Saudi University Students Views, Perceptions, and Future intentions towards E-books

Afnan Oyaid [1], Hessah Alshaya [2]

[1] aaoyaid@pnu.edu.sa, Princess Nourah University, Saudi Arabia

[2] hmalshaya@pnu.edu.sa, **Princess Nourah University, Saudi Arabia**

ABSTRACT

While observing the rapid growth in the field of e-learning, the present research aims to provide an experiential insight into the use of e-books, documenting its benefits, issues and future prospects. For this purpose, the researchers used their own eBook "Education Technology: Foundations and Applications" as the research instrument and evaluate the perceptions, feelings, and views of the education technology course students in Saudi University, in order to understand the importance of using eBooks for educational purposes. The eBook was designed as an interactive app which was provided to 27 students who purchased it using a gift voucher. They were asked to study from the provided eBook throughout the semester. At the end of their semester, a discussion group was held. The discussion group concludes that almost all of the students found the use of eBook for an educational purpose quite beneficial as they believe it is much cheaper, portable and easily accessible from any place and at any point in time. Some of the participants may have found issues with the usage such as no copy paste options, etc.; however, the majority of them intended to use eBooks in future if the characteristics and features of the eBooks are same as this book.

Keywords: *E-books, perceptions of e-books, text e-books*

INTRODUCTION

Rapid technological development and constantly changing environment and mindset of people across the globe have led to the introduction of new technologies that are contributing to the rise in flexibility rates for learning with regards to time and space. Furthermore, this technological growth has increased the speed and accessibility to numerous learning materials for students, for example; electronic textbooks (Ruiz, Mintzer & Leipzig, 2006; Collins & Halverson, 2018).

E-books are mainly known as a set of informative text material, which has been designed for the study in a completely digital format, consisting of written texts, video and/ or animation, graphics, images, audio clips, etc., allowing the reader to just read text from the information displayed on the screen. In past, the rate of spreading and utilising electronic books at educational institutions and universities all over the world have risen from the introduction of such concept in the late nineties across the educational arena (Shelburne, 2009). Even though, college students still use traditional books as their reading model (Kimball et al., 2010; Letchumanan & Tarmizi, 2011), E-books is said to witness exceptional growth as a sophisticated and innovative technological advancement that will completely replace the traditional paper books over time (Lynch, 2012; Shen, 2011; Lai & Chang, 2011).

The e-book technology has facilitated in the provision of more informative content, which has been enhanced for the readers as it has been able to provide them with helping hand for discovering, building, applying, circulating and the exchanging the knowledge (Rao, 2003). It also has benefits over the traditional paper books as they provide the user with an effective screen text display, multimedia or plug-text digital information, hyperlinking various information and enabling the user to reach out more learning sources just through one e-book. Therefore, the need of the process of teaching and learning are now effectively met with the use of an advanced electronic interactive text, which is featured with interactivity, richness, and harmonisation and editing ability, provided to both students, teachers, and faculty of educational institutions (Shiratuddin et al., 2006). This increases the level of interaction among the students having able to learn from the e-content, which is easily available to them and also support their team activity by allowing them to easily interact and comment on the text and observation on the e-book itself (Gong et al., 2013; Tsang et al., 2013). It also enables them to search for information needed and is made available for the students 24/7. Furthermore, the contents of the e-book and the specifically searched information can then be easily compared to that of traditional textbooks (paper) (Clark et al., 2008; Shelburne, 2009). Hence, it has been foreseen that in the near future, the digital template publishing will be taking over all of the business and educational publications (Kelly, 2006, 43).

Despite these technical advancement (successive) and the numerous positive benefits of the e-books, there still are regarded as a controversial tool, which give rise to many difficulties and the disadvantages of the use of e-books in the institution and universities for several prominent reasons like: unclear texts, problems /issues in transitioning from one page to another, weak readability levels and the issues with respect to reading on digital screen on a User Interface. In addition to this, the issues or problems in finding classes and specific words in the available e-text. These difficulties, which typically impact the perception, rate of utilisation and attitude of the students negatively (Hernon et al., 2007) have resulted in the form of recommendation by various researchers to do more on the topic in question and face these challenges, which are fading the benefits of using e-books (Slater, 2010; Shen, 2011; Walters, 2013).

Since past years, the world has witnessed a tremendous progress in publishing and using these electronic books in a reflective way, while contributing to the growth of the scientific publishing sector by promoting the use of same at various higher education institutions, global universities with the emergence of major projects which require them to publish, distribute and then trade these e-books (Wang, 2015). The current article aims to provide more insight over the topic and uses E-book designed by the author of this research as a research tool to assess how the students in Saudi Arabia, views, feels and look upon the benefits and issues related to the use of e-books.

The E-book design and development

In this study, the researchers used their own eBook "Educational technology: Principals and Applications" which they wrote, designed and published on apps platforms previously. Reviewing pieces of literature review such as Wang & Huang (2015), Lim et al. (2012) and Yeh (2010), the researchers identified the list of e-book design criteria: 28 criteria divided into four domains as follows:

- *The first domain - user interface*: the design of the screen is simple and provides easy access to the book. There are options related to change the font type; font maximising and minimising; marking hyperlinks in a different colour; highlighting of significant sections; taking notes on the pages of the book; pointer to the user's location within the book; clear and understandable icons to the user; searching for a specific word through inserting it into the search box; and navigating to specific pages through inserting its number in the search engine.

- *The second domain - Content*: the screen contains adequate amounts of texts; combining texts and images on the same screen; view photos and graphics with high resolution; the possibility of enlarging images and graphics; use of the bullets; and splitting texts into portions for easier reading.

- *The third domain - output and total view*: providing an electronic reading experience close to the one of reading the paper; providing front and back cover to the book; operating on different platforms using a variety of devices; the possibility of flipping pages like paper book; having the length and size of the page similar to paper book; and unifying output of lines in terms of size, colour and presentation.
- *The fourth domain - Interactivity*: having multimedia hyperlinks; sharing highlighted sections across the social networks; supporting the book index with hyperlinks allowing the transition to the required chapter directly; including a video clip, the book offers an electronic interactive content, such as asking questions to the reader and providing immediate feedback.

The e-book of educational technologies course that is produced and published on App store and Google have features like flipping pages, maximising and minimising the fonts size, supporting the index of the book by hyperlinks allowing the user to go directly to the required chapter and highlighting the important portions to read. It also enables the user to take notes by writing it on the margins of the pages and letting the user move across specific pages by entering its number in a search engine. The e-book also has an exciting feature of sharing the highlighted parts through social networks, posting and inserting video clips and linking to external sites.

RESEARCH METHOD

Participants

The research is concerned with students' views, feelings, and perceptions towards certain issues related to the usage of eBooks. In this study, a total of 27 students of educational technology course which took place on the 2017-2018 academic year were offered a gift voucher to purchase the book.

Data Collection Tool

The most suitable way to explore and understand the student's perspectives and perception towards the use of e-books is to utilise data collection tools usually associated with qualitative approaches such as discussion groups or focus groups (Hoseth & McLure, 2007), since they concentrate on social interactions and socially constructed meanings.

Collection of Data

All of the 27 Students were asked to download the book app on their smartphones and tablets and started using the book as the main educational resource for the course. The students were chosen based on their wish to participate in this new educational experience. During the study the researchers provided technical support to students in case they faced any difficulties in using the app and encouraged those to use all available features to allow them to get all anticipated benefits from using eBooks. By the end of the semester, we held a discussion group with these 27 students to ask them about their experience with the eBook and to know more about the difficulties they faced.

The discussion group focused on directing the discussion towards the following topics: the best features of the eBook, the most important feature in any eBook, general evaluation of the experience, difficulties in using eBooks, a preferred genre in eBooks, and future intentions regarding using eBooks based on previous literature (Hoseth & McLure, 2007) (Wang, 2015); . The discussion was organised and managed by both researchers and lasted for an hour divided equally between the main topics mentioned earlier. Notes were also taken in preparation for the analysis stage of this study.

Data Analysis

Data analysis starts from the moment the analyst transcribes, listens, and reads notes. In this study,

the researchers had the opportunity to become well-acquainted with the data, as they directed the conversation themselves. By reading the notes, the researchers started finding trends, which can be categorised into themes and this offered a better understanding of the discussion.

Validity and Credibility

To ensure the validity of the current research, 2 highly professional individuals have been involved in the overall process as a moderator and evaluator who were responsible for evaluating and assessing the overall process. The inter-rater consistency score reflected around 83.3% agreement among the raters. This ensures the credibility of the research study.

FINDINGS

The best features of the eBook were the first topic to be discussed with students. The students pointed out 28 different features, which varied in importance. The top three features were the interactivity of the eBook (no: 21), followed by the user-friendly interface (no:17) then highlighting important parts of the eBook (no:16). Whereas, changing font size and type (no: 4), an indicator of readers progress (no: 5), and differentiating hyperlinks in another font colour (no: 6) ranked as least important. The students mentioned all eBooks features and discussed their importance thoroughly, which indicated their extensive usage of the course eBook and their willingness to use them in their education.

Table 1. Best Feature of the E-books

Frequency	Best Feature of the E-book
Top 3 Features	
21	Interactivity
17	User-Friendly Interface
16	Highlighting Feature
Least 3 Features	
4	Changing Font Size And Type
5	Indicator Of Readers Progress
6	Differentiating Hyperlinks In Another Font Colour

The discussion about features led us to talk about the most important feature of eBooks to be read by students. Their answers varied but they asserted the importance of simplicity i.e. the eBook should be easy and simple to use (no: 12), with clear icons and well-organised interface (no: 7). Moreover, it should also be easy to navigate (no: 17) and has a searching function to find specific words or page numbers (no: 8). The eBook should open the last visited/saved page of the student on the subsequent visits (no: 3). To assist students in reading the eBook, there should be a highlighting function for noting important information (no: 5), and writing notes similar to what usually students do with paper books (no:3). In addition, the eBook should facilitate the ability to change font size according to students' needs (no:4).

Table 2. Most Important Feature of the E-books

Frequency	Most Important Feature of the E-book
7	clear icons and well-organised interface
12	easy and simple to use
17	easy to navigate
8	searching function to find specific words or page numbers
3	last visited/saved page on the subsequent visits and a highlighting function
4	ability to change font size according to students' needs

The students were asked to generally evaluate their experience in using eBooks, which can be categorised as follows: Excellent (no:7), great (no: 9), interesting (no: 2), first time to use eBooks and I will continue using them (no: 2), amazing (no: 2), and wonderful (no: 5).

During the use of the eBook, students faced some difficulties. 14 out of 27 said that they faced no problems or difficulties during the use of eBook. However, other pointed out several issues such as not being able to cut and paste from the eBook text to another app (no:1); preferring paper books because the student was not able to remember the place of information in the book (no:1); not being used to study from a screen (no: 3); the phone screen is very small (no:1); difficulty in reading notes while studying (no: 2); receiving phone call suspends the app, thus losing the page that the student was reading (no: 5).

Table 3. Issues Related to the E-Books

Frequency	Issues Related to the E-book
1	not being able to cut and paste from the eBook text to another app, the phone screen is quite small and it is hard to remember the place of information in the e-book.
3	not being used to study from a screen
2	difficulty in reading notes while studying
5	Receiving phone call suspends the app

Some students had previous experience with eBooks while others never used it before. By the end of this experience, students had developed positive attitudes towards using eBooks and prefer to read their favourite genre in that format. Students responses varied and covered most book genres as follows: educational (no: 13), a novel (no: 3), self-development (no: 2), stories (no: 3), and cultural (no: 6). Students preferred educational books in digital format because it is cheaper and lighter and takes no space in their studies and rooms.

Lastly, The students' positive experience with eBooks influenced their future intentions to use them. All students asserted their intentions to use eBooks in the future using different expressions. This includes yes (no: 10), surely (no: 4), of course (no: 5), always from now on (no: 3), if it is with the same features as this eBook then definitely (no: 2), and I will probably use it though I prefer paper books (no: 3).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Although the use of traditional books is still in practice by the college students (Kimball et al., 2010; Letchumanan & Tarmizi, 2011), the introduction of e-books has now leading its way to exponential growth in terms of innovation and technological advancement which has expected to completely replace the traditional books with the passage of time (Lynch, 2012; Shen, 2011; Lai & Chang, 2011). The literature review suggested that this e-book technology has not only facilitated the provision of informative content but also has enhanced the reader's ability in understanding, discovering, building, applying, circulating and exchanging the knowledge (Rao, 2003). This further leads to the increase in level of interaction among students and help them in learning from the e-content that is easily accessible to each of them, enabling them to support the team activity and allowing them to interact and comment on the text or information on the e-book itself (Gong et al., 2013; Tsang et al., 2013)

In this study, we documented students experience in using eBooks in education. Students expressed their positive views towards using eBook and their intention to use them in the future. They were really satisfied with the interactivity, highlighting, change of font size and hyperlinking to external sources features. They also pointed out the most important feature of eBooks to them and the difficulties they faced shedding light upon some of the most recurring problems with the usage of the designed e-book. These findings are aligned with the research findings of the prior literature (Slater, 2010; Shen, 2011; Walters, 2013) which discussed the problems/issues in exploring the classes and words in the text. The difficulties which may negatively impact (Hernon et al., 2007) the perception of the students with regards to the usage of e-books, needs to be addressed.

Suggestions

- The study recommends extending the use of eBooks to other courses and levels to promote the application of this new advancement in technology.
- The study also suggests that the highlighted errors or issues in the e-book are to be addressed with an aim of applying all of these features in the other e-books as wells.

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