

Evaluating digital texts' engagement: Insights from English, Literacy and Communication courses' students

Susan Olajoke Akinkurolere

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3058-8576>

Communication and Study Skills Unit

University of Botswana

Botswana

Corresponding email: akinkurolere.suzan@gmail.com

Abstract

The digital age opens the opportunity for online learning. Yet, tutors have complained about students' lackadaisical attitudes to reading digital texts shared on learning management systems. This calls for research from the students' angle of the begging issue. Digital texts are quite essential in teaching English, Literacy and Communication Courses, which are mandatory courses for the academic development of all students in higher institutions. This paper is a study of the use of digital texts by selected students in Nigeria with insights from socio-constructivism theory. To address the issues, specific objectives were generated and data was derived from Year 1 and Year 2 students who have studied one or two ELC courses. To analyse the responses, the paper depends on a mixed methods approach to provide in-depth analyses as students write their opinions on the benefits, challenges, and solutions. Therefore, the data are analysed quantitatively and quantitatively. Indeed, the discussion is premised on the results from the statistical data and themes of the qualitative data. The paper concludes that addressing issues raised by students on the parts of the institution, lecturers and students while taking ELC courses will enhance students' competence, support study skills, and overall academic development of the courses' texts.

Key words: Second language, learning, communication, texts, literacy, competence.

Introduction

Reading is not just a rhetoric of mining information from text but an understanding of meanings of texts. Critical reading involves the abilities to understand textual, visual, or multimodal communication, comparing and contrasting information sources, evaluating sources and recognizing one's biases and the point of view of the sources (Weninger, 2020). In one-way, a digital text, also known as an electronic text, is a text that can be displayed and saved on

a computer or its devices (Vocabulary.com Dictionary, 2022). There are various definitions of digital texts, but they all serve as pointers to the fact that digital texts are texts or information stored on digital devices or those accessible through the internet (Manalu, 2019; Sage, Augustine, Shand, Bakner & Rayne, 2019).

Indeed, how people engage with different modes is significant in communication (Li, 2023). Different digital texts share related features but the common ones are unimodal texts, multimodal texts, and inter-texts (Mills, 2023; Kress & Leuwen, 2020). A unimodal text involves a single type of data, multimodal texts have different types of data (audio, video, image), while inter-texts allow an exchange of communication (Segura-Bedmar, & Alonso-Bartolome, 2022, Mills, 2023). Since these types of digital texts provide new ways of experiencing literacy through technology, they are relevant types of digital texts in English, Language and Communication courses.

The use of digital texts in higher institutions is increasing and concerns about lecturers' digital competence their design and process are receiving scholarly attention in recent times (Inamorato dos Santos, Chinkes, Carvalho, Solórzano, & Marroni, 2023). No wonder, lecturers as digital text designers are concerned about treatment of line-ending, spaces between words and lines, spaces between the lines and length of lines, treatment of paragraph beginnings, typeface or font, type size, pictures and text, and headings. These features characterize digital texts as a distinct type of text and it is essential to acknowledge the fact that digital texts are relevant at all levels of reading especially for beginning readers (Walker, Black, Bessemans, Bormans, Renckens, and Barratt, 2018). There are opportunities for accessing digital texts online especially through Open Educational resources (OER). The benefits of accessing digital texts through OER are lower cost, easy distribution, instant access, and inclusion (Seaman & Seaman, 2021).

Improving the quality of teaching and teaching materials has been a concern for educators, researchers, policy makers, teachers, and stakeholders (Farias & Veliz, 2019; Kamalvand & Khany, 2022), while designing text materials in English language has been a focus (Al-Mousawi, 2018; Rathert & Cabaroğlu, 2022). Indeed, efforts have been made to use different texts in teaching languages and language-related courses and this is connected to the

enhancement of education quality. Some educational systems have served as references especially in the developed countries for developing countries and it is worth acknowledging that the availability of digital texts through technology is an avenue to improve teaching quality.

Information sharing through printed documents is as important as that of digital texts (Farias & Veliz, 2019; Pardede, 2019). Printed texts are the traditional type of text since it existed before digital texts, but as more printed texts are created in digital forms, there is more and easy access to information (Weber, 2019). Despite the inconsistencies on which type of text is better, it is evidently proven that students prefer digital texts to print documents even though both could enhance students' reading and comprehension skills (Manalu, 2019). This is without prejudice to the fact that the most preferred may not always be the most beneficial or effective as there are factors such as accessibility, environmental and economic factors that could make print documents better in a specific context while they could be less important in another context.

The driving force behind digital texts is technology. Through technology, digital texts provide a dynamic way of reading aside from the traditional print-document reading. For academic literacy, reading and writing skills are essential and digital texts provide a new way of experiencing literacy. As such, students have access to engage with a new format of text (Darvenkumar & Devi, 2022; Manalu, 2019) because they have access to digital devices and internet.

Also, digital texts constitute crucial teaching material for teachers and material content developers, and it has been recommended, in the past, that recourse should be made to relevant theories and current issues when creating contents (Kamalvand & Khany, 2022). Digital texts are more popular for university students (Sage, et al., 2019). More digital contents are produced for students without questioning students' preferences and experiences with the texts and material. For students to be effective in communication skills for present and future, teachers who produce and recommend learning material should gain understanding about students' perceptions on digital texts in order to meet their preferences and needs. In addition, it is crucial to promote their social and interpersonal skills in addition to their career life by being mindful of their interest (Chen, 2021).

Educators and other stakeholders in education agree that texts, including digital texts, are vital in teaching, but students' perceptions of these texts are crucial to the effective and successful actualization of its objectives. The perceptions are products of students' feelings, attitudes and experiences while studying English, Literary and Communication (ELC) courses.

Objectives

The principal aim of this paper is to explore students' experiences with the use of digital texts in English, Literary, and Communication (ELC) courses with the intention of understanding the associated challenges, benefits towards apparent solutions to the problems. Therefore, the specific objectives of the research are to

- i. examine students' preference of three types of digital texts by students studying ELC courses.
- ii. investigate the students' gains in attaining communicative competence and academic development through digital texts.
- iii. identify the students' experiences in using digital texts.

Literature Review

Farias & Veliz (2019) researched on the use of multimodal texts in Chilean English teaching education and explored the experiences of educators and pre-service teachers. The study was conducted through online surveys, and it was noted that both educators and pre-service teachers are familiar with multimodal texts, but they hardly use them for academic purposes due to some peculiar challenges. These most significant challenges are inadequate time, resources, and preparation. The author further decried the lack of match between the use of social media for academic purposes which the educators and pre-service teachers acknowledged. This research focused on the use of multimodal texts in Chile without a reference to their sources. Even though multimodal text makes a part of digital texts, it must be accessible through technology to be regarded as a digital text. At the same time, the role multimodality plays in literacy can never be overestimated as research portrays its relevance beyond reasonable doubt.

Also, Manalu (2019) explored students' perceptions in the reading of digital texts. The research

deployed a mixed-methods approach to investigate students' interests, motivations, preference, and problems in using digital texts. The preference of students was on a choice between digital texts and printed texts. The findings revealed that students preferred digital texts to print documents based on its interesting and motivating features and only complained about its effects on the sight through irritation. Manalu's (2019) research is an implicit comparison between digital texts and print documents whereas the concern of this research involves a comparison of students' preference among types of digital texts since available pieces of evidence have shown that students appreciate reading digital texts than print documents.

Weber (2019) investigated how digital texts impact the reading of second grade students by comparing reading print texts with digital texts and there was more engagement with digital texts than printed texts. This was achieved through the instruments of pre and post survey and interview. With increased engagement, there will be better comprehension. She identified some benefits of reading digital texts as the provision of word-meaning and pronunciation through a click on the device, making reading a fun for children, enhancing reader's comprehension. Some of the negative implications of digital text reading are reduced performance in assessment, more energy to process the format, inadequate information from search, poor navigation tools, less eye strain among others. No doubt, this study has proven that digital texts have both advantages and disadvantages, but the fact remains that these digital texts have types and students' preference, and experiences deserve scholarly attention.

Seaman & Seaman (2021) conducted a study on the use of digital texts during Fall 2020 term in the time of COVID educational resources in U.S. higher education as a litmus test. They further investigated how faculty were able to adapt to online teaching as it increased from 34% to 71% while face-to-face teaching dropped from 96% to 14% and there was an increased reliance and modification of digital texts especially on open educational resources. Interestingly, faculty still showed high interest in the recommended commercial textbooks.

Xia & Huiyang (2022) observed mass increase of English language text materials online due to increasing access to computer technologies. To improve the teaching of English language, an algorithm of Artificial Intelligence (AI) was adopted to help check the relevance and quality of text materials. In essence, this will help users of English texts to decisions by identifying and

extracting information based on semantic rules and similarity of meaning. The authors were able to problematize the availability of a large chunk of digital texts and manual search and provided solutions through AI without referring to academic databases that could provide digital texts detection in English language teaching. Also, students make choices as to what type of digital texts they prefer when learning, especially as support materials to their competence in a second language.

The extent to which text materials could help a second language learner achieve communicative competence in the second language was recognized in Al-Mousawi's (2018) article. It is expected that text materials for English language should provide in-depth exposure, engagement, mental resources, observation of second language use, communication, interaction and meaning-centred. These are general expectations of all types of text whether it is digital text or printed text. Of importance is the fact that digital space encourages texts that are interactive and engaging since Al-Mousawi (2018) emphasized the importance of second language acquisition through "a relaxed and enjoyable experience. He concludes that English materials should be task driven.

Mason, Tarchi, Ronconi, Manzione, Latini, & Bråte (2022) compared texts with videos online by investigating the processes and outcomes. The researchers used participants' experimental design and discovered that students were more interested in watching the videos than reading digital texts. However, multimodal digital texts allow the use of different modes such as videos, audios and other mediums since technology has expanded the meaning of text to capture images. So, both are digital texts. The results of the research only showed more engagement in video and no significant difference in context, interaction, or outcome effects. This study is like the current research by comparing online texts with online videos. Yet, it is limited because digital texts were restricted to online texts and videos which are monomodal without recourse to multimodal digital texts.

In designing tasks for texts in English language, cultural tasks have been recommended (Arshad, Shah, & Ahmad, 2020; Al-Mousawi (2018)). Some of the available texts are being investigated for cultural contents especially in primary and secondary schools within and outside Africa (Arshad, Shah, & Ahmad, 2020; Awayed-Bishara, 2015) The aim of this study

was to examine the types of cultures mirrored in Oxford Progressive English text materials (Level-10) and the results of the study indicated that most of the text materials lacked cultural and intercultural content even though learners are from different cultural environments. This paper is not concerned about the cultural content of digital texts but the preference of students in the use of types of digital texts.

Ratovskaya (2020) highlighted that students need the support of teachers in reading, engaging, and comprehending digital texts. It is also helpful when both teachers and students know how to navigate through digital space. There are teachers who were trained using the print texts and if they are not trained to embrace digital texts, it will be difficult to support learners. Hence, Ratovskaya acknowledged the importance of educators' support for all categories of learners to digital practices. From the literature review, researchers have focused on quality and contents of text materials and digital texts in English language without investigating what types of digital texts that students find interesting and prefer to read. This study attempts to fill this gap by delving into students' experiences to understand their challenges and what solutions they consider appropriate.

Theoretical Framework: Socio-Constructivism

For this study, socio-constructivism framework is adopted. The theory of constructivism is also known as social-constructivism, and it postulates that learners should be in control of their learning process in real life situations (Saleem, Kausar, & Deeba, 2021). In essence, constructivist learning makes learning an active and personalised meaning-making adventure (von Glasersfeld, 2001). No wonder, Jonassen, Davidson, Collins, Campbell, & Haag (1995) argue that constructivist educators try to enhance learning by creating environments that enable readers to process their thinking and learning.

The online space provides students with the opportunity to increase their knowledge based on previous learning experiences. This theory borders on three aspects of beliefs which are epistemological, psychological, and educational. Indeed, the educational aspect is relevant to this study as it focuses on how to support the learning system. Any educational study on how students seek knowledge online is within the framework of constructivism. This theory also recognizes interaction as a way of supporting learning. Within technology enhanced classroom

or outside the classroom, students can interact with through digital texts and the accompanying multimodal features.

To Saleem, et al., (2021), social constructivism of Vygotsky is derived from arguments on language, thought and how they are negotiated in the society. This justifies the choice of this theory for investigating students' experiences when reading ELC texts in digital forms. Digital texts promote social speech which creeps into the thoughts of learner as they read.

Methodology

For this research, an online questionnaire was designed through a survey using an online questionnaire. The collection of the data for analysis was done using a mixed methods approach. This is premised on the fact that students were required to write on the challenges they experience using digital texts; the benefits they derived from using digital texts; how the challenges can be overcome to derive the qualitative data while the structured aspect of the online questionnaire required students to choose from a predefined answer. The theoretical framework is socio-constructivism which is justified because it is relevant to students' engagement of digital texts. One tertiary institution was selected in Nigeria. The link to the online questionnaire was shared in the WhatsApp group of National Diploma 1 & 2 classes of Mass Communication students. The Year 1 and 2 classes were selected purposively because they have studied a minimum of three ELC courses. 102 students responded as participation was made voluntary with approval from the faculty research committee. The results of the data were extracted and analysed. The discussion, conclusions and recommendations were linked to the findings in line with the objectives.

Data Analysis and Discussion

There are two categories of data that are analysed quantitatively and qualitatively. There was a structured set of questions that was analysed and represented with pie and bar charts and the unstructured questions that were analysed through themes, categorisation, and discussion.

Analysis and Discussion of Quantitative Data

The data are analysed and discussed as shown below. Demographic characteristics such as age

and gender were not elicited except the level of education which was the common feature and the basis of choosing Year 2 students studying ELC courses.

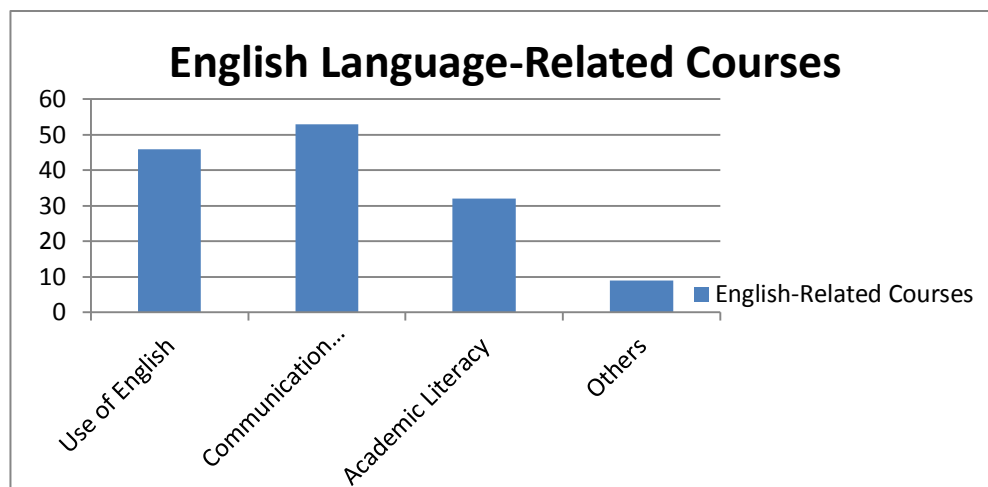


Figure 1: The Use of Digital Texts in English-related courses

The students identified the different categories of English-language related courses that they have studied utilizing digital texts. There are different names for ELC courses depending on the curriculum for National Diploma in Mass Communication and the General language courses. The percentages of students who had studied specific ELC courses are 45% for Use of English, 52% for Communication Skills, 31% for Academic Literacy and 8% for other ELC. “Among others” category is English for Mass Communication course. This implies that the students are exposed to ELC courses as shown in the above chart but it does not reflect whether they read digital texts in the identified courses. This is in consonance with Wellinger’s (2020) argument that digital literacy has become a part of traditional literacy, and its reading has become indispensable in all spheres.

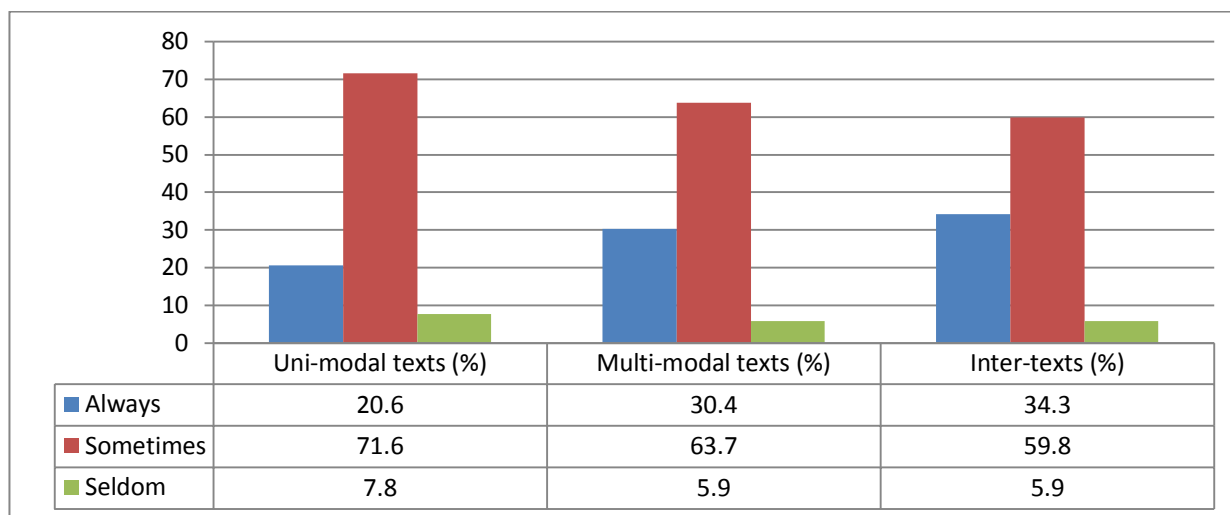


Figure 2: Students' Reading of Types of Digital Texts

The above figure reflects how students read, engage, and interact with digital texts to address Objective 1 which was to examine the use of three types of digital texts by students studying ELC courses. On how students read uni-modal digital texts, 20.6% of the students always read unimodal texts, 71.6% sometimes read this type of digital text while 7.8% seldom read unimodal texts. For multimodal texts, the students who always read it are at 30.4%, sometimes read at 63.7% and seldom read at 5.9%. While the results for intertexts show that 34.3% always, 59.8% sometimes read inter-texts and 5.9% students rarely read inter-texts.

Mass Communication students have courses that are related to digital texts aside ELC courses, especially Journalism, Newsprint and Publishing courses. This shows that the students study courses that promote the reading of digital texts. Apart from reading these digital texts, the students are trained to produce digital texts. Yet, they have their preferences while studying ELC courses because Use of English and Communication Skills are crosscutting courses that other students are taught as well.

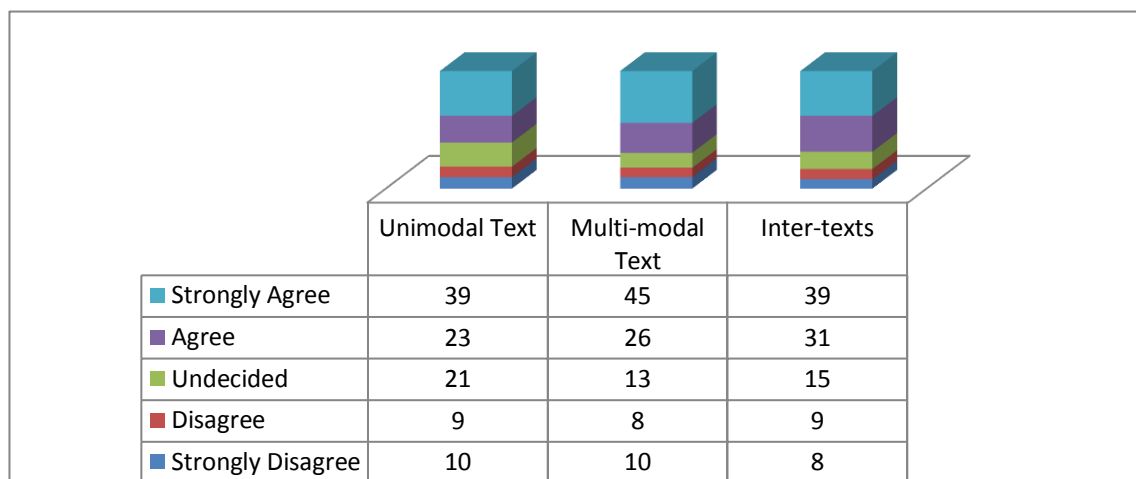


Figure 3: Helpfulness of Digital Texts in English, Literacy and Communication Courses

A 5-point Likert scale was used to allow students to indicate the helpfulness of the types of digital texts. 39 students strongly agreed, and 23 students agreed that unimodal texts are helpful. 21 students were neutral while 9 students disagreed, and 10 students strongly agreed that unimodal texts were helpful. For multimodal digital texts, 45 students strongly agreed, and 26 students agreed this type of digital texts is helpful; 13 students felt indifferent while 8 students disagreed and 10 students strongly disagreed. On another note, 9 students agreed strongly, and 31 students agreed that inter-texts are helpful in ELC courses. 15 students could not decide whether this type is helpful while 9 students disagreed, and 8 students disagreed strongly that intertexts are helpful. The results are influenced by the digital literacy skills of students, access to digital space and the support system available to students.

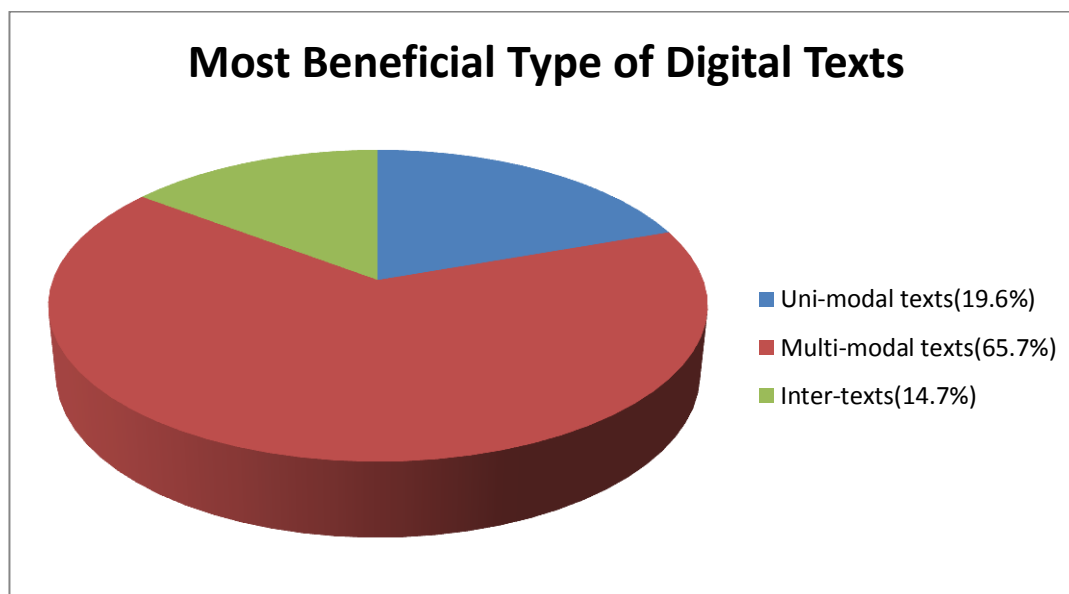


Figure 4: Texts that are most Beneficial in English and Communication Courses

From Figure 4, 19.6% of the students felt that uni-modal texts are the most beneficial type of digital texts, 65.7% indicated they derived most benefits from multimodal texts while 14.7% of the students chose inter-texts as the type with most benefits in relation to their ELC courses. The experiences of the students with the types of digital texts are necessary for both teachers that serve as their guide and ELC digital texts developers. No doubt, the use of digital texts is based on digital literacy skills of the students since it is difficult for students who do not read digital texts for academic purposes to give a concise response on the use of types of digital texts.

Qualitative Analysis and Discussion of the Data

Each student responded to three specific questions by writing their answers. The responses are categorized as themes for discussion.

Gains of Reading Digital Texts

The benefits of reading digital texts are categorized into eleven themes which are better comprehension, improved vocabulary and communication skills, portability and accessibility, research and presentation skills, improvement of academic performance, self-development, critical thinking skills, interpersonal skills, fluency and speed of reading, academic interest, and

visualization of concepts.

Of a fact, students stated that digital texts help them to comprehend better. This collaborates with Weber (2019), who argued that digital texts increase engagement and enhance better comprehension. Considering that digital texts allow multi-modes and intertext communication, students can link lexical items to connect with images, listen to audios and watch videos that enhance understanding. Students responded by saying thus:

"You understand things better."

"Understanding from a different perspective is very helpful."

"Better understanding about a topic and being able to relate."

"It helps me to understand more in communication."

"It give(s) more understanding about language modes"

Vocabulary development is a theme generated based on the students' responses. Students referred to this through their responses by saying *"vocabulary nourishment"*, *"My vocabulary improved, I got to learn new vocabulary"*. Indeed, the more the reading efforts of students, the more the likelihood of learning new words which feed their mental lexicon. The vocabulary is built in the context of use. This provides both semantic and pragmatic interpretations.

A significant advantage of reading digital texts is enhanced communication skills. Communication skills, whether verbal or non-verbal, have a wide scope in academia. In this context, students laid emphasis on improved abilities to communicate effectively within and outside the classroom. Below are the answers that students wrote that relate to improved comprehension and enhanced skills of communication:

"Helped to raise my standard of communication towards different people and how to treat them."

"Being able to improve my communication skills."

"It improves the academic performance of students by allowing them create content such as presentations, videos and blog posts."

"It help(s) me more on how to speak English language"

"Better understanding of communication skills"

Students appreciated the portability and accessibility of digital texts as one of the gains of reading such texts. Once students have their texts saved on their hardware or access to the internet, they can easily read digital texts. With digital texts, students could move with a lot of texts that is impossible with print documents. *“It is easier to carry a gadget than book”, “Use of digital tools for learning”, “I can read anywhere and anytime”, “digital content can be updated, and it(sic) does not require the(sic) purchase of a new book”, “convenient”, “storage space reduced”, “easy (ease) of access”* are some of the students’ statements that point to the theme categorized as portability and accessibility in this research.

With the practical approach to ELC courses on one hand, students are given written and presentation tasks that require them to conduct research. One of the benefits students identified is that they can learn to conduct research and improve their presentation skills through digital texts. Research is seeking information in an objective manner to provide explanation for a phenomenon or solution to a problem. Students outlined some research-themed benefits as *“effective content searches”, “proper citations”, “utilizing them in research project”,*

On another hand, students’ academic performance improves when they use relevant and appropriate digital texts to conduct research and prepare contents for their presentations. In essence students’ recognition of improvement in academic performance as one of the gains of digital texts is the consequential result of their abilities to conduct research and present their work effectively. Some of the students indicated these themes as follows:

“It improves academic performance.”

“Knowledge that is(sic) up to date.”

“More knowledge and reading ahead.”

“It gives me more knowledge on it.”

“It broadens my knowledge.”

Another theme is self-development. Self-development is a vital benefit listed by the students. Self-development is relevant and critical to students. Students understood that they need to put in personal efforts to develop themselves and a distinct way of achieving this is by reading digital texts. Some students highlighted this benefit by submitting as follows:

"I come across some topics that are not in my handout which may be beneficial to my study".

"Whenever I meet English that I can't understand, I use to find it in Dictionary, and this makes me to understand some of the words that are difficult."

"self-development"

Students also wrote that digital texts enhance their fluency and speed of reading. Responses such as "ability to read", "It help(s) in reading English", "fluency in reading and speed", "improve my reading skills", "ability to communicate in English fluently and fervently", "fluently communicating in English communication skills", are statements that show that students benefit from reading digital texts with improvements.

Also, students can think critically. The critical thinking skill is a learning development skill that is applied to improve thinking (Murawski, 2014). Students could easily think to improve learning when digital resources that could stimulate such are available. Some students responded to the benefits of digital texts by stating that *"It improves my thinking skills", "offers clarity because you can get a wide range of information on a specific field on different digital texts"* which indicates critical thinking skills. Interpersonal skills are enriched through the reading of digital texts as observed by the students. Interpersonal skills such as listening, verbal and nonverbal, negotiation and cross-cultural skills are improved through technologies to manage social interactions and relationships. Statements stated below are indications of interpersonal skills:

"Respect for other's opinions and ideas",

"Get explanation through interaction",

"collaboration",

"Interpersonal skills",

"confidence".

Students are, therefore, evaluated during research presentations and group discussions based on interpersonal skills. No doubt, this benefit is crucial to students.

Visualization of concepts and sustained interest in reading are different themes that imply engagement. Without interest, it will be hard for students to read and comprehend since images or videos help them to read effectively. The fact that students could visualize concepts increases their academic interest. No wonder, students responded by stating *"interesting"*,

“enhance students’ engagement”, “it makes reading and engaging interesting”, “I was able to picture what was being discussed as well as retain the information”. Visualising concepts or ideas is an added advantage of reading digital texts.

Challenges Experienced in Reading Digital Texts

The identified themes generated from students’ challenges in reading digital texts are mainly three. They are student-related, institution-related, tutor-related. Students-related themes are seven, institution-related themes are three, while only one theme is generated as tutor-related.

Student-related Challenges

Complex or new vocabulary is identified as one of the challenges faced by students while using digital texts when studying ELC courses. This is not limited to digital texts as print documents also have complex words. Since technology introduces new words from time to time in the digital space, there is the possibility that new words would appear first online before appearing in print. Most academic materials are first published online and easily accessible online. This access provides an exposure to mass texts and the more texts are available, the more the likelihood for students to come across complex, new, or unfamiliar words. The students itemized *“new sophisticated words”, “vocabulary words that are new”, “difficult terms”, “not being able to pronounce some words”, “pronunciation”* as some of the challenges they experienced while reading digital texts.

Lack of Comprehension is also regarded as a challenge to some of the students. Students in the same class do not share similar mental abilities. So, some students complained as follows:

“Sometimes it is difficult to comprehend the literacy level used.”

“Failure to understand the comprehension”

“Unable to understand and research”

“The challenge is that while reading this, it will get to some point I will not understand again.”

“I don’t always understand it.”

It is noted that students have access to a lot of texts on the internet and inability to use search tools to identify digital texts for their level could result to lack of comprehension. Hence, before addressing the challenge of comprehension, it is beneficial to ask whether students could identify digital texts that are appropriate for their ELC courses.

Students noted that they easily get distracted and lose concentration when reading digital texts. Sentences such as *“sometimes you are distracted”*, *“I get distracted easily”*, *“I sometimes get distracted and swayed”*, *“Lack of concentration and reading on a digital device is distracting”*, *“concentration fades away due to other things that pop up such as ads”* are pieces of evidence that students sometimes get distracted which leads to loss of concentration or engagement while reading digital texts especially through advertisements.

Some of the students noted they could not manage their time while reading digital texts because digital texts are time-consuming. Poor time management is, therefore, identified as one of the challenges. This boils down to self-discipline on the part of the students who easily get distracted and spend a lot of time on other things aside reading digital texts online. Opinions such as *“time-consuming”* and *“limited time to explore more digital texts”* are pointers to poor time management.

Students identified health issues as a student-related problem. Aside issues of screen, other statements are also applicable to reading print texts. Statements such as *“I feel sleepy”*, *“I sometimes have eye problems”*, *“Sleeping, I am a slow learner”*, *“I experience eye problem and headache”*, *“experience neck pains while reading”* are negligible unless students are allergic to the screen of devices used to read digital texts.

Verification of digital texts is a problem to some students. It is either they are not taught how to confirm information sources, or they do not pay attention because statements such as *“wrong information”*, and *“Some sources provide information which is not verified”*, show that such students did not get their information from credible sources.

Institution-related Challenges

The identified institution-related challenges are basically poor internet access, erratic power supply and inadequate digital texts in the library. Students criticized the lack of internet at their institution. They also stated that internet problems generally are a major challenge to accessing and reading digital texts. Some of their comments are *“lack of internet”*, *“sometimes, the internet connectivity is poor”*, *“poor network connection”*, *“sometimes data went(go) off”*, *“internet problems”*. This indicates that the institution did not provide good internet that could help students gain maximally from internet.

Power supply is another challenge for students studying ELC courses. It is noted that this is due to erratic supply of electricity in Nigeria. The onus lies on the institution to provide power through alternative means to enable students to use their digital devices. Some students stated that “need of power”, and “lack of electricity at times serves as a challenge”. Indeed, this is peculiar to the environment and could limit access to digital texts.

Tutor-related Challenge

The only tutor-related challenge that students identified was lack of support or guidance. Aside ELC courses, there is Use of Library, an information literacy course that students are expected to be digitally literate. This course is included in the Academic Literacy course in other institutions such as University of Botswana. The required support that students need to be digitally literate is from both the library tutors and ELC tutors. Some students identified “*lack of teacher support*” and “*inadequate support*” as challenges in accessing and reading digital texts.

Suggested Solutions to the Identified Challenges of Reading Digital Texts

Students had the opportunity to proffer solutions to the challenges they identified. Apparently, students’ experiences helped them to also identify student-related, institution-related, tutor-related, and sources-related solutions.

Students-related Solutions

Students recommended improved time management as a solution to the challenge of poor time management. Specifically, “*creating time*”, and “*create a schedule and stick to it*” are some of the ideas listed in their responses. It is also interesting that students identified regular use of the dictionary as a way of overcoming the challenges associated with difficult or complex words. Expressions such as “*Dictionary use*”, “*by using dictionary*”, and “*Research on challenging words*” are common in the students’ recommendations.

Students recommended being focused as a solution to distraction and other associated challenges. Their statements include but are not limited to “*To always be focused and don’t be distracted*”, “*By focusing while reading and paying attention*”, “*By focusing and listening*”, and “*By reading and get used to the texts*”. There would always be distractions when students

read from the internet except when such texts have been saved on their devices, students need to develop the act of focusing on what they need to read and ignore distractions.

Institution-related Solutions

Students realized that their institution was not providing good internet connection and adequate technology required to access digital texts. Their recommendations include *“getting good connectivity”*, *“Lots of Wifi should be connected”*, *“school should give us more data”*, *“by providing adequate technology(software) for reading digital texts”*, *“improving connectivity of networks”*, *“provision of internets facilities to the students”*, *“And using verified websites which provide digital texts e.g., Google scholar”* and *“provision of data”*. There are office and translation software which are important for students to open and read digital texts. Aside from this, good internet is quite helpful.

Functional e-library is vital to access digital texts. Students recommended that the provision of digital materials and functional library is a solution to the problem of inadequate information or wrong information on some topics in ELC courses. Subscription to reputable databases goes a long way to provide digital texts for students. *“Provision of digital materials”*, and *“Provision of functional library”* are some of the statements made on the solutions to their challenges in reading digital texts.

A stable power supply is a desired solution by the students. Even though the institution provides power from the state grid, alternatives such as solar, generator, and power banks could serve the students. Students’ suggestions are stated thus:

“standby electricity supply in the school area”

“provision of power banks”

“providing power banks”

Students are mindful of irregular supply of electricity, and they desire some support from the institution through a standby alternative and provision of power banks so that they can charge their digital devices and use them to read digital texts.

Tutor-related Solutions

Students, despite the level of higher education, still felt that tutor-guidance is required to

maximize the benefits from reading digital texts. The students mentioned that they need “access to lecturers’ support”, and “knowledge on texts-search through verified websites”. Other suggestions are stated accordingly:

“Being able to refer to the lecturer alone and ask questions...”

“Mentioning of sources fully, especially videos and audios”

“I would ask for helps from lecturers”

“I need a tutor”

“To know how to search for difficult words and know the meaning”

Students still expect much support from the lecturers even at the level of higher learning. Some want the lecturers to provide more information about digital texts that they need to read. Therefore, their suggestions indicate their expectations that have not been met by their lecturers.

Sources-related Solutions

Students indicated that there is the need for improvements on sources of digital texts. First, there should be channels to provide feedback on digital texts. In fact, one of the identified solutions, “there should be a way to communicate one on one with the writer/author of the text” is on feedback. Other solutions border on content and language. These are “*using words that are understandable, simple language by content creators*”, “*provide simpler meanings*”. Changing the contents of digital texts by the authors may be difficult but students’ responses could help lecturers make informed decisions about recommended digital texts for students of ELC.

Findings

From the quantitative data analysis and discussion, it is evident from Figure 1 that all the students have read digital texts in at least one ELC course. Also, Figure 2 shows that students ELC students read different types of digital texts differently. Students always read the types of digital texts at 20.6% for unimodal, 30.4% for multimodal and 34.3% for intertexts. Also, students sometimes read digital texts at 71.6% for unimodal, 63.7% for multimodal and 59.8% for inter-texts. Nevertheless, 7.8% of the students for unimodal, 5.9% of the students for

multimodal and another 5.9% of the students for intertexts, hardly read digital texts. This indicated that there were students who hardly read digital texts, though few, as more than 90% of the students read digital texts always or sometimes. Students found multimodal texts to be the most beneficial texts in their ELC courses at 65.7%, followed by unimodal texts at 19.6% while 14.7% indicated that inter-texts are most beneficial.

The students identified benefits and they are relevant for communicative competence and academic development. These are in line with the objective of ELC courses. Objective 2 of this research was to identify students' gains, and these are better comprehension, improved vocabulary and communication skills, portability and accessibility, research and presentation skills, improvement of academic performance, self-development, critical thinking skills, interpersonal skills, fluency and speed of reading, academic interest, and visualization of concepts.

The challenges identified by the students are peculiar to the students except for internet, power, inadequate texts, and inadequate support from tutors. On the identified challenges, one of the responses is "they are just personal, I have to work on them". This confirms that students know their general weaknesses. In essence, they are aware that most of the challenges border on their individual abilities and behavioral patterns, and they are also in the best position to identify ways of overcoming them. Objective 3 was to identify the students' challenges in using digital texts towards probable solutions. These challenges are categorized as student-related, institution-related, and source-related. Students identified complex or new words, lack of comprehension, distraction, poor time management, health issues and verification of sources as challenges they experienced while reading digital texts. For the institution, there are the challenges of poor internet access, erratic power supply and inadequate digital texts. Furthermore, lack of support or guidance from tutors was identified as the only challenge from tutors. This aligns with the position of Sage, et al. (2019) on the need to ascertain the educational value of digital texts because unique drawbacks are observed in its usage.

To fulfil Objective 3, students made suggestions that were also categorized. These suggestions include proper time management, regular use of the dictionary, and being focused for students; provisions of good internet, constant power supply and functional e-library by the institution;

proper guidance by the tutors; and feedback, improved language, and contents for digital texts.

From the findings, one could ask a question on why students at higher education level still need the guidance of tutors in reading. Then, the answer is that lecturers need to teach students how to read and understand digital texts so that they become less complex for the students because Natalini & Orecchio (2020) make a call for the expansion of texts to include different modes so that students can benefit maximally and appreciate them. Also, there is evidence that teachers' attitudes and knowledge of digital texts influences students to read them too (Laeli, Setiawan & Anam, 2020). Hence, there is the need for new ways of teaching not only reading but digital reading at the level of higher education. This is in tandem with Pardede's (2019) argument that digital texts need new ways of learning and teaching.

Conclusion

The types of digital texts are relevant for different ideas that could enhance ELC learning. The variety of learning materials for students could help address issues of boredom and distraction since there is a variety of digital texts on the same idea or topic. Leveraging on different modes of texts for learning enhances students' academic achievements.

The conclusion is premised on the position that teaching students to read digital texts should align with their competence and acquired skills in ELC courses (Ratovskaya, 2020), because digital literacy skills are critical or relevant skills required in the 21st century irrespective of students' career choices. It is quite apt that students are aware of the benefits even with their identified inadequacies. This invaluable awareness will go a long way in influencing students' behaviors and attitudes towards the reading of digital texts.

Also, from the students' responses, it is noted that students' pre-admission competence in digital literacy skills are underestimated and therefore, this concern deserves attention as there are students with limited access to digital texts before gaining admission. These students will need extra support because they are not familiar with the medium of digital texts or inaccessibility of the source before they can effectively read digital texts to enhance their academic success in ELC courses.

Moreover, students showed positive attitudes towards digital texts which signify a successful

future of teaching and learning through digital texts. Previous studies have shown that teachers also have positive attitudes towards digital texts (Laeli et al., 2020). Therefore, digital literacy is the new literacy that teachers and institutions should not only embrace but support with the required and identified resources by the students as consumers of knowledge in new literacy.

Funding

There is no funding for the research. All financial implications are borne by the author.

References

- Al-Mousawi, S. A. (2020) English language materials development: Text-driven framework as an approach. *English Language Teaching*; 13(11):40-48.
- Arshad, A. Shah, S.K & Ahmad, M. (2020) Investigating cultural contents in English language teaching materials through textbook evaluation, *Pakistan Journal of Language and Cultural Education*, 8(2):127-145, DOI: 10.2478/jolace-2020-0017
- Awayed-Bishara, M. (2015) Analyzing the cultural content of materials used for teaching English to high school speakers of Arabic in Isreal, *Discourse & Society* 2015, Vol. 26(5) 517–542, Doi: 10.1177/0957926515581154
- Chen, R.J (2021) fostering students' workplace communicative competence and collaborative mindset through an inquiry-based learning design, *Education Sciences*, 11(17):1-3. Doi.org/10.3390/educsci11010017
- Darvenkumar, D & Devi, V. A (2022) Text-Based game — A tool to enhance critical reading and critical thinking skills in English classrooms. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 12(11): 2298-2306.
- Farias M. & Veliz L. (2019) Multimodal texts in Chilean English teaching education: experiences from educators and pre-service teachers. *Issues Teach. Prof. Dev* 21(2): 13-27.
- Inamorato dos Santos, A., Chinkes, E., Carvalho, M. A. G., Solórzano, C. M. V., & Marroni, L. S. (2023). The digital competence of academics in higher education: Is the glass half empty or half full? *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*, 20(9):1-25. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41239-022-00376-0>
- Jonassen, D., Davidson, M, Collins, M., Campbell, J., & Haag, B.B. (1995) Constructivism and computer-mediated communication in distance education. *American Journal of Distance Education*, 9(2), 7-26, DOI: 10.1080/0892364950950956885
- Kamalvand, A. & Khany, R. (2022) 100 years of research on English language learning/teaching materials: A systematic literature review, *The Electronic Journal for English as a Second Language* 25(4): 1-27.
- Kress, G., & Leeuwen, T.V. (2020). *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (3rd ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003099857>
- Laeli, Setiawan & Anam (2020) Reading digital text as a new literacy in ELT: Teachers' perception & practices. *English Teaching Learning and Research Journal*, 6(2):312-327.

Li, Y., Peng, Y., Zhang, X., Lyu, B., Zhang, X., Ji, Y., Liu, Y., Yang, L., Peng, Z., Chen, J., & Zhao, L. (2023) Evaluation of unimodal and multimodal information in health communication on GGO-related lung cancer screening: An eye-tracking study. *Journal of Cancer Research and Therapeutics*.19 (1), 124–131. DOI: 10.4103/jcrt.jcrt_2013_22

Manalu B. H. (2019) Students' perception of digital texts reading: A case study at the English Education Department of Universitas Kristen Indonesia. *Journal of English Teaching* 5 (3): 192-203 DOI:10.33541/jet.v5i3.1312

Mason, L., Tarchi, C., Ronconi, A., Manzione, L., Latini, N., & Brâte, I (2022) Do medium and Context Matter when learning from multiple complementary digital texts and videos? *Instructional Science* 50:653–679 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11251-022-09591-8>

Mills, K. et al. (2023) *Literacy for Digital Futures: Mind, Body, Text*. New York; Routledge.

Murawski, L. M. (2014) Critical thinking in the classroom...and beyond. *Journal of Learning in Higher Education*, Volume 10(1): 25-30.

Natalini, A., & Orecchio, F. (2022). Reading and understanding printed and digital texts: Towards a semiotically integrated didactics. *Formazione & Insegnamento*, 20(3), 265–284. https://doi.org/10.7346/-fei-XX-03-22_20

Pardede, P. (2019) Print vs digital reading comprehension in EFL. *Journal of English Teaching*, Volume 5 (2), 77-90. DOI: 10.33541/jet.v5i2.1059

Rathert, S & Cabaroğlu, N (2022) Theorising textbook adaptation in English language teaching. *CEPS Journal* 12(2): 169-188, DOI: 10.26529/cepsj.1287

Ratovskaya, S.V. (2020), *Teaching University Students to Read Digital Texts in English*, CEUR-WS.org/vol-2834/Paper31.pdf, 364-373, last accessed on 1st June 2023.

Sage, K., Augustine, H., Shand, H., Bakner, K. & Rayne, S. (2019). Reading from print, computer, and tablet: Equivalent learning in the digital age. *Educ Inf Technol* 24, 2477–2502. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-019-09887-2>

Saleem, A. Kausar, H. & Deebea, F. (2021). Social Constructivism: A new paradigm in teaching and learning environment. *Perennial Journal of History*, 2(2), 403-421. <https://doi.org/10.52700/pjh.v2i2.86>

Seaman J.E & Seaman J. (2021) *Digital Texts in the Time of COVID Educational Resources in U.S. Higher Education*. Bay View Analytics.

Segura-Bedmar, I., & Alonso-Bartolome, S. (2022) Multimodal Fake News Detection. *Information*, 13 (6):284. <https://doi.org/10.3390/info13060284>

Vocabulary.com Dictionary Homepage, <https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/>, last accessed on 20th September 2022.

von Glasersfeld, E. (2001) The radical constructivist view of science. In A. Riegler (Ed.), *Foundations of Science*, special issue on "The Impact of Radical Constructivism on Science", 6, 1-3: 31–43.

Walker, S., Black, A., Bessemans, A., Bormans, K., Renckens, M. & Barratt, M. (2018) Designing digital texts for beginner readers: performance, practice, and process. In: Barzillai, M., Thomson, J. M., Schroeder, S. and Broek, P. W. v. d. (eds.) *Learning to Read in a Digital World: Studies in Written Language and Literacy* (17). John Benjamins, Amsterdam, pp. 31-56. DOI: 10.1075/swll.17.02wal

Weber, L. (2019) *Digital Texts and Engagement in 2nd Grade*, An unpublished master's paper in the Department of Science Education, University of Wisconsin.

Weninger, C. (2020). Digital literacy and English language teaching: Promises, pitfalls and potentials. In Y. Leung (Ed), *Selected papers from the twenty-ninth International Symposium on English Teaching*. Taipei: English Teachers' Association-ROC.

Xia, L. & Huiyang, Z. (2022) A text detection and recognition algorithm for English teaching based on deep learning. *Hindawi: Scientific Programming*, 1-8. DOI:10.1155/2022/1287979