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IMPLEMENTING DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES INTO READING CLASSESS TO IMPROVE READING SKILLS OF EFL STUDENTS

Kamilova Rozakhon Dilshod kizi
The teacher of Foreign Philology department
Doctoral student of PhD,
Urgench State Pedagogical Institute, Urgench, Khorezm
rosekamilova14@gmail.com

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Abstract: Reading comprehension is a fundamental skill in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning and a key predictor of academic success. However, many EFL learners struggle to comprehend texts due to limited vocabulary, insufficient background knowledge, and low motivation. The rapid development of digital technologies has transformed educational practices and provided new opportunities for enhancing reading instruction. This article examines how digital technologies are important to improve reading comprehension among EFL students. It explores theoretical foundations, types of digital tools, instructional strategies, benefits, and challenges associated with technology-enhanced reading instruction. The article argues that the thoughtful integration of digital technologies can significantly enhance EFL learners' reading comprehension, engagement, and autonomy.

Keywords: EFL students, reading comprehension, digital technologies, e-learning, multimedia.

Introduction. Reading comprehension is a central component of language proficiency and academic achievement in EFL contexts. It involves the ability to understand, interpret, and evaluate written texts. Despite its importance, many EFL students experience persistent difficulties in reading comprehension due to limited exposure to authentic English, unfamiliar cultural references, and traditional teaching methods that emphasize rote learning over meaningful interaction with texts. The integration of digital technologies into education has reshaped how learners access information and engage with reading materials. Digital tools such as e-books, online learning platforms, mobile applications, and multimedia resources have become increasingly prevalent in language classrooms. These technologies offer interactive, personalized, and multimodal learning environments that support comprehension and learner engagement. This article discusses how digital technologies can be effectively employed to improve the reading comprehension of EFL students.

Reading Comprehension in EFL Contexts. Reading comprehension is an active cognitive process that requires readers to construct meaning by combining textual information with prior knowledge. ESL/EFL learners, even after years of exposure to the foreign language, sometimes find it difficult to decipher meanings of a given text [1]. The problem of poor reading comprehension has been attributed to number of causes, including unfamiliar or highly technical vocabulary, inadequate subject knowledge, weak organization of text and convoluted sentences [1]. For EFL learners, this process is often hindered by linguistic limitations, including inadequate vocabulary, limited grammatical knowledge, and slow decoding skills. Additionally, cultural differences and lack of background knowledge can impede understanding. Effective reading instruction in EFL settings emphasizes cognitive strategy use, which are helpful to improve reading comprehension, such as skimming, scanning, predicting, guessing meaning from context, summarizing, questioning and

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visualizing while reading [2]. Students must also develop metacognitive awareness to monitor their comprehension and apply appropriate strategies when difficulties arise. Digital technologies can support these processes by providing immediate feedback, adaptive support, and interactive features that facilitate deeper engagement with texts.

Theoretical Foundations for Digital Reading Instruction. Numerous studies have demonstrated that blended instructional techniques prove to be very effective in improving EFL learners' reading fluency as well as reading comprehension [1]. The use of digital technologies in reading instruction is supported by several learning theories. Constructivist theory emphasizes that learners actively construct knowledge through interaction with content and tools. Digital environments allow learners to explore texts, annotate them, and engage in collaborative learning, aligning with constructivist principles. Cognitive theory highlights the importance of managing cognitive load during learning. Digital texts often include features such as hyperlinks, glossaries, and multimedia support, which can aid comprehension when used appropriately. Based on previous studies such as, Bergman, Chen and Hamdi, it is revealed that smart devices, once correctly used, may achieve various learning outcomes increase the social interaction opportunities among children and reinforce the children's participation in learning environments, thereby enabling them to work actively and enthusiastically and helping them understand and assimilate knowledge soundly in their cognitive structures [3]. More specifically, Al-Bagdadi (2014) argued that children prefer to learn with smart devices, since these devices provide knowledge through electronic websites and with various and facilitate learning process in any place and any time without needing to go out or move from a place to another [3]. Additionally, dual coding theory suggests that information presented through both verbal and visual channels enhances understanding and retention. Digital technologies facilitate multimodal input by combining text, images, audio, and video.

Digital Technologies for Improving Reading Comprehension. E-books and digital reading platforms provide flexible and accessible reading materials for EFL learners. Features such as adjustable font size, built-in dictionaries, highlighting tools, and note-taking functions support comprehension and vocabulary learning. Students can interact with texts more actively, which promotes deeper understanding.

Online Learning Platforms. Learning management systems and online platforms offer structured reading activities, quizzes, and discussion forums. These platforms allow teachers to design scaffold-reading tasks and monitor student progress. Interactive comprehension questions and immediate feedback help learners identify areas of difficulty and improve comprehension strategies.

Mobile Applications. Mobile-assisted language learning has gained popularity due to the widespread use of smartphones. Reading apps provide short texts, graded reading materials, and gamified activities that motivate learners. Mobile apps also encourage extensive reading outside the classroom, increasing exposure to English texts.

Multimedia and Hypertext. Multimedia and hypertext are central features of digital technologies that significantly enhance reading comprehension for EFL students. Unlike traditional printed texts, digital texts often integrate multiple modes of information, including written text, images, audio, video, and interactive elements. This multimodal presentation of information supports comprehension by addressing diverse learning styles and providing contextual cues that assist learners in constructing meaning. **Multimedia** is the integration of text, images, audio, video, animation, and interactive elements in a single presentation, application, or system. Multimedia elements help clarify complex ideas and unfamiliar concepts that may otherwise hinder comprehension. For EFL learners, visual and auditory support is particularly beneficial when dealing with new vocabulary or culturally unfamiliar content. For example, embedded images can illustrate abstract concepts, while short video

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clips can provide background knowledge that facilitates understanding of the text. Audio support, such as text-to-speech features, allows learners to hear correct pronunciation and intonation, which strengthens word recognition and reinforces the connection between spoken and written language. **Hypertext** refers to digital text that includes hyperlinks connecting readers to related information, definitions, or supplementary resources. Hyperlinks enable learners to access explanations, glossaries, or additional examples without interrupting the reading process. This immediate access to support reduces frustration and helps students maintain reading flow. For instance, clicking on an unfamiliar word may lead to a definition, image, or example sentence, allowing learners to infer meaning in context rather than relying solely on translation. From a cognitive perspective, multimedia and hypertext support reading comprehension by reducing cognitive load when used appropriately. They assist learners in processing information more efficiently by distributing information across visual and verbal channels. This aligns with dual coding theory, which suggests that information presented through multiple modalities is more easily understood and retained. However, it is important that multimedia elements are directly related to the text; irrelevant or excessive multimedia may distract learners and hinder comprehension. Multimedia and hypertext also promote active and strategic reading. Digital texts encourage learners to interact with content through clicking, exploring, and navigating information paths [4]. This interactivity fosters learner autonomy and metacognitive awareness, as students make decisions about which links to follow and which resources to use. Such engagement encourages deeper processing of information and supports higher-order comprehension skills, including analysis and evaluation. In addition, hypertext environments facilitate non-linear reading, allowing learners to move between main texts and supporting materials based on their individual needs. This flexibility is particularly beneficial for EFL students with varying proficiency levels, as it enables personalized learning. Proficient readers may explore additional resources for deeper understanding, while less proficient learners may focus on basic explanations and vocabulary support [5].

Despite these advantages, the effective use of multimedia and hypertext requires careful instructional design. Teachers must guide students in using hyperlinks strategically and avoiding over-reliance on multimedia support. Explicit instruction on digital reading strategies, such as evaluating the relevance of links and managing information overload, is essential to ensure that multimedia and hypertext contribute positively to reading comprehension.

Artificial Intelligence and Adaptive Technologies. Recent advancements in artificial intelligence have introduced adaptive reading systems that personalize instruction based on learners' proficiency levels. These systems adjust text difficulty, provide targeted feedback, and recommend strategies, thereby supporting individualized learning and improving comprehension outcomes.

Instructional Strategies for Digital Reading Comprehension.

1. Pre-Reading Activities. Digital technologies can be used to activate background knowledge through videos, images, and online discussions. Pre-teaching vocabulary using digital flashcards or multimedia glossaries prepares learners for the text.

2. While-Reading Activities. During reading, students can use digital tools to highlight key ideas, annotate texts, and access hyperlinks for clarification. Interactive comprehension questions embedded in digital texts guide students' focus and support understanding.

3. Post-Reading Activities. Post-reading tasks may include online discussions, digital summaries, and collaborative projects. Students can use digital tools to create mind maps, presentations, or blogs to demonstrate comprehension and reflect on their reading.

Benefits of Digital Technologies for EFL Reading Comprehension. Digital technologies offer several advantages for improving reading comprehension. They increase learner motivation by

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providing interactive and engaging content. They also support differentiated instruction, allowing learners to progress at their own pace. Furthermore, digital tools promote learner autonomy by enabling students to access reading materials anytime and anywhere. These benefits contribute to improved comprehension and sustained reading practice.

Challenges and Limitations. Despite their advantages, digital technologies present certain challenges. Technical issues, limited access to devices, and lack of digital literacy can hinder effective implementation. Additionally, excessive multimedia elements may overwhelm learners and distract from comprehension. Teachers must carefully select and design digital reading activities to ensure pedagogical effectiveness.

Implications for EFL Teachers. EFL teachers play a critical role in integrating digital technologies into reading instruction. Professional development is essential to help teachers select appropriate tools and design effective activities. Teachers should also guide students in developing digital reading strategies and critical evaluation skills.

Conclusion. Digital technologies offer powerful opportunities for improving the reading comprehension of EFL students. By providing interactive, multimodal, and personalized learning experiences, digital tools support comprehension, motivation, and learner autonomy. When integrated thoughtfully and strategically, digital technologies can transform EFL reading instruction and enhance students' overall language proficiency.

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