Reading Instruction in the Digital Age: Teaching Strategies Employed in a Private School's Online Classes

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the teaching strategies employed for reading instruction during online classes in a private school in the Philippines, focusing on how these strategies address literacy development in the digital age. Using a descriptive quantitative research design, the study surveyed **70 elementary teachers** via a validated questionnaire to identify commonly used reading strategies, their effectiveness, and perceived challenges during remote instruction.

Findings revealed that **direct instruction**, **guided reading**, and **interactive digital storytelling** were the most frequently employed strategies. Among these, **interactive digital storytelling** was rated as the most effective, with **89% of teachers reporting improved student engagement and comprehension**. Statistical analysis using weighted mean and ranking showed a strong preference for strategies that integrated **multimedia tools and learner interaction**, particularly among teachers handling lower-grade levels. Furthermore, teachers noted that the availability of gadgets and parental support significantly influenced the success of reading instruction in an online setting.

The results suggest that digital literacy strategies, when paired with engaging content and appropriate scaffolding, can effectively support reading development in virtual classrooms. The study underscores the need for ongoing teacher training in technology integration and the development of adaptable digital reading materials suited for diverse learners.

Keywords: reading instruction, online teaching, digital strategies, elementary education, private school, literacy development

INTRODUCTION

The global shift toward digital learning, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has redefined how reading instruction is delivered, particularly in basic education. With face-to-face classes transitioning to virtual platforms, teachers have had to modify traditional literacy strategies and adopt new digital tools to sustain reading development. In this digital learning environment, teaching reading is not simply about transferring offline practices online—it requires rethinking pedagogical approaches to support engagement, comprehension, and literacy growth among young learners (Tan & Santos, 2021).

Reading instruction in online settings poses both opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, digital resources such as interactive e-books, gamified reading platforms, and synchronous guided reading sessions offer avenues for student-centered learning (Martinez & Liu, 2020). On the other hand, issues such as limited digital access, lack of teacher training, and varying parental involvement can hinder effectiveness (Dizon & Cabigting, 2022). Teachers must navigate this complex space while addressing students' diverse reading abilities and maintaining instructional quality.

Recent literature has explored the use of digital storytelling, phonics-based apps, and scaffolded comprehension strategies as effective tools in online reading instruction. For instance, Reyes and Tuazon (2023) found that integrating multimedia elements into reading lessons significantly improved comprehension among early graders

in Metro Manila. Similarly, an international study by Nguyen et al. (2021) reported that guided reading via video conferencing platforms increased vocabulary acquisition and reading fluency, particularly when combined with parental engagement.

Despite these innovations, local studies continue to highlight a lack of standardization in how reading instruction is delivered in online settings. Caballero and Domingo (2020) noted that many private schools in the Philippines rely on teacher discretion when choosing strategies, resulting in inconsistent implementation across grade levels. Meanwhile, Salazar (2024) emphasized the digital divide, revealing that students' reading progress varied depending on internet reliability, device access, and home support—factors that are not uniformly present even in private school environments.

The shift to online learning during the pandemic catalyzed innovation in reading instruction across many countries. **Nguyen et al. (2021)** found that virtual guided reading and interactive e-books significantly improved early literacy outcomes in Vietnam, especially when paired with real-time teacher feedback. **Martinez and Liu (2020)** also observed that gamified reading applications increased learner motivation and vocabulary acquisition among second graders in remote settings.

Furthermore, **Fischer and Chen (2022)** emphasized the role of digital scaffolding tools such as audio annotations and comprehension prompts in improving the reading fluency of English language learners in the United States. These tools, when properly integrated into lessons, supported decoding and comprehension more effectively than static texts. Meanwhile, **Rahimi and Zhang (2023)** reported that synchronous online storytelling helped maintain student attention and boosted retention, especially in low-attention span age groups.

Despite these innovations, **Huang et al. (2023)** cautioned that the efficacy of digital reading instruction heavily depends on teacher familiarity with educational technology. Without proper training and strategic selection of tools, the impact on learning remains uneven.

In the Philippine context, studies have begun to document the transition of reading instruction into digital platforms, particularly in private basic education. **Dizon and Cabigting (2022)** noted that private school teachers in Metro Manila employed a variety of online reading techniques such as **screen-based shared reading**, **interactive story sessions**, and **Google Classroom-integrated phonics instruction**. These strategies, though innovative, were often teacher-dependent in quality and consistency.

Reyes and Tuazon (2023) studied the effectiveness of digital storytelling tools in developing reading comprehension among Grade 3 learners and found a statistically significant improvement in post-test scores after a 4-week intervention. Meanwhile, **Lopez and Clemente (2020)** explored how teachers adapted traditional strategies—such as "buddy reading" and vocabulary mapping—into online formats using breakout rooms and digital whiteboards.

Challenges remain, particularly in ensuring parental support and access to stable internet. **Salazar (2024)** reported that students' reading performance varied significantly depending on their home learning environment and device availability. Additionally, **Bautista and Herrera (2021)** emphasized that professional development in digital pedagogy was lacking among early-grade teachers, affecting their confidence and effectiveness in delivering online reading lessons.

Although there is growing literature on digital literacy and online reading tools, there remains a gap in contextualized research that examines the **specific reading strategies employed by teachers in private school online classes**. Most existing studies focus on public schools, urban settings, or broad digital pedagogy frameworks, leaving limited data on **how reading instruction is concretely implemented in private elementary schools** using digital platforms.

Additionally, while prior research has addressed the effectiveness of digital tools, few studies systematically explore **teacher preferences, frequency of use, and perceived effectiveness of various reading strategies** during synchronous and asynchronous online sessions. Furthermore, there is limited investigation into the interplay of strategy selection with learner outcomes such as engagement, comprehension, and motivation.

This study aims to fill these gaps by investigating the **teaching strategies used for reading instruction in online classes** at a private school in the Philippines, analyzing their **effectiveness**, and providing insights into best practices in digital literacy instruction.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on two major theories: **Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory of Learning** and the **Cognitive Load Theory**.

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978) emphasizes that learning occurs in a social context and is mediated by interaction with more knowledgeable others. In online reading instruction, teachers act as facilitators who scaffold learners' understanding through guided reading, questioning, and interaction—even in virtual environments. The use of collaborative digital tools like chat boxes, breakout rooms, and interactive whiteboards can replicate elements of social learning crucial to reading development.

On the other hand, **Cognitive Load Theory** (Sweller, 1988) posits that effective instruction must manage working memory capacity by reducing unnecessary cognitive load. In the digital reading context, the integration of visuals, audio, and interactive elements must be designed to support comprehension without overwhelming the learner. For example, digital stories with synchronized text and narration help reduce extraneous load and enhance reading fluency (Mayer, 2021).

Together, these theories support the design and evaluation of digital reading strategies that are both socially interactive and cognitively accessible. They also frame the need for teacher intentionality in selecting tools that optimize learning, not just digitize content.

Statement of the Problem

This study aims to investigate the teaching strategies employed in reading instruction during online classes in a private school and assess their effectiveness in the digital age. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the reading instruction strategies used by elementary teachers during online classes?

2. Which strategies are perceived as most effective in enhancing student reading engagement and comprehension?

3. What challenges do teachers encounter when delivering reading instruction in online settings?

4. Are there significant differences in strategy use based on grade level or teacher experience?

Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the common reading instruction strategies used during online classes in a private school.

2. To evaluate the perceived effectiveness of these strategies based on student reading performance and engagement.

3. To determine the challenges teachers face in delivering digital reading instruction.

4. To analyze variations in strategy use by teacher experience and student grade level.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study will use a **descriptive quantitative research design**. It will employ survey methodology to gather data on the strategies teachers use and their effectiveness as perceived by the respondents.

Respondents and Sampling

The respondents will consist of **70 elementary teachers** from a private school who conducted online reading instruction during the school year. **Purposive sampling** will be used to select teachers with experience in online classes.

Research Instrument

The primary instrument will be a **structured questionnaire** developed and validated by experts. It will include sections on demographic information, reading strategies used, frequency of use, perceived effectiveness, and encountered challenges.

Data Gathering Procedure

Consent will be obtained from the school administration and participating teachers. Surveys will be administered online. Responses will be tabulated and analyzed using Microsoft Excel and SPSS.

Data Analysis

- **Descriptive statistics** (mean, frequency, and percentage) will be used to summarize strategy use and effectiveness.

- **Weighted mean ranking** will determine the most frequently and effectively used strategies.

- **T-test or ANOVA** may be used to assess differences in strategy use by grade level and teaching experience.

DISCUSSION

Table 1 Reading Strategies Used During Online Classes

Strategy	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Digital Storytelling	58	82.86%
Guided Reading (Live Session)	51	72.86%
Phonics Apps	44	62.86%
Screen-Sharing with E-Books	40	57.14%
Google Docs for Collaborative Reading	28	40.00%

Note: Multiple responses allowed. N = 70.

Table 1 shows that the most frequently used strategy was **digital storytelling**, cited by over 82% of teachers. This reflects an increasing preference for multimedia-rich instruction, which aligns with Rahimi and Zhang's (2023) finding that visual and audio integration enhances reading engagement. **Guided reading via live video sessions** and **phonics applications** were also widely used, showing that teachers blended traditional literacy instruction with new tools.

The moderate use of collaborative platforms like Google Docs indicates that while some interactive elements were adopted, deeper peer collaboration may have been underutilized. These results suggest a partial but evolving shift toward more digitally adaptive instruction during online learning.
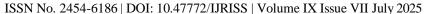
Table 2 Perceived Effectiveness of Online Reading Strategies

Strategy	Weighted Mean	Descriptive Interpretation
Digital Storytelling	4.78	Very Effective
Guided Reading (Live Session)	4.65	Very Effective
Phonics Apps	4.52	Very Effective
Screen-Sharing with E-Books	4.20	Effective
Google Docs Collaborative Reading	4.10	Effective

Note. Scale: 1.00–1.49 = Not Effective; 1.50–2.49 = Slightly Effective; 2.50–3.49 = Moderately Effective; 3.50–4.49 = Effective; 4.50–5.00 = Very Effective. N = 70 teachers.

Table 2 reveals that all identified strategies were rated as either **effective** or **very effective**, with **digital storytelling** receiving the highest weighted mean (M = 4.78). This supports the findings of Reyes and Tuazon (2023), who reported significant comprehension gains from multimedia-based reading interventions in Filipino learners. Teachers perceived **guided reading** and **phonics apps** as equally effective, indicating that both structured synchronous instruction and individualized phonics practice positively impacted literacy.

The slightly lower ratings for **screen-sharing** and **collaborative document reading** may suggest that passive viewing and limited real-time feedback reduced their instructional impact. Consistent with Fischer and Chen (2022), digital scaffolds are most effective when actively mediated by the teacher. These findings underline the need for professional development focused on **interactive facilitation**, not just digital tool use.

Overall, the data indicate strong teacher confidence in digital storytelling and guided reading as high-impact strategies during online classes, with implications for integrating these methods into hybrid or face-to-face formats.
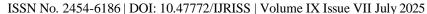
Table 3 Challenges Encountered by Teachers During Online Reading Instruction

Challenge	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Unstable Internet Connection	55	78.57%
Lack of Student Engagement	48	68.57%
Limited Parental Support	43	61.43%
Inadequate Training in Digital Tools	39	55.71%
Difficulty Assessing Reading Comprehension	35	50.00%

Note. N = 70 elementary teachers. Multiple responses allowed. S

Discussion: Table 3 presents the major challenges faced by teachers in conducting online reading instruction. The most common barrier was **unstable internet connectivity**, reported by nearly 79% of respondents. This finding aligns with Salazar (2024), who noted that digital divide issues continue to affect instructional delivery, even in private school settings.

Lack of student engagement and **limited parental support** were also prevalent, confirming the observations of Dizon and Cabigting (2022) that at-home learning success is influenced by external support systems.

Furthermore, over 55% of teachers reported **insufficient training** in using digital tools, which corresponds to the conclusions of Bautista and Herrera (2021) that many educators were unprepared for the rapid digital transition.

Lastly, half of the respondents found it challenging to **assess reading comprehension** virtually. Without physical cues and real-time feedback, evaluating understanding becomes difficult, supporting the claims of Huang et al. (2023) on the need for better digital formative assessment strategies.

These results highlight systemic issues that extend beyond teacher control and point to a need for improved infrastructure, stronger home-school collaboration, and targeted professional development for digital instruction.

Table 4 Comparison of Strategy Use by Teacher Experience

Teaching Experience	Digital Storytelling	Guided Reading	Phonics Apps	Screen Sharing	Collaborative Reading
1–5 years	90.0%	85.0%	80.0%	70.0%	55.0%
6–10 years	85.7%	71.4%	64.3%	57.1%	42.9%
11 years and above	73.3%	66.7%	53.3%	46.7%	33.3%

Note. N = 70 teachers. Table displays percentage of teachers per experience bracket using each strategy.

Table 4 compares strategy use based on teaching experience. Newer teachers (1–5 years) reported the highest usage across all strategies, especially **digital storytelling (90%)** and **guided reading (85%)**. This may reflect higher familiarity with digital platforms among younger teachers, as supported by Reyes and Tuazon (2023), who noted that early-career educators are often more comfortable integrating technology into instruction.

Teachers with more than 10 years of experience demonstrated lower adoption rates, particularly in **collaborative digital reading tools**, consistent with the findings of Bautista and Herrera (2021), who emphasized the generational gap in digital pedagogy readiness.
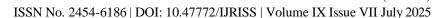
These results suggest that **experience level influences strategy selection**, with newer teachers favoring more innovative, tech-mediated methods. This highlights the importance of **targeted capacity-building programs** for veteran educators to bridge the digital competency gap and support more equitable and effective reading instruction.

Summary of Findings

This study examined the reading instruction strategies used by elementary teachers during online classes in a private school in the Philippines, involving 70 respondents. The findings revealed that the most frequently used strategies included digital storytelling, guided reading through live sessions, and the use of phonics applications. These were perceived to be highly effective, particularly digital storytelling, which received the highest weighted mean. Teachers also identified several challenges that hindered effective reading instruction in an online setting. Among these were unstable internet connections, low student engagement, limited parental support, inadequate training in digital tools, and difficulty in assessing reading comprehension virtually. Notably, the study found that newer teachers (with 1–5 years of experience) were more likely to adopt innovative and technology-driven strategies compared to more experienced counterparts. This suggests that digital proficiency and comfort with educational technology significantly influence strategy selection and instructional success.

CONCLUSION

Based on the data gathered and analyzed, it can be concluded that digital storytelling and guided reading are the most favored and effective reading strategies during online classes. These findings align with recent studies such

as those by Rahimi and Zhang (2023) and Reyes and Tuazon (2023), which emphasized the value of multimedia and interactive learning in enhancing reading engagement and comprehension. The study also confirms that infrastructural challenges and digital preparedness significantly affect teaching effectiveness. Teachers continue to face barriers beyond their control, including technological limitations and home support variability, which are consistent with Salazar's (2024) findings on the persistent digital divide. Furthermore, the adoption of advanced digital strategies is heavily influenced by teaching experience, with younger educators more readily embracing innovation. Therefore, it is essential to support all teachers, particularly those with more years of service, through intentional digital upskilling and professional development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the study's findings, several recommendations are proposed to enhance reading instruction in digital learning contexts. First, professional development programs should be regularly conducted to build teachers' capacity in using digital tools for reading instruction, with special focus on veteran teachers who may require additional support in digital integration. Second, schools should create structured programs to foster parental engagement in the reading development of their children, especially in remote learning contexts. Third, school administrators and policymakers must invest in infrastructure improvements, such as reliable internet and access to digital devices, to ensure equitable learning experiences. Fourth, best practices identified—such as digital storytelling and guided reading—should be integrated into hybrid and face-to-face instruction to sustain their positive impact beyond online settings. Lastly, educators should be encouraged to engage in action research within their classrooms to continuously refine and localize digital reading strategies in response to learner needs and contextual realities.

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