

Digital Literacy in Teaching English for Young Learners: A Critical Research Review

Wachidaturrohmah* & Nuf Afifi

IAIN Kediri, Kota Kediri 64127, Indonesia

Abstract

This study explored various studies related to digital literacy in teaching English to young learners in Asia. A systematic review was conducted using the PRISMA methodology to analyze studies published between 2014 to 2024. The screening process found seven relevant studies selected to be reviewed. The data were synthesized to explore the importance and challenges of digital literacy in English language teaching for young learners. The results revealed that using digital tools like digital storytelling, digital pictures, and video-based instruction enhances students' engagement and students' skills. However, unequal access to technology and teachers limited digital literacy were identified as challenges. The findings pointed the need of training programs for teachers to enhance digital literacy skills. Policymakers and schools should collaborate to provide the technology and make sure the internet can be accessed equally. Overall, this study highlighted that in teaching English, the use of technology and traditional method should be balance.

Keywords: digital literacy; english teaching, young learners.

1. Introduction

The generation following Generation Z referred to as Generation Alpha, has grown up in a time when digital technology is an integral part of daily life. From a young age, they have had constant access to the internet and social media. Young ages are increasingly using gadgets in public spaces, such as restaurants and supermarkets, to engage with games and movies they enjoy. Compared to their parents, they tend to be more adaptable and proficient with digital technologies like smartphones and tablets (Puteri, 2024). This fact is a valuable asset, especially in education, where teachers can create an interactive learning atmosphere by utilizing technology in the learning process, even the use of technology can also improve students' literacy skills (Sugara et al., 2023). Therefore, in this digital era, teachers cannot only rely on conventional learning, instead, teachers need to integrate the learning process with technology.

However, it should be highlighted that digital literacy for young learners needs school activity and parental involvement (Septiani & Syaodih, 2021) to be controlled and monitored. In addition, young learners should be aware of searching and understanding the information, so it would not harm their learning process. The successful use of digital literacy in English learning, however, may be hampered by issues with access, teacher readiness, and pedagogical strategies, notwithstanding the possible advantages (Purmayanti, 2022). Therefore, to comprehend the potential and constraints in this field, it is essential to critically analyze the current research on digital literacy in the teaching of English to young learners and explore its importance and challenges.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Digital Literacy

Since technology integration in education is still booming nowadays, it provoked innovation in promoting literacy and created a new form of digital literacy. Bunyamin defined digital literacy as a process that relies on knowledge literacy, internet literacy, and other digital tools (Vidhiyasi et al., 2021). In the context of English learning, students can learn from digital text forms to improve their reading skills independently. Arsari (2022) emphasizes that in digital literacy, students properly understand how to use the internet, its positive and negative impact, and know what devices to use. In terms of specific forms, according to Kady and Vadeboncoeur (as cited in Wei, 2022.), digital literacy can be defined as students' ability to search, evaluate, compose information, and do tasks using digital tools. For instance, digital

literacy in a learning context refers to students' ability to use digital sources to gain information, do tasks, and do other activities that can be done by using digital tools.

In language learning, digital literacy plays an important role since it can enhance students' language skills. Technology integration with language teaching gives students a chance to search for various information, and think critically, and motivates them to build bigger vocabularies (Mantiri et al., 2019). Furthermore, students with the ability to think critically will be able to recognize the truth of information by evaluation (Wang et al., 2023). By addressing the importance of digital literacy in language teaching practice, teachers should consider the advantages and disadvantages of it.

2.2 English Teaching for Young Learners

There are various categorizations of the age range of young learners. Moreover, young learners are often used to define learners under the age of eighteen. Linse stated (as cited in Sehan, 2018) that to meet student developmental stages, teachers need to adjust their educational processes where the teachers should pay attention to the characteristics, needs, experiences, and practices that are appropriate for them.

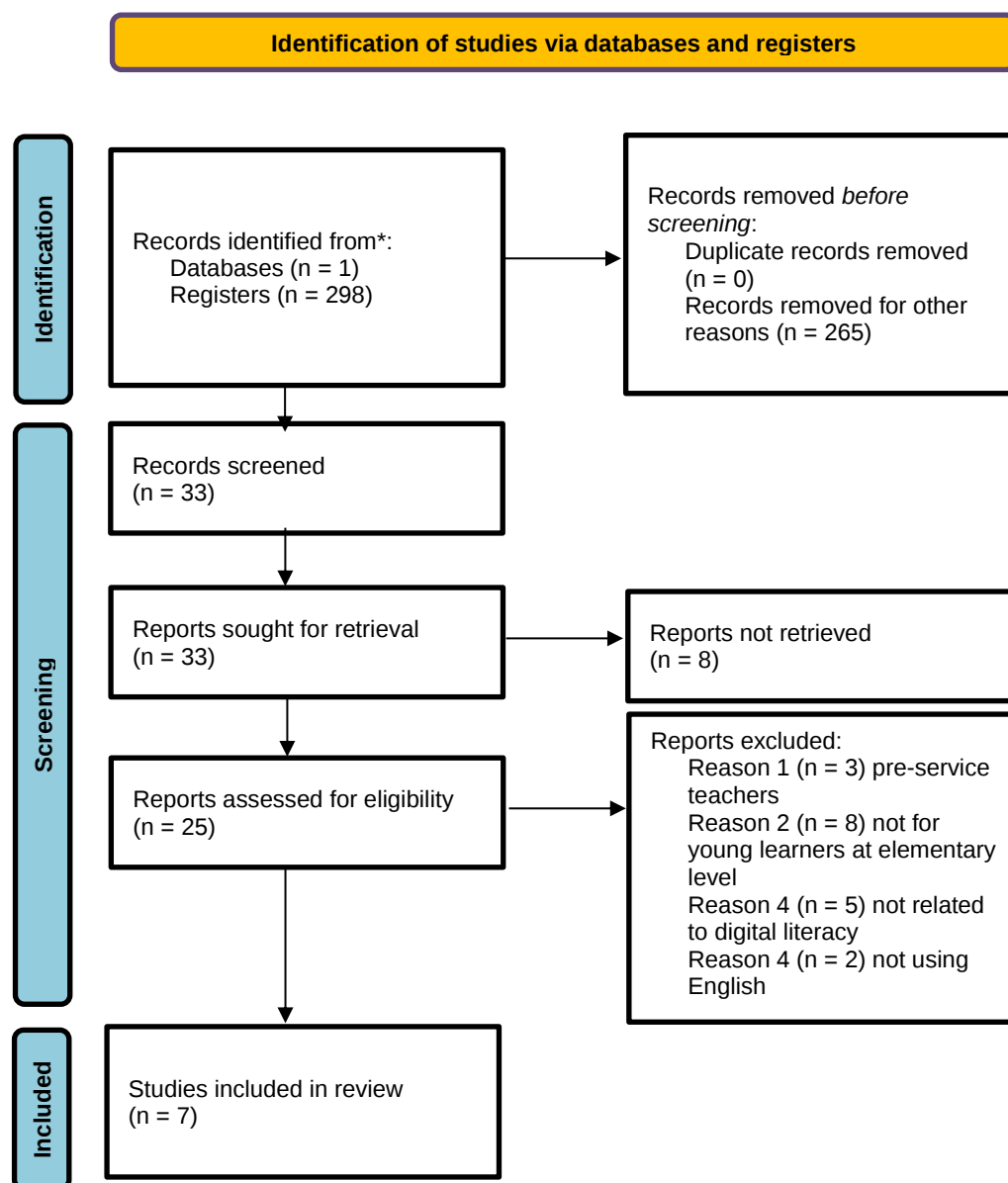
In addition, understanding students' characteristics is more important to apply various techniques in teaching maximum. According to Sehan (2018), young learners from ages 5-7 are thought to possess the fundamental language skills necessary to transmit meaning or will and to convert spoken communication into comprehension. They can both decode and encode language and meaning, particularly the language employed at their level. And young learners from ages 8-12, develop the cognitive ability to comprehend meaning and use it in language use or communication. For example, students can tell the difference between fact and fiction and can work with others.

However, in Indonesian practice, most misconceptions about teaching English to young learners are that it does not require teachers with English proficiency, especially at an advanced level. According to Musthafa (2010), there are seven suggestions for English teachers in teaching young learners so that the teaching English can function as expected: 1) Teachers of English should English all the time/or as much as possible in the classroom during the instructional sessions; 2) Print-rich environment in English should be created in and around the classroom; 3) Teachers of English for young learners should use activity-based teaching-learning techniques such as total physical response (TPR), games, and projects; 4) Teachers of English for young learners should use various techniques for short periods to maintain the interest level of the children in engaging the English lessons; 5) Teachers of English for young learners should focus on functional English for vocabulary development and for immediate fulfilment of communicative needs of the learners; 6) Teachers of English for young learners should reiterate often to ensure the acquisition of English expressions or vocabulary items; 7) Teachers of English for young learners should provide useful, acquisition-promoting routines. At the end of the learning process, teachers can use digital tools to make the learning environment more enjoyable.

3. Research Method and Materials

A systematic review was employed to answer the research questions by following the PRISMA Methodology (Moher et al. 2009). Moreover, the research used a critical perspective where the author reviewed some research in the same subject area to show up-to-date understanding, provide current opinions, and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the specific areas (Jesson & Laccey, 2006). To determine an appropriate timeframe and search terms, this research conducted an initial scoping search for relevant papers using Google Scholar. The timeframe from 2014 to 2024 focuses on digital literacy in English teaching for young learners.

Keywords used as a search query in the identification phase focusing on "Digital Literacy" AND "in Teaching English" AND "for Young Learners", and found $n=298$ studies related to the search query. From the original results, $n=266$ were removed because those were books, proceeding articles, thesis, and conference articles. The next articles were screened from the first removed to $n = 32$. Next is considering the title and abstract of these studies. If the title and keywords related to the main search query and abstract looked promising, then the item was obtained. Therefore, to get specific findings, there are seven studies included in the review.



Flow Chart 1. Identification of studies via databases and registers

4. Results and Discussion

Table 1. Studies included in review

Author (s)	Purpose	Sample	Key Findings
Muhammad Awais, Muhammad Tahir, Muhammad Sabbor Hussain (2024)	1. Evaluate the efficacy of informal digital learning approaches in English instruction for young learners at the primary level. 2. Investigate the impact of digital technologies on language acquisition among primary school students.	Pakistan	1. By using digital learning approaches, students' engagement is higher 2. Digital technologies significantly enhance young learners' language acquisition through interactive, visually engaging, and adaptable learning experiences. 3. Advantages: make learning more engaging and adaptable to various learning styles.

Author (s)	Purpose	Sample	Key Findings
	3. Analyze the obstacles and advantages of incorporating digital tools into English language learning at the primary level. 4. Investigate the attitudes and perspectives of young learners towards informal digital English learning. 5. Offer valuable insights and recommendations to educators and policymakers for maximizing the utilization of digital resources in English language education for primary school students.		Challenges: Access to digital tools isn't equal, with some students facing financial barriers 4. Young learners are motivated and enjoy the learning 5. Policymakers should work to ensure all students can access digital tools, such as through funding for schools in low-income areas.
Li Tang Yu (2018)	Explore the experience of native English-speaking teachers of videoconferencing as a supplementary teaching activity for efl elementary school students	Taiwanese	Student engagement varied widely due to differences in motivation, personality, and English proficiency, impacting the interaction quality. Technical issues like unreliable bandwidth, insufficient equipment, and lack of teacher familiarity with the technology also hindered communication.
Fatima Sadaeva (2024)	Evaluate the impact of technology on learning outcomes, student engagement, and the overall teaching methodology in early English education.	Rusia	Integrating Technology in early education enhances foundational skills and supports students' development. Therefore, parental involvement plays important role.
Chyntia Kumalasari (2023)	1) Understand the teachers' perceptions about the use of technology for teaching English in young learners' classroom 2) Analyze the teachers' expectations in using technology for teaching English in young learners' classroom 3) Investigate the challenges and what are the solutions while teaching English using technology in young learners' classrooms	Indonesia	Teachers perceive technology, especially digital pictures, as an important and motivating tool in young learners' English classrooms. However, they face challenges such as technical difficulties and the need for effective teaching strategies tailored to young learners' characteristics.
Yuli Astutik, Slamet Setiawan, Syafi'ul Anam, Suhartono (2022)	1. Investigate how teachers maximize student learning from their videos 2. Evaluate how teachers integrate their role as facilitators in the videos	Indonesia	1. The study emphasizes how the teachers utilized various strategies to maximize student learning by using videos, for example, they used visual cues, such as vocabulary words paired with images, and vibrant colors, to direct attention to critical information. This helped to make abstract concepts more concrete and accessible for their young learners. By showing video, teachers did not only hold students' attention, it also increase students' motivation, participation, and cognitive engagement. Finally, students were involved in the learning actively. 2. In their role as facilitators, teachers provided guidance and information, fostering an

Author (s)	Purpose	Sample	Key Findings
			environment conducive to learning while acknowledging the limitations of video-based instruction. Although they faced challenges in providing personalized support and counseling within the videos, they made efforts to integrate these roles through other means such as calls or home visits.
Lailatul Maya, Sri Sumarni, Muchlas Suseno (2022)	1. Investigate the notion of young learners' perspective on the use of digital storytelling in vocabulary learning and how it contributed to their vocabulary development. 2. Enlighten EFL learners' viewpoints on using digital storytelling in EFL vocabulary classes	Indonesia	1. Digital Storytelling is engaging and motivating for students. Students reported that it facilitated understanding and retention of new vocabulary. Moreover, it was enjoyable. 2. The use of digital storytelling in EFL classrooms was regarded favorably, with learners seeing it as an engaging, motivating, and effective tool for vocabulary learning. This tool helped them overcome common vocabulary acquisition difficulties, such as pronunciation and memorization.
Heri Mundra (2020)	Investigate benefits and barriers of digital literacy as perceived by EFL teachers and learners	Indonesia	1. Benefits of Digital Literacy: students improve their English skills, and EFL teachers find authentic digital content beneficial for exposing learners to real-life language use and cultural context. 2. Barriers to Digital Literacy: limited internet availability, expensive digital tools, and some teachers' lack of experience with digital literacy tools posed barriers to make teaching more effective.

Here, the key findings draw the potential and limitations of using digital tools in teaching English to young learners.

4.1. Enhanced Engagement and Adaptability in Learning Styles

Using digital learning tools in teaching English increases students' engagement and meets various learning styles (Awais et al., 2024) (Maya et al., 2022). As shown by Maya et al., young learners who face difficulties pronouncing and memorizing vocabulary can enjoy the vocabulary acquisition process in the class. Similarly, Awais et al. emphasize that digital learning environments enhance students' engagement by giving them relevant ways to interact with material visually and contextually. However, even using digital in the learning process is like an investment, where students have developed their vocabulary acquisition, but teachers should notice the risks. Kuznetsova and Azhmukhamedov (2020) emphasize that digital learning negatively affects students' sight. Information presented on the screen creates difficulties for visual perception and understanding by showing high brightness. Moreover, there is a risk of engagement when students do not translate vocabulary into deeper meaning, they are only interested in the visual and ignore the main content. It should be highlighted that teachers must balance using digital and traditional tools to make sure that students understand the content besides focusing on the visuals.

4.2. Importance of Teachers' Digital Literacy

In implementing digital learning in the classroom, teachers not only equip the tools but also the skills to operate and troubleshoot digital platforms to provide a smooth learning environment. On the other hand, in a study by Kumalasari (2023) and Yu (2018), teachers perceive digital tools like videoconferencing, but they face challenges in technical issues and limited digital literacy. These limitations show that there must be digital literacy among teachers since this reveals a critical gap in presenting digital integration effectively in the classroom. Therefore, building digital literacy skills in teacher training is essential to maximize the English learning process since one of the factors affecting students' success in learning is teachers' readiness (Lynch et al., 2017) (Tumanduk et al., 2018). In addition, Farisia and Syafi'i (2024) found that the program intervention for teacher professional development shows a positive impact on teachers' digital literacy competencies, especially in using digital media in the teaching-learning process for young learners.

4.3. Challenges in Equal Access and Technology Infrastructure

A significant challenge as highlighted by Awais et al (2024) is equitable access to digital learning resources. Students or educational environments with low-income areas and limited infrastructure will have less experience in engaging and participating the digital learning. Yu (Yu, 2018.) added that even though the school completed the infrastructure, the challenge come from the unreliable internet bandwidth and unequal distribution of internet access. Therefore, to maximize digital learning, there should be policymakers' awareness and support in ensuring these opportunities are accessible to all students (Mundra, 2020).

4.4. Digital Literacy in Young Learners and Parental Involvement

Technology can support foundational skills for young learners as shown by Sadaeva (2024) by watching videos and listening to English songs. Here, parental involvement is crucial in early education. Since young learners can manually access and engage with digital tools, their environments should support them by guiding them to build literacy skills, such as how to navigate the tools, choosing appropriate information, understanding digital etiquette, and developing critical thinking. The process can be supported by parents who play a vital role in reinforcing digital literacy at home (Haryanto et al., 2022). However, since some parents may lack digital literacy, it is necessary to create programs to increase both students' and parents' digital literacy.

4.5. Teacher's Strategy

A study by Astutik et al, (2022) highlighted that teachers can actively promote student engagement and foster an inclusive learning environment by using digital literacy techniques that make difficult concepts easier to understand. Teachers can use digital content, such as videos with visual cues, to enhance student comprehension by making abstract concepts concrete. However, relying too much on digital means to provide the material also runs the danger of impairing students' ability to digest information that is not digital. Therefore, it is necessary to foster digital literacy as both a cognitive and an operational ability, training children to assess, interpret, and question the information they encounter online.

5. Conclusion

Reflecting on this research, the purpose of this study was to explore digital literacy in teaching English for young learners. The study revealed that digital literacy has emerged as an essential component in language learning. It serves as a bridge to integrate technology into teaching and allows learners to develop their skills innovatively. Although the impact of using digital media sounds positive, challenges such as equitable access and teachers' readiness need to be addressed to ensure its effective implementation. Therefore, several suggestions were addressed to English teachers to make sure the use of digital technology could enhance students' language skills effectively. Here the English teacher was expected to use various methods in teaching English by balancing the traditional and digital methods.

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