

Empowering the Use of Reading Strategies and Literacy through E-Book Novel: An Extensive Reading of the Great Gatsby

Cevdet Yılmaz¹ & Serhat Güzel²

Abstract: Defining literacy within the context of language teaching using various interfaces is considered an endeavor that holds a great potential to discover new contexts for meaning making. In addition, employing strategies both prior to and during the reading process is a way to enhance the effectiveness of meaning making process of reading. However, in the context of digital literacy and online extensive reading as e-book reading, the amount of research presenting insight on English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners' strategic behaviors is limited in number. Therefore, this paper aims to reveal the role of strategies and understanding of literacy when performing extensive reading using e-book novels. In this qualitative study in which descriptive analytical research design was implemented, 10 EFL learners were given a reading strategies training prior to reading an e-book novel. Following the process, their understandings of strategies and strategic behaviors were analyzed to be presented in a descriptive manner. The analysis of the qualitative data revealed that EFL learners highly favored extensive online e-book reading due to various reasons such as easy access to the reading material, reading at the convenience of their mobile devices, etc. In addition, they reported that their reading behaviors in terms of implementing reading strategies did not lead to any dramatic changes in their general reading behaviors. As the final note, however, participants responded that online e-book reading experience raised an awareness toward online reading literacy as a unique type of literacy.

Keywords: EFL; literacy; novel; online reading; strategies

DOI: 10.29329/mjer.2019.185.31

¹ **Cevdet Yılmaz**, Assoc. Prof. Dr., English Language Teaching, Faculty of Education, Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Çanakkale, Turkey, ORCID: 0000-0003-4713-6565

Correspondence: cyilmaz@comu.edu.tr

² **Serhat Güzel**, Research Assist, English Language Teaching, Faculty of Education, Balıkesir University, Balıkesir, Turkey, ORCID: 0000-0001-8337-3862

INTRODUCTION

The advances in the technology prompt language teachers and learners to question the value and the place of literacy (Chou, 2015). The reason for this change in the perspective stems from the unfitting conventional definition of literacy. Traditionally, literacy is referred to as the ability and capacity to read and comprehend a text to convey meanings (Yılmaz, Gün & Yıldırım, 2017). However, the introduction of various tools and environments into the educational context has led to some changes in the perception of literacy. Literacy can be conceived as the ability to make sense and meaning out of a context presented by any interface that offers information either fictional or informative, then to make use of the items that has been gathered.

In connection with the literacy, this paper aims to reveal how literacy can be placed within alternative learning and reading environments as e-books in terms of English as Foreign Language (EFL) learning with the use of reading strategies. To set a foundation for the research, a literature review is provided. The literature is presented in a contextual order as follows: definitions and the role of literacy are discussed, reading strategies and their place are determined in the light of studies, and digital reading behaviors of language learners are revealed.

Literature Review

Coiro (2003) defines literacy in its contemporary context, stating that it has moved beyond conventional understanding such as the ability to write and read, to the notion that it is an ability to make meaning out of technological equipment in a way that knowledge, comprehension, and interaction is made possible. In addition, Yılmaz et al. (2017) identified literacy as more than being able to read and understand a text; rather, it was described as going back and forth between dimensions of a text presented on various environments. In the study, they revealed that participants regarded literacy as being able to create alternate meanings and a depth to a text, which enabled critical thinking. On a related note, Liaw (2001) suggested that changing characteristics of language teaching has provided a whole new dimension to the understanding of the use of literary texts, prompting a new outlook for their functions in language classrooms.

Concerning reading strategies and their use, Mistar, Zuhairi and Yanti (2016) categorized three types of studies: a) studies that attempt to determine what types of strategies readers employ while reading, b) studies that attempt to identify the relationship between certain strategies and reading performance, and c) experimental studies in which learners are trained for reading strategies to improve their reading performance or strategic awareness. Urlaub (2011) asserted that strategies to read play a vital role in meaning making process of reading. In the experimental study, Urlaub (2011) revealed that strategy training based on interpreting the text and reconstructing what was given positively affected language learners' interaction with literacy and critical analysis of a text. Moreover,

Phakiti (2003) divided strategies to reading into two types: a) *learning strategies* and b) *use strategies* (pp.27-28). Learning strategies are regarded as life-long strategies that learners use during their language performances. Use strategies, on the other hand, are directed towards special and unique language circumstances. In addition to the role of strategies in reading, presenting the optional range of strategies to choose in reading is also regarded as vital (Razi, 2014). According to Razi (2014) whose study indicated that providing a well-organized strategies training can immensely improve reading awareness among EFL learners, it is crucial to train learners to effectively use strategies before reading for specific purposes so as to enable them to choose the most appropriate reading strategies for their styles.

Regarding online reading behaviors, Chou (2012) stated that there was a lack of research in terms of exploring EFL learners' digital reading habits and the nature of their online reading processes. In addition, discovering new means of medium appears noteworthy and there is a need for testing online reading experiences to determine if there is a difference in reading behaviors (Grimshaw, Dungworth, McKnight & Morris, 2007). Grimshaw et al. (2007) stated that children learning languages approached two different media of reading differently depending on the condition; in that, in some situations, digital reading took longer, or strategies used online did not appear in conventional reading. Most importantly, digital media of reading provided learners with a safe and secluded area where mistakes and failures to understand the text can be hidden. As a final note, Chen, Chen, Chen and Wey (2013) investigated the impact of e-book reading as an extensive reading activity on EFL learners. Their experimental research revealed that EFL learners improved their vocabulary capacities, reading comprehension levels, and attitudes towards reading thanks to extensive e-book reading. In addition, Chen et al. (2013) recommended that teachers should provide online resources for their students to perform extensive reading since the findings indicated that EFL learners felt engaged and willing to read e-books extensively. This allows learners to develop their reading and vocabulary skills with their own free choices and well use of time outside of the classroom. Similarly, Arnold (2009) discovered that foreign language learners improved in terms of reading motivation, reading confidence and reading skills when they were introduced online extensive reading activities.

Considering the insights on literacy and reading strategies presented, the study aims to answer following research questions:

1. What reading strategies do EFL learners use when reading an online e-book novel?
2. What are the advantages and / or disadvantages of reading a novel in online environments?

Methodology

Research Design

The research was designed to follow a descriptive-analytical nature as it aims to identify language learners' reflections of online e-book reading experiences by describing their perceptions of reading strategies and alternative reading environments. The study uses a qualitative framework in which participants' opinions on novel and online e-book reading, and their responses to semi-structured interview questions after reading the novel online by systematically employing seven reading strategies are explored.

Setting and Participants

The study took place during the spring semester of 2017-2018 academic year. 10 EFL learners who study at Balıkesir University English Language Teaching Department, consisting of six males and four females actively participated in the study. Participants were 1st, 2nd and 3rd grade students of the department; and their ages ranged from 19 to 23. The study took place as an outside of the classroom activity, making the process an extensive reading. Subjects participated in the study during their activities in the student club they formed to improve themselves academically and linguistically.

Table 1. Demographic Information of Participants

		Male	Female	Both
Age	Min	19	19	19
	Max	22	23	23
Grade	1 st grade	1	4	5
	2 nd grade	2	-	2
	3 rd grade	3	-	3
	Total	6 (60%)	4 (40%)	10 (100%)

Tools

As the data collection tools, five instruments were used. First, the novel *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald was used as the main source to exploit in the data collection. Second, seven cognitive reading strategies developed by McEwan (2007) were introduced to participants to make use of in their reading experience. These seven strategies included: activating, inferring, monitoring / clarifying, questioning, searching / selecting, summarizing, and visualizing / organizing. Third, as the first step of data collection, a background questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was implemented to participants to document and account for demographic information of participants. Fourth, reflection papers revealing what they understood from the novel and three of their most favorite strategies that they employed in the reading process were collected. Last, two semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix 2)

regarding a comparison between hardcopy reading and e-book reading experiences, and positive and negative sides of e-book reading were asked to each participant.

Procedure

The study was conducted by following several steps to collect and present data related to the matter at hand. First, chairman of the student club, who was also one of the participants of the study, was contacted and asked for agreement to conduct such a research with them. After informing the chairman and the student group about the plan, they were asked of their opinions on volunteering in the study. Second, a time schedule of two weeks for reading the online book was agreed upon with volunteering ten participants. Before starting to read the book, they received an instruction on the seven strategies towards reading. Third, they were given a two-week-long time period to read the book by employing the strategies presented to them. Fourth, they were asked to write reflections on the novel and their experience of online e-book reading, and they were requested to report three reading strategies they used the most frequently. Fifth, they were asked to answer two semi-structured interview questions concerning the experience. Last, after the data collection, the analysis of the data commenced.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the participants were analyzed by considering recurring themes as responses to each interview question. The reflections written by participants were scanned and their understanding of the novel and their opinions on the online e-book reading experience were taken into consideration. Their reflections were collected and organized under meaningful themes. Subsequently, their answers to semi-structured interview questions were similarly dissected into meaningful and thematic components to make sense out of them.

Results

The data collection on participants' perceptions of online literacy and e-book reading strategies was basically based on two sources. First, their reflections on the novel and their online reading experiences during which learners attempted to employ reading strategies presented by the researcher were analyzed. Second, participants' responses to two interview questions regarding reading strategies and evaluations of online e-book reading were examined to comprehend how they felt during the experience.

Online E-Book Novel Reading Strategies of EFL Learners

Participants generally responded to the experience positively in a way that they regarded novel reading in e-book as an eye-opening experience. In addition, they reflected that employing reading strategies was rather different than using them on hardcopy books. To specify the findings for a better

understanding, Table 2 presents an insight on their reflections in an orderly way. The presentation of the data in the table is only the extracts that represent their complete statements in a thematic fashion. In addition, from now on, the participants will be addressed with assigned nicknames to protect their identities.

Table 2. Participants' Reflections Regarding the Reading Experience and Strategies Used

Participant	The Novel	E-Book Reading	Three Strategies Used
Jake	Consumerism in America is the main topic of the book. It really shows the importance of money in people's lives.	It was a very different experience but a little bit hard for me.	Inferring, monitoring, visualizing
Finn	How people moving to the US try to change their lives.	I like reading online materials because it is easy. So, I enjoyed reading it digitally.	Visualizing, activating, questioning
Sarah	People depend on materials to feel good about themselves	I don't know what I feel about the experience because reading is always the same for me.	Visualizing, monitoring, questioning
Jeremy	I pictured lots of businessmen and fake kindness. People's life is similar to ones in İstanbul. They like showing off.	It was a familiar experience because I always use computers and phone to read something. But reading to understand something was hard in e-book.	Visualizing, inferring, questioning,
Sam	The book shows a very similar world to real life. People are the same as the characters in the book.	Reading the book online was the same with normal reading but I got distracted a lot. I checked my social media and forgot what I was reading.	Visualizing, inferring, questioning
Clara	It was a very interesting book on how rich people can act and what they can do.	It was a different experience for me. But it was a bit difficult to read.	Activating, visualizing, questioning
Will	It is basically a book on a character ready to do everything to achieve his goals. Rich people can be very empty.	I really enjoyed reading the book with my phone because I could read it very easily.	Activating, inferring, questioning
Riley	In the book, we understand that American dream is exaggerated in poor people's dreams. Actually, richness doesn't bring happiness.	I liked the book but I couldn't finish it because I was a bit demotivated.	Visualizing, inferring, monitoring
Bruce	The life shown in the book did not seem realistic to me. But we can understand the idea of American dream.	I didn't feel anything different because I always read things on my laptop or mobile phone. It was a normal experience for me.	Inferring, activating, visualizing

Mary	The book greatly makes us understand how the life in America was like. It is very realistic. We can understand that rich people cheat and lie and it's hard to stay normal among them.	It was really fun for me because using strategies was a new thing for me. It really made reading fun. But it took a lot of time.	Visualizing, questioning, activating
------	--	--	--------------------------------------

Reflections on Online E-Book Reading Regarding Advantages and Disadvantages

Participants reacted that the study was quite new for them, and even though they always read texts from online sources by using their technological devices, they had never experienced a similar goal-directed e-book reading with language learning purposes. In addition, they responded to questions (see Appendix 2) with short answers. The responses revealed that, first of all, they mostly regarded e-book novel reading experience as quite different from normal reading. As Finn stated:

It was a great experience for me because reading needs time and I find it really hard. I can't carry my books with me all the time. So, it's very easy to do homework and study with your phone.

Similar to Finn's response, Jeremy found that as a general reading experience, e-books are not vastly different than traditional hardcopy reading. However, it was the reading for learning by applying strategic frameworks into reading that made the experience different. He responded:

Normally I read a lot of things from internet sources and websites etc. and I understand general meaning. Sometimes I study for my exams on internet notes. But I never used strategies and serious ways for reading. It was hard and I couldn't finish the book because it was very long and I didn't have time. But it was very useful.

As can be inferred from Jeremy's statement, reading experience with the help of strategies transform the process into a more serious event, and it enables students to read for a purpose rather than for enjoyment. In addition, for some students, solemnity of strategy use in reading was what made the activity more fun. With this regard, Mary stated:

I didn't know there was strategies like this. But our teachers in high school wanted us to read more carefully in the paragraph questions because he didn't want us to make them wrong. So, we were very careful. I think it is the same... I always read writings carefully. Because of this, it wasn't different for me. I enjoyed it because I learnt a lot of things with strategies.

Even though responses were mostly positive, there were negative comments concerning e-book reading experience. For instance, Riley reflected:

It was useful but it wasn't different than normal reading. Because it was serious and we had to use strategies. It was like homework. I know it's for research but I couldn't focus on it. Because I like reading fun things with my phone.

As can be inferred from Riley's response, the combination of strategies and e-book reading made the process challenging and tedious. It was evident that some learners felt frustration since it took a great deal of their time and enjoyment while trying to read the novel accompanied by strategies. Similarly, Sam indicated that online e-book reading was quite different, but in a negative way. According to him:

...e-book is different because I do things differently with it. In normal reading I only read the book in my hand. I read it and put it in my bag etc. But in e-book reading I opened other things, websites, internet pages, check my Facebook page, Instagram, etc. So, I prefer reading normal books. But it was useful. We used new strategies and we can learn a lot of things with the strategies.

Regarding the second question, some advantages and disadvantages provided by each participant are listed in Table 3. To make advantages and disadvantages comprehensible in the sense of data analysis, statements made by participants were categorized under thematic titles. In essence, all statements were phrased differently, yet they addressed the issue presented in the table.

Table 3. Participants' Responses to Pros and Cons of E-Book Reading

Participant	Advantages	Disadvantages
Jake	Interesting, fun, and useful	Hard to focus
Finn	Helpful to learning	N/A
Sarah	Enjoyable	N/A
Jeremy	Fun and interesting	Hard to understand
Sam	Useful and interesting	Distracting
Clara	Useful and interesting	Difficult to read
Will	Fun and interesting	N/A
Riley	Helpful to learning, enjoyable	demotivating
Bruce	Helpful to learning, interesting, and fun	N/A
Mary	Helpful to learning	Time-consuming

Note: N/A= No Answer

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The study revealed several conclusions in terms of EFL learners' use of reading strategies and their perceptions of online e-book reading. The data indicated that participants showed great interest to reading an online e-book novel. However, they reflected disadvantageous sides to reading e-books instead of hardcopies. In other words, even though they found the activity interesting to participate, some participants were unwilling to continue since the experience of reading to achieve a serious task was similar to doing homework for them. The feeling of doing homework generated by the experience put burden on their shoulders. To specify, it can be deduced from the responses that learners were at least intrigued by the experience of reading a novel in online e-book from. Coinciding with what Liaw

(2001) proposed, online e-book reading with the help of certain strategies served as an alternative way to language teaching using literature.

In terms of using strategies, participants favored visualization and questioning strategies the most. Therefore, it can be inferred that they used visualization to help them understand the setting, characters, and the time of the narrative, which suggested that they favored a reading behavior very similar to conventional reading behaviors. In addition, they preferred questioning which means asking questions to characters in the book or their peers who read the same book at the time for a better understanding of the novel. Similarly, they favored strategies that they could use reading a hardcopy book. Therefore, it can be inferred that they did not develop or use reading behaviors that could be unique to online e-book reading experience. However, it should be taken into consideration that the alternative online reading environment raised an awareness for online literacy. As evidenced from the responses, the ground for this assumption is that online reading is an activity which students perform on a daily basis for leisure-time purposes. Therefore, it can be inferred that students were more aware that online reading activities are as serious and attention-demanding as conventional reading experiences.

In addition to its useful and enlightening features, the study has some limitations. First, the study consisted of ten participants from the same department. Second, the context of research was limited to the training of seven reading strategies. Third, the research made use of a mainstream novel as a literary text to exploit in an online e-book form. Last but not least, the research solely depended on qualitative data as data source.

Recommendations for Future Research

In the light of this qualitative research, some recommendations can be made for the future studies. First, researchers should conduct a study with a larger number of participants, possibly with the attendance of learners from other departments and universities. Second, future research should benefit from quantitative research elements as well as an improved qualitative data collection procedure. Third, as Mistar et al. (2016) presented, related future studies should employ experimental research design to reveal whether strategies training has affected strategical awareness or reading performances with the help of quantitative data collection and analyses. Last, researchers should focus on using more challenging and alternative reading materials to employ reading strategies into.

REFERENCES

- Arnold, N. (2009). Online extensive reading for advanced foreign language learners: An evaluation study. *Foreign Language Annals*, 42(2), 340-366.
- Chen, C., Chen, S., Chen, S. E. & Wey, S. (2013). The effects of extensive reading via e-books on tertiary level EFL students' reading attitude, reading comprehension and vocabulary. *Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology*, 12(2), 303-311.

- Chou, I. C. (2012). Understanding on-screen reading behaviors in academic contexts: a case study of five graduate English-as-a-second-language students. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 25(5), 411-433.
- Chou, I. C. (2015). Engaging EFL students in e-books using reader-response theory. *The Reading Matrix*, 15(2), 167-181.
- Grimshaw, S., Dungworth, N., McKnight, C., & Morris, A. (2007). Electronic books: Children's reading and comprehension. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 38(4), 583-599.
- Liaw, M. L. (2001). Exploring literary responses in an EFL classroom. *Foreign Language Annals*, 34(1), 35-44.
- McEwan, E. K. (2007). *40 ways to support struggling readers in the content classrooms, grades 6-12*. Corwin Press: Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Mistar, J., Zuhairi, A. & Yanti, N. (2016). Strategies training in the teaching of reading comprehension for EFL learners in Indonesia. *English Language Teaching*, 9(2), 49-56.
- Phakiti, A. (2003). A closer look at the relationship of cognitive and metacognitive strategy use to EFL reading achievement test performance. *Language Testing*, 20(1), 26-56.
- Razi, S. (2014). Metacognitive reading strategy training of advanced level EFL learners in Turkey. *The Reading Matrix*, 14(2), 337-360.
- Urlaub, P. (2012). Reading strategies and literature instruction: Teaching learners to generate questions to foster literary reading in the second language. *System*, 40, 296-304.
- Yılmaz, C., Gün, S., & Yıldırım, B. (2017). Turkish EFL pre-service teachers' conceptions of literacy: some implications for teacher training. *Journal of Educational & Instructional Studies in the World*, 7(4), 70-80.

Appendix 1

Demographic Information

- Age** :
- Gender** :
- Grade** :
- Favorite Three Strategies** :

Reflections on the Novel and E-Book Reading Experience

Appendix 2

Interview Questions

- 1- What are the differences between e-book novels and conventional novels in terms of using reading strategies while reading?
- 2- What are the advantages and / or disadvantages of reading e-book novel to improve language learning?