

DIGITAL LITERACY IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW ON TEACHER COMPETENCIES AND STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

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Abstract:

This systematic literature review investigates the integration of digital literacy in English Language Teaching (ELT), with a specific focus on teacher digital competencies and their impact on student engagement. Despite the proliferation of digital tools in education, there remains a lack of comprehensive studies that examine the dual influence of teacher readiness and learner responsiveness in ELT classrooms. Guided by the PRISMA 2020 framework, this review synthesizes 38 peer-reviewed articles published between 2015 and 2025 from major academic databases including Scopus and Google Scholar. Thematic analysis revealed three major themes: (1) the importance of teacher digital competencies, such as the application of TPACK and SAMR models; (2) the role of digital pedagogy in enhancing behavioral, cognitive, and affective engagement among EFL learners; and (3) the presence of enabling and inhibiting factors in digital integration, including infrastructure, training, and policy support. The findings emphasize that teacher digital literacy significantly influences the quality and effectiveness of language instruction. Teachers who are digitally proficient are better able to design interactive, learner-centered digital learning experiences. This review contributes to a more holistic understanding of how digital literacy shapes teaching and learning in ELT and offers strategic insights for policymakers, educators, and curriculum developers in promoting engaging, technology-rich instruction.

Keywords: Digital Literacy, Teacher Competencies, Student Engagement, English Language Teaching (ELT)

INTRODUCTION

The advancement of digital technologies has significantly transformed the educational landscape, especially in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT). As digital tools and platforms become increasingly integrated into formal and informal learning environments, the role of teachers has shifted from traditional knowledge transmitters to facilitators of digital literacy and learning innovation. Digital literacy itself is no longer a supplementary skill but a core competency essential for both educators and learners in the 21st century. Calvani et al. (2021) describe digital literacy as a multidimensional construct that includes technological skills, cognitive competencies, and ethical awareness—each of which is critical for effective participation in digitally mediated learning environments.

The integration of digital technologies in ELT offers vast opportunities to enhance language learning processes, from personalized instruction and multimedia resources to collaborative tools that transcend geographical boundaries (Andriyani et al., 2022; Wahyuni & Pratiwi, 2021). However, these advancements also present substantial challenges, particularly regarding the preparedness of teachers to utilize technology effectively. Teachers are expected to possess digital competencies that go beyond technical proficiency. They must understand how to adapt digital tools to pedagogical strategies, align them with language learning objectives, and engage students in meaningful, interactive learning experiences. Frameworks such as TPACK (Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge) and SAMR (Substitution, Augmentation, Modification, Redefinition) are widely referenced in the literature to conceptualize and assess such competencies (Davies & West, 2014; Basuki et al., 2020).

In parallel, student engagement in digital learning environments has become a critical concern in ELT. Engagement is a multifaceted construct that includes behavioral participation, emotional involvement, and cognitive investment in learning tasks. As Setiamurti et al. (2023) note, digital platforms have the potential to foster higher levels of student engagement, provided that the learning experiences are well-designed, interactive, and responsive to learners' needs and preferences. Moreover, Anggeraini et al. (2023) argue that engagement increases when students are empowered with digital tools that allow autonomy and creativity.

Despite the growing body of literature on digital literacy in education, few systematic reviews have attempted to analyze how teacher digital competencies specifically influence student engagement in ELT settings (Haryanto et al., 2022). Most existing studies either focus exclusively on teacher training or examine student motivation without considering the pedagogical strategies employed. This siloed approach limits the understanding of how these variables interact in real-world classrooms. Therefore, this study seeks to bridge that gap by conducting a systematic review that integrates both perspectives: teacher digital competencies and student engagement.

This review has three main objectives. First, it aims to identify the core digital competencies required by ELT teachers in the digital age. Second, it explores how these competencies influence the different dimensions of student engagement in English language learning. Third, it seeks to map out current research trends and methodologies in the field, offering insights into the direction of future studies. By addressing these objectives, this review contributes to a more holistic understanding of digital literacy in ELT and provides practical implications for teacher education, curriculum design, and educational policy.

In sum, understanding the interplay between teacher readiness and student responsiveness in digital ELT environments is essential for maximizing the benefits of technology in language education (Pratiwi et al., 2021). This paper argues that only by equipping teachers with the necessary digital competencies and pedagogical frameworks can schools create engaging and effective learning experiences that align with the demands of 21st-century education.

METHODS

This study employed a systematic literature review design guided by the PRISMA 2020 (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework (Page et al., 2021). This methodology was selected for its structured, transparent, and replicable approach to identifying, screening, and synthesizing relevant studies from a wide range of academic sources. The review focused on literature that examines the interplay between teacher digital competencies and student engagement within the field of English Language Teaching (ELT).

Eligibility Criteria

To ensure relevance and quality, strict inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied. Included studies met the following conditions: (1) published between 2015 and 2025 to capture the most recent trends and technological shifts; (2) written in English; (3) published in peer-reviewed journals or as proceedings from reputable international conferences; and (4) focused on topics such as digital literacy, teacher professional competencies, student engagement, and technology integration in the context of ELT or English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Excluded were dissertations, editorials, opinion pieces, non-peer-reviewed reports, and articles that did not address the intersection of teacher digital competencies and learner engagement (Ramadhani et al., 2021).

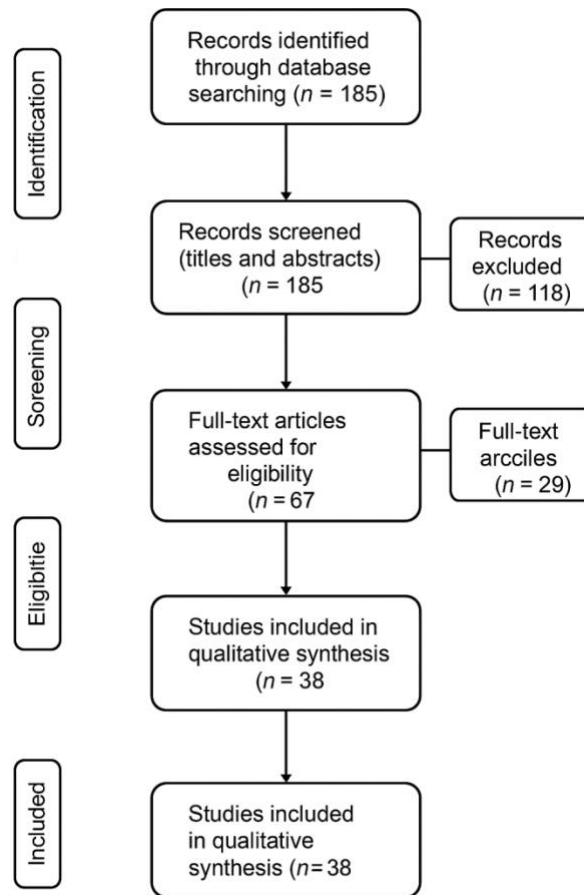
Database Search and Strategy

A comprehensive literature search was conducted across four major academic databases: Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC (Education Resources Information Center), and Google Scholar. These databases were chosen due to their broad coverage of educational and interdisciplinary publications (Simamora et al., 2022). The search was conducted using a combination of controlled vocabulary and Boolean operators to maximize retrieval efficiency.

The keywords used in various permutations included: "digital literacy", "teacher digital competencies", "student engagement", "ELT", "EFL", "technology integration in education".

Screening and Selection Process

The initial search yielded a total of 185 articles. After removing duplicates and reviewing titles and abstracts, 67 articles remained. These were further assessed for eligibility through full-text review, resulting in 38 articles that met all inclusion criteria. The screening process followed the PRISMA four-stage flow: identification, screening, eligibility, and final inclusion (Suwandi et al., 2022).



Data Extraction and Thematic Analysis

Data extraction was conducted using a structured coding sheet developed by the authors. Information extracted included: author(s), year of publication, study location, research design, participants, main findings, and relevance to teacher digital competencies and student engagement (Utami et al., 2023).

Thematic analysis was used to synthesize data from the selected studies. This qualitative analysis technique allowed the identification of recurring themes and patterns across diverse research designs and educational contexts. Three major thematic categories were established:

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Theme 1: Teacher Digital Competencies

Across the studies analyzed, a recurring emphasis was placed on the essential nature of teacher digital competencies. While early conceptions of ICT integration focused on technical proficiency, more recent research has shifted toward pedagogical frameworks that enable transformative digital teaching (Basuki et al., 2020; Huda et al., 2023). Notably, the TPACK and SAMR models were frequently cited as guiding frameworks. Davies and West (2014) emphasized that teachers must not only be familiar with technology but also integrate it meaningfully into the learning process to enhance cognitive engagement and communicative competence in ELT.

Professional development emerged as a key mechanism for building these competencies (Pratiwi et al., 2021). Some studies revealed that continuous support and peer collaboration are crucial for sustaining teacher motivation and experimentation with digital pedagogy (Syamsudin & Fajri, 2020).

Theme 2: Student Engagement

Student engagement in digital learning contexts was examined through three dimensions: behavioral, cognitive, and affective. Studies consistently found that the highest engagement levels occurred in environments where teachers employed interactive, project-based learning activities, game-based tasks, or multimedia-enhanced content (Anggeraini et al., 2023). Wahyuni & Pratiwi (2021) confirmed that contextual and relevant content—especially when matched with students’ interests—increased emotional and cognitive involvement.

Theme 3: Challenges and Enablers

Despite the potential benefits, the review also uncovered significant barriers to the successful integration of digital technologies in ELT. Calvani et al. (2021) noted persistent issues such as limited access to digital infrastructure, inadequate technical support, and insufficient training opportunities. Similar challenges were reported by Haryanto et al. (2022), who found that many schools lack systematic plans for digital implementation. Conversely, studies by Ramadhani et al. (2021) and Suwandi et al. (2022) suggest that effective leadership and institutional support can counteract these limitations.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this systematic literature review underscore the critical role of teacher digital literacy in shaping student engagement within ELT. In an increasingly digitized educational landscape, teachers are not only expected to master digital tools but also to apply them strategically within pedagogical frameworks that enhance student interaction, motivation, and learning outcomes (Basuki et al., 2020; Huda et al., 2023).

The relationship between teacher readiness and student participation is not coincidental but deeply interconnected. Teachers who demonstrate high levels of digital fluency are more likely to adopt interactive methodologies, integrate multimedia resources, and respond flexibly to the evolving needs of their learners (Syamsudin & Fajri, 2020). Thus, teacher competence functions as both a predictor and facilitator of successful digital integration in ELT settings (Utami et al., 2023).

Moreover, the study emphasizes that digital literacy should not be viewed solely as a technical skill but as a pedagogical and reflective practice (Wahyuni & Pratiwi, 2021). Institutional support—including access to digital infrastructure, sustained mentoring, and visionary leadership—is also crucial in enabling this transformation (Suwandi et al., 2022).

In light of these conclusions, it is recommended that educational institutions, policymakers, and curriculum developers prioritize the development of comprehensive digital training models for ELT educators. Such efforts will ensure that teachers are not only technologically equipped but also pedagogically empowered to enhance student engagement and language acquisition through meaningful digital practices (Ramadhani et al., 2021; Simamora et al., 2022).

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