

Teaching Electronic Literature in EFL Classrooms: The Know-What, The Know-How, and The Know-Why.

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Highlights

This conceptual article explores three aspects of teaching Electronic Literature in English Language Teaching by considering the suitable materials and contents, the appropriate teaching strategies, and the urgency of including 21st-century skills in ELT through e-lit.

ABSTRACT: Electronic literature has been broadly discussed for the last two decades along with the rapid development of new media. The ongoing debate has been concerned with its shifting form from printed text to digital text which brings along several changes in how literature must be seen. However, studies on this subject are still limited to its L1 setting and most of the discussions focus on its cultural material discourses. To fill the gap, this paper discusses the necessity of bringing up the practical application of electronic literature in EFL classrooms. The discourse revolves around addressing several key inquiries: the types of electronic literature viable as learning materials in ELT (the know-what), the teaching strategies through which electronic literature can be effectively taught in ELT (the know-how), and the fundamental rationale underscoring the importance of teaching electronic literature to EFL students (the know-why).

Keywords: electronic literature, teaching literature in EFL classrooms

Introduction

John and Mary meet.
What happens next?
If you want a happy ending, try A. (Atwood, 2008)

An opening of a meta-fictional story written by Atwood that was first published in 1983 showed how a short story was able to engage readers by giving them chances to choose an ending for the story. Although the ending is limited to several options, Atwood provides six alternatives to the story development but with one authentic ending. To some extent, her meta-fiction conveys the idea that the reader can be involved in deciding the way a story is developed and ended. Three decades later, in 2012, Atwood joined Wattpad, an internet-based story-sharing platform. At this point, she has proven that her preceding meta-fiction emphasizing the active engagement between the reader and the text is a basic formula commonly applied in electronic systems including Wattpad. This interactivity is only one of many possibilities carried out by digital technology which offers a new direction and new genre in the field of contemporary literature that has been mostly consumed by today's generation.

The study of this new literary genre is positioned under the study of electronic literature (e-lit). The genre has been in the spotlight in literary discussion, the most intensively since the 1990s, thanks to the development of digital technology. The digital turn has shifted the conventional way of reading and writing in the literary field of English-speaking countries. Not only is the shift a mere dimensional change from two-dimensional printed paper into digital forms, like from books into e-books, but it also brings forth a new paradigm of reading-writing acts, more varied modalities of text, and the shifting power and knowledge between reader(s) and author(s).

Electronic literature (e-lit) is an umbrella term that unifies some specific new literary terms like hypertext, cybertext, or digital literature. It is defined as works containing literary aspects that take advantage of the abilities and contexts offered by the stand-alone or networked computer. However, e-lit must be born digital, thus e-book is not classified into this type of literature because the original format is in printed media, which means it cannot easily be produced or consumed in a print literary context as its native digital environment. Within the large kind of e-lit, (Rettberg, 2019) summarized several forms and threads of practice, which are: (1) Hypertext fiction and poetry, (2) Combinatory poetics, (3) Interactive fiction (and other games-based digital literary work), (4) kinetic and interactive poetry, (5) Poems and stories that are generated by computers, (6) Networked writing based on the collective experience of the Internet. They are not classified into strict distinctions. It means that one form can be produced into another form, for example, hypertext poetry or interactive fiction can be collaboratively written. These types of e-lit have been preserved by The Electronic Organization and archived through the creation of the Electronic Literature Collection, <https://collection.eliterature.org/>, online anthologies of e-lit. However, the forms of this internet-based literature have been dynamically expanded following the latest advances in global technology, for instance, flash or micro-fiction in the form of Twitterature or Instapoetry.

E-lit is not easily well-received. Resistance was--and is--inevitable. Some perceive its existence as contrary to conventional literature. The disagreement has its reasons. Hayles (2004) explains this uneasy acceptance takes place because the practice of producing and consuming literary works has been established for thousands of years in its current manner. Similarly, literary studies have been treated to be a paper-based type of research. Besides, instead of being comprehended as a more paperless and computationally networked process, the printing and publishing industry sees electronic literature as simply any other cultural product. It is believed that a great number of readers still prefer reading what is on paper, not on the screen. Moreover, Matthew Kirschenbaum (2018) questions the aesthetic aspects of electronic literature since it is produced through popular cultural platforms. He thinks the quality is only measured by the many likes, clicks, or shares it gets.

E-lit insofar has been studied from various literary perspectives; from its form and aesthetic values, readers, authorship, and publishing system, to the ideology brought through its language machine. The discussions of e-lit form were conducted by Bao-Yu (2015), who focused on the narrative form of Twitter Fiction. Other research remarks on the complexity of non-linear forms of hypertext novels (Mangen & van der Weel, 2016). At the same time, the questions about micro-fiction's aesthetics due to its banality on social media were delivered by Kirschenbaum (2018). From the reader's perspective, Kraxenberger & Lauer (2022) spotted the readers of the online literary platform. Research concerning the publishing system of Twitter fiction serialization was conducted by Andersen (2017). To take into consideration, the practical application of electronic literature in language classrooms has not been immensely discussed, let alone carried out. Meanwhile, the spread of electronic literature seems to be barely stoppable and targets readers from non-English-speaking countries. The aforementioned

new paradigm of reading and writing act regarding electronic literature in the L1 setting, as well as the opportunities to consider what is happening to our situation within a world increasingly mediated by digital technology are at least two considerations that make electronic literature significant to be brought in EFL classrooms. Furthermore, Today's Higher Education Institution mandates the 21st-century skills of information and communication technology literacy in the curricula (P21, 2015). It is within these contexts; that this study will explore the application of electronic literature in EFL classrooms by focusing on (1) What kinds of electronic literature can be taught in EFL classrooms? (2) How can electronic literature be taught in EFL classrooms? and (3) Why is teaching electronic literature essential for EFL students?

This study is focused on the possibilities of using E-lit in EFL classrooms by elaborating the theoretical groundwork of each research focus. Not only does it discuss the theoretical basis, but it also provides some practical ideas for instilling E-lit in EFL classrooms.

Literature and E-literature in EFL Classrooms

Literature has been a useful material for language learning. The benefits of instilling literature in English Language Teaching (ELT) have been marked through some research, for example, Matos (2011), Babae & Yahya (2014), Yimwilai (Yimwilai, 2015), and Delanoy (2015) all support the appropriateness of employing literary works in EFL classrooms. Stern (2001) and Erkaya (2005) have all agreed upon the use of authentic literary texts (e.g., short stories and novels) in EFL classrooms in order to provoke students' interests and interpretive skills, support them to reveal their opinions and feelings, and facilitate their personal engagement with texts. Peacock (1997) and Ghosn (Ghosn, 2002) criticize the use of traditional material in ELT and fall into the similar argument that authentic literature is beneficial for building students' personal interest in ELT, boosting their critical thinking, and providing them with a challenge to discuss cultural and global issues.

Using a similar perspective, E-Lit is viewed as a promising authentic material for ELT. Though the use of e-lit to enhance language skills in an EFL setting has rarely been examined, Mitrevski (1993) through his language laboratory once investigated the application of storyboard, a hypertext software, in his language class. He found that Storyboard is extremely useful for developing reading material for EFL students since this program offers a huge of hyperlinking abilities. Among other types, interactive fiction such as digital stories are the most commonly used in English Language Teaching Røkenes (2016) concluded the advantages of using digital storytelling in language teaching as the students were producers of knowledge rather than consumers in the project. A similar result is marked by Widodo's research (2016) that digital story is beneficial for language learning in a contextual learning environment.

Teaching Electronic Literature in EFL Classroom: The Know-What

Although e-lit addresses digitally born literature, it still has deep connections to experimental writing and literary aspects of the print literature age. Thus, the way the teacher selects and designs learning material of print literature in EFL classrooms can also be adapted as a way to select appropriate e-lit in ELT. Tomlinson (1986) proposed six main principles that should be driven to developing literature as learning material, which are: exposing authentic use of target language, helping students recognize features of authentic input, providing the student opportunities to use the target language for communicative purposes, offering opportunities for feedback, sustaining the students' curiosity, and stimulating intellectual, aesthetic, and emotional involvement. Here, we can see that Tomlinson insists on content-based material to support communication skills and the 21st competencies.

Based on the criteria aforesaid, there are several kinds of E-lit that are suitable for learning material in EFL classrooms. Considering three traditional literary genres tradition of poetry, fiction/ prose, and drama, the teacher can select similar genres in electronic forms. A collaborative poem is one of the suitable materials. Nick Montfort's "Taroko Gorge" (2009), which was previously created as a poetry generator describing Taiwan's national park of the same name, is a good start for pinpointing the nature of electronic poems. The form of this literary work is a simple script producing an endlessly scrolling poem. This poem does not produce a dense reading experience because of its short length and simple language. It is in accordance with what the previous studies highlighted on the student's language competence to understand the literary text in terms of the literary text's meaning and message. (Tevdovska, 2016)

Now, the form of this e-lit has been overwritten into several different poems composed collaboratively. What makes this poem well-known is that Montfort did not intend to write the e-lit collaboratively as happens now. It was hacked and remixed dozens of times by other writers as Rettberg points out that the appeal of "Taroko Gorge" is in its invitation for the readers to openly produce a new version of the poem digitally by changing its code. Up to now, there are sixteen remixed, remade, and parodied poems that are collaboratively created based on Taroko Gorge's poetry generator. The first remixed poem of Taroko Gorge created in the same year is Tokyo Garage (2009), a poem that is different from "Taroko Gorge". If Montfort's poem is a Zen nature poem with a short line and minimalist diction; in contrast, Rettberg's remix illustrates a cosmopolitan populated city with maximalist vocabulary. Surprisingly, the remixed version did not end. A year later, J. R. Carpenter used the same code base and developed "Gorge", a hacked poem about eating and digestion. In 2011, Tallan Memmott's "Toy Garbage" focused on kitsch and plastic toys. In the same year, Mark Sample paid tribute by creating "Takei, George", a poem about Star Trek.

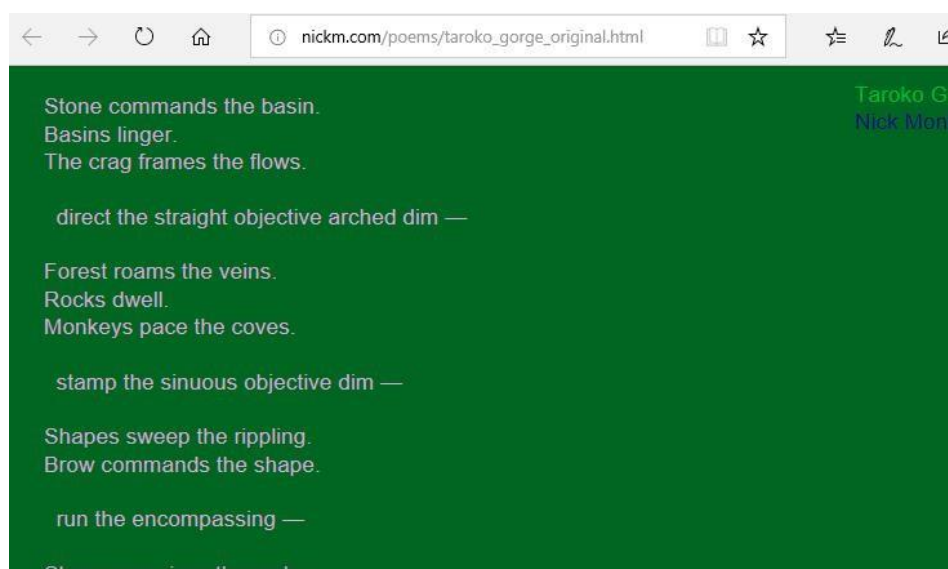


Fig. 1. Taroko Gorge

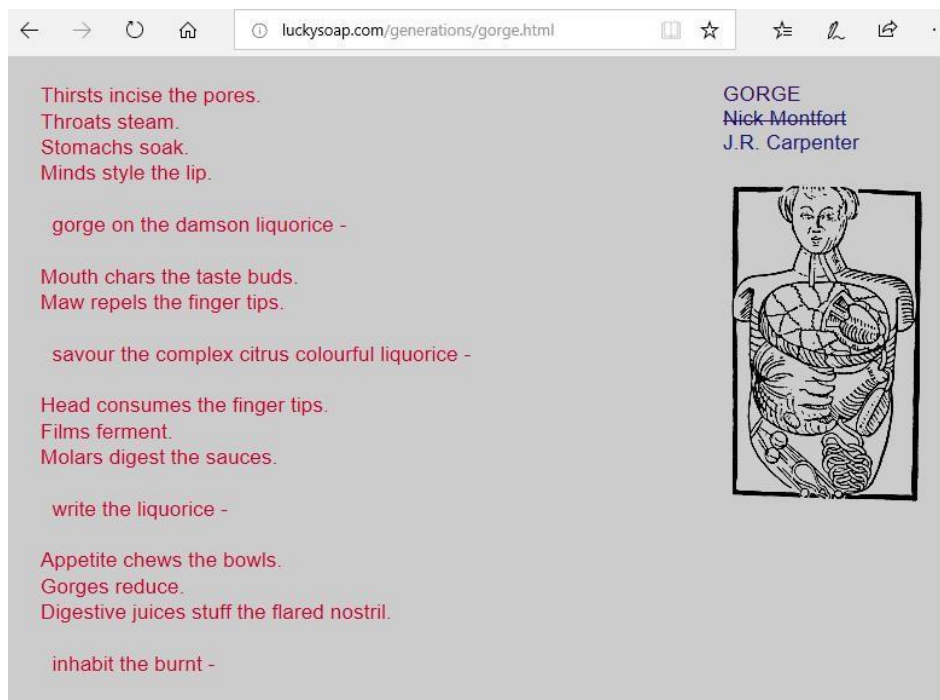


Fig. 2. Taroko Gorge's remix: Gorge

Preferable content-based teaching is also advised by McKay (2001) in designing learning material by using short stories in ELT. To promote authentic material and attract students' interest, she suggested an accessible literary text with an engaging theme. She highlights another important aspect when choosing a short story, the story must be able to encourage the students to express their individual interpretations and must refer these interpretations back to the text. Hypertext fiction is one of the appropriate materials to use. Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* (1995) is likely the most-referenced work of first-generation hypertext fiction. It is a feminist retelling of Frankenstein's story. It consists of five subsections: the journal, story, graveyard, crazy quilt, and the body of the text. The sections illustrate a nonlinear narrative of the monster's creation, escape to America on a ship, relationship with another woman, and eventual dissolution. It gives a great advantage of visual layout which makes the students able to select the individual body part and read the story of the woman from whom the body part came.



Fig. 3. Patchwork Girl

Authentic electronic prose enables students to be aware of the digital environment of e-lit. It means that the teacher should not employ fiction/ nonfiction that was originally derived from a printed form, or simply say, should not use e-books. To facilitate the sense of reading engagement, the teacher can employ interactive fiction that the tradition builds from the heritage of text adventures. This interactive prose allows the reader to participate in a story and explore digital space. As illustrated in the opening of this article, this type of e-lit is an enhanced version of Atwood's metafiction. An excellent example is the interactive epistolary novel created by Emily Short (2012) entitled *First Draft of the Revolution* (the story can be accessed through this link: <https://lizadaly.com/first-draft/content/intropage.html>). This is free material, so the students can easily access the story.

The work enables the reader to participate in the act of writing, generating a metafiction that invites the reader to consider the act of letter-writing and correspondence, as well as what the editing process exposes and conceals. As the reader goes inside the thoughts of the two characters (Juliette and Henry) and dictates the seemingly insignificant aspects of their correspondence, the reader can learn more about the literariness of the novel.

In the form of drama, e-lit benefits from its written form (such as reading a drama script), performance (act or movie form), and even a text performance (without an actual person performing the story). A written text performance can be in the form of web-based drama like *How to Rob a Bank* as made by Alan Bigelow in 2016 (<https://www.webyarns.com/howto/howto.html>). This romantic drama can be implemented in EFL classes, particularly in the EFL class for teen or young adult pupils. This is a love story of an inexperienced young bank robber named Ted and his girlfriend, Elizabeth. The story is revealed through the five-story parts of the bank robber's intensive use of the iPhone, Google search engine, texting application, animation, online games, and any other features on iPhone. Using this web-based literature can performatively show the plot and how the conflicts appear throughout the changing use of Internet-based tools without showing the embodied actors of the story.

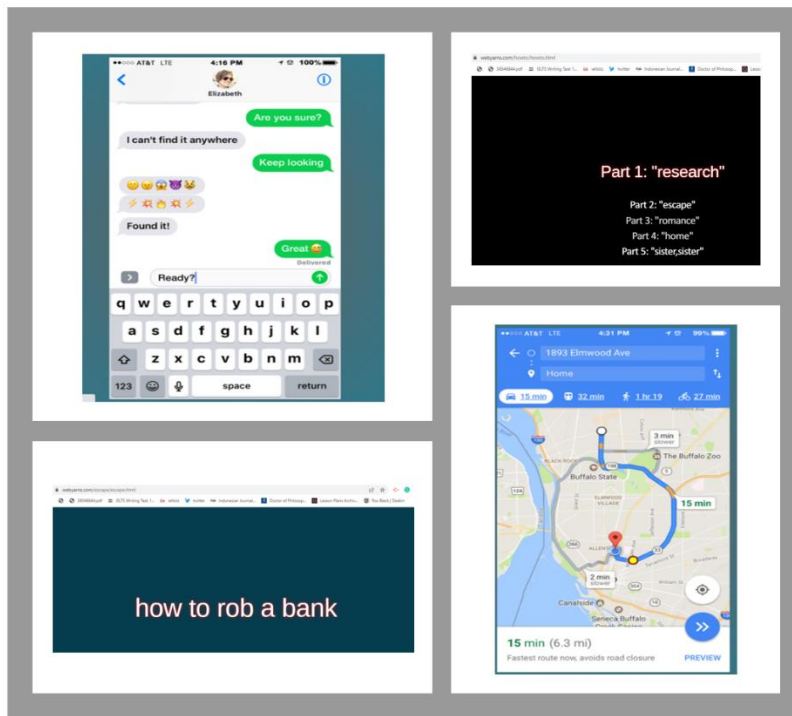


Fig. 4. Some story parts in *How to Rob in a Bank*

Teaching Electronic Literature in EFL Classroom: The Know-How

The idea of using literature to teach language was initially proposed by the Grammar Translation Method era, however, the popularity of this idea decreased, until in 1980s, when some linguists and literature scholars brought the idea back (Duff & Maley, 2007). Since then, some methodological approaches to teaching literature in EFL classes have been developed, such as language-content-personal growth model (Carter & Long, 1991), stylistic and critical literary approaches as proposed by Maley (2001), story grammar and reader response approaches (Amer, 2003), Van's (2009) teaching approaches that following the literary criticism, and integrated approach proposed by Timucin (2001) and Savvidou (Savvidou, 2004). However, using e-lit in an EFL classroom involves another approach that will facilitate the advancement of the internet and the richness of multimodal electronic text. Other than that, in line with the context of the internet native generation, the activity should be conducted by using the 21st-century learning approach that enables students to actively engage, to be critically and creatively involved in the learning process, and to be technologically savvy. To accommodate, Tamam & Asbari (Tamam & Asbari, 2022) emphasize three principles of language learning by using internet-based literature, which are personal experiences, active learning, and social interaction. Thus, this writing proposes a combination of the aforementioned approaches to use e-lit in EFL classrooms.

Adopting Carter and Long's teaching model, e-lit can be implemented by focusing on the language aspect. However, the principle of social interaction must be an additional condition in teaching English through literature. Rapidly increasing opportunities for computer-mediated communication holds promise for the integration of interaction among learners worldwide. In cyberspace, there are synchronous and asynchronous ways of communication. For synchronous communicative e-lit, such as Twitter literature, chatterbots, or any two-way interactive e-lit, the teacher should consider the interactive privilege of this learning material. On this side, productive language skills can be drilled. E-lit serves as an excellent starting point for writing

exercises. Teachers can assign students to write a narrative's ending in their own words or to tell a story from the perspective of a different character in e-lit. For writing practice, more creative exercises of a similar nature could be created so the students can be assisted to respond actively to Twitterature or even to start creating their own creative writing and post it on their social media.

Another strategy for teachers is creating e-lit projects, adapting *The 24-hour Micro E-Lit Project* by Dene Grigar, an experimental flash fiction. The project produced a collection of twenty-four flash stories about life in an American city in the twentieth century created by twenty-five participants. In this participatory fiction project, the teacher can come up with a topic that is relevant to their students' social and cultural background, for instance: a topic about the city they are living in, then ask their students to tweet a flash story about the city's life based on their personal experiences. The students are allowed to retweet and comment on other's tweets to make the communication run in two ways. This strategy is beneficial to train students to express their thoughts in limited words. This strategy also makes the hypertext model possible to create among students since the students are allowed to retweet, tag, or make comments. Through retweets, the teacher can ask the students to elaborate or collaborate on the previous tweet to make a thread. Another strategy is to ask the students to explore the tags or hashtags they use, for instance by exploring the hashtag #flashfiction or any hashtag about the title of literary works. By doing so, the students can understand the way hyperlink literature works. It means e-lit can serve the social function of language as a source of contextualized linguistic features in internet-based communication.

Through remixed poems, such as in the remix of "Taroko Gorge", students can learn about vocabulary, alliteration, and rhyme. How a poem generator chooses particular words to replace the previous or the original terms can enrich the student's vocabulary, particularly their choice of words and figurative language. To take an example we can stimulate the students to pay attention to the use of the alliteration of "T" and "G" as in the original version and its remixes and guess the function of creating this effect when reading rhythmically. In remixed poems of "Taroko Gorge", we can ask students to compare the original version of "Taroko Gorge" and its remixed generated poems. Another language focus is on the improvement of students' vocabulary knowledge through e-lit reading. Rasyiid et.al (2021) agreed on the effectiveness of using Instagram to improve students' English vocabulary. The students can learn both formal English and daily-use English words from flash fiction or micro-stories provided by Instapoem or Twitterature. From a literary perspective, this poem illustrates the intertextuality of some literary work and shows the students the very basic logic of electronic literature, that reading a literary text in the digital world is an active producing- consuming process.

The second way of asynchronous communicative e-lit like hypertext fiction needs a different method to bring a sense of interactivity. The teacher can apply blended learning by taking the discussion offline in the class and encouraging them to respond to the author of the e-lit by commenting on the author's page, sending an email or message to the author's message box, remaking the e-lit, and tagging the author's original version. This active reading process allows the students to be an active reader. This mode of communication is possible since the authorship and readership in internet-based literature are fluid.

The way to bring e-lit into the EFL context must also highlight the cultural approach, both L1 culture and the students' cultural context. According to this paradigm, literature serves as an ideal platform for expressing the cultural ideas associated with the language, including its history, literary theories, genre theory, author biographies (Carter & Long, 1991; Keefer & Lazar, 1995), customs, politics, art, and geography. *The Patchwork Girl* can be used to serve this purpose. This fiction can stimulate the students to interpret the hypertext fiction critically

about women's body parts which apparently shows the metaphorical identities of the patchwork girl. Other than that, this fiction is the best material especially for the advanced level students since the work demonstrates the use of multimodality in fictional text which enables the students to expand their interpretation and interactively communicate with a text consisting of visual and textual modal. Other than that, this material selection is in line with the need to bring cultural knowledge as one of the functions of bringing literature in EFL classrooms (Zubair, 2022), how female bodily identity is represented through interactional fiction. The students can be stimulated to think critically about their bodies and the discourse of their bodies through some literary theories such as feminism, masculinism, or postcolonialism.

Teaching Electronic Literature is Essential in ELT: The Know-Why

Digital literacy is one of the goals in the 21st century's skill-based learning which we must start to cultivate in EFL classrooms. The skills are creativity and innovation, critical thinking and problem-solving, communication and collaboration, and information and technology literacy. They are essential for lifelong learning and productivity (P21, 2015; Trilling & Fadel, 2010) However, teaching English for EFL should implement 21st-century skills through practices and processes that cultivate the competencies (Black, 2009). Thus, it is crucial for students to learn digital literacy in order to be active users and producers of their own social, cultural, and ideological materials through e-lit. As revealed by Nuroh et.al (2020) that the development of 21st-century thinking abilities has not been the goal of English language instruction in Indonesia; instead, the emphasis is still mostly on acquiring incomplete textual knowledge rather than an integrative contextual understanding of the material covered.

E-lit directs us to consider how digital technology and cyberculture affect us ultimately in the broadest sense. The study of electronic literature is concerned less about making meaning of the Canonic literary works than it increases our understanding of the creative potentials of digitally mediated learning material. Likewise, electronic literature encourages us to consider how to provide new literary modes, while supporting them in contextually specific ways. Regarding the need to teach 21st-century skills, the most important reason for reading electronic literature is the study of these works provokes us to critically consider what is happening to our world nowadays which is massively mediated by digital technology, as self-reflexive cultural artifacts, electronic literary works.

With regard to the multimodality of e-lit, teachers should emphasize the interplay of textual, oral, visual, gestural, tactile, and spatial patterns of meaning (Kalantzis et al, 2016: 1) in the e-lit. This is substantial because students need to be aware of the symbolic meanings, gestures, and intonation. It means that intercultural competencies can be embedded in e-lit by showing the students how particular symbols or gestures convey various meanings depending on their contexts and vice versa, the students must possess symbolic competence since the way they express their imagination can be directly commented other readers worldwide. This competency is in line with Kramsch's (2006) notions in which the student's ability to take symbolic action and exercise symbolic power can be nourished by literary imagination in language teaching.

Conclusion

This writing aims to fill the gap in teaching literature in an EFL setting by using e-lit. As a foregrounding study, this article emphasizes the use of e-lit as a learning material to cultivate digital literacy and 21st-century skills related to creativity and critical thinking. Collaborative writing poems, bots, and hypertext fiction are examples of e-lit that can be implemented in ELT due to their interactive forms and thought-provoking contents. By using a communicative

language teaching approach, the teaching-learning process will be accommodated appropriately as it focuses on creating communicative English synchronously and asynchronously.

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