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# Researching University Students' Perceptions about How Digital Tools Help Them Achieve Holistic Comprehension of English Academic Texts

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## **ABSTRACT**

Reading is a relevant and complex skill used by students to achieve their academic, research, and professional goals. The main research objective of this study is to explore the perceptions of university students using digital tools (DT) to comprehend English texts, overall, when they take online classes. The participants study in different BA programs and hold basic or intermediate English level. They are 15 students; some of them are in the process of graduating. Some studies claim that university students prefer to read more on their devices, such as laptops, tablets or mobile phones and it will make them more autonomous. This research uses the observation method; therefore, it is grounded on observed experiences during face-to-face or online classes, which allows one to have some perceptions about the phenomenon. The results reveal that education is going towards a digitalized environment where both students and teachers need to improve online teaching and learning every day to facilitate the use of didactic tools to get the expected success.

## **KEY WORDS:**

University students, perceptions, digital tools, holistic comprehension, English academic texts.

## **RESUMEN**

La lectura es una habilidad relevante y compleja utilizada por los estudiantes para alcanzar sus objetivos académicos, de investigación y profesionales. El objetivo principal de este estudio es explorar las percepciones de los estudiantes universitarios que utilizan herramientas digitales (DT) para comprender textos en inglés en general, cuando toman clases en línea. Los participantes estudian en diferentes programas de licenciatura y tienen un nivel de inglés básico o intermedio. Son 15 estudiantes; algunos están en proceso de graduarse. Algunos estudios afirman que los estudiantes universitarios prefieren leer más en sus dispositivos, como computadoras portátiles, tabletas o teléfonos móviles, lo que los hace más autónomos. Esta investigación utiliza el método de observación; por lo tanto, se fundamenta en experiencias observadas durante

clases presenciales o en línea, lo que permite tener algunas percepciones sobre el fenómeno. Los resultados revelan que la educación avanza hacia un entorno digitalizado donde tanto estudiantes como profesores necesitan mejorar la enseñanza y el aprendizaje en línea día a día para facilitar el uso de herramientas didácticas y así conseguir el éxito esperado.

### **PALABRAS CLAVE:**

Estudiantes universitarios, percepciones, herramientas digitales, comprensión holística, textos académicos en inglés.

### **Introduction**

Reading is a fundamental ability for students to achieve their academic goals. Reading within the English language is often complex, especially when the students do not know this, as it can cause success or failure in their professional development. Nowadays, to get a degree, university students need knowledge of languages to make the process easier; hence occasionally taking online, blended, or face-to-face English reading comprehension courses. Thus, they require outstanding reading practice to advance in understanding the academic texts in English. Because of this and the new changes within education, they must improve their developing learning through electronic tools since it makes it easier to search for words when they read. Technology has transformed the way of life in the world; people have faster communication using digital devices. Reading is no exception to it, as mentioned by Benny (2019), "Technology makes information easy to access, especially in digital sources" (p.191). Therefore, the main aim of this study is to explore the perceptions of university students using digital tools (DT) to understand English texts comprehensively, overall, when they take online classes. For this reason, it is pretended to know what the challenges are, which they had to face during an online reading comprehension English course (ORCEC).

### **Research Problem**

The online reading comprehension English courses (ORCEC) are offered to university students in person or in blended way. During the COVID-19 pandemic, students had to face new challenges when they certainly had to take classes online. So, in an ORCEC, the need to learn management or improve skills when using new digital tools was observed. Despite not being familiar with the use digital tools (DT), or having some electronic deficiencies, students began to show more interest during the course, due to the dynamics that could be performed with the different digital resources that were used, when they took the course in person, they only read, underlining words in printed texts, which demonstrated boredom in them. This observation allows us to research what university students perceived when using digital tools and how they helped them improve their knowledge during an ORCEC. In response to the problem identified, the following research questions have been designed.

### **Research Questions**

To obtain the most focused answers to the present analysis, the following questions are addressed:

- What are university students' perceptions about how digital tools help them achieve holistic comprehension of academic texts in English?
- How do digital tools help enhance the comprehension of English texts?
- What is the significance of reading comprehension in university language classrooms?
- What skills do university students need for comprehending texts in English?

## Significance of the Study

This study aims to analyze the perceptions of university students when reading with digital tools to achieve a holistic understanding of the texts during the process of online English reading comprehension courses; hence, one of the primary aspects to consider for university students is the importance of learning reading in an L2. Therefore, interacting with digital texts makes students perceive reading more interestingly because of the immediate feedback they can get, as cited by Imtiaz, et al. (2017). Thus, reading practice with digital tools shows how the current world is based on immersion and technological normalization, which makes the students involuntarily improve their skills when using digital tools DT in an ORCEC.

## Participants

The participants came from different BA programs and possessed basic or intermediate English level. They are 15 students; some of them are in the process of graduating. Others have a degree, and the majority work and study. Their ages range from 18 to 50 years and study in a public university.

## Research Context

This research analyzes students in a virtual environment in a public university in the center of Mexico. These are online classes, five hours one day a week. The purpose of these courses is to help students improve their skills in comprehension of texts in English and know the digital strategies that students put into practice to develop their reading competence using different technological tools. Some applications used were Google Meet, Zoom, Padlet, Vocaroo, Google Blogs, and Canva among others, as support during their training in an ORCEC.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to know and analyze information about the opinions of university students who, during the COVID-19 pandemic, saw the need to take definitive classes online. This document also aims to show what the needs and skills that students had to implement or renew in the use of digital tools, as well as the preference for different forms of reading, to be able to improve the comprehension of digital texts in English in a holistic way, and at the same time accept the global changes that began to emerge with distance learning.

## Justification of the Study

The study focuses on the importance of digital tools in an ORCEC. These digital resources have made users more interested in learning a second language due to the ease with which they can obtain quick and effective information for understanding English texts through hyperlinks or different applications. Hifzhan (2022) has also contributed to this research. "Thus, the integration of ICT instruments such as laptops, LCD projectors, smart whiteboards, internet services and applications in education that act as a strong support will aid learners to use English in a fun and stress-free language learning environment" (p, 730).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Understanding the Concept of "Reading"

In referring to the meaning of the word reading, we understand the importance of this ability

to acquire and enhance knowledge in different fields of teaching and learning. Hence, several studies show interest in the definition of reading in different contexts. In the '70s and '80s, it was considered that reading confirms and forms hypotheses through texts and a "process through which we combine information from the text with the reader's knowledge of the world; it is a dialogue between the reader and the text" (Bustos & Loreto 2007, as cited in Carrel, et. al, 1990, p. 245). Nevertheless, currently reading is changing and at the same time its concept, since over the years, ideas and vocabulary have a different development because there are new words and others disappear, in the most recent research the definition of reading focuses more on vocabulary and on the extinction that university students can achieve with reading skills. Blanka & Katarina (2020) defined "Reading is a fundamental skill for academic success because university students need to comprehend an extensive amount of information in a short time to achieve their academic goals" (p.1).

### **Reading in a Foreign Language**

Bernal (2020) argues, "Many EFL and ESL researchers have agreed that reading is an essential academic skill to develop as a tool to learn ESL or EFL" (p.19). In addition, it is argued that reading skills are fundamental to learning a foreign language and paramount to teaching ESL/EFL courses. Reading comprehension in an L2 gives the university a critical thinking reflexive for its insertion in sociocultural processes as one of the aims of university education and its formative strategies (González, et al., 2019).

### **Reading Comprehension Definition**

By understanding the concepts of reading and the importance of reading for learning a second language, it is understood that reading comprehension will be the next step in improving any particular study. According to Bojovic (2010), "The reader has a purpose for reading, whether it is for entertainment, information, or research" (p.1). Finally, reading comprehension can be defined as "the correlation between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension" (Laufer, 1992 & Quian 2002, as mentioned in Ruiz, 2019, p. 203). Although it has been understood that for some authors to understand reading or texts sometimes becomes complicated, others propose different strategies to facilitate or develop this skill better.

### **Teaching Reading Strategies**

Some students find it difficult to comprehend readings in their native language, and it becomes even more challenging in a second language. The strategies implemented for reading comprehension of printed texts focus on following certain patterns. Some authors focus on the following points for printed reading: 1. *Predicting*. Students talk about their knowledge or experiences to make predictions about the text. 2. *Visualizing*. This strategy requires students to imagine or create an image of what is read and then interpret it by drawing or writing something about it. 3. *Making connections*. Apprentices put their knowledge into practice and connect them with the ideas of the text. "Text-to-Text, Text-to-Self, Text-to-World". 4. *Summarizing*. This strategy allows the student to order ideas, which will help the student better distinguish and relate the interpretation of the text. 5. *Questioning*. At this point, students ask questions about the text, so the students have to read the text to find the answers. 6. *Inferring*. It refers to reading between the lines; students can obtain conclusions and build meanings from information or drawings in this strategy (Ana, 2020, p. 3-4).

Regarding digital reading, some authors' strategies for understanding may focus on 1. *Identifying*

*the topic and search terms.* Students should have a more explicit purpose than they intend to investigate and create their topic, questions, answers, and the facts they need to check. 2. *Evaluating the usefulness of a text based on the reading purpose.* Students should evaluate the search sites, remember the purpose or response of what they are looking for, have an information organization, and check whether the information is a fact or an opinion. 3. *Remain focused on one text and avoid distractions.* At this point, students should focus on reading and develop more rapid reading skills, avoid ads unrelated to texts, and organize information if a hyperlink related to the text appears. (Nicol, 2019, p. 5-7). To know some strategies for understanding printed and digital texts allows us to analyze conflicting opinions of printed and digital texts, so below is a brief approach to both texts.

## Reading Print-Based Texts vs Digital Texts

The way of acquiring information or knowledge through reading has changed considerably since digital media have had more boom to develop this ability so that printing texts constantly remain a second resource. According to Bella et al. (2017), "in the context of the apparent dichotomy of print-based texts versus e-texts, an overwhelming number of studies reviewed suggested that print-based texts contributed more to increased comprehension and recall than e-texts" (p.3). Meanwhile, the negative things that can be noticed when someone is in front of a screen are that there are distractors when reading or feel sleepy eyes, so some people prefer to read the print text (PTX) because it could be friendly. Nevertheless, the reality is that the new generations of students constantly use different devices to get relevant information since when they need a specific book or relevant lowdown, they can surf the net and obtain it, and save time and money; although, some of them agree with the printing texts (PTX); also they use the digital reading to look for or read crucial scientific information, so the actual reason is that the digital texts make more accessible the performance of their works in which have to use reading comprehension texts. To better understand the differences between both forms of reading, the context of print-based texts and digital texts is shown in more detail.

### Print-Based Texts

The printed paper became one of how people learned about what was happening around the world, and this encouraged the reader to write in a meaningful way, but it is also considered that this form of communication tends to end, as stated by Benny (2019) in the definition of Pred, "Printed texts are tangible objects having a beginning and an end" (p.194) Alternatively, there is a definition of the reading text and reading in Multimodal Texts (MT) since the print texts is required but is not enough to give sense to the text with some visible pictures, graphics, or effects of sounds as electronic texts. So, printed reading every day is replaced more with digital reading because this has reduced the use of paper to an extreme measure and, at the same time, allows ease and speed in the search for information so that the reader can acquire and improve their knowledge on several topics at once. Now, the term Digital Texts (DTX) is discussed to understand with more clarity or detail.

### Digital Texts

Digital reading is reading texts from technological apparatus such as the screen of smartphones, tablets, or computers, either online or offline. Digital reading helps literature comprehension because of the vast exposure to interesting readings (Kirin et al., 2012). According to Ariel G. (2006) "The enormous utilization of computers and the new resources on the web have created a new and uprising form of reading that is beginning to have an essential impact on the development



of knowledge: electronic reading, also known as e-reading, cyber-reading, or digital reading.” (pp. 3-8) This innovative way of reading based on digital texts DTX, allows the new generations the facility to create and exercise actions in one or more digital texts at a time. They can change annotations of fonts, Index, copy, edit, replace, improve, expand, or insert images, probes, etc., becoming cyber-co-authors. Furthermore, in this kind of electronic reading, hypertexts are very common, and the readers can research information because they can surf different sites simultaneously. Accordingly, as mentioned by Min-Hsun (2016) “The dynamic nature of the hypertext environment gives it an ability to connect with the net-generation readers” (p. 234). However, teachers and students must improve their learning abilities or find concentration methods to facilitate learning through digital texts DTX since digital reading will grow for a long time. After clarifying the terms of print and digital texts, it is essential to know some of the electronic materials or resources that exist to implement reading comprehension or to obtain and share rapid information through digital reading.

### **E-books and Reading through Devices**

The change in reading through digital books was in the 1990s; in these years, *E-books* became a library source (Dorner 2003, mentioned in Yuening & Roger, 2011). The new forms of reading started to change considerably; the digital books were on some platforms: Ebrary, NetLibrary, and Books 24X7 (Sprague & Hunter 2009, mentioned in Yuening & Roger, 2011, p. 5). When the e-book revolution appeared, several studies were practiced at different levels of education to know better the use of these new materials; some of the studies were at the University of Wales in the United Kingdom in the students of engineering, business and management, and medicine (Armstrong & Aucoin, 2005). So, in this research, the students agree with these kinds of books, and engineering and health suggested that the monographs, research, or professional reports should be in electronic books. Through some studies, the concept of e-reading change dramatically changed the print reading structure, and reading in this new form to acquire knowledge demonstrated that a recent material could help to improve and facilitate the learning process in university students, thus beginning to come out some definitions for this electronic stuff that is considered as: “an electronic version of a printed book which can be read on a personal computer or a handheld device designed specifically for the purpose” (Anuradha & Usha, 2006, p.49). Therefore, university students use different digital tools in their research daily, improving their skills to obtain more knowledge from e-books. Furthermore, these studies have demonstrated that when university students implement digital tools to understand English texts, they improve their reading comprehension skills.

### **Enhancing Reading Comprehension in Texts of English through Digital Tools**

English texts have always been a necessary resource for university students, and understanding reading in an L2 becomes challenging. When they can understand English reading holistically, they enhance their ability to learn and comprehend this language better. Therefore, it is considered that today’s students feel more motivated when reading on digital devices and reading comprehension in English is usually more enjoyable for them.

Shirin (2016) mentions three ways to improve reading comprehension through the computers “1. Controlling what and how long readers saw something digitally to develop reading strategies, 2. Providing comprehension exercises, and 3. Offering comprehension aids” (p, 112). So, “Digital reading helps reading comprehension of literature because of the vast exposure to interesting readings” (Shirin, 2016, mentioned in Kirin et al., 2012, p. 112). Hence, the electronic reading platform or e-books are effective for literacy language and literacy teaching learning in an L2. According to

Gyoomi & Jiyoung (2002), "The use of digital devices in language learning can enhance learners' learning motivation and attitudes" (p. 22). University students prefer to read more on their devices, and it will make them more autonomous. Therefore, it can be deduced that some reasons why students may prefer to use their cell phones for reading comprehension in English are:

- **Accessibility:** Cell phones are portable devices that allow access to many digital resources anytime, anywhere, and make it easier for students to read English texts from their mobile devices without carrying books or computers.
- **Inter-activity:** Digital applications and resources in cell phones often incorporate interactive elements, such as multiple-choice testing, drag-and-drop exercises, and listening and pronunciation activities.
- **Convenience and flexibility:** Cell phones are personal devices that many people carry. Students can take advantage of waiting times, such as on public transport or during breaks between classes, to read English texts from their phones.

After knowing the opinion of some EFL students when using digital resources, we give steps to understand better the concept and utility of an ORCEC.

### Online Reading Comprehension English Class (ORCEC)

The English reading comprehension courses were created to assist university students in obtaining a degree. Initially, the classes were offered in a face-to-face or blended format. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the courses were moved strictly online. As a result, several digital concepts became necessary resources for these courses, becoming Online Reading Comprehension Courses (ORCEC). The course was conducted in both synchronous and asynchronous environments. The digital tools DT played a critical role in teaching the topic in class and improving the student's understanding throughout the course. Electronic resources also made the ORCEC more exciting and enabled the students to receive immediate feedback. The digital tools sparked more interest in the ORCEC since the course's idea was for the student to complete tasks during the class using various applications and upload them automatically to the classroom platform. The teacher and students gained new skills in navigating various applications and websites thanks to using hypertexts. They helped the students become more independent in their learning for the course. During the ORCEC, the students could improve their vocabulary and understanding of literary devices or analyze complex texts. Various pedagogical approaches, such as collaborative, inquiry-based, or project-based, were considered to engage and motivate students and know their perceptions in a virtual environment.

### Students in an ORCEC

The enormous use of new technologies unexpectedly led the population, especially educational institutions, to perceive the greatness and strength that can be given in online learning when it is well-founded. The impression generated by the constant use of technology for digital reading and the discovery of existing electronic resources that facilitate the comprehension of texts in English caused them to resurface, and new ones were created for the educational concept. Recognizing that some university students showed great attention to using different digital tools caused interest in knowing their perception of the ORCEC. The characteristic of perception, according to Reuchilin, (1980), in Añaños, (1999, as cited in Pilar, 2006), shows that:

- It is selective because not all stimuli will be considered in the perceptual construction process. This section deals with the adaptive activity of the subject, allowing it to capture as much helpful information as possible.
- Its appreciation of size, shape, color, and movement is constant.



- The individual and social context influence it.
- It usually works unconsciously very quickly.
- Perceptual organization is essential for perceiving both isolated objects and sets of objects.
- It is not done randomly but is governed by some principles (p.92).

Therefore, if one of the characteristics of perception is to function unconsciously quickly, then as mentioned before, “the immersion and technological normalization, make the students involuntarily improve their skills in the use of the digital tools” (Garcia, 1986, as cited in Pilar, 2006, p. 189). Therefore, these skills create advantages of digital reading.

### **Advantages and Disadvantages of Online Teaching**

The advantage of finding information through technology is having fast multi-access to different sites in that reading is more normalized every day in a digital way. Printed reading preferences are changing considerably. Some prefer to continue reading printed texts because their concentration is better since there are no distractions as there can be in digital reading. A better understanding of reading through printed texts is one of the advantages that can stand out in printed reading. Furthermore, “they do not need to be plugged in or connected to the internet, making them a more accessible option for those who do not have access to these resources”, mentioned Quibell (2023, p. 2-3). Nowadays, printed books are created using advanced technology that allows for easy correction of words and phrases and duplication of texts. Moreover, technology allows for the designing and creating images that enhance the reader’s understanding of the ideas presented in the text. The use of digital resources for printing not only results in better quality but also helps develop skills for effectively communicating one’s ideas.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Instance**

This study follows the Observation Method; therefore, it is based on observed experiences during face-to-face or online classes, which allows one to have an opinion about the phenomenon. “Observation Method is described as a method to observe and describe the behavior of a subject, and it involves the basic technique of simply watching the phenomena until some hunch or insight is gained” (Kumar, 2022, p.1). The quantitative method helps recognize the population model to specify research planning, data collection, and analysis to interpret applied research correctly (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative methodology is also part of this research, considering that it is characterized by what people think about the phenomenon studied, with an *ethnographic* approach focused on the experience of the daily life of the individual, which allows understanding the social practice to analyze the data of opinions and experience, which can be expressed in words. “Ethnography focuses on culture of group of people, which includes share attributes, language, practices, structure, value, norms, and material things, evaluate human lifestyle” (Pawar, 2020, p. 47). This study considered the participation of fifteen students at a public university in central Mexico who study English and other language skills. These courses can be blended or online for 5 hours a week. The participants were eight females and seven males, ages 18 to 30, and came from different university careers; some had already finished these, and others were in process. Most study English through extracurricular courses focused on reading comprehension in English and has an A1 level or lower, and the aim of practicing the English language through this approach is for students to obtain their degrees and simultaneously understand information that helps them in their professional development. These results allowed the researchers to describe the context of this research in a more complete form.

## Research Context

This study was carried out at a university in central Mexico City. This institution offers extracurricular courses in the English language, and some of these courses are more focused on the practice of reading comprehension. During the online classes, Meet and Zoom were used as digital platforms. The primary tool for teaching was an e-book or a PDF book, which helped students improve their English reading comprehension by covering related topics. Exercises were shared through PDF documents and WhatsApp and displayed on the screen to aid learning. To engage with students, various applications and links were suggested to access multimodal texts. Additionally, students were encouraged to use an audio reading application and record their voices in another app while reading, making the learning process more interactive, practical, valuable, and exciting. Finally, tasks were assigned on the "Classroom" platform to improve the learning and teaching process. Good feedback is provided to help students enhance their skills in understanding English texts. The following instruments were created to achieve the desired objective of the study more holistically.

## Instruments

To collect the most accurate information as possible, resources were taken from a survey, which was done utilizing a questionnaire in Google Forms format, as well as a semi-structured interview, which was applied to four participants. Questionnaires are "a series of questions asked to individuals to obtain statistically useful information about a given topic. They are a valuable method of collecting a wide range of information from many individuals, often referred to as respondents. Adequate questionnaire construction is critical to the success of a survey" (Roopa & Rani, 2017, p. 273). The survey was conducted in Spanish to avoid confusion and ensure all participants could complete it without problems. The questionnaire comprises five sections, shown in Figure 3.4 below. As well as a semi-structured interview, which was applied to four participants.

For the interview, four participants were chosen and were interviewed through the Zoom platform. This interview investigates "students' perceptions of how digital tools help them achieve a holistic understanding of academic texts in English."

In this process, they were asked five questions derived from the research questions. The themes for the questions are as follows:

1. Opinion when performing exercises with English texts through digital tools
2. Opinion when reading an English text on a digital device and a printed text
3. Perception to investigate information in English through digital tools
4. Recommendation for reading digital texts in English

The information collected provides a deeper and more detailed understanding of the subject, contributing to generating knowledge and fortifying the academic and professional field in an ORCEC or virtual educational field.

## Data Gathering

This study was conducted for a period of two months, during which data was collected for eight weeks. The class sessions lasted for a total of 40 hours and focused on various study techniques for data collection. The techniques included conducting a survey using a questionnaire, developing an appropriate approach to conduct a group interview, and analyzing opinions based on

developing multimodal or multi-semiotic skills.

After the course, participants were requested to collaborate by completing a questionnaire sent via WhatsApp. The answers were ordered from higher to lower according to the corresponding number and were written in both Spanish and English, highlighting the most relevant of the answers to conclude later in the data analysis of the same.

### Data Analysis

Data were analyzed based on the points of the Google Forms questionnaire sent to the participants. The questionnaire had five sections. The first was about the digital devices used to read English texts. The second part focused on the frequency of use of digital devices to improve the understanding of English texts and academic knowledge. In section 3, the analysis was conducted in two sections: the first is about the forms of reading, and the second is focused on the utility of understanding texts in English. The fourth section of the questionnaire was designed with 9 questions focused on how often they develop the skills needed for English comprehension texts. In the last section of the questionnaire, section 5, we wanted to know 4 questions that so often agree on specific preferences for understanding texts during the process of an English course. The most relevant information was then compared in each questionnaire focused on the research questions. Finally, the graphs are shown with the results that describe the opinions of the participants and the analysis to provide the corresponding literature.

## ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

### Report Data Analysis Group

**Section 1** of the questionnaire analyses personal information gathered from 15 student participants. This section investigates demographic information, which is not directly relevant to the research questions but is still essential.

N° Participant	Gender	Age range 18-50	Career belonging	Semester	Activity	Language level
S1	Female	21-30	Pharmaceutical chemical	9º completed	Job only	C1 Advance
S2	Male	36-40	Information technology	10º completed	Work and study	A2 Elementary
S3	Male	31-35	Communication and journalism	8º	Job only	A2-B1 Intermediate
S4	Female	21-30	Dental surgeon	10º	Job only	A2 Elementary
S5	Female	21-30	Pedagogy	8º	Job only	A1 Beginner
S6	Male	18-20	International relations	1º	Work and study	A1 Beginner
S7	Female	18-20	International relations	1º	Studio only	B2 Upper intermediate
S8	Male	18-20	International relations	1º	Work and study	A2-B1 Intermediate
S9	Female	21-30	Administration	8º	Work and study	A2-B1 Intermediate
S10	Male	21-30	Bachelor of Nursing	8º	Job only	A2-B1 Intermediate
S11	Female	41-45	Economics	9º	Work and study	A1 Beginner
S12	Male	21-30	Industrial design	6º	Studio only	A2-B1 Intermediate
S13	Male	21-30	Industrial design	6º	Studio only	B2 Upper intermediate
S14	Male	21-30	Pedagogy	8º not completed	Studio only	A2 Pre-intermediate
S15	Female	21-30	Pedagogy	8º not completed	Studio only	A2 Pre-intermediate

Figure 1 Personal information of the participants (total number of respondents 15)

The second section of the questionnaire consists of four items that focus on the “digital devices used for reading English texts”. The results presented in Figure 2 indicate that most participants rely on their mobile phones for the activities mentioned. Specifically, 80% of the 15 participants used their cell phones for the online English course and read various online materials.

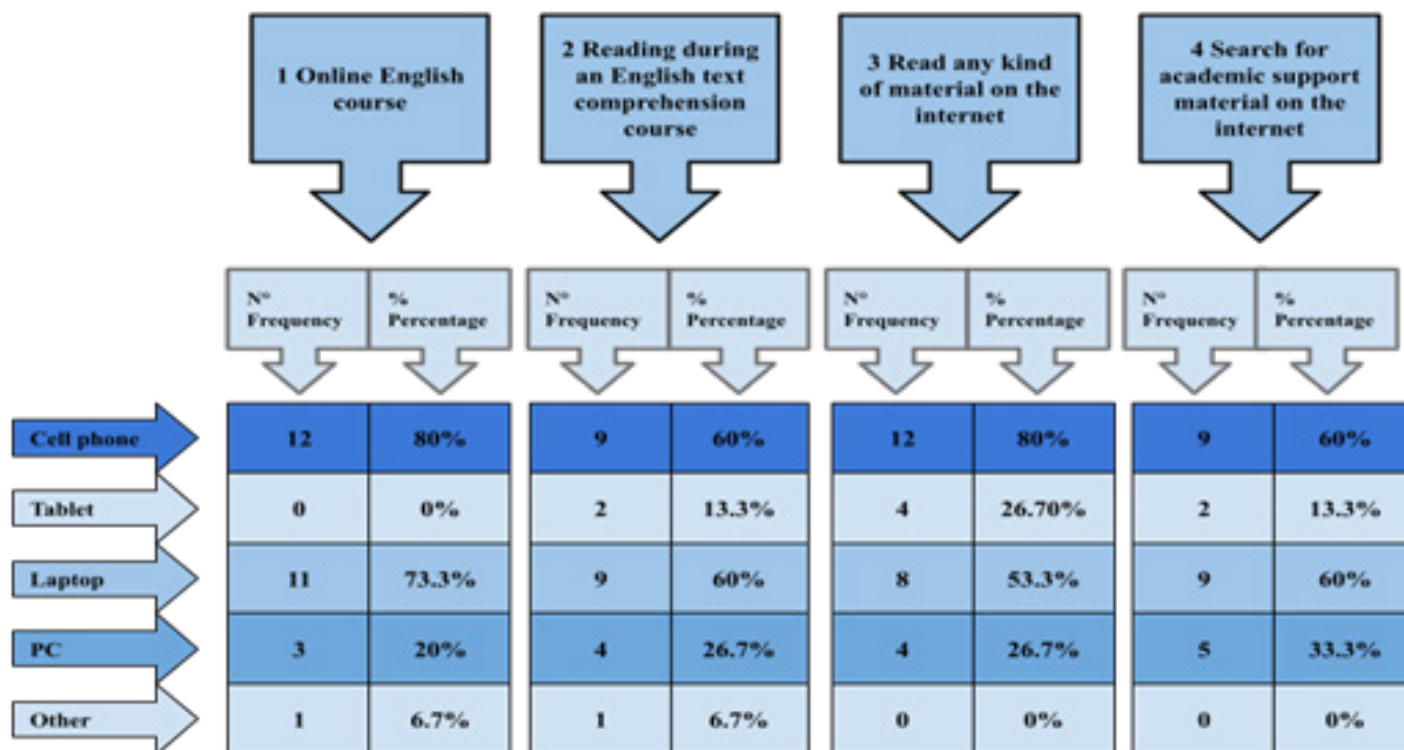


Figure 2 Section 2 Digital devices used for reading English texts

The second most popular device was a laptop, with 73.3% to 53.3% of the participants performing the two activities mentioned before. Moreover, they use it to read English text during a comprehension course and search for academic materials online. The use of tablets and PCs was lower than that of mobile phones and laptops for the mentioned activities in the survey, leaving 33% of participants below the surveyed average. According to Ogata and Yano (2005), as cited in Abduljalil & Ali, 2016), mobile learning is mainly characterized by permanency, accessibility, immediacy, interactivity, and situating of instructional activities. As a result, cell phones have become the most used digital device due to their convenience and speed. However, it is essential to mention that nowadays, the general population reads more through electronic devices. In addition, as has been said in this investigation, the pandemic COVID -19 was an impact that made all fields of education use more new digital devices to give classes. At the same time, the student population was forced to get better electronic devices. Although this kind of reading comprehension course has been given in face-to-face and blended format, the students used different electronic resources for it. Still, they had to improve the devices to obtain better results during the ORCEC training.

**Section 2.1 Frequency to Improve the Understanding of Texts in English and Academic Knowledge through Different Forms of Reading**

Based on the results presented in Figure 3, this indicates that most participants frequently use digital reading to enhance their understanding of academic texts, printed materials, and digital content, as well as to search for information from specialized sites and digital libraries.

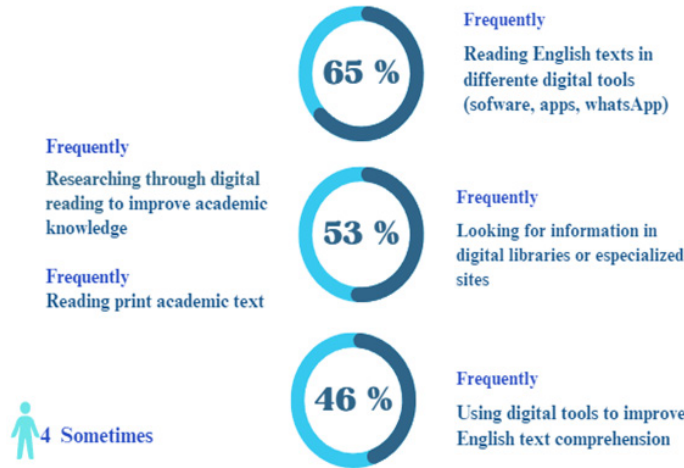


Figure 3 Frequency scale graphs to find out digital reading can improve the understanding of English texts

This shows that the percentages obtained outstanding to carry out the above activities are 65% to 46% in the 15 students surveyed. The results indicate that digital reading has improved university students' understanding of English texts and academic knowledge. Then, this allows to accept that university students surf more on their electronic devices to read using digital tools, making their use more common daily. As a result, English language teaching institutions are encouraged to incorporate technology into their teaching methods and provide students with the necessary resources to enhance their learning experience. Furthermore, knowing what forms of reading university students prefer is essential to obtain more attention from the students.

### Section 3 of the Questionnaire: Forms of Reading

The following analysis presents section 3 of the questionnaire. Three questions belong to this section, which shows three forms of reading in Figure 4, and these belong to each question. The first question is about of the preferred reading genre. The second question is related to the printed reading genre, while question three, shows the digital reading genre.

In this section, the analysis focused on ten different reading genres preferred by 15 participants. The genres are comedy, culture, romance, politics, adventure, poetry, blogs, social networks, news, and others, which were chosen based on the preferences and forms of each participant.

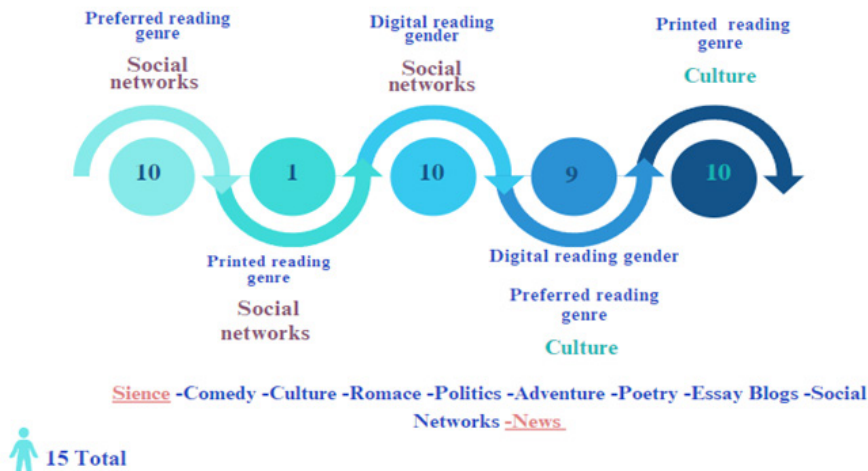


Figure 4 Forms of Reading



The results from Figure 4 indicate that social networks were the participants' most preferred **genre** to read. Nine also indicated that their second most preferred genres were culture and adventure. In the second question, **printed reading genre**, the data results show that 66% (ten participants) of the participants prefer to read the cultural genre on paper. These results are like the preference of preferred literary genre, so they could be subjects of interest to university students due to the concept of their studies or career perform or have performed. By showing the cultural diversity naturally shown in the human being. This third question shows the data analysis corresponding to the **preferred reading genre in digital form**, reveals a similarity in the outstanding results in the two previous forms participants preferred to read social networks and culture for the remaining genres in this form of digital reading, no 0% result is shown, which allows us to deduce that university students prefer electronic reading to reading any gender. However, some may need to catch up to the preference to read in print. Finally, as Elche and Yubero (2019) mention, digital reading maintains the essence of traditional reading; therefore, the uses of digital reading of reading habits cannot be separated" (p. 54). Therefore, as Martos and Martos (2018) points out, "reading education can no longer be separated from media and digital culture (p. 21).

Digital reading has perhaps transformed reading gender preferences. Digital technology has also influenced how students access and consume training, which can affect their reading preferences. It is essential to note that such preferences are individual and may vary significantly among university students who took an ORCEC. Some may prefer literary fiction, others may be more interested in academic or non-fiction texts, and others may have specific preferences according to their study area. However, according to the results of the Figure 4 that belong to the questions in section 3, it can be shown that although there is a printed reading generosity that the reader may prefer, a greater variety of charities is selected to read digitally, which is of usefulness to reading and understanding texts in English.

**Section 3.1 of the Questionnaire: Utility of Understanding Texts in English**

After studying the reading preferences of participants, this section examines whether the participants agree or disagree with the usefulness of understanding English texts. Figure 5 shows that out of 15 participants, nine of them are outstanding in Totally Agree (TA), in that understanding English texts helps in learning a language including vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation.

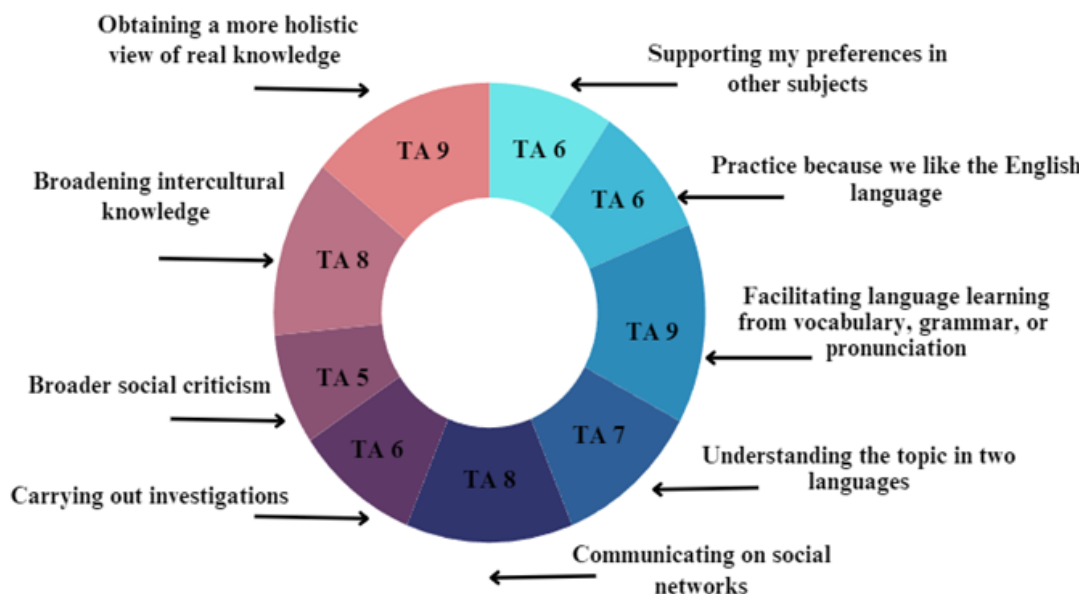


Figure 5 Utility of understanding texts in English

Nine questions were measured on a Likert scale to determine the level of agreement and disagreement. The research found that the participants strongly agreed on the benefits of reading English texts for improving their multicultural and general knowledge. Understanding English texts can enhance academic performance and aid in learning a second language until a more comprehensive understanding is achieved. The study also aimed to identify the skills that university students require to comprehend texts effectively.

**Section 4 of the Questionnaire: Skills Needed for English Comprehension Texts**

This section discusses the skills required for an English comprehension course. According to Figure 6, the questions in this section were rated on a frequency scale from always to never, shown below to facilitate analysis. Nine participants excelled in translating English texts into their native language for better understanding. As it shows the question 4, this is the most relevant skill for participants and indicates that 60 % of the students always develop this ability to enhance their understanding of English.

	<i>When you read a text in English how often...?</i>	Always	Frequently	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1	Consult supporting material or tools (e.g. the dictionary) to try to understand reading	5	4	6		
2	Analyze the drawings and graphs appearing in the text for a better understanding	6	7	2		
3	Try to guess the meaning of unknown words or phrases, taking into account the content of the text	8	6	2		
4	Translate words and phrases from English into your native language to better understand the text	9	5	1		
5	Previously read a printed text for comprehension	4	5	2	5	
6	Read hypertexts and access at the same time different related links to facilitate and accelerate the exploration and understanding of research	4	5	2	3	1
7	Linking and conceptualizing information	6	6	3		
8	Quickly search for required information in different digital tools (serendipity)	3	8	2	1	1
9	Rely on the use of digital tools to be more creative, participatory, autonomous, and share ideas	8	5	1		1

**Figure 6 Skills needed for English comprehension texts**

Another outstanding ability was found in questions three and nine, which had a high frequency of “always,” which showed that the students could guess the meaning of unknown words based on the context’ content and be more creative and autonomous when using digital tools. Questions 8 and 4 also demonstrate that university students frequently quickly search for required information in different digital tools, analyzing drawings and graphics in texts for better understanding.

**Section 5 of the Questionnaire: Preferences English course for Texts Comprehension**

The following report analyzes section five of the questionnaire. This section focused on obtaining material resources for text comprehension through the participants' preferences. On a scale of agree and disagree, four questions are shown in Figure 7. It shows that the participants "totally agree" with 66.7% (ten participants) that "the teacher will provide the material that will be used (PDF, web pages, photos, e-books, photocopies, etc.)" In this result, the participants show that they prefer the ease of material resources for the English reading classes, so digital devices and hardware can give this practicality.

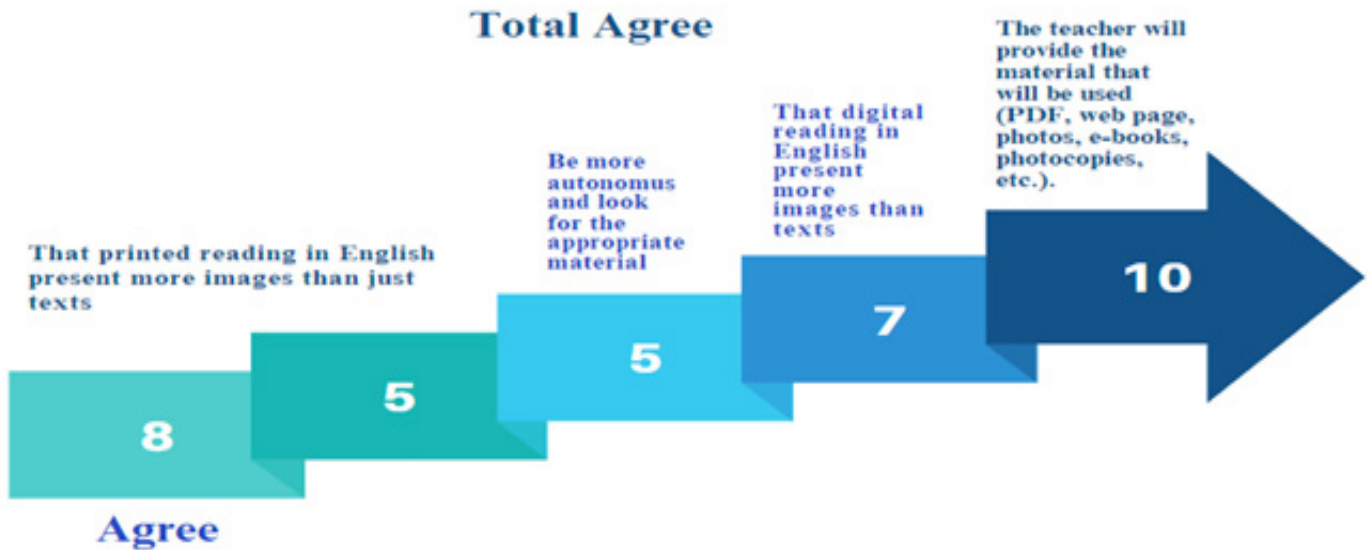


Figure 7 Obtaining material resources for text comprehension

Furthermore, 46.7% (seven participants) "totally agree" that the resources in "digital readings in English present more images than texts (iconography/semiotic)." Also, they had a similarity of 53.3% (eight participants) and 40% (five participants) "agree" with "That printed readings in English present more images than just texts (iconography/ semiotic)" This is because students are more immersed in the use of tools, which can show more color and images that call their attention to a better understanding of the texts. The participants showed to be more autonomous and look for the appropriate material. Finally, by analyzing the four questions, it can be shown that the preferences to acquire the material resources during the process of the reading comprehension courses in English are attached to the materials that can be purchased on the internet. Therefore, it will facilitate both the student and the teacher to get the resource faster and more updated. Having analyzed the questionnaire to learn more deeply the opinions of university students on how digital tools help them to holistically improve their understanding of English texts, the interview data of the participants focused on the research questions and the questionnaire are examined.

### Interview

The interview was structured and took place with four participants in 2 sessions via Zoom. One participant was interviewed in the first session and the remaining three in the second session. The first question was "Opinion when performing exercises with English texts through digital tools". The second question was "Opinion when reading an English text on a digital device and a printed text". While the third focused on "Perception to investigate information in English through digital tools", finally question 4 was addressed to "Recommendation for reading digital texts in English". Therefore, the analysis of the interview is shown below to know about the most relevant opinions of the participants when using digital tools for understanding texts in English.

Questions	Answers
<p><i>Question 1:</i>  <b>Opinion when performing exercise with English texts through digital tools</b></p>	<p>I consider that <b>the formats are more diverse in digital platforms</b>, and that allows us to have, <b>be able to rehearse or have exercises under different schemes that facilitate a great diversity</b> of understanding the same subject.</p>
<p><i>Question 2:</i>  <b>Opinion when reading an English text on a digital device and a printed text</b></p>	<p>The way I see it is <b>much better. I don't know if it's because of my generation but having the text physically because it allows me to make drafts to make annotations for myself. It is much better</b> to handle English documents by reading English documents in physical format.</p>
<p><i>Question 3:</i>  <b>Perception to investigate information in English digital tools</b></p>	<p>I think it is much more convenient and <b>beneficial to use digital media</b> for research. With just a few clicks, you can access a vast amount of information that you wouldn't find by physically searching through libraries. Even in English-speaking institutions, the <b>libraries may not have a diverse range of titles available</b>. In contrast, <b>digital platforms provide much better management and accessibility of information for research purposes</b>.</p>
<p><i>Question 4:</i>  <b>Recommendation for reading digital texts in English</b></p>	<p><b>Well, I, in particular, what I do is to have applications that support me and so, to have a dictionary, synonyms, a tool of conjugations, to have, can, and/ or use markers within the digital part, have the facility to highlight the text to put some as in a PDF</b>, put some text that gives me the meaning of some word, go the whole part of the digital format as a word processor that allows me to do what you do manually and that you cannot so easily as copy and paste for example not edit the text go.</p>

**Conclusion**

The findings discussed and presented above provided us with several significant explanations of the opinions of a group of university students when using digital tools to improve the comprehension of English texts. The first section of the instrument allowed the analysis of the personal information of the participants, which shows that despite the age, profession, and level of English, technology plays a vital role in learning another language. In section 2, the digital devices used by university students for an ORCEC and for reading text comprehension in English were analyzed, allowing us to see that cell phones are the most common electronic devices for these and other activities. At the same time, it was shown how often participants perform certain activities to improve their understanding and knowledge of academic texts in English. This showed that they perform digital reading more frequently for that activity. According to Section 3, the type of reading preferred both on paper and in digital form was shown, with electronic reading standing out considerably. At the same point, the usefulness of reading texts in English was analyzed, highlighting that this facilitates the learning of a language in different contexts, such as grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, in addition to showing that students fully agreed that understanding English texts are helpful for them to communicate on social networks. Finally, sections 4 and 5 showed the material skills and resources that students need to understand reading in English, making clear that this ability is to translate words or phrases and rely more on using digital tools to be

more creative and participatory. Besides that, they prefer that the teacher provide them with the material in any digital or printed format but that more images are present as iconographies or semiotics for understanding academic texts in English. We can infer that electronic tools are crucial in today's ORCEC operations.

On the other hand, the interview responses again showed the participants' preference to use digital tools in an EL in a virtual environment. This allowed us to conclude that most university students constantly take digital resources for their learning development, both in a second language, in an academic environment and in daily life. The results of both instruments show that education is going towards a digitalized environment where both students and teachers need to improve online teaching and learning to facilitate the use of the tools every day and get the expected success.

### **Summary of Key Findings**

This study was concluded to describe the perception of the use of digital tools during an ORCEC. Another important factor was knowing the skills that participants have developed to have a better understanding of texts. The strategies used allowed students in a virtual context to have preferences to obtain the materials in the course. However, it is essential to mention that this research demonstrated that the general population reads more through electronic devices. Also, as has been said in this investigation, the pandemic COVID -19 was an impact that made all fields of education use more new digital devices. At the same time, the student population was forced to get better electronic devices. Although this kind of reading comprehension course has been given in face-to-face and blended format, the students used different electronic resources for it. Still, they had to improve the devices to obtain better results during the ORCEC training. Throughout the course, students demonstrated progress in managing their devices. They could easily share their screens to display their work, quickly locate relevant vocabulary during class, and actively participate more in discussions.

### **Implications and Contributions**

This study was able to conclude according to the perceptions of university students. The positive contribution of them helped to carry out the analysis of this research. According to their experiences and perceptions during a virtual course of reading comprehension. Using digital tools contributed favorably to making the class more dynamic and students more participatory. Although this research was carried out virtually in the course context, participants could respond satisfactorily to research instruments. At the same time, they were demonstrating the rapidity of collecting information digitally. The implications that could be observed during the course were to have a more obsolete digital device or a low reception of the internet.

### **Directions for Further Research**

This research was analyzed under an online concept. It was possible to identify that students use their digital devices to read. Learning the English language may be easy after having a cell phone, and these devices allow the student to navigate and investigate new theories and ways of learning. Both students and teachers constantly need to learn new forms of teaching-learning. Although it can be observed that some participants still read printed texts, they continue relying on digital tools to have better results. It is visible that the digital age is making extraordinary changes, constantly facilitating the renewal of information. However, it worries how fast past generations must improve their technological skills. Being at the forefront of the new generation will allow us to compare printed and digital information and improve in the field of research.



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