

# Will paper books ever be replaced by e-books?

Hoang Van Thien

Vietnamese-German University

Final Report, Academic English 5

Instructor: Dr. Mark Spittle

20th April 2018

## **Abstract**

Since the first introduction of e-books in the market in 1999 (Ramaiah, 2012), they have transformed the way people acquire knowledge. In the past decade, many research has been done in universities around the world to collect readers' preferences and to compare the qualities of e-books and paper books, while the issue was not widely discussed in Vietnam. This paper therefore delve into the Vietnamese juveniles' predilections for e-books and for paper books. The method used in this analysis was online survey, which has attracted almost 50 students of the Vietnamese-German University. From the data gathered, it appears that e-books and paper books had diverse genres and were widely accessed, though printed books were used more frequently. However, each type has its own advantages and disadvantages, making it difficult say if printed books could go vanished in the next 100 years.

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Methods</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Results and discussion</b>	<b>6</b>
E-book usage . . . . .	6
Paper book usage . . . . .	9
Comparison between the two book types . . . . .	10
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Appendices</b>	<b>15</b>

## Introduction

Electronic book (e-book) is “an electronic version of a printed book which can be read on a computer” or a “handheld device” (Oxford Dictionary, 2018). Since the first introduction of e-books in the market in 1999 (Ramaiah, 2012), they have created a phenomenon among public readers. According to Greco and Osman (2013), in 2014, a third of books traded by retailers were e-books.

Of the great deal of previous studies in students’ attitudes towards these two kinds of books, some give people’s reasons to choose one type over another, some give figures on the popularity level of each of them. For instance, Gregory (2008) has investigated into the perceptions of e-books of students at the College of Mount St. Joseph. The survey showed that 34% of students would prefer an electronic book with equivalent content to a paper book. The most important reason was, said by the students, the instant access—they didn’t have to go the library but could find the book online. Other reasonable responses included cheaper cost, better comprehension, portability. In 2002, Dilevko and Gottlieb’s study found that undergraduates felt more productive if they used print books. They claimed the advantage of print books as “containing exactly the required information,” while e-books contained “good enough” information. Another survey conducted at the California State University (Langston, 2003) among the customers of netLibrary e-book collection showed that, although 68% of subjects would use the electronic library again, only 38% of subjects would choose e-books over paper books. Based on these previous literature, it can be seen that e-books are taking steps to transform the reading habits of millennials.

However, even though many studies have reported reading preferences of the young generation, there has been hardly any similar research conducted in Vietnam. The purpose of the

present study is therefore to investigate Vietnamese juveniles' predilections for e-books and for paper books. The paper describes the methods, summarises the data, and opens discussions about the pattern in people's preferences.

## **Methods**

The research method for this study was an online survey, which was opened for 10 days, from March 26 to April 4. Prior to publishing the survey online, three students had pretested the form and given feedback for improvements. The close-ended questions gathered quantitative data about subjects' e-book/paper book usages, evaluations of reading experience with each type of books, and prediction of the future of reading. The open-ended question was optional and asked each subject for his/her most important reason to favor one type over the other. Details for each question was provided in Appendix A.

The subjects in the research were first-year students of the Vietnamese-German University, whose study majors were Computer Science, Mechanical Engineering, Electrical Engineering, Business Administration, and Financial & Accounting. The questionnaire was designed using Google Forms, an online survey platform developed by Google LLC, and distributed to the subjects via e-mail. Of 49 responses recorded, five were classified as invalid due to duplicates and spam, left 44 valid responses analyzed in this paper. The responses were given in Appendix B.

# Results and discussion

## E-book usage

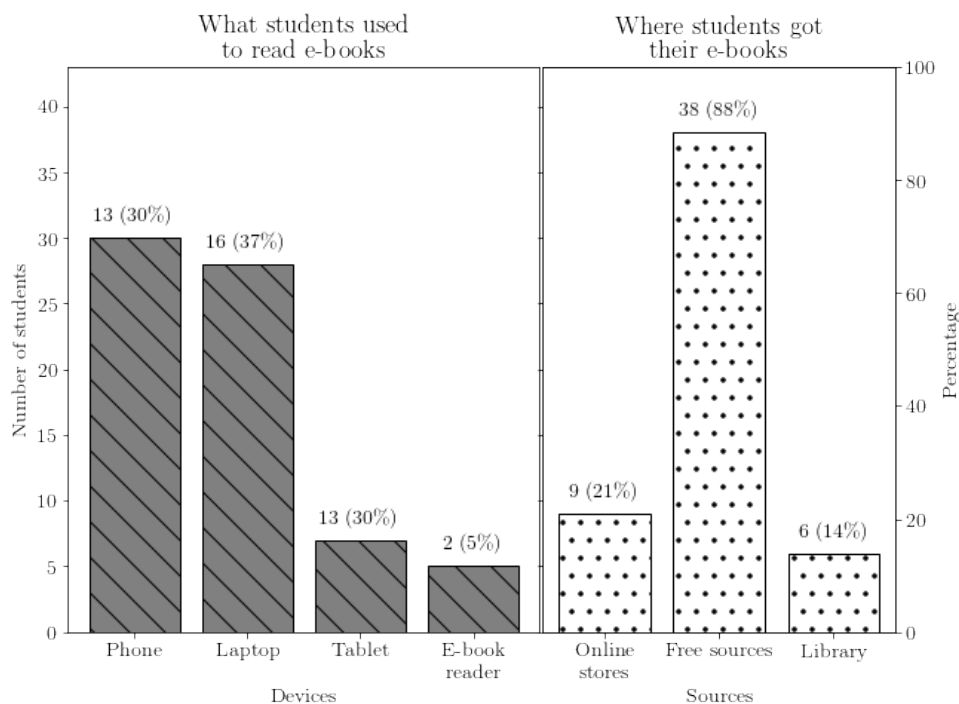


Figure 1: Device usages and e-book sources

Only one of 44 people has not used e-books although had heard of the technology, therefore he/she will be temporarily excluded in this section of e-book usage. Among the e-book users, smartphones and laptops were the most popular devices, which were used by 70% and 65%, respectively, of people surveyed. These numbers were significantly larger than that of tablets and e-book readers, which were only 16% and 12% (Figure 1, left).

Nevertheless, it is surprising that only 21% of the people actually paid for the service. Most of the people (88%) had downloaded e-books from free sources (Figure 1, right). From here rise many concerns about the ethical and legal side of book distribution, along with the needs of copyright laws to protect the benefits of e-book writers.

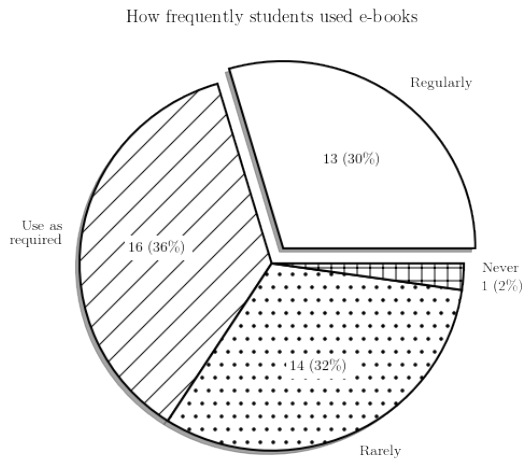


Figure 2: E-book usage frequency

The participants were asked to describe how frequently they had used e-books, with four options available being Regularly, Use as required, Rarely, and Never. Only 13 people (that is roughly 30% of the subject population) reported that they had used e-books on a regular basis. The usage frequency of the rest (70%) ranged from “when required” down to “not at all” (Figure 2). This is a surprising

finding, because it does not advocate what is shown in Figure 3, popular types of e-book. In Figure 3, up to 23 students (more than a half of the subject pool) shared that they had used to read fiction on electronic devices, making the genre be the most popular type. However, fiction should not have a good reason to be a requirement for students’ school work, given that the interviewees’ study were not related to literature nor linguistic fields. A reasonable explanation for this conflict in data is that, the regularity and experience of reading fiction e-books were not significant enough to leave an impression in these respondents, hence were not considered when they estimated their frequency of reading e-books.

The next most common types of e-book were course books, used by 19 students (44%), and Science, used by 13 students (30%). This agreed with the aforementioned usage frequency and readers’ study areas: students were required to read textbooks and materials provided by their lecturers, which were in e-book format. Ranked from the most to the least, the rest common types were Literature, Self-help, and Non-fiction.

In the last section about e-books, participants were asked to justify their e-book reading experience on a five-level scale: “Excellent,” “Good,” “It varies,” “Poor,” and “Very poor.” The



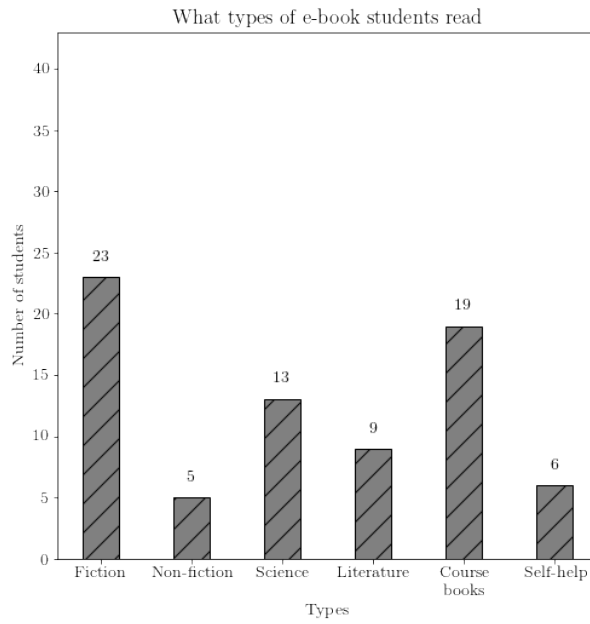


Figure 3: Popular e-book genres

distribution was illustrated in Figure 4, though it does not display the “Very poor” area, because this level was not chosen by any respondents.

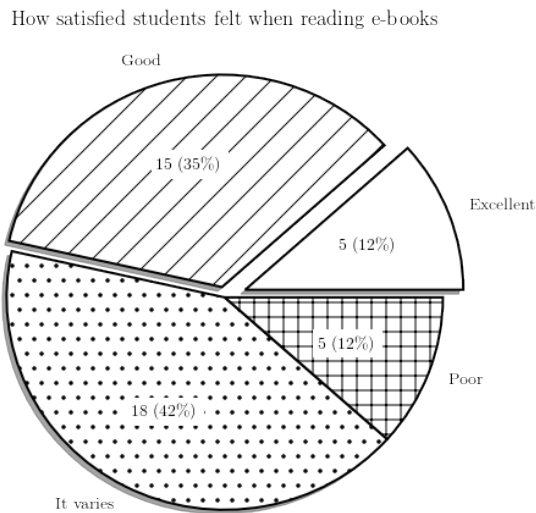


Figure 4: Students’ satisfaction in their reading e-books

Positive responses altogether (“Excellent” and “Good”) did not take up a half of those interviewed. Most of the students rated their satisfaction at a neutral level (“It varies”). A small portion of students (12%) described their experience with e-books as “Poor.” Given the users’

enjoyment above, this was a lost match for this emerging technology, as will be discussed in the subsequent sections.

## Paper book usage

In this section, similar questions were given to the subjects regarding where they got physical books, the genres, the frequency, and how satisfied they felt.

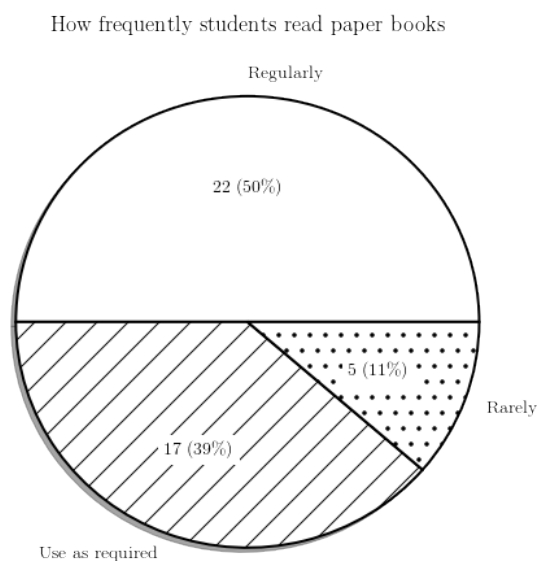


Figure 5: Paper book usage frequency

students, though preferred flicking through the paper to swiping on the screen, still relied on the digital version of a book to access the content.

Concerning paper book categories that the participants had read, Fiction, Course books, and Literature were the most popular. The bottom half on the list consists of Science, Non-fiction, and Self-help.

In opposition to e-book usage frequency, an exact half of the subjects said that they used paper books usually (Figure 5). Additionally, only about a tenth of the respondents hardly ever

Book stores, where three quarters of the respondents had purchased books, were the most common place to obtain paper books, as shown in the data collected. The next major source of physical books was online shopping, with almost a half of the respondents. A further issue that emerged from the interviews was 15 students (34%) who reported that they printed out the electronic content of a book to read it on paper. This is an interesting outcome, implying that this group of

read paper books, which is three times smaller than the figure of the same category in e-book analysis.

Recall the result of e-book satisfaction in Figure 4, 47% of respondents showed positive reaction to e-books (“Excellent” and “Good”). Meanwhile, Figure 6 depicts that these reactions were chosen by 82% of the subject population when it came to paper books. Only 7% were hesitant with their feelings, as they answered “It varies” to the question and a minority of one student described the experience as “Poor.” It is clear that regardless of the e-books’ spreading, physical books still play an irreplaceable part of the reading community. People rather to find the pleasure of perusal with paper than screens.

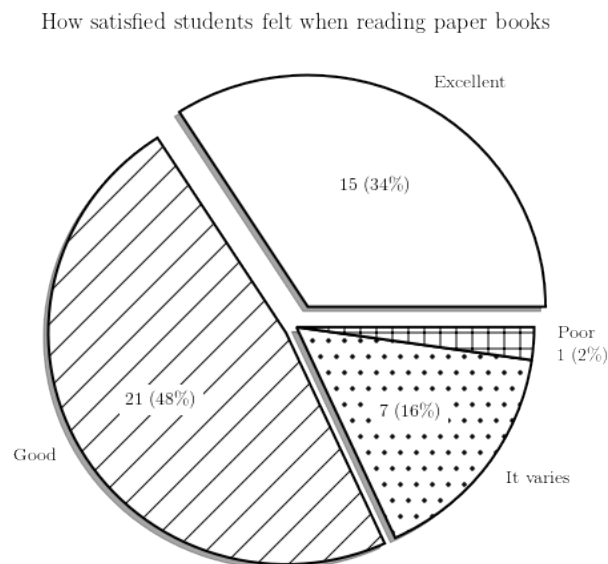


Figure 6: Students’ satisfaction in their reading paper books

### Comparison between the two book types

The students were asked for their awareness of nine features in reading, for each feature, they were required to select which type of books provided better quality. There were five levels to select, ranging from “Definitely e-books” to “Definitely paper books” (Figure 7).

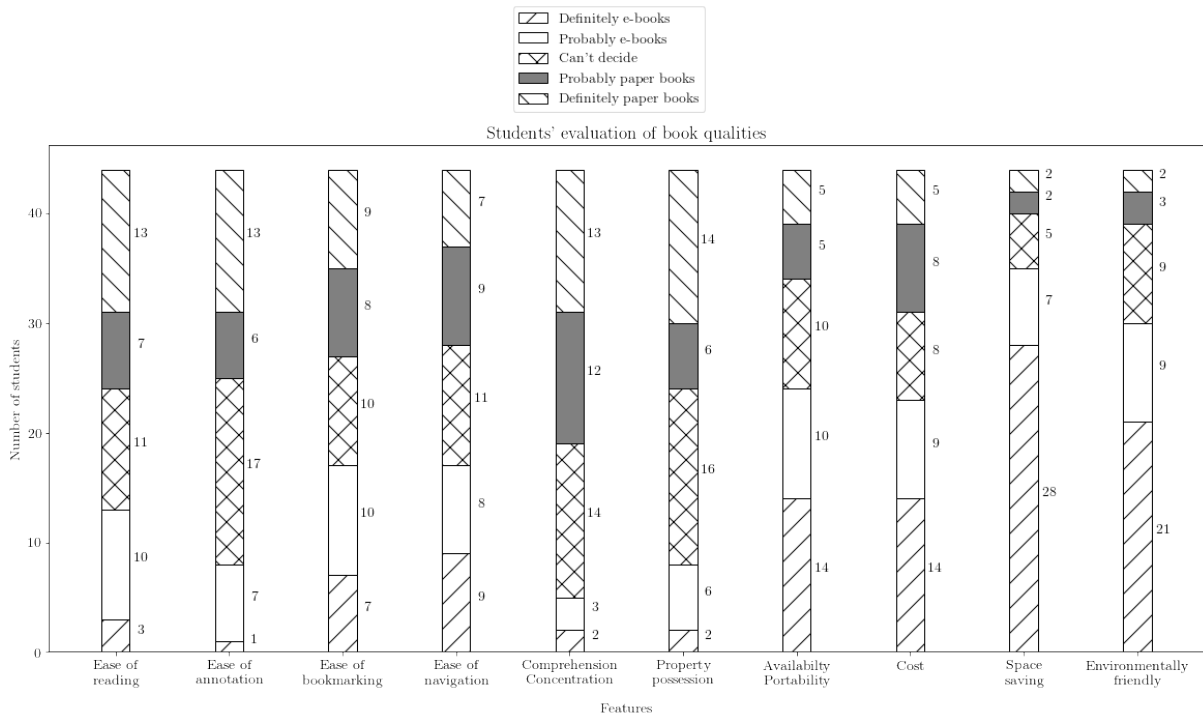


Figure 7: Students' evaluation of each feature for the two book types

By ignoring the “Can’t decide” bars, it can be seen from the data that paper books were favorable at “Ease of reading,” “Ease of annotation,” “Comprehension / Concentration,” and “Property possession.” It is surprising that comprehension and concentration was a feature at which paper books performed better, proving that the effectiveness of reading depends not only on the content of the book, but also the format it is delivered to the users. Concerning other factors like “Availability,” “Cost,” “Space saving,” and “Environment,” e-books were seen to be a choice of higher quality. In fact, one student actually claimed that she selected e-books over printed books because of financial issues, and another one expressed that he felt “annoyed” to carry physical books around. E-books were also widely believed to be environmentally friendly, with 30 of the 44 people.

There were only two areas that both types of books appeared equally wonderful, they were “Ease of bookmarking” and “Ease of navigation.” This implies that the advance of e-book has reached the point where navigation on screen is as effortless as on paper.

Subjects were also interviewed which was the most important feature of a book and why. “Ease of reading” was selected by the proportion of 43% (19 people), and almost 80% of this group were paper book supporters. “Comprehension / Concentration” was the second popular choice, suggested by about 20% of the subject population, but none of them were e-book supporters. One participant called e-book “not a real book,” and shared that paper books gave him “a sense of satisfaction and concentration” to continue reading. Some people even associated the use of e-books with Internet distractions.

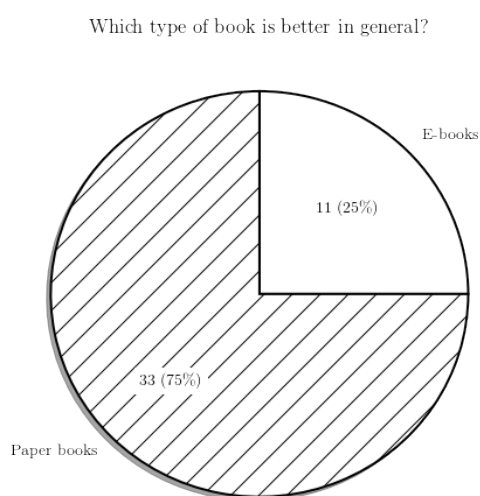


Figure 8: Students' final choice of books

After giving a chance for the subjects to carefully review their experience with e-books and paper books by answering the questions above, at the end of the survey, they were asked to choose one type of books that was generally better, and to predict the use of printed books in the next century. Only a quarter was willing to select e-books over paper books, while the rest (75%) still valued the traditional way of reading (Figure 8). In the question of prediction, subjects were given five levels of likeliness (1—paper books would surely be replaced, 5—paper books can never be replaced). The average outcome was around the middle of the scale, which was 3.5, showing a scenario in which both book types can develop in parallel.

## **Conclusion**

Although e-books have brought a new and convenient way of reading to people, from the survey it seems that paper books were a more favorable choice. However, each kind had its own strength and weakness, together with diverse genres and wide accessibility, making readers reluctant to say if printed books could go vanished in the next 100 years. Therefore, more research needs to be done regularly to observe the changes in Vietnamese reading community.

## References

- Dilevko, J. and Gottlieb, L. (2002). Print Sources in an Electronic Age: A Vital Part of The Research Process for Undergraduate Students. *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 6:391.
- Greco, A. N. and Osman, E. (2013). The competitive advantage of U.S. book publishers in the international market for books. *D. Bogart (Ed.), Library and book trade almanac 2013*, pages 451–470.
- Gregory, C. L. (2008). “But I want a real book”: an investigation of undergraduates’ usage and attitudes toward electronic books. *Reference & user services quarterly*, pages 266–273.
- Langston, M. (2003). The California State University E-book Pilot Project: implications for cooperative collection development. *Library Collections, Acquisitions, and Technical Services*, 27(1):19–32.
- Oxford Dictionary (2018). *E-book*. Oxford University Press.
- Ramaiah, C. K. (2012). The Roots of Automation Before Mechatronics. *DESIDOC Journal of Library & Information Technology*, pages 79–82.

## **Appendices**

The appendices (A, B) were included with this document in seperate files.