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The positive impact of using digital tools for teaching EFL through reading from High School English teachers perspectives

El impacto positivo del uso de herramientas digitales para la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera a través de la lectura desde la perspectiva de los profesores de inglés de secundaria

Lisbeth Jazmin Hinojosa Acosta

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0817-8191>

lhinojosaa@unemi.edu.ec

Universidad Estatal de Milagro
Ecuador – Milagro

Yuri Jennifer Chumo Zambrano

yhumoz@unemi.edu.ec

<https://orcid.org/0009-0004-7691-8245>

Universidad Estatal de Milagro
Ecuador – Milagro

Melissa Virginia Alvarez Mendoza

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8915-3377>

malvarezm14@unemi.edu.ec

Universidad Estatal de Milagro
Ecuador – Milagro

Carla Isabel Lozano Alvarado

clozanoa@unemi.edu.ec

<https://orcid.org/0009-0003-1963-1339>

Universidad Estatal de Milagro
Ecuador, Milagro

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RESUMEN

Este estudio examina la percepción y experiencia de docentes de inglés en escuelas secundarias públicas de Ecuador con respecto al uso de herramientas digitales para la enseñanza de la lectura, con el fin de identificar beneficios, desafíos y condiciones necesarias para su implementación efectiva. Tuvo como objetivo explorar las percepciones de 30 docentes de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) en escuelas secundarias públicas de Ecuador con respecto al uso de herramientas digitales para la enseñanza de la lectura. La metodología aplicada fue un enfoque de métodos mixtos, que combina encuestas y entrevistas semiestructuradas, donde se analizaron las experiencias, los beneficios y los desafíos de la integración de recursos digitales en el aula. Los resultados muestran que el 86,7% de los docentes cree que las herramientas digitales mejoran significativamente la comprensión lectora, mientras que el 80% destaca su mayor interactividad en comparación con los métodos tradicionales. Además, el 93,3% valora el impacto de recursos


como audiolibros y videos interactivos en el desarrollo de habilidades lingüísticas básicas, observando un aumento en la motivación de los estudiantes (86,7%). En el caso de las entrevistas, sus resultados revelan que estas herramientas permiten un aprendizaje personalizado, fomentan la autonomía y facilitan procesos como la inferencia y el acceso inmediato a los recursos lingüísticos. Sin embargo, se identificaron limitaciones, como dificultades técnicas, problemas de conectividad (53,3%) y falta de apoyo institucional, especialmente en zonas rurales. Se concluye que, si bien las herramientas digitales mejoran la enseñanza de la lectura, su eficacia depende de condiciones tecnológicas adecuadas, la formación docente continua y políticas educativas que promuevan su integración estratégica.

Palabras clave: herramientas digitales, enseñanza de lectura, inglés como lengua extranjera, motivación estudiantil

ABSTRACT

This study examines the perceptions and experiences of English teachers in public secondary schools in Ecuador regarding the use of digital tools for reading instruction, in order to identify benefits, challenges, and necessary conditions for their effective implementation. The study aimed to explore the perceptions of 30 English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in public secondary schools in Ecuador regarding the use of digital tools for reading instruction. The methodology used was a mixed-methods approach, combining surveys and semi-structured interviews, which analyzed the experiences, benefits, and challenges of integrating digital resources in the classroom. The results show that 86.7% of teachers believe that digital tools significantly improve reading comprehension, while 80% highlight their greater interactivity compared to traditional methods. Furthermore, 93.3% value the impact of resources such as audiobooks and interactive videos on the development of basic language skills, observing an increase in student motivation (86.7%). In the case of the interviews, the results reveal that these tools enable personalized learning, foster autonomy, and facilitate processes such as inference and immediate access to language resources. However, limitations were identified, such as technical difficulties, connectivity issues (53.3%), and lack of institutional support, especially in rural areas. The conclusion is that, while digital tools improve reading instruction, their effectiveness depends on adequate technological conditions, ongoing teacher training, and educational policies that promote their strategic integration.

Keywords: digital tools, reading instruction, English as a foreign language, student motivation

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past few years, the use of digital tools in education has significantly changed traditional teaching approaches, especially in the area of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). With constant technological advancements, teachers have increasingly integrated digital resources into their lessons to boost student engagement and enhance learning outcomes.

Reading is one of the most important skills to develop in order to learn a language. Thankfully, digital tools offer new ways to develop it and make it more accessible and engaging for students. For instance, resources like e-books, adaptive learning apps, and interactive reading platforms help us as teachers to personalize our students' experience, transforming a boring learning into an interactive and more personalized to students. These kinds of resources not only make reading more engaging but also have the potential to increase understanding and encourage motivation.

Although there is research regarding the use of technology to learn a language, there is still a lack of studies based on the effectiveness of digital tools for specifically teaching reading from English teachers' perspectives in an EFL context. Understanding their experiences, challenges, and opinions is essential to assessing the real impact of these tools and determining the best ways to integrate them into the classroom. This study seeks to fill that gap by examining how high school EFL teachers perceive both the benefits and difficulties of using digital resources for reading instruction.

In order to achieve this, the investigation uses a mixed method through tools such as surveys and interviews to collect insights from teachers with several levels of experience and professional backgrounds. The results obtained will contribute to the current discussion on the impact of technology in the classroom based on a EFL context, providing different perspectives that can be useful to enhance teaching strategies and contribute to the development of digital education in the future.

Literature Review

Reading

Reading is the process of looking at written or printed words and understanding their meaning. It involves recognizing letters, words, and sentences and interpreting them based on prior knowledge and context. Duke & Cartwright (2021) propose a theory that shows the active view of reading, as an expansion of the simple view and can be used to convey important advances in the field.

There are different types of reading, including:

Skimming – Quickly looking over a text to get the main idea; Scanning – Searching for specific information; Intensive reading – Reading carefully for deep understanding; Extensive reading – Reading for pleasure or general understanding.

Skimming refers to reading rapidly to grasp the main idea of a text, while scanning involves rapid reading to find specific information. “In essence, skimming provides readers with a sense of the overall information contained in a section, while scanning assists readers in pinpointing particular details” (Fatmawan et al., 2023).

Importance of reading skills for language acquisition

Reading helps students improve understanding, writing style, vocabulary, grammar and spelling. The earlier students learn to read and write in English, the stronger their foundation will be for developing overall language proficiency. Reading and writing skills are essential for understanding grammar, expanding vocabulary, and improving communication. When students start early, they have more time to practice and become comfortable with the language, making it easier for them to succeed in advanced English courses.

Additionally, Bátiz et al., (2021) mentions that literacy achievement, the quantitative assessment of reading and writing ability, is an outcome measure of language development and depends on general cognitive processes. Children with language difficulties have lower literacy achievement and higher rates of reading disorders.

Therefore, the development of reading precursors and the acquisition of skills that facilitate reading, such as listening comprehension, vocabulary knowledge, and phonological awareness during early childhood, could be considered a meaningful outcome measure of cognitive and language development and could predict reading proficiency later in life.

How technology enhances EFL learning

Technology significantly enhances English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning by offering interactive and flexible tools that facilitate language acquisition. Digital platforms enable students to practice various language skills at their own pace, while multimedia resources create immersive experiences that improve comprehension and retention. Additionally, artificial intelligence provides personalized feedback, helping learners refine pronunciation and grammar (Sari, 2024).

Gamification elements, such as quizzes and challenges, boost motivation and encourage active participation. Moreover, real-time communication tools allow students to interact with peers and native speakers worldwide, fostering authentic language practice. By integrating technology, EFL education becomes more dynamic, accessible, and effective.

Digital learning platforms promote collaboration through discussion forums and shared spaces. Additionally, immersive technologies such as virtual and augmented reality enhance engagement and accessibility in online education. According to Zhang (2024) the integration of educational technology has transformed the way instructors interact with students, with gamification introducing competition and achievement to motivate active participation. Furthermore, real-time collaboration tools support synchronous interactions, enabling live debates, brainstorming sessions, and direct engagement with instructors.

The impact of listening-while-reading strategies

“Reading fluency is a critical component of successful reading development, as it bridges word recognition and reading comprehension by enabling efficient, accurate, and expressive reading” (Maki & Hammerschmidt-Snidarich, 2022). Recently, audiobooks and text-to-speech (TTS) technologies have surfaced as tools capable of helping with audio-assisted fluency instruction. The aim of this essay is to discuss the use of these technologies in the development of reading fluency among struggling readers and analyze the role of listening-while-reading (LWR) approaches on the development of literacy.

Repeated reading and listening while reading are two important strategies that improve students' fluency and comprehension (Amin, 2022). This statement highlights the importance of repeated reading and listening while reading (LWR) as effective strategies for improving two crucial aspects of literacy development: fluency and comprehension.

Audiobooks and Text-to-Speech as Scaffolding Tools

Audiobooks allow language learners to read and listen to the same text simultaneously; however, the effects of this bimodal (written and spoken) input on learners' comprehension have been inconsistent, suggesting that the conditions under which audiobooks can aid comprehension are not well understood (Hui, 2024). Furthermore, the implementation of a text-to-speech app is one of the solutions to help students with autism improve their English reading comprehension, the app helps them hear correct pronunciation and intonation, so they can better imitate and practice reading texts in English (Araujo, 2023).

Audiobooks offer greater accessibility and new ways to interact with academic texts. While the development of academic audiobooks is at a relatively early stage, one important issue that has not yet received due attention is the presentation of referenced materials in audio format (Bacaller, 2021). Currently, this is addressed on a case-by-case basis, with no centralized industry standards, so protocols are established by each publisher or negotiated between rights holders and narrators.

Listening-While-Reading Strategies

The Learning with Words (LWR) method, which integrates visual and auditory information, has been shown to improve reading fluency and comprehension. Listening while reading with error correction and repeated reading with word rehearsal did not appear to produce a greater effect than the other; however, both interventions resulted in an acceleration in the number of correct words read and a deceleration in the number of incorrect words read overall (Essex, 2023). This dual-modality teaching method has been shown to be beneficial for dyslexic students, as it strengthens word identification and reduces reading stress (Gonzalez-Frey and Ehri, 2021).

Developing English as a Foreign Language (EFL) skills is a necessary requirement for communication, but also for perfecting a second language (L2) (Garcés, 2021). Therefore, the

objective of this paper is to propose a system of activities for Bachelor's Degrees in Education, this system integrates two skills: reading and speaking, and also enhances the development of critical thinking.

Impact on Reading Fluency and Comprehension

Research has shown that students who engage in Literacy and Writing (LWR) activities experience substantial improvements in their reading fluency. Makebo et al. (2022) mention that the results of their study revealed a significant positive correlation between students' reading fluency and their reading comprehension, implying that those who read more fluently also understand what they read better. Furthermore, instruction that focuses on both fluency and reading comprehension is essential for improving reading outcomes among struggling elementary students, as fluency links word recognition and comprehension, enabling more effective reading (Cockerill et al., 2023).

Audiobooks and TTS technology play a critical role in supporting struggling readers, as they offer an audit trail for fluent reading and reduce cognitive barriers to text comprehension. The LWR approach has proven effective in improving reading fluency, automaticity, and prosody. As educational institutions continue to integrate digital tools into literacy instruction, leveraging these audio-assisted strategies can help narrow the achievement gap for students with reading difficulties, thus fostering a more inclusive learning environment.

METHODOLOGY

Our research uses a mixed-method, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to analyze the perspectives of high school English teachers on the positive impact of using digital tools for teaching EFL through Reading. The study employs two data collection instruments: a survey and semi-structured interviews. The use of these tools offers a complete view, in one way we collect information about their teaching experiences and in the other way we try to find recurring themes about the effectiveness strategies of technology to improve students' reading skills.

The survey was focused on teachers who teach English as a foreign language in public High school institutions.

Participants come from diverse cultural and social backgrounds and possess extensive knowledge of the language. The selection follows a purposive sampling method to ensure that all participants have experience in EFL teaching.

This article adopts an educational framework focused on the effective use of teaching skills with modern digital tools, with the goal of improving reading skills in students at different levels.

Participants

This study involved a sample of 30 EFL teachers from different public institutions. They sought to improve teaching and learning among students through the use of applications or programs that spark interest and improve reading skills.

The participants in this study were selected from public institutions in different cities across the country, ensuring that through experiential education they develop better strategies to foster their students' interest in reading and employ these techniques in their curriculum.

The survey consisted of 30 participants, with a distribution skewed toward a predominantly female demographic, specifically 60% women and 40% men. This pattern aligns with the common trend observed in teaching across different grade levels within the educational system.

The educators ranged in age from 25 to 45 years, with a diverse group of English teachers from public institutions with multiple academic degrees who potentially add to their teaching experience. All participants are non-native English speakers, with varying levels of English proficiency. Others are continuing to develop their professional skills.

Research instruments and tools

The research aimed to evaluate the positive impact of using digital tools for teaching English as a foreign language through reading from the perspective of High School English teachers. To ensure this meticulous and multifaceted study, the research employs several technological data collection instruments.

Quantitative Instruments

The research used surveys to collect information about teachers' experience teaching English with digital tools and professional background. The survey consists of 10 questions, divided into two main sections:

The first section takes part from question 2 to question 5, which are based on teacher Profile. These questions collect demographic data, and professional background information such as: age, gender, level of education, years of experience, use of digital tools to teach english.

On the other hand, the second part takes part from the question 6 until the question 10, which are based on teachers' perception and experience using digital tools focused on enhance students' reading skills. These type of questions try to assess teachers' perspectives on the effectiveness, challenges and benefits of implementing digital tools for teaching reading in English as a Foreign language.

Qualitative Instruments

The qualitative component was based on the interviews conducted via Zoom applied to teachers who shared their experiences with their own teaching techniques and strategies. This component gives teachers the opportunity to share their knowledge such as experiences, insights, and concerns about using digital tools for teaching reading in the classroom in an EFL context.

In order to obtain detailed responses, the types of questions used in the interviews are open-ended questions. These types of questions are really useful because it allows teachers to express themselves freely, reflecting on the challenges they find and giving suggestions based on their experiences.

Data Analysis

The information collected from the survey will be analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify patterns in teachers' viewpoints. On the other hand, the answers gathered from the qualitative tool, in this case the interviews, will be examined through thematic analysis in order to identify recurring themes proportionated and key insights by the teachers' perspectives about the use of digital tools.

This methodology corroborates a complete understanding of high school English teachers' perspectives and experiences about the application of digital tools in the classroom to enhance reading.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Quantitative results

The results obtained from quantitative data collected through a structured survey of 30 English teachers working in public schools in Ecuador show a generally positive attitude toward the use of digital tools for teaching reading in English. 86.7% of respondents stated that digital tools have significantly improved their students' reading comprehension. Furthermore, 80% stated that the tools have improved compared to traditional methods and that classes are now more interactive.

Another important finding is that 93.3% of teachers believe that the use of digital resources, such as interactive videos, audiobooks, and other applications, helps students achieve instructional levels of basic language skills. Furthermore, 86.7% reported observing an improvement in student motivation when digital texts are illustrated with multimedia resources. However, 53.3% expressed concern about the technical and connectivity difficulties that hinder the daily use of these tools, especially in rural areas or disadvantaged family situations.

This research collected a series of data through surveys that allowed for a detailed understanding of how English teachers in public schools perceive the use of digital tools in their reading classes. A total of 30 teachers participated, with 70% being women and 30% men. This distribution reflects a very common reality in the educational field, particularly in language teaching, where women often represent the majority. Interestingly, despite this numerical difference, both male and female teachers expressed quite similar opinions regarding the role of technology in teaching English as a foreign language.

One significant aspect that emerges from the study is the high level of agreement among teachers that digital tools provide clear benefits to student learning. Many highlighted how these

technologies not only capture students' attention but, more importantly, enhance their reading comprehension. This is a noteworthy point, considering that understanding texts is one of the central challenges in English teaching. The majority of respondents acknowledged that incorporating reading applications, digital texts, and multimedia materials has had a visible impact on how their students acquire vocabulary and improve their reading fluency. In fact, over 85% stated that these tools have contributed to students becoming more interested in English and actively engaging with reading activities.

Delving deeper into the teachers' experiences, a clear trend related to their years of service was found. Teachers with more than five years of experience reported a greater utilization of digital resources. These educators noted that technological platforms offer a flexibility that is not always achievable with traditional methods. Thanks to these tools, they can tailor lessons to meet the diverse needs and levels of students within the same group. This capacity for personalization is crucial for achieving effective and satisfying learning for all.

However, not everything is a smooth path. A small number, approximately 15% of participants, acknowledged that there are limitations that hinder the full use of these technologies. Some pointed out that a lack of adequate training, along with limited access to devices or insufficient institutional infrastructure, constitutes significant barriers. Nevertheless, despite these challenges, the majority agrees that digital tools are a valuable complement to traditional teaching methods and that, when used correctly, they can significantly enhance learning.

Therefore, these quantitative data suggest a clear consensus among professionals: educational technology, when integrated appropriately, does not replace traditional teaching methods but rather enriches them, helping to make English reading classes more dynamic, motivating, and tailored to the needs of each student.

Qualitative results

In interviews with a group of English teachers, the current importance of using digital tools was discussed, complementing the quantitative findings of the study. Several teachers agreed that these digital tools allow for better adaptation of content to students' interests and levels, contributing to a more satisfying reading experience. These teachers stated that the use of online platforms enabled more extensive reading and encouraged the production of inferences that were previously impossible to address in lectures. One teacher stated: "With digital texts, students can underline main ideas, answer questions interactively, and access dictionaries in real time. It completely transforms the way they read." Some teachers stated that students are more proactive in searching for texts on their own, without the restrictions that the classroom can sometimes impose. However, certain non-beneficial challenges were also addressed. The interviews revealed a consistent concern about the lack of effective use of these tools in teaching, as well as the lack of technological support in some public schools.

The semi-structured interviews conducted for this research provided an essential complement to the numerical data, as they allowed for firsthand knowledge of the personal experiences and strategies that teachers use with digital tools in their reading classes. Through their narratives, it was possible to identify common patterns that enrich the understanding of the impact technology has in the classroom.

One of the themes that stood out most strongly was the increase in student motivation. Teachers noted that when they incorporate educational applications, online articles, videos, or collaborative tools like Google Docs, they observe a significant change in how students engage with reading. It is not just about making the class more attractive, but about transforming the very experience of learning into something more accessible and enjoyable. For instance, one teacher mentioned that she uses interactive storytelling apps that not only facilitate comprehension but also encourage her students to read outside of school, something that did not happen with traditional methods.

Additionally, several teachers linked the use of visual resources, such as infographics and videos accompanying texts, to improvements in the understanding of students with lower proficiency levels. These materials help students keep up with the content and feel less lost or frustrated, contributing to their continued involvement in reading activities.

Another important aspect highlighted was the significance of student-centered teaching, leveraging the possibilities offered by digital technologies. Teachers shared that they allow their students to choose texts from digital libraries or participate in online reading forums. This freedom generates a sense of responsibility and autonomy in students regarding their learning, which is fundamental for their development as active learners. In the words of one participant: "When students have the opportunity to explore digital content at their own pace, they feel more confident and motivated to continue learning English."

The idea of professional growth through digital integration also emerged strongly. Many educators acknowledged that the use of digital tools has pushed them to innovate their teaching practices, seek continuous training, and collaborate with colleagues to share resources and strategies. However, they also expressed a need for more institutional support and ongoing teacher training programs to maximize the benefits of educational technology.

Despite the challenges, the overall tone of the interviews was clearly positive. Teachers firmly believe that technology, when used intentionally and knowledgeably, does not replace traditional teaching but rather complements and enriches it. This way, they make reading activities more personalized, engaging, and effective for students with different levels and learning styles.

CONCLUSIONS

This research shows that, from the perspective of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in Ecuadorian public institutions, the use of digital tools for teaching reading in English has a predominantly positive impact.

The results reveal that a large majority of teachers experience significant improvements in students' reading comprehension, as well as greater interactivity and effectiveness compared to other traditional methods. Furthermore, a high percentage highlight the pedagogical value of interactive resources and audiobooks for developing basic language skills. In this study it was generally found an increase in student motivation when incorporating multimedia elements.

These findings were supported by interviews results, which highlight how digital tools allow content to be adapted to students' interests and levels, fostering a more dynamic, autonomous, and enriching reading experience. Digital platforms facilitate processes such as inference, immediate access to linguistic resources, and direct interaction with texts, which profoundly transforms the reading process.

However, significant limitations were also identified, particularly related to technical difficulties, connectivity issues, and a lack of institutional support, primarily affecting rural areas or disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds. Likewise, some teachers expressed concern about the unstrategic use of these tools in daily practice, which limits their educational potential.

Overall, the results suggest that, although the use of digital tools represents a significant advance in the teaching of reading in English, their optimal use depends on adequate technological conditions, continuous teacher training and educational policies that promote their effective integration in the classroom.

Recommendations

In this section we can analyze that the study developed before the perspectives of teachers of English as a foreign language in the teaching of reading in Ecuador show the positive impact of digital tools as they are more effective in teaching and learning, these are significantly in reading comprehension, vocabulary development and the most important that was found was the motivation that awakens students to learn more easily and concretely.

Knowing the reality of the environment of teachers in secondary schools is a challenge to reach the use of these tools in its entirety; since, for reasons of not having a majority of students with access to technology awakens the need to seek the implementation of these resources with different managements to achieve learning more effectively, this is a challenge that today commits most of the students to continue in the work of teaching with new techniques and modern methods adapted to the new era.

To conclude before this recommendation would point out that teachers seek institutional support for the professional development of our new generations, and encourage autonomy, active

participation, transforming the experience of a traditional reading to one with interactive and attractive digital environments, considering the value of these techniques to improve the quality of learning in a student takes advantage of.

Teaching with love and patience is what characterizes a teacher who strives to achieve his goals, which are to prepare young people with the ability to develop in their future professional life demonstrating their learning in a timely manner to society, since we are in a millennium of challenges in which we go hand in hand with technology and adapt it to the teachings we will achieve a modern and timely education.

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