

## **ASSESSING READING COMPREHENSION THROUGH THE USE OF DIGITAL MEDIA (A CASE STUDY IN FACULTY OF ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS, UNIVERSITY OF MUHAMMADIYAH MAGELANG)**

*Umi Rachmawati, M.Pd.*

University of Muhammadiyah Magelang

email: Rachmawati\_umi@ummgl.ac.id

### **Abstract**

English language teaching in Indonesia has been focused on the teaching of reading comprehension, including in Faculty of Economy and Business at University of Muhammadiyah Magelang. This is as the consequences of having broader opportunities for the students to have more written exposures of the target language. Students are expected to have not only good reading comprehension but also the critical thinking skills which enable them to compete in the modern and digitalized era. Various efforts and aspects have been considered including the assessment of the students' reading. Lecturers have hundreds of methods in assessing their students' reading comprehension from the traditional ones into the modern ones. Dealing with the current situation of TEFL in Indonesia, digital media are supposed to be mastered by not only the students but also the teachers. For higher level students, digital media are their parts of life since they always make benefits from those media. Many have found that the use of the media can provide positive impacts on the success of language assessment. On the contrary, the free use of the digital media also requires the teachers to wisely apply the media in their assessment. This paper presents the opportunities and challenges of the application of the digital media in the assessment of reading comprehension especially for university students. This study was done in a private university in Magelang regency, University of Muhammadiyah Magelang, through the use of case study. The findings of this study are in terms of the positive impacts and the challenges of the use of digital media in reading comprehension assessment.

**Keywords:** assessment, reading comprehension, digital media, CALL

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Reading plays an important role in the teaching and learning of a language, in this case English as a foreign language. The existence of English in Indonesia is mainly influenced by the use of the target language. The new paradigm in teaching and learning of English is the communicative approach which deals with the use of genres. This is due to the broad and varied texts can be accessed by the language learners in Indonesia. The texts accessed are mostly in terms of written texts and less spoken texts. The use of the spoken texts is also limited because the students have limited opportunities in using the target language orally.

On the other hand, the implementation of genre based approach in the teaching of English, required teachers to facilitate the students with various texts based on its functions in the real context. As mentioned earlier, the written texts, then, are broadly accessed by the students during the teaching. The focus of the teaching is on the improvement of the reading comprehension. This is absolutely true since having good reading comprehension may influence the mastery of the three other language skills namely, listening, speaking, and writing. By having good reading comprehension, the students can have good knowledge both knowledge of the world and knowledge of the language. With the rich knowledge of the language and the world, students

can easily understand what is being talked when they have listening section. It is also helpful for the students who is speaking since they have good content delivered during the speaking. Lastly, they can have good writing with the use of their sufficient experiences and knowledge of the language and the world. Therefore, reading can be assumed as the key success of mastering the four language skills.

Reading is also crucial for the students due to the extremely varied and complex texts accessed through various modes. Internet provides not only good texts which require higher order thinking to have appropriate interpretation. Recently, many Indonesians are easily influenced by free texts written disrespectfully. Readers in this new era need to be critical in comprehending the texts. They need to make their interpretation far from the problematic ones. Being critical means that the readers are expected to criticize the texts read by having high order thinking. Critical reading is required to be mastered by the students to interpret the texts which might contain harmful content for the development of their personality.

In accordance with the implementation of the digital media in language teaching due to its practicality and feasibility, many teachers use the media to motivate their students in learning. There are millions of reading sources can be accessed through digital media. It also provides multimodality which can improve the students' motivation in learning the target language, digital media do not only provide one mode of presenting the text but only have other modes of presenting the texts. Digital media presents texts completed with pictures and probably mp3 which can improve the students' motivation in learning. Thus can also improve the students' mastery of the target language. Another reason of implementing the digital media is the cost effective. It is clear enough if the teachers use the printed texts, they may spend their whole salary due to the expensive printed texts. Digital media provide its solution for both the teacher and the students. This is suitable for the schools which have low income and fund for conducting the teaching and learning.

Many experts have conducted studies of the implementation of the digital media in language teaching. They realized how important is the studies to really measure the success of the digital media during the teaching and learning. One way to measure the success of the teaching and learning is through assessing the students' achievement. Assessing reading is also a new problem for the faculty of Economics and Business in University of Muhammadiyah Magelang since the lecturers do not have fund for the assessment and the faculty does not facilitate the assessment in terms of the test and answer sheets. It is the new regulation that the lecturers' fee includes the assessment fee. This creates new ways of thinking for the teachers in which they need to be wise in spending the time and money. Therefore, there are many lecturers who conduct the assessments which do not spend much money. One medium can be used to cover this problem is the use of digital media in the assessment.

Digital reading assessment is commonly used but it still faces many challenges in the implementation. Teachers and students need to have better understanding and figures of the implementation. Teachers are expected to be able to select the types of modes which will be used during the test. Based on the preliminary observation conducted, there are many lecturers who use LCD and computers during the assessment. One main reason is the practicality and cost efficiency. Although the medium used is same but there are some differences in terms of the implementation of the medium. Some lecturers make some considerations on the feasibility and the readability of the texts presented through LCD and some of them might not realize this aspect. The teaching and learning processes of reading in FE UMMgl presents new paradigm. The faculty starts the teaching and learning through the use of digital media such as LCD and computer. The lecturers implement those media during the teaching and learning which is aimed at attracting the students to have good reading motivation during the lesson. Students of this university have

unique learning motivation due to their background. There are some students who love to learn but there are also many of them who do not. Attracting the students with different learning media and assessment can improve the students' motivation.

The new condition of the structured assessment changes the lecturer's method in assessing the students. Many of them conduct the assessment through the use of digital media to have feasible assessment in terms of the time, materials, and cost. The use of LCD provides more sophisticated reading assessment for the students but it also makes problems for the students if the test giver does not provide good reading assessment in terms of validity and reliability. Hence, it is highly demanded for the teacher to consider all aspects in language assessment.

Assessment can be done not only at the end of the class but also during the class. Naturally, teachers assess the students' achievement at the end of the class to dig any information on the success of the teaching. In fact, there are many teachers who want to make clear pictures of the students' achievement to make the betterment of their teaching and this can be done through formative assessment. The assessment is conducted in the middle of the teaching. The two methods of assessing the students' learning depends on the time of the assessment but both of the test types have similar purpose, measuring the students' achievement after a period of learning time.

The most important consideration in organizing the assessment is the use of the test. An assessment is organized to gather any information on linearity of the students' achievement and the learning goals and the target population (Fulcher & Davidson, 2007: 23). A test is used based on the aims of assessing the test takers. In organizing the test, the test writer needs to consider aspects of the reading comprehension skills and the context. Test writer needs to cover the reading skills based on the aims of the teaching to really measure the success of the teaching. Being contextualized means that the test writer also has to consider the test taker's characteristics, the time of the test, the duration, and the condition of the test taker and during the process of assessing the test takers. By considering those aspects, the test writer can create valid and reliable test sheet.

An assessment is organized to make the do the test based on their capabilities and context. Test writer, then, should have good knowledge to give opportunities for the students to be active in the assessment in line with the assessment goals. Assessing the students' reading comprehension means that the teacher also assesses the students' cultural understanding. Therefore, many of them develop intercultural learning which is also implemented in the assessment. Teachers as a test writer develop the students' ability as learners and understand the new cultures they are learning (Fulcher & Davidson, 2007: 25).

Assessment must be linear with the growth, change, and development of the assessment implementation. The measurement is done in centered control but it is less appropriate to the local wisdom. This condition requires the assessment developer to develop more contextual reading assessment which is linear with the learning goals and local needs of the target users. The assessment, then, is closely related to the use of globalization era which is mostly digitalized. As elaborated by Stoyhoff (2012: 240), the globalization movement causes the movement of the measurement focusing on the local needs and the standards.

Assessment is done for the purpose of teaching needs to measure the students' achievement. The results of the measurement will be used for the criteria of good and appropriate teaching. In giving feedback and scores for the students' achievement, the criteria will provide more elaborated standards of the expected products. This measurement is conducted to dig information on the success of the teaching and learning.

Basically, there are two types of criteria in providing feedback and scores of the students' achievement, norm-based reference and criteria-based reference. Norm-based reference is interpreted based on the means, median, standard of deviation, and percentile level (Brown, 2003: 7). Meanwhile, the criterion-based reference is done through providing feedback from the test in the form of rank for a certain learning and teaching goal. All types of tests developed are done

based on the curriculum and the scoring system which is in line with the lesson plan. The recent assessment is mainly on the communicative measurement. Communicative measurement is developed to gather information on the use of the target language communicatively based on a certain context in the real world. The authenticity of an assessment is highly demanded since the center of communicative language assessment requires contextual language use (Brown, 2003: 10). In communicative language teaching, there are four competences should be mastered by the students. Those competences are grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence. (Brown, 2007: 119-120). Grammatical Competence includes lexical and morphology, syntax, semantic, grammar, and phonology. This competence connects the linguistic codes of a language to the linguistic competence. Then, discourse competence deals with the complement of grammatical competence. This is the competence of connecting sentences in discourse level and to develop meaning from the texts. Discourse means everything from short texts until the longest texts such as articles and books. If the grammatical competence give more focus on the sentence level, discourse level deals with the relationship among sentences. Sociolinguistic Competence is knowledge of social, cultural, and discourse rules. This type of competence requires socio-contextual understanding in which language is used as participants roles, information shared, and interactional function. In a certain context, this type of assessment is done toward the nature of a certain text. Lastly, strategic Competence is a very complicated concepts. Strategic competence is on special position in constructing meaning of communication. These strategies are used to developed effectiveness of certain communication. In measuring the students' achievement in reading, there must be micro and macro skills of reading which should be considered in the assessment. As mentioned by Brown (2007), there are some micro and macro skills of reading comprehension.

a. Micro-skills

- 1) Able to differentiate the graphemic and orthographic forms.
- 2) Able to comprehend big number of language pieces in the short-term memory.
- 3) Able to process the written texts through efficient speed to suit the goals of reading.
- 4) Able to recognizing stems and interpreting the words structures and its significance.
- 5) Able to recognize grammatical word classes (nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc.), system (such as tenses, and agreement), pattern, rules, and ellipsis.
- 6) Able to interpret certain meaning expressed in different grammatical forms.
- 7) Able to recognize the cohesion tools in the written texts and its functions in giving sign on the relationship among the clauses.

b. Macro-skills

- 1) Able to recognize rhetorical forms on written texts and its significances to have the interpretation.
- 2) Able to recognize communicative function of texts based on the forms and function of the text.
- 3) Able to make conclusion on the text implicitly based on the prior knowledge.
- 4) From the idea, events, etc., it can be drawn that students are able to make relationship and connection among the events.
- 5) Able to simplify cause and effect as main idea, supporting details, new information, existed information, generalization and modeling.
- 6) Able to differentiate between literal and implied meaning.
- 7) Able to recognize certain cultures and interpret in cultural scheme context.
- 8) Able to develop and use reading strategies such as scanning and skimming, recognize the discourse markers, guess word meaning from the context, and activate scheme to interpret texts.

Assessment should be valid and reliable. Valid is the condition in which the test should test what it should be tested. Gronlund (1998: 226) in Brown (2003: 26) says that validity is the extent to which inferences made from assessment results are appropriate, meaningful and useful in terms of the purpose of the assessment. The result of the test should give views on the purpose of the test. A test is reliable if the results of the test are statics. It means that when the test takers take the same test, the results are the same as the previous ones. If the test results are different from the previous ones, it means that the test is unreliable. Brown (2003: 20) states that reliable means that the test is consistent and dependable. A good test should have those two aspects, validity and reliability. Reading comprehension is capability to read texts more comprehensively in relation to the readers' prior knowledge. The readers need not only prior knowledge but also adequate knowledge of the texts in order to be able to read the text better. The readers use their language mastery and background knowledge to read the texts provided by the writer. Richards & Schmidt (2002: 99) support this view. They argue that comprehension is an active process constructing information gathered both in the message and background knowledge. This process is by which the readers get meaning and information stated in the texts based on the context and readers' and writer's intentions. Mikulecky & Jeffrie (2007: 74) say that comprehension is a process of making sense of what you read and connecting the content of the text to the existing knowledge. Comprehending is defined as a process of thinking when the readers read. If the readers have good and sufficient knowledge of the topic discussed, the readers are able to comprehend the content of the texts.

Reading comprehension guides the readers to build meanings that can help them find the main idea and specific information more easily of the written texts. Lembs, Miller, & Soro (2010: 170) state that reading comprehension is the ability to construct meaning from a written text. The comprehension of the text is drawn through constructing meanings from the written signs presented in the text. The written signs are from the smallest part of a word which is about letters which are composed in words and structured those words into sentences. The readers compose meaning from the content of the text which has been formulated by the writer. The readers are assumed as having the same schemata and linguistics knowledge as the writer's so the main point of the text is transferred properly. The same linguistics knowledge mastered by the writer and the readers can help the readers interpret the writer's messages of the texts correctly. Nunan (1989: 12) states that students are expected to be able to know the various grammatical rules and use the rules effectively and appropriately when communicating. Therefore, the aim of communicating through written texts is achieved.

Reading materials written in English is the prime goal of many reading programs around the world. Assessing reading is also starting to be the main focus of language learning and teaching. There are no significant differences of the content of the assessment through internet-based test and paper-based test. The content is the same but the medium used is different. This kind of text becomes very popular as the demand of the language learners to have easier and more feasible tests. Internet-based test can be used for the massive test takers and done in the same time. The use of internet in the test also provides other positive impacts. As stated by Teeler & Gray (2000: 36-37), there are some beneficial aspects that can be got from the use of internet. The first aspect is the scope. Through internet, the test developers can access huge information which can be used as the assessment. Then, internet also provides various topics. Not only various topics, the test developers will also have more updated topics which can be used in the test sheets. With the topicality, the test developers also can suit their tests with the test taker characteristics since internet provide more personalization than the text books do.

There are some specification highlighted by Lee and Owens (2004: 118-127) for describing standards and design for multimedia elements. They are elaborated as follow.

- c. Define the look and feel of the theme.  
The theme should be associated with the job solution. It also depends on the materials and the characteristics of the students. The theme should be able to add interest and relate to the students and contents, supply a thread linking the course elements, support learning with a unified look and feel, and constitute a starting point for creating multimedia analogies, graphics, set and costume design, text styles, activities, and so on.
- d. Define the interface and functionality.  
To define the interface and functionality of the product developed, there are some characteristics that the interface design should be. Lee and Owens (2004: 119) explain those characteristics as presented that interface design should be
- 1) Be as simple as possible, with adequate white space, uniform spacing, and adequate margins (top and bottom, left and right).
  - 2) Use consistent screen areas for repeated screen elements such as titles, feedback, links, menus, or prompts.
  - 3) Include a consistent navigation design so users become comfortable within the learning or support environment.
  - 4) Keep in mind that most people from western cultures view screens using a Z pattern. The Z pattern is drawn below.

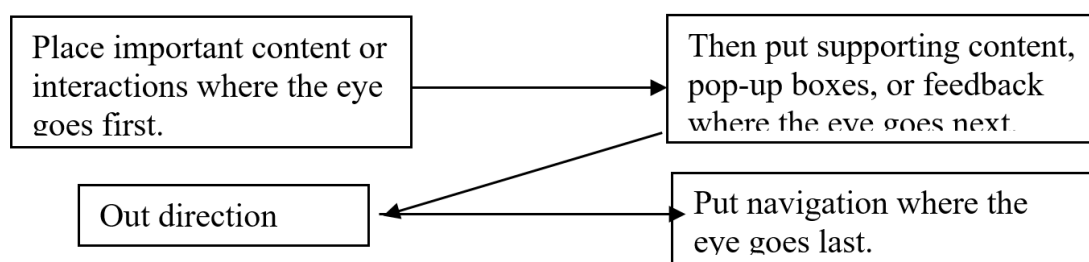


Figure 2. Screen Design Pattern (Lee & Owens, 2004: 120).

- e. Define the interaction and feedback standards.  
Interaction becomes one important capacity of multimedia. The exciting work includes intelligent interfaces, visual reality, and other various interactions such as natural-language interface, voice and speech, technology, gesture recognition, and even biological interface. There should be clear instruction and the question contains only correct response. As with the feedback, the questions rise from the situation and learning can be through “doing” using situational based computer simulations.
- f. Define the video and audio treatments.  
There are some standards of the media and the technology specifications. They are described as follows.
- 1) Audio: narration style and tone
  - 2) Photography: file type, file-naming, conversations, and size requirements.
  - 3) Video: file type, file-naming conventions, and size requirements. It should be shot with details and support the text, graphic, and audio presentation of the content.
- g. Indicate text design standards.  
Text design and standards stimulate such things as font style, size, and color. The text appearance and resolution on the screen should determine the size and font.
- h. Prepare the graphic design standards.  
The graphic design standards include file type, file-naming convention and color range. The graphic should have clear benefit to the presentation of the content and hold the simplicity of

design. The text and the graphic must be readable.

- i. Decide on animation and special effects.

It is good for having moving objects to illustrate the theme. The use of animation and the special effects is to support the learning objectives. The developer should consider the use of effects sparingly and consistently to support the project goals.

## **2. RESEARCH METHOD**

This study is a case study in some classes at Faculty of Economics and Business, University Magelang. The subject chosen is based on the terms elaborated in the previous section. Case study is a particular instance frequently designed to give illustration on a more general principle (Nisbet and Watt, 1984: 72). This study provides deep and wide elaboration on the subject taken which depends on the context and is correlated to the ideas and principles of the subject discussed. There are some principles of the implementation of a case study as noted from Hitchcock and Hughes (1995: 322) as presented below.

- a. Case study is concerned with a rich and vivid elaboration of events relevant to the case.
- b. Case study shares chronological narrative of events dealing with the case.
- c. Case study blends an elaboration of events with the analysis of them.
- d. Case study focuses on individual actors or groups of actors, and seeks to understand the perception of events.
- e. It highlights specific events relevant to the case.
- f. The researcher gets involved in the case.
- g. An attempt is developed to give portrait of the richness of the case in writing up the report.

Based on the elaboration above, it can be viewed that a case study is a set of temporal, geographical, organizational, institutional, and other contexts enabling boundaries drawn around the case. The case was done to get both the qualitative and quantitative findings of the implementation of the digital reading assessment towards the students of accounting and management at University of Muhammadiyah Magelang. This study might be contextualized based on the subjects and may provide different results from different subjects. The main concern of this study is on the process of implementing of the digital media in reading assessment.

This study is done in 2016 in the odd semester during August until December 2016. The subjects include the first and the third semester of accounting and management study programs at Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Muhammadiyah Magelang. The data collected is done through observation and interviews. Observation was done during the assessment of some classes of the study programs mentioned. The interviews were done both to the lecturers and the students. The results of the data were analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. The quantitative data were analyzed through descriptive quantitative and the qualitative data were analyzed through the use of qualitative analysis.

## **3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Based on the study conducted on the use of digital media in reading assessment for the students of faculty of Economics and Business in University of Muhammadiyah Magelang, there are some major findings. Those findings are classified into some terms; reading assessment preparation, reading assessment process, and the results of the reading assessment. All of the findings are briefly elaborated as follows. [Times New Roman 11, normal].

### ***3.1 Preparation of the Digital Reading Assessment***

It is completely clear for the teacher to have preparation on their test before he/ she conducts the reading assessment. Through the use of digital media, the teacher needed to be well-prepared

both the test content and the media would be used during the test. The lecturer had prepared to questions which are aimed at measuring what the lecturer had done during the teaching processes. The questions, then, were developed based on the syllabus and the lesson plans had been used during the teaching.

To meet the validity of the test, the lecturer chose to use the questions stated on the formal test such as TOEFL or the like. Questions used in this type of test are valid since they have been tested before the test is conducted. This was done due to the limited time expand in a semester. Some questions were chosen and used in the assessment to dig information on the students' achievement. This solution will be best be done by any lecturers who do not have much time to prepare the assessment but they still have the test validity.

Due to limited space of the media used, the test maker chose the short text for the students of reading class. The texts chosen were short but represented the needs and wants of the students. It was also done to control the visibility of the text presented through the use of LCD. Therefore, the presentations were done by providing short and clear text to the students. The text presented should also be presented in a certain font size which enables the students to read the text. Another aspect is the color of the background and the font. It is good for the lecturers to use dark background such as black and light font color such as white. Those colors can help the students read the texts so they do not need to read effortful. The texts presented in the LCD must be clear and readable for the students.

Next consideration is the duration of the slide show. The presentation of the slides are influenced by the duration. Duration becomes important because the test can be more than one slide and there is no repetition of the presentation. The duration of the slide show must be exact so the students will not have time to 'sleep' during the test because they have done with the tests. It also should be not so fast that the students cannot read the whole texts and answer the tests. The test developers must consider the heterogeneity of the test takers.

### 3.2 Process of the Digital Reading Assessment

The implementation of the digital reading assessment in higher education can improve the students' motivation in completing the test. The students who have this type of test presents more positive responses during the test. They feel that they need to compete with the time to fulfil all of the blank spaces or questions on the test. The students are also interested in the use of supporting details of the texts provided on the slides such as pictures or animation of the slides.

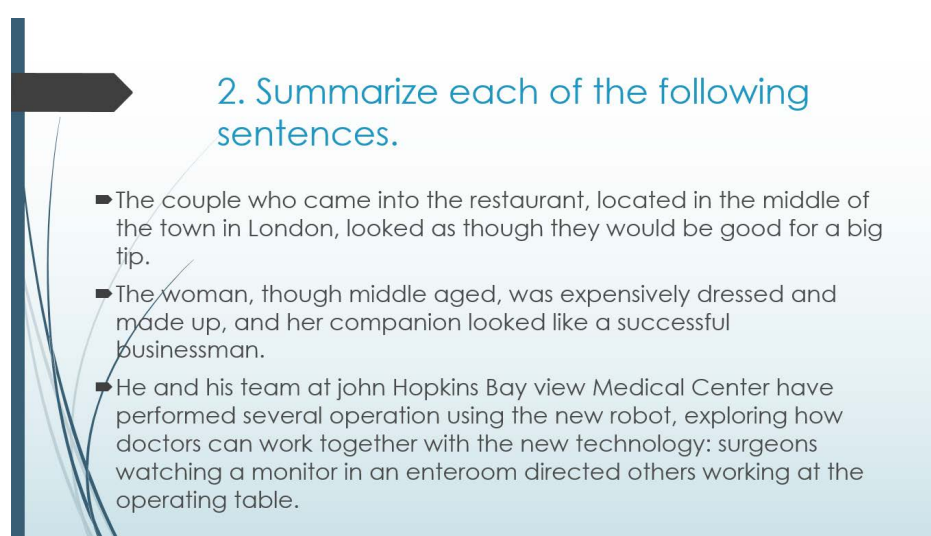


Figure 1. Example of Digital Reading Assessment



The most important aspect should be considered during the implementation of the digital reading assessment is the controlling of the test takers. Test administer must be exact in timing the test takers. He or she needs to always check the time during the test to avoid longer or shorter test duration than the duration decided in the preparation phase. The test administer also has to give notification for the test takers about the duration of each slide. This is done to give opportunities for the test takers to complete the slide before it jumps into another slide.

Another consideration is the honesty of the test takers during the test. It is a pressure for the students to have quick response on the text and questions prepared by the test administer. The test administer should always check the test takers' works to limit the students' dishonesty. This can happen since the students have more time to find the answers of the questions. Moreover, psychologically, when the test takers are in pressure because of the slide show duration, they will do anything to decrease the stress. Thus, the test administer cannot keep their eyes out of the test takers' works.

Dealing with the media implemented during the test, digital media require electricity. If the electricity is out use, the digital test cannot be implemented. The test administer should conduct another type of test, paper-based test. Thus, the lecturer needs to prepare not only digital test but also paper-based ones. Another solution for this challenge is the preparation of the electricity substitution. Electricity substitution can be used when the electricity is out of use since Indonesian government frequently turn off the electricity to save the energy. In conclusion, the test administer should be convinced if the electricity can be used during the test.

In the process of conducting digital reading assessment, media should be another consideration for the test administer. In this case, LCD and computer are two practical media used during the assessment. Test administer have to be ready with the various accidents happens during the assessment. The computer sometimes is not directly connected to the LCD so the test administer needs to set the computer and the LCD. Then, the memory of the file should be not too heavy since not all of the computers have high performance. To control this, the test administer should focus on the assessment to minimize problems.

### ***3.3 Results of the Digital Reading Assessment***

The last classification is on the results of the digital reading assessment. The main purpose of the assessment is to measure the student's achievement on teaching and learning processes. The results of the assessment is viewed as critical input for the teacher and students to make betterment in their teaching and learning. The results of the test conducted present some findings in terms of the degree of achievement and satisfaction of the students and teacher. Each finding is elaborated simply in the following section.

Based on the results of the digital reading assessment, the students present positive improvement of the students' behavior during the test. The students show good attitude by obeying the rules of the class. Based on the observation conducted during the digital assessment and the paper-based assessment, the students who enrolled the digital reading assessment show better behavior in terms of their honesty in completing the task. Meanwhile, the students who enrolled the paper-based test show more disrespectful behavior by cheating during the assessment process. This is clear enough that conducting digital reading assessment can be a practical solution for the teachers who have less-respectful students.

The final score of the assessment also provides evidence that the students who enrolled the digital reading test do not have lower achievement than the paper-based assessment. The students still find it practical and feasible to have digital reading assessment. There is no difference on the students' achievement on the digital and paper-based reading assessment. It tells us that the visibility and readability of the texts presented through digital media do not give significant problem for the students.

From the duration of the digital assessment, it is obviously helpful for the lecturers who might have limited time for example, English 3 who only has one credit in a semester. The duration of a whole class is only fifty minutes and there is a need to develop simple and practical reading assessment. Hence, the digital reading assessment is conducted to control the time span of the assessment. The teacher can develop simple test but it still meet the main goal of conducting the test.

The use of digital media also enables the teacher and students in saving the world because they have limit their use of paper. The use of paper can increase the global warming so the educators need to change the ways of their teaching to minimize the use of paper. Digital reading assessment can be one solution because the teachers do not need to provide many papers for the students. Based on the observation done in target subject, the students only need to provide a piece of paper as the answer sheet. This condition shares good implementation of the global warming prevention on the education field.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Digital reading assessment has been widely used due to its practicality and feasibility. Digital reading assessment provides more opportunities both for the students and teachers to have better reading assessment in term of the preparation, implementation, and the result. Through the use of digital reading assessment, teachers can have better preparation since they need to consider many aspects of the assessment, such as time span, number of questions, and modes. They also have to be ready if the electricity does not work which means that the digital reading assessment cannot be done digitally. Although it will be ecofriendly if the digital reading test can run well because it will save more papers than paper-based assessment does. It means that the teachers cannot do any assessment without any preparation. Then, during the implementation of the digital assessment, teachers still need to focus on the students' behavior. The teachers do not only focus on the media used during the assessment but they also have to organize and control the students to have valid and reliable results. The results of the digital reading assessment presents positive findings. Many students are satisfied with the digital assessment and they provide positive results not only in terms of the score but also the behavior. They share honest assessment and competed assessment situation. From the elaboration above, there are many positive benefits from the implementation of digital media in reading assessment.

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