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EFL PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON DIGITAL READING INSTRUCTION FOR YOUNG LEARNERS

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Abstract: Recent technology advancements have altered the perception of literacy, and it is no longer limited to the connection with the print text. The shifting meaning of literacy has been reflected in the growing number of teachers who are integrating digital learning into their reading instruction. However, little is known about the evidence of future teachers' views on the implementation of digital learning, specifically in relation to young learners' early literacy. Thus, this study aims to examine pre-service teachers' perceptions of the benefits, drawbacks, and reading skills taught by using digital learning to enhance early reading skills in EFL context. This study will investigate seventy pre-service teachers who have taken English for Young Learners courses. The data of this study is collected by distributing questionnaires consisting of three aspects (benefits, drawbacks, and reading skills) concerning digital learning usage, using a Likert scale (strongly disagree, disagree, agree, and strongly agree) as the measurement. The survey will be conducted using google form. The study's findings will reveal how pre-service teachers perceive the benefits, drawbacks, and reading skills taught by implementing digital learning in young learners' classrooms.
Keywords: *digital reading, young learners, english, pre-service teachers, teachers' perception*

INTRODUCTION

The integration of digital learning into the curriculum has emerged as a critical consideration in modern pedagogical practices, particularly within the realm of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education for young learners. The rapid evolution of technology presents both opportunities and challenges for educators seeking to enhance reading instruction. As EFL pre-service teachers prepare to enter the classroom, their perspectives on utilizing digital tools in reading instruction significantly affect not only their teaching practices but also the literacy development and engagement of their future students. Exploring these views provides meaningful insights into pedagogical strategies that foster both comprehension and motivation among young EFL learners.

Research emphasizes that the preparation of pre-service teachers in utilizing digital technologies greatly affects their subsequent use in educational settings. Çebi and Reisoğlu (2019) argue that enhancing pre-service teachers' digital competencies during training is crucial, as their experiences significantly influence future pedagogical practices. Graduates who possess a strong foundation in digital literacy are more likely to implement meaningful and engaging digital instruction, particularly in early literacy development. Furthermore, as Nugroho and Atmojo (2022) illustrate, frequent engagement with digital tools in informal contexts encourages EFL learners and teachers alike to develop a more favorable attitude toward various forms of digital learning, influencing subsequent classroom dynamics.

In the specific context of reading instruction, digital tools such as storytelling apps, interactive multimedia, and reading progress software have demonstrated potential in improving vocabulary acquisition, fluency, and comprehension. Digital storytelling, in particular, merges narrative with visuals and audio, capturing young learners' attention and supporting deeper learning (Eslit, 2023; Maya et al., 2022). This combination helps create immersive experiences that allow children to connect emotionally with the content while developing language skills in a contextually rich environment. These multimedia elements not only engage learners but also support vocabulary development and comprehension (Leong et al., 2019). By associating new words with images and sounds, learners can better retain meanings and apply them in various contexts, which contributes to improved literacy skills. Messis (2024) highlights that both learners and pre-service teachers appreciate the multifaceted nature of digital applications, which can promote interactive and meaningful learning experiences. This suggests that digital tools are not only effective pedagogically but are also well-received by users, increasing motivation and active participation in the learning process. Similarly, Alahmadi (2024) shows how digital reading tools can facilitate fluency and comprehension while enhancing overall engagement. The study demonstrates that such tools provide real-time feedback and adaptive features, allowing learners to progress at their own pace and build confidence in their reading abilities.

The transition from traditional to digital narratives in reading instruction allows educators to create authentic and immersive learning experiences that significantly impact students' reading comprehension (Tham & Thủy, 2023). Studies also reveal that learner-generated digital content can promote deeper learning approaches and greater self-efficacy among students (Alwafi, 2023), while fostering autonomous and student-centered literacy environments (Muharom et al., 2021). These findings suggest a growing consensus among educators and EFL learners regarding the efficacy of digital tools in enhancing literacy outcomes.

However, despite these demonstrated benefits, the seamless integration of digital tools into EFL instruction is not without challenges. Pre-service teachers often report feeling underprepared or lacking confidence in using educational technologies, which may discourage them from implementing digital strategies (Masoumi, 2020). According to Waemusa and Jongwattanapaiboon (2023), a disconnect frequently exists between pre-service teachers' everyday technology use and the expectations of formal educational policy, complicating implementation. Moreover, advanced digital tools such as augmented reality applications require higher-order digital literacy and problem-solving skills (Kamaruzaman and Rozuki, 2024). These tools, while promising, pose significant barriers without adequate training and support.

Furthermore, the way pre-service teachers are trained to use digital tools is equally important. Teng and Zhang (2021) emphasize the role of metacognitive awareness in enhancing literacy outcomes, suggesting that self-reflection and understanding one's own learning processes are vital to the successful integration of digital strategies. Although metacognitive strategies and scaffolded comprehension are critical, little research explores how pre-service teachers connect digital tools to evidence-based reading instruction. Studies reveal that reading comprehension strategy instruction is often overlooked in EFL classrooms (Brevik, 2019), further complicating the effective use of digital tools for literacy development. Moreover, few investigate pre-service teachers' views—despite their pivotal role in shaping future classroom practices. In addition to technical training, EFL teacher education must address the pedagogical

dimensions of digital learning. As Reynolds and Teng (2021) argue, current discourse in EFL education reflects a growing tension between traditional literacy instruction and the demand for progressive, technology-driven approaches. With young learners demonstrating increased motivation when using digital reading tools (Khan et al., 2021), it becomes essential to re-examine the instructional practices that best support reading comprehension in a digitally rich environment.

Given these developments, this study investigated EFL pre-service teachers' views on utilizing digital learning in reading instruction for young learners. By exploring their perceptions, experiences, and challenges, this research aims to contribute to the broader discourse on digital competence in teacher education and the evolving role of technology in early EFL literacy instruction. These insights can inform a deeper understanding of how digital resources can be effectively implemented in diverse classroom contexts. Specifically, this study contributes to the field by highlighting the critical need for targeted digital pedagogy training in pre-service teacher education programs, identifying key areas where EFL pre-service teachers feel underprepared, and offering practical recommendations for integrating digital tools in early literacy instruction. As the landscape of educational technology continues to evolve, preparing a digitally competent generation of EFL educators is essential for fostering effective, engaging, and sustainable literacy development in young learners.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study aims to investigate pre-service teachers' perceptions of digital learning in enhancing early reading skills among young English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. The methodology employed in this research was designed to gather data that reflects the benefits, drawbacks, and the specific reading skills associated with digital learning tools. Based on the objective and the characteristics of the data, survey research was conducted. The survey design would enable the researchers to provide insights on how the pre-service teachers perceived the use of digital learning for reading skills for young learners.

Participants

This study was conducted in English Language Education Study Program of Teacher Training and Education Faculty, Lambung Mangkurat University. The accessible population of the study was the students of English Department who took English for Young Learner course. The sample for this study consisted of 70 pre-service teachers enrolled in English for Young Learners courses at Lambung Mangkurat University. This demographic was selected to provide insight into future educators' views on integrating digital technologies in teaching reading, particularly for young learners within an EFL context. The participants were recruited through targeted announcements in relevant coursework.

Research Instrument

A structured questionnaire served as the primary tool for data collection due to its alignment with the research questions, which seek to examine pre-service teachers' perceptions of digital learning tools in reading instruction. In particular, the survey was designed to assess three key dimensions—benefits, drawbacks, and reading skills promoted through digital learning—directly addressing the research objectives. The questions were designed to capture a range of perceptions about the impact of digital learning on reading instruction. The

questionnaire utilized a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," allowing respondents to express varying degrees of agreement with each statement regarding their perceptions of digital learning. The survey was administered online using Google Forms, enabling efficient data collection while ensuring accessibility for participants. This method also streamlined the process of data analysis by automatically collating responses for subsequent statistical evaluation. The online format is particularly relevant given the increased reliance on digital platforms for education following recent global events (Prachagool et al., 2022).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Benefits of Digital Learning in Literacy Instruction

The survey results indicate a strong consensus among pre-service teachers regarding the benefits of digital learning tools for enhancing early literacy skills among young learners. Notably, 90% of respondents agreed that children benefit from using digital learning to enhance their phonological awareness, and 85% affirmed that digital learning aids in the acquisition of phonemes. These findings align with prior research, emphasizing the significant role of phonological awareness in reading acquisition (Ruan et al., 2018; Liu et al., 2022). This critical skill, which involves the ability to manipulate sounds in words, serves as a foundational element for reading success. These results also resonate with the research of Eslit (2023) and Maya et al. (2022), who demonstrated that digital storytelling effectively engages young learners by integrating narrative with audiovisual components, thereby promoting deeper learning experiences. Moreover, 80% of the pre-service teachers agreed that using digital learning supports the development of phonemic awareness, indicating recognition of the comprehensive benefits these resources can provide in advancing students' understanding of language. Phonological training has been affirmed in previous studies for its capacity to enhance reading proficiency across diverse learners, especially those with limited English skills (Brennan et al., 2022; Milankov et al., 2021).

The findings also suggest that digital learning tools effectively promote reading fluency, with 55% agreeing and 45% strongly agreeing that such tools enhance fluency. This result is critical as fluent reading is a key component of literacy, facilitating comprehension and overall reading enjoyment (Liu et al., 2022). Additionally, 100% of participants acknowledged that vocabulary enhancement is another crucial benefit of digital tools, with a substantial portion indicating strong agreement. The ability to support vocabulary development through interactive digital applications can lead to improved comprehension skills, which is supported by previous research linking vocabulary to reading proficiency (Lima et al., 2018; Milankov et al., 2021). This growth in vocabulary is particularly vital, as early vocabulary development significantly predicts later reading success. These insights reflect the necessity of utilizing interactive and engaging tools in fostering literacy among young learners, reinforcing the view posited by Nugroho and Atmojo (2022) regarding frequent exposure to digital tools and resultant favorable attitudes toward learning.

Barriers to Effective Implementation

Despite the noted benefits, significant barriers to integrating digital learning in reading instruction were identified. A considerable 80% of participants reported that the lack of teacher

training opportunities hinders effective implementation. This aligns with the findings of previous studies, highlighting the importance of professional development in equipping teachers with the necessary skills to utilize these tools effectively (Humaera et al., 2023; Ehm et al., 2019). The limited availability of suitable software (75% agree) and hardware (70% agree) poses additional challenges, as inadequate resources can significantly undermine the potential advantages of digital learning (Humaera et al., 2023).

The survey also revealed concerns regarding students' technological skills, with only 50% acknowledging that these skills could affect children's reading progress. This reflects the need for both educators and learners to engage with technology adequately, as a lack of digital competence can impede successful reading instruction (Humaera et al., 2023). Insufficient support from school administration and educational authorities was highlighted by 50% of respondents as a barrier, signaling the necessity for systemic changes to support teachers in their transition to digital pedagogy (Lima et al., 2018).

EFL Pre-Reading Strategies

When contemplating pre-reading strategies, a majority of the respondents affirmed their intention to use digital learning for various instructional purposes. Notably, 75% indicated they would use digital tools to assess children's reading progress, affirming the role of technology in formative assessments, which aligns with contemporary trends toward data-driven instruction (Liu et al., 2022). Approximately 65% expressed confidence that digital resources would motivate children to read, which is crucial in fostering a love for reading among young learners.

Crucially, 60% of participants stated they would utilize digital learning to model fluent reading and teach children to read aloud. This practice not only helps students hear correct pronunciations and intonations but also encourages active engagement with texts (Liu et al., 2022). The findings underscore the emerging trend of integrating digital tools into everyday reading exercises, promoting interactive learning opportunities that can help bridge the gap between traditional literacy instruction and contemporary educational practices.

CONCLUSION

Conclusion

In summary, the findings from this study underscore the positive perceptions of EFL pre-service teachers of English Language Education Study Program of Teacher Training and Education Faculty, Lambung Mangkura University, towards using digital learning tools in reading instruction for young learners. While the benefits—particularly in enhancing phonological awareness, vocabulary, and reading fluency—are well recognized, barriers related to resources, training, and support systems remain a pressing concern. As educators continue to navigate the complexities of digital integration, professional development and robust institutional support will be essential for fully capitalizing on the potential of digital learning in enhancing literacy outcomes for young EFL learners.

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