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## ENGLISH TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES ON THE USE OF DIGITAL READING MATERIALS IN DEVELOPING LEARNERS' VOCABULARY SKILLS AND READING ENGAGEMENT: BASES FOR AN ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM

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## ABSTRACT

This study explored the experiences of English teachers in using digital reading materials to enhance learners' vocabulary skills and reading engagement. The results of the study revealed that, for vocabulary skills, three themes emerged, including customization and contextualization of reading materials, improvement of learners' interactive vocabulary skills, and easy access to e-books, online dictionaries, and games. For reading engagement, the identified themes were making reading more interactive and easier, increasing learners' motivation, and developing comprehension and retention. However, challenges such as online distractions, limited digital literacy, technology-related difficulties, and reduced focus on lengthy texts were also encountered. Based on these findings, an enhancement program was proposed. The study concluded that, with proper guidance and implementation, digital reading materials can effectively support vocabulary development, strengthen reading engagement, and improve overall reading performance.

**Keywords:** *Experiences, Digital Reading Materials, Learners' Vocabulary, Reading Engagement, Enhancement Program*

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## INTRODUCTION

In the Philippine educational system, the integration of digital reading materials into classroom instruction had been recognized as a promising approach to enhance students' vocabulary and reading engagement. Digital resources such as e-books, interactive reading platforms, and online vocabulary applications offered opportunities for more dynamic, visually engaging, and interactive learning experiences compared to printed materials. They also allowed teachers to access a wider variety of content that could be tailored to diverse learning needs and reading levels. However, despite these advantages, the effective adoption of digital reading materials remained a significant challenge for many English teachers, particularly in public and under-resourced schools.

Several studies highlighted persistent barriers to digital integration in the classroom. Limited access to computers, tablets, and other digital devices, unstable or slow internet connectivity, and insufficient technical support were among the most common obstacles (Tengler et al., 2022; Lucero et al., 2022). Teacher readiness was also considered a critical factor; Lee (2022) emphasized that without proper training in digital pedagogy, teachers struggled to maximize the potential of these tools. Brown and Williams (2023) noted that the educational environment, including institutional support and infrastructure, played a decisive role in determining how effectively digital materials were used. In the Philippine context, research by Cruz and Garcia (2022) indicated that while digital reading tools were becoming more available, their actual classroom application remained inconsistent due to these ongoing constraints.

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In the specific school setting where this study was conducted, English teachers reported frequent difficulties in using digital reading materials effectively. Efforts to incorporate e-books, online reading exercises, and vocabulary-building games were often limited by insufficient device availability, unreliable internet access, and a lack of specialized training in digital instructional strategies. These experiences directly impacted the consistency and quality of vocabulary development activities, as well as students' engagement in reading. Moreover, the digital divide persisted—students who lacked access to devices or internet connections at home were placed at a disadvantage, which further widened learning gaps.

Given these recurring issues, there was a pressing need to investigate the experiences faced by English teachers in integrating digital reading materials into their teaching practices. Gaining an understanding of these lived experiences offered important insights that guided the development of an enhancement program aimed at addressing technological, pedagogical, and resource-related challenges. Such a program aimed to empower teachers with the strategies, tools, and confidence necessary to effectively utilize digital reading resources for improving vocabulary acquisition and fostering sustained reading engagement among learners.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Research Methodology

This chapter presents the research method, research design, participants in the study, research instrument, data-gathering procedures, and data analyses.

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**Research Method**

This study utilized a qualitative research method to explore English teachers' experiences in using digital reading materials in developing learners' vocabulary skills and reading engagement as a basis for an enhancement program.

Qualitative research was appropriate because it allowed for an in-depth understanding of participants lived experiences and perceptions, which could not be captured through quantitative measures alone (Merriam & Tisdell, 2022).

The descriptive nature of this approach aimed to provide a rich, contextualized explanation of the phenomenon under study, while maintaining impartiality and rigor in presenting the participants' viewpoints (Naeem, 2023).

**Research Design**

This study employed a phenomenological research design utilizing in-depth interviews as the primary data collection tool. Phenomenology is a qualitative approach that seeks to understand the essence of a shared experience from the perspective of those who have lived it (Creswell & Poth, 2023).

Through open-ended, discovery-oriented interviews, the study gathered detailed narratives from English teachers regarding their use of digital reading materials in developing learners' vocabulary skills and reading engagement. This design was well-suited for capturing the subjective meanings and commonalities in their teaching experiences.

By focusing on descriptive and interpretative analysis rather than numerical data, the study aimed to uncover nuanced insights into how digital reading materials supported or

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challenged instructional practices. The qualitative phenomenological approach enabled the researcher to understand contextual factors influencing their use and provided grounded bases for designing an enhancement program to improve vocabulary development and reading engagement among learners.

**Participants in the Study**

The participants of this study included six (6) purposively selected English teachers who had experience in using digital reading materials in their classes in one of the schools in the Province of Iloilo during the academic year 2024–2025. These participants were selected because they were directly involved in facilitating reading instruction and integrating digital texts to support learners' vocabulary development and reading engagement. Purposive sampling was utilized to ensure that only teachers with relevant experience and active use of digital reading materials were included, thereby enabling the collection of rich, relevant, and credible data to address the objectives of the study.

Purposive sampling was considered an effective approach in qualitative research, as it allowed the researcher to deliberately select participants who could provide in-depth insights into the phenomenon under investigation. This method ensured the inclusion of information-rich cases that were most relevant to the study's aims, thereby enhancing the quality and depth of the findings. By focusing on teachers actively engaged in using digital reading materials, the study ensured that the data collected directly reflected the experiences, perspectives, and instructional practices that informed the development of the enhancement program.

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**Sampling Design**

This study utilized purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling method in which participants are selected based on specific characteristics relevant to the research objectives. According to Palinkas et al. (2023), purposive sampling is effective in qualitative research because it allows the researcher to intentionally select individuals who can provide rich, relevant, and diverse insights into the phenomenon being studied. In this case, only English teachers who had experience in using digital reading materials in their classrooms were included. The participants consisted of six (6) English teachers from one of the public high schools in the 4th Congressional District of Iloilo during the School Year 2024–2025.

This approach ensures that the data gathered came from those with direct experience and knowledge of integrating digital reading materials, thereby enhancing the depth, credibility, and relevance of the findings for designing an enhancement program.

**Research Instrument**

The study used the researcher made in-depth interview guide as the primary research instrument. The instrument was answered face-to-face by the six English teachers to gather in-depth insights into their experiences and instructional strategies when using digital reading materials. This method allowed flexibility in responses while ensuring that key topics were covered. Additionally, the instrument was used to guide the systematic collection of data from the teachers, helping to maintain consistency across participants while allowing for rich, detailed responses. These instruments were validated by experts in qualitative research to ensure the relevance and clarity of the questions before data collection.

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**Validity of the Research Instrument**

The validity of the research instrument was ensured through the expert validation by a panel composed of experts in qualitative research, language education, and technology expert who collaboratively validated the interview guide to ensure its clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study's objectives. The researcher thoroughly reviewed and revised the questions based on the comment and suggestion of the experts to effectively capture the participants' experiences with digital reading materials. Creswell and Poth (2022) advocated that, expert review was an essential step in qualitative research to establish instrument validity and enhance the credibility of the study.

**Data-Gathering Procedures**

The study collected data through in-depth interviews with six (6) English teachers from one of the public high schools in the 4th Congressional District to explore their experiences in using digital reading materials. Permission was obtained from the school head before conducting the study to ensure ethical compliance. The interviews were guided by a structured questionnaire to maintain consistency while allowing participants to share detailed insights. All responses were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed to identify common themes, which informed the development of the proposed enhancement program.

**Data Analysis**

The collected qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved identifying, organizing, and interpreting recurring themes from the interviews and classroom observations. The recorded responses were transcribed and coded to categorize key

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experiences and instructional strategies related specifically to the use of digital reading materials. Patterns and relationships within the data were examined to gain deeper insights into the impact of digital reading on vocabulary development and reading engagement. To ensure the reliability and validity of the findings, member checking was conducted, allowing participants to review the transcriptions for accuracy before the final analysis. As outlined by Braun, Clarke, and Weate (2022), thematic analysis was a flexible method well-suited for capturing rich, detailed data patterns in qualitative research, while member checking strengthened trustworthiness by validating participants' perspectives.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The purpose of this study was to ascertain the experiences of English teachers in using digital reading materials to help students improve their vocabulary and reading engagement. The results of the study were used as a basis for developing an enhancement program.

The participants were six (6) English teachers from one of the public high schools in the 4th Congressional District of Iloilo, for S.Y 2024-2025 who were chosen on purpose because they had experience in using digital reading materials in their teaching.

The main tool used in the study was the researcher-made guide. Teachers were asked questions about their experiences, and their answers were carefully studied and grouped into themes.

The findings of the study revealed that English teachers' experiences in using digital reading materials to develop learners' vocabulary skills included the following themes: help

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customize and contextualize reading materials, improve learners' interactive vocabulary skills, and easy access to eBooks, online dictionaries, and games. In terms of reading engagement, teachers highlighted the themes: makes reading more interactive and easier, increased learners' motivation, and develop comprehension and retention. These findings suggest that digital reading materials promote flexible, meaningful, and student-centered learning by allowing learners to actively engage with content, expand their vocabulary, and connect lessons to real-life experiences.

An enhancement program was developed as a result of the challenges encountered by the English teachers. It focused on the enhancement of the vocabulary skills and reading engagement as shared by the teachers in the in-depth interview guide administered to them.

Based on the findings, the following insights were drawn:

The experiences of English teachers in using digital reading materials revealed that these tools significantly influenced vocabulary development. The findings implied that when teachers were able to customize and contextualize reading materials, integrate interactive activities, and provide learners with accessible eBooks, dictionaries, and educational games, students were more actively engaged and able to take greater control of their learning. This suggested that digital reading materials supported differentiated instruction, encouraged self-directed practice, and facilitated deeper understanding and retention of new vocabulary. It also indicated that thoughtful integration of technology could strengthen instructional strategies and make vocabulary learning more meaningful and relevant to students' real-life experiences.

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In terms of reading engagement, the use of digital materials showed that interactive and multimedia features enhanced learners' motivation, comprehension, and retention. The findings implied that when lessons were presented in dynamic, visually supported, and interactive formats, students were more likely to participate actively, maintain focus, and develop positive attitudes toward reading. This suggested that digital reading materials transformed traditional reading instruction into more student-centered, enjoyable, and effective experiences. Overall, these insights highlighted the potential of digital tools to create a flexible and engaging learning environment, demonstrating that an enhancement program grounded in these practices could improve both vocabulary skills and reading engagement among learners.

Building on these insights, the Enhancement Program on Vocabulary Skills and Reading Engagement provides teachers with practical strategies to apply digital reading materials effectively. Through focused training on customizing content, interactive vocabulary activities, and multimedia approaches, the program helps teachers create engaging, student-centered lessons that improve comprehension, retention, and vocabulary growth. It demonstrates how structured support can turn the benefits of digital tools into meaningful classroom practices that motivate and empower learners.

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## CONCLUSION

Based on the insights generated from the study, the following recommendations were proposed:

The school should strengthen the use of digital reading materials in classrooms by providing teachers with the right tools, resources, and strategies. Regular training and professional development should be conducted so teachers could fully use e-books, online dictionaries, and interactive apps to improve students' vocabulary and comprehension.

Teachers should use varied, learner-centered approaches when using digital resources to keep students motivated and engaged. They should guide students to focus more on understanding texts instead of just skimming or getting distracted by unrelated online content.

The school administration should provide strong technical support, including stable internet, enough devices, and access to online libraries or platforms, to reduce challenges for both teachers and learners.

Parents should support their children's digital reading by monitoring online activities, limiting distractions like excessive gaming, and encouraging responsible and balanced use of digital resources for learning.

The proposed Digital Interactive Reading Program should be adopted and implemented in the school to train teachers on customizing reading materials, improving interactive vocabulary skills, motivating learners, and strengthening comprehension and retention. This program may serve as a model that could later expand to other schools in the district.

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Future studies may explore other factors affecting digital reading performance, such as socioeconomic background, home resources, and teacher digital literacy. Research may also examine the long-term effects of digital reading on students' academic performance and reading habits.

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