PESHUM : Jurnal Pendidikan, Sosial dan Humaniora
Vol.5, No.5, Agustus 2026

A Descriptive Study on the Integration of Technology and Contextual Learning in Supporting Students' Reading Skills

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Article History:
Received: 08 Agustus 2026
Revised: 23 Agustus 2026
Accepted: 29 Agustus 2026

Keywords: *technology integration; contextual learning; reading skills;*

Abstract: *Purpose – This study aims to describe the integration of technology and contextual learning in supporting Grade VIII students' reading skills in English instruction at SMP Negeri 13 Kota Pontianak. It focuses on the digital tools used in reading activities and how contextual learning connects reading texts with students' real-life experiences. Design/methods/approach– This study employed a qualitative descriptive research involving one English teacher and ten Grade VIII students selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, document analysis of instructional documents including the lesson plan and teaching module. The data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis, while data triangulation was used to strengthen the credibility of the findings. Findings – The findings reveal that technology functioned as a reading support system rather than merely as a presentation medium. Teacher-selected tools supported material presentation, task distribution, and vocabulary practice, while student-selected tools helped students understand vocabulary, pronunciation, and text meaning independently. Contextual learning was reflected in reading activities that related texts to familiar technology, local phenomena, school life, and students' daily experiences. However, contextual links needed to be made explicit so that students could recognize the relevance of the texts more clearly. Research implications/limitations – The study implies that teachers should integrate digital tools with contextual reading tasks rather than using technology only as a supplementary medium. This study was limited to one school, one teacher, and a small group of students.*

INTRODUCTION

Reading is a foundational skill for academic learning and lifelong literacy. In Indonesian secondary education, strengthening reading literacy remains urgent because students are expected to access, interpret, and evaluate increasingly complex information in the digital era. The OECD (2023) reported that Indonesia's PISA 2022 reading score remained below the OECD average, indicating that reading literacy continues to be a major educational concern. Tiwery (2025) further highlights that reading instruction challenges in Indonesian junior secondary schools are compounded by resource limitations and inadequate integration of meaningful literacy practices, especially in underserved regions. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, this issue becomes more complex because students must understand vocabulary, sentence structure, textual organization, and meaning in a language that is not used as their daily means of communication.

Digital transformation has changed the way students encounter English texts. Technology can provide visual support, multimodal input, pronunciation assistance, online dictionaries, interactive quizzes, and access to varied reading materials. However, technology does not automatically improve reading comprehension. Batubara (2021) shows that technology integration in Indonesian EFL classrooms becomes meaningful when teachers provide clear guidance and when students are supported to use digital tools for educational purposes. Similarly, Zuo and Ives (2024) note that technology-assisted reading instruction should move beyond measuring outcomes and pay more attention to learners' literacy practices and interactive engagement in digital contexts.

Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) offers a pedagogical frame for making reading activities more meaningful. CTL emphasizes the interconnectedness between academic content and real-life contexts, enabling students to construct meaning through familiar experiences, inquiry, collaboration, reflection, and authentic assessment (Johnson, 2002). In EFL reading, contextual learning can help students connect unfamiliar English texts with local knowledge, personal experience, and authentic reading purposes. Previous studies have shown that CTL can support students' reading comprehension when learning materials are connected to meaningful contexts (Aryawira pratama & Sumardi, 2022; Utami et al., 2023).

Although studies on technology-assisted reading instruction and CTL have continued to develop, the existing literature still leaves a specific gap. Some previous studies mainly discuss the effectiveness of technology in language classrooms, while others examine CTL as an instructional approach for improving reading comprehension. Fewer studies describe how both approaches are implemented simultaneously in junior secondary EFL reading classrooms, especially by drawing evidence from teacher perspectives, student experiences, classroom practices, and instructional documents. This gap is important because classroom implementation often differs from theoretical expectations and requires context-sensitive analysis (Eryansyah & Erlina, 2023; Mustofa & Damayanti, 2024).

Preliminary observations and informal discussions with the English teacher at SMP Negeri 13 Kota Pontianak indicated that several Grade VIII students still struggled to move beyond literal comprehension and tended to rely on word-by-word translation. Jannah et al. (2023) found that Indonesian EFL students often exhibited low reading interest in academic texts, particularly when they perceived the content as disconnected from their daily lives or learning needs. The teacher used Google Classroom, WhatsApp, Wordwall, a projector, PowerPoint, and other digital media to support reading instruction, yet some reading activities still needed clearer links to students' everyday experiences and authentic reading purposes. This condition shows the need to examine not only what technologies were used, but also how contextual learning was enacted in reading instruction.

The gap of this study lies in documenting the simultaneous implementation of multiple digital technologies and contextual learning principles in junior secondary EFL reading instruction through qualitative evidence obtained from the teacher, students, classroom observation, and instructional documents. Unlike studies that focus only on technology use or CTL separately, this study provides a data-near description of how technology and contextual learning are pedagogically connected in an actual Grade VIII reading classroom. Therefore, this study addresses two research questions: (1) what technologies are used in teaching reading to Grade VIII students at SMP Negeri 13 Kota Pontianak? and (2) how is contextual learning implemented to connect reading texts with students' experiences and authentic tasks?

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research to describe how technology integration and Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) were implemented in EFL reading instruction. A qualitative descriptive approach was appropriate because the study aimed to present a context-sensitive account of classroom practices as they naturally occurred, without manipulating variables or testing hypotheses (Ayton, 2023; Villamin et al., 2025). This design also allowed the researcher to interpret teacher and student experiences while remaining close to the data.

The study was conducted at SMP Negeri 13 Kota Pontianak, West Kalimantan, Indonesia. The research site was selected purposively because the English teacher had used digital tools and contextual learning activities in reading instruction. The participants consisted of one English teacher and ten Grade VIII students, generally aged 13-14 years. The teacher had more than twelve years of teaching experience and was actively involved in technology-supported English instruction. The ten students were selected through purposive sampling because they had participated in the observed reading activities, represented different levels of classroom participation, and could provide varied responses regarding the use of digital tools in reading. This sampling strategy was used to obtain information-rich data relevant to the research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2024).

Data were collected through classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Non-participant classroom observations were conducted to document how digital tools were used and how CTL principles appeared during reading activities. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the teacher and the students to explore their experiences, strategies, and responses to technology-supported contextual reading instruction. Document analysis was conducted on the lesson plan, teaching module, reading materials, digital activity designs, assessment rubrics, and classroom presentation materials. These data sources were used to compare planned instruction, classroom practice, and participant perspectives (Morgan, 2022; Surawy-Stepney et al., 2023).

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the six-phase framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) and further elaborated by Byrne (2022). The analysis began with repeated reading of observation notes, interview transcripts, and instructional documents. Initial codes were then generated by labeling meaningful data segments related to technology use, student reading support, and contextual learning. Similar codes were grouped into potential themes, reviewed for coherence, refined, and named according to their central meaning. The final themes were reported by combining analytical interpretation, participant excerpts, and evidence from the teaching module.

To ensure trustworthiness, this study applied credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as quality criteria for qualitative inquiry (Adler, 2022; Ahmed, 2024).

Credibility was strengthened through methodological triangulation by comparing classroom observation, teacher interview, student interviews, and document analysis. Transferability was addressed by providing a clear description of the school context, participants, and instructional setting. Dependability was maintained by following the phases of thematic analysis systematically, while confirmability was supported by grounding interpretations in participants' excerpts and document evidence rather than relying solely on the researcher's assumptions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings from classroom observation, teacher interview, student interviews, and document analysis of the teaching module. Thematic analysis generated three interconnected themes: (1) technology as a reading support system, (2) student agency in technology use, and (3) contextualization of reading materials. These themes answer the two research questions concerning the technologies used in reading instruction and the implementation of contextual learning in connecting texts with students' experiences and authentic tasks.

Research Setting, Information, and Data Triangulation

The research was conducted in Grade VIII English reading instruction at SMP Negeri 13 Kota Pontianak. The use of multiple data sources allowed the researcher to compare what was planned in the teaching module, what was reported by the teacher, and what was experienced by students. This triangulation was important because technology integration and CTL are not only reflected in lesson documents but also in classroom interaction and students' actual reading strategies.

Table 1. Research Setting, Informants, and Data Sources

Aspect	Description	Analytical Relevance
Research Site	SMP Negeri 13 Kota Pontianak, Grade VIII English reading class	Provides a junior secondary EFL context for examining technology-supported contextual reading instruction.
Teacher information	One English teacher with more than twelve years of teaching experience	Represents pedagogical decision-making in selecting tools, texts, and contextual activities.
Student information	Ten Grade VIII students coded Student-Student and Student-Student, generally aged 13-14 years	Represents students' experiences in using technology to support reading comprehension.
Observation data	Classroom reading activities involving digital media and contextual tasks	Shows how technology and CTL were enacted during instruction.
Document data	Teaching module on descriptive text: "Describing Technology and Real-Life Context"	Shows the planned integration of reading objectives, technology, contextual tasks, assessment, and reflection.

Table 1 shows that the findings were not produced from a single source. The teacher interview explained the pedagogical rationale, student interviews revealed learning experiences, observation data showed classroom enactment, and the module provided evidence of instructional planning. This combination strengthened the analysis because the same issue could be examined from different angles.

Theme 1: Technology as a Reading Support System

The first theme shows that technology functioned as a reading support system rather than as a decorative classroom medium. The teacher selected tools for different stages of reading instruction. Visual tools such as PowerPoint, Canva, and projector-based videos were used to activate prior knowledge before reading, while Google Classroom and WhatsApp supported task

distribution and communication. Wordwall was used for vocabulary practice and short interactive exercises.

Table 2. Teacher-Selected Digital Tools in Reading Instruction

Digital Tool	Instruction Use	Evidence and Analytical Meaning
PowerPoint, Canva, and projector-based video	Providing visual input in the pre-reading stage	Teacher stated that she sometimes used PowerPoint or Canva and showed videos before reading so that students could observe and analyze the topic. This indicates that technology was used to prepare students before they encountered the text.
Google Classroom	Distributing reading texts, instructions, and assignments	The platform organized reading materials and extended learning beyond classroom time.
WhatsApp	Sending reminders and supplementary information	WhatsApp functioned as a practical communication channel, especially for reminders and learning links.
Wordwall	Providing vocabulary practice and short interactive tasks	Wordwall supported gamified vocabulary practice, although students' responses varied depending on their familiarity with the platform.

The teacher's statement, 'Sometimes I use PowerPoint or Canva; we first show the current condition through video, and then students observe and analyze it' (Teacher), indicates that technology was used to build a bridge between students' prior knowledge and the reading text. In this sense, technology supported the pre-reading stage by helping students predict the topic and form initial ideas before reading. The teacher's use of technology was therefore pedagogical, not merely technical.

However, the students' responses to digital tools were not uniform. Some students enjoyed Wordwall because it felt like a game and encouraged them to learn vocabulary, while others were unfamiliar with the platform. Moorhouse and Kohnke (2024) confirm that Wordwall is a versatile digital tool for creating vocabulary activities that can be integrated into in-person or remote classes, yet must be used within a well-balanced curriculum to be effective. This variation suggests that digital tools require clear teacher guidance and repeated exposure before they can fully support reading activities.

Theme 2: Student Agency in Technology Use

The second theme concerns students' independent use of technology. Students did not only rely on tools selected by the teacher; they also created personal digital strategies to manage vocabulary difficulty, pronunciation, and comprehension. This shows student agency because learners selected tools according to their needs during reading.

Table 3. Student-Selected Digital Supports for Reading

Tool / Application	Reading Support	Student Evidence and Analytical Meaning
Google Translate	Checking word meaning and pronunciation	Student stated that Google Translate was useful because it was fast and could pronounce difficult words. This shows that students used translation tools to reduce vocabulary barriers.
Kamusku / offline dictionary	Understanding vocabulary without internet access	Student valued Kamusku because it could be used without internet connection, showing how students adapted to limited connectivity.
Text-to-speech feature	Listening support for written texts	Student stated that hearing the text helped him understand the content faster, indicating that audio support helped students process written input.

Duolingo, Grammarly, ChatGPT, and Gemini	Self-directed practice, language checking, and idea clarification	These tools indicate that students used digital resources beyond teacher instruction to support comprehension and language learning.
Web browser and Google Search	Searching additional information related to texts	Students used search tools to clarify unfamiliar topics and support reading tasks.

Student explained, 'Google Translate is the most useful because it is fast and can pronounce how to read the word.' This excerpt shows that students used technology not only to find Indonesian equivalents of English words, but also to access pronunciation. Meanwhile, Student stated that an offline dictionary was helpful because it could be used without an internet connection. These responses show that students' digital choices were shaped by both learning needs and practical classroom conditions.

The use of ChatGPT and Gemini also indicates a shift in students' reading practices. AI-based tools were used to clarify meanings, generate explanations, and support comprehension. Similarly, Irzawati and Unamo (2023) found that students perceived Duolingo positively as a self-directed tool for vocabulary and grammar practice, particularly because of its accessibility and immediate feedback. Nevertheless, the data suggest that these tools should be guided by teacher instruction so that students do not depend only on automatic answers and still develop reading strategies such as prediction, inference, and contextual guessing.

Theme 3: Contextualization of Reading Materials

The third theme shows how contextual learning was implemented through the teaching module, teacher explanations, and students' responses. The module was designed around descriptive texts about technology, a topic close to students' daily lives. Students were asked to identify text structure, recognize language features, and connect the reading text with technologies they used at home or at school.

Table 4. Contextual Learning Design in the Teaching Module

Module Component	Technology Used	CTL Principle	Reading Support Strategy
Learning objectives	Google Classroom (distributing module)	Constructivism	Students connect reading texts about technology with objects they use daily, building meaning from prior experience
Pre-reading activity	PowerPoint, Canva slide, projector-based video	Questioning & Modeling	Teacher displays familiar technology (smartphones, laptops, tablets) to activate prior knowledge and prepare students before encountering the text
While-Reading Activity	Wordwall, text-to-speech, digital dictionary	Inquiry & Learning Community	Students read "My Digital Assistant: A Tablet Computer", analyze text structure, and use digital tools to support vocabulary and comprehension
Post-Reading / Production Task	Google Classroom, WhatsApp	Authentic Assessment	Students write a descriptive text about technology they use and submit it digitally, connecting reading knowledge to real-life production
Assessment & Reflection	Quizizz, Kahoot, Google Form	Reflection	Students review their understanding through interactive platforms and reflect on how reading texts relate to their daily experiences

The module shows that contextual learning was not incidental. It was planned through objectives, pre-reading questions, text selection, production tasks, and reflection. For example, the question 'What technology do you use every day?' invited students to connect the text with

familiar objects before reading. This design helped students approach the descriptive text through concrete experience rather than treating it as an isolated language exercise.

Table 5. Triangulation of Contextual Learning Evidence

Data Source	Evidence	Interpretation
Teacher interview	The teacher connected reading texts with rain, flooding, and garbage in the local environment.	CTL was enacted through inquiry, questioning, and real-world observation.
Student interviews	Students mentioned traditional food, social media, local tourism, folklore, and school activities.	Students recognized contextual relevance when texts were close to their daily or cultural experiences.
Teaching module	The module used descriptive text about technology and asked students to relate it to objects they use.	The planned curriculum supported contextual reading and authentic tasks.
Observation Data	Reading activities involved visual input, questions, and discussion before and after reading.	Classroom practice showed an effort to connect texts with students' prior knowledge and experiences.

The teacher explained that a text about flooding could be connected with local conditions: 'When it rains, I sometimes invite students to observe how water flows and how garbage blocks the water flow' (Teacher). This example reflects the CTL principle of connecting academic content with real-world observation. Student responses also supported this pattern. Student, for example, found descriptive texts about local tourist destinations easier to understand because he already had an image of the place. However, some students still considered certain texts distant when they described foreign places or cultures. This means that contextualization needs to be made explicit through teacher questions, examples, and reflection so that all students can recognize the relevance of the reading material.

Overall, the results show that technology and contextual learning worked together to support reading instruction. Technology provided visual, lexical, audio, motivational, and communicative support, while contextual learning helped students relate texts to familiar experiences. The findings answer the two research questions by identifying the technologies used in reading instruction and explaining how contextual learning was enacted through module design, classroom practice, and participant experiences.

Discussion

The findings indicate that technology integration in this classroom functioned as a layered reading ecosystem. Teacher-selected tools supported presentation, task distribution, communication, and vocabulary practice, while student-selected tools supported vocabulary recognition, pronunciation, and independent comprehension. This finding supports Batubara (2021), who reports that technology in Indonesian EFL classrooms becomes useful when teachers provide clear instruction and when students use digital tools for learning purposes. It also aligns with Sari and Astuti (2023), who emphasize that technology use in English classrooms should be understood through both teacher decision-making and student learning experiences. In the present study, the teacher provided the instructional structure, but students expanded that structure by using tools they considered helpful for reading.

Students' frequent use of Google Translate and digital dictionaries suggests that vocabulary remains a central barrier in EFL reading. Rather than viewing translation tools only as signs of dependency, the findings show that students used them as immediate lexical scaffolds. Student used Google Translate because it provided quick meaning and pronunciation, while Student preferred Kamusku because it worked without internet access. Nurkamto et al. (2021) similarly

found that EFL teachers in Indonesian secondary schools recognized vocabulary as the primary obstacle in reading comprehension and that students often relied on external supports to manage unfamiliar words. This pattern supports Zuo and Ives' (2024) argument that technology-assisted reading instruction should pay attention to students' actual literacy practices in digital contexts. However, translation tools should be positioned as temporary scaffolds. Teachers still need to guide students to infer meaning from context, identify main ideas, and interpret implicit information so that reading does not remain limited to word-by-word translation.

The use of AI-based tools such as ChatGPT and Gemini adds another layer to the findings. These tools helped some students clarify meanings and support comprehension, but they also require critical guidance. Kohnke, Moorhouse, and Zou (2023) explain that ChatGPT offers affordances for language teaching and learning, while also requiring digital competence and ethical use. Haziz et al. (2025) further note that Indonesian EFL students benefited from ChatGPT for improving grammar accuracy and strengthening essay organization, but that critical scaffolding from teachers remains essential to prevent over-reliance on AI-generated responses. In this study, AI tools were not the main classroom platform, but they appeared in students' independent strategies. This indicates that EFL reading instruction can no longer ignore AI-assisted learning practices. Teachers need to help students use AI to ask better questions, check understanding, and compare explanations, rather than simply copying responses.

The findings also strengthen the relevance of CTL in EFL reading instruction. Contextual learning helped students approach reading texts through familiar experiences, such as technology use, school activities, local phenomena, cultural stories, and local tourism. This supports Johnson's (2002) view that meaningful learning occurs when academic content is connected to real-life situations. The finding is also consistent with Aryawira pratama and Sumardi (2022) and Utami et al. (2023), who found that contextual learning can support reading comprehension when materials are related to students' experiences. Indrayadi et al. (2020) also demonstrated through a quasi-experimental study that students who received CTL-based instruction significantly outperformed those in the conventional group in reading comprehension achievement, reinforcing that context-connected learning produces measurable benefits. Moreover, Jubhari et al. (2022) confirmed that CTL approaches were effective in developing Indonesian EFL secondary learners' language skills when materials were anchored in familiar cultural and experiential contexts. However, the present study adds that contextualization must be made visible to students. Some learners did not recognize the relevance of texts when the topic involved foreign places or unfamiliar cultures, showing that contextual links should be explicitly built through questioning, modeling, and reflection.

The teaching module played an important role in strengthening the analysis because it showed that technology and CTL were included in the planned curriculum. The module used a descriptive text about technology, contextual questions, digital activities, assessment, differentiation, and reflection. This confirms Morgan's (2022) view that document analysis can provide important evidence of educational practice. Nevertheless, the comparison between the module and participant data shows that classroom implementation was adaptive. Some tools listed in the module were not equally emphasized in student responses, while students also used tools beyond the module, such as ChatGPT and Gemini. This suggests that teachers should design modules flexibly and anticipate students' actual digital habits.

Pedagogically, this study implies that technology-supported reading instruction should not be limited to presenting slides or distributing assignments. Digital tools should be connected to explicit reading purposes, such as activating background knowledge, supporting vocabulary development, guiding comprehension, encouraging reflection, and linking texts to students' real-

life experiences. Perales and Ulla (2025) found that teachers who consciously integrated technology within a CTL framework reported more meaningful and context-relevant learning experiences for students, suggesting that the combination of digital tools and contextual pedagogy is more effective than either approach alone. Teachers should also provide alternative low-bandwidth activities and clear digital guidance because students' access and digital readiness may vary. In this way, technology and CTL can work together to create reading instruction that is more meaningful, accessible, and responsive to students' learning contexts. The trustworthiness of these interpretations was strengthened by the methodological triangulation applied in this study, consistent with the quality criteria for qualitative research outlined by Nowell et al. (2017), who emphasize that credibility in thematic analysis requires sustained engagement with the data through multiple sources and member checking.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that technology integration and contextual learning supported Grade VIII students' reading instruction by helping them access texts, understand vocabulary, and connect reading materials with daily experiences. Teacher-selected tools such as PowerPoint, Canva, projector-based videos, Google Classroom, WhatsApp, and Wordwall supported presentation, communication, and guided practice, while student-selected tools such as Google Translate, digital dictionaries, text-to-speech features, Duolingo, ChatGPT, and Gemini functioned as personal reading supports. Contextual learning was reflected in the teaching module and classroom practices that linked reading texts with familiar technology, local phenomena, school life, and students' cultural experiences. The pedagogical implication is that teachers should integrate digital tools with explicit contextual reading tasks rather than using technology merely as a presentation medium. Since this study was limited to one school, one teacher, and ten students, future research should involve broader classroom settings, more participants, and additional evidence such as students' reading products or comprehension assessments to examine how technology-supported CTL contributes to reading development over time.

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