McKeown & Beck, 2006).

When it comes to mental development, reading is known to stimulate the muscles of the eyes. According to Cain & Oakhill (2004), reading is an activity that involves greater levels of concentration and adds to the conversational skills of the reader. It is an indulgence that consistently enhances the knowledge acquired. The habit of reading also makes it possible for readers to decipher new words and unknown phrases which they may come across either in books or conversations in daily life. The habit can become a healthy addiction and adds to the information available on various topics. It helps us to stay in-touch with contemporary writers as well as those from the past, and makes us sensitive to global up-to-date issues.

### *B. The Change of Reading*

The major stream in an English teaching method for the last couple of decades was GTM (Grammar-Translation Method). What is accounted for this method is, as Brown (2001) indicated, that “focus on grammatical rules, memorization of vocabulary and of various declensions and conjugations, translation of texts, and doing written exercises” (p. 18). In fact, students’ English ability was measured either by his or her knowledge of vocabulary or by the ability of analyzing and translating sentences. However, as the importance of communicative competence has been on the rise since the 1970’s, approaches and methods in language teaching have been changed, apart from grammar-translation method, or one of the traditional learning approaches. Instead, communicative language teaching and cognitive psychology were watched with deep concern. It had been emphasized that the alternatives were of distinguished feature; the focus on teaching, for example, has turned from being teacher-centered into student-centered, and process-centered rather than product-centered (Bowyer-Crane & Snowling, 2005). This new phenomenon finally ended up affecting English language teaching. Later, it was also applied to actual reading class; that is, a reading class was naturally focused on text-based into reader-based. Students were encouraged not only to understand the simple texts, but also to analyze and evaluate the given information (Roe, et al., 2011; Stein, 2008; Teale, 1984). Furthermore, they were even taught strategies to help themselves become strategic readers with diverse opportunities presented in the classroom.

Consequently, reading has turned its view from a simple process only to grasp the given texts, to a more complex and diversified one (Anderson, et al., 2006). Readers are now required to construct a meaning from a written text, starting simply from that it is something we do with books and other materials printed or published online. Also, reading is not only to figure out the meaning of vocabulary, understand the grammatical rules and translate perfectly into L1, but it is also to seize the general meaning with given information in the text (Cha, 2004, pp. 83). In other words, reading ought to place focus on synthetic comprehension of the given texts, aside from understanding the single glossary.

### *C. Characteristics of an E-book*

Recently, as the tremendous growth on the information and communication technology has held up with the Internet, the new terminology in reading comes into being; that is ‘e-book’, or ‘eBook’ (electronic book), beyond the whole concept of traditional printed books so that it adds a few remarkable concepts as well as the existing definitions of traditional counterpart. Cambridge advanced learner’s dictionary 3rd edition (2008) defines an e-book as, “a book that is published in electronic form, for example, on the Internet or on a disk, and not printed on paper, and an e-book reader or player is a small electronic device with a screen which allows people to read an electronic book, perform searches, add notes.” In other words, an e-book is a digital format text file which displays on an e-book reader, electronic device or computer. The term, “e-book”, also may include such concepts as a text in digital form; a book converted into digital form; digital reading material; a book in a computer file format; or an electronic file of words and images to be displayed on a computer screen (Leu et al., 2007; Wallace, 2004). Besides, an e-book is immediately read on a computer over a network, or viewed on a desktop, notebook and dedicated portable devices after downloading, read on all types of computers, or formatted for display on an e-book reader (Rao, 2001). In summary, the definition of an e-book is simply to be considered as follows:

- 1) it is published and downloaded through the Internet.
- 2) it is viewed on the screens of diversified portable electronic devices (e.g. Smartphones & Tablet PCs, BlackBerry Play Books, Galaxy Tab, Kindle, etc. as well as desktops or laptops with digital contents downloaded from the Internet)
- 3) it is instantly purchased with no shipping costs and no waiting.

### *D. Pedagogical Application of an E-book*

Unlike traditional printed books, e-books have more advantages in educational application. Due to the multimedia linkage, an animated e-book can also make the learning environment easier and funnier (Walsh, 2007). There are four major pedagogical benefits with an e-book. In terms of an animated e-book, the first one considered is the music sound and effect, which people of all ages listen to. It was revealed that reading with a sound, or with background music can encourage readers to be more involved in reading (Kiger, 1989), and this is related to a suggestopedia that Lozanov (1978) had first proposed. He explained that "There is no sector of public life where suggestology would not be useful" (Lozanov & Gateva, 1988). As a matter of fact, the concept of applying suggestopedia proves that the readers of early ages especially tend to get very involved and remain undistracted during the reading process. This is because music, as Lozanov mentioned, can be an assistant tool for readers, who in particular, are of a young age. They can focus on what they are reading and facilitate learning in natural atmosphere. There cannot, therefore, be any doubt that these sound effects or music may contribute to the pleasure of reading, in comparison with printed books.

Secondly, as mentioned earlier, an e-book is simply based on the Internet, which is very suggestive of using multiple electronic devices. In accordance with their efficiency and performance, for example, the resolution of the monitors, or how many picture elements, shortly called 'pixels' are composed of might provide readers with enormously splendid graphics as well as clear images through the screen that could never have been imagined in traditional paper book (Coyne et al, 2004). In the same manner, with suggestopedia, as stated above, it is definitely clear that this does apply to children of early ages in terms of motivation, which is followed by triggering their interest and zest for reading activity.

And thirdly, due to the development of information technology, one remarkable benefit an e-book holds is its portability that makes it possible for readers to enjoy the pleasure of reading at any place or at any time, in spite of the unsolved problems.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### A. Research Questions

This study is designed to examine students' improvement of reading ability and vocabulary after using online automated e-books in the English language classroom, and to investigate the change of students' attitudes and interests in the use of e-books. Therefore, the main research questions to be investigated are as follows:

1. In which ways does to use an e-book in EFL classroom contribute to improving students' reading comprehension and increasing vocabulary?
2. By reading an e-book, is there any changes in students' attitude and interest toward further reading and general English learning?

#### B. Research Subjects

This experiment was conducted to a treatment group without any control group. The total participants of this study were 78 ELL students from fifth grade classes in a public elementary school located in Eastern Gangwon province, South Korea. They were consisted of 40 male (51%) and 38 female (49%). Clustering sampling was used for selecting participants, which refers to a sampling method that has the following properties - the population is divided into N groups called clusters and the researcher randomly selects  $n$  clusters to include in the sample (Freeman et al, 2007). All of the students voluntarily took English reading class, as after-school program, and the research was carried out from May to July, 2010. The reason of selecting the fifth grade ELL students for this research was because students at this developmental stage basically learn and develop both basic computer literacy skills, and English reading skills as ELLs.

#### C. Research Instruments

In this present study, five instruments were used: a background survey, a reading comprehension test, a vocabulary test, a e-book survey and a student's written comment. A background survey was distributed in order to collect participants' basic information about English learning backgrounds and an e-book reading experience. And to find the development of the students' reading comprehension and vocabulary, pre- and post-tests were conducted. Besides, to investigate the change of the students' general thinking and attitude toward reading an e-book, two surveys were administered before and after the class. Plus, all the students were encouraged to write a comment or thought about reading e-books after the whole research period was over.

#### D. Research Procedure

After-school English reading program was carried out for forty minutes twice per week for twelve weeks. In the first step, after setting up the theme of the research, the researcher found related references and previous studies, established research questions and planned the lessons using an e-book. In the second step, a website for an e-book reading (<http://www.starfall.com>) was chosen for the research and for the sake of students' appropriate level and interest. In the third step, the researcher taught a reading class based on the readings from [www.starfall.com](http://www.starfall.com). To examine students' development and improvement in reading comprehension and vocabulary, two tests were conducted as a pre- and post-test. In addition to such tests, two survey were administered to figure out the change of the students' attitude and interest on e-books. In the final step, students wrote their thinking about a reading class using an e-book. After that, the research questions were verified and the results and conclusion were drawn.

### E. Data Analysis

In this present study, collected materials consisted of quantitative and qualitative data, so the data analysis for these two was conducted separately. First, the results from the survey were collected and every student's character, interest and attitude toward studying English were described. The students' comments about an e-book reading were also gathered in order to verify students' opinions about the use of an e-book reading more in depth. After finishing the whole class, the questionnaire was also analyzed to see the differences of before and after the class. Second, to find out whether reading an e-book affects the improvement of overall reading comprehension and vocabulary increase, T-test using IBM SPSS (version 19) was used.

## IV. RESEARCH FINDINGS

### A. Results of Background Survey

The results of the personal background survey show that first, with regard to previous English learning backgrounds, the average amount time of English study was 4.5 years, and only 13% of the total participants have experienced in staying in English speaking countries. Regarding the most common reading practices outside the classroom, 74% answered that they have been more familiar with paper-based materials, but 88% of all responded that they have experienced to use online reading materials before which they felt were helpful for learning English and gaining interest. And it was learners' interest and curiosity that led the majority of students to try reading online reading materials.

Second, with regard to experiencing an e-book, all participants had access to the Internet at both home and school. 95% the students mentioned that they knew what e-books are. In addition, nearly a half of them (49%) reported that they habitually kept using an e-book in the reading time. For the question about preference of additional learning resources from the teacher, 64% of participants preferred animated e-books to a plain paper textbook. Also, more than half of all participants (52%) anticipated that to use an e-book in English reading class would be useful for improving their English. Overall, the participants were accustomed to using e-books and had preference of using them to their counterpart, particularly on additional English learning outside the classroom. In addition, they showed high degree of expectation on the learning effects of using e-books in their English studying.

### B. Results of Pre-and Post-reading Comprehension & Vocabulary Test

There was a positive difference between the results of the pre- and post-reading comprehension and vocabulary tests. Total 25 multiple questions from e-books students read in the class were adapted and modified by the researcher. As can be seen at Table 1, the mean score of the reading comprehension test was improved as nearly five points, from 75.70 to 80.22.

TABLE 1  
RESULTS OF PRE- AND POST-READING COMPREHENSION TEST

Reading	N	Mean	t	p
Pre-test	78	75.70	1.965	0.85
Post-test	78	80.22		

Plus, pre-and post-vocabulary tests were conducted to monitor the vocabulary improvement. In total, 30 words (half in the main texts and half in other source) were selected to take a test to measure how much the vocabulary had been enriched at the end of the study. Table 2 shows the mean score of the two vocabulary tests.

TABLE 2  
RESULTS OF PRE- AND POST-READING VOCABULARY TEST

Reading	N	Mean	t	p
Pre-test	78	73.05	-1.895	0.160
Post-test	78	77.40		

As the result indicated above, there was an evidence for the efficacy of an e-book reading instruction. With the increase of the mean score, this result can be deducted that using an e-book with a program-external glossary led to the increase in vocabulary. And it is clear that an increased vocabulary not only improved overall academic aptitude, reading comprehension, critical thinking and problem solving skills, but also triggered students' imagination and exposed them to new experiences and concepts.

### C. Results of E-book Survey

Regarding the use of an e-book, twenty five items on the survey questionnaire were asked using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 'strongly agree (5)' to 'strongly disagree (1)'. Descriptive statistics for the questionnaire is presented in Table 3 below. The mean scores of all parameters were ranging from 4.01 to 4.21, indicating that the students were satisfied with using online animated e-books in the reading class.

TABLE 3  
MEAN SCORES OF EACH PARAMETER

Item	Parameters	Mean	SD
1	Features of e-book	4.02	.81
2	Promoting motivation by e-book	4.05	.88
3	Learning effectiveness with e-book	4.02	.80
4	Attitude change after e-book reading	4.12	.78

Tables from 4 to 7 present the results of satisfaction survey analyzed by mean scores and standard deviations of responses for each item based on the four parameters: 1) features of e-book, 2) promoting motivation by e-book, 3) learning effectiveness with e-book, and 4) attitude change after e-book reading.

TABLE 4  
PARAMETER 1- FEATURES OF E-BOOK

Item	Parameters	Mean	SD
1	It is easy and fun to use an e-book in learning English.	4.26	0.75
2	It is great to be able to access the e-book site anytime, regardless of time and space.	4.12	0.78
3	It is convenient to buy or to download e-books for learning English.	3.77	1.02
4	It is helpful to repeat the reading activity depending on the needs.	4.00	0.81
5	It is useful to practice language skills(reading, listening, speaking)	3.90	0.98
6	It motivates learners by providing graphics and sounds.	4.11	0.76

As shown as Table 4 above, Parameter 1 inquired about opinion about the platform of an e-book, and obtained considerably high mean scores, ranging from 3.77 to 4.26. Particularly, an item number 1, "It is easy and fun to use an e-book in learning English." obtained a high mean score of 4.26. In the other hand, item number 3, "it is convenient to buy or to download e-books for learning English," obtained the lowest mean score of 3.77.

TABLE 5  
PARAMETER 2 – PROMOTING MOTIVATION BY E-BOOK

Item	Parameters	Mean	SD
7	It is possible to choose e-books based on each proficiency level.	4.21	0.65
8	It is fun to do activities using drag and drop function.	4.00	0.79
9	High graphic and music sound make e-book reading more pleasant.	4.07	0.66
10	Listening activities using e-books are helpful for learning English.	4.10	0.86
11	Speaking activities using e-books are helpful for learning English.	3.90	0.70
12	Reading activities using e-books are helpful for learning English.	4.11	0.81
13	Vocabulary activities using e-books are helpful for learning English.	4.02	0.89

Above Table 5 shows that Parameter 2, "promoting motivation by e-book" also gained reasonably high mean scores ranging from 3.90 to 4.21. In particular, the mean score of question No. 7 was 4.21, suggesting that in choosing an e-book, students had an option to select a appropriate book based on each proficiency level. And they were highly satisfied with the multimedia features on e-books which included sound, TTS, drag & drop activity and so on. Specifically, the tasks types that students thought were helpful for their learning English were listening (4.10) and vocabulary practice (4.02) .

TABLE 6  
PARAMETER 3- LEARNING EFFECTIVENESS WITH E-BOOK

Item	Parameters	Mean	SD
14	I like the instant feedback and answer from the online activities.	4.06	0.66
15	I can control my learning process by simply clicking.	4.13	0.81
16	I gain self-confidence in learning English by using e-books.	4.07	0.78
17	I think e-books help me to broaden creative and critical thinking.	3.89	0.92
18	I can practice not only reading and wring but also listening and speaking with e-books.	4.00	0.79
19	I think to use e-books boost my English learning.	3.98	0.89

As displayed in Table 6, Parameter 3, "learning effectiveness with e-book" obtained high mean scores ranging from 3.89 to 4.13, indicating that the students felt to use an e-book was effective to improve their English skills and to gain self-confidence in studying English. Especially, it was revealed that the participants were highly satisfied with self-controlled study which obtained mean score of 4.13, and with repeated practice of a learner (4.01).

TABLE 7  
PARAMETER 4 – ATTITUDE CHANGE AFTER E-BOOK READING

Item	Parameters	Mean	SD
20	I think it is interesting and pleasant to study English using e-books.	4.25	0.65
21	I think to use e-books in English learning promotes interest.	4.22	0.64
22	I feel more confident in English after using e-books.	4.13	0.81
23	I want to read more e-books for further study.	3.84	0.89
24	I think e-books motivate my overall English learning.	4.30	0.79
25	I want to recommend friends to use e-books for their self-study.	4.02	0.72

According to Table 7, Parameter 4, “attitude change after e-book reading” gained high mean scores 3.84 to 4.25. Specifically, an item number 20, statement of “I like using e-books for learning English more than using the paper textbook,” got mean score 4.25, indicating the students highly preferred using online e-books to paper based materials. Also, an item number 21, “I think to use e-books in English learning promotes interest,” obtained mean score of 4.22, and showed that students had highly a positive attitude about using e-books for their English learning.

#### D. Results of Students' Written Comments

The students' common opinions which were responded by at least more than ten students for each question were categorized as following. First, for the parts of an e-book which they liked most regarding learning English, the most frequent response (58 of frequency) was that learning through an e-book was more interesting and fun than learning through paper based materials. The reason of this can be deducted from the fact that they could use multimedia resources in an e-book for their English learning, which was not available in the form of a paper book. The second (51 of frequency) most frequent response was that to use an e-book was more convenience than to do a paper book. This is in accordance with the positive responses for the statement of the satisfaction survey that using an e-book is helpful for English learning because it has no limitation of time and space. The third (43 of frequency) most frequent opinion was that to use an e-book helped them improve their English skills, which is consisted with the result that 62 of 78 students got higher score in the post-test than in the pre-test. The fourth (34 of frequency) and fifth (29 of frequency) most common thoughts were that they could get control their learning progress by going back and forth. Due to the multimedia feature, it was also possible for them to repeat reading activities based on their needs. The sixth (23 of frequency) most frequent answer was that the background music and sound effect in an e-book were very interesting and helpful to trigger their pleasant reading. This showed their preference of learning through multimedia, especially songs that had rarely been possible to use for their self-study in offline learning environment. The last (12 of frequency) most frequent opinion was that the amount of time for studying English has been increased. A comment from student A presented below describes how well an e-book worked in students' reading class.

*I think I gained more interested in English and its learning because of e-books. Because there are a lot of interesting contents to do in e-books, I wanted to read more and to use more frequently. And I became to like to study English and have more interest, and it's just like playing a game (Dahyun<sup>1</sup>, July 2010).*

In conclusion, it was revealed that the students thought using online e-books for learning English was convenient and interesting. They also presented that to read e-books helped them improve their English skills in terms of reading comprehension and vocabulary enhancement. In addition, it was found that the students had positive attitudes about the features of an e-book, and such remarkable functions encouraged them to have a sense of pleasure in learning.

#### V. CONCLUSIONS

The summarized results of the present study and discussion for each result are as following. First, in order to find out whether reading an animated e-book affects on the improvement of the participants' reading comprehension and vocabulary, the mean scores of the pre- and the post-tests were compared. As a result, the participants' mean score of reading and vocabulary test had been enhanced. The reason for the improvement of their reading comprehension and vocabulary is regarded that the students were able to have more opportunities to get involved in an online reading activity. However, the experimental instruction had carried out for ten weeks and it was rather short for the participants to get sufficient opportunity to practice English and to show meaningfully higher degree of improvement in their general English proficiency test.

And for the purpose of investigating the degree of participants' satisfaction of reading an e-book, an e-book pre- and post-survey and students' written comments were employed. The results of two survey explain that the participants were highly satisfied with using an e-book, showing the mean score of over 4 out of 5, especially in that an e-book helped them improve their English skills of reading and vocabulary, which was also supported by the students' responses in written comments. In written comments, what the students liked most of an e-book was fun, and students thought the effectiveness of using an e-book to motivate them to participate actively in English learning through an e-book.

Overall, the results of the e-book survey and the students' written comments indicate that the main characteristics of an e-book, that is, flexibility in access and use of multimedia, motivated the students to enjoy reading and studying English, and therefore, promoted interest and desire for further study and reading.

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<sup>1</sup> A pseudonym is used to protect a participant' identity.

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