A Comparative Analysis of ELT Curriculum Approaches: Traditional vs Digital Material Integration

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the comparative effectiveness of traditional and digital material integration within English Language Teaching (ELT) curriculum, focusing on their respective impacts on student engagement, language proficiency, and learner autonomy. Traditional ELT approaches, grounded in structured, teacher-led instruction using textbooks and printed resources, have provided stability and reliability in language learning. However, the advent of digital materials has introduced interactive, personalized learning experiences through multimedia and online platforms, enhancing flexibility and student engagement. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research collected data via surveys and interviews from a sample of pre-intermediate English students to explore preferences, challenges, and perceived benefits of each approach. Findings indicate that while traditional materials excel in delivering organized content and structured practice, digital materials significantly boost engagement, autonomy, and real-world application of language skills. Notably, learners expressed a preference for a blended approach, where traditional resources provide foundational knowledge and digital tools supplement with interactive exercises and multimedia exposure. Despite the advantages, digital integration also presented challenges, such as technological access issues and potential cognitive overload. This study concludes that a balanced integration of both traditional and digital materials can address diverse learner needs, supporting structured language acquisition while promoting engagement and adaptability in dynamic educational contexts. The results offer practical insights and best practices for curriculum developers and educators aiming to enhance language learning outcomes by combining traditional and digital methods.
Keywords: ELT Curriculum; Traditional Material; Digital Material

INTRODUCTION

In the rapidly evolving field of English Language Teaching (ELT), curriculum design has undergone substantial transformations to adapt to changing learner needs, technological advancements, and evolving pedagogical theories. Traditionally, ELT has relied heavily on classical approaches such as the Grammar-Translation Method and the Audio-Lingual Method, both of which emphasize structure, accuracy, and teacher-led instruction (Chan, 2021). These traditional methods, while effective in building foundational language skills, often limit opportunities for spontaneous, real-world language application (Fadilah et al., 2023). The limitations of such approaches are increasingly apparent as learners and educators demand more interactive and flexible learning experiences that cater to diverse language needs in a globalized world.

In response to these demands, digital material integration has gained prominence as an essential component of modern ELT curricula. Digital resources, such as language apps, multimedia content, and online learning platforms, offer new possibilities for interactive and personalized learning (Orak & Alagözlü, 2023). Unlike traditional materials, digital resources support learner autonomy and adaptability, making them valuable in diverse educational contexts (Sadhu & Bhatt, 2024). However, despite these advantages, digital materials also present challenges, such as cognitive overload, accessibility issues, and distractions, which can impact learners' focus and retention of knowledge (Febriansyah et al., 2024).

Theoretically, digital integration in ELT is supported by the SAMR model (Substitution, Augmentation, Modification, Redefinition), which guides how technology can transform teaching practices by enhancing student engagement and collaboration (Orak & Alagözlü, 2023). However, while this model highlights the benefits of technology, it does not adequately address the need for a balanced approach that incorporates traditional methods' structured benefits with the interactive potential of digital resources. Furthermore, research has shown that a combination of traditional and digital materials, often referred to as blended learning, can maximize engagement and learning outcomes by leveraging the strengths of both approaches (Kumar et al., 2022).

This study aims to address the gap in understanding how best to integrate traditional and digital materials in ELT to meet the evolving needs of learners. Although studies have explored the effectiveness of individual approaches, few have provided a comparative analysis of traditional versus digital material integration in ELT specifically within the framework of learner engagement, flexibility, and effectiveness. This research will evaluate these materials in a university-level English course, assessing which combination better supports language acquisition. By investigating the complementary roles of traditional and digital materials, this study seeks to offer insights for educators and curriculum developers on how to create a balanced, effective ELT curriculum that meets the demands of contemporary learners

LITERATURE REVIEW

Traditional English Language Teaching (ELT) methods have long been characterized by teacher-directed instruction, where educators primarily control the pace and content, often using textbooks and other printed materials. This approach is based on the "transmission model," in which teachers impart knowledge through structured, accuracy-focused lessons, often centered around grammar and vocabulary (Febriansyah et al., 2024). While effective in building foundational language skills, this method is limited in its ability to foster spontaneous language use and critical thinking, which are increasingly valued in modern pedagogy.

Recent studies emphasize the value of integrating authentic materials to enhance communicative competence and cultural awareness. The combination of traditional methods with digital tools supports a more holistic ELT curriculum, adapting language instruction to meet students' diverse learning needs and preferences (Chan, 2021). Febriansyah et al. (2024) highlight that traditional materials, while trusted for their reliability, lack the interactivity that digital tools offer, suggesting a blended approach to increase engagement and learner motivation.

The digital transformation of ELT has introduced multimedia resources, online platforms, and interactive applications, enriching the language learning experience by catering to diverse learning styles. For example, Kumar et al. (2022) discuss the theoretical underpinnings of digital integration in ELT, emphasizing that digital materials offer flexibility and autonomy, essential for promoting learner-centered education. Digital tools encourage students to engage in interactive and collaborative learning activities, as they often mimic real-world communication contexts, which is crucial for language acquisition in the 21st century.

Moreover, Orak and Alagözlü (2023) examine how digital integration in ELT affects educators' approach to curriculum design. Their study reveals that ELT lecturers frequently use technology at the substitution level—simply replacing traditional tools with digital alternatives—yet they acknowledge the need for more transformative applications, which could be achieved by adopting higher-order digital integration models such as the SAMR model. This model promotes redefinition, enabling entirely new ways of learning through tasks that would otherwise be impossible without technology.

Smith et al. (2023) further explore innovation in ELT, emphasizing how blending traditional and digital methods can bridge the gap between structured language learning and the need for spontaneity and real-world application. Their research suggests that while traditional materials provide structure, digital tools promote autonomy, engagement, and real-world language skills, advocating for a balanced curriculum that meets the evolving needs of modern language learners.

Previous Study

Smith et al. (2023) conducted an action research study in a Chinese university setting, illustrating the evolution of traditional ELT approaches toward more innovative practices. Teachers participated in a semester-long cycle of reflective practice, documenting their experiences in adapting traditional methods to include digital elements. The study revealed that while traditional methods provide structural consistency, the integration of digital resources allows educators to personalize instruction and foster active student participation. This shift encourages incremental organizational redesigns, where teachers redefine their instructional strategies to meet both institutional expectations and learner needs.

In another study, Febriansyah et al. (2024) examined the role of traditional media in contemporary ELT classrooms in Indonesia, utilizing a mixed-methods approach. Their findings indicate that while traditional materials are still highly valued for their reliability, digital tools offer enhanced interactivity, which appeals to a broader range of student preferences. According to their research, 70% of students prefer digital resources due to ease of access and engagement, suggesting that blended learning methods could help overcome the limitations of solely traditional or digital approaches.

Orak and Alagözlü (2023) analyzed digital technology integration among ELT lecturers in Turkey during remote learning scenarios. Utilizing the SAMR model, they observed that while digital tools are often used as direct substitutions for traditional materials, there is a growing interest in transforming teaching practices to enable richer, more interactive learning experiences. This study emphasizes the potential for transformative digital integration, advocating for a model where technology not only complements but also redefines traditional instructional methods to enhance learning outcomes.

Together, these studies underscore the necessity of combining traditional and digital materials in ELT to promote an adaptive and effective curriculum. By aligning traditional pedagogical practices with digital innovations, educators can create a more holistic and dynamic learning environment that meets the diverse needs of modern language learners.

METHOD

Design and Sample

This study utilizes a mixed-methods comparative analysis design to assess the effectiveness of traditional versus digital material integration within English Language Teaching (ELT) curricula. By employing both qualitative and quantitative data collection, the research seeks to provide a holistic understanding of each approach's impact on language acquisition, learner engagement, and overall teaching efficacy. The sample comprises 35 students enrolled in a Pre-Intermediate

English I class at Universitas Klabat during the 2023/2024 academic year. This sample was selected for convenience, providing a diverse group across various ages, genders, and educational backgrounds, which allows for a well-rounded perspective on learner preferences and engagement with traditional and digital materials.

Instrument and Procedure

Data were gathered primarily through a structured questionnaire designed to evaluate student experiences, engagement, and preferences regarding traditional and digital ELT materials. The questionnaire included three sections:
   - **Demographic Information**: This section collected basic participant data, including age, gender, prior English learning experience, and familiarity with digital tools.
   - **Perceptions of Traditional and Digital Materials**: This section featured Likert-scale questions to assess perceived benefits, engagement levels, and material preferences for both traditional and digital resources.
   - **Material Preference and Engagement**: Participants indicated their preferred learning materials and reflected on how each type affected their motivation and interaction within the classroom.

Each participant completed the questionnaire independently, allowing for the collection of both quantitative and qualitative insights into the effectiveness and limitations of traditional and digital ELT materials.

Data Analysis

For quantitative data, the study employed frequency analysis to examine participants' views on traditional versus digital materials, focusing on their perceived success, engagement, and overall usefulness in language acquisition. Likert-scale responses were analyzed to quantify the levels of engagement and effectiveness attributed to each material type. Data were organized and processed using statistical software to ensure clarity and accuracy. Frequency distributions were then interpreted to summarize key findings and draw meaningful conclusions regarding participants' perceptions and preferences. This approach allowed for an effective comparison between traditional and digital material impacts, informing best practices for ELT curriculum integration.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings from the study present a comparative analysis of traditional versus digital materials in English Language Teaching (ELT), specifically examining their effects on student engagement, perceived effectiveness, and learning preferences. Firstly, the study identifies a balanced demographic composition in the sample, with ages ranging primarily between 22 and 23 years, representing 40% of participants, and nearly equal gender distribution—approximately 51% male and 49% female. Academically, most participants were in their third year (67%), while others were

in their second (28%) and first years (5%). Students primarily majored in Decave (42.85%) and Accounting (28.57%), followed by smaller representations in Informatics, Philosophy, and Management.
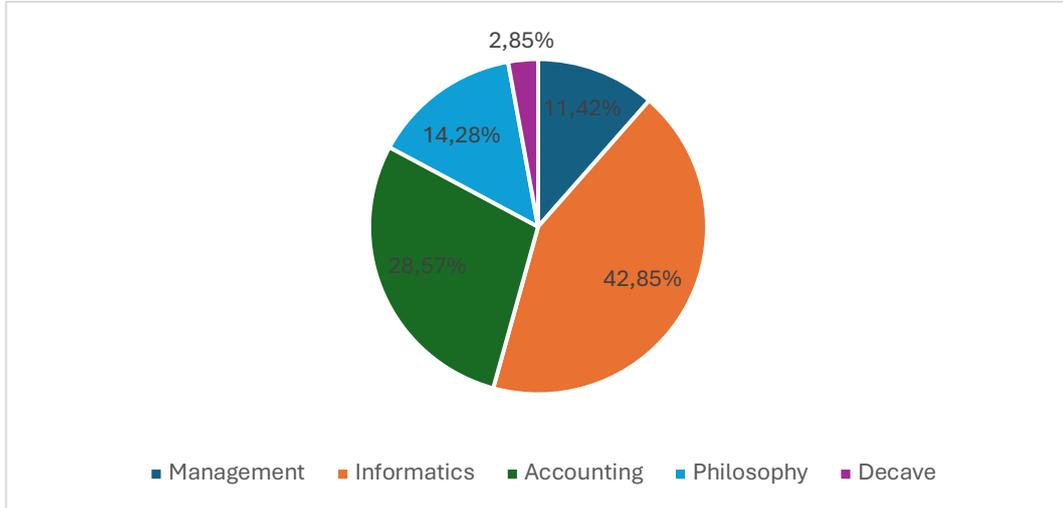

Figure 1. Majoring

Regarding material usage, 45.71% of participants reported using traditional materials like textbooks only "sometimes," while 28.57% used them "often." A smaller portion, 20%, used these materials "rarely," indicating an ongoing, though diminishing, role for traditional resources. In contrast, digital materials, including online resources and educational applications, were "often" used by 62.85% of participants, while 22.85% used them "sometimes." Only a small fraction (11.42%) used digital materials "rarely," highlighting a preference for digital resources in language learning.
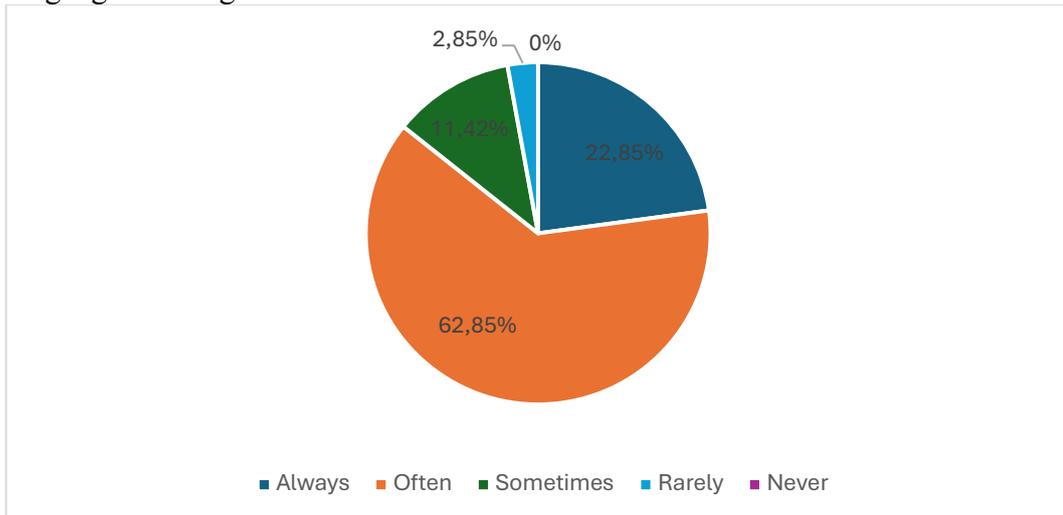

Figure 2. Frequency of Material Usage

In terms of material preference, 40% of participants favored a balanced approach, utilizing both traditional and digital materials. This preference suggests that

students find value in blending both types of resources, leveraging the structured nature of traditional materials with the interactivity and flexibility of digital resources. Meanwhile, 37.14% expressed a preference for digital materials alone, while 20% favored traditional methods. Only 2.85% indicated "no choice," suggesting that most students appreciate the flexibility digital materials provide without entirely disregarding traditional resources.
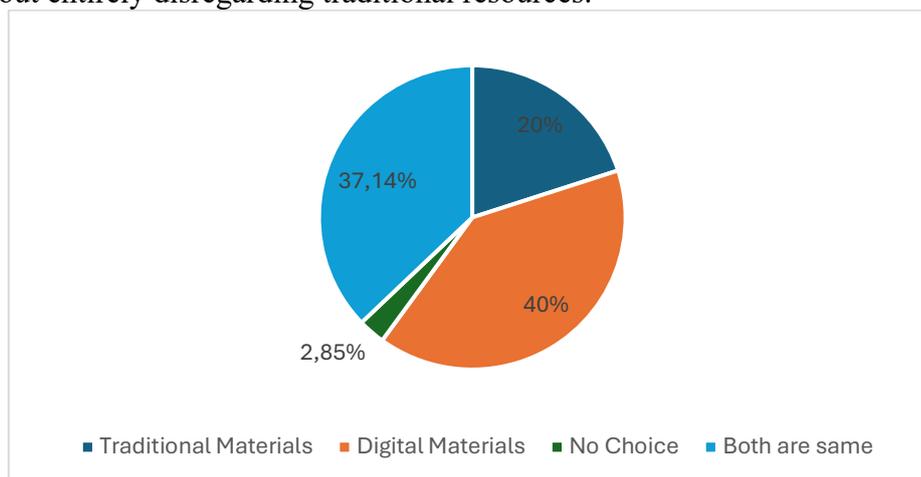

Figure 3. Material Preferences

Effectiveness of each material type was rated positively overall, with 54.28% perceiving traditional materials as "extremely effective" for improving language skills. Another 35% rated them as "effective," affirming that traditional materials remain valuable in language instruction. Conversely, 17.14% considered them "less effective," while a minimal 5.71% found them "not effective." This distribution reflects the continued importance of traditional materials despite the increasing adoption of digital tools.
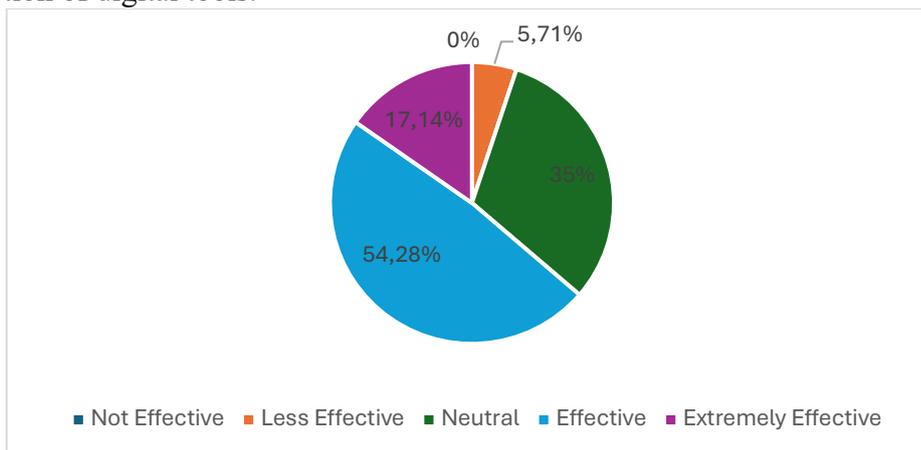

Figure 4. The Effectiveness of Traditional Material

Similarly, digital materials received high effectiveness ratings, with 54.28% viewing them as "extremely effective" and 28.57% as "effective." A smaller group, 17.14%, found digital materials "slightly effective," with none rating them as "not

effective." This indicates a strong, positive perception of digital materials' ability to enhance language skills, likely due to their interactive and accessible nature.
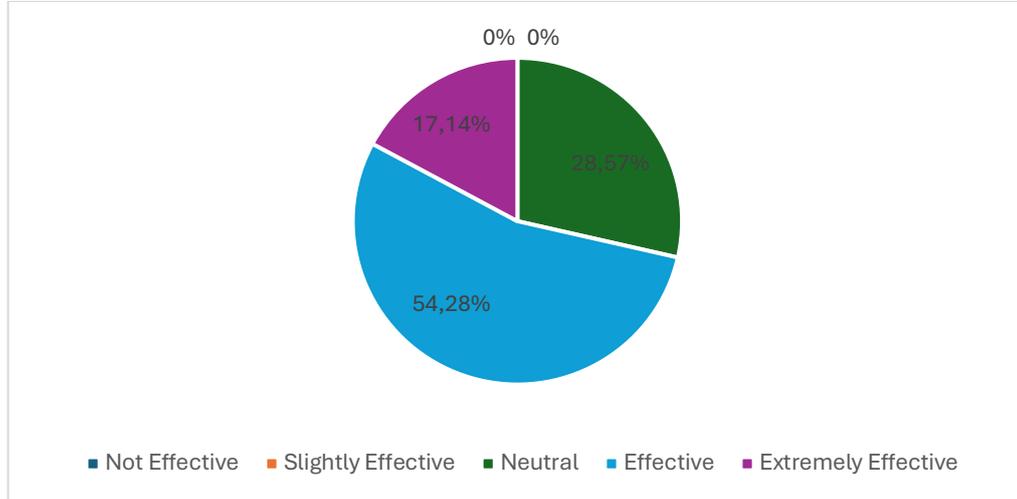

Figure 5. The Effectiveness of Digitiall Material

The study also highlights specific challenges with each material type. For traditional materials, the primary issue was "lack of engagement," as cited by 60% of respondents, followed by "limited resources" at 34.28% and "outdated content" at 5.71%. This lack of engagement may stem from the passive learning structure typical of traditional resources, which might not stimulate students as much as digital methods.
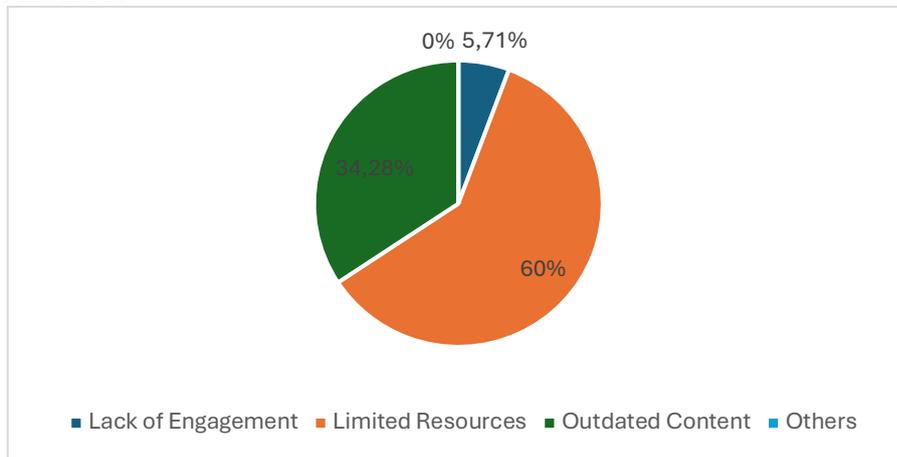

Figure 6. Challenges of Traditional Material

Challenges associated with digital materials were predominantly technical, with 74.28% of respondents reporting "technical issues" like slow internet and software difficulties. A further 20% cited "distractions" as a concern, often due to the presence of non-educational content online, while 5.71% mentioned "difficulty in accessing resources," likely linked to internet access limitations.
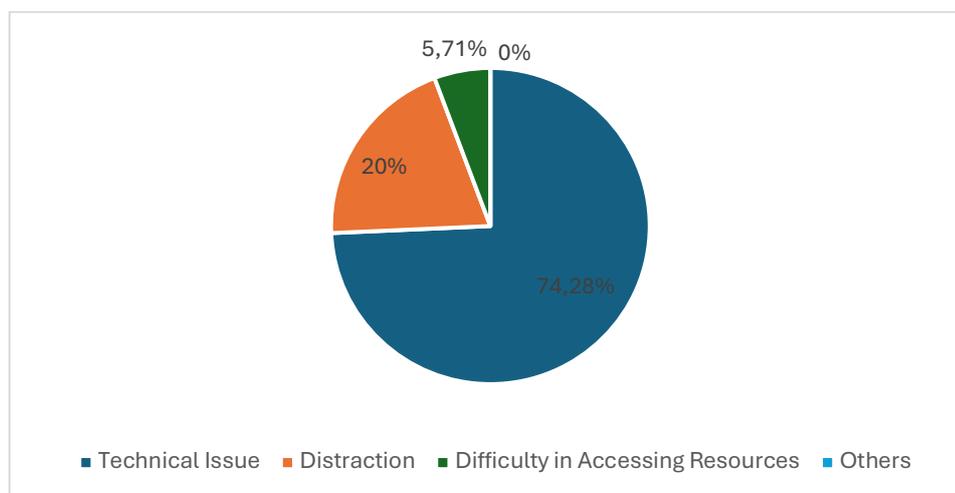
Figure 6. Challenges of Digital Material

Finally, the conclusion underscores the importance of an integrated approach, combining the reliability and structure of traditional materials with the engaging and interactive qualities of digital tools. To optimize the benefits of digital materials, the study recommends addressing technical issues and ensuring that students have the digital literacy skills needed to fully utilize online resources. It highlights that an effective ELT curriculum should be adaptable to diverse learning needs and emphasize practical language use in a digital context. These findings support a blended ELT approach, as the advantages of each material type can complement the limitations of the other, ultimately enriching the language learning experience and better preparing students for global communication needs.

Traditional materials, such as textbooks and printed handouts, have historically served as the backbone of ELT, offering structured, reliable content that reinforces foundational grammar and vocabulary skills (Chan, 2021). However, as evidenced by the significant portion of students preferring digital materials, technology-enhanced learning provides distinct advantages in promoting autonomy, interactivity, and engagement (Febriansyah et al., 2024). This shift suggests that while traditional materials remain relevant, the integration of digital resources is critical to addressing the dynamic needs of modern language learners.

The study's findings reveal that many learners see value in both traditional and digital materials, suggesting that an integrated approach best supports language development. This aligns with recent research advocating for blended learning models, which combine the best of both methods to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes (Smith et al., 2023). For instance, a study by Orak et al. (2023) found that digital integration during remote learning significantly boosted student engagement, particularly among learners accustomed to technology in their personal lives. The current study's finding that 40% of students preferred a balanced approach underscores the demand for a blended model, which can leverage the structured benefits of traditional materials while incorporating the flexibility of digital resources to meet varying learner needs.

However, challenges persist with both types of materials. For traditional resources, lack of engagement and outdated content emerged as common issues, aligning with findings from Fadilah et al. (2023), who emphasized that traditional assessments often fail to meet the interactive demands of today's learners. This study reinforces the need to modernize traditional materials to keep them engaging and culturally relevant. Conversely, digital materials were primarily hindered by technical issues, as 74.28% of respondents encountered difficulties with internet connectivity or device compatibility. This is consistent with Kumar et al. (2022), who identified similar technological barriers in digital ELT classrooms, particularly in regions with limited internet infrastructure. These findings highlight the importance of addressing technical limitations to maximize the benefits of digital integration in ELT.

The implications of this study are significant for ELT curriculum developers and educators, suggesting that an adaptive approach to material integration can foster better learning experiences. By offering a balanced use of traditional and digital materials, ELT programs can create a more inclusive learning environment that accommodates diverse learning styles and technical accessibility. The findings also underscore the necessity for institutions to invest in digital literacy training and provide technical support, as these factors are essential for students to fully engage with digital materials. As suggested by Sadhu and Bhatt (2024), promoting digital literacy is essential in empowering students to navigate and leverage online resources effectively.

In terms of research novelty, this study contributes valuable insights into the comparative efficacy of traditional and digital materials in ELT, with a particular focus on user preference and engagement—a dimension less frequently examined in existing literature. While previous studies have explored the benefits of digital tools independently, the comparative approach in this study provides a nuanced understanding of the advantages and limitations of both methods. This research thus builds on existing frameworks by presenting a practical model that emphasizes adaptability and responsiveness to learner needs, ultimately advocating for a flexible and integrated ELT curriculum that is both modern and inclusive.

CONCLUSION
The integration of digital materials into English Language Teaching (ELT) curricula presents a promising avenue for enhancing language learning experiences. While traditional materials continue to hold value, the flexibility, interactivity, and personalized learning opportunities offered by digital tools have the potential to revolutionize language education. However, a balanced approach that combines the strengths of both traditional and digital materials is crucial. Traditional materials, such as textbooks and workbooks, provide a structured foundation for language learning, while digital materials can supplement and enhance these traditional resources. To maximize the benefits of digital integration, it is essential to address the challenges associated with technology, such as technical difficulties

and digital literacy. By providing adequate training and support, educators can empower learners to effectively utilize digital tools and overcome these obstacles. Ultimately, the successful integration of digital materials in ELT depends on a thoughtful and strategic approach. By carefully considering the specific needs of learners and the learning objectives of the curriculum, educators can create engaging and effective learning experiences that prepare learners for the demands of the 21st century.

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