EFL Students' Perceptions of Reading Electronic Books

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This article investigated EFL students' perceptions of reading e-books. A questionnaire was employed in this research, containing twelve-item questions of perceptions and the use of e-book plus seven demographic questions. The link of questionnaire was distributed through social media, and 100 participants joined the research. The data was analyzed and themed in six parts, 1) use, awareness and purpose of e-book, 2) comparison with printed books, 3) use and satisfaction of library service, 4) library supports of e-books, 5) advantages and disadvantages of e-books, and 6) catch-all question. The result showed that most participants were generally satisfied with e-books; however, they still preferred the printed book because of some issues. Little availability of e-books in the university library also became one of the reasons why they still preferred regular book and considered e-books only as complements.

Key Words: EFL, E-book, Perception

Artikel ini meneliti persepsi para mahasiswa jurusan bahasa Inggris di Jakarta mengenai membaca menggunakan buku elektronik. Penelitian ini menggunakan sebuah kuesioner berjumlah 19 pertanyaan mengenai persepsi dan penggunaan buku elektronik. Kuesioner ini disebarkan melalui media sosial dan berhasil mengumpulkan 100 peserta. Data tersebut kemudian dianalisa dan dibagi menjadi 6 (enam) tema, 1) penggunaan, pengetahuan dan tujuan penggunaan buku eletronik, 2) perbandingan dengan buku konvensional, 3) penggunaan dan kepuasaan mengenai pelayanan perpustakaan 4) dukungan perpustakaan terhadap buku elektronik, 5) kegunaan dan kekurangan dari buku elektronik, 6) pertanyaan keseluruhan secara umum. Hasil temuan dari penelitian ini adalah, secara umum, hampir semua peserta berpendapat bahwa mereka puas dengan adanya buku elektronik dikarenakan manfaat yang didapat dari buku elektronik, tetapi mereka lebih memilih buku cetak dikarenakan permasalahan penggunaan layar dalam

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membaca. Ketidaksiapan perpustakaan mengenai buku elektronik juga menjadi salah satu alasan mengapa mereka lebih memilih buku cetak dan menganggap buku elektonmik hanya sebagai pelengkap saja.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, people are no longer restricted to learning through conventional books. Some of them turn to digital world by accessing reading materials through electronic devices. E-reading activities can be conducted through devices like smart phones, tablets, and e-book readers. This phenomenon is noticed by Wright, Fugett, & Caputa (2013) who state that the advancement in technology has introduced people to the use of electronic books in reading activity. Reading in digital type is frequently used by today generations for some reasons, such as convenience, efficiency, and availability. The same opinion is also admitted by Larson (2009) who argue that activities of kids of this era are dominated by electronic devices, and it is more preferred to other types of entertainment. This situation has an impact due to the education aspect where many institutions start to use an electronic book. For example, University of Sultan Qaboos (SQU) in Sultanate of Oman has realized the importance of e-books and its responsive role in sustainability so that SQU has been making electronic books available for its stakeholders such as academic staff, researchers, and students as the primary format of instruction (Al Saadi, Lane-Kelso, Al Hafeedh, Zainab, & Al Wishahi, 2017).

E-books offer many advantages compared to conventional ones. One of them is that e-books are often considered economic and friendly for students (Johnson, Levine, Smith, & Stone, 2010). E-books are also considered easy to use by teachers and students. They can easily access e-books anytime anywhere (Lam, Lam, & McNaught, 2015). Also, Doering, Pereira, and Kuechler (2012) add another advantage: users can annotate, copy and paste text, highlight, and so on. This makes e-books become user friendly. E-books also bring big impact for students' health. Owing to in electronic format, students no longer need to bring heavy books, so it decreases their burden. This is supported by Embong, Noor, Hashim, Ali, and Shaari (2012) by stating that e-books can reduce weight and enable students to grow healthily without any harm effect such as back pain and poor body posture which could affect backache in adulthood.

Despite their advantages, e-books also have limitations. For example, Liaw and Huang (2016) mention that some of books are not available in digital format or can't be downloaded for free. Jamali, Nicholas, and Rowlands (2009) comment that e-book type needs more time to be downloaded, should be printed for whole page, needs time consuming in access and reading, push the users' dependency on technologies, and decreases users' motivation to use library. The more students rely on electronic book, the more decrease library users will be.

However, many studies have confirmed the benefits of the use of electronic books. For example, Hung and Young (2015) explored the students' view of the use of digital book in writing class of Northern Taiwan University. They found that students' perceptions regarding electronic readers were good. The participant's feedback during the interview also showed this proposition. However, another research by Chou (2014) that investigated 20 undergraduate students at Taiwan College regarding the use of e-book in intensive reading program showed different finding. During the research, students were provided three websites and asked to read four juvenile novels. Then, they had to write the reading report collected once a month for one

semester. Findings revealed that students' perception of reading through e-books was not really good. They confirmed that e-book were accessible, but the reading experience was unpleasant since many of them got their eyes dry easily. Internet issue was also another complaint as students needed good internet connection to access the websites and read the e-books. Based on those two studies, we can highlight that e-books give benefits for students; however, e-books still have limitations when implemented in teaching-learning processes.

This gap clearly brings out one issue: are students pleased with e-books type? This current study, therefore, explored students' perceptions of e-books in their academic learning. The research question formulated was as follows: How do EFL students perceive reading activities through e-books?

Literature Review
E-book
E-book is generally viewed as a book in screen which is operated using device. Önder (2011) describes electronic book as a digital type of regular printed book or as product of digital technology. In other word, e-book is a book which can be accessed using portable device such as laptop or special application to run the e-book. Similar definition is also stated by Vassiliou and Rowley (2008) who state e-book as a digital type of conventional printed book that can be used by the support of specific devices and software. In addition, Mulholland and Bates (2014) define e-book as paper-based text which can be operated using compatible devices. To sum up, it can be concluded that e-book is a regular book in screen which can be used with the help of particular device or software.

Studies of E-book in Higher Education
Woody, Daniel, and Baker (2010) conducted a survey study regarding factors that influence e-book preference. 91 students of General Psychology participated. The study found that the students still preferred conventional textbooks to e-books even though most of them rely on technology.

Another survey was held by Clark (2006) with 2,067 participants including students, faculty members, and staff at University of Denver. The survey consisted of 19 questions about e-book usage and awareness. The result showed that even though e-books were already known, teachers, students, and staff surprisingly used e-books occasionally. Most respondents only read small portion of e-book because reading in screen took long time and caused eyestrain, so students tended to skip some lines or even pages. Often, they only did skimming and scanning. The study revealed that over 60% of respondents preferred conventional to electronic books.

The same case was also found by Yalman (2014) who investigated pre-service teachers' view about e-book. The study found that they only use e-book when needed and necessary. Similarly, Chou (2012) interviewed five graduate students about their attitude in using e-book. The study found that when using e-book they often skimmed the whole materials first and then printed out the selected items or theory needed for the further learning. The abovementioned studies indicate that e-books do have its place in higher education, but still, generally the users are more likely to use conventional textbook than digitalized books.

E-book Usage in L1 and L2 Reading Programs

Some authors show positive results of reading activity using e-books in higher education. For instance, Sun (2003) did an experimental study to find out the implementation of extensive reading program using online reading website. The participants were 59 students at Taiwan University. After reading each article, students were asked to write comments or reflections and share their opinions with their classmate on the system. The result showed that the participants enjoyed the reading activity, especially with the help of ERO (Extensive Reading Online) features. They found it improved their online reading skills. The participants also became competent of discovering suitable reading materials. The same type of experiment was also held by Arnold (2009) who evaluated the implementation of extensive reading program. Eight advanced students who were learning German as a foreign language participated in the study. In this study, learners could choose what articles to read. The purpose of reading was usually related to pleasure, information, and general understanding. Result of the study showed that students' ability in reading increased. They no longer used dictionary when they thought it wasn't really necessary. Meanwhile, before they got used to reading online, they often used dictionary. They could figure out the meaning without misunderstanding the comprehension.

Another research with regard to reading activity using e-books was conducted by Huang (2013) that explored students' view of an e-book reading program. 67 students of English who had learned the language for at least six years participated in the study. Students were provided a website and they could download the materials. Each time the students were done with reading, they had to turn in reading logs and had an interview in the end of the program. Online discussion forum was also provided by the researcher to share and exchange students' perceptions of the article and the reading process. The study showed positive attitudes with regard to reading e-books downloaded from the website. Most of them were pleased with the tools provided in the website to read e-books because it made reading easier. They also informed that the program increased their reading ability, and they kept reading the e-books even though the project ended.

Chen, Chen, and Wey (2013) conducted an experimental study to investigate the influence of online extensive reading using e-book. They focused on exploring how the program affected students' reading attitudes, comprehension, and vocabulary mastery in reading. There were eighty-nine students which were divided into two groups (experimental and control group). The experimental group was asked to join ten-week e-book extensive reading program while the control group only got the regular English classes. The study showed that, compared to the control group, the experimental group had better reading attitude, comprehension, and vocabulary mastery.

METHOD

Study Design

This study followed the study by Chou (2014) that investigated EFL students' perception of e-book at a college in Southern Taiwan specializing in language instruction. The differences of the current study with the previous one were the number of participants and location. Also, Chou (2014) gave the students treatment in a particular period of time and had them make reports of their reading activity. On the other hand, in this research, the participants were asked to complete the questionnaire with their knowledge of e-books spontaneously.

This study employed a quantitative survey method. Bell (2010) states a survey method aims to acquire information from the representative of the population. It is also effective and economical. The study also employed a convenience sampling technique with an internet-based survey for collecting data. This study used a questionnaire as an instrument for data collection method. The questionnaire was adapted from Smyth and Carlin (2012) and added with one more demographic question. The total number of questions was 19. The survey consisted of demographic questions, six items of e-book perception, and five items on the use of e-book. The twelve-item questions of perceptions and use of e-books were divided into three indicators, namely 1) preferences, 2) effectiveness and flexibility, 3) attitude and method (see Table 1). The seven demographic questions comprised gender, age, region, level of study, mode of study, experience in using e-book, and awareness of e-book in universities' library. This current research was conducted for six months using the Google form platform to create the questionnaire.

Table 1. *List of items and indicators*

Indicator	Item	Code
Preferences	Always print	P1
	Always E-book	P2
	Usually print but sometimes electronic	P3
	Usually electronic but sometimes print	P4
	I Mostly use print books	P5
	E-books are useful resource	P6
	I use e-books to compliment print books	P7
	I have online access to all E-books I want to use	P8
	I usually read research monograph in e-book version	P9
	I usually read encyclopedias in e-book version	P10
	I prefer read text book in e-book version	P11
	I usually read Fiction in e-book version	P12
Effectiveness and Flexibility	E-books are better in ease of making copies	EF1
	Printed books are better in ease of making copies	EF2
	Both formats are equal in ease of making copies	EF3
	E-books are better in ease of reading	EF4
	Printed books are better in ease of reading	EF5
	Both formats are better in ease of reading	EF6
	E-books are better in ease of use	EF7
	Printed books are better in ease of use	EF8
	Both formats are better in ease of use	EF9
	E-books are better in reading for pleasure	EF10
	Printed books are better in reading for pleasure	EF11
	Both formats are better in reading for pleasure	EF12

	Discomfort/difficulties reading on screen *R*	EF13
	Lack of choice of E-book titles for the subject areas relevant to my study *R*	EF14
	Internet connection problem *R*	Ef15
	Lack of choice of E-book titles in Arabic or my specific language *R*	EF16
	Page is too long to navigate/too slow *R*	EF17
	Should have personal computer or bringing hand-held device anytime I want to access e-book *R*	EF18
	Cost much money when I should print the files *R*	EF19
	Ease of access – ability to access books anytime anywhere	EF20
	Usefulness of search tools or other available features	EF21
	Automatic referencing or citation	EF22
	Off campus access	EF23
	Convenient, fast, and easy	EF24
	Good range/ selection of titles	EF25
	e-books enable me to be more efficient in my academic pursuits or work	EF26
	The library supports my learning and research needs in respect of E-book	EF27
	The library provide effective support and training in the use of E-book	EF28
Attitude and method	Visiting the library building	AB 1
	Visiting the library websites	AB2
	Search database	AB3
	Use E-books	AB4
	I read the entire book (in e-book version)	AB5
	I read only chapter/article (in e-book version)	AB6
	I read only Single page (in e-book version)	AB7
	I only scan for keywords in reading e-book	AB8
	I use e-book for Lecture preparation	AB9
	I use e-book for research	AB10
	I use e-book for reading for pleasure	AB11
	When reading E-books, which method of access do you use? Laptop/pc	AB12
	E-book reader (e.g. Amazon Kindle or Sony E-book reader)	AB13
	Smartphone	AB14

Participants

100 EFL students participated in the survey (see Table 2). The selection of these participants was because the previous research only explored the students' perception from a single institution only and gave the students a treatment to see the significant change in the use of e-

book over a year. Meanwhile, the selection of participants in this study was because the researcher had the same experience in using e-book in college life and often heard many complains by her friends regarding the use of e-book in class during the learning process; however, most of them were good with reading online article or novel.

Table 2. *Demographics data*

Demographics		Respondents	Percentage
Gender	Female	59	59%
	Male	41	41%
Age	Under 18	1	1%
	18-24	81	81%
	25-30	18	18%
	31 above	0	0%
Affiliation	South Jakarta	19	19%
	North Jakarta	8	8%
	East Jakarta	63	63%
	West Jakarta	10	10%
Level of Study	First year	7	7%
	Second year	22	22%
	Third year	22	22%
	Fourth year	49	49%
Mode of study	Full time student	73	73%
	Part time student	27	27%
E-book usage experienced	E-book user	78	78%
	Non e-book user	7	7%
	doubted	15	15%
E-book awareness	yes	64	64%
	no	11	11%
	doubted	24	24%

Data Collection and Analysis

The questionnaire was created using Google Docs platform and distributed online through Whatsapp, Email, and Instagram. The questionnaire was adopted from Smyth and Carlin (2012) and added with one more demographic question with the total of 19 questions. In doing

the analysis, the study followed the previous study. The analysis was divided into six section, as follows (1) Use, Awareness and Purpose of E-books, (2) Comparison with Printed Books, (3) Use and Satisfaction with Library Service, (4) Library Support of E-books, (5) Advantages and Disadvantages of E-books, and (6) Catch-all question. Some tables and figures are also provided to show the number of percentage of all sections.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

All 100 participants responded to the questionnaire. Respondents were largely 18 – 24 years old (81%), followed by 25 – 30 years old (18%) and under 18 years old, as can be seen in the Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. *Demographic data of respondents*
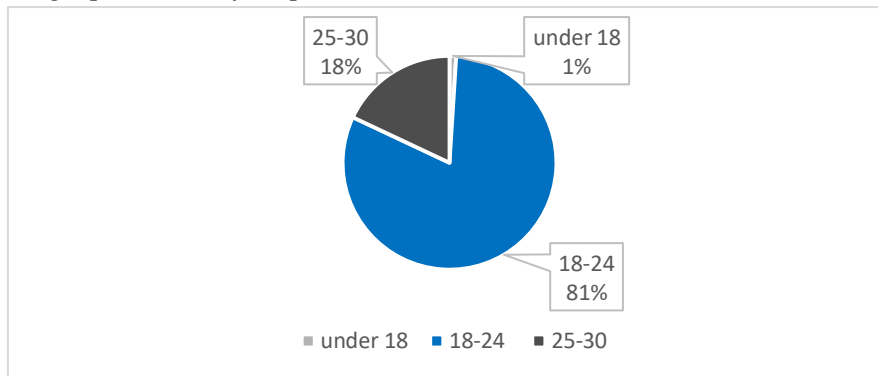
The respondents were mostly (63%) based in East Jakarta and dominated by female students (59%). Almost half of them were senior students (49%), followed by freshman (7%), and sophomores & juniors (22%).

## Use, Awareness, and Purpose of E-books

Most participants had ever used e-books and been aware of the availability of e-book in the library (55%). A lower percentage of non-users (3%) were conscious of e-books from their universities.

Figure 2. *Awareness of university's e-books (e-book users and non-users)*
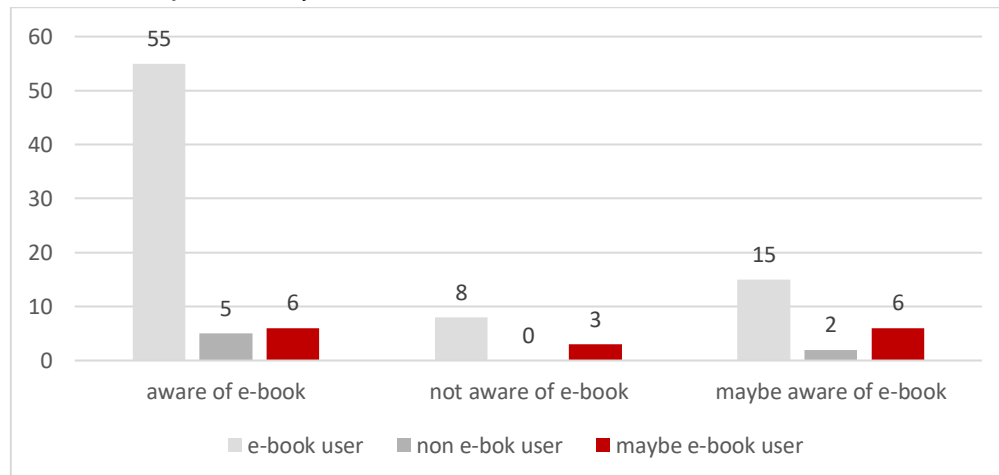
The study results also revealed the objective of using e-books in college life. The most common use was for research (73%), followed by reading for pleasure (60%) and preparing for presentation (12%)

Figure 3. *Purpose of e-book usage*
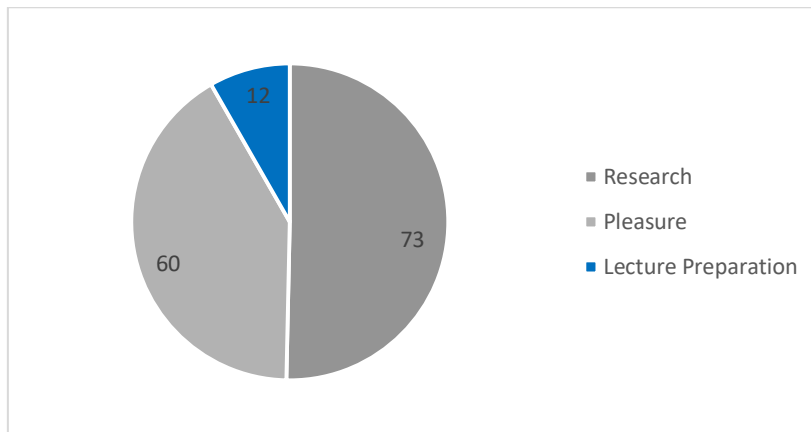
Textbook was the most popular type of e-book (58%). This indicated that most of them used e-book for academic reading. The next popular type was fiction (50%), encyclopedias and dictionary (49%), and research monograph (40%). Most respondents indicated that they typically scanned for keywords when using e-books (64%). 60% of them read the chapter/ article, and only few read the entire book (24%). The preferred access method of e-book was smartphone (87%). 60% of respondents used laptop or personal computer to read e-books, followed by E-book reader such Amazon Kindle or Sony e-reader (17%). For information, this question allowed the participants to choose more than one option so the result may be varied. The research showed the minimal score of e-book reader due to lack of information in how to use it. Some of them may not know that e-book reader applications were available.

**Comparison with Printed Books**
Answering Q8 "Given a choice between print and electronic versions of the same book, which would you choose?" participants showed various responses, with "usually print but sometimes electronic" being the most frequent answer (55% agreed), followed by "usually electronic but sometimes print" (28%) of participants. This indicates the possibility of using e-book as an option. Gender was inessential in spite of the figures being lower for male respondents, as can be seen in the following figure.

Figure 4. *Format choice by gender*
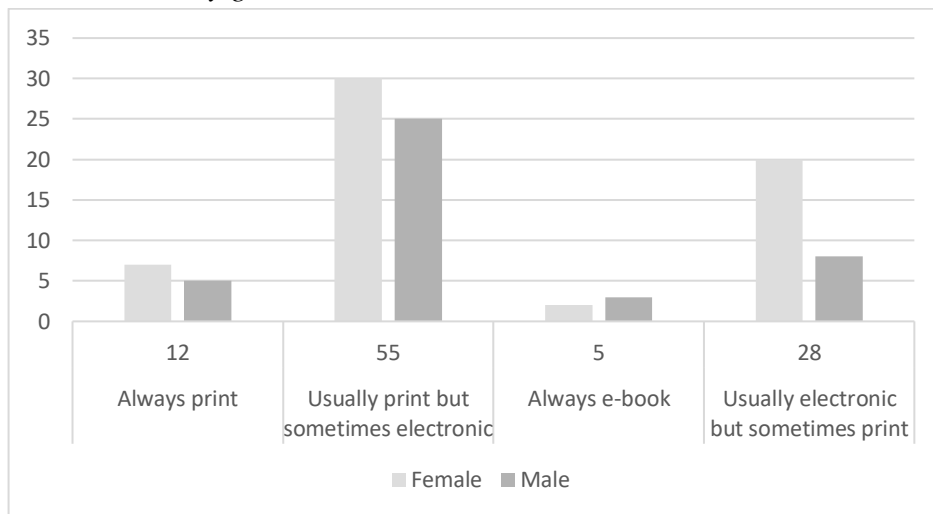
Response to Q13 asking how participants' habit towards library things was quite interesting. We discovered that library exploration frequency had no effect on the book preferences type, as can be seen in Figure 5 below.

Figure 5. *Frequency library use and preferences format*
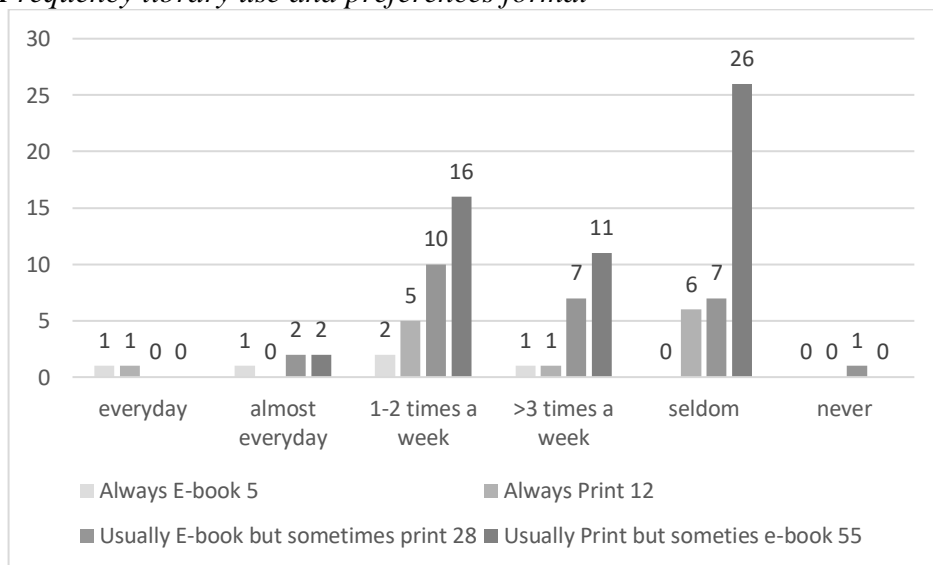
Responses to the issue "How much do you agree with the declaration" "Google Generation" (age 18-24) showed the most preference to printed books, as can be seen below.

Figure 6. *Positive responses to the statement "I mostly use print books."*
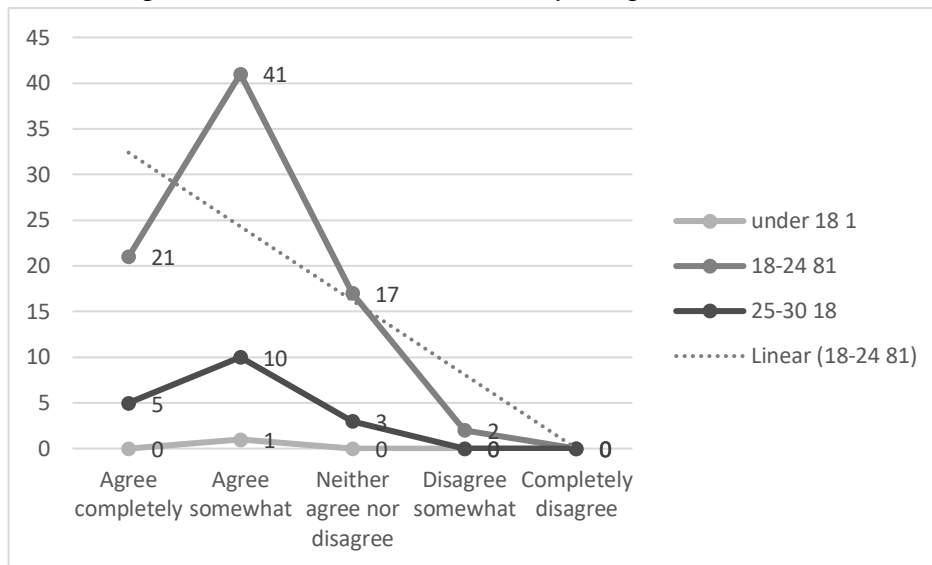
When asked to compare e-books with printed ones. E-books were definitely chosen to make copies (58 percent agreed), but printed books were considered better in terms of reading enjoyment and readability (47 percent agreed). This is in agreement with studies by Chu (343) Clark (297), Smyth & Carlin (189), as can be seen in Figure 7.

Figure 7. *Comparison of printed and e-books with specific aspects of use*
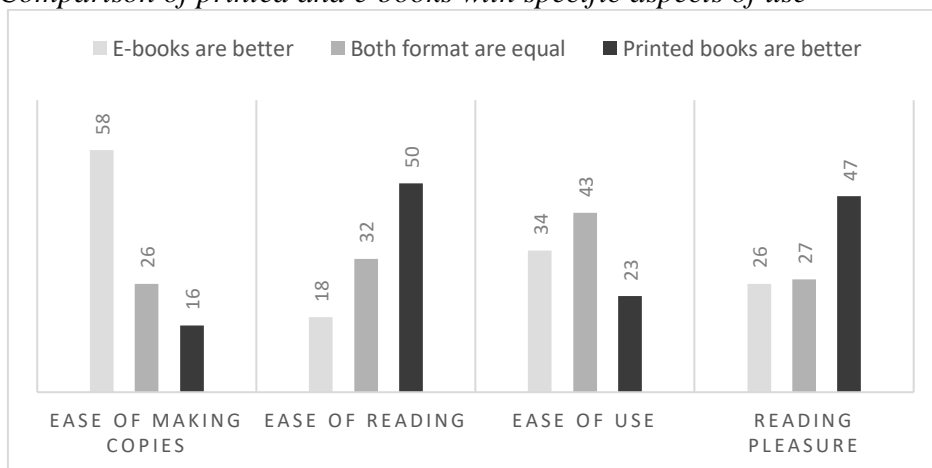
Use of and Satisfaction with Library Services

Findings showed that participants were mostly infrequent users of library building (39%), but 37% of them visited library website 1-2 times a week. However, frequent use of library databases was 42%, followed by frequent use of library e-books 33%. This reveals the habits of respondents who rarely visit the library but still access library's web, databases, and e-books.

Respondents were generally satisfied with library service. Electronic journal become the first most favorite source (50%), followed by e-books (49%), database and online subject guides (45%), and library service (41%), as can be seen in Figure 8 below.

Figure 8. *Satisfaction with electronic resources provided by each university in general*
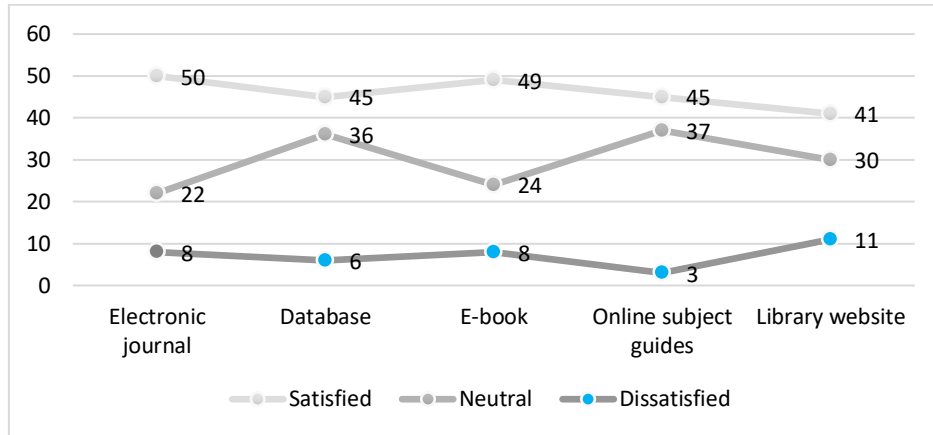
Library Support with E-books

Question number 10 asked how participants thought about the function of the library in offering assistance and access to e-books and other resources. The majority of participants (74%) agreed. When it came to using e-books to supplement printed books, the majority of respondents (83%) agreed with others commented negative (2%) and neutral (15%). When asked how e-books contributed to the effectiveness of study, the majority (80%) agreed, while 4% of participants disagreed with 16% neutral, as can be seen below.

Figure 9. *Perceptions of library support with e-books*
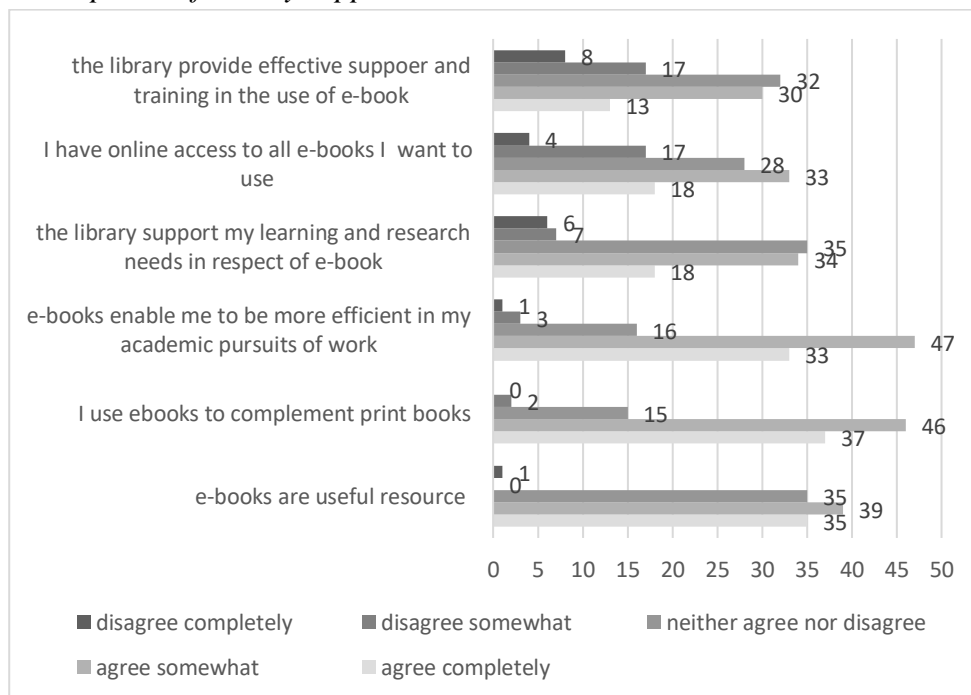
In reaction to the statement "The library supports my learning and research need in respect to e-books," 52% of respondents expressed agreement, while 11% disagreed with 35% neutral. When asked whether the library offers efficient assistance and instruction in e-book use, 43% of respondents agreed, while 25% of them responded negatively with 32% neutral. With the statement "I have online access to all the e-books I want to use," Respondents stated agreement (51%) and disagreement (21%), while 28% of them was neutral.

**Advantages and Disadvantages of E-book**

Responding to the question "What do you think the advantages of e-book?" 81% of respondents stated flexible time to access e-book anytime and anywhere, followed by convenient, fast and easy (69%), usefulness of available features (53%), good range or selection of titles and automatic referencing or citation (48%), and off campus access (29%).

Figure 10. *Advantages of e-book*
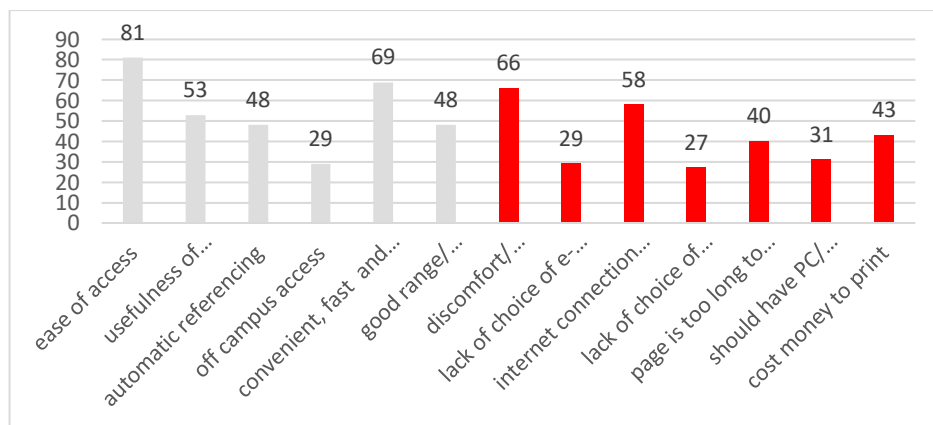
Besides the advantages, respondent were also asked about the disadvantages of e-book. The result was quite surprising because even though they stated that e-books were easy to access (81%), they also stated the difficulty and discomfort in reading by screen (66%). Internet connection problem also became the disadvantages of e-book (68%). The cost to print was another disadvantage (43%) related to statement "I use e-books to complement printed books" (Q10), as can be seen in the figure below.

Figure 11. *Disadvantages of e-book*
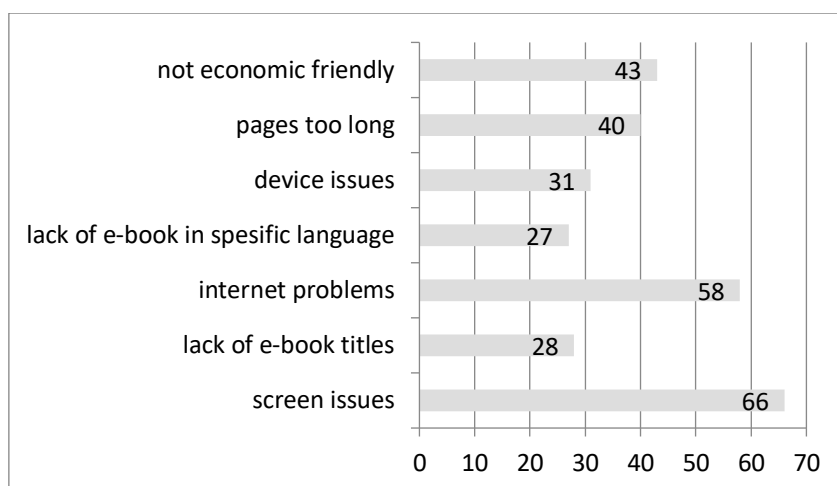
This phenomenon shows that even though students use e-books to compliment the printed books, they still complain about the cost they have to spend to print the book. This may burden the respondents in economic aspect. Another disadvantage was e-book was sometimes too long to read (40%) which made the participants tend to do skimming or scanning for keywords or important parts only. Besides this, not having personal computer was also a problem to access e-books (31%), while lack of choice of e-book titles in relevant studies (29%) was still found.

Catch-all Question
The questionnaire's final question asked: is there anything that you want to tell us regarding course text, print or electronic, or about your university's library service? Themed analysis showed that responses to this question were equals, but the lack of accessibility/availability of their university's e-books was the most noticeable, as can be seen in the Table 3 below.

Table 3. *Themed responses to "catch-all"*

Aspect of Use	Negative responses	Positive responses
Library service	10	5
Accessibility / availability	13	4
Preferences in using e-book	2	12
Preferences in using printed	1	6
Training needs	1	0
Total	27	27

Several points can be drawn from EFL students' perceptions of reading through Electronic Books. First, EFL students are quite satisfied with e-books but still prefer printed books. Although, more than half of respondents are google generation who are very friendly with technology, most of them still prefer printed books to e-books. This phenomenon is also

found in the previous research by McGowan, Stephen, and Bradley (2009) and Spencer (2006)

Second, this research reveals EFL students' awareness of E-book advantages. The most dominating term is the flexible use. This mean the students can access e-books anytime and anywhere. They also claim that e-books are convenient, fast, and easy. On the other hand, they are also aware of some disadvantages of e-books; the most complained disadvantage is the discomfort and difficulty of reading them on screen. Finally, the study found no significant impact of library activity with reading habit. Both, the frequent and infrequent library users, prefer printed books to e-books.

CONCLUSIONS

This research has explored how EFL sudents perceive the use of e-books in their study. Findings of this research report that most participants are generally satisfied with e-books because of some advantages mentioned above, but they still prefer printed books because of the screen issue. Little availability of e-books in their university's library also becomes one of the reasons why they still prefer regular books and consider e-books only as complements.

However, the result of this study cannot be generalized to all EFL students even though the researcher took different study levels of students. The small number of participants also become the limitation of this study. As this study only focuses on students' perceptions of reading e-books, further studies may explore the challenges in applying e-book in learning activity and investigate teachers' readiness on implementing e-book-based activities in the classroom.

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