

Chapter 15

Empowering English Teachers for Digital Reading Activities for Gen Z Students

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1. RATIONALE

In the current educational environment, English Language Teaching (EFL) is facing an extraordinary paradigm shift driven by the digital evolution of its current learners: Generation Z. Born into a world fully integrated with ubiquitous technology, Gen Z students possess distinct cognitive profiles, favouring visual-rich, non-linear, and highly interactive content. However, this digital immersion has triggered a paradoxical "deep reading crisis" (Wolf & Stoodley, 2018), where students are constantly exposed to online texts but increasingly struggle with sustained reading comprehension and critical analysis. Unfortunately, many EFL reading classrooms remain isolated from this digital reality. Traditional reading instruction frequently relies on conventional, static methods, such as distributing lengthy printed texts followed by monotonous comprehension questions, which inevitably leads to disengagement, boredom, and a lack of intrinsic motivation among Gen Z learners (Baron, 2021). Further, Rahmawati et al (2024) stated that the long and printed texts are not interesting and made the Gen Z students being unmotivated to learn.

To bridge this widening gap, the focus must shift from simply providing digital gadgets to enhancing the pedagogical

creativity behind the technology. However, a key problem remains: although many English teachers can use basic technology, their TPACK is still limited, making it difficult for them to design interactive and meaningful digital reading activities (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). Wirayuda et al (2025) also stated that digital the Gen Z demonstrates stronger engagement when reading materials are presented digitally, while Harida (2024) emphasized that the Gen Z preferred to be examined through digital or online ways. Therefore, targeted Teacher Professional Development (TPD) is essential. It should go beyond basic IT training and focus on practical instructional design that helps teachers create collaborative and engaging digital literacy activities.

In response to these challenges, this chapter presents a framework for helping English teachers design interactive digital reading activities tailored to Gen Z students. It examines Gen Z literacy habits, the limitations of traditional reading pedagogy, and strategies for using collaborative digital tools across the pre-, whilst-, and post-reading stages. Ultimately, it argues that professional development focused on practical digital design can transform reading classrooms into more engaging spaces that support lifelong digital literacy.

2. IMPLEMENTATION

In this sub topic, there are 5 topics that will be described. The topics are generation Z, digital literacy and literacy habits, conventional reading, practical strategies, and development model for the teachers to teach reading. The explanation will be as follows.

2.1 Characterizing Gen Z as True Digital Natives

Generation Z (Gen-Z) refers to the generation of individuals born around 1990s and 2010s who have grown up in rapid technological advancement with high digital connectivity. In

simpler, Gen-Z means the group of people who were born between the late 1990s and the early 2010s, who are widely recognized for their familiarity with the internet and digital technologies (Oxford, 2026). It represents the first demographic cohort to grow up entirely in the digital age, with high-speed internet and mobile technology available since early childhood (Harida & Nasution, 2024; Sakdiyakorn et al., 2021). So, it can be concluded that Gen-Z is known as the individuals who born between the late of 1990s and the early 2010s who grow up in the digital era, characterized by rapid used of internet and technology.

As true digital natives, they are customed to using digital technologies and demonstrate a strong ability to process visual information rapidly (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). However, constant exposure to the fast-paced streams of social media has reshaped their cognitive habits, resulting in a shorter attention span and a tendency to skim or scan content rather than read linearly (Twenge, 2017). This psychological shift creates a distinct behavioural pattern where Gen-Z students inherently prefer interacting with their digital gadgets rather than engaging with static classroom delivery (Harida & Nasution, 2024). Consequently, the primary challenge for contemporary educators has shifted from merely providing text access to sustaining meaningful cognitive engagement during reading task.

So, it can be concluded that Gen Z refers to individuals born in the late 1990s to early 2010s who grew up in the digital era. They are highly familiar with internet and digital technologies, process visual information quickly, and tend to prefer short, interactive content over long texts (Hasbi et al., 2024). As a result, they learn more effectively in technology-based, interactive environments.

2.2 Digital Literacy, Literacy Habits, and the Challenges

In this sub topic, the definition of digital literacy, then the literacy habits, and the challenges will be described. Firstly come from Law et al (2018) stated that digital literacy is the ability to

access, manage, integrate, evaluate, communicate, and create information safely and appropriately using digital technologies and networked devices for participation in economic and social life.

Digital literacy is also defined as the ability to safely and appropriately access, manage, understand, integrate, evaluate, communicate, and create information using digital technologies for work, decent employment, and entrepreneurial activities (Law et al., 2018; Vuorikari et al., 2022). It encompasses a range of competencies commonly known as computer literacy, ICT literacy, information literacy, and media literacy. In other words, digital literacy is the ability to use digital technologies safely and effectively to find, understand, evaluate, share, and create information for everyday life, learning, work, and social participation.

Digital literacy can be demonstrated through several common habits that reflect how individuals interact with technology in their everyday lives. First, integration into daily life is considered a fundamental habit, as digital literacy is not merely a collection of technical skills but a way of naturally incorporating digital technologies into daily activities for learning, communication, work, and problem solving (Gilster, 1998; Nor et al., 2026). Another important habit is responsible digital communication, which involves communicating effectively, respectfully, and ethically through digital platforms while following online etiquette, respecting cultural diversity, and using appropriate language in different contexts (Vuorikari et al., 2022). Next is digital problem solving, it refers to the habit of using digital technologies creatively and effectively to address everyday challenges, select appropriate digital tools, troubleshoot technical issues, and evaluate alternative solutions (Law et al., 2018; O'Neill & Dinh, 2012). Together, these habits demonstrate that digital literacy extends beyond technical competence, encompassing responsible, critical, and ethical engagement with digital technologies in everyday life.

Despite its many benefits, digital literacy faces several significant challenges. One major challenge is the rapid spread of misinformation and disinformation, which requires individuals to critically evaluate the credibility of digital information before accepting or sharing it (Law et al., 2018). Another challenge is the digital divide, where unequal access to digital technologies and internet connectivity limits opportunities for developing digital literacy skills (OECD, 2023). In addition, the increasing risks of cyber threats, privacy breaches, and online fraud highlight the importance of strengthening digital safety awareness and responsible online behaviour among digital technology users (Vuorikari et al., 2022). Therefore, overcoming these challenges requires continuous efforts from individuals, educational institutions, and policymakers to foster responsible, critical, and inclusive digital literacy for effective participation in the digital society.

Finally, it can be said that digital literacy refers to the ability to use digital technologies safely, effectively, and responsibly to access, evaluate, communicate, and create information for meaningful participation in modern society. It is reflected in everyday habits such as integrating technology into daily life, communicating responsibly, thinking critically, solving problems, and practicing safe online behaviour. However, it is also challenged by some issues such as misinformation, the digital divide, and increasing cybersecurity risks. Therefore, fostering digital literacy requires continuous learning and collaborative efforts to ensure responsible and effective engagement in the digital world.

2.3 Conventional Reading and the Teacher's Challenge

Conventional reading involves engaging with printed materials, including textbooks, novels, and newspapers, as a means of gaining knowledge and developing literacy. Compared with digital reading, it offers a more focused and uninterrupted reading experience. Research shows that printed reading often

improves comprehension, retention, and critical reflection because it reduces digital distractions (Clinton, 2019; Delgado et al., 2018). Although digital technologies have become increasingly prevalent in education, conventional reading remains an essential component of literacy development, particularly for promoting sustained attention and deep reading.

Despite its benefits, encouraging students to engage in conventional reading has become increasingly challenging for teachers in the digital era. Many students prefer digital media and short-form content, which can reduce their motivation to read lengthy printed texts and limit their ability to concentrate for extended periods (Harida & Nasution, 2024; OECD, 2021). Teachers should design engaging reading activities, use effective strategies, and create supportive environments that balance print and digital resources. This approach helps students maintain strong reading habits and develop deeper comprehension in both contexts.

In conclusion, conventional reading remains essential for developing students' reading comprehension and critical thinking. Despite the challenges of the digital era, teachers play a key role in encouraging meaningful reading habits (Hasbi & Wulansari, 2025). Therefore, balancing conventional and digital reading practices is important for strengthening students' overall literacy.

2.4 Practical Strategies for Integrating Digital Tools for Reading

Integrating digital tools into reading instruction has become an effective strategy for improving students' reading skills and engagement. Digital tools such as e-books, online reading platforms, educational applications, and interactive websites provide learners with flexible access to reading materials and opportunities for personalized learning. According to UNESCO (2023), technology should be used to support learning through meaningful instructional design rather than simply replacing

traditional teaching methods. Likewise, the OECD (2023) emphasizes that digital tools are most effective when they encourage active learning, collaboration, and critical thinking. Therefore, successful integration of digital tools depends on how teachers use technology to support meaningful reading experiences.

Teachers can integrate digital tools into reading instruction through interactive e-books, online discussion platforms, digital annotation tools, and gamified reading apps. These tools can improve comprehension, support collaboration, increase motivation, and provide immediate feedback (Fajaria et al., 2026). Research by the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE, 2023) also suggests that teachers should select digital tools based on learning objectives and students' needs rather than the technology itself. In summary, effective digital reading instruction requires appropriate digital resources, student-centred activities, and purposeful instructional planning.

Overall, digital tools can make reading instruction more engaging and meaningful, but their effectiveness depends on teachers' pedagogical competence. Thus, technology should complement, not replace, effective teaching and reading strategies.

3. REFLECTION

The use of digital tools in EFL reading has become increasingly important because they can improve students' engagement and provide flexible access to learning resources. Digital literacy is a key factor that indirectly improves students' academic achievement. This influence occurs through several mediating mechanisms (Yuan et al., 2025). First, high levels of digital literacy contribute to the creation of a positive digital learning environment, which enhances students' engagement in digital learning activities. Second, digital literacy strengthens students' self-efficacy by increasing their confidence in using digital technologies effectively. In addition, Harida (2026)

believed that many students like to use digital sources and AI tools rather than printed materials. As a result, students are more motivated to use digital resources, engage actively in learning, and improve academic performance.

However, there is still debate about whether digital reading promotes deep comprehension, as many Gen Z learners tend to skim online texts rather than read critically and reflectively (Baron, 2021; Wolf & Stoodley, 2018). Therefore, teachers should ensure that technology supports meaningful reading rather than simply making learning more attractive. Another important consideration is the role of teachers in integrating technology into reading instruction. The readiness of the teachers to use or to teach digital literacy is still questionable (OECD, 2023). Further, digital tools alone cannot improve learning outcomes unless they are supported by appropriate teaching strategies and strong pedagogical competence. As emphasized by Mishra and Koehler (2006), teachers need sufficient TPACK to design interactive reading activities that effectively combine technology, pedagogy, and content knowledge.

In conclusion, digital tools should complement rather than replace conventional reading practices. A balanced approach combining printed and digital reading can help students develop both digital literacy and deep reading skills. Therefore, continuous professional development is essential to empower English teachers to design effective digital reading instruction for Generation Z learners.

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