

TEACHERS' PERCEPTION ON THE INTEGRATION OF DIGITAL LITERACY IN TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE (TEFL)

Silvia Putri¹, Fauziah², Zaiturrahmi³

^{1,2,3}English Education Department, Universitas Jabal Ghafur, Sigli

*Corresponding author: silviaputri091217@gmail.com, fziah05@yahoo.com, zaiturrahmi@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study explores EFL teachers' perceptions in integrating digital literacy into TEFL. As technology becomes increasingly vital in education, understanding how teachers adopt digital tools is essential. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis involving four English teachers. The findings reveal that teachers generally have a positive perception of digital literacy, recognizing its potential to enhance student engagement, improve language skills, and connect with students' digital habits. The study concludes that integrating digital literacy effectively requires supportive policies, reliable infrastructure, and continuous professional development.

Keywords: Digital literacy; EFL; teachers; TEFL; teacher perception; educational technology

1. Introduction

The rapid evolution of technology in the 21st century has reshaped many aspects of daily life, including the field of education. As digital tools and platforms increasingly permeate the learning process, digital literacy has emerged as a key competency for both teachers and students. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), the integration of digital literacy is not merely a pedagogical trend but a necessity. Teachers are now expected not only to master language teaching methods but also to integrate digital tools that align with students' digital lifestyles and global communication needs.

Digital literacy is broadly defined as the ability to access, evaluate, use, and create information through digital technologies. It includes technical, cognitive, ethical, and communicative competencies (Ifenthaler et al, 2021; Martínez-Bravo et al, 2022). For EFL teachers, digital literacy means more than knowing how to operate technological devices—it involves the ability to select, adapt, and apply digital tools meaningfully to support language learning outcomes (Feng & Sumettikoon, 2024). In EFL classrooms, digital literacy enables interactive learning through online platforms, enhances student engagement, and provides access to authentic language materials that are essential for developing communicative competence.

Numerous studies support the integration of digital technology in language teaching. Gao et al (2022) and Wang et al (2023) argue that digital tools can increase learners' motivation and improve language skills when used appropriately. Similarly, Guo et al (2023) highlight how multimedia and online platforms foster collaborative learning, critical thinking, and creativity.

Furthermore, digital storytelling, online quizzes, video content, and platforms like Google Classroom or Canva allow students to interact with materials in dynamic and personalized ways (Jordan et al, 2023).

There is also a tension between the ideal of digital integration and the practical realities faced by teachers. Some studies suggest that teachers may over-rely on basic tools like PowerPoint or YouTube without truly transforming their teaching practices (Ding et al. 2019). Others point out that digital literacy initiatives often focus more on students, overlooking the crucial role of teacher perceptions and readiness (Tondeur et al, 2019). These gaps reveal a need to understand how teachers themselves perceive, experience, and adapt to the digital shift in education—especially in underrepresented contexts such as rural or resource-constrained schools.

In Indonesia, the integration of digital literacy into TEFL is gaining attention but still faces structural and pedagogical hurdles. Despite national efforts to digitize education, schools in rural areas often lack reliable internet, functional multimedia equipment, and digital training programs for teachers (Pratolo et al., 2023; Cornelia & Sulistyaningrum, 2024). Nevertheless, many teachers continue to show resilience and innovation by using offline methods, self-learning, and accessible platforms like WhatsApp to deliver instruction.

This study was motivated by the need to better understand teachers' voices in the digital transformation of education. By focusing on teachers' lived experiences, this study aims to contribute to the academic discussion on digital pedagogy and provide practical insights for teacher training, educational policy, and curriculum design.

To frame this inquiry, the research adopts a qualitative case study approach, examining four EFL teachers through interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. This method allows for an in-depth understanding of the contextual factors that shape teachers' perceptions and practices. The study is guided by three research questions:

1. What are EFL teachers' perceptions of integrating digital literacy into English language teaching?

In sum, this study seeks to understand how EFL teachers perceive and enact the integration of digital literacy in their professional practice, especially in the face of infrastructural, institutional, and pedagogical constraints. The core argument is that while digital literacy is widely recognized as essential, its successful implementation in TEFL requires systemic support, teacher agency, and ongoing professional development. By examining teachers' voices and actions, this article aims to illuminate the practical realities of digital transformation in EFL classrooms and advocate for more inclusive and sustainable digital education practices.

2. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore EFL teachers' perceptions, challenges, and strategies in integrating digital literacy into classroom instruction. The approach allowed for in-depth investigation of teachers' lived experiences in their natural teaching contexts.

The research was conducted at two senior high schools in Pidie District, Aceh, Indonesia, over a two-month period from February to March 2025. The study involved four English teachers, selected through purposive sampling based on their experience in integrating digital tools in teaching. The participants, anonymized as Teacher A, B, C, and D, varied in years of experience and technological familiarity.

Table 1 Participants' Demographic Data

No	pseudonym	Teaching experiences	School	Total students	Grade
1.	Teacher A	1 years	1	22	11
2.	Teacher B	1 years	1	20	11
3.	Teacher C	2 years	2	28	11
4.	Teacher D	3 years	2	20	11,12

Data were collected using three techniques: semi-structured interviews. Each teacher participated in an in-depth interview lasting between 30 and 45 minutes. The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions focused on the teachers' understanding of digital literacy, their experiences using digital tools. Probing questions were used to elicit further clarification and reflection. All interviews were conducted in Indonesian, audio-recorded with consent, and later transcribed and translated for analysis. Participants were given the opportunity to review transcripts for accuracy as part of the member checking process.

Data interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework: familiarization, coding, theme identification, reviewing, defining, and reporting. This method allowed recurring patterns to be categorized into themes aligned with the study's research questions. To ensure credibility and trustworthiness, data triangulation was applied across the three methods. Member checking was conducted to validate interview data, and peer consultation helped refine theme development. Thick descriptions and reflexive journaling were also used to enhance transparency and rigor. This methodological approach provided a comprehensive understanding of how EFL teachers engage with digital literacy in real-world settings and how they respond to the challenges of digital integration in language teaching.

3. Finding and Discussion

This study aimed to explore English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers' perceptions, challenges, and strategies in integrating digital literacy into their classroom practices. Data were gathered from four teachers through interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. Thematic analysis revealed three overarching themes: (1) positive perceptions of digital literacy, (2) implementation challenges, and (3) strategies to overcome challenges. Each theme is elaborated below with supporting data and discussion.

3.1. EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Digital Literacy Integration in TEFL

The four of EFL teachers who were respondents in this study had positive perceptions towards the integration of digital literacy in English language teaching, realizing the important role in the digital era, the importance of increasing student engagement and motivation, direct support for language skills development, the need for Teacher competence and adaptation and technology as an integral component of modern Teaching. This positive outlook was deeply rooted in their awareness of the current technological era and the evolving needs of Gen Z students.

3.2 Recognition of Indispensable Importance in the Digital Era

EFL teachers generally acknowledge the importance of digital literacy. They perceive it as an essential element of modern education, particularly in the current digital era where technology is pervasive. Like Teacher A explicitly stated that:

"English is closely related to technology" and that "digital is very important because now is the era of technology, especially in the field of education, there are so many features that can be used".

This statement supported by Teacher B, who emphasized that:

"Digital literacy is very important, especially in the digital era, they must understand technology, not be outdated."

This strong perception stems from the understanding that students today were digital natives, and teaching methods must adapt to their technologically-driven world to remain relevant and effective. Teacher C highlights this by stated:

"If we use technology, the response so far has been very positive because now it's already the AI generation."

This statement reflects the teachers' awareness that today's students, who grow up in a digital environment, often require engaging and interactive learning settings. The teacher believed that neglecting digital literacy would create a "gap" between students' technological understanding and traditional teaching methods.

3.3 Enhanced Student Engagement and Motivation

A key aspect of teachers' positive perception is the belief that digital literacy significantly enhances student engagement and motivation. Teachers observed that modern students, particularly Gen Z, were easily bored by conventional teaching methods that lack visual or interactive elements.

Teacher D also emphasized the practical importance of integrating technology in EFL learning, explaining that:

"It is very important to incorporate technology into EFL learning because students nowadays get bored easily."

Digital tools and platforms were seen as vital for capturing and maintaining students' attention, making learning more dynamic and appealing. The interactive nature of digital resources prevents boredom and encourages active participation, which is crucial for effective language acquisition.

3.4. Direct Support for Language Skill Development

EFL teachers perceived digital literacy as a powerful tool that directly supports the development of all four core English language skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. For reading, platforms like Readworks provide varied articles and interactive questions, making the process more engaging and providing immediate feedback. In terms of speaking and listening, teachers highlight the benefit of authentic audio and visual materials. Teacher A and D both mentioned:

“That with digital learning, students can watch videos, listen to native speakers, and imitate accents and pronunciations more easily, leading to clearer pronunciation and a better understanding of spoken English.”

Teacher D specifically stated: “It can really support, for example, for reading it is very clear, then for speaking, for example, children can more easily see directly what they mean, they watch videos and then they imitate the accent, their pronunciation. So, they did not just listen to the teacher but can also learn through technology.”

This ability to provide contextual and authentic language input is highly valued by the teachers, as it exposed students to real-world language use that might otherwise be unavailable in their local environment. Teacher B further reinforces this, stated that:

“Digital literacy is all used in English, in speaking, reading, listening, writing.”

Teacher C also mentioned specific platforms and tools frequently used to support language learning. For instance, students often watch YouTube videos to improve listening and pronunciation; they submit assignments via Google Forms; use Canva to edit and design written texts; and frequently use infocus projectors and PowerPoint to present their ideas in class. These tools make learning more interactive, accessible, and aligned with students' digital habits.

Teachers utilized various digital platforms to enhance listening and speaking skills, such as using videos, podcasts, or voice recording applications to provide real-life language exposure and opportunities for oral practice.

3.5 Necessity for Teacher Competence and Adaptation

Teachers recognized that for digital literacy to be effectively integrated, they themselves must possess strong digital literacy skills. Teacher A emphasized that:

“The most important thing is that we must first have digital literacy so that we can apply digital technology in class.”

Then Teacher C explained that:

"Teachers must learn, adapt, provide learning experiences according to their current world" and "we must be able to use technology, do not let students be more proficient in using technology than teachers."

This idea was further supported by another teacher who stated: "The most relevant aspect is the use of technology. I need to learn first, for example, whether this tool is suitable to be applied to this particular material or not."

This statement emphasizes that teachers are not only aware of the importance of mastering digital tools, but also actively reflect on their pedagogical appropriateness, showing a thoughtful approach to integration rather than mere usage.

This perception highlighted a self-awareness among teachers regarding the need for continuous professional development to keep pace with technological advancements and to effectively guide students in the digital learning environment. They understand that their own digital competence is the foundation for successful technology integration in the classroom.

3.6 Technology as an Integral Component of Modern Teaching

Beyond merely being a supportive tool, digital literacy is increasingly perceived as an integral and indispensable component of modern teaching methodologies and assignments. Teacher C believed:

"Technology is not just a tool, but it has become the core of the teaching and assignment process, and it strongly supported the improvement of digital literacy for both teachers and students."

This perception signifies a shift from viewing technology as an optional add-on to considering it a fundamental aspect of contemporary pedagogical practice. The pervasive used of digital tools for all aspects of teaching, from delivering content to collecting assignment, solidified this view.

The teacher utilized YouTube Shorts, a platform that students were already familiar with, to create a more accessible and relatable learning environment. This strategy aligned with students' digital habits and made the English lesson more engaging and relevant to their daily lives.

Then picture 4.4, 4.5 and 4.6 above, presented the result of document analysis collected from Teacher C, it showed the teacher's effort in implementing digital tools in the classroom and enhancing student engagement in learning English through the use of technology. Furthermore, this activity reflected the principles of digital literacy, which emphasized the use of digital tools for effective communication, creativity, and self-expression in educational settings.

4. Conclusion and suggestion

This study concluded that EFL teachers perceive digital literacy as an essential component of modern English language teaching. They believed that the integration of digital tools not only enhances student engagement, but also supports the development of language skills and aligns

with the learning preferences of contemporary learners. Teachers recognized that digital literacy is no longer a supplementary skill, but rather a core element of effective and relevant pedagogy in the digital era.

1. For Teachers:

Teachers are encouraged to continuously improve their digital literacy through training, workshops, and self-learning in order to design more engaging and effective English lessons.

2. For Schools and Institutions

Schools should provide strong infrastructure support such as stable internet access, multimedia equipment, and flexible policies that allow the use of technology in the classroom. Regular digital literacy training is also essential to enhance teacher competence.

3. For Future Researchers

It is suggested that future research explore student perspectives, compare the effectiveness of various digital tools, or examine digital literacy integration across different educational levels to gain broader and deeper insights.

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