



Shifting Reading Habits: The Role of Digital Resources in Improving Vocabulary for College Students

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Abstract

Students' reading habits as well as their vocabulary development show gradual changes because of the increased adoption of digital technology. The research investigates digital resource effects on these changes by examining final-year English education students from Universitas Swadaya Gunung Jati Cirebon. A qualitative descriptive research design involved questionnaire and interview data collection methodologies to obtain more accurate and in-depth findings. Students can achieve greater vocabulary development through digital resources, which include mobile apps alongside e-books and online articles, because these resources deliver enhanced reading material accessibility, allowing learners to engage with texts more frequently and in more diverse contexts. The majority of 74% of participants experienced productive vocabulary growth because digital resources help them recognize new words easily and repeatedly in various settings. The survey participants noted that digital resources enabled both better flexibility when reading and increased reading sessions due to the convenience and user-friendliness of such platforms. Therefore, structure common prey-worth resources with curriculum needs to foster improved reading behaviours, which result in higher language advancement for students and support their long-term academic success in English language learning.

Keywords: Digital resources, Reading habits, Vocabulary development, Language learning

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INTRODUCTION

The digital era has brought rapid changes in how people access and engage with reading materials. In the past, students relied on printed books, newspapers, and magazines, often reading in libraries or specific study areas. The habit has changed significantly today, as we have incorporated smartphone use, tablets, and laptops in our everyday activities. Digital technologies provide unlimited and effortless access to different forms of reading, such as academic journals, multimedia creations, or any other form of reading; thus, it is the most used method of reading by most students. The facility of digital access in the

form of e-books, articles served online, and interactive websites also introduces a convenient way and a cost-effective solution to replace classic methods of reading. The students use more than just academic tools to achieve success: they use them to develop as a person and learn unofficially, which means a shift in the sphere and the aim of modern reading.

The digital reading tools have varied forms that aid in academic growth and development in the form of interactive e-books, academic e-journals, multimedia, and online databases such as JSTOR and ScienceDirect (Kumara & Sampath Kumar, n.d.). These modules make them more accessible and usable, especially to students who have varied learning styles. In particular, videos, podcasts, and animations can be used by visual and auditory learners who will simplify complex information (Abang Yusof, 2021). Additionally, digital content platforms favor students by stimulating critical thinking and enriching their awareness of what is going on (Mirza et al., 2021).

At the same time, digital platforms such as Coursera and edX provide access to massive open online courses (MOOCs) that expand learning opportunities beyond the classroom (Cull, 2011). Educational tools like Mendeley, Zotero, and Google Drive also allow students to store and organize reading materials effectively (Kalsoom et al., n.d.).

As digital platforms become increasingly embedded in everyday life, student reading habits shift accordingly. The expansion of e-learning, mobile connectivity, and online services makes information more accessible than ever (Atayeva et al., 2019). However, while digital platforms offer convenience and variety, they may also alter students' reading patterns, affecting frequency, attention span, and format preferences (Packialakshmi et al., 2021)

Reading does not become a habit unless it is done consistently and critically. Habitual reading is typically measured by how often students read, how much material they consume, and how much time they dedicate to it (Alsaeedi et al., 2021). Digital reading may also affect vocabulary development by providing features such as built-in dictionaries, pronunciation tools, and interactive exercises (Zhu et al., 2024). In fact, mobile apps and digital flashcards have been shown to enhance vocabulary memorization more effectively than traditional approaches (Xodabande et al., 2022); (Zarrati et al., 2024)

Preliminary findings from a survey conducted in early 2025 support this growing trend. The majority of university students reported daily use of digital reading resources, whereas printed book reading occurred significantly less often. Most respondents had started using digital resources as early as 2015, indicating a long-term shift in reading habits. These findings validate the urgency to study how digital resources shape reading behaviours and vocabulary development.

However, research examining the combined effect of digital reading on both reading behaviour and vocabulary growth remains limited. Previous studies often isolate these variables or focus on general motivation. This research addresses that gap by investigating the relationship between digital reading patterns and vocabulary acquisition among Indonesian university students.

This study positions itself as an extension of existing research by providing local insights into how digital platforms shape autonomous learning and language development. Rather than merely replicating prior studies, it explores a specific context where digital literacy plays a pivotal role in student academic success.

This study aims to examine how digital resources influence university students' vocabulary mastery and reading habits, focusing on how digital tools support vocabulary retention and reading consistency. It is guided by the research question: What are the perceptions of college students about the impacts of utilizing digital resources on their reading habits and vocabulary development? To provide clear boundaries, this research is limited to non-academic reading activities and vocabulary development among students at the University of Swadaya Gunung Jati Cirebon. The study explores student perceptions and practices within this context, aiming to uncover how digital exposure contributes to vocabulary growth and habitual reading outside formal academic assignments.

The study's importance brings awareness about maximizing digital resources to develop good reading practices and advance students' word knowledge. Worldwide implementation of digital learning demands complete comprehension of digital reading patterns to generate optimal literacy programs

alongside language teaching approaches. The research findings will help both teachers and policymakers, and curriculum developers select the digital learning materials that optimize vocabulary learning and prolonged reading involvement. The research findings can later function as the basis for additional studies in educational technology dedicated to autonomous learning and better literacy achievements in higher education.

RESEARCH METHODS

To thoroughly explore the role of digital resources in shaping students' reading habits and vocabulary mastery, a comprehensive research methodology was developed. The methodological approach was carefully selected to align with the nature of the research questions and to capture both quantitative and qualitative dimensions of the students' experiences. Given the focus on the perspectives of English Education students at Universitas Swadaya Gunung Jati, the methodology combines descriptive case study techniques, structured instruments, and thematic analysis to obtain a nuanced understanding of how digital tools influence academic literacy practices. The following section outlines the research design, participants, instruments, procedures, and data analysis techniques employed in this study.

Research Design

In this study, a case-study methodology was utilized for the descriptive research that was conducted. Researchers employ qualitative descriptive approaches to analyze attitudes, numerical trends, opinions, or responses from the general populace (Creswell, 2009). The population of this study is the University of Swadaya Gunung Jati Cirebon undergraduate students in Indonesia. The subject of this research is the role of digital resources on students' reading habits and their vocabulary mastery. The study focused on undergraduate students as participants. This study is the students' perspective as a result of this research.

The research was conducted from February to April 2025 at Universitas Swadaya Gunung Jati, located in Cirebon, Indonesia. This university was selected due to its active integration of digital resources in its learning environment, especially among students majoring in English Education.

Research Target/Subject

The study involved 9 respondents, all of whom were fourth-year or final-semester students majoring in English Education. The reason for selecting final-year students as respondents is that they have had extensive exposure to academic reading materials and digital resources throughout their studies. They show the improved reading along with improved vocabulary skills of students before they even graduate, as compared to other earlier semesters. An additional advantage of the skills that final-year students have developed in digital tool usage indicates that they would also be good study objects in investigating the implications of digital resources with regard to learning languages.

Research Procedure

Data collection was made in two steps: installing the questionnaire and sending the questionnaire to the respondents using the Google Forms application. The questionnaire provided 10 items, and the respondents were supposed to indicate what they understood by indicating either agreement or disagreement with each item by placing a check on a Likert scale of 5-1, with a scale moving from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." Percentages on the questionnaire were calculated to determine the results.

After the questionnaire, the researchers interviewed some of the respondents in order to learn their views in greater detail. The interview was intended to find out the experience of students, their attitude, and issues regarding the digital resources in their reading habits and vocabulary learning. The interview results were analysed to supplement the results of the questionnaire.

Instruments and Data Collection Techniques

The types of data, how the data is collected, with which instruments the data is collected, and the techniques for collecting it, need to be explained clearly in this section.

Data analysis technique

To collect data, the researchers used two instruments: an online questionnaire and an interview.

1. The questionnaire consisted of 10 items using a Likert scale and was shared with the respondents via Google Forms.
2. The interview was conducted with selected respondents to gain qualitative data related to students' experiences with digital reading.

These instruments enabled the researchers to collect both quantitative and qualitative data to support the research findings.

Data analysis technique

Analysis of the attributes of the questionnaire was done by calculating percentages of the responses to each item in their category. The interview material was transcribed, and a thematic analysis was carried out to determine some of the common themes and recurring concepts expressed by the respondents. The results of the two tools were then explained against the research question, goals, and the issues that were identified in the use of digital reading resources.

Questionnaire Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to review the data from the questionnaire. A 5-point Likert scale, with "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree" as the opposites, was used to score each item. The percentage of agreement and disagreement for every argument was calculated by the researchers, who also determined the total number of replies for each group. The changes in students' opinions about the influence of digital resources on their reading habits and vocabulary growth were then concluded from these percentages.

Interview Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to examine the interview data. Following transcription, the researchers deeply checked over the data several times to familiarize themselves with the answers. Following this, preliminary codes were produced inductively, encoding significant terms and concepts that participants had shared. Similar codes were divided into more general categories that represented shared perspectives or experiences. The researchers used triangulation, which compares the answers of the questionnaire and the interview, and peer debriefing, which involves validating issues among the participants, to verify validity and reliability. This procedure made sure that the qualitative information strengthened and supported the understanding of the research findings collectively.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Questionnaire

The researcher adapted and changed the survey on how students perceived using digital resources to change their reading habits and build vocabulary. In 2023, Ogunbodede and Sawyerr-George did a study that is comparable to this one, titled "Digital resources and the reading habits of University students in Nigeria." The following is the questionnaire:

Table 1. Questionnaires about "Shifting Reading Habits: The Role of Digital Resources in Improving Vocabulary for College Students."

NO	QUESTION	SA	A	N	D	SD
1	Digital Resources make it easier for me to find new information	7	2			
2	Digital Resources have improved my searching skills.	7	2			
3	Digital Resources have increased my reading.	4	3	2		
4	Digital Resources have improved my reading frequency.	2	3	4		
5	Digital Resources make it easier for me to read flexibly anywhere and anytime.	6	3			

NO	QUESTION	SA	A	N	D	SD
6	I discover new words easily and find their meanings faster when using digital resources.	8	1			
7	Digital resources make it harder for me to focus on learning vocabulary.				2	7
8	Digital Resources reduce the cost of reading	5	4			
9	I have issues accessing Digital Resources due to an unstable internet connection, which prevents me from reading digital books regularly.		3	5	1	
10	Digital Resources are wasteful of internet data.	1	2	3	3	
Total		36	23	14	6	7
Total Score		180	92	42	12	7
ΣSkor		333				
Percentage (%)		74%				

Based on the survey findings, the majority of English undergraduate students—74%—think that using digital resources helps them expand their vocabulary. Ten items made up the questionnaire used to collect this data, which was centered on how students perceived the impact of digital resources on vocabulary development. In the part that follows, each questionnaire item will be shown and described.

Table 2. Digital Resources make it easier for me to find new information.

Number of responses and percentage(%)					
SA	A	N	D	SD	
7(78%)	2(22%)	(0%)	(0%)	(0%)	

All students (78% strongly agreeing and 22% agreeing) indicated that using digital resources makes it easier to find up-to-date information. The fact that no respondent expressed neutrality or disagreement highlights how universally accepted the advantages of digital platforms for information access are. It also indicates that, in contrast to traditional sources, digital platforms have successfully met students' need for current content by offering quicker and easier access to significant reading resources. This absence of opposing viewpoints highlights the fact that one of the main reasons students use digital media for their reading assignments is the immediate access to a wide range of information.

Table 3. Digital Resources have improved my searching skills.

Number of responses and percentage(%)					
SA	A	N	D	SD	
7(78%)	2(22%)	(0%)	(0%)	(0%)	

Likewise, with the last topic, there was total agreement in the responses. All students (100%) agreed with the statement, indicating that digital platforms have significantly improved their ability to find accurate data. This finding suggests that as students use online platforms, they not only consume information quicker but also improve their digital literacy. Their capacity to find specific material quickly and effectively seems to have been enhanced by their regular use of search engines, scholarly databases, and internet tools. All respondents agreed, which is indicative of a larger trend toward digital fluency as a fundamental academic ability.

Table 4. Digital Resources have increased my reading

Number of responses and percentage(%)				
SA	A	N	D	SD
4(44%)	3(33%)	2(22%)	(0%)	(0%)

77% of students had a good opinion when asked if utilizing digital resources has enhanced their overall reading activity, with 44% strongly agreeing and 33% agreeing. None of the respondents disagreed, while 22% chose the neutral option. These findings imply that the convenience and diversity provided by digital platforms increased the frequency and volume of reading for the majority of pupils. Neutral answers, however, can suggest that some students' increased reading is situational or restricted to particular book kinds. Nonetheless, the overall pattern suggests that college students' increased reading habits are a result of digital accessibility.

Table 5. Digital Resources have improved my reading frequency.

Number of responses and percentage(%)				
SA	A	N	D	SD
2(22%)	3(33%)	4(44%)	(0%)	(0%)

The same conclusions show up when looking at reading frequency: 55% of participants said that digital resources had helped them read more frequently, while a considerable 44% said they were neutral. Even if some students had contrasting feelings regarding the extent of change, the lack of negative replies in both situations highlights a generally positive opinion. The large percentage of unclear responses would suggest that although students value the availability of digital resources, other factors like time management, motivation, or academic workload may still have an impact on how often they actually read. However, the lack of disagreement suggests that digital tools are generally seen favourably as a future research way to improve regularity in reading.

The consistently positive responses across items related to reading frequency (Table 5) indicate that students are not merely experimenting with digital resources but are developing stable reading routines. It aligns with (Verplanken & Aarts, 1999) theory of *goal-directed automaticity*, which suggests that when individuals repeatedly engage in a beneficial behaviour in a consistent context—such as digital reading for vocabulary improvement—it can evolve into an automatic habit. The continued exposure to new content and the ease of access that digital platforms offer contribute to the formation of such habits, where reading becomes an almost effortless activity embedded in students' daily routines.

Table 6. Digital Resources make it easier for me to read flexibly anywhere and anytime.

Number of responses and percentage(%)				
SA	A	N	D	SD
6(67%)	3(33%)	(0%)	(0%)	(0%)

Digital resources' flexibility and ease of use work only to increase their attractiveness. 67% of students strongly agreed and 33% agreed that these tools allow them to read at any time and from any location. This consistency of support highlights the benefits of digital reading for accessibility. According to these results, students place a high importance on being able to read on a variety of devices and in a variety of settings, including while waiting, on the commute, and outside of normal study areas. Digital technologies' portability seems to encourage informal and independent reading, reducing the need for structured classroom settings and measurable books for learning. The flexibility might help motivate students to build reading more easily into their everyday schedules.

Furthermore, the high agreement on flexible reading experiences (Table 6) reflects the psychological mechanism described in (Eyal & Hoover, 2014), the *Hooked Model*. Digital platforms trigger

reading behaviour through external cues (e.g., notifications or app recommendations), which lead to immediate actions (such as opening a reading app), followed by internal rewards (such as enjoyment or learning new words). Over time, students invest attention and effort—such as saving articles or highlighting vocabulary—making them more likely to return and engage regularly. This loop fosters long-term user retention and habit formation, explaining why many students perceive digital reading as not only convenient but also motivating and sustaining.

Table 7. I discover new words easily and find their meanings faster when using digital resources.

Number of responses and percentage(%)				
SA	A	N	D	SD
8(89%)	1(11%)	(0%)	(0%)	(0%)

Digital tools were widely acknowledged to help not just with reading habits but also with vocabulary acquisition. A clear 89% of students strongly agreed, and 11% agreed, that using digital platforms speeds up their ability to learn new words and comprehend their meanings. This result demonstrates how useful internet resources are for supporting language acquisition. This agreement of opinion demonstrates how digital platforms—especially those with integrated dictionaries, translation tools, or contextual recommendations—have a major impact on vocabulary growth. Students may easily search up new phrases and get definitions instantly, which encourages incidental vocabulary building. According to these results, reading digitally not only makes content easier to access but also promotes meaningful language learning in real time.

Table 8. Digital resources make it harder for me to focus on learning vocabulary.

Number of responses and percentage(%)				
SA	A	N	D	SD
(0%)	(0%)	(0%)	2(22%)	7(78%)

The argument that using digital resources makes it more difficult to concentrate on learning vocabulary was strongly rejected by students, in contrast to worries about digital distractions. In particular, there was no neutral or favourable response, with 22% disagreeing and 78% strongly disagreeing. This finding implies that students see digital tools as enhancing their learning process rather than affecting it. This finding is significant because it clarifies the common belief that using electronic gadgets reduces focus. In this instance, students believe that digital reading environments enable them to maintain or even improve their vocabulary study focus.

Table 9. Digital Resources reduce the cost of reading

Number of responses and percentage(%)				
SA	A	N	D	SD
5(56%)	4(44%)	(0%)	(0%)	(0%)

Additionally, students clearly agreed that digital reading is cost-effective. With 44% agreeing and 56% strongly agreeing, all respondents stated that digital resources play a role in decreasing the cost of reading. The lack of opposition shows the apparent financial benefits of digital platforms. There is general agreement that students' preference for digital reading resources is influenced by economic factors, particularly in higher education settings where limited finances are common.

Table 10. I have issues accessing Digital Resources due to an unstable internet connection, which prevents me from reading digital books regularly.

Number of responses and percentage(%)				
SA	A	N	D	SD
(0%)	3(33%)	5(56%)	1(11%)	(0%)

Not every encounter, though, was completely favourable. When questioned about technical issues, a few students mentioned that they had trouble accessing digital resources because of inconsistent connectivity to the internet, which sometimes made it difficult for them to read digital literature routinely. Overall, the data indicates that although digital platforms are practical, their efficiency still depends in part on dependable structures, which can vary between students.

Table 11. Digital Resources are wasteful of internet data.

Number of responses and percentage(%)				
SA	A	N	D	SD
1(11%)	2(22%)	3(33%)	3(33%)	(0%)

While it relates to fears concerning internet data usage, students' opinions are more mixed. Even though a large percentage of respondents acknowledge the advantages of digital resources, many ultimately believe that these tools use many internet data. Some students believed that using digital resources online can waste data, which can be problematic, particularly for people with expensive or limited internet plans. Others, on the other hand, disagreed or stayed neutral, arguing that the benefits of digital resources may outweigh the challenges of data use. This mixed response shows that even if digital reading is widely supported, students still need to take seriously practical concerns like data use when utilizing digital tools in their daily learning routines.

The questionnaire findings show that most students view digital resources as beneficial for building vocabulary and improving reading habits. High agreement on items related to accessibility, vocabulary discovery, and reading flexibility suggests the emergence of consistent digital reading behaviours. This aligns with Verplanken & Aarts' (1999) concept of habit as goal-directed automaticity, where repeated digital engagement fosters lasting reading habits. Likewise, (Eyal & Hoover, 2014) Hooked Model helps explain how features like convenience and immediate rewards encourage students to repeatedly engage with digital platforms, turning reading into a sustained and motivating routine.

Interview

In order to gain a complete image of the role of digital resources in acquiring vocabulary, one must not only answer the question of what, in this case, but also of how and why. The interview data presented below strives to present such insights, expanding on the results of the questionnaire by revealing the personal experiences and individual reading habits.

The Shift in Students' Reading Habits Through Digital Engagement

This tendency is in line with the conclusions of (Ogunbodede & Sawyerr-George, 2023), who found that the combination of higher accessibility to digital resources positively affected the level of reading and the independence of university students enormously. Equally, Abang Yusof (2021) observed that with digital tools, students' reading habits have been transformed to include frequent as well as casual reading habits beyond academic requirements. These behavioural trends represent the theoretical model of habit formation, especially the concept of automaticity that was proposed by Verplanken & Aarts (1999). Based on this theory, behaviours acquired in fixed environments or actions that are repeated, in this case, the use of digital platforms, have the potential to become automatic and habitual with time. The use of digital tools in the daily practice of students in this study provided a stable environment, in which the process of reading was made regular and low-resistance. As an example, the respondent (Participant 4) cited the reading of

blogs or stories at bedtime, and lurking was the instance when easy and persistent reading habits were formed by going digital.

Besides, this process corresponds to (Eyal & Hoover, 2014) *Hooked Model*, which describes the mechanism of habit formation technologies as the loop of a trigger, action, reward, and investment. Digital reading, such as that provided by Wattpad, can be considered an outer driver that encourages one to read, provides instant gratification in the form of joy or learning new words, as well as having the potential to reinvest in it through storing a story or marking progress. In this cycle, students not only exercise regular involvement in the reading materials but also have their reading habits grow stronger, self-sustaining as time goes on.

Reading Interests and Vocabulary Enrichment

(Grabe & Stoller, 1997) argue that extensive reading, which involves engaging with a variety of texts over time, is one of the most effective strategies for vocabulary development. This is reflected in the participants' reading behaviours, as they reported reading a wide range of genres beyond academic materials. Fiction, particularly romance and fantasy, emerged as the most favoured, while non-fiction texts such as self-development articles and educational blogs were also commonly read. This diversity suggests that students engage in extensive reading not only for academic purposes but also out of personal interest and motivation. One participant shared, "I enjoy reading fiction, especially about romance and mystery, and I also like motivational articles related to English learning" (Participant 1). These preferences indicate that digital platforms facilitate extensive reading habits, which in turn promote incidental and contextual vocabulary acquisition, as theorized by Grabe and Stoller. Importantly, all participants noted significant vocabulary development. This was supported by contextual exposure to new words and the immediate ability to look up meanings. As Participant 1 explained, "I learn new words almost every time I read something online. I can quickly check the meaning... and understand them better."

This aligns with (Mirza et al., 2021), who emphasized the value of incidental vocabulary acquisition through context-rich digital content. The use of features like integrated dictionaries and highlight tools contributed to both understanding and retention, reinforcing digital reading as a powerful means of vocabulary learning.

Digital Tools and Strategies for Vocabulary Retention

Despite their progress, participants acknowledged challenges in remembering complex or idiomatic expressions. To address this, they adopted various personalized strategies: writing vocabulary journals, using apps like Anki, creating flashcards, or applying new words in daily use. One creative strategy came from Participant 1: "*Sometimes I make a song from the new word... and sing it like my favorite songs.*"

These strategies demonstrate not only learner autonomy but also the adaptive use of digital affordances to support vocabulary retention. This is consistent with (Ogunbodede & Sawyerr-George, 2023), who found that students' increased control over their learning tools enhanced reading outcomes and confidence.

Digital functions, such as quick-search, pronunciation, and annotation functions, were reported to be critical in the process of students processing new vocabulary. Immediacy of these tools promotes a high active participation, particularly when reading for leisure or personal curiosity.

Perceptions on Digital vs. Printed Reading for Language Learning

All participants perceived digital reading as more effective than traditional print for vocabulary acquisition, highlighting its speed, interactivity, and portability. As Participant 4 expressed, "*I think digital is better because I can learn anywhere, anytime—even while waiting in line!*". These perceptions align with the findings of (Ogunbodede & Sawyerr-George, 2023), who revealed a high positive correlation between the use of digital resources and better reading patterns in Nigerian university students. The common desire to learning independently and continuously outside the traditional academics demonstrates a general shift of mentality as reading ceased to be a physical pursuit or an educational requirement but has become a part of daily life as an inseparable habit, facilitated by the digital environment.

Although digital literacy is a relatively new field of research across the world, the present study adds to the growing body of international research on the topic by affirming the results of (Ogunbodede & Sawyerr-George, 2023), who revealed that there is a strong relationship between the usage of digital tools and the improvement of reading practices among Nigerian university students. The aggregation of findings in varied national and educational contexts demonstrates the wider significance of digital reading platforms as efficient tools to promote self-regulated learning and long-term development of vocabulary in tertiary education.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the present research, one can conclude that digital resources can be a helpful contribution to developing the reading habits and vocabulary of students. The statistics showed that 74 participants had positive beliefs about the application of digital resources in learning vocabulary, with 89 people confirming that they would be able to obtain and comprehend new words effortlessly by using such materials. In addition, digital media enhances the flexibility of reading, elevates reading frequency, and boosts the information-seeking abilities of students. Some participants indicated that they had a few problems concerning the stability of the internet, although most attested that this was not much of a challenge. Overall, the findings indicate that digital resources, when used consistently and purposefully, serve as effective tools for fostering autonomous learning and language proficiency.

In light of these results, students are encouraged to actively incorporate digital resources, such as e-books, online dictionaries, language learning apps, and educational websites, into their daily study routines to enhance vocabulary retention and reading engagement. Educators and institutions should also facilitate this digital shift by providing access to reliable digital materials, strengthening digital infrastructure, and promoting critical digital literacy. Future research is recommended to explore the long-term effects of digital reading in diverse academic contexts, particularly on independent learning and sustainable reading culture in higher education.

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