

Exploring Students' Preferences Between Print and Digital English Learning Materials at MTsN Makassar

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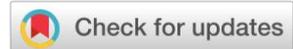
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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the preferences of junior high school students concerning printed versus digital English learning resources at MTsN Makassar. The research included 120 students from Grade IX who completed a structured questionnaire, along with 10 individuals in semi-structured interviews. In the process of data analysis, we employed descriptive and inferential statistical techniques for quantitative data, while qualitative responses underwent thematic evaluation. The research shows that scholars have a distinct liking for electronic learning content ($M = 4.04$, $SD = 0.7$) as opposed to their printed resources ($M = 3.19$, $SD = 0.8$). Students noted that characteristics like accessibility, interactivity, and engagement serve as important advantages of digital resources, while printed materials were credited with enhancing concentration and readability. Independent samples t -tests revealed no significant differences based on gender ($p > .05$); however, students with access to digital devices at home exhibited a significantly higher preference for digital formats ($p = .040$). The thematic analysis revealed three primary themes: (1) the engagement with digital media and the enjoyment it provides, (2) the motivation derived from easy access and constructive feedback, and (3) the essential task of aligning resource allocation with emerging challenges. Studies suggest that applying mixed learning techniques, combining internet-based and physical resources, can facilitate inclusiveness, amplify student interest, and improve the thoroughness of educational experiences in English Language Teaching (ELT).

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1. Introduction

The contemporary educational landscape has undergone a profound transformation, predominantly driven by advancements in technology and the increasing incorporation of digital instruments within the educational paradigm. This shift in pedagogical approaches has necessitated that educators and researchers examine students' preferences concerning diverse learning materials, particularly in relation to language acquisition (Weda et al., 2021; Said et al., 2021.; Ko et al., 2025). Within the framework of MTsN Makassar, a junior high school situated in Indonesia, it is crucial to identify students' predispositions toward print versus digital English educational resources to develop effective pedagogical strategies that address their particular educational requirements.

At MTsN Makassar, resources facilitating the acquisition of the English language exist in both tangible and digital formats, constituting essential components of the instructional methodology. Instructors regularly improve standard educational tools by weaving in modern tech advancements, digital learning formats, and visual assistance. The various teaching methods that students tend to prefer, alongside the effects of these choices on their drive and participation, are still largely unexamined. From this perspective, ongoing investigations clarify how pupils understand, apply, and judge the effectiveness of concrete resources compared to online materials in their journey of learning the English language. This link corresponds with worldwide studies showing that students' inclinations towards paper compared to digital formats are determined by their perceived cognitive advantages, background knowledge, and specific task conditions. Extensive global studies indicate that learners from over twenty nations generally favor print media for academic reading, owing to its facilitation of concentration, comprehension, and memory retention (Mizrachi et al., 2018; Mizrachi & Salaz, 2020; Youngsun et al., 2024). Further investigations demonstrate that print continues to offer significant advantages for the in-

depth analysis of intricate English texts, particularly when contrasted with digital displays (Daha, 2023; Jensen et al., 2024; Karubaba & Rahman, 2025).

Within the Indonesian ELT context, digital resources have become increasingly influential, with students reporting high usefulness and engagement during online English learning (Hidayat et al., 2022; Elisa, 2023), while educators continue to recognize the value of printed texts for critical and sustained reading tasks (Astri et al., 2024). Furthermore, empirical work has shown mixed outcomes, with some studies indicating that e-books can be equally or more effective for learning depending on context and learner readiness (Santoso et al., 2018; Listanto et al., 2025). These findings suggest that examining the preferences of MTsN Makassar learners is not only timely but necessary, given the co-existence of both material formats in Indonesian classrooms and the differing affordances they provide.

Based on observations by researchers who have been teaching English in the after-school program at MTs N Makassar for the past few years, Researcher noticed many students using tablets while reading or even doing assignments. Researcher then interested in delving deeper into this phenomenon and whether it had any connection to their language skills. When instructors make efforts to develop a just academic environment, it is important to recognize student preferences together with the academic outcomes derived from integrating multiple formats. The significant rewards of age-old writings versus internet applications showcase a burgeoning intrigue in customized academic frameworks that utilize the strengths of both platforms. To provide an instance, even though digital resources might foster interaction thanks to their engaging attributes, classic materials yield a physical experience that enhances memory retention and understanding, particularly with intricate topics. This tactic that merges different educational methodologies corresponds with insights that endorse a mixed teaching framework, which has proven beneficial in accommodating diverse learning needs and cultivating a more inclusive classroom atmosphere Febriansyah et al., (2024). Moreover, addressing potential challenges such as disparities in access to technology can further ensure that all students benefit from both types of resources, thereby contributing to improved educational outcomes in English Language Teaching (ELT) at institutions like MTsN Makassar.

The objective of this research is specifically tailored to: (1) investigate students' inclinations towards printed versus digital English learning resources; (2) assess differences associated with gender and comfort level with digital mediums; and (3) explore the personal experiences and views of students via qualitative interviews. The disclosures revealed greatly strengthen the narrative around English Language Teaching (ELT) by indicating the effect of media selection on student involvement, accessibility, and the evolution of teaching aids.

2. Methodology

The inquiry took on a hybrid research design, merging solid statistics with personal reflections to illuminate the breadth of student inclinations. The quantitative component comprised the dissemination of a systematically structured survey to 120 ninth-grade students at MTsN Makassar, whereas the qualitative component involved informal interviews with ten meticulously selected participants. Embracing a comprehensive research method greatly enriches our comprehension of how learners utilize diverse resources, presenting essential viewpoints that may guide upcoming educational programs.

This evaluation highlighted 20 assorted reference benchmarks that were measured with a five-point Likert scale extending from 'Strongly Disagree' (1) to 'Strongly Agree' (5). Exploration of student involvement and factors that inspire them, the value placed on various resources, and the choices made between print versus digital formats was undertaken. A foundational pilot assessment took place, confirming the stability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.89$), suggesting a respectable level of internal uniformity. The discussions explored individual educational experiences and perceptions, yielding nuanced insights regarding student preferences. The conclusions stress the urgent need to honour student options, as they are critical for the evolution of teaching tactics that improve both student interest and learning achievements.

Data analysis was conducted in two separate stages. Employing descriptive statistics such as mean, percentage, and standard deviation, the quantitative data were analysed to encapsulate observable trends, in conjunction with independent samples t-tests to identify significant disparities attributable to gender and device ownership. Matching the frameworks indicated by Braun & Clarke (2008), we engaged in a thematic investigation of the qualitative perspectives, involving transcription, coding, theme creation, and interpretation.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1 Quantitative Findings

The quantitative component of this research endeavour offers an extensive and thorough statistical depiction of the preferences exhibited by students regarding the utilization of printed versus digital materials for the purpose of learning the English language. In a broad sense, the responses provided by the students indicated a pronounced and significant predilection towards the use of digital media, a trend that is in alignment with the growing incorporation of technological advancements within the realm of language education. When analysing the aggregated data derived from all 20 items measured on a Likert scale, it was found that the mean score corresponding to the statements related to digital resources was calculated to be 4.04 with a standard deviation of 0.7, which signifies a high level of agreement among the participants, while conversely, the average score for the statements concerning print-based resources was determined to be 3.19, accompanied by a standard deviation of 0.8, which reflects a moderate preference for traditional learning materials. This substantial disparity of nearly one full point serves to underscore the notable transition towards digital learning modalities among junior high school students attending MTsN Makassar.

Table 1. Mean Scores of Students' Preferences for Digital and Print Resources

Material	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Digital English Learning Resources	4.04	0.70	High preference
Printed English Learning Resources	3.19	0.80	Moderate preference

A meticulous and detailed analysis conducted at the item level further illuminated the findings, revealing that an impressive 85% of the students concurred or expressed strong agreement with the assertion that digital resources render the process of learning English significantly more engaging and interesting. In a similar vein, 81% of the students acknowledged that the use of mobile applications, such as Duolingo, Quizizz, and instructional videos available on YouTube, has notably enhanced their skills in pronunciation and listening comprehension. In stark contrast to these findings, it was observed that fewer than half of the participants, specifically 48%, articulated a preference for traditional printed textbooks, and only 42% agreed with the notion that printed materials contribute positively to their concentration levels during the learning process. These observed outcomes resonate with prior research conducted by Amir and Rustam in (2025), which documented comparable trends among learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Indonesia, thereby emphasizing the assertion that the utilization of multimedia-based tools significantly promotes student engagement and increases exposure to the language being learned.

Table 2. Descriptive Percentage Data from the Questionnaire

Survey Item	% Agree / Strongly Agree
Digital resources make English learning engaging	85%
Mobile apps improve pronunciation & listening	81%
Prefer printed textbooks	48%
Printed materials help concentration	42%
Digital platforms allow flexible learning anytime & anywhere	78%

Moreover, the quantitative insights obtained stress the key necessity of accessibility when discussing educational provisions. A significant majority, exceeding 78% of the students surveyed, reported that the availability of digital learning platforms empowers them to engage in their studies at any time and from any location, which they found to be an incredibly liberating characteristic of modern learning. In line with the foundations of self-determination theory, this autonomy is believed to elevate intrinsic motivation in learners, which ultimately fosters deeper engagement and sustained effort in their studies. This study highlights that mobile technology accessibility affects not just the material choices students make for their education but also their foundational motivation. Notably, students who regularly utilized smartphones as tools for English learning exhibited higher mean scores on motivation-related survey items, with a calculated mean of 4.3, in comparison to their peers who infrequently employed such devices, whose mean score was recorded at 3.6.

Furthermore, the independent samples t-tests performed during this examination offered extra, more nuanced perspectives on the data. The comparative analysis based on gender revealed that there were no statistically significant differences across all items measured ($p > .05$), indicating that both male and female students place equal value on both digital and printed educational resources. This finding corroborates the conclusions drawn by Nero and Zulkiply in 2020, who contended that the disparities between genders in digital learning environments have diminished as a result of universal access to mobile technologies. However, an intriguing divergence was revealed when examining the results of the t-test based on device ownership, which demonstrated a statistically significant difference ($p = .040$). Students with personal access to their own smartphones or laptops often achieved superior scores, reflecting their tendency to favor digital materials, with a mean score of 4.27, as opposed to their peers without such access, who had an average score of 3.80. This observation supports the argument put forth by Sari in 2024, which emphasizes that the digital divide continues to present a substantial challenge to the equitable integration of technology within educational contexts. Pupils lacking adequate digital access may forfeit the many benefits that multimedia learning presents, potentially causing shortcomings in both involvement and educational achievements. The collective data suggests that learners regard digital materials as being not only more engaging but also more applicable and advantageous for mastering a language. Still, these revelations demonstrate that the level of student involvement in online platforms is affected by many elements, such as technological accessibility, inherent drive, and knowledge of digital assets. This indicates that enhancing digital literacy and ensuring equitable access to technological resources are critical components for maximizing the pedagogical advantages that technology can offer within the realm of English language education.

3.2 Qualitative Findings

The comprehensive thematic analysis conducted on the interview data serves to complement and substantially deepen the understanding of the quantitative trends that were previously established. Through a rigorous and systematic process of coding and categorization, which involved a meticulous examination of the data, three primary themes were discerned: (1) digital engagement and enjoyment, (2) motivation through accessibility and feedback, and (3) the intricate balancing of material use in conjunction with the overcoming of various barriers. These emergent themes poignantly encapsulate the lived experiences and nuanced emotional responses of the students as they interacted with both digital and printed learning materials in their educational journey.

Theme 1: Digital Engagement and Enjoyment

Students articulated their experiences within digital learning environments, characterizing them as engaging, stimulating, and markedly enjoyable. The expressions that were frequently used in their narratives featured words like 'funny,' 'insightful,' and 'timely,' capturing a collective feeling towards these modern educational resources. Numerous contributors shared that the integration of interactive aspects, featuring videos, quizzes, and gamified challenges, notably enriched their experience of involvement in the learning process. A student remarked, 'I really like using videos for learning as they make classes entertaining and easier to grasp,' highlighting how essential multimedia is for enhancing comprehension. This perception of enjoyment is not merely anecdotal; it is consistent with the established concept of "digital flow," a phenomenon in which students experience profound focus and satisfaction as they engage with interactive media. Additionally, these discoveries uphold the perspective that virtual media can profoundly elevate learner motivation and engagement in the sphere of language studies, a thesis that has been substantiated by earlier scholarly research Majid et al., (2025). Additionally, the fluid incorporation of stimulating instruments matches the escalating demand for online content among current students, marking a significant evolution towards more animated and engaging educational interactions Mulyani et al., (2024).

To their astonishment, numerous students expressed that the online learning methods significantly lessened their anxiety, particularly regarding speaking tasks, which are frequently viewed as daunting. Services that supply pronunciation advice permitted them to engage in practice away from an audience before demonstrating their talents to their contemporaries. This self-directed rehearsal not only fosters a sense of confidence but also promotes autonomy, a notion that aligns with the findings of Li (2024), who conducted a meta-analysis confirming the effectiveness of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) in facilitating speaking development. This analysis specifically noted the role of MALL in decreasing anxiety and promoting self-regulated learning, thereby enhancing learner autonomy through the utilization of Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR) technology.

Theme 2: Motivation through Accessibility and Feedback

A recurrent narrative that emerged among students was the assertion that digital platforms significantly enhance motivation through improved accessibility and the provision of instantaneous feedback. Numerous contributors conveyed

their appreciation for the chance to engage in study work on their phones during periods not associated with regular school schedules. One student remarked, "I can learn anywhere, even when I'm in the Gocar," effectively illustrating the remarkable flexibility and convenience offered by digital learning environments. In addition, the delivery of instant feedback from tests and different software offered learners a quick feeling of success and fulfilment. A contributor mentioned, "Observing my score flash up swiftly compels me to seek better outcomes next time," underlining the vital role of rapid feedback in boosting motivation. This interpretation is in agreement with the results provided by Nehe et al. (2023), which openly affirmed that all participants recognized their application of mobile language learning tools to facilitate their English language skill enhancement outside the standard classroom. Key aspects highlighted for this selection were the straightforward access to study materials, the versatility concerning the venue and timing of learning sessions, and the encouraging chance to advance at their own rhythm based on unique demands and self-guided educational inclinations.

Theme 3: Balancing Material Use and Overcoming Barriers

Notwithstanding the pronounced inclination towards digital resources, numerous students articulated obstacles that hindered their participation. Prevalent difficulties encompassed unreliable internet connectivity, restricted data allowances, and the necessity for shared devices. One student conveyed, "At times, the signal is weak, prompting me to utilize my textbook instead." Another student noted, "I share a phone with my sibling, which restricts my ability to study online consistently." These remarks elucidate the socio-economic disparities that influence digital engagement. Numerous pupils who faced unstable connectivity opted for hardcopy materials to maintain their educational progress, thereby underscoring the timeless significance of traditional publications.

Oddly enough, learners did not think of printed items as irrelevant; rather, they perceived them as extra support. They admitted that learning resources offered a foundation of stability, attention, and trustworthiness during technological setbacks. This pragmatic perspective indicates that students consider both media not in adversarial terms but as mutually supportive. In alignment with Rizky & Anggraini (2023), the findings revealed that students regarded the significance of engaging with both printed and digital textbooks as equivalent for their academic endeavors, and "None of the students rated one format better than the other." Qualitative data additionally illustrated that students expressed heightened comfort and regarded printed textbooks as "more effective" and "quicker to read." This underscores the fundamental pragmatic viewpoint of their reciprocal importance.

3.3 Integrated Discussion

The interplay between data-driven research and subjective insights profoundly bolsters our awareness of students' educational patterns. The correlation identified between verifiable information and personal journeys suggests that students' inclination towards virtual support is significantly impacted by emotional and mental forces. In the realm of emotional connection, online platforms evoke sensations of happiness and curiosity, while they also deliver rapid feedback, varied educational experiences, and personalized speed from a mental viewpoint.

The outcomes affirm and develop the combined learning paradigm, illustrating the connection between conventional and electronic educational practices. In the setting of MTsN Makassar, this harmony carries unique weight due to the differing levels of digital availability and infrastructure backing. In digital learning scenarios, students with uninterrupted internet service are prospering, while others dealing with tech barriers continue to use physical resources. As a result, the research uncovers a bifurcated trend of digital enthusiasm coupled with a pragmatic dependence on print, illustrating a hybrid learning ecology that is emblematic of the broader educational transition occurring in Indonesia.

From a pedagogical perspective, these findings propose that efficacious English instruction ought to leverage students' enthusiasm for digital media while preserving the structural clarity inherent in print-based learning. Educators have the chance to engage with digital resources to strengthen immersive word usage, elevate pronunciation practices, and promote personal grammar investigation. Alongside, tangible publications can work as vital foundations for cultivating enhanced reading awareness and written analysis. This two-pronged strategy may serve to unite the engagement divide that separates students engaged in technology-enhanced settings from those who are at a disadvantage technologically.

Moreover, the significance of feedback emerges as a pivotal pedagogical tenet. Digital feedback's quickness functions not just as a source of motivation but also grants learners essential understanding about their academic growth, consequently strengthening formative evaluation practices. Nevertheless, in the absence of appropriate pedagogical mediation, an excessive reliance on applications may inhibit critical thinking and in-depth comprehension. Consequently, educators must scaffold the integration of digital tools by incorporating reflective discourse and collaborative review sessions.

The findings further enhance the significant discussions regarding equity and inclusion linked to the merging of technology. The digital divide evident in MTsN Makassar reflects national patterns identified by Basuki et al., (2025) which explicitly delineates a "glaring digital infrastructure gap" across regions and institutions, in conjunction with "inequitable internet access" and "limited technological devices," which represent significant barriers to equitable digital learning.

4. Conclusion

This investigation concludes that students at MTsN Makassar demonstrate a pronounced preference for digital English learning resources, propelled by factors such as accessibility, interactivity, and motivational attributes. Gender may not affect these preferences, but personal digital devices certainly amplify students' involvement with digital resources. Qualitative observations imply that online education enhances both fervour and personal control, while also facing obstacles stemming from infrastructure. As a result, promoting blended learning frameworks that unite printed and online materials is suggested for the efficient delivery of English Language Teaching (ELT). Later research initiatives should integrate long-range methodologies to gauge the effects of digital visibility on language accomplishments across a timeline. In addition, the skills and readiness of instructors in the realm of digital teaching require more investigation to promote effective changes in classroom dynamics.

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