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Teaching in the Digital Age: English Instructors' Experiences with Digital Coursebooks in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

As the integration of digital tools in education accelerates, digital coursebooks have emerged as prominent resources in English language instruction. This study investigates the perspectives of in-service English instructors on the implementation of digital coursebooks within a tertiary-level Academic English program. Adopting a qualitative design, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 instructors at a private university. Thematic analysis of the data revealed seven key themes: general perceptions of digital coursebooks, factors influencing their effectiveness, benefits, challenges, motivational impact on learners, attitudes toward digitized teaching, and suggestions for improvement. Findings suggest that digital coursebooks are widely perceived as pedagogically necessary in the 21st-century classroom. Instructors highlighted advantages such as multimedia integration, accessibility, and engagement, while also identifying significant barriers, including technical issues, insufficient infrastructure, and reduced student note-taking habits. The study contributes context-specific insights into how digital coursebooks are used in practice, underscoring the need for intentional design, ongoing teacher training, and infrastructure investment. These findings have implications for educators, curriculum designers, and digital publishers seeking to align technological innovation with classroom realities.

Keywords: Digital coursebooks, English language teaching, qualitative research, instructor perspectives, educational technology, higher education

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*This study is derived from a Master Thesis

Introduction

Digital technology has played a significant role in transforming educational practices, particularly by enabling more flexible and accessible settings for language learning (Alhujaylan, 2019). English language teachers today often integrate digital tools with traditional materials such as grammar books, audio recordings, and dictionaries to support language learning (Espinoza-Celi & Pintado, 2020). Owing to rapid advancements in computer technology, digital learning tools now provide an extensive range of pedagogical possibilities (Bogach et al., 2021). The use of digital tools refers to applying computer-based applications that are interactive, informative, and appropriate for language teaching and learning (Kencana et al., 2022; Gaballo, 2019; Huertas-Abril, 2021; Nawaila et al., 2020). Among these innovations, digital coursebooks have emerged as a particularly influential innovation, blending structured content with multimedia features and interactive components to meet diverse learning needs.

Digital coursebooks, especially those designed for smartboards or interactive whiteboards, bring in a wide range of engaging materials into English language classrooms (Cinkara, 2018). These tools are useful in both English language learning for general purposes and in teaching English for specific professional or academic fields. (Vymetalkova & Milkova, 2019). Their use also contributes to an engaging classroom experience through features like images, audio, and video (Vymetalkova & Milkova, 2019). Many pre-service teachers choose digital coursebooks specifically to improve classroom language practice (Allen, 2015). Research also connects the use of digital coursebooks to better outcomes on exams like the TOEFL, showing their impact on student proficiency (Kencana et al., 2022). These resources support a learner-focused teaching model and are especially effective in online settings, helping students improve their English skills (Gaballo, 2019). EFL students also turn to digital tools to strengthen their knowledge and skills, assisting them with coursework and performance in the target language (Muharom & Nugroho, 2022). Considering how common digital content is in daily life, using digital materials either to support or replace traditional ones is both practical and necessary. Despite being relatively new in language education, digital coursebooks are becoming increasingly important, especially in EFL instruction, even though their conceptual foundations are still being developed (Rizky & Anggraini, 2022).

As digital tools become increasingly embedded in English language education, digital coursebooks are now widely used alongside, and in some cases, in place of traditional print materials. Especially in higher education, these tools offer greater access, flexibility, and pedagogical potential (Cinkara, 2018; Basuki, 2020). However, the rapid shift toward digital coursebook adoption has raised new questions about their actual impact and usability in classroom settings. Despite growing interest, limited research has examined how in-service instructors perceive and experience these tools in real teaching contexts, particularly in academic English programs.

In fact, with the rise of the digital age, the coursebook market has started shifting, with more materials being made available in digital formats. As mobile and tablet devices have become more widespread, publishers have begun offering digital versions of books that were previously only in print (Millar & Schrier, 2015). Digital tools have now become essential in language classes, offering multimedia features like sound, images, and videos to create a more authentic and attractive learning environment (Basuki, 2020; Vymetalkova & Milkova, 2019; Khomyshak, 2022). Along with their educational value, digital coursebooks are also seen as a cost-effective alternative (Murray & Perez, 2011).

Modern coursebooks frequently include software that is compatible with smartboards or interactive whiteboards (IWBs). In general, digital coursebooks are simply the digital versions of printed textbooks (Cinkara, 2018). Major educational publishers, including Cambridge, Oxford, and Macmillan, have increasingly begun offering digital alternatives to support language learning (Ohu, 2013). Digital coursebooks enhance accessibility by allowing learners to interact with instructional materials across multiple devices. They may feature QR codes, hyperlinks, or learning platforms where teachers can create virtual classrooms, share resources, and interact with students. These resources often contain supplementary digital content, instructional videos, mobile applications, and other interactive tools (Moundy et al., 2021).

There are several advantages of using digital coursebooks. For example, they offer updated content and include interactive elements like hyperlinks, video and audio files, animations, graphics, and educational games. Students can access them at any time and place, eliminating the need to carry heavy materials. Since they don't require printing or shipping, they are also environmentally friendly and often cheaper than physical books. Additional advantages include instant feedback, increased motivation, more interaction, and overall enjoyment of learning (Hani, 2014; Turayeva & Kholmurodova, 2022; Pupavac, 2022).

However, there are also some limitations. Lack of technical equipment or infrastructure can be a barrier. In some cases, teachers may not be fully trained to use digital tools in their lessons. This highlights the need for ongoing professional development in digital teaching methods (Hani, 2014; Huo, 2019; Park & Son, 2009; Alkahtani, 2011; Hakim, 2015; El Aggoune & Ghaouar, 2019). Moreover, a growing number of publishing houses are integrating artificial intelligence (AI) features into digital coursebooks, enabling adaptive learning, automated feedback, and individualized student support (Uali, 2025; Noviyanti et al., 2024). These developments reflect a broader trend in which AI-supported tools are reshaping how digital content is designed, delivered, and evaluated. Despite these advancements, there is limited research on how instructors experience and respond to this evolution, especially in tertiary-level English language instruction. Given these rapid changes, this study investigates English instructors' perspectives on the use of digital coursebooks in academic English programs. The goal is to better understand the practical opportunities and challenges these tools present, particularly in light of ongoing developments in AI-enhanced educational technologies.

To improve English language instruction and address evolving student needs, institutions are increasingly integrating digital tools into classroom practice. Rather than merely supplementing instruction, these technologies are reshaping how learning takes place by offering new modes of engagement and accessibility (Mucundanyi & Woodley, 2021). Among these tools, digital coursebooks have emerged as prominent platforms that blend structure with multimedia content, supporting both in-class and independent learning (Huong & Hung, 2021). As digital materials become more common in educational settings, it is essential to explore how English instructors perceive and experience their use, particularly in academic programs where coursebook content must align with institutional and curricular goals (Fauzi et al., 2021). Understanding instructors' perspectives is essential because they are the ones directly responsible for implementing digital materials, adjusting teaching strategies, and shaping student engagement. Their insights can reveal not only the benefits and limitations of digital coursebooks but also inform future improvements in design and policy.

This study, therefore, aims to explore the experiences and perspectives of English language instructors at a private university regarding the use of digital coursebooks in their teaching. By

focusing on their needs, challenges, and suggestions, the study seeks to contribute practical insights for developers, institutions, and teacher educators working to improve digital integration in English language classrooms. In doing so, it also addresses the growing presence of AI-supported features in digital coursebooks such as adaptive feedback and multimedia personalization which are rapidly shaping the future of instructional materials (Dou & Wang, 2024; Noviyanti et al., 2024; Tabiri et al., 2024; Uali, 2025). These recent developments underscore the need for empirical insights into how instructors experience, evaluate, and implement such technologies in real classroom contexts.

Literature Review

Digital Tools in Language Education

The growing reliance on digital technologies in education has brought a diverse array of tools into the EFL classroom. These tools include mobile apps, digital dictionaries, online platforms, and multimedia resources, all designed to enhance the teaching and learning experience. Studies have consistently shown that digital tools can improve learner outcomes by fostering interaction, collaboration, and motivation (Huong & Hung, 2021; Hadianti & Rohmah, 2021). Mulyati et al. (2024) explored students' needs and preferences regarding digital tools in EFL contexts and highlighted the mismatch between available digital content and learners' expectations. Their study called for better alignment between digital resources and curricular goals, which reinforces the value of examining instructors' insights as a means of improving implementation. Moreover, research indicates that digital tools support personalized and flexible learning environments, empowering both students and instructors to co-construct knowledge in line with social constructivist learning theories (Lo, 2023).

Teachers perceive digital tools as practical for supporting lesson delivery, adapting materials to learners' needs, and maintaining student engagement (Çelik & Aytın, 2014; Cheng, 2018). In addition, digital tools help address students' diverse learning styles and offer access to rich linguistic input and contextualized language use (Jamal, 2022). Recent studies highlight that learners benefit most when digital tools are meaningfully integrated into pedagogy—particularly when these tools support learner autonomy and align with students' technological preferences and expectations (Herman, et al., 2024; Noviyanti et al., 2024; Tabiri et al., 2024).

However, some educators report challenges such as time constraints, lack of training, or concerns about classroom management. Instructors often encounter barriers such as inadequate training, uncertainty about appropriate pedagogical strategies, and a lack of institutional support (Lo, 2023; Emadi & Hosseini, 2024). Furthermore, digital transformation in universities is uneven, with many educators still developing their digital competencies (Аренова et al., 2023). Still, the effective integration of digital tools, particularly in higher education contexts, has become a crucial component of contemporary EFL instruction (Mucundanyi & Woodley, 2021). The challenges of integrating digital literacy into language teaching have also been documented in the literature. For example, Аренова et al. (2023) and Emadi and Hosseini (2024) emphasized that while digital tools are becoming more prevalent, many educators still struggle with limited digital competencies and lack institutional support. Their findings indicate that teachers' perceptions, comfort levels, and contextual constraints are central to the success of digital coursebook adoption.

Digital Coursebooks

Digital coursebooks represent an innovative shift in instructional materials, merging the structure of traditional coursebooks with dynamic and interactive elements. Designed for use with smartboards, tablets, or computers, these coursebooks often include audiovisual components, grammar exercises, embedded hyperlinks, and customizable tasks (Możejko & Krajka, 2011; Cinkara, 2018). They are commonly employed in both ESP and EFL settings, offering flexibility for in-class or blended learning (Fung, 2017; Vymetalkova & Milkova, 2019). Recent studies emphasize their alignment with constructivist and learner-centered pedagogies, as they facilitate exploratory, personalized, and multimodal language learning (Noviyanti et al., 2024; Emadi & Hosseini, 2024). Digital coursebooks are increasingly viewed not just as technological upgrades but as pedagogically significant tools requiring thoughtful integration. Uali (2025), for instance, examined EFL freshmen's perceptions of printed versus digital coursebooks and found that digital formats often enhance learner engagement and accessibility, but their effectiveness depends on content design and usability. These findings underscore the importance of investigating how instructors perceive and adapt such materials in practice.

Research has demonstrated the pedagogical value of digital coursebooks in improving learners' proficiency in grammar, vocabulary, reading, and listening (Gaballo, 2019; Kencana et al., 2022). Additionally, they promote learner autonomy, encourage participation, and provide access to contextualized and authentic language input. Dou and Wang (2024) highlight that digital textbooks designed within platforms like MOODLE not only enhance content delivery but also allow instructors to integrate supplementary material, thereby tailoring instruction more effectively. Furthermore, Uali (2025) found that students generally perceive digital coursebooks positively, associating them with ease of access, interactive content, and environmental sustainability, though preferences vary by digital literacy levels.

Instructors have expressed positive attitudes toward using digital coursebooks, especially for supporting student motivation and extending practice beyond the classroom (Allen, 2015; Fauzi et al., 2021). However, factors such as teacher experience, confidence with technology, and the availability of digital infrastructure continue to influence their effective implementation (Çelik & Aytın, 2014). Rathert and Cabaroğlu (2024) provide deeper insight into this complexity, showing that teachers' utilization of coursebooks often falls between strict adherence and strategic adaptation, shaped by institutional constraints and personal pedagogical beliefs. Their findings underscore the importance of empowering teachers through training and allowing more autonomy in coursebook use. In addition, Аренова et al. (2023) stress the need for developing teachers' digital competencies, indicating that confidence and proficiency in using such materials are vital for maximizing instructional value. On the other hand, Noviyanti et al. (2024) argue that digital coursebooks should not be seen as mere digital replications of printed materials, but as pedagogically distinct tools requiring redesigned instructional strategies. They advocate for a more intentional integration of these resources into curriculum planning an approach echoed by participants in the current study.

In addition, Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) has played a central role in integrating technology into language education. It encompasses a wide range of digital applications, including multimedia tools, web-based programs, and communication platforms that support interactive and learner-centered instruction (Hubbard & Colpaert, 2019). CALL offers learners access to authentic materials—videos, images, animations, audio, and interactive exercises—which enhance comprehension and engagement (Liu, 2015; Wang, 2021). In

particular, multimedia systems support multimodal input and help students improve language skills in contexts that mirror real-world use.

Research highlights the positive impact of CALL on learner motivation, participation, and performance. For instance, studies found that CALL environments boost learners' vocabulary development, grammar proficiency, and listening comprehension (Nachoua, 2012; Khan et al., 2018; Enayati & Gilakjani, 2020). Furthermore, computer-assisted systems support self-paced and personalized learning paths, promoting learners' autonomy and confidence (Torut, 2000; Mahmoudi et al., 2012). Despite its benefits, effective CALL implementation depends on access to resources, teacher readiness, and institutional support (Hakim, 2015; Park & Son, 2009).

Although a growing body of literature supports the use of digital tools and CALL in language teaching, there is limited research specifically examining in-service English instructors' views on digital coursebooks, especially in the context of Academic English programs at universities in Turkey. Understanding how instructors perceive and use these tools, and what suggestions they may offer for designing effective digital materials, can inform both practice and future coursebook development. Most prior studies have either focused on student attitudes or general digital tool use rather than on the pedagogical affordances and constraints of digital coursebooks as experienced by instructors. This study aims to fill that gap by exploring English instructors' views on the advantages, challenges, and instructional implications of using digital coursebooks in Turkish higher education settings.

With this in mind, the study is guided by the following research questions: (1) What are in-service English instructors' views on using digital coursebooks in their teaching? (2) What do instructors see as the advantages of using digital coursebooks? (3) What challenges do they encounter while using these tools including those that may be addressed or compounded by emerging AI-supported functionalities? (4) What features make digital coursebooks effective for English courses in university-level language programs and to what extent might these features relate to or anticipate AI-enhanced capabilities?

Exploring these questions can help improve how digital coursebooks are designed and used. The findings will provide useful input for both educators and developers to create more effective, accessible, and teacher-friendly digital materials (Allen, 2015; Hadianti & Rohmah, 2021; Cheng, 2018).

Method

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative research design, which focuses on exploring the depth and meaning of human experiences (Creswell, 2013; Fraenkel, et al. 2012). A qualitative approach allows for an in-depth understanding of how English language instructors perceive and experience the use of digital coursebooks in their teaching contexts. This interpretive framework is particularly useful for investigating complex, real-world phenomena through the voices and lived experiences of participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore English language instructors' experiences and perspectives on the use of digital coursebooks in a tertiary academic English program. A case study is appropriate when the goal is to conduct an in-depth exploration of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clearly defined (Yin, 2017).

In this study, the "case" refers to a bounded system consisting of in-service English instructors working at a private university in Türkiye, specifically focusing on their use of digital coursebooks in academic English instruction. This bounded context allowed for the examination of how institutional, pedagogical, and technological factors interact in shaping the instructors' use of digital coursebooks. The case study approach was chosen because it enables a detailed investigation of participant experiences, contextual conditions, and practical implications. This design is particularly well-suited to addressing the study's aim of generating context-rich insights that can inform future digital integration practices in higher education language programs.

Sampling Procedure

Participants were selected using convenience sampling, a commonly used strategy in qualitative research for accessing participants who are readily available and willing to share their experiences (Fraenkel et al., 2012). Inclusion criteria for participant selection included: (1) active employment as an English language instructor within the Academic English Unit, and (2) current or recent experience teaching academic English courses at the tertiary level. Instructors who had no experience with digital coursebooks or who were not teaching academic English at the time of the study were excluded. This ensured that all participants could provide relevant and context-specific perspectives. The study involved 15 English language instructors from the Academic English Unit of a private university. The sample included 11 female and 4 male instructors, with a mean age of 31.4 years. All participants were actively teaching academic English courses, and five of them were regular users of digital coursebooks. Although this sampling method limits generalizability, it provides meaningful insights into the research topic from individuals with relevant and immediate experience.

This study focuses specifically on instructors' experiences, as they are the primary implementers of digital coursebooks and key decision-makers in their pedagogical integration. While learners' perspectives are equally important, the current study was designed to examine the institutional and instructional dimensions from the educator's viewpoint. Future research should incorporate student voices to build a more comprehensive understanding of digital coursebook use in higher education.

Trustworthiness of the Study

To ensure the quality and trustworthiness of the findings, the study followed the criteria established by Guba (1981): credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility was enhanced through prolonged engagement with participants and the research setting, which allowed the researcher to build rapport and understand the context. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, recorded, and transcribed. After the initial thematic coding, member checks were performed by sharing transcripts and preliminary themes with a group of participants to verify accuracy and consistency.

As a result, credibility was achieved through prolonged engagement and participant validation, ensuring that the findings accurately represent instructors' perspectives.

Transferability was addressed by providing rich, descriptions of the research context, data collection procedures, and participant backgrounds. These details allow readers to determine the relevance of findings to other contexts (Creswell, 2013). Descriptive accounts of the research setting and participant demographics were included to give readers enough information to evaluate the applicability of the findings. This attention to contextual richness supports transferability,

allowing other researchers or practitioners to determine the relevance of the results to their own educational environments.

Dependability was ensured through a dependability audit conducted by the researcher's academic supervisor, who monitored each stage of the research design, data collection, and analysis to ensure methodological consistency. To ensure consistency and reliability, the research design, data collection steps, and analysis procedures were documented and reviewed by the researcher's academic supervisor. This included an audit of coding decisions, theme development, and methodological consistency. These steps established dependability, confirming that the research process was logically traceable and clearly documented.

Confirmability was strengthened by maintaining an audit trail of decisions including memos, reflexive journals, coding records, and decision logs. The researcher took reflective notes throughout the process to critically examine potential biases and assumptions. These practices enhanced confirmability, ensuring that findings emerged from the data and not from the researcher's predispositions.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were employed as the primary data collection tool. These interviews are ideal for generating rich, detailed narratives while also allowing for comparability across participants (Fraenkel et al., 2012). Semi-structured interviews balance structure and flexibility by including a set of guiding questions that can evolve during the interview depending on participant responses (Fylan, 2005). The interview protocol consisted of 16 questions, organized under four categories: (1) General opinions about digital coursebooks, (2) Positive aspects of their use, (3) Negative aspects, (4) Suggestions for improvement.

Interview questions were developed by the researcher and reviewed by another academic to ensure relevance and clarity. A pilot interview was conducted with a colleague to assess the comprehensibility of the questions. Based on feedback, necessary revisions were made. All interviews were audio-recorded with participant consent and later transcribed verbatim using transcription software. The transcriptions formed the basis for the data analysis.

All interview recordings were securely stored on a password-protected device and transcribed using transcription software. Transcriptions were cross-checked for accuracy and anonymized prior to analysis. Participant names and identifying details were removed to ensure confidentiality, and all data were organized systematically using coded folders.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the semi-structured interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, which is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within qualitative data (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Thematic analysis was selected because it provides a flexible yet systematic approach to interpret participants' views and experiences, making it particularly suitable for research focused on understanding perceptions and practices. In fact, this approach was selected because it allows for flexible yet systematic interpretation of participants' perspectives, aligning well with the study's aim of exploring instructor experiences in depth. To ensure transparency, a multi-step process was followed. First, interview transcripts were stored, labeled, and managed using a secure file structure. Analytic memos were maintained throughout coding, and an audit trail documented all major coding and category decisions.

The analysis process began with a careful and repeated reading of all interview transcripts to gain familiarity with the data. During this initial phase, the researcher noted preliminary observations and recurring ideas.

Following this, open coding was applied to the first transcript. In this stage, meaningful words, phrases, or segments were identified and assigned codes that directly reflected their content. These codes represented participants' experiences and expressions in relation to digital coursebooks, such as "student engagement," "technical issues," "flexibility," and "limited training." Codes and themes were managed using a structured coding tree, which was iteratively updated as new data were analyzed. The coding structure was regularly reviewed and cross-validated with an academic advisor to ensure consistency and analytical rigor.

Based on the initial set of open codes, a coding tree was developed to guide the subsequent analysis. This tree helped to organize the codes into broader categories and ensured consistency across the coding of the remaining transcripts. As each new transcript was analyzed, the coding tree was continuously revised and refined to account for new codes or variations in meaning, ensuring that the analysis remained grounded in the data.

Next, axial coding was used to identify relationships among the open codes and group them into sub-themes and categories. For example, codes like "student motivation," "increased interaction," and "autonomy" were grouped under a larger category such as "Perceived Benefits." Similarly, codes such as "internet problems," "software access issues," and "lack of training" were grouped under "Challenges in Implementation."

Once axial coding was completed, the final phase involved selective coding, in which the main themes were derived based on both the categories that had emerged and the original research questions. Four main thematic categories were constructed to directly reflect the research questions: (1) General perceptions of digital coursebooks, (2) Advantages perceived by instructors, (3) Challenges and limitations faced in implementation, and (4) Suggestions for improving digital coursebook design and use.

Within these four categories, seven specific themes were identified to represent the richness and nuance of instructors' experiences. These themes are:

(1) general opinions about digital coursebooks, (2) factors influencing their effectiveness, (3) positive aspects of using digital coursebooks, (4) negative aspects of using digital coursebooks, (5) effects on learner motivation, (6) English instructors' attitudes toward digitalized teaching environments, and (7) suggestions for the effective implementation of digital coursebooks. Each of these themes is situated within the broader research-aligned categories, and is supported by a set of sub-themes. This layered structure allowed for both theoretical alignment and descriptive depth. The full list of themes and sub-themes is presented in the results section.

Throughout the analysis, the process was iterative and reflexive. The researcher maintained analytic memos and consulted with an experienced academic supervisor during regular discussions to ensure accuracy and consistency. This multi-step, rigorous approach to thematic analysis allowed for a thorough exploration of instructor experiences and the development of themes that meaningfully represented the data. The data collected in this study were systematically analyzed, leading to the identification and refinement of key themes.

Results

Although the data for this study were collected prior to the widespread classroom integration of AI technologies, several participants expressed needs and expectations such as immediate feedback, adaptive learning materials, and enhanced interactivity that closely mirror the functions of AI-supported educational tools. For instance, one participant emphasized the desire for "a system that could instantly respond to students' answers and asks follow-up questions accordingly," which reflects the core functionality of AI-powered personalization. Another participant noted that "if the coursebook could recognize what students are struggling with and change activities on the spot, that would really help," highlighting a desire for real-time adaptation. These organically emerging perspectives illustrate that instructors were already envisioning features that are now being realized through AI-enhanced coursebooks. These AI-relevant insights are elaborated further within the themes presented below.

Mainly, the data analysis yielded seven main themes that represent English language instructors' perspectives on the use of digital coursebooks in their instructional practices. These themes and sub-themes are as follows:

Themes | Sub-Themes

1. General Opinions about Digital Coursebooks | Necessity in the 21st century; Replacing traditional coursebooks; Practicality and modern relevance

2. Factors Influencing Effectiveness | User-friendly interface; Technological infrastructure; Instructor adaptability

3. Positive Aspects of Digital Coursebooks | Portability; Audio-visual aids; Interactivity; Environmental and cost benefits; Rich supplementary content; Flipped classroom potential

4. Negative Aspects of Digital Coursebooks | Technical issues (e.g., crashes, blurry images); Lack of classroom equipment; Reduced student note-taking habits

5. Effects on Learner Motivation | Increased engagement; Sensory stimulation through multimedia; Interactive learning activities

6. Instructors' Attitudes toward Digitized Teaching Environments | Resistance due to old habits; Concerns about technological readiness

7. Suggestions for Effective Implementation | Instructor training; Technical support and infrastructure; Timely feedback to publishers for revisions

Seven themes and their sub-themes emerged in the study are presented in table 1 below:

Table 1. Themes and sub-themes

General Opinion About Digital Coursebooks
The necessity of the time
Factors Affecting the Efficiency of Digital Coursebooks
Interface (Userfriend-liness)
Negative Aspects of Using Digital Coursebooks
Technical Problems
Lack of Technological Facilities
Reducing Students' Note Taking habits
Positive Aspects of Using Digital Coursebooks
Audio-visual aids
Improving listening and speaking skills
Portability
Applied in communication and collaboration tools
Attracting students' attention
Useful icons
Environmentally-friendly
Cost effective
Rich content
Flipped classroom
Engaging students' not having coursebook
Reducing hand writing
The Effects of Digital Coursebooks on Students' Motivation
Positive effects
No effect
Instructors' Attitudes Toward Digitized Teaching Setting
Positive attitudes
Negative attitudes
Suggestions for Implementing Digital Coursebooks Effectively
Trainings
Providing feedback to the publishing house
Strengthening technological facilities

General Opinions about Digital Coursebooks

The majority of participants described digital coursebooks as essential and inevitable tools in modern education. Eight out of fifteen instructors stated that in the digital age, printed coursebooks alone are insufficient to meet students' needs and expectations. They emphasized the shift in learner profiles and the importance of adapting instructional materials accordingly:

"We are now in 2023 and it is not possible for teachers to engage students in the lesson through a printed coursebook, but digital coursebooks help us to do it." (P4)

"Digital coursebooks have become like an obligation. Even though students have the hard copy of their coursebook, it is not enough for them who are in the 21st century to look at the printed coursebook in their hands." (P5)

Factors Influencing Effectiveness

A recurring theme was the usability and interface design of digital coursebook platforms. Instructors expected the software to be intuitive, responsive, and efficient. Complaints about scrolling, zooming, and delayed content loading were linked to disruptions in classroom flow. Participants stressed that even minor technical flaws could hinder the effectiveness of lessons and consume valuable class time.

Positive Aspects of Digital Coursebooks

Participants highlighted a range of benefits associated with using digital coursebooks, emphasizing both practical and pedagogical advantages. A commonly mentioned benefit was portability and accessibility, with instructors noting that digital coursebooks allowed students and teachers to access all necessary materials -including the student book, workbook, and teacher's guide- on a single platform. One participant shared, "It's really convenient not having to carry multiple books. Everything's in one place, and I can project it easily in class."

Another advantage frequently cited was the integration of multimedia elements, such as videos, animations, and sound recordings. These features were described as enhancing student engagement and improving comprehension. Instructors noted that visual and audio support helped explain complex grammar points or vocabulary in ways that traditional books could not. As one instructor put it, "Students focus more when they see something moving or hear native pronunciation. It brings the lesson to life."

Several instructors also discussed the flipped classroom potential of digital coursebooks. The ability to assign sections for students to study before class enabled more self-paced learning and allowed for more interactive sessions during lesson time. Finally, environmental and economic benefits were acknowledged, with some participants appreciating the reduction in paper use and the elimination of printing and shipping costs.

Negative Aspects of Digital Coursebooks

Despite the benefits, instructors identified three major challenges: A prominent concern involved technical issues. Instructors reported problems such as software crashes, blurry visuals, and system lag. These interruptions often disrupted lesson flow and led to frustration. One participant noted, "Sometimes, right in the middle of the class, the book freezes or the audio doesn't work. It breaks the rhythm of teaching."

Another major issue was insufficient infrastructure. Teachers pointed to unreliable internet connections, outdated classroom technology, and limited student access to personal devices as barriers to smooth implementation. An instructor commented, "Not all of our classrooms are equipped with the tech needed. It's frustrating when you want to use the digital book but the projector doesn't work or the connection is lost."

Participants also expressed concern about reduced student note-taking in digital environments. Some believed that students were becoming passive, relying too heavily on on-screen information rather than actively engaging with the material. One instructor remarked, "With printed books, students used to underline, take notes, and write on the side. Now they just scroll and forget."

Effects on Learner Motivation

Most participants agreed that digital coursebooks had a positive influence on student motivation. They described how the interactivity and visual appeal of digital resources helped capture and maintain learners' attention. The presence of videos, clickable activities, and animations was said to increase student focus and participation, especially among visual and auditory learners. As one instructor explained, "When we use the digital book, students seem more alert. They participate more and actually enjoy the lesson."

Attitudes Toward Digitized Teaching Environments

While instructors appreciated the advantages of digital resources, eight participants voiced hesitations or negative attitudes toward fully digital classrooms. Some reported feeling overwhelmed by the pressure to adapt, while others were concerned about the overreliance on technology. One instructor stated, "I still feel more comfortable with a physical book. With digital, I'm always worried something will go wrong, and I miss the interaction that comes with paper."

Others raised concerns about how digitized environments might alter the traditional dynamics of teaching, potentially limiting spontaneous classroom discussion or physical interaction with learning materials.

Suggestions for Effective Implementation

Participants shared several recommendations for improving the implementation of digital coursebooks in their institutions: First, many recommended structured training sessions for instructors at the beginning of the academic year. These trainings, they argued, should not only explain technical features but also offer pedagogical strategies for classroom integration. "We need proper guidance," one teacher said. "Just giving us the digital book isn't enough."

Second, participants advocated for direct communication channels with publishers. They emphasized the need for responsive support when technical problems occur and suggested that user feedback should inform ongoing updates and improvements.

Lastly, instructors stressed the importance of institutional investment in digital infrastructure. They recommended upgrading classroom equipment, ensuring reliable internet access, and providing students with better access to compatible devices. Without such support, they warned, even the most advanced digital coursebook could fall short of its potential.

Discussion

This study explored English language instructors' experiences with the integration of digital coursebooks in tertiary-level English instruction. The findings reflect a complex landscape in which digital coursebooks are increasingly viewed as indispensable, yet their implementation remains challenged by usability issues, infrastructure limitations, and pedagogical concerns. The discussion is organized around three focal areas derived from the research questions: (1) the evolving role of digital coursebooks in the English language curriculum, (2) perceived benefits of their use, and (3) major challenges and implications for practice. Participants' emphasis on the necessity of digital coursebooks reflects broader trends in the literature suggesting that digital tools are becoming central to instructional models in higher education (Herman et al., 2024; Huong & Hung, 2021). However, this study adds specificity by highlighting the disconnect between digital transformation policies and the limited support available to instructors on the ground (Аренова et al., 2023; Bozoğlu, 2024). Their narratives show that while digital adoption is often framed as a progressive institutional goal, instructors experience it as a practical and emotional negotiation between past practices and future expectations.

A central finding is the widespread perception among instructors that digital coursebooks are no longer optional but represent a pedagogical necessity in the 21st-century learning environment. Participants emphasized that printed books alone fail to meet the needs and expectations of digitally native learners. This aligns with recent literature suggesting that digital resources can bridge the gap between evolving student needs and traditional instructional models (Herman et al., 2024; Huong & Hung, 2021). What makes this finding meaningful is not the

general recognition of the shift toward digital materials which is well-documented but the instructors' articulation of a felt obligation to adapt, often in the absence of institutional direction or support highlighting a disconnect between digital transformation policies and on-the-ground realities (Аренова et al., 2023; Bozoğlu, 2024). This sense of inevitability is accompanied by tensions between pedagogical ideals and technological constraints, a point that merits further investigation in future research and teacher training programs.

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Digital Coursebooks as Evolving Tools in English Language Education

The results reveal a shift in instructors' perceptions of digital coursebooks from optional supplements to essential components of the modern classroom. Most participants described digital coursebooks as a requirement of the digital age, aligning with the literature that highlights the growing normalization of digital tools in language teaching (Basuki, 2020; Cheng, 2018; Wang, 2021). However, this study adds nuance by showing that instructors do not simply accept digitalization passively they articulate a felt pressure to adopt, often without sufficient training or infrastructure. This sense of urgency, driven by the digital habits of students and institutional expectations, positions instructors in a space of ongoing negotiation between tradition and innovation. Some instructors described feeling professionally or emotionally distanced from fully digital environments. Concerns such as emotional detachment from paper-based materials or the loss of tactile feedback echo the tension between modern demands and traditional pedagogical values.

This tension mirrors prior research emphasizing the complexity of technology adoption in education, particularly when implementation is inconsistent or lacks infrastructure (Rathert & Çabaroğlu, 2024; Shruthi et al., 2025). The emotional ambivalence expressed by some instructors such as detachment from printed materials or anxiety about technical failure indicates that effective digital transition also requires attention to teacher beliefs and identity, not only their technical proficiency.

Unlike many prior studies that examine digital tools broadly (e.g., apps, platforms, CALL environments), this study offers a focused examination of digital coursebooks as pedagogical tools. It highlights how digital coursebooks are not only perceived as technologically appropriate but also as representations of institutional digital policy, serving as indicators of progress and modernity in curriculum design.

Positive Contributions of Digital Coursebooks

Participants valued the interactivity, multimodality, and motivational appeal of digital coursebooks. These tools were seen to enhance student focus and engagement, particularly through the use of embedded videos, quizzes, and other dynamic features. Participants specifically described how the variety of activity types and embedded multimedia content created immersive learning environments that aligned well with students' learning preferences and attention spans. Consistent with previous research (Gaballo, 2019; Vymetalkova & Milkova, 2019), participants

valued digital coursebooks for these features. The study supports literature showing how audiovisual components and interactivity enhance student engagement and accommodate various learning preferences (Jabali & Walker, 2021; Çelik & Aytın, 2014). Yet, what distinguishes this study is its emphasis on the pedagogical fluidity provided by digital coursebooks the ability to access multiple resources quickly, transition between activities smoothly, and adapt materials for blended or flipped learning contexts. In addition, the findings reinforce existing scholarship on the benefits of multimodal learning environments in promoting attention and participation (Uali, 2025; Noviyanti et al., 2024). More specifically, they echo Enayati and Gilakjani's (2020) argument that well-designed digital materials can create more immersive and responsive learning contexts. Instructors' observations about smoother activity transitions and quick resource access also align with research on digital fluidity in blended and flipped learning environments (Gaballo, 2019; Çelik & Aytın, 2014).

Instructors also acknowledged environmental and economic advantages, such as reduced paper usage and cost savings, echoing findings from Hani (2014) and Pupavac (2022). These perspectives broaden the discussion of digital tools by incorporating sustainability into pedagogical decision-making—an area still underrepresented in language education research.

Importantly, participants stressed the motivational benefits for learners, particularly the use of interactive activities and media-rich content to maintain student interest. This supports Enayati and Gilakjani's (2020) assertion that digital materials can create a more dynamic and engaging classroom environment. However, the present study adds specificity to this claim by showing that instructors observed increased engagement particularly when interactive digital elements -such as videos or tasks- were clearly linked to lesson goals and adapted to student levels."

Persistent Challenges and Practical Implications

Despite these advantages, participants highlighted three consistent barriers: technical issues, inadequate infrastructure, and declining student note-taking behaviors. Technical glitches such as software crashes or display problems were not merely inconvenient, they were described as pedagogically disruptive, forcing instructors to adjust or abandon lesson plans mid-class. This finding aligns with Hakim (2015) and Huo (2019), who emphasize the impact of unreliable systems on instructional quality. They suggest that digital delivery may unintentionally promote passivity unless students are explicitly guided to engage cognitively with the material. This invites further exploration into the metacognitive effects of digital coursebook use a topic underexamined in digital pedagogy literature.

Classroom infrastructure also emerged as a limiting factor. As in previous studies (Alkahtani, 2011; El Aggoune & Ghaouar, 2019), participants cited inconsistent access to reliable internet, projectors, or compatible devices as major hindrances to effective use. These findings reinforce the importance of institutional commitment not only to adopting digital tools, but also to maintaining the conditions that allow them to function as intended.

One novel contribution of this study lies in participants' concern that digital coursebooks may unintentionally reduce students' active note-taking. Instructors perceived this behavior not just as a shift in format, but as a loss of engagement and cognitive processing essential to learning. While prior research has celebrated the accessibility of digital content, participants here raised concerns that students may become passive recipients of information, relying too heavily on the visual presentation of materials rather than actively processing and recording content. This insight

invites further inquiry into how digital tools affect students' learning strategies and metacognitive engagement an area currently underexplored in CALL and digital pedagogy literature.

Finally, participants offered concrete, practice-based recommendations, including the need for annual training, real-time feedback loops with publishers, and improvements in classroom technology. These are not merely logistical concerns; they reflect instructors' desire for agency and voice in shaping how digital tools are implemented. Unlike prescriptive models of digital integration, the instructors in this study advocate for co-constructive models, where teachers are active participants in evaluating and improving the tools they are expected to use. Furthermore, although not explicitly labeled as such, several of the features instructors expressed a need for responsive feedback, individualized content delivery, and real-time adjustment; reflect emerging possibilities enabled by AI-enhanced coursebooks. This alignment suggests that instructors were already anticipating functionalities that AI tools are now beginning to offer.

These insights suggest that digital coursebook success depends not just on the quality of the tool, but on the ecosystem in which it is deployed (Emadi & Hosseini, 2024; Tabiri et al., 2024). Instructors valued the all-in-one access to materials, yet emphasized that true pedagogical impact depends on support, infrastructure, and thoughtful integration.

Conclusion

This study set out to explore English language instructors' perspectives on the integration of digital coursebooks in tertiary-level English language instruction. The findings reflect a rapidly evolving educational landscape, where technological tools, particularly digital coursebooks are no longer viewed as supplementary, but as essential components of modern pedagogy. Instructors broadly acknowledged the necessity of embracing digitalization in response to student expectations, institutional trends, and the broader demands of 21st-century education. This is consistent with literature that positions digital coursebooks as symbols of pedagogical progress in the digital age (Wang, 2021; Basuki, 2020). However, the study goes further by unpacking the lived complexity of that progress as experienced by educators. The instructors in this study spoke not only of benefits but of real constraints like; technical, pedagogical, emotional constrains that make digital adoption a deeply situated process.

Seven major themes emerged from the analysis, shedding light on both the perceived value and the practical challenges of using digital coursebooks in academic English programs. While many of the advantages identified; such as multimedia features, accessibility, and motivational impact have been echoed in existing literature, this study contributes nuanced insights grounded in the realities of implementation. Instructors expressed concerns over usability, infrastructure, and the unintended effects of digital reliance, such as decreased student note-taking. These findings challenge overly optimistic narratives of digital transformation and suggest that the successful integration of digital coursebooks requires more than availability it demands thoughtful design, teacher support, and ongoing dialogue between users and developers. Notably, several of the participant insights shared in this study, particularly those related to adaptability, automation, and interactivity, are now being realized through AI-enhanced tools. While AI was not yet mainstream during data collection, the alignment between participant needs and current technological capabilities underscores the forward-looking relevance of their perspectives.

What sets this study apart is its contextual grounding in the perspectives of in-service instructors who are actively navigating the transition to digital course materials in institutional settings. Their perspectives draw attention to the conditions necessary for meaningful integration

training, infrastructure, responsive design, and pedagogical alignment (Tabiri et al., 2024). The study also confirms the importance of hybrid models that blend the strengths of print and digital formats, supporting more inclusive and adaptable learning environments.

Ultimately, the study demonstrates that the success of digital coursebooks is not determined solely by their content or design, but by the broader ecosystem in which they are embedded an ecosystem shaped by access, training, institutional priorities, and teacher agency. These insights contribute to a growing recognition that sustainable digital innovation in education requires collaboration between all stakeholders: instructors, designers, institutions, and learners alike.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The results of this study carry several important implications for educators, institutional leaders, curriculum designers, and digital publishers. As educational institutions continue to promote digital innovation, the following areas require critical attention:

Pedagogy and Curriculum Integration

Digital coursebooks should not be seen as digital replicas of printed books but as pedagogically distinct tools that require intentional integration into curriculum design. Several instructors in this study expressed that digital coursebooks often fall short when their features are not aligned with instructional goals or classroom needs. They emphasized that engaging elements like videos or clickable tasks are most effective when directly tied to learning outcomes. This highlights that digital coursebooks should not be seen as mere digital replicas of printed books but as pedagogically distinct tools that require intentional curriculum integration. Institutions could benefit from encouraging collaboration between instructional designers and classroom teachers to ensure that digital features are purposefully embedded and practically applicable.

Ongoing Professional Development

A recurring theme in the data was the need for comprehensive and continuous training. One-time workshops or platform introductions are not sufficient. Instructors need opportunities to explore the pedagogical applications of digital coursebooks, troubleshoot technical issues, and exchange ideas with peers. Professional development programs should address both technical competence and pedagogical strategies for digital teaching, fostering instructors' confidence and capacity to innovate.

Digital Infrastructure and Equity

Even the most well-designed digital coursebook cannot function effectively without the necessary technological infrastructure. Institutions must invest in up-to-date hardware, reliable internet access, and responsive IT support. At the same time, they must consider issues of equity, ensuring that both teachers and students have the tools and access they need. Failure to do so risks widening the gap between pedagogical intent and practical outcomes.

Collaborative Design with Educator Feedback

Publishers and developers should establish ongoing feedback mechanisms that allow instructors to report usability issues and suggest improvements. The findings from this study show that teachers are not just end-users but experienced evaluators of digital tools. Their insights can directly inform revisions, updates, and future editions. Creating channels for teacher input can lead to more functional, intuitive, and pedagogically sound coursebooks.

Balancing Innovation with Traditional Practices

While embracing digital tools is essential, the findings also suggest the importance of maintaining a balance between digital innovation and effective traditional practices. Institutions should support hybrid approaches that allow instructors to draw from both digital and print resources. At the same time, students should be encouraged to engage in active learning strategies—such as note-taking and reflective writing—even in fully digital classrooms.

This study highlights the complexities and possibilities of digital coursebook integration in English language teaching. It reveals that successful digital transformation is not simply a matter of technology adoption, but of human-centered implementation. The experiences of instructors show that while digital tools offer significant pedagogical benefits, their effectiveness ultimately depends on thoughtful design, institutional support, and responsiveness to classroom realities. As digital education continues to expand, further research should explore long-term impacts on student learning outcomes, the role of digital literacy in shaping instructional practice, and how teacher agency can be fostered in technologically mediated environments. For now, the voices of the instructors in this study serve as a valuable reminder that technology in education must serve teaching—not replace it—and that meaningful innovation always begins in the classroom.

Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights into English language instructors' perspectives on the use of digital coursebooks in tertiary education, it is not without its limitations. These limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings and assessing their applicability to other contexts.

Sample Size and Sampling Method

The study was conducted with a relatively small sample of 15 instructors from the Academic English Unit of a single private university. While this allowed for in-depth exploration of individual experiences, the use of convenience sampling limits the generalizability of the results. The perspectives shared may reflect the specific institutional context and technological environment of that university and may not fully represent instructors in other settings, including public institutions or different geographic regions.

Self-Reported Data

Data collection relied on self-reported accounts through semi-structured interviews, which are subject to potential biases such as social desirability or selective memory. Participants may have highlighted experiences that aligned with perceived expectations or omitted challenges that they considered personal or context-specific.

Focus on Instructor Perspectives Only

The study focused exclusively on the views of in-service English language instructors. While this focus was intentional, it leaves out the perspectives of learners, administrators, and instructional designers, all of whom play key roles in the implementation and evaluation of digital coursebooks. Including multiple stakeholder perspectives could have provided a more comprehensive understanding of the digital coursebook experience. Although the study offers insights into how instructors perceive and apply digital coursebooks, future research should investigate how students engage with these tools to provide a fuller picture of their effectiveness and impact

Technology-Specific Findings

The study's findings are shaped by the specific digital coursebook platforms used at the time of research. As digital tools and educational technologies continue to evolve rapidly, some findings—particularly those related to technical issues or interface design—may become less relevant as platforms are updated or replaced. Future research should consider longitudinal approaches to track how perceptions and experiences shift over time.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Use

AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Grammarly, or others) were not used during the writing, editing, data analysis, or any other part of the research or manuscript preparation process, please describe their use in the space indicated in the section.

Ethics

The ethics application for the study was made on 28.04.2023 and the research was carried out with the approval of Middle East Technical University Ethics Commission dated 15/05/2023 and numbered 0243-ODTU-İAEK_2023.

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