

Digitalization in Reading Classroom: How University Students View Digital Texts?

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Abstract

Background: The implementation of digital texts in classrooms can be helpful yet coming with some issues faced by the students. The research gap targeted by this paper is related to how students view digital texts in terms of the implementation and how digital texts influence their reading comprehension.

Objective: This paper aims to present how students perceived the use of digital text in a reading classroom.

Methods: It was a case study involving 40 students of 4th semester as the respondents selected with purposive sampling technique to fill out a questionnaire distributed by the lecturer. 20 students of them were selected with snowball sampling as the respondents of interview. The responses were analyzed with thematic analysis approach.

Findings: The findings revealed that using digital texts mostly can be enjoyable for students since it is easy for them to bring the text in their smartphones though it comes with several problems such as eyes fatigue. It also revealed that students' comprehension skill was not significantly helped by digital texts.

Conclusion: The implication is presenting insights on how to manage the use of digital texts based on students' perceptions.

Keywords: digital text; ELT; extensive reading; ICT in classroom; reading comprehension

Introduction

The integration of digital technologies in education has transformed traditional learning approaches, particularly in English language teaching. Digital texts have emerged as popular alternatives to printed materials, offering unique advantages such as accessibility, portability, and interactive features. However, their effectiveness in supporting reading comprehension remains debated.

Digital reading differs fundamentally from print reading in cognitive processing strategies. While digital texts enable dynamic interactions through hyperlinks, multimedia elements, and adjustable displays, they may also create distractions that affect deep reading comprehension (Lim & Toh, 2020). However, students tend to decline the strategies used on reading printed texts. Students often engage in surface-level reading behaviors such as scanning and browsing rather than sustained, focused reading (Islami & Warni, 2020). It is mentioned that digital reading can be different from printed reading activities in the sense of strategies, such as, browsing or spotting keywords. This digital skill is considered to help students to not only deal with spotting specific information but also processing information, drawing conclusions, connecting ideas and building arguments. This reading behavior is believed to give students unique experiences and build reading strategy to help with comprehension.

Digital reading is believed to reshape reading concepts by using various sources such as social media that are dominated with acronyms or emoji. There are numerous reviews discussing the advantages and disadvantages of digital and printed texts, especially related to the ability to comprehend and process information. On one hand, digital reading may come with convenience, accessibility, or low price, students tend to read digital texts by scanning the information. Moreover, digital texts are accompanied by more images considered as visual-aids for readers which is believed to decrease script relativity (Präkel, 2021).

The phenomena present new challenges for educators and students around the world. Students are required to have more competencies in language and comprehension, especially on academic texts. As presented by Mardiah et al. (2021), students said that it is difficult for them to keep up with academic texts consisting academic vocabularies which demand them to pay more attention. This is supported by the fact that students tend to read the academic texts just before the deadline given affecting their ability to comprehend ideas and information.

The use of digital texts shows more popularity with a number of researches comparing digital texts with printed ones. A study presented by Taylor (2011) shows that the students' ability to work with digital text is influenced by numerous variables, such as, complexity of the texts, engagement of the students, and long-term focus. Students' comprehension ability is not significantly influenced by the involvement of digital texts in reading course. It is inferred that the ability is affected mostly by students' will of reading rather than the ways of the texts are presented.

Another study revealed different perspectives where topic knowledge and students' preferences are discussed. In a study conducted by Singer & Alexander (2017), students tend to choose digital texts compared to the printed ones where they predict they can comprehend digital texts better. However, the results of their performance did not appear as predicted. When the students are asked to identify main idea, recall key points and link them to the main idea, and present other details, they show better comprehension when they use printed texts although there are not any differences whether they read newspaper or book chapters.

In the case of extensive reading activities, Ni'mah and Umamah (2020) presents students' perceptions on reading digital text. This previous study states that students think digital texts help them in terms of portability and flexibility. They can read anytime without having to visit library for certain types of books. They also state that digital texts are practical, easy, and affordable when it comes to extensive reading. However, the preference to printed books is still found. As in Loh & Sun (2019), printed books still become adults' favorite due to their social environment though technology can motivate them to read more. In a study conducted by Srirahayu and Premananto (2020), printed books were selected because readers can prevent themselves from tired of reading screens.

Some previous studies conducted by Nur et al. (2022), Liu (2005) , or Hargreaves et al. (2022) present the ideas of advantages and disadvantages of using digital texts in the classroom. But they did not mention how to overcome the disadvantages especially when it comes to students' limitation. The previous studies by Ayşegül and Karadeniz (2021), Long and Szabo (2016) and Saqr (2021) present the advantages and the disadvantages of working with digital texts for students and how digital texts work with students' comprehension skill.

Current research presents conflicting findings about digital versus print reading effectiveness. Some studies suggest digital texts enhance engagement through interactive features and visual aids, while others indicate that print materials support better comprehension and retention, particularly for complex academic content. This study addresses gaps in understanding how Indonesian EFL university students perceive and interact with digital texts across different genres in extensive reading contexts. Unlike previous research focusing on general comparisons, this investigation examines student preferences and comprehension outcomes across various text types within a structured curriculum.

The present study aims to present students' perceptions on their experiences working with digital texts and how digital texts help them in reading activities. The research questions are comprised as follow;

1. How are students' perceptions on the use of digital texts in reading classroom?
2. How does the use of digital text influence their reading comprehension?

Literature Review

Digital Texts Pros and Cons

Digital reading comes with several disadvantages related to their comprehension ability. As cited by Lim and Toh (2020), Herold (2014) revealed that students tend to work only on the surface of a text instead of exploring deeper information for better comprehension. It is supported by the fact that students spend less time on digital texts than printed texts leading to scrolling and browsing activities which negatively affect students' comprehension. The study also presents that students tend to feel eye-strain and experience lack of focus and comprehension when working with digital texts. It is reported in the study that though people have shifted from printed texts to digital texts, there are still difficulties found, especially when they have to highlight or annotate. This goes along with Liu (2005) stating that digital reading leads to decrease of long attention due to one-time reading and less in-depth reading.

Generally, digital texts reading challenges people with reading preferences, meaning they only do it when it comes to certain documents such as e-mails or short texts while they read printed texts when they require more focus and attention since they found that they tend to comprehend less when reading digital texts. Also Liu (2012) argue that digital reading bring a new phenomenon of clicking due to the easy access to websites leading to the possibility to deal with numerous topics at the same time which also influences the focus of readers. Hyperlinks presented in digital reading is considered distracting since that stimulate readers to click them while waiting for the page visited to load. This activity is mentioned to replace thinking activity because it requires less efforts. From those studies, the use of digital texts does not only bring advantages for the users. Digital texts require digital device to present which comes with several problems related to the limitations of the device itself. Since working with digital device or screens still become problems for some people, using digital texts continuously in classroom is considered less effective and helpful.

On the other hand, digital reading offers new perspectives in terms of reading activities. As revealed by Nur et al. (2022), digital reading brings wide impacts on students' reading activities. It provides possibility for students to work dynamic aspects like shapes, colors, even interactions. Small help was highlighted in the study such as the ability to adjust the font size based on their preferences. Technology also allows them to improve their literacy skill. Furthermore, digital texts are easy to share, easy to access and portable which become other aspects of interactions offered. An analysis presented by Hargreaves et al. (2022) reveals that digital reading activities build students ease and speed in reading influenced by cost and environmental considerations.

However, the study presents the fact that students work better with printed reading in terms of focus, details, and fun of reading. Students mentioned that digital reading is better used based on the purposes of reading. Those findings are supported by Schwabe et al. (2022) stating that the interactive functions of digital texts affect readers positively in terms of comprehension instead of distractions in various genres of texts. The finding is also supported by Tanjung and Gultom (2017) stating that students do online reading in terms of searching pleasures or preferred information instead of doing it for academic needs. Overall, digital forms of texts offer various advantage such as interactions while reading and the easiness of access which become

main considerations for people, especially students, nowadays. The possibility to access any sources anytime and anywhere is mentioned to be the main cause of choosing digital texts as learning media.

Other study is proposed by Yaghi et al. (2019) stating that students may have different perceptions on reading online texts. It is found that students do not care about what their peers are thinking about their preferences in reading. Most of the students revealed that they are more confident when they read online texts reflecting their freedom in reading by searching what they want, jumping from one website to another, interacting with everyone possible, and expressing thoughts as well as opinions. They stated that they work with internet in most of their time daily causing their familiarity with online texts. The study also reveals that students relate the motivation of their reading to their aims of reading such as presented by Liu (2012) that short texts are preferred while reading digital texts. The awareness of global issue is mentioned to be one of the reading purposes occurs among students. This motivation of online reading, stated by Fitriyah (2022) is not related to students' reading achievement and comprehension though the combination of reading motivation, and online reading practice for reading achievement show a connection.

The external motivation such as media is proven to play more important roles than intrinsic motivation such as willingness to comprehend or get information (Indrayadi, 2021). It is revealed that there are some factors influencing students' preferences in texts presentation when they read. Though digital texts may cause more distraction by allowing students to jump from one tab to another, it gives more access to students to learn, especially motivating them to maximize the use of digital texts. Overall, the motivation of reading was not affected by then use of either digital texts or printed ones.

Digital Texts for Reading Comprehension

Some previous studies have worked on how digital texts affect students' reading skill. A study conducted by Long and Szabo (2016) observed how digital texts work for students. The e-readers students revealed that they still need printed text to support their digital texts since sometimes the technology doesn't work properly. Another challenge faced by e-readers is that

sometimes they need bigger screen to read texts. Although guided reading activities was mentioned to be helpful while doing activities with digital texts, students stated that the printed texts are preferable. Digital texts, in fact, are considered more fun when they are presented with various text features such as colors, pictures, quotes, leading to higher motivation of reading.

Related to students' comprehension skill, a study presented by Ayşegül and Karadeniz (2021) state that digital texts improve students' comprehension skill significantly in terms of language acquisition. They gain better reading skill as well as language skill through digital reading activities. This study highlights the importance of reducing teachers' intervention and adding group-work activities to improve reading positivity and engagement. Consequently, these cycles need to be supported by well-designed digital texts or books according to the curricula implemented in each school and home-environment.

The possibility to personalized digital texts is also mentioned in the study as an aspect supporting students' performance with digital texts. Hence, the use of digital reading activities can be considered as an effective way to boost reading comprehension skill and language acquisition in the context of EFL classrooms as also stated by Sidabutar et al. (2022) This goes in line with what stated by Kaman and Ertem (2018) where digital texts reading activities develops fluent reading skill including the comprehension skill though the effects decrease during the prolonged time. However, the digital reading activities do not affect the reading attitude. The students mentioned that digital texts give them better experiences in reading.

From the previous studies mentioned, a study by Saqr (2021) summarized that reading digital texts mostly influences reading experiences instead of reading skill. With all the benefits, reading digital texts offer better experiences of students than reading printed texts. Teachers or lecturers are expected to get involved in the activities to guide students' activities in reading so they can gain maximum experiences in using digital texts. Numerous factors are considered to influence the effectiveness of using digital texts in reading activities, such as, technological familiarity, students' and teacher's expertise in technology, and the ability of reading comprehension itself. Therefore, this reserach intends to focus on students' perceptions on the use of digital texts in reading class and how it affected their comprehension which may lead to better implementation of digital texts as learning media in the classroom.

Method

Design

This study was a qualitative study employing case study to observe the phenomenon happens in an environment to support the process of observation on students' perceptions as presented by Phillips (2013) that case study enables deep and authentic observation on opinions and experiences including training and philosophies. This is considered suitable to observe a phenomenon happens deeper and more comprehensive. As stated by Yin (2014, p.33), case study is relevant for answering the questions of "How" and "Why" in research at some contemporary circumstance. Case studies also answer the questions requiring deep and extensive description of social phenomena.

Context and Participants

The study was conducted in a course of reading called Extensive Reading aimed to 4th semester students at English Literature Department of a private university in Semarang. Extensive Reading course was chosen because it works with various types or texts starting from magazines, novels, to news articles. Extensive Reading was also the last course of reading comprehension course and it is expected that students had adequate experiences with printed texts before shifting to digital texts that involved in this course.

There were 40 students consisting of 13 male students and 27 female students of 4th semester students involved in the course of Extensive Reading which became the respondents of the questionnaire distributed by the lecturer based on purposive sampling techniques. It stays on the selection of rich-information samples to respond in a deep interview to observe a phenomenon (Shaheen et al., 2019, p.28). 20 of the students consisting of 6 male students and 14 female students were selected with snowball sampling technique. Each of the respondents was asked in prior related to their availability and willingness to be respondents in the research.

Table 1. Respondents of Questionnaire

Number of Students	Male	Female
40	13	27

Table 2. Respondents of Interview

Number of Students	Male	Female
20	6	14

Data Collection

The data were collected in these following procedures: (1) The lecturer conducted the lecture with different types of text and genres in every other meeting, for example, students worked on their comprehension on narrative text in printed text on the first meeting and narrative one in digital text on the second meeting. (2) On the third meeting, the class worked with their comprehension on news item on printed text and the digital one on the fourth meeting. (3) On the fifth and sixth meeting, the students worked with printed novel while they worked on digital novel on the seventh and eighth meeting. (4) On the ninth and tenth meeting, the students worked with their comprehension on printed research article related to English Literature while on the eleventh and twelfth meeting, they worked on the digital version of the article. (5) On the thirteenth meeting, students were asked to fill-out a questionnaire about their perceptions working with digital texts compared to printed texts. (6) On the fourteenth meeting, an interview was conducted to gather data related to students' perceptions on the influence of digital texts on their reading comprehension.

Data Analysis

The items of the questionnaire have been through triangulation with research education experts to get the neutral and valid items. The responses gathered from the questionnaire were analyzed using SPSS to test the validity and the reliability.

The responses gathered from the interview were analyzed using thematic analysis to collect the keywords from students' answers. In Mortazavi & Davarpanah (2021), thematic analysis was employed to distinguish the efficacy of research strategies aimed to validate the qualitative data collected from research journals and in-depth interviews. The themes occurred in thematic analysis were then analyzed with triangulation, especially investigator triangulation.

As stated by Fusch et al.(2018), investigator triangulation was employed by involving an investigator to reduce the biased data interpretation.

The analysis was mentioned to be a deductive approach since it applies theories of digital texts on the data gathered from the students.

Instruments

The instruments employed in this research were a questionnaire with 5 scales of Likert Scale and interview questions; Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Neutral (N), Agree (A), and Strongly Agree (SA).

The questionnaire in table 3 was used to assess how students perceived their experiences in using digital texts;

Table 3. Questionnaire

Question Items	SD	D	N	A	SA
1. I feel helped by digital texts					
2. I understand digital texts better					
3. I feel difficult in reading digital texts					
4. I prefer digital texts for courses' texts					
5. I prefer digital texts for fun reading					

The interview questions in table 4 were arranged to get the deep opinions on using digital texts in this study.

Table 4. Interview Questions

Question Items	Themes	Frequency
1. How much time do you spend in a day with digital texts?		
2. How much time do you spend in a day with printed books/ texts?		
3. What do you think about reading digital texts?		
4. What are the good points of digital texts?		
5. What are the challenges of reading digital texts?		

Question Items	Themes	Frequency
8. Which type of text is the best presented in digital texts?		
9. Why is the text mentioned to be better presented in digital texts?		
10. Which type of text is the most difficult to read in digital texts?		
11. Why is the text mentioned to be difficult to read in digital texts?		
12. What experiences do you feel after working with digital texts in this course?		
13. How do digital texts help you in reading?		
14. How do digital texts help you in comprehension?		

Findings

Students' Perceptions on Using Digital Texts

The results of the questionnaire were presented in table 5;

Table 5. Questionnaire responses

Question Items	SD	D	N	A	SA
1. I feel helped by digital texts				32	8
2. I understand digital texts better		25	5	10	
3. I feel difficult in reading digital texts			33	7	
4. I prefer digital texts for narrative' texts				30	10
5. I prefer digital texts for novel	13	27			
6. I prefer digital texts for news item texts				30	10
7. I prefer digital texts for research articles				30	10

From the responses it can be seen that most of the students (32 students) felt helped by the digital texts although they disagreed that digital texts help them comprehend texts better (25 students). 33 students responded with “Neutral” related to their difficulties in reading digital texts which can be assumed that they were in doubt whether their experiences were categorized as difficulties. 30 students responded that narrative texts such as folktales, legends, etc were better read in forms of digital texts but it did not happen to novel which was considered as difficult to read in digital texts by 27 students. 30 students gave positive responses when it came to reading news items in digital texts as well as reading research articles.

Using Digital Texts on Students’ Comprehension

The themes emerged from the analysis of the interview responses are presented below;

Table 6. Interview Responses

Question Items	Themes	Frequency
1. How much time do you spend in a day with digital texts?	10 hours	27/ 40
2. How much time do you spend in a day with printed books/ texts?	8 hours	23/40
3. What do you think about reading digital texts?	Interesting	27/40
4. What are the good points of digital texts?	Adjustable	29/40
5. What are the challenges of reading digital texts?	Eye-fatigue	30/40
8. Which type of text is the best presented in digital texts?	Narrative	30/40
9. Why is the text mentioned to be better presented in digital texts?	Colorful	30/40
10. Which type of text is the most difficult to read in digital texts?	Novel	40/40
11. Why is the text mentioned to be difficult to read in digital texts?	Too long	40/40
12. What experiences do you feel after working with digital texts in this course?	Fun	40/40
13. How do digital texts help you in reading?	Increase interest	30/40
14. How do digital texts help you in comprehension?	Not much	40/40

From the table 6, 27 students spent 10 hours in a day with the internet. They mostly spent it on social media especially Instagram and Twitter to get update information and also on handouts or presentation files used in courses.

23 of the students spent less time in printed texts which was mostly spent when they have courses at classroom when reading textbooks or handouts from the lecturer.

Digital texts were mentioned by 27 students as interesting reading media. Some stated it because digital texts presented texts in various presentation. Moreover, since they could choose their own texts, they could choose texts that were equipped with illustration.

Digital texts were mentioned to be adjustable in terms of the size of the fonts, and the display. Students could zoom in to make the font bigger or zoom out to make it smaller. They could adjust the brightness of their screen so they could read it anytime.

Unfortunately, digital texts could lead to eye-fatigue which was mentioned to be a challenge faced by students. Their eyes tend to be tired and they got dizzy when spending too much time on screen though they used bigger screen such as tablet. Other responses were related to the accessibility when their gadgets ran out of battery.

They stated that narrative texts were best presented in digital texts since the texts could be presented in colorful illustration supporting the story they read while novels were mentioned as the least favorite texts presented in digital texts because they are too long that can be related to the eye-fatigue they experienced.

Overall, digital texts were considered fun since it was easier for them to bring tablets or android phones instead of books. Printed texts had risks of torn or dirty.

The students stated that though digital texts did not help them much in comprehending information from texts, they still thought that digital texts at least improve their interests or motivation in reading. Some of them argued that they would prefer reading printed texts in terms of course handouts or textbooks since they were easier to comprehend.

Discussions

Students' Perceptions on Using Digital Texts

The results of questionnaire and interview above were in line with what stated by Lim and Toh (2020) when citing Herold (2014) where students work only on the surface of texts instead of exploring deeper comprehension. The students' preference of narrative texts to be presented in the digital texts showed that they felt more comfortable to read digital texts which do not need deep comprehension. Narrative texts were aimed to entertain the readers instead of

providing information. This is in line with Hargreaves et al. (2022) that digital texts is best used in certain purposes of reading especially entertainment.

This factor of entertainment is also mentioned in Tanjung and Gultom (2017) and Long and Szabo (2016) that students read digital texts only for pleasure not for academic purpose. The entertainment purpose of narrative prevents students from getting in too deep to the texts meaning they could read it as a fun thing to do instead of to get information leading to the possibility of reading it in speed reading instead of slow reading. The responses from students related to the advantages offered by digital texts are also in line with the study conducted by about the entertainment aspects brought by digital texts such as colors and pictures. Illustrations were mentioned to be an aspect of digital texts liked by students.

This could be interpreted that reading digital texts has some challenges such as maintaining the focus and attention. The students of 4th semester who were involved in this present study were considered adults with longer time-span of concentration; however, reading certain types of texts in digital was considered difficult since digital texts can occur with more distractions than printed books. The unlimited accessibilities to other websites can be mentioned as one of the examples as what stated by Liu (2012). It is related to their refusal to read novels in digital texts since novels are long and time-consuming to finish a novel.

Eye fatigue emerged as a significant barrier to sustained digital reading, particularly affecting longer texts. This physical constraint, combined with digital distractions, may limit the focused attention necessary for comprehension development (Nur et al., 2022). Reading long texts on screen can definitely cause eye-fatigue causes students to take more frequent rests in between reading activities which is considered related to what stated by Mardiah et al. (2021) where academic texts are mentioned to be difficult when they are presented in digital texts. It can be another disadvantage occur due to the use of digital texts in reading classroom. This is also related to Kaman and Ertem (2018) where digital texts reading activities cannot sustain the focus in reading and the effect of comprehension itself decreases during the prolonged time. This can be caused by the ability to maintain the focus which become the main problem faced by students while doing digital reading.

The disconnect between increased motivation and unchanged comprehension supports previous research on digital reading's surface-level processing tendencies. While students found

digital texts engaging, this engagement did not translate to deeper textual understanding. The interactive functions offered by digital texts were also mentioned by Schwabe et al. (2022) as one affecting students' comprehension which is not found in the present study revealing that students found that digital texts do not influence their comprehension in reading a text especially gaining information, as what also stated by Singer & Alexander (2017) where students are found performing better when they work with printed texts. This finding is also contrary to Ayşegül and Karadeniz (2021) and Sidabutar et al. (2022) stating that digital texts improve students' comprehension skill significantly in terms of language acquisition. The fact that students did not choose news items texts nor research articles as their favorite digital texts can be related to their comprehension.

The Influence of Using Digital Texts on Students' Comprehension

The results reflect what found by Kaman and Ertem (2018) and Saqr (2021) that digital reading offers reading experiences instead of offering improvement in reading comprehension which are related to Ni'mah and Umamah (2020) study stating that the experiences of digital reading told by students were about the flexibility and accessibility instead of comprehension. The familiarity to the digital texts or the internet influences their digital reading experiences. The experiences mentioned include their motivation or interest in reading as what stated by Yaghi et al. (2019). It reveals that their independence in choosing texts they want to read influence their motivation in reading. Students can choose the title of text that is considered interesting for them. It affects their motivation and enjoyment in reading although does not affect their comprehension skill significantly as what stated in the interview. However, in this study, the motivation of digital reading, again, does not influence their ability in comprehending texts. As what proposed by Fitriyah (2022) and (Indrayadi, 2021), the motivation is mostly influenced by the media and the topics of reading while the use of digital texts in reading classroom does not affect the reading comprehension skill.

From the discussion, the presents study offers new insights on how digital texts should be presented in the classroom based on students' needs and perceptions and how digital texts are used to help students in learning reading comprehension.

Conclusion and Implication

The present study aims to reveal students' perceptions on the use of digital texts in reading classroom, especially extensive reading, and how digital texts contribute in their learning process. The findings showed that digital texts are preferred when students read light texts such as narrative text while academic texts such as scientific papers are preferred to be presented in printed texts. They also revealed that though digital texts are interesting, the digital aspects did not help them comprehend a text better. In terms of implementing digital texts, it is suggested for the lecturers or teachers to prepare the use of digital texts well in terms of matching the genres of texts with the reading media. The findings can be implemented when lecturers or teachers assign students to work with digital text. Students' perceptions on the use of digital texts are worth to be considered before employing digital texts in the teaching and learning process. Theoretically, this study is expected to support the theory of integrating digital aspects in the teaching and learning process to support digital literacy on students. Practically, this study is expected to give insights on involving digital texts in the classroom based on students' needs and preferences. It is also expected that the lecturer and students employ digital texts according to the purpose of the lesson without generalizing the use of digital texts. Pedagogically, the findings are expected to contribute in the process of preparing lecturers on implementing digital texts in the classroom to make it effective for students. This study has limitation in terms of numbers of respondents and the variety of respondents. As recommendation, further researches are suggested to come up with the issues of how digital texts can be used effectively in the classroom.

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