



## **Engaging EFL Students in E-books Using Reader-Response Theory**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*E-book reading is generally considered suboptimal because people engaging in e-book reading tend to browse through digital texts. As a result, studies concerning students' e-book preference in academic contexts have shown that students less prefer using e-books than hardcopy books when engaging in academic reading which is considered intensive reading. However, in the language learning field, studies have indicated that e-books are useful tools in ESL/EFL classrooms to engage students in extensive reading. If higher educators want to use e-books in academic contexts, it is important to implement different pedagogical approaches to help college students engage in e-book reading but with a less intensive reading purpose. Reader response theory has been considered as an effective approach to engage readers in reading and responding literature. Thus, this study using a reader response perspective attempted to engage EFL college students in e-books in a semester-long literature course. The result indicates that the students could still undergo meaningful reading practice through e-books.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Reading activity has undergone recent technological changes. Reading in a screen-based environment has gained popularity with the proliferation of electronic texts, such as e-books and e-journals. Not only an increasing number of reading materials become available electronically, but also more reading devices are now available for those who want to read something in an electronic format. One can choose to read from a standard computer screen, a tablet computer, a small-form device such as a cell phone, or a reading-specific digital device (an e-reader). Advocates of using e-books in the language classroom focus on digital-books' ability to motivate reluctant or young readers to support English language learners of different levels of proficiency. Although some argue that the features of interactive e-books (e.g., animations and sounds) may distract children (Burrell & Trushell, 1997), reading motivation seems to be higher after children interact with e-books (Glasgow, 1996). As Maynard and McKnight (2001) state, the supportive functions, such as multimedia features and the lively way of the presentation, make e-books an easy way to catch a young learner's attention and stimulate reading interest and motivation. Other features found to be helpful in facilitating children's reading comprehension and enjoyment

include word pronunciation, narration, sound effects, and animated pictures (Grimshaw, Dungworth, McKnight, & Morris, 2007; Lewin, 2000; Matthew, 1996).

In addition, many studies concerning students' second-language reading ability have proposed using e-books in an extensive reading program (Arnold, 2009; Chen et al., 2013; Safaeia & Bulca, 2013; Sun, 2003). Sun (2003), for instance, investigated university students' attitude toward extensive reading online. The results showed that the students had a positive attitude toward an extensive reading program. Arnold (2009) also conducted an online extensive reading program related to learning German as a foreign language. The participants' extra-curriculum reading motivation, attitude, and confidence in L2 reading, reading ability, and reading pleasure increased. Lin (2010) investigated junior high school students and found that e-books enhance students' confidence as well as interest in English. Students, moreover, spent their time reading these English e-books outside the curriculum. Finally, Chen et al. (2013) conducted an experimental study to investigate the effects of extensive reading via e-books on undergraduate EFL students' English reading attitude, reading comprehension, and vocabulary. The findings showed that the experimental group exhibited a significantly better reading attitude, reading comprehension, and vocabulary use than the control group. The authors, hence, concluded that e-book extensive reading is a powerful tool to stimulate EFL students' reading attitude, reading comprehension, and vocabulary use (p.308).

Since digital texts played an increasingly important role in colleges and universities, it is expected that electronic literacy will largely supplant hardcopy literacy for many academic purposes. At Taiwanese universities and colleges, e-books allow school libraries to purchase books in English and other languages that are not available in Taiwan. E-books, moreover, are considered more environmentally friendly than hardcopy books. As a result, exposure to and practice with the medium seems to be increasingly critical for college students (Chou, 2012; 2014). Even though e-book extensive reading studies have contributed a great deal to understanding the impact of using e-books in extensive reading programs, they do not focus on readers' reading processes. The reading act is considered a process of meaning making by readers interacting with the text based on his or her world of experience, personality, and current frame of mind. van Dijk and Kintsch (1983), for example, distinguished among surface, textbase, and situation-model levels of representation. The surface code reflects features of the surface text. The textbase captures the meaningful relations among elements within sentences and across sentences in the text and reflects a very minimal impact on prior knowledge. The situation model captures the referential meaning of the text, that is, the real or imaginary situation in the world that the text describes, and depends on the integration of information in the text with prior knowledge. The reading process generally follows a cyclical pattern involving processing activities at these multiple levels. According to Kintsch (1998), a reader begins by activating in their mental representation the verbatim information that is presented on the page (or the screen as it were), creating a surface level representation of the text. As this process moves forward, readers activate the meaning of the text they are reading and expend their representation into the textbase level representation. Readers end on a situation-model level, which includes conclusions and inferences drawn from the text that are integrated with what may already be known about a particular topic.

Since the reading process involves multiple levels, previous studies concerning end products, though important, cannot depict what really happens when readers interact and make meaning when reading in a digital environment. The end achievement, such as reading attitude and comprehension, is important, but the meaning-making process cannot be overlooked. As Schumacher and Waller (1985) argued in the context of reading research in general, reading

researchers may risk losing important information by not focusing upon the process variables associated with the reader's use and interaction with the text. To understand the reading process of college students when they interact with e-books, this teacher-inquiry study employed the reader-response theory and quantitative method to understand how Taiwanese undergraduate students conceive of e-books as a form of reading material and how they construct meaning from e-books in a regular young-adult English literature course.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **Reader-Response Theory**

Reader-response theory has been considered an effective approach to engage readers in reading and responding to literature (Hirvela, 1996). Moreover, reading and responding to literature enable higher-level comprehension (Carlisle, 2000; Larson, 2009). Instead of considering reading as a process of taking from the text only what was put there by the author, Rosenblatt (1938/1995) argued that reading is a fusion of text and reader. The meaning is created by readers interacting with the text as part of the reading act based on his or her world of experience, personality, and current frame of mind. Readers, according to this perspective, play an active role in constructing meaning when they interact with literary texts. Thus, reading is considered learned, rather than natural, behavior (Fish, 1980). Drawing from this perspective, the literature experience in this study is evaluated to see how the participants read and respond to e-books.

Another important aspect of Rosenblatt's theory is that reading is done for two purposes: efferent reading (to take knowledge from the text) and aesthetic reading (to live through a literary experience). When people read for an efferent purpose, they direct their attention "toward concepts to be retained, ideas to be tested, actions to be performed after the reading" (Rosenblatt, 1978, p.24). When people read for the aesthetic purpose, they assume the identity of a book character by bringing in their private meaning, personal histories, and feelings. This also is referred to as reading for enjoyment or for entertainment. Doing so allows readers to focus on the experiences they undergo in their transactions with a literary text (p.24). Karolides (2000) elaborates on this viewpoint.

The term transaction is meaningful in expressing the reader-text relationship during the reading event. It signals the connection between them and the nature of the connection. Transaction denotes a situation of mutuality. During the reading activity, the reader and text mutually act on each other, each affecting and conditioning the other (p.5).

This view of reading as a transaction can be applied to all media. Given the purpose of this study, the concept of reading as a transactional process (Rosenblatt, 1938/1995, 1978; Karolides, 2000) was used to understand how readers construct meaning in their transactions with English e-novels.

Reader-response theory has been implemented in many classrooms (e.g., Giovanelli, & Mason, 2015; Harfitt & Chu, 2011; Mizuno, 2015), and the findings were positive in general. Giovanelli and Mason (2015), for example, investigated the reading experiences of two year-7 groups of students when they underwent authentic reading in the literature classroom. The term authentic reading in their article means "a reading that is born out of an individual's own process of unmediated interpretation" (p.41). By highlighting how the students constructed their own

world, they demonstrated the value of providing students opportunities for authentic reading. Harfitt and Chu (2011) incorporated a reader-response lesson into a teacher training course in the Hong Kong context. The teachers were asked to share their views on a poem with each other before eliciting responses. This strategy, as Harfitt and Chu (2011) claimed, gave the teachers more confidence about talking about the literature (p.101). Mizuno (2015) implemented with the reader-response theory in the interactive reading community project on Japanese university students. The results showed that this integration had a positive impact on the cognitive process of reading (p.18). However, Mizuno's study did not show any empirical evidence to support the findings. Finally, Lohfink (2015) examined the effect of using reader-response theory on struggling readers. Six second graders were guided to pay attention to images in pictures books and made meaning from them. The results revealed that these "noticings" increased the participants' oral reading accuracy (p.21). Although many studies have discussed the effects of reader-response theory in classrooms, majority of them have been conducted among young learners or high school students. Limited studies have reported the impact of using reader-response theory on undergraduate students.

Some scholars have suggested ways to promote students' responses in classroom activities. Hirvela (1996) proposed using different questioning styles to stimulate students to express their own reflection rather than to answer what the author intended. Elliot (1990) used role play, drama, and letter writing while Oster (1989) suggested allowing students rewrite from an alternative point of view. Carlisle (2000) proposed using a reading log as a tool to guide students as they enter and explore the literary world (p.14). He, moreover, explained that writing reading logs was the simplest and most direct way to guide students to develop their own individual responses to the literature. In addition, writing reading logs can be beneficial to students in an English-as-a-foreign-language context. Students in his study claimed that their English reading and writing skills had improved (p.18). This study adopted Carlisle's suggestion for two reasons. First, Carlisle gave clear instruction regarding practical applications. Second, the samples Carlisle used in his article were Taiwanese students. Considering that the research site here is also based on Taiwanese students, the writing-reading log appeared to be an appropriate tool to elicit Taiwanese students' responses.

### **Readers Responding to E-Books**

Though many researchers have examined students' responses to literature (e.g., Carlisle, 2000; Marshall, Smagorinsky, & Smith, 1995; Rogers, 1991, 1997; Sipe, 2000, 2008), their work has focused largely on response to hardcopy texts. Not many studies are concerned with students' response to e-books in classroom settings (Chu, 1995; Larson, 2009, 2010). Larson (2009), for example, investigated 26 fifth graders' online discussion after reading two historical nonfiction e-books. She found that an online message board provided students opportunities to share their thoughts about the book (p.647). In her other study (2010), Larson investigated two primary children's involvement with and response to texts through digital reading devices. The texts in those reading devices were selected and downloaded by the instructor through Amazon.com. The digital texts contained no additional supportive features, such as animations. Students could use some basic functions of the reading devices, such as the dictionary, insert notes, and change the font size. The results suggested that digital reading devices "provided new opportunities and extended possibilities for individual engagement with and interpretation of the text" (p.21). However, neither of Larson's studies focused on the students' reading response per se. The first study focused on the advantages of using an online message board as a platform for the students

to build up an online learning community. The second study emphasized the impact of using the reading devices rather than using e-books as such on children's literature involvement.

Chu (1995) investigated three first graders' responses to five interactive computer books. The computer books were designed as interactive books. The students were able to click some labels or icons to hear pronunciation and explanation of words, for example. The children then discussed what they had read. The findings revealed that the children demonstrated high interest in reading the computer books. They actively constructed meaning while responding to the literature. Chu concluded that transactional reading experiences can take place in an electronic reading environment. Nevertheless, the participants in Chu's and Larson's studies were young children, and they were all English-as-a-first-language readers. Limited studies have been done with college students as well as English-as-a-foreign-language readers.

The most current study done among EFL undergraduate students is Chou's (2014) study. In this study, twenty students enrolling in a literature course were asked to response to e-books throughout a semester. The results showed that students' attitude toward reading e-books changed over time. They even developed strategies to cope with difficulties when reading e-books. This indicates that a prolonged engagement with e-books helped the students become more familiar with e-books (p.16). However, what pedagogical approach can be applied to help students engage in pro-long reading activities is missing in previous literature. This study, thus, is aim to fill this gap.

## **METHOD**

### **Setting and Participants**

The site of this study is in southern Taiwan in a language-specialized university. The course used for the study was an elective course of English young adult literature in which 15 undergraduate students (18-23 years old) were required to read juvenile novels extensively in one semester. The instructor, also the researcher, provided three websites and asked students to choose four online juvenile novels to read. The students needed to write a response report after reading each e-novel. The instructor collected the students' reports on a monthly basis. As mentioned, because this university is language-specialized, all courses are taught in English. Students in the class are also encouraged to use English to discuss and communicate. All assignments should also be written in English. The instructor, however, would not grade the students' reports or correct any grammatical errors in the reports because she viewed herself as a facilitator and monitor to ensure that the students did their reading.

Participants' reader-response reports were guided by thought probes. The thought probes were intended to get readers to report their immediate thoughts as they occurred during reading. Probst's (1994) sequence of questions was used as the thought probes. Five questions were proposed by Probst:

The first question dealt with readers' primary reactions to the text in the first encounter.

The second question asked how the readers understood the text.

The third asked them to compare their readings with those of other students.

The fourth question instructed students to reflect on the context of the reading.

The fifth question asked students to consider how meaning has evolved or changed after discussion in the course. (p.43-44)

The fifth question, however, was deleted for several reasons. First, this extensive reading activity was an extra-curriculum activity which was done outside the classroom. On the day when the participants handed in their reports, they merely shared their reading with other group members. Therefore, after-discussion reflection was not included in their reading reports. Second, as can be seen, the fifth question was related to students' reflection after the class discussion. Since the participants were free to choose whatever books interested them, it was difficult for them to discuss the same book with others. All they could do was share what they had read. The process of how meaning can be shaped, changed and evolved during discussion was not included in the course design. Since reading e-books was a relatively new experience to the participants, the fifth question hence was deleted from the sequence of questions.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The course began in February 2013 and ended in June 2013. The participants handed in their response reports in the second week of each month (starting from March) for four months. A total of four reports from each student was collected. To make sure that the students did their extensive reading, hardcopy of reading reports had to be handed in to the instructor. The instructor also asked the students to send their reading reports via e-mail for her records. Students were encouraged to write in English. However, considering some students with a low-English-proficiency level, the instructor allowed the students to use their mother tongue, Mandarin Chinese, when they wrote their reflection. All 15 students engaged in reading e-novels. In the first lesson, the instructor borrowed a computer lab to demonstrate how to find juvenile books from the websites provided. After showing the websites, the instructor explained the requirement, the response reports, to the students. The students then explored the websites and tried to write the response report in class under the instructor's guidance. After the first lesson, the remainders were conducted in a regular classroom with only one classroom computer. The students needed to write other response reports outside the classroom.

Each month, the instructor collected the students' reading response reports. On that date, the students were also given a chance to share information about their texts, reading experience, questions regarding the texts, and their e-book reading experience. Students were put into groups and shared with their group members first. The group sharing lasted about 10 minutes. Then the instructor would ask each group to share what they had discussed. After the group and whole class discussions, the students handed in their reports.

Additional efforts were made to identify students representing multiple English reading and language proficiency levels. The students' identity was coded. In addition, to truly present the students' reading experience, the students' comments in the finding section were quoted directly and exactly from their reading reports. The author did not intend to correct or change errors in the comments. The participants' reading reports were categorized and analyzed based on Probst's question sequence.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Since this course was elective, the 15 students were from different departments and from different years of study. Their English proficiency levels varied from low to advanced. Table 1 shows the backgrounds of the 15 students.

The students were free to find books from the school's library or free e-book websites. None of them reported any difficulties finding e-books. However, two students complained that not all e-books they wanted to read were free of charge. Therefore, they still experienced some limitations on choosing e-books to read. Most of them read on a computer screen. Only three of the students reported that they read from tablet computers since it was more convenient to carry around than a laptop computer. One student reported that she chose audio-books because it was difficult for her to read and understand novels in English. When she listened to the story, it helped her comprehend the content better.

**Table 1.** Students' Backgrounds

Students	Gender	Major	Year of college	Proficiency <sup>1</sup>
1	F	German	4	Advanced
2	F	Translation	4	Advanced
3	M	Japanese	1	Beginning
4	F	Education	2	High-intermediate
5	M	German	1	Beginning
6	M	Business	1	Beginning
7	F	French	4	Intermediate
8	F	English	2	Intermediate
9	F	English	2	Intermediate
10	F	Chinese	4	Intermediate
11	F	English	3	High-intermediate
12	F	Business	3	Intermediate
13	F	English	1	High-intermediate
14	F	English	1	Advanced
15	F	English	1	High-intermediate

### Students' E-book Reading Responses

To depict college students' experiences in reading English-language young adult novels via e-books, segments from the students' responses to the reading texts were analyzed based on Probst's (1994) sequence of questions. Notice here, the comments are directly quoted from the students' reading reports to preserve the readers' original voices. As such, one may feel a sense of unease when reading the students' ungrammatical and confusing sentences.

### Readers' Primary Reaction and Understanding

The students were able to summarize what they had read in their reports. However, only two students described their primary reactions to the books. Student 4 [S4], for example, described how she felt when she started to read the book she chose:

When I saw the title of the book *The Black Beauty*, I thought the protagonist would be a girl. I was surprised to see that the main character was actually a horse.

S13 also described how she felt when she read the first few chapters of the book *The Secret Garden*.

Although I haven't finished reading this book, I think it's a bad story because the girl in the story is so lonely. It seems that she is ignored by everyone. No one likes her so far.

Most of the students did not mention their primary reactions. This may reflect the way in which the students chose e-books. Most of the students chose the books that they had read before in their first language. As S12 described, "I have read this book [*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*] before but just not in English." They were afraid that they could not comprehend the content if they read a new book in a second language; I would slow their reading rate. Since those books were not new to the students, they did not have a "first reaction" experience.

When summarizing the books, the students with beginning English-proficiency levels tended to synthesize what they had read in a short paragraph, about 35-40 words. S3, for example, choosing *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* to read for his first report, wrote:

It talks about a girl named Alice who saw a rabbit and chased after it. She fell into a rabbit hole after the rabbit. Finally, she met a cat which gave her some advices.

Another summary example was from S5 who read *The Adventure of Pinocchio*:

It talks about Mastro Cheery found a piece of wood. It's strange that it can speak. Mastro Cherry heard someone talking, but he didn't know where the sound came from. The two little men got anger at each other because there was a misunderstanding. Mastro gave the wood to his friend Geppetto, and wanted the wood can dance.

The two students' summaries showed that they skipped many details when summarizing the stories in the reports; they may have had some difficulties comprehending the stories. In S3's summary, the first two sentences described what happened in the first chapter. Suddenly, in the last sentence, he mentioned the cat, which did not appear until chapter 6. He wrote that the cat gave Alice some "advices." But in the story, the character that gave Alice advice is a caterpillar. S5 also tried to cover a wide range from chapters 1 to 3 in his summary. He used two sentences to describe the content in chapter 1, but used one sentence each to describe chapters 2 and 3. The last sentence he wrote was also confusing. In the story, Geppetto was the one who wanted to use the wood to make a marionette. His expression seemed to infer that Mastro was the one who would use the wood. The second part of the sentence "wanted the wood can dance" was not only grammatically incorrect but also incomprehensible. Students with higher-than-beginning proficiency level, on the other hand, tended to summarize in much more detail. S2, for example, wrote her summaries in a chapter-by-chapter style. Moreover, she gave detailed description of each chapter. Below is one of her summaries from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* chapter 2.

Alice at once took up the little golden key and hurried off to the harden door. However, it was as much as she could do. She sat down and began to cry again. Alice shed gallons of tears, until there was a large pool all around her. She saw a white rabbit splendidly dress, with a pair of white kid gloves in one hand and a large fan in the other. However, the white rabbit scurried away into the

darkness as hard as he could go. Alice was so very tired of being all alone here. Then she heard something splashing about in the pool a little way off, and she swam nearer to make out what it was. It was the mouse who was trembling down to the end of his tail. Alice and the mouse talked about dogs and cats. There are crowded with the birds and animals that had fallen into pool and several other curious creatures swam to the shore. <Chapter 2>

S2 not only described in detail but also tried to use some idioms and phrases in her summaries. The word choice was also more sophisticated than the students at beginning levels. S15 also summarized each chapter rather than simply synthesizing what she had read. Here is her summary of chapters 4 and 5 from the book, *Black Beauty*.

In the fourth chapter, Darkie was sent to a new master's house. He tried to be familiar with other horses such as Merrylegs, Ginger, John, and James. Merrylegs told Darkie that Ginger had a bad habit of biting everywhere and had an ill-tempered. In the fifth chapter, the coachman, John Manly, and the new master were satisfied with Darkie's behavior and gave him a new name "Black Beauty." Then the Black Beauty worked with Ginger and became a great friend with Merrylegs.

S1 organized her summaries of *Anne of Green Gables* based on the pages she anticipated to finish each time.

Page 1 ~ 25

Anne Shirley is an orphan. Mr. and Miss Cuthbert adopt her because of a mistake. In the beginning, they want a boy to help Mr. Cuthbert. When they find this mistake, they think they should send Anne back to the orphanage. But Mr. Cuthbert likes Anne. He would like to keep Anne. Anne likes to talk and Mr. Cuthbert thinks she is interesting.

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Page 26 ~ 59

Anne likes the Green Gable, and she hopes she can stay here. Therefore, she tries to learn how to pray, go to church. She is also willing to apologize to Mrs. Lynde.

Even though those students did not report too much detail in each chapter, their descriptions were much clearer than the students at the beginning proficiency level. This language use was also more precise, sophisticated, and accurate. These responses indicate the students' current understanding of the characters and plots through retelling parts of the story (Hancock, 1993). As can be seen, beginning English-language students had some difficulties in comprehending details as well as summarizing the stories in their reports.

### **Students' Reflection on the Context of the Reading**

One section of the students' reading reports included their reflections on the novels. The students' reflections can be categorized into several aspects: prediction and question, feelings and thoughts, and critique and evaluation.

Among the students, eight of them expressed their questions and predictions in their reflection sections. S9 asked a question after she read the first few chapters of *A Call from the Dark*: "I don't understand what 'A call from the dark' mean to the story." S2 and S7 gave predictions of the stories they had read. In her second report, S7 wrote that "I have read a few chapters [of *The Little Princess*]... I think the story is going to be suspicious." In another segment

of her reflection on the same book, S7 said that “the story had brought me in step by step and I found that the story became more and more interesting. Besides, I also know something about the personalities of the characters appeared in the story. The chapters I’ve read were very interesting. I am curious about the following developments that will happen in the following chapters. I think it’s worthy of expecting.” S2 also mentioned how she felt about the book *Treasure Island*.

Although I did not read much about this novel, I’m pretty sure that this is an exciting novel about pirates...Jimmy found a treasure map. That’s how the story begins. They would start an adventure. Will they find the treasure or not? We will see later.

S14, moreover, imagined what she would do if she were the protagonist in Alice’s *Adventure in the Wonderland*.

When I finish reading the novel, I felt I experienced an adventure as same as Alice. I started to image that if I were Alice, what I would do when I’m facing with the things that she had faced. Will I escape or overcome? I think I will escape it because it is too strange to see a caterpillar smoking.

Even though S14’s question is not related to the content of the story, the reflection question demonstrated her understanding of her own personality.

The most commonly seen reflection reflected the students’ feelings and thoughts. All students commented on what they had read based on their personal experience and personal value. S13, for example, tended to bring in her own personal experience when she reflected on the stories. The following are two segments she wrote for her reflection on *The Little Princess and Little Women*.

*2nd report:* In this story, I learned no matter you are rich or poor, pretty or ugly, we should be kind to people just like Sara. When she is rich, she isn’t prideful; when she is poor, she doesn’t complain. She used her imagination to think that everything will be fine. That is what I lack, and I should learn from her.

*3rd report:* Since I read this book, I found that there are many kinds of families in this world. Although their family is very different from mine, the attitudes our parents have are similar. That really makes me understand our parents’ minds. Sometimes, they are trying to do something good for us. We just refuse.

S5 also commented on the book, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, saying that

In modern society, most parents care about children’s grades but ignore the spirit of willing to fight and venture. I think it’s better to pay more attention to morality, aesthetic, physical, and cooperation education, not only on children’s grades.

The two students connected their personal values with the stories. They interpreted the stories from different perspectives based on their own personal experience. S13 reflected on her personality and her relationship with her family. S5, on the other hand, focused on the inspiration that *Tom Sawyer* brought him to criticize the current Taiwanese educational system.

The students’ comments were not always positive. S7, for example, expressed her feelings toward the book, *A Call from the Dark*: “The book is kind of boring. I feel that this story is full of sarcastic and people in the story were kind of hat[ing] each other. They don’t easily believe others.”

Sometimes the students would also express the change of their perspectives after reading more chapters. For example, S2 expressed that “I thought the little princess was a spoiled child at first. As I kept reading more, I changed my idea about the protagonist. For example, she did boldly what is righteous. She went to comfort the girl who got some trouble in learning French and help her when everyone laughed at her.”

S4 described how reading the book at a different time made her think differently.

I feel I get in Alice adventure again. The description in the story is in very detail. Although I had read the story when I was a child, I still feel it is a new adventure. I think the story can teach children some things. For example, it tells kids that no matter what the obstacle is, we should be brave and overcome it. The story also can inspire reader’s imagination.

S4 not only expressed her own reflection but also tried to connect her reflection with her current major. Because she was studying in a pre-service teacher program, she mentioned how the book may connect to children. Her reflection also demonstrated a vicarious experience in reading. She put herself in the protagonist’s role and wondered what she would do if she were the protagonist.

Two students also expressed their evaluation on the literary level. S1 commented on the author’s writing style in *Anne of Green Gables*, saying that “the chapters describe the scenery very vivid. I can imagine the beautiful scenery. The author also shows detail in the characters’ lives. I can see their personality by their conversation.” In the same vein, S4 expressed her evaluation of the book, *The Black Beauty*, saying that “this story is suitable for children. The vocabulary is not too difficult and the story is not too boring. From taking a horse’s perspective to view the world, the readers will have different insight and perspective.” The two students’ comments focused on the language and the literary level.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The reader-response approach to literature has been adopted by many reading researchers for teaching reading in an English class. However, only a few researchers have implemented this approach in a digital environment. This study tried to find out students’ reading processes when given opportunity engage in e-book reading. Analysis of the students’ reports reveals that the students went beyond mere comprehension of the texts. The students actively constructed meaning through complex transactions with digital texts. They reflected on their personal experience, proposed questions, and evaluated the literary styles. The result indicates that, in the case of the fifteen students, they can still undergo meaningful reading practice through e-books. They are not merely passive recipients of a technological presentation; instead, they are actively involved in the meaning construction and response process. One student even started to think critically in relation to who created or uploaded the e-books. E-books clearly provided new opportunities and extended possibilities for individual engagement with and interpretation of the text.

The students’ command of the literature is related to their English ability to appreciate the literature. As Davis and his colleagues (Davis, Kline, Gorell, & Hsieh, 1992) note, limited linguistic proficiency could result in inaccurate coding of the target language texts and even misunderstanding of the overall intent of the text. This phenomenon was observed among the students at the high-beginning proficiency level. Their responses demonstrated some misinterpretations of the content. However, this difficulty did not seem to interfere with their

reflection on the story. All students were able to undergo an aesthetic experience by associating themselves with the characters or the stories and showing personal involvement with the text. The students also expressed a certain level of satisfaction at the end of the semester. The students' reflections support the value of implementing reader-response theory in a language classroom. As Hirvela (1996) stated, the reader-response approach views reading as a productive activity in which it "investigates and privileges the learner's whole experience of the reader-text transaction" (p.132). If students approach reading with a language-learning mind set, they may be reluctant to read and become frustrated with reading English novels; that is, they may try to look up every word that they do not understand. Their focus of attention will be what facts they can retain for use after reading is completed (Carlisle, 2000). The novel is not being read as literature but as a piece of information. However, when students are given opportunities to express personal opinions, their focus will shift from language learning to literature appreciation and hence will be positive toward literary study (Davis et al., 1992).

The impact the Internet is having on society and education cannot be ignored. As electronic books, developed as a result of the Internet, continue to attract attention as a pedagogical tool, some literacy educators have cited a need for teachers to use them in classrooms (e.g., Larson, 2009, 2010). This study supports this point. The participants, after a semester, underwent meaning-making processes. This suggests an educational advantage if teachers give students opportunities to engage in e-books. By encouraging students to reflect on electronic texts as they do on hard-copy texts, literacy educators may help them become active e-book readers rather than passive ones. There is, however, a need to proceed with caution.

The reader-response approach to literature has been adopted by many researchers for teaching reading in English class (e.g., Davis, 1989; Elliot, 1990; Hirvela, 1996; Liaw, 2001). This study supports implementing this approach in literature class. The students' written reports in this study reveal positive responses toward this reading approach. Although the participants found the reading load heavy, they felt that they were able to express their own feelings without being corrected. As Davis et al. (1992) claimed, foreign-language students' positive attitudes toward literature study are related to the opportunity they are given to express their personal opinions, look for the underlying meaning of the text, and read about people and experiences from which they can draw personal relevance. Only by using the reader-response approach can students focus on appreciating the literature itself rather than their less-than-optimal linguistic knowledge. EFL teachers who want to engage their students in reading English novels are encouraged to implement this approach.

Although this study advances the understanding of L2 readers' e-books reading process and their opinions of reading e-books over time, it is subject to several limitations. First, data collected from students' interaction in group sharing were limited. Recognizing this, future research might conduct a focus group to gain an understanding of how a sense of community may bring about qualitative changes in students' responses toward e-books. Second, only one class of students participated in this study. Therefore, generalizability of the results is limited. It is suggested that this study be replicated in different contexts or with different students to see if the participants undergo qualitative changes after reading e-books for an extended time.

Despite the limitations, this study contributes to an understanding of how EFL university students make meaning when interacting with e-books. In addition, this study reemphasizes the benefits of using the reader-response approach to teaching literature in an EFL context. In conclusion, educators and teachers can productively create opportunities for students with varying

degrees of experience reading e-books to share their responses to e-book use. In so doing, students are introduced to new ways of reading and discussing this particular form of text.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> The proficiency level is defined using TOFEL iBT score. Beginning level is TOFEL iBT < 49; Intermediate is TOFEL iBT 55-60; high-intermediate is TOFEL iBT 61-64; Advanced is TOFEL iBT > 65.

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