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Development of Korean EFL Learners' Learning Attitude using Flash-Based Animated Books

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is intended to identify the effectiveness of flash-based animated books when applied to the EFL elementary English class. As a teaching material, a flash-based animated book was chosen and discussed in order to figure out any changes of learners' attitude toward English learning. Given the analysed data which were collected mainly through questionnaires and interviews with focal participants, findings suggested that flash-based animated books provided EFL students with rich content context, and created an interactive learning environment by promoting their motivation.

Keywords: *reading, EFL, online, storybook, motivation*

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Introduction

In Korea, English, as a mandatory course is being taught from the elementary school to the high school. In other words, most of the students spend literally around ten years studying English in a formal school setting. While learning the English language, students are continually told and taught that the ultimate goal of learning English should be targeted toward enhancing their communicative competence. In 2009, MOE (Ministry of Education) in Korea laid special stress on the students' development of communication ability in terms of using English in a real world. According to the 8th revised national English curriculum by MOE, the objective of teaching and learning English is as follows;

The goal of the English curriculum is intended to cultivate the basic communicative ability to understand and use English in everyday life. The objective of elementary English is particularly to escalate students' interest in English, and foster their basic communicative skills to comprehend and express themselves in English. Bearing these aims in mind, students are ultimately expected to acquire interest in English, build confidence in basic use of English, build a foundation for basic communication in English in everyday life, and understand foreign customs and cultures through English education.

Along with such learning purposes in elementary education, students in secondary school are encouraged to cultivate the ability to understand and communicate in English about general topics in daily life. Based on the English learned in elementary school, they are expected to understand the necessity to communicate in English, communicate effectively in daily life and about general topics, understand diverse foreign information in English, and put it into practical use, and appreciate diverse cultures and introduce our culture in English. In other words as shown above, it seems so clear that English should be taught for fostering the ability to communicate in everyday life, as well as building a basis to promote the interest and confidence in English for students. However, in spite of the fact that a communicative purpose lies the key in learning English stressed by MOE, the students in EFL settings still tend to focus on learning English for the test itself, rather than to develop their verbal skills. Even English teachers in a high school class, for instance, pay excessive attention to elaborating grammar rules, vocabulary and reading comprehension, since NSAT (National Scholastic Aptitude Test) in Korea is on the basis of those areas. Given the fact that students suffer from the pressure of NSAT for the advanced private university entrance, learning English at the public school sounds like not learning for a real communicative purpose, but learning for the test score. As a matter of fact, this *lucus a non lucendo* has caused students to target to gain a high test score as a fundamental reason for studying English, regardless of developing the communicative ability. It became consequently explicit that there exists a huge gap between what is currently being taught to the students of EFL in English class and what has to realistically be taught to them. What is worse, the result of the tests does not necessarily mean that those who get a high score in the English assessment are of high English proficiency in terms of communicative performance. The more English curriculum at the public school has been geared toward the test; it has been obvious the more students have lost their learning motivation and interest. Nonetheless, it is considered by many of the students that English, as a required subject is a must-pass-course merely in order to obtain a high score in the test. In fact, most of the students today still pay close attention to the standardized test score, which they believe plays a key role in guarantying better university or career in the future. Simply put, English learners too much care for the English test, but put less emphasis on the ultimate purpose of learning English which is to develop communicative competence.

Significance of ICT Use in ELT

Although a traditional ELT (English language teaching) still concentrates on enhancing students' academic achievement at the public school setting, there is a movement occurring together with the development of ICT (information and communication technology). This trend focuses on the learners' substantial use of English and on promoting learning motivation out of the tests. Surprisingly, since early 2000s, teaching and learning English in an EFL situation has been changed drastically due to the development of ICT. As opposed to the traditional ways of teaching and learning English such as GTM (grammar translation method), the communication-based approach has gradually been preferred by classroom English teachers or practitioners. A rapid development of ICT skills brought its positive effect into ELT area in which both teachers and learners could utilize ICT to broaden and enlarge learners' communicative competence. In the area of current ELT, many previous research studies have already proved the potentials of using multimedia in the English classroom, such digital storytelling (Yoon, 2008), e-books (Chen, et al, 2013; Korat, 2010), and other multimedia-based tools (Barret & Sharma, 2007; Hannafin & Hannafin, 2010; Yang, et al, 2012; Zhao & Lai, 2007).

In particular, studies of Korat & Shamir (2012) showed the educational effects of a flash-based digital story (FBDS) in a foreign language classroom, and proved that an instruction of using a flash-based digital story provided EFL learners with enjoyment in studying English as well as learning motivation for further study. They put a strong emphasis that a flash-based digital story contains a combination of SATIs (sound, audio, text, and image) and can be read through such digital devices as computers, smart phones, tablet PCs, which digital native learners of today are good at using. Yoon (2008) described that a flash-based digital story is an excellent resource for EFL learners of a low English proficiency, and learners who are literally digital natives can take advantages of utilizing such multimedia materials into their learning process. Basically, today's learners have a keen interest in using and adapting new technologies in everyday life, and it is why they call themselves as a digital native. By using those components, it is estimated that learners are able to get more involved in learning. Therefore, more and more language teachers came to realize a flash-based digital story can bring enjoyment and excitement into the English study, and language materials in a flash-based story format may encourage students to arouse the learning motivation and fulfil the realistic aim for learning English (Andrews, 2000; Benson, 2007; Kent & Facer, 2004; Little, 2007; Zehir-Topkaya, 2010; Zhao, 2013).

Hence, this current research discusses the prospects of using flash-based animated books (hereafter, FBAB) in teaching and learning English, and aims both classroom English teachers and practitioners to use FBAB as an alternative medium, helping students to get more involved in learning English.

Review of Literature

Electronic-based learning materials

It is literally crucial to choose a learning material properly appropriate to the level of each learner. In particular, learning focus in the EFL context needs to be made for connecting the knowledge which is learned in class and the practice which can be applicable outside of the class. According to Brown (2001), authentic language and real world tasks can make learners to grasp the relevance of the classroom activities for their long-term communicative goal. Previously, relevant research studies have proved that authentic materials like a storybook have the potentials to take learners with real lives into the classroom by triggering an effective learning experience (Chen, et al, 2013; Yang, et al, 2012). In fact, authentic storybooks help learners to fall into a foreign context and culture in which they have never experienced.

According to Chen, et al. (2013), extensive reading with e-books on tertiary level EFL students worked well in developing their reading attitude, reading comprehension and vocabulary capacity. Their research was conducted with eighty-nine participants with 46 students in the experimental group and the other 43 in the control group. For the experimental group, students were encouraged to read the materials freely from three e-book library collections, and then reading Attitude questionnaire and TOEFL reading comprehension and vocabulary test were employed to collect the result. The findings of the study revealed that the experimental group using e-books showed better reading attitude, reading comprehension and vocabulary score than the control group. It became clear that therefore, extensive reading with e-books helped learners to enhance tertiary level EFL students.

A study of Korat & Shamir (2012) examined the effect of direct and indirect teaching of vocabulary and word reading on pre-kindergarten and kindergarten children with an electronic storybook. For the experiment, the participants in control group were randomly assigned, and encouraged to read e-books. The e-book contained a function of supporting word meaning. When completing the research, the results indicated that children using e-books exhibited better understanding and progress in the word meaning by the computer as opposed to the control group.

Similar to Korat & Shamir (2012), Korat (2010) also investigated the effectiveness of reading an electronic storybook (e-book) on Israeli children's language and literacy program. He compared 40 kindergarten children aged 5-6 and 50 first graders in elementary school. The children in each age group were randomly assigned into two groups. An intervention group then read e-books five times and a control group followed the regular school program. Pre- and post-tests for vocabulary and words were administered, and post-tests also included story comprehension questions. Findings showed that children who read the e-book showed significant progress in word meaning and word reading compared to the control group. Kindergarten children progressed in word reading more significantly than first graders across treatment groups.

Another research by Larson (2013) exhibited the perspectives of pre-service teachers on using e-books. In this study, 49 pre-service teachers participated in an e-book reading experience in order to prepare them to teach with e-books in the class. In addition to examining the pre-service teachers' digital reading behaviours, the ways of utilizing e-books in today's classrooms and trends in e-book technologies were discussed. It was concluded that new literacy education using e-books has to become part of a balanced literacy approach.

Motivation towards language learning

One of various aspects which impact learning process, motivation seems closely to be related with success to fulfil the learning goal. In particular, it has been proved that it promotes the effective language learning when applied to second language learners. Gardner & Lambert (1972) stressed the notions of instrumental and integrative motivation. According to them, instrumental motivation is described as learner's desire to learn a language for utilitarian purposes in the context of language learning. Integrative motivation involves the learner's will to learn a language to integrate successfully into the target language. Through classroom activities of integrative motivation, language teachers can help learners to build up their self-confidence, experiences of success, learning satisfaction and finally their strong desire for further learning. Another reinterpretation of motivation is a theory of self-determination proposed by Ryan & Deci (2000), who defined motivation as two different aspects like intrinsic and extrinsic one. Intrinsic motivation refers to attitudes driven by internal rewards of each learner. In other words, the motivation to engage in attitude arises from within the each individual because it gets intrinsically rewarding. Brown (2007) described that "intrinsic motivation refers to the reason why we perform certain activities for inherent satisfaction or pleasure; you might say performing one of these activities is reinforcing in-and-of itself." On the contrary, extrinsic motivation occurs to learners after driven by external rewards such as money, fame, grades, and praise. Brown (2007) explained "extrinsic motivation refers to our tendency to perform activities for known external rewards, whether they be tangible (e.g., money) or psychological (e.g., praise) in nature." For instance, a learner with extrinsic motivation learns a second or foreign language in order to earn external rewards or avoid punishments. Simply put, to be aware of the nature of learner's motivation lays a key to language teacher, because it eventually plays a significant part in designing and adapting language learning strategies.

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to investigate any potentials of FBAB in teaching English in EFL context, and to consider actual practice in English language classroom. Therefore, a qualitative method was chosen to meet the intention of the research. In order to find out the effectiveness and potentials of FBAB, the researcher administered participant questionnaire and conducted participant group interviews. The whole research process was conducted for 2 weeks through Google online survey tool and Skype video conferencing. After collecting those data, the results were analysed qualitatively.

Participants

A total 5 number of in-service elementary school teachers enrolled in a graduate program at a teacher's college in Korea participated in this study. All of the 5 focal participants have been teaching English by using FBAB in their teaching and tutoring. As shown as below, Table 1 shows detailed information about them.

Table 1. Background Information of Participants

Name*	Gender	Grade	Years in learning English	Years in teaching English
Ted	M	7	15	2
Sunny	F	4	13	3
Alex	M	8	14	3
Gracie	F	6	16	4
Gloria	F	5	13	1

*A pseudonym was used for all participants to conceal their identity

Materials

For this research, 'StoryTimeForMe' (www.storytimeforme.com) was chosen because it provides free online storybooks appropriate to young learners. It was run based on flash animation and contained interactive functions with colorful display. The animation of those flash-based books was fully designed to stimulate young learners' interest and to be user-friendly in that users could simply turn on/off sounds, highlight the narrated sentences and turn pages of the books by controlling buttons located at the bottom of the page. Below are some of the screenshots of Story time for me.

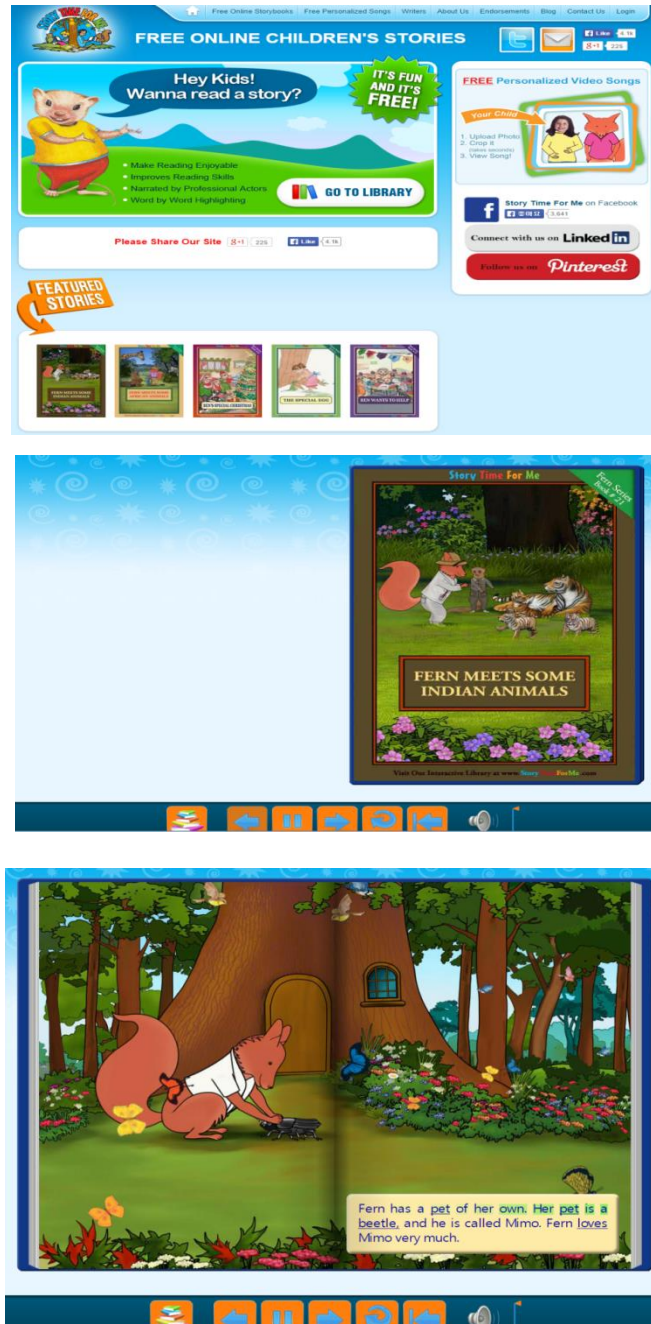


Figure 1. Screenshot of Story time for me (www.storytimeforme.com)

Questionnaire

In order to figure out any potentials of using FBAB in English lesson, a questionnaire shown as in Appendix #1 was distributed to all of the participants. It was composed of 15 questions with one open-ended type of one. Specifically, it was divided into 4 sections. First questions from 1 to 4 were categorized as Section #1 which was related to asking participants' background information. Section #2 including questions from 5 to 7 asked their teaching experiences with FBAB.

Next section mainly dealt with questioning learners' attitude towards using online storybooks for English learning. In followed section#4, questions from 11 to 15 were aimed to grasp the effectiveness or challenges of using FBAB. The last question surveyed participants' opinions and perspectives on using FBAB in English teaching.

Group interviews with participants

In order to figure out each participant's perception on the use of FBAB, group interviews were conducted at the end of the research. Using Skype video conferencing, all the participants and the researcher joined the interview together, which was recorded simultaneously in a PC as an MP4 format for transcription. Throughout the interview process, they were asked to answer their thoughts and views on FBAB in English teaching and learning. All interviews were done in Korean, and then all the comments and interaction were translated into English while transcribing.



Figure 2. Screenshot of Skype Video Conferencing

Data Collection and Analysis

The participant questionnaire was designed and created online using Google survey tool. The researcher emailed the survey link to all the participants who were supposed to fill out and finish it within one week. The result was notified immediately to the researcher whenever one participant had finished the questionnaire. Since this was online-based questionnaire, the data were easily gathered and analyzed using Google spreadsheets. In terms of group interview data, it was collected by recording the whole Skype video interview, and was transcribed to identify any meaningful texts and comments which were related to this research purposes. Interview data was especially critical in terms of understanding in-service teachers' perceptions of language and motivation development through use of FBAB, and their evolving thinking about FBAB. Reactions to interviews were used to determine beliefs and knowledge about the effectiveness of FBAB.

Results

Learners' Attitude towards Teaching English Using FBAB

In order to find out changes of learners' attitudes and thoughts using FBAB, interview data and questionnaire results were compared and similar answers were categorized. Participants picked up one of the most beneficial effects on FBAB as 'fun to use'. By obtaining a sense of enjoyment and interest,

they believed that learners are able to stay motivated. It is therefore probable that learners, by using FBAB, can advance interest and motivation, as well as the ability to accurately identify words. But for the advantages of FBAB, it was impossible for young learners to support beginner reading skills, build fluency and vocabulary, and increase comprehension. The participant mentioned as shown below that learning with FBAB has potentials to increase confidence and self-esteem, improve group-working and co-operative skills, enhance achievement, and eventually influence their further reading and English study.

Gracie: "I think students' interest for study is getting better, and some of them like to click on the new words for pronunciation practice. Pictures are also good clue to figure out the meaning."

Gloria: "I don't use computer a lot in my class, but this might work well to beginner level students. They all have a PC at home, and they can simply visit the web and click on what they like to learn."

Ted: "I feel mixed feeling in my class. One is that students are very active and like to involve in learning because of the graphic and sound. The other is that they get easily distracted so that it is difficult for me to manage a class."

Application in English Classroom Using FBAB

Participants answered that getting to know FBAB can enable learners to get involved in reading, to have motivation, interest and a desire for further study. Another significant reason why FBAB needs to be focused in English class is that it helps to enhance four skills in learning a language in particular. An FBAB provides a wealth of authentic written, audio and video material which might be of personal or professional interest to students. So, it can be exploited in the EFL classroom, not only to provide practice in the receptive skills but also to stimulate the productive use of language. Therefore, teachers should bear in mind how to choose the right materials that create a relaxed and enjoyable atmosphere to motivate their students. Plus, those materials should be appropriate to learners' level or slightly higher than their current level.

Conclusions

When it comes to a purpose of learning any foreign languages, the fundamental question lies on how to build up communicative competence. For the sake of communication, language educators and teachers have been adapting and employing a variety of teaching techniques and approaches. As illustrated in finding section, using FBAB in a foreign language class can be one of the effective teaching methods. FBAB as mentioned earlier provides young learners with rich-contents, and creates an enjoyable learning environment. By utilizing FBAB in the class, learners also can keep motivated and have a desire for further learning. Therefore, language teachers in EFL setting need to consider how to incorporate FBAB effectively into their lesson to trigger the intrinsic motivation for the continued learning.

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Appendix

Questionnaire

Date: _____ Name: _____

1. How long did you study English?
 - ① Less than 10
 - ② 10--20
 - ③ 20--30
 - ④ 30--40
2. How many years have you taught English?
3. How is your class size?
 - ① Less than 10
 - ② 10--20
 - ③ 20--30
 - ④ 30--40
4. In general, how is students' English proficiency in your class?
 - ① High
 - ② Intermediate
 - ③ Low
5. Have you been teaching English by using FBAB? (Yes/No)
6. If so, how do you feel about students' motivation in learning English using FBAB? (multiple choice)
 - ① Pass examinations
 - ② Interests
 - ③ Go abroad
 - ④ Communicate with foreigners
 - ⑤ etc.(please, specify)
7. If no, how do you think of using FBAB in English teaching?
8. Please specify what English language skills that you most want students to acquire or improve.
 - ① Increase vocabulary and improving grammar
 - ② Improving specific English communication skills, such as listening, speaking
 - ③ Etc.(please, specify)
9. Please specify the reason for you to teach English through FBAB in the classroom. (school's requirement, students' expectation, teacher's personal wish, etc.)
10. Do you agree that movie is effective in English teaching?
 - ① Strongly agree
 - ② Agree
 - ③ No opinion
 - ④ Disagree
 - ⑤ Strongly disagree
11. Why do you think teaching English through FBAB is an effective method? (multiple choice)
 - ① Improving students' learning interest
 - ② Providing students' opportunities for real communicative contexts
 - ③ Introducing foreign culture background
 - ④ Cultivating students' autonomous learning
 - ⑤ Etc.(please, specify)
12. How do you feel about student's attitude towards using FBAB for EFL?
 - ① Strongly agree
 - ② Agree
 - ③ Uncertain
 - ④ Disagree
 - ⑤ Strongly disagree
13. What do you want to achieve through FBAB for EFL in your classroom (multiple choice)
 - ① To improve students' learning interest
 - ② To make students to express their ideas freely in different contexts through English, to develop communicative language skills
 - ③ To have a better understanding of different culture background, to understand English speakers and their way of thought
 - ④ To train students' autonomy learning
 - ⑤ Etc.(please, specify)
14. Are you satisfied with your achievement in teaching English through FBAB?
 - ① Absolutely satisfied
 - ② Satisfied
 - ③ Just so-so
 - ④ Not satisfied
 - ⑤ Absolutely dissatisfied
15. Feel free to write your opinion and thoughts on using FBAB in English teaching? By using this, what do you as a teacher, think learners can take advantage of this or are there any limitations or challenges?