

USE OF AN E-BOOK: ENHANCING READING PERFORMANCE WITH EFL LEARNERS

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***Abstract:** The purpose of this study is to investigate the grammatical changes in reading performance over time. In this e-book-based study, 13 high school students were given twelve weeks of instruction and provided with online e-book reading materials. To assess students' grammatical changes in reading performance over time, an online book report was employed, and post-reading activities were conducted in class which included group discussion, short report-writing, or re-telling. The result showed that grammatical changes in reading performance have been identified in that students were able to write in more detail about their thoughts and to fully express the summary, plot and the story as well as to describe the books' characters, places and events successfully. This study proves that an e-book reading or teaching English with an e-book can be of benefit to EFL learners.*

***Key Words:** e-book, reading comprehension, curriculum, EFL context, reading course*

Introduction

We are living in the world of 'ubiquitous', which makes it possible to share information through the medium of a network. A survey in 2008 by the National Internet Development Agency (NIDA, 2008) reports that presently, all aspects of Korean society are dictated by the Internet, with 70% (31 million) of the nation's total population using the Internet and 12 million households connected via broadband Internet. With this development of information technology and the wide spread of the Internet, the volume of digital information has been increasing. According to recent research, more than 93% of new information produced is being created in digital format (Johnson & Christie, 2009). Due to this increasing volume of digital contents, there is a growing interest in an electronic book. Gates, et al (1996) predicted in their book, 'The Road Ahead' that by the end of the decade, a significant percentage of documents, even in offices, would not be fully printable on paper. The use of an e-book can be regarded as more efficient than paper-based books from the various perspectives such as storage, transfer, delivery, and accessibility (Gibbons, 2001; Grudzien & Casey, 2008; Rossman, 2005).

Therefore, it can be no longer such a big surprise to see people reading e-books through PDA (personal digital assistant) or via mobile phones even in the running subway. And with diverse functions of multimedia and hypertext links, an e-book enables readers to view video clips, listen

to sound and narrations, or jump to the Web simply by selecting a link (Diez, et al, 2009; Gielen, 2011; Hodges et al, 2010; Landoni & Gillian, 2007).

Taking this into account, this paper is designed to investigate Korean EFL high school students' responses, who are learning English as a foreign language. Based on the previous research on the reading effect using the Internet stories (Beame, 2005; Damton, 2007; Hawkins, 2000), and in an attempt to study how EFL learners read on the Web, this study explores an effect of an e-book reading in a Web-based project. The primary purpose of this study is to ascertain whether there are any grammatical changes in reading performance over time.

The Role of E-Book in Education

Recently, as the tremendous growth on the ICT (information communication technology) fields 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.

E-Book

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, 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 (Binder, 2008; Sangani, 2009). 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. smartphone (PDA, P2P, Blackberry, Palm OS, Tablet PCs and 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.

E-Book Reader

In order to use an e-book, electronic devices must follow which are called 'e-book readers, viewers or players'. A device used to display e-books includes powerful electronic features that offer a reading experience beyond that of a traditional book (Larson, 2010). Readers can turn pages and change the text orientation just by clicking or pushing a button. And by simply touching the screen, it is possible to enlarge the text size, bookmark pages, highlight passages, make notes, and search for key words and hyperlink to other parts of the book.

Methodology

Participants

The study was conducted at a public secondary school in Eastern Kangwon, South Korea, with focus on students of learning English as a foreign language. The participants were total 8 eleventh graders, all 18 years old, and one English instructor, 30 years old who was a native speaker of Korean. The experiment using e-books was conducted in after school English program for 12 weeks.

Instrument

Online book report was chosen in order to figure out the change of students' writing performance because it was truly an expression of the reader's opinion of the story, or of specific aspects of the book. It has been reported by many researchers that writing a book report helps students to practice giving their opinion about different aspects of a book, such as the author's use of description or dialogue. Moreover, with a book report, it was possible to figure out how many books they read during the whole research process, and how many levels they moved into.

Research Process

For their first encounter with e-books, students were told to take a look at some stories from the 'Story Time for me' (<http://storytimeforme.com>). In the next class, they discussed the stories they liked focusing on a story's message and interesting aspects. Then, they discussed how to write online book report. Afterwards, they were directed to check out class website to upload their writing work individually at home. In case they had any questions, they were encouraged to turn to their instructor or the researcher for help. The students preferred to use flash-based animated e-books because it provided them with animation, sound, music and graphic.

Data Analysis

A teaching schedule was kept following the action plan and students' attitudes were carefully observed with the online book report. The result of reading performance over time has also been examined and students' works including writing activities such as a re-telling in class were qualitatively examined and assessed to measure how much they had improved throughout the research sessions.

Findings

Online book report contained a factual summary of the book along with each student's reaction to the book. Book report made it clear that they have read the entire book, including basic information about the book (title, author, etc.), summary, and reader's reaction. To see grammatical changes in reading performance over time, as reading an e-book, participants thought about what they wanted to include in a book report and uploaded it. They were given an online sample book report and wrote their own one after each class.

Consequently, students showed an improvement in a spontaneous writing format which included capitalization, punctuation, spelling, vocabulary, syntax, and grammar. Next table 1 is a sample

writing of one participant, ‘Won-Pyeong’ (pseuonym) and it was written during the first week of this study.

Table: 1

A Sample Writing by Won-Pyeong (1)

| | |
|--|-----------------------|
| <p>Title : Goldilock and the three bears</p> | <p>Date :</p> |
| <p>The main character is Goldilock and father bear, mother bear and baby bear. There was a girl named Goldilock</p> <p>She go a walk and saw a house.</p> <p>So she go inside and saw three plate of soup.</p> <p>So she ate biggest thing it's too hot.</p> <p>She ate <u>middle</u> thing but it's too cold.</p> <p>At last she ate <u>[]</u> smallest thing that's just right.</p> <p>So she ate that all.</p> <p>And saw three chairs but two of them <u>are</u> too big.</p> <p>The last thing <u>is</u> small so that chair is break.</p> <p>And soon she saw three beds.</p> <p>Two of them <u>is</u> too hard and soft.</p> <p>So she slept at the smallest thing.</p> <p>Soon three bears <u>are come</u> they <u>are</u> very angry.</p> <p>When she was awake she ran away and never <u>come</u> back.</p> | <p>Student Name :</p> |

As shown above, a student had grammatical problems in writing, at first, which centered on mainly verb (agreement, tense consistency and weak construction). Most of the sentences were also composed of just a few words and had sentence problems which included fragments, comma faults, parallelism, and punctuation for clarity. While the first writing work needed many corrections, most students have shown improvement on sentence construction over time. On table 2, it demonstrates the enhancement of writing, acceptable usage in grammar, diction (choice of words), sentence construction, and punctuation. With continued reading and writing over time, students gained confidence in writing and could express and organize their thoughts.

Table: 2

A Sample Writing by Won-Pyeong (2)

| | |
|--|-----------------------|
| <p>Title : The paper crane</p> | <p>Date :</p> |
| <p>Title is the paper crane'. There <u>are some character</u> in this story. The main character is a man, a man's son, his grandpa and the paper crane. I read this book because the paper crane in the first picture was bigger <u>then a man's son's head</u>. It looked so funny. In the story, a man had a restaurant. A man worked from morning until night, and he was happy. but <u>soon</u> people did not come to his restaurant. So he was sad. Some day a grandpa came and made the paper crane. A man's son began playing with <u>that paper crane</u>. <u>Some</u> days later, many people came to a man's restaurant. Because people liked to listen to the flute very much. A man feels very happy. More days later, grandpa came and played the flute. Then the paper crane flew away and disappeared. Finally, he became so sad and cried. His restaurant had no people any more.</p> | <p>Student Name :</p> |

As shown in sample writing, most of the students have significantly absorbed the grammatical changes in writing, and they showed changes on oral presentation and group work, as well. Here are major changes of students with an e-book reading over period.

Firstly, regarding the title and beginning of the report, students presented the title page, but lacked much of the required information. But gradually, not only is the title page present, but it also contains the title, author, students' names, and appropriate graphics, as well.

Secondly, when they described main characters, there was incomplete or inadequate description of the main characters, but later they could represent adequate descriptions and character sketches of the main characters, even including a few comparisons among the characters.

Thirdly, their first brief summary lacked an incomplete plot summary and an incomplete or inaccurate story board, since each student had no idea what to write and how to depict the story.

In the end, however, they successfully could complete the plot summary including the story board and highlighting major events.

Fourth, when addressing the originality of the story, they presented merely a basic summary of the plot in which there was no evidence of new, personal thought, inventiveness, or insight. On the contrary, at the end, the researcher was able to figure out that the book report showed significant evidence of originality and inventiveness and students demonstrated a basic understanding of the content and extended beyond just that to offer new insights and understanding of the book.

Fifth, oral presentation was another interesting attempt conducted simultaneously with writing a book report. Students were encouraged to make an oral presentation at class. At first, almost of the students had little eye contact, poor voice projection, tone, and style, since they were not accustomed to making a speech in front of an audience. But it was remarkably surprising to see how much their attitudes of presentation had changed at the end. They presented with adequate eye contact, voice projection, a pleasing tone, and an engaging style.

Finally, students were required to have a team/group work, since it was a good opportunity either to compare or contrast the same book each of them had read. Although they were expected to have a lively discussion, the first result showed poor teamwork and some misbehavior, and sometimes a book report was late for deadlines and project requirements. Nonetheless, as classes made steady progress, they proved to have excellent teamwork and good behavior, and worked together to meet all deadlines and project requirements.

To sum up, the students' awareness of an e-book reading enhanced their reading ability and with increased vocabulary power, they were able to write online book reports in more detail. In addition, not only the ability of speaking was remarkably elevated, but confidence and also the interest in English learning was increased. Table 3 below shows the summary of the changes which students had during the study.

Table: 3

Changes in Reading Performance over Time

| | at the initial stage | at the last stage |
|-----------------|---|--|
| Title Page | - lacks much of the required information | - title, author, students' names and appropriate graphics |
| Main Characters | - incomplete or inadequate description of main characters | - adequate descriptions and character sketches of main characters including a few comparisons among characters |

| | | |
|-------------------|--|---|
| Brief Summary | - incomplete plot summary and incomplete or inaccurate summary | - complete plot summary including story highlighting major events |
| Originality | - merely a basic summary of the plot - incomplete new thought, idea, or insight | - significant evidence of originality and inventiveness - a basic understanding of the content |
| Oral Presentation | - little eye contact, poor voice projection, tone, and style | - adequate eye contact, voice projection, pleasing tone, and engaging style |
| Group Work | - poor teamwork, misbehavior | - excellent teamwork, good behavior |

Conclusion

It is generally concluded that the development of good reading habits and skills can improve students' ability to write. Through online book report and post reading activities on the class, the result demonstrated that students were able to write in more detail about their thoughts and fully express the summary, plot and of the story as well as describe the books' characters, places and events successfully. With increased vocabulary, writing online book report also helped students to practice giving their diverse opinions about different aspects of a book which they had read.

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