

# The Implementation of Wordwall Application in Teaching Reading for General Communication in Higher Education

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## Abstract

This study investigates the implementation of the Wordwall application as a digital learning tool to support reading skills development for general communication among first-year undergraduate students in the English Education Department. Employing a qualitative research approach, the study involved 30 students participating in classroom activities using the Word Wall in a natural learning environment. Data were collected through direct classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and students' reflective journals to capture their experiences and perceptions regarding the use of the application. The findings indicate that the Word Wall application effectively enhances student engagement by creating an interactive and visually appealing learning atmosphere. This increased engagement contributed to higher motivation levels and encouraged active participation during reading exercises. Furthermore, students demonstrated improved vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension as a result of the repeated and contextualized exposure to words facilitated by the Wordwall activities. Although some students faced initial challenges such as limited digital literacy and occasional technical issues, they adapted quickly, which suggests that the integration of such digital tools is feasible and beneficial in higher education contexts. The study also highlights the potential of technology-enhanced learning to address common difficulties in teaching reading for general communication by providing dynamic and accessible vocabulary practice.

**Keywords:** Interactive Learning; Vocabulary Acquisition; Reading Comprehension; Digital Tools; Higher Education

## INTRODUCTION

Reading is one of the fundamental skills in English language learning and is essential for academic success, especially in higher education. In the Indonesian EFL context, many university students face challenges in reading English texts due to limited vocabulary knowledge, insufficient reading strategies, and lack of motivation (Inayah & Argawati, 2019; Radfar & Lengkanawati, 2020; Rizqiya et al., 2017). These difficulties hinder students' ability to comprehend texts effectively and to use reading as a tool for general communication. Traditional methods of teaching reading, which often rely on passive learning and teacher-centered instruction, do not adequately support students in developing the skills necessary to become proficient readers. To address these challenges, the integration of digital tools in reading instruction has gained increasing attention. One such tool is the Wordwall application, a web-based educational platform that allows teachers to create interactive activities such as word matching, sorting tasks, and vocabulary games. This application promotes student engagement and supports vocabulary acquisition—two key components in the development of reading skills (Belo et al., 2016; Lysenko & Abrami, 2014; Syathroh et al., 2020). Interactive vocabulary instruction is particularly important because vocabulary knowledge is strongly correlated with

reading comprehension (Parmawati, A., & Inayah, 2019; Rico-Juan et al., 2024). When students understand more words, they are better able to infer meanings, grasp the main ideas, and follow the flow of the text. The use of Wordwall aligns with the principles of Constructivist Learning Theory, which emphasizes active participation, learner autonomy, and knowledge construction through meaningful experiences (Piaget, 1970; Vygotsky, 1978 in (Pheeraphan, 2013)). When students engage with vocabulary through games and interactive tasks, they are not only memorizing words but also applying them in context, which enhances retention and deepens understanding. Moreover, Dual Coding Theory by Paivio (1986) in (Arafat et al., 2025) supports the idea that combining verbal and visual information—such as text and images in Word Wall—can improve memory and learning outcomes. This theoretical foundation suggests that digital tools like Word Wall, which integrate visual and linguistic elements, are effective in supporting language comprehension and learning. Recent studies have demonstrated the positive effects of digital applications in language teaching. For example, (Chen et al., 2025) found that using interactive media improved students' vocabulary mastery and reading motivation. Similarly, (Hübner et al., 2023; Tran & Ma, 2025) emphasized that EFL students showed increased reading comprehension when digital tools were incorporated into reading instruction. However, despite these promising findings, there is still limited research that specifically explores the use of Word Wall in the context of teaching reading for general communication in Indonesian higher education. Given this gap, the current study aims to investigate the implementation of the Word Wall application in teaching reading for general communication purposes. This study focuses on how Word Wall is used in the classroom, how students respond to its use, and what impact it has on their reading development. The objective is to provide insights into the pedagogical effectiveness of Word Wall and to contribute to the broader discourse on the integration of technology in English language teaching. Practically, this study can offer innovative strategies for lecturers seeking to improve their reading instruction. Scientifically, it contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing empirical data on how digital tools can support language literacy in higher education settings.

## METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the implementation of the Word Wall application in teaching reading for general communication among first-year undergraduate students. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to explore phenomena in a natural setting, focusing on how participants interpret and make sense of their learning experiences (Fraenkel et al., 2023). The central purpose of this research is not to test hypotheses or generalize findings but to develop a rich, contextual understanding of how digital tools like Word Wall influence reading practices in higher education classrooms.

As (Alwasilah, 2011) points out, qualitative research is ideal for studies aiming to capture the complexities of social interactions and educational experiences from the perspective of the participants. It enables the researcher to investigate how technology-supported reading instruction is enacted in real classroom settings, and how students respond to these interventions both cognitively and affectively.

### Participants and Setting

The participants in this study were 30 first-year undergraduate students enrolled in the English Education Department at a private university in Bandung, West Java, Indonesia. These students were part of a General English course, which is a compulsory subject designed to strengthen basic English communication skills, with a particular emphasis on reading comprehension and vocabulary development.

The study was conducted in the students' regular classroom setting, which serves as a natural context for learning. Conducting the research in a naturalistic environment aligns with the principles of qualitative inquiry, as it enables the researcher to observe authentic behaviors, classroom interactions, and learning dynamics (Fraenkel et al., 2023). The classroom was equipped with internet access and multimedia facilities, which supported the use of the Wordwall application during the reading sessions.

A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants. According to (Silverman, 2005), purposive sampling is appropriate when the researcher intentionally selects individuals who are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with the phenomenon being studied—in this case, students engaged in digital reading instruction. All participants voluntarily agreed to take part in the study and were informed about the research objectives and data collection procedures.

### **Research Design and Procedure**

The implementation of the Wordwall application took place over a four-week period, comprising four instructional sessions. Each session lasted approximately 90 minutes and was integrated into the regular reading instruction schedule. Before the intervention, an orientation session was held to familiarize the students with the Wordwall platform and explain how it would be used to support reading activities.

During each session, the lecturer introduced a thematic reading passage related to general communication topics such as social media, daily routines, cultural exchanges, and academic life. The Wordwall application was used to design interactive vocabulary-building tasks, matching games, sentence rearrangement, and comprehension quizzes based on the reading materials. These activities were designed to engage students in active learning and to help them practice essential reading sub-skills such as skimming, scanning, identifying main ideas, and understanding word meanings from context.

The researchers observed the teaching-learning process closely, focusing on how the Wordwall application was integrated into instruction, the types of student engagement that occurred, and any challenges or positive developments that arose during the sessions.

### **Data Collection Techniques**

In accordance with qualitative research standards, multiple sources of data were collected to ensure credibility and provide a well-rounded understanding of the phenomenon. The data collection methods included:

- 1. Classroom Observations**

Classroom observations were conducted by the researcher during all four sessions. Observational data were recorded using detailed field notes, capturing aspects such as students' participation, engagement levels, group dynamics, verbal responses, and non-verbal behaviors. The observations aimed to document how students interacted with the Word Wall activities and how these interactions influenced their reading comprehension and motivation.

- 2. Student Reflections**

At the end of each session, students were asked to write short reflective responses about their learning experience. They were prompted to express their opinions on the usefulness of the Word Wall application, their level of engagement, and how it helped them understand the reading materials. These reflections offered insights into students' perceptions, attitudes, and affective responses, which are central to qualitative interpretation.

- 3. Informal Interviews**

Informal interviews were conducted with ten selected students after the fourth session.

The participants were chosen based on their active involvement in class and the richness of their reflections. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing students to express their thoughts freely while still covering key areas such as usability of the application, difficulties encountered, and perceived learning gains. Each interview lasted between 10 to 15 minutes and was audio-recorded with the participants' consent.

These triangulated data sources such as observations, reflections, and interviews enhanced the trustworthiness and validity of the findings (Alwasilah, 2011; Silverman, 2005).

### **Data Analysis**

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the six-step procedure proposed by (Silverman, 2005)). The steps include: First, the researchers familiarized themselves with the data by reading and re-reading it thoroughly. This step was essential to gain a deep understanding of the content and begin noticing initial patterns or significant points within the data set. Second, the researchers generated initial codes. In this phase, we systematically identified and labeled key features of the data that appeared relevant or meaningful. These codes helped organize the information into smaller, manageable units for further analysis. Third, the researchers searched for themes by grouping related codes together. This step involved examining the connections between codes and identifying broader patterns that represented important aspects of the data. Fourth, the researchers reviewed the themes to ensure we were coherent and accurately reflected both the coded data and the overall data set. This phase sometimes required refining or merging themes to improve clarity and consistency. Fifth, the researchers defined and named the themes. We carefully analyzed each theme to determine its core meaning and then assigned clear and descriptive names that captured their essence. Finally, the researchers produced the final report. This included writing a detailed and compelling narrative that presented each theme with supporting evidence from the data, effectively addressing the research questions.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Results**

This section presents the findings from the qualitative investigation on the implementation of the Word Wall application in teaching reading for general communication to first-year undergraduate EFL students. The results are analyzed thematically and compared with relevant literature to highlight their theoretical and practical significance. Four major themes emerged from the data: (1) Increased Student Engagement, (2) Vocabulary Development and Retention, (3) Enhanced Reading Comprehension, and (4) Challenges in Digital Integration.

#### **1. Increased Student Engagement**

The most immediate and observable outcome of using Wordwall was the heightened student engagement during reading sessions. Students responded positively to the gamified elements of the application, which transformed otherwise passive reading activities into interactive learning experiences. Observation notes showed that students were more focused, motivated, and willing to participate in classroom tasks when Wordwall was used.

This is consistent with the findings of (Jääskä & Aaltonen, 2022; Le Thi Ngoc, 2024), who argued that digital gamification tools enhance learners' intrinsic motivation and participation in language learning. Compared to traditional methods such as textbook-based reading or passive comprehension questions, Word Wall created a more dynamic and collaborative learning

environment. These findings support the objective of improving learner involvement in reading for general communication.

## **2. Vocabulary Development and Retention**

Another significant finding was the improvement in students' vocabulary acquisition. Wordwall's features such as interactive quizzes, matching games, and visual prompts—helped students learn and retain new words more effectively. Several students reported in reflections and interviews that the app's repetition and contextual usage made unfamiliar vocabulary easier to remember.

This observation aligns with (Gomaa et al., 2024; Lysenko & Abrami, 2014) theory of vocabulary learning, which emphasizes the importance of multiple encounters with a word in meaningful contexts. Furthermore, (Martins, 2015; Pheeraphan, 2013) stressed that learners remember vocabulary better when engaged in visual and kinesthetic learning, which Word Wall facilitated. The tool thus contributed to enhancing students' lexical competence, which is essential for successful reading comprehension.

## **3. Enhanced Reading Comprehension**

The use of Word Wall also positively affected students' reading comprehension skills. The application required students to engage with the text actively through tasks such as identifying key ideas, sequencing events, and contextual guessing which sharpened their understanding. Student reflections indicated that the activities guided them to read with more purpose and attention to detail.

These findings reflect the ideas of (Díaz et al., 2024; Zolfaghari et al., 2025), who emphasized that interactive and task-based approaches to reading instruction can promote deeper comprehension. The results also support the view that when reading is integrated with vocabulary tasks and immediate feedback, learners are more likely to internalize meaning and make inferences from the text (Hübner et al., 2023; Inayah & Rahayu, 2022).

## **4. Challenges in Digital Integration**

Despite the overall success, the study also uncovered some challenges, primarily related to students' digital literacy and technical access. Initial sessions revealed that some students struggled to operate the application due to unfamiliarity, while others faced internet connectivity issues. Although these challenges diminished over time as students adapted, they still represent potential barriers to the effective implementation of digital tools in low-tech classrooms.

This corresponds with findings by (Arafat et al., 2025; Tran & Ma, 2025), who noted that the success of technology-enhanced language learning relies not only on the tool itself but also on the readiness of both teachers and students. It also highlights the importance of scaffolding, as emphasized by Vygotsky's (1978) in (Díaz et al., 2024) sociocultural theory, in helping learners move toward digital fluency and self-regulated learning.

## **Relevance to Previous Literature and Practice**

The findings of this study reinforce the growing body of research that supports the integration of educational technology in language instruction. While several studies have explored digital tools like Kahoot!, Quizizz, and Edmodo, fewer have examined the use of Wordwall specifically in the context of reading instruction for general communication in higher education. This study fills that gap by demonstrating how Word Wall can bridge the affective and cognitive domains of learning, enhancing both motivation and comprehension.

In practical terms, the study provides a model for other EFL instructors seeking to make reading instruction more interactive and student-centered. Scientifically, it contributes to ongoing



discussions about the role of gamified learning environments in fostering literacy development in tertiary education.

**Table 1. Summary of Key Themes and Descriptions**

Theme	Description
<b>Increased Student Engagement</b>	Students showed more enthusiasm and participation during reading lessons with Word Wall.
<b>Vocabulary Development and Retention</b>	Repeated exposure and interactive vocabulary games helped students remember new words more easily.
<b>Enhanced Reading Comprehension</b>	Students better understood texts due to interactive and task-based reading support.
<b>Challenges in Digital Integration</b>	Some students faced internet and device limitations, especially in early sessions.

*Note. Thematic analysis was conducted from classroom observations, student reflections, and informal interviews.*

Table 1. presents a summary of the key themes that emerged from the qualitative data collected during the study. These themes reflect students' experiences and perceptions regarding the use of the Wordwall application in teaching reading for general communication. The first theme highlights the enhancement of student engagement, where participants reported increased interest and motivation due to the interactive and visually stimulating nature of the application. The second theme focuses on vocabulary acquisition, with students expressing that repeated exposure to target words through Word Wall activities helped them remember and use new vocabulary more confidently. The third theme involves improvements in reading comprehension, as learners were able to better understand texts by recognizing and recalling words practiced on the platform. Another theme addresses challenges encountered during implementation, including initial difficulties with digital literacy and occasional technical problems, which, however, were overcome as students became more familiar with the tool. Lastly, the theme of practical benefits emphasizes the application's role in making vocabulary learning accessible and flexible, allowing students to practice outside the classroom. Together, these themes provide a comprehensive view of how the Word Wall application supports language learning in a higher education context.

**Table 2. Sample Student Responses by Theme**

*Note. Responses were translated from Bahasa Indonesia to English and anonymized.*

Table 2 presents examples of student responses grouped by the main themes identified in the study. These responses provide insight into how students perceived the use of the Wordwall application in their reading classes. Regarding increased engagement, students indicated that the interactive features made learning more enjoyable and stimulating. In the vocabulary acquisition theme, learners reported that repeated exposure to words helped them remember and use new vocabulary more effectively. For reading comprehension, students explained that familiarity with the words from the Wordwall facilitated better understanding of reading passages. The challenges' theme reflects students' experiences with initial difficulties in navigating the application and occasional technical issues, which improved with continued use. Finally, in the practical benefits theme, students highlighted the convenience of being able to review vocabulary independently outside of class. These responses illustrate the students' experiences and demonstrate the practical value of using the Word Wall application in language learning.

## Discussion

The findings demonstrate that the Wordwall application has significant pedagogical value when used thoughtfully in EFL reading instruction. The increase in engagement, vocabulary mastery, and comprehension suggests that Word Wall can serve as a powerful tool for promoting active reading, especially among first-year university students who are still developing foundational language skills. Moreover, the results relevant to Vygotsky's (1978) in (Arafat et al., 2025; Rico-Juan et al., 2024; Tran & Ma, 2025) socio-cultural theory, which emphasizes the importance of tools and mediation in learning. Word Wall functioned as a mediating artifact that supported collaborative learning and scaffolded reading tasks, allowing learners to perform beyond their individual capacities. The study also underscores the importance of teacher readiness and student training in integrating educational technology. While the tool itself offers interactive features, its impact depends on how it is used within a well-structured lesson and how students are supported throughout the process.

## CONCLUSION

This study shows that using the Wordwall application in teaching reading for general communication in higher education improves student engagement, vocabulary learning, and reading comprehension. Its interactive and visual features create a more engaging learning environment, encouraging participation and repeated exposure to new words. Overcoming early tech-related challenges also helps build learner autonomy and confidence. The results are useful for educators and curriculum designers aiming to enhance language learning through technology. Wordwall offers a flexible tool that supports ongoing vocabulary practice both in and outside the classroom. This research adds to existing studies on educational technology by offering qualitative insights into the benefits and challenges of digital tools in language teaching. Future research could explore its long-term effects and use with different learners and skills. Overall, Wordwall shows strong potential to support student-centered reading instruction in higher education.

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