Students' Perceptions on Reading Digital Storybook "Let's Read": Efl Junior High School Context

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Abstrak

Membaca merupakan salah satu keterampilan bahasa Inggris yang penting untuk menyerap informasi baru dan memperkuat ingatan yang ada. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui persepsi siswa setelah membaca buku cerita *digital* bahasa Inggris *"Let's Read"* selama pembelajaran *online*. Penelitian ini melibatkan 25 siswa kelas 9 SMP yang terdiri dari 12 laki-laki dan 13 perempuan. Peneliti menggunakan jenis penelitian kualitatif dengan menggunakan instrumen kuesioner terbuka dan wawancara semi terstruktur untuk mengumpulkan data. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan persepsi positif bahwa *"Let's Read"* merupakan situs *web* yang menarik dan portabel. Persepsi siswa berdasarkan aspek sensasi dan perasaan menunjukkan bahwa *"Let's Read"* mudah digunakan sehingga siswa merasa senang saat membaca. Berdasarkan aspek pengalaman, siswa merasa familiar karena ilustrasi cerita yang unik. *"Let's Read"* terbukti mempengaruhi motivasi siswa lebih giat membaca untuk mencapai impiannya. Kesulitan yang di hadapi siswa yaitu koneksi internet dan kosakata sulit. Untuk mengatasi masalah tersebut siswa mengunduh cerita dahulu dan menggunakan *google translate*.

Kata Kunci: *Persepsi Siswa, Membaca, Let's Read*

Abstract

Reading is one of the important English skills that students need to absorb new information and strengthen existing memories. This study aims to determine students' perceptions after reading the English digital storybook "Let's Read" during online learning. This study involved 25 students from 9th grade Junior High School consisting of 12 boys and 13 girls. The researcher used a qualitative study using open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to collect the data. The results showed that most students positively perceived that "Let's Read" is an engaging and portable website. Regarding sensations and feelings, it shows that "Let's Read" is easy to use and makes students feel happy to read. Regarding experiences, students are familiar because the illustrations are unique. "Let's Read" affects students' motivation to be active in reading to reach their dreams. Students' difficulties come from internet connections and challenging vocabulary. To solve the problem, students download the story and use google translate.

Keywords: *Students' Perceptions, Reading, Let's Read*

INTRODUCTION

Reading is an English receptive skill that students need to repair concentration, expand their minds, and provide creative ideas (Alsalem, 2018). At present, reading has an important role in our daily life. When we often spend time reading news or articles, indirectly, it upgrades our knowledge about what is happening and gains more information about technology, science, and various other useful topics (Chen Hsieh, 2021). Reading is significant for students to understand various texts and negotiate the meaning (Park, 2018). Reading is also necessary to achieve successfully study in school and in the future in different situations.

Nowadays, the way how to read has changed a lot from reading through paper-based to technological platforms. It shows that digital book has become significantly used for learning purposes, and digital book may reduce paper usage to protect the environment (Lin et al., 2019). This transformation affects every aspect of the process of teaching-learning, especially reading activities. Students who traditionally read books using paper-based adapt to the current world's changes, so they do not get left behind in the era of digitalization (Lin et al., 2019). Digital books have wide varieties, such as electronic books designed in 3D to be read online or printed books that display the text on the screen without pictures or animations (Goodwin et al., 2020). According to Rajeh et al., (2020), digital books, online books, or textbooks are more reasonably priced. It minimizes cost and relieves students from bringing thick storybooks. They can easily download storybooks from digital platforms or websites like https://letsreadasia.org/.

"Let's Read" is a digital storybook platform that allows students to read in every condition (Ermerawati, 2019). It was developed by The Asia Foundation to make the process of online activities during the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic more effective and fun. The platform collaborates among local writers, illustrators, and editors to create high-quality storybooks, develop more chances for Asian students to have enough or even more reading exposure using their cellphone (Ermerawati, 2019). Meantime, parents and teachers can collaborate on using "Let's Read" to facilitate literacy activities at home. More than 200 digital storybooks with various genres and levels were selected to support children's literacy development. There are also local stories presented in the "Let's Read" collections. It will help readers gain important topics such as equality, diversity, and the environment (Ermerawati, 2019). The platform also has some features that paper books do not have, such as reading lists, videos, and reading aloud. It can be a good platform as an alternative for teachers to teach reading to students. Students will be able to choose their digital storybook of the many genres available on the platform. There are some features that students can use from the "Let's Read" such as favorite books, reading lists, and filter options.

The story's theme in the digital story is appropriate for students in junior high school, exclusively for the 9th grade. In this study, students read the narrative text in the genre of folktales. The theme of folktales is suitable with Indonesian government decree no. 37, specifically basic competencies 3.7 and 4.7 (Kemendikbud, 2018). The objective of basic competencies is essential to limit students understanding of the learning materials. Over than that, students must apply in their daily life capably, masterly, and responsibly. It will increase students' cognitive domain knowledge, polish talents, readability, and capability. Students will learn about the narrative text and read the story through the "Let's Read" digital storybook.

Many studies have focused on the use of digital book as a technology tool to create a convenient reading activity during the process of teaching learning. One of which is found in research from (Lin et al., 2019), he compares the use of paper book with e-book to know students reading fluency level. The researcher uses e-book-based detection system to know students' accuracy in word decoding and how far students will automaticity recognizing words. The result shows a significant correlation between e-book and paper book based on accuracy, word count, and reading rate. E-book is used as a touchscreen technology to pointed the words while students use finger to pointed the words in paper book through speech-to-text.

Reading upgrades students' confidence, preferable learning, and support their goals in the future. Ermerawati (2019) explores the application of "Let's Read" in extensive reading classes using MALL (Mobile Assisted Language Learning) and Task-Based learning. The researcher wants to seek the study because some classes have limited English storybooks. Then, the researcher used "Let's Read" as a technology tool in the regular reading activities combining tasks that require students to experience pre-task, interactive tasks, and weekly task-based. The result indicates that there is an improvement in expose students that can help them to have a good English proficiency in the future.

Reading through digital books give an opportunity for students to experience and build reading habits gradually. Ivone, Francisca & Jacobs, George & Santosa, (2020) explore the use of "Let's Read" as a technology tool for students to create their books. The researchers use particular websites such as "Literacy Cloud", "Let's Read", "Story Weaver", "Story Jumper", and "Story Bird." In this study, those platforms use Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as a sample for students to produce their books in dialogue with teachers and peers. Students need to collaborate with their peers to expand ideas, dialogue, text, and visuals. In the end, students will receive feedback from teachers and friends. They also need to respond about it, sharing and storing the result of their book in the classroom. This study shows that students' books will give the experience to produce apprehensible output.

The current study concentrates on students' perceptions after reading the English digital storybook. Perception is one of the student's voices in the classroom. Two theories argue about perception: top-down and bottom-up processes. According to the top-down theory from Gregory (1974), humans need the sense of organs such as the eye, ear, and nose to accept information from the atmosphere. Gregory (1974) suggests that perception implicates numerous hypotheses testing to deliver the information served to the sense organs. He thought human perceptions are hypotheses built upon past experiences and stored data. Perception is a hypothesis from prior knowledge or actively developing our perception of reality from our surroundings. Meanwhile, Gibson (1969) states about bottom-up theory that perception is direct and does not refer to hypothesis testing. There is sufficient information in our circumference that is reasonable for the world naturally. He clarified that sensation is a perception same as what you see and what you get. There is no demand for processing (interpretation) the information we obtain about size, condition, and space, or anything more detailed to associate directly with the environment around us. One way to achieve this study is through reading narrative text stories about folktales from the "Let's Read" digital storybook. Few recent studies have investigated about reading related to the reading fluency, digital storybook as an ICT (Information and Communication Technology) for students to produce their own book creation, extensive reading classes using MALL (Mobile Assisted Language Learning) and Task-Based learning. Yet, there is still lacking study talk about student's perception after reading "Let's Read" digital storybook relate to the basic competencies mainly for reading in EFL Junior High School Context. Therefore, this study aimed to know students' perceptions on reading digital storybooks by using "Let's Read". The findings of the study will be useful information, especially for teachers in junior high school to achieve the learning goals stated in the curriculum. This study seeks to answer the question of "How is the student's perception of using the digital storybook "Let's Read" in their academic life in terms of sense, feelings, experiences, challenges, and motivations when they read the English digital storybook.

METHODOLOGY

The research was designed as interpretive-descriptive qualitative research to reach the goal because the study gives a result without numerical data. Creswell (2001) defines *qualitative research* as a way to investigate and understand individuals and groups, meaning considering social human issues or problems. A qualitative study supports the researcher in gathering data from students and classroom activities. The participants are 9th-grade junior high school students aged 15-16 years old. In this study, the researcher took one class with 25 students consisting of 13 girls and 12 boys who frequently used the digital storybook "Let's Read" as a learning media in the classroom. The study was conducted in a Junior High School in Surabaya, East Java, Indonesia. The researcher chooses the level of Junior High School because "Let's Read"

provides a colorful appearance and illustration that is appropriate for students in junior high school groups. Students in the level of Junior High School still have a habit of reading a book that consists of many pictures. It will boost their curiosity and motivation about what is happening in the book's story after reading the storybooks in level 5 with the title "**Sunkeshi: The Princess with Golden Hair**".

The data in the study are the results of students' perceptions after reading the digital storybook "Let's Read", such as reader-response and reports from questionnaires and interviews. The instruments in this study are questionnaires and interview guidelines. The researcher conducts an open-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interview to answer the research question. The researcher uses a semi-structured interview to get further elaboration from the students' answers during the interview. After the reading activity is complete, the researcher distributes a questionnaire containing questions about how they feel when reading digital books. Then, semi-structured interviews were conducted with several students to support the questionnaire data. The data analysis is collected using three stages from Ary et al., (2014). The first stage is **familiarizing and organizing** to categorize the data from participant responses (Raw Data) by the preferred results or categorize them into some groups. The second stage is **coding and reducing to reduce** the long explanation into short by making it easier to read by looking at the codes and spotting the data with colors. The third stage is interpreting **and representing** to interpret the data and then relate it to the theories that have been chosen. In this study, the researcher adopts questionnaire questions from (Deny, 2012) which consist of 13 questions and the participants' should answer in the form of a single word or a short phrase. Meanwhile, the interview questions were adopted from (Sariay, 2017). It consists of 12 questions to explore the students' feelings after reading the digital storybook and their experience in reading English material.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

1. **Students' sense and feelings when they read the English digital storybook "Let's Read"**

The questionnaire results reveal that after reading the digital storybook "Let's Read," most students sense the website is easy to use. It showed that 25 out of 25 students' sense that the use of the website is convenient and straightforward to use. The illustrations make the story easier to read. The story's genre, length, and language choice make the readers grasp the story more accessible. After reading the digital storybook "Let's Read, "most of the students felt very happy, happy, fun, calm, and confident after reading "Let's Read." The story has a light plot with not too much conflict and is a simple and exciting story. The vocabulary is suitable to read with friends and for all ages, especially Junior High School students, and helps students learn English through reading

activities. However, only a few felt ordinary when reading the digital storybook "Let's Read."

The results of the interview section supported the questionnaire result that those students felt happy while reading "Let's Read." The answers above indicated that students prefer to read the digital storybook "Let's Read" rather than the paper book. Students felt that the website was flexible, portable, saved money, and helped them learn English skills better than reading paper books. It happened because students can read digital storybooks everywhere and every time without any burden feelings, and they do not need to come to the library during this pandemic situation. Sometimes, students also sense that reading through paper is saturated because the book is filled with the script and fewer illustrations, sometimes printed in black and white, blurry, and not clear. In the results below, students also reveal that the illustration, the appearance, font, and color influence how they understand the story. Students are interested in the website's appearance, and they can choose the theme of nude, black, or white while reading the digital storybook. They can also choose the font size that can fit their eyes. Most of the students said that the website's color is soft and makes their eyes comfortable while reading it. Students also like reading through digital storybooks because it helps them learn English. It was definite that reading digital is way more interesting in terms of the illustration, the appearance, and the use of the website itself.
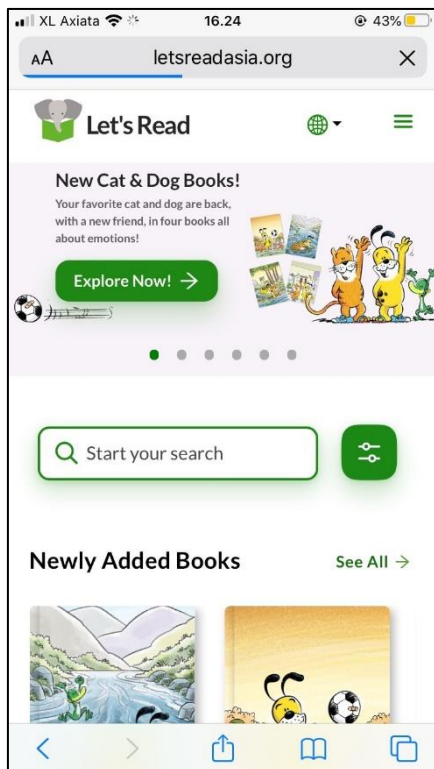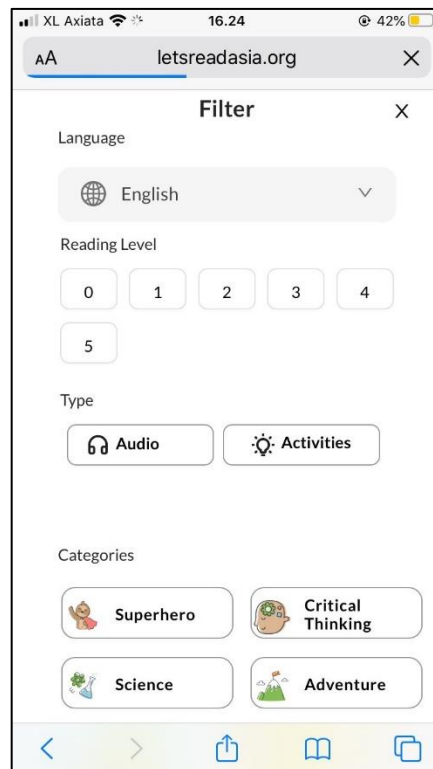
Figure 1. The Appearance of "Let's Read"

Figure 2. The Filter Option
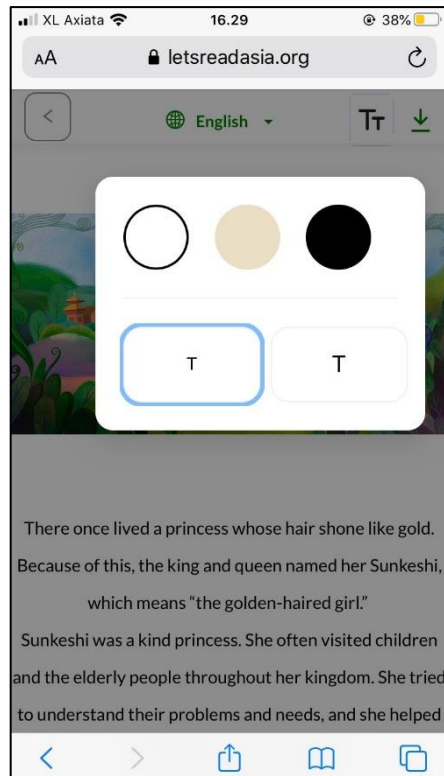
Figure 3. The Cover Page
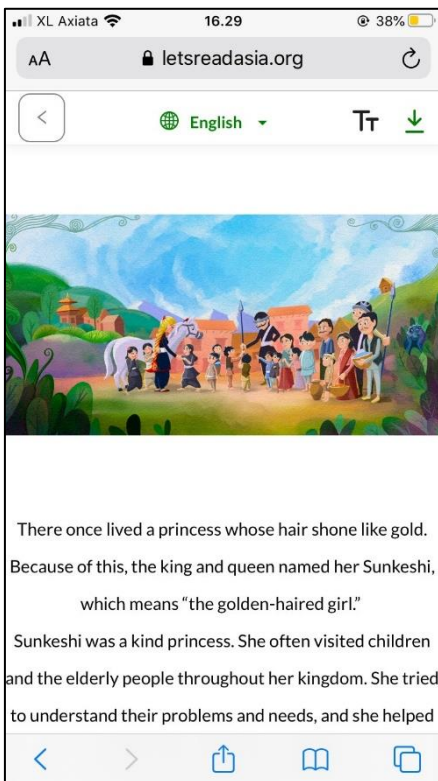

Figure 4. The Theme and Font Size

Figure 5. The Story Page

2. **Students' experiences when they read the English digital storybook "Let's Read"**

The questionnaire results showed that students experience differently from one another when reading "Let's Read." Based on their experience, it showed that all of the students understood the story plot of "Sunkeshi: The Princess with The Golden Hair." It was proof from their answer to the questionnaire that 25 out of 25 students could re-tell the story in short with their own words correctly. The way students re-tell the story in the questionnaire is also suitable with the Indonesian Government Policy no. 37 / 2018 in terms of students can grasp the meaning of social functions, text structure, and elements of narrative text. Most of the students can re-tell the story with different words but the same meaning that the *story talks about a princess who was kidnapped by the monster but managed to escape and marry the prince.* Related to the student's perception of the digital storybook "Let's Read," students experience that the unique value of "Let's Read" comes from the portable of the website. The website is practical; no need for heavy storage on a cell phone or laptop. The website is also beneficial to use at any time and any place.

It is supported by the result of interviews that all of the students explain that they are familiar with "Let's Read" because the website is easy and convenient. Students thought that the story's illustration boosts their imagination about the plot. They can imagine what the characters look like and the story plot in their mind. They also thought that the illustrations were eye-catching. Students' experiences are familiar with the website "Let's Read" features such as filter options, language choices, categories, reading levels, and downloads are easy to understand and use. Students prefer to read the genres such as action, horror, family, friendship, adventure, art, and music. Most students have no experience reading another digital storybook based on the result. Still, there are also a few students who have experience reading another digital storybook such as Webtoon. They experience that both Webtoon and "Let's Read" seem similar but are different. The difference comes from the appearance because Webtoon is directed to look like a comic.

3. **Students' challenges when they read the English digital storybook "Let's Read"**

Reading through "Let's Read" has proven many advantages to the students' reading process. However, despite presenting many advantages, several students also faced challenges when reading "Let's Read." The questionnaire results reveal that most students perceive fluent and peaceful and do not find any problems. Nevertheless, 3 out of 25 students find it challenging to deal with complex vocabulary, internet problems, and pronounce the words. It is supported by the result of interviews when the researcher asked three questions related to the student's challenges when reading the digital storybook "Let's Read." The result represented that most of the students did not face any difficulty understanding the story and using the "Let's Read" website. It means that they

have been able to use the website features well and comprehend the story well. Meanwhile, students usually overcome the problem of internet connections by downloading the digital storybook in the form of a pdf, using "google translate" to translate complex vocabulary, and using "google translate voice" to help pronounce the words.

4. **Student's motivations when they read the English digital storybook "Let's Read"**

Students' motivation is essential to maintain their interest in reading. The questionnaire results showed that all students pointed out that reading an English digital storybook gives a significant improvement. "Let's Read" encourages students' motivation to reach their dreams, increases reading interest and fluency in reading, enhances vocabulary, and improves English skills cause the language choice makes the readers grasp the story more accessible. 20 out of 25 students said that reading English digital storybooks helps them boost their motivation to reach their dreams, such as studying abroad and being a doctor in the future. They believe that reading a book can be an encouragement for them always learn and learn more. They assure that reading books can add insight that they did not know before.

Students claim that they will read "Let's Read" several times based on the result. Most of the students said they would read 2-5 stories or 2-4 books 2-3 times every week. Some students said they would read several times and regularly every week, while others said that they would read when they had free time in a week. The results above support the interviews that "Let's Read" can be beneficial for students to boost their motivation in reading English digital storybooks. It showed that Reading through "Let's Read" is necessary to improve and expedite students' reading skills. It is also significant in helping students become fluent in learning English, especially in reading, improve English skills, find new vocabularies that they never knew before, and help them reach their own goals through learning English. Students thought that their reading skills should be sharpened every time so that their vocabulary becomes broader and more accustomed to reading stories in English. Students also believe that reading an English digital storybook through "Let's Read" undoubtedly improves their reading process. They believe that they can be more competent in English when they learn it regularly. They also assure that reading regular English will gradually help them master English correctly and not randomly.

Discussion
1. Students' perceptions based on sense and feelings

The findings explain that students directly sense that "Let's Read" is an accessible website. They also felt very happy, normal, calm, and confident because they were influenced by the illustration, appearance, font, and color. It supports the theory presented by Gibson (1969) that perception starts with the stimulus, and what you see is what you think. Based on the theory, sensation is a kind of perception because it starts with analyzing sensory inputs such as

appearance (what the website of "Let's Read" looks like). Processing is implemented in one guidance from the retina to the visual cortex, with every chronologic stage in the visual lane executing an actual further elaborate analysis of the input. The website's illustration, appearance, font, and color influence students' retinas in how they can say that they are interested, very happy, easy, and straightforward.

Moreover, the findings are also suitable with the study by Ivone, Francisca & Jacobs, George & Santosa, (2020) that technology is utilized to support the process of teaching-learning. Nowadays, technology offers students and teachers many avenues to read a book digitally, especially in this era with the future foretelling that people will rely more and more on technology, such as during the emergency times of the COVID-19 pandemic. It proves that those technology features in the website that the paper book does not have will help students read a book better.

2. Students' perceptions based on experiences

Regarding experiences, students' have a previous idea about what the website looks like when they hear the title "Let's Read." It happened because students' expectations influence their previous knowledge and the information available in their minds. Students' answers to the first interview question, "What comes to your mind when you hear about "Let's Read," showed that their previous idea influenced their thought. When they hear the website's title, "Let's Read," they already have something in their mind that the website is about reading, and there are a lot of books on the website. Gregory (1974) supported that perception requires information from past experiences or stored knowledge to conclude what we have viewed. Students' answers to the first interview question, "What comes to your mind when you hear about "Let's Read," showed that their previous idea influenced their thought. When they hear the website's title, "Let's Read," they already have something in their mind that the website is about reading, and there are a lot of books on the website. Their previous idea or memory influenced it; when they hear about "Read," it means that they will read something. A few students also have previous knowledge about the digital storybook because they have experience reading other digital storybook such as Webtoon.

Moreover, the outcome also appropriate as supported by Lin et al., (2019) that reading using digital book help students to understand the story better. In his study, students use digital books to control the reading process and adjust the words' size. It supported the data that students can re-tell the story in their own words based on their experience and understanding of the story itself.

3. Students' perceptions based on challenges

The study showed that a few students faced challenges after reading the digital storybook "Let's Read," such as internet connection and complex vocabulary in a sentence or paragraph. Those challenges above suits the study

of (Goodwin et al., 2020). In their study, it is known that students' challenges in reading might happen influenced by factors such as content, length, and complexity of the story. For the first challenge, it is better when students download the story in pdf form so they can easily read it both in online and offline situations. The second challenge happens because sometimes students felt hard to break down when finding complicated word meanings that they had never known before for the third challenge. It can lead to a different understanding of the story plot. Therefore, students use "google translate" to overcome the problem.

4. Students' perceptions based on motivations

Students' motivation to read digital English books also suits with Gibson (1969) theory that what you see is what you get. Students felt well-motivated to read digital English storybooks because the website's appearance was good. It affects their mood when reading the book. They become interested because every page in the book illustrates the storyline. Students' answers in the interview indicated that several elements influenced their motivation in reading. Most of them said that reading English motivated students to reach their goals in the future. They want to be a doctor, students exchange to study abroad, and fluent in English. It supported the study of Ermerawati (2019) that was reading through Let's Read as a MALL (Mobile Assisted Language Learning) effectively allows students to increase their motivation and help them have a good English proficiency for careers in the future. It establishes the exposure in learning English, especially in the era of digitalization, to provide reading sources in a digital way that can impress students' motivations to read more. Students believe that regularly reading is necessarily needed to improve their competence. If the students can do it a habit to read several books within a week or every week, their reading ability will improve significantly. It is related that nowadays, mastering English is an important skill to find a job.

CONCLUSION

The research results of this study indicated that "Let's Read" has proven to be a helpful website and learning media since it positively impacts students' ability to be more active in reading storybooks. Students' perceptions begin from their sight when viewing the appearance of the "Let's Read" website, which goes through seeing, touching, feeling, and receiving something. Then, they select, organize, and interpret the information received into a description that means. Students become more interested in reading built upon several aspects: colorful illustration and theme, convenient font and size, lots of varieties, and unique story plot and characters. It also proved that reading the English digital storybook "Let's Read" helps students gain new vocabularies that they never knew before. The phenomenon of this site is not only influenced by observations but also influenced by past experiences. The perception only applies to themselves and not to others because basically everyone's perception will be different from one

another. "Let's Read" is a useful teaching material that teachers can use to create reading activities in the classroom under lesson plans and essential competencies. The use of "Let's Read" can innovate the teaching-learning process with the current conditions, where school activities are combined with face-to-face and online distance learning. Distance learning using "Let's Read" website will be effective because students are happy with fun reading activities and do not feel bored. Even if a few challenges were faced, reading an English digital storybook through "Let's Read" still can be afforded for the students.

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