



## Voices of Young Readers: A Phenomenological Study of Grade 2 Pupils' Experiences with the Google Read Along App

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### Abstract

In the digital age, mobile-assisted learning tools are increasingly being used to address early literacy challenges among young learners, particularly in resource-constrained educational settings. This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of Grade 2 pupils who engaged with the Google Read Along application as part of a classroom-based reading intervention. Conducted at a public elementary school in the Division of Cagayan de Oro City, the Philippines, the research aimed to understand how young learners perceived and responded to a mobile-assisted reading tool designed to enhance reading comprehension and vocabulary. Through informal interviews and thematic analysis, three (3) key themes emerged: increased enjoyment of reading, vocabulary development and learning gains, and motivation through positive reinforcement. The findings revealed that pupils experienced reading as more engaging and meaningful due to the app's interactive features, gamified rewards, and supportive feedback. These experiences contributed not only to cognitive gains in vocabulary but also to affective growth in reading motivation and confidence. The study affirms the potential of mobile-assisted learning tools in foundational literacy instruction, especially when thoughtfully integrated into learner-centered classroom environments. Implications are offered for educators, developers, and policymakers seeking to improve early-grade reading outcomes through technology.

**Keywords:** *Educational Intervention, Read Along Application, Reading Proficiency, Vocabulary Development*

### INTRODUCTION

In today's digital age, technology is reshaping how children acquire literacy skills, offering new opportunities to enhance early reading development through mobile and interactive platforms (Herda et al., 2024; Manliquez & Traverro, 2025; Traverro & Padilla, 2025). Reading is not merely the mechanical act of decoding written symbols—it is a complex cognitive and affective process that enables learners to make meaning, communicate ideas, and engage critically with texts. In early childhood education, reading proficiency and vocabulary development are widely recognized as essential predictors of academic achievement and lifelong learning (Castles et al., 2018; Rubin & Traverro, 2022). However, in many low-resource contexts, learners struggle to achieve foundational literacy due to limited instructional support, low engagement, and inadequate access to print-rich environments (OECD, 2022; Padilla et al., 2024).

To address these challenges, mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) tools such as the Google Read Along application have been developed to provide accessible, engaging, and adaptive literacy support. The Read Along app, featuring interactive storytelling, speech recognition, and real-time feedback, seeks to improve reading fluency and comprehension by combining technology with gamification (Sattva Consulting, 2020; Ramasamy et al., 2025). These features are particularly relevant for early-grade learners, who benefit from immediate correction, motivation through rewards, and auditory modeling of language.

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Several quantitative studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of Read Along and other MALL interventions in improving reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition (Falloon, 2013; Teymouri, 2024). Nonetheless, prior research has primarily focused on measuring performance gains, often overlooking the perspectives of young learners themselves. This presents a gap in the literature: while we know that these tools can enhance literacy outcomes, we know far less about how children actually experience and interpret them. Young learners are not passive recipients of content; they actively construct meaning from their interactions with digital tools and their learning environments (Hsin et al., 2014; Berico & Traverro, 2023). Their voices provide valuable insights into engagement, motivation, and emotional experiences—factors often neglected in data-driven evaluations.

The present study addresses this gap by adopting a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of Grade 2 pupils at a public elementary school in the Division of Cagayan de Oro City, the Philippines, who used the Google Read Along application during an eight-week reading intervention. Specifically, the main objective of this study is to explore the lived experiences of Grade 2 pupils using the Google Read Along application during the intervention. In centering on learners' own perspectives, the study aims to uncover how digital reading tools shape their reading behavior, vocabulary development, and attitudes toward literacy.

The significance of this inquiry lies in its focus on learner-centered evidence, complementing existing outcome-based studies with qualitative insights. It contributes to the growing body of research on digital equity and literacy, demonstrating how MALL tools can both support and transform foundational reading instruction, particularly in multilingual and resource-constrained settings (Ji & Abdul Aziz, 2021; Katemba, 2021). The novelty of this work lies in foregrounding the voices of young readers themselves, thereby offering educators, developers, and policymakers nuanced perspectives that can inform the design and integration of literacy technologies.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

A growing body of research highlights the importance of early literacy as a foundation for later academic achievement and lifelong learning. At the same time, advances in digital technology—particularly MALL—have opened new pathways for supporting reading development, especially in resource-constrained contexts. This literature review first discusses early literacy development in the digital age, then examines the role of MALL in enhancing reading and vocabulary, and specifically considers the Google Read Along application as a literacy tool. It further explores learner engagement, motivation, and the affective dimensions of reading, and identifies key gaps in current research that provide the rationale for the present study.

### Early Literacy Development in the Digital Age

Early literacy lays the foundation for academic success and lifelong learning. Research consistently shows that early reading proficiency and vocabulary development are strong predictors of later achievement, as they directly influence reading comprehension, cognitive skills, and school performance (Castles et al., 2018; Rubin & Traverro, 2022). Shared reading and access to books in early childhood have been linked to higher reading scores in later years, with distinct developmental pathways connecting these factors to long-term literacy outcomes (McNally et al., 2023).

Likewise, interventions such as activity-based learning in early classrooms can effectively promote vocabulary growth and reading comprehension (Rahn et al., 2023). Vocabulary development, though critical for reading comprehension, is often underestimated in its complexity (Hadley & Dickinson, 2020). More recently, evidence suggests that oral vocabulary knowledge and

comprehension skills advance significantly during early adolescence, with achievement gaps narrowing between the least and most able learners (Guo et al., 2025).

Despite these recognized benefits, many children in resource-constrained contexts face significant barriers to achieving foundational literacy. Limited access to books and materials, insufficient instructional support, and low learner engagement remain persistent challenges (OECD, 2022; Padilla et al., 2024). However, studies point to promising solutions. Culturally responsive and community-driven approaches, including integrating local cultural elements into literacy instruction, have been shown to improve learner engagement and outcomes (Ningsih et al., 2025; Vasoya & Vansdadiya, 2023). Similarly, multilingual strategies such as translanguaging can help bridge disparities between home and school literacy practices, making instruction more inclusive for diverse learners (Magxala & Baidoo, 2025).

At the same time, reading is increasingly recognized as both a cognitive and affective process. Learners' cognitive skills—such as vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension—develop in tandem with affective dimensions like self-concept, enjoyment, and motivation. Research shows that cognitive and affective reading self-concepts are distinct yet strongly interrelated, and both are significantly associated with reading achievement across genders (Karimova & Csapó, 2021).

Moreover, the affective benefits of reading extend beyond the classroom; regular reading builds cognitive reserve, fostering resilience against cognitive decline and enhancing quality of life (Savarimuthu & Ponniah, 2024). These findings underscore the need to view literacy not only as a technical skill but also as an experience shaped by emotional and cultural factors. Given these challenges and opportunities, digital innovations such as MALL tools are increasingly being explored as scalable, engaging, and culturally adaptable solutions to strengthen early literacy development.

### **Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) and Early Literacy**

Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) refers to the use of mobile technologies to support and enhance the acquisition of language and literacy skills. Over the past two decades, MALL has evolved from experimental applications into a mainstream educational strategy, supported by advances in mobile accessibility, task-based learning, and gamification (Burston, 2015; Shadiev et al., 2020). By leveraging portable devices, MALL enables learners to engage with language in familiar, authentic environments, often extending learning beyond the classroom and into everyday contexts.

Recent studies highlight the wide-ranging benefits of MALL for learners of all ages. It has been shown to foster motivation and self-confidence and to reduce anxiety in language learning (Zhen & Hashim, 2022), as well as to improve pragmatic competence and communicative skills in second-language contexts (Moghaddam et al., 2024). Beyond speaking and writing, MALL interventions have demonstrated measurable gains in vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension. For example, Falloon (2013) found that app design and content strongly influence young learners' reading pathways, while Ji and Abdul Aziz (2021) reported that mobile-assisted platforms enhance vocabulary acquisition by providing repeated, meaningful exposure to words. Similarly, Katemba (2021) observed that MALL improved vocabulary performance in a rural school setting, underscoring its potential for bridging literacy gaps in resource-constrained contexts.

The integration of gamified and task-based approaches further amplifies the effectiveness of MALL. Pingmuang and Koraneekij (2022) showed that combining MALL with gamification strategies significantly enhanced students' writing skills and overall satisfaction. These findings resonate with the design of the Google Read Along application, which incorporates interactive storytelling, speech recognition, and real-time corrective feedback to sustain engagement and promote reading fluency (Sattva Consulting, 2020; Ramasamy et al., 2025). Such features align with

calls for learner-centered pedagogies that not only focus on cognitive outcomes but also address affective dimensions of learning, including motivation and enjoyment.

Taken together, the literature affirms that MALL is an effective and versatile approach for supporting early literacy development. Its strengths lie in personalization, accessibility, and emotional engagement, making it particularly relevant for young learners in multilingual and resource-limited educational settings. However, most existing studies emphasize outcome-based measures of reading and vocabulary gains, leaving open the question of how learners themselves experience these tools in their day-to-day reading practices.

### **Google Read Along as a Literacy Tool**

Among the many MALL tools developed for early literacy, the Google Read Along application has gained attention for its accessibility and child-friendly design. Initially launched as “Bolo” in 2019, the app was developed to provide interactive reading support for young learners, particularly in contexts where instructional resources are limited. Its features include a virtual reading assistant (Diya), speech recognition technology, gamified rewards, and real-time corrective feedback—elements intended to sustain motivation and promote reading fluency (Sattva Consulting, 2020; Ramasamy et al., 2025). By blending play and pedagogy, the app aims to make reading both enjoyable and instructionally meaningful.

Evidence from recent studies affirms its potential. Ramasamy et al. (2025) reported significant improvements in reading skills among rural learners using Read Along, while Teymouri (2024) emphasized the app’s role in vocabulary retention through repeated exposure and corrective feedback. In addition, Falloon (2013) highlighted how design elements, such as story-based engagement and interactive features, shape young learners’ literacy pathways, findings echoed in evaluations of Read Along’s effectiveness. These outcomes are particularly relevant for early-grade learners, who benefit from immediate feedback, motivational rewards, and auditory modeling of language.

The app’s interactive nature also supports affective dimensions of literacy. Positive reinforcement through gamification, stars, and Diya’s encouragement not only fosters reading accuracy but also cultivates learner confidence and enjoyment. Such affective outcomes align with broader evidence that engagement and motivation are crucial precursors to sustained literacy development (Chuang & Jamiat, 2023). At the same time, its offline functionality and multilingual options make it adaptable to resource-constrained and diverse educational settings, thereby contributing to digital equity in early literacy instruction (Katemba, 2021; Ji & Abdul Aziz, 2021).

Despite these promising findings, most prior research on Read Along has focused on quantifiable outcomes such as reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition. Far less is known about how children themselves perceive and interpret their experiences with the app. Understanding these lived experiences is vital for capturing the affective, motivational, and contextual factors that shape how digital reading tools are used in practice.

### **Learner Engagement, Motivation, and Affective Dimensions of Reading**

Literacy development is not solely a cognitive process; it is equally shaped by learners’ emotional experiences, motivation, and engagement. Research consistently demonstrates that positive affective factors—such as enjoyment, self-confidence, and exposure to supportive learning environments—play a critical role in sustaining reading practice and promoting long-term literacy gains. Empirical studies have shown that learners’ affective reading self-concept and motivation are strongly associated with reading achievement, highlighting the interdependence of emotional and cognitive dimensions of literacy development (Karimova & Csapó, 2021).

Moreover, interactive and learner-centered reading environments have been found to

enhance enjoyment and sustained engagement, which are particularly important for young learners who are still developing reading habits (Chuang & Jamiat, 2023). For early-grade pupils, perceiving reading as an enjoyable and rewarding activity can foster intrinsic motivation and resilience in addressing literacy challenges.

Digital tools have been shown to enhance this affective dimension of learning. For example, Chuang and Jamiat (2023) found that interactive reading applications increased enjoyment and sustained interest among children, thereby encouraging more independent reading. Similarly, Jedi-Sari-Biglar and Liman-Kaban (2023) reported that mobile-assisted interventions reduced stress and promoted more positive attitudes toward language learning. Features such as immediate feedback, gamified rewards, and supportive virtual assistants help create emotionally rich environments that lower anxiety and build learner confidence (Helwa, 2017; Zhen & Hashim, 2022).

These findings align closely with the design of the Google Read Along application, where encouragement from the virtual assistant Diya, star-based rewards, and real-time corrective feedback are intended to reinforce learners' progress. Positive reinforcement, whether digital or teacher-mediated, not only validates learners' efforts but also cultivates habits of persistence and self-regulation (Burston, 2015; Sari & Santosa, 2024). Indeed, McNiff (2021) underscores that even in technology-enhanced environments, teacher recognition remains a powerful motivator that complements digital reinforcement.

Taken together, the literature suggests that learner engagement and affective growth are central to successful literacy development. Digital reading tools that integrate motivational design with pedagogical value can transform how children experience reading, making it more playful, rewarding, and confidence-building. However, while affective outcomes are recognized as important, they are often underexplored in outcome-driven studies. This highlights the need for research that foregrounds learners' own voices in describing how digital tools shape their reading motivation, confidence, and enjoyment—an emphasis directly addressed by the present study.

### **Gaps in Current Research and Rationale for the Study**

While numerous studies have established the effectiveness of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) tools in improving reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition (Falloon, 2013; Ji & Abdul Aziz, 2021; Katemba, 2021; Teymouri, 2024), much of this research has been outcome-driven and quantitative. These studies often highlight measurable literacy gains but offer limited insight into how learners perceive and experience these tools in their everyday learning contexts. This is a critical gap, as children are not passive recipients of digital interventions; rather, they actively interpret and respond to the interactive, affective, and motivational features embedded in these technologies (Hsin et al., 2014; Berico & Traverro, 2023).

In particular, there is a scarcity of qualitative, learner-centered research that captures the voices of early-grade pupils in resource-constrained settings. The perspectives of young readers are essential for understanding not only the cognitive outcomes of digital tools but also the affective dimensions—such as enjoyment, motivation, and confidence—that drive sustained literacy engagement (Chuang & Jamiat, 2023). Moreover, existing studies have rarely examined how children experience gamification, virtual guidance, and real-time feedback, despite these being central design features of widely used applications such as Google Read Along (Sattva Consulting, 2020; Ramasamy et al., 2025).

Against this backdrop, the present study addresses these gaps by adopting a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of Grade 2 pupils using the Google Read Along application in a classroom-based reading intervention. In centering on learners' reflections, this research seeks to illuminate how digital reading tools shape their enjoyment of

reading, vocabulary growth, and motivation through positive reinforcement. In doing so, it contributes to the broader discourse on digital equity and learner-centered pedagogy, while offering practical insights for educators, developers, and policymakers seeking to integrate technology meaningfully into early literacy instruction.

### **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of Grade 2 pupils who participated in a reading intervention using the Google Read Along application. Phenomenology is particularly suited to this inquiry, as it seeks to understand how individuals perceive and make meaning of a specific phenomenon—in this case, the integration of a speech-based reading app in early-grade literacy instruction (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The participants of the study were Grade 2 pupils from a public elementary school in the Division of Cagayan de Oro City, the Philippines, during the academic year 2023–2024. The class, composed of 14 boys and 24 girls aged 7 to 9, was selected through purposive sampling based on their involvement in the previously conducted intervention using the Read Along application. While the class was considered the top-performing section among five Grade 2 classes, pre-intervention assessments revealed that none of the students reached the “story level” in the ASER diagnostic reading tool, indicating that significant support in foundational literacy was still needed.

Data collection was carried out through informal, one-on-one interviews conducted after the intervention period. These interviews aimed to elicit the pupils’ reflections, thoughts, and feelings about their experience using the Google Read Along app. Given the participants’ ages, interviews were conducted in a conversational, child-friendly manner in both English and Filipino, allowing learners to express themselves more naturally. Their responses were recorded through note-taking and audio recordings, with parental consent secured prior to the interviews.

The data were then transcribed and subjected to thematic analysis, following the steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), which include familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, identifying themes, reviewing and defining themes, and producing a final report. Emerging themes were derived inductively and supported with direct quotes to preserve the authenticity of student voices.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, several strategies were employed. Credibility was strengthened through prolonged engagement with participants during the intervention period and by using verbatim excerpts to represent pupils’ voices accurately. Dependability was supported by a systematic, transparent analytic procedure consistent with established thematic analysis guidelines. Confirmability was addressed through careful documentation of coding decisions and theme development to minimize researcher bias and maintain alignment between data and interpretations. Transferability was enhanced by providing detailed descriptions of the research context, participants, and procedures, allowing readers to determine the applicability of the findings to similar educational settings.

Throughout the research process, ethical considerations were prioritized to protect the rights and welfare of the child participants. Informed consent was obtained from both the school administration and the pupils’ parents or guardians. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by using pseudonyms and coding responses. The researcher ensured a safe, respectful, and supportive environment during interviews to prevent discomfort or pressure among the young respondents.

### **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

This section presents the three major themes that emerged from the pupils’ reflections on their experience using the Google Read Along application. Thematic analysis revealed patterns in

learners' perceptions of the app's usefulness, enjoyment, and instructional value. Each theme is supported by direct quotes from participants and followed by a discussion linking their experiences to relevant educational literature.

### **Theme 1: Increased Enjoyment of Reading**

The most prominent theme that emerged from the responses was the increased enjoyment of reading among students. The majority expressed that using Google Read Along made reading a more engaging and rewarding experience. A key factor contributing to this enjoyment was the application's gamified elements, such as earning stars and prizes for correct answers.

For example, one learner shared, *"I love reading with Read Along because if I get it right, I receive lots of stars."* (L16). This indicates that the app's reward system fosters intrinsic motivation, making reading feel more like an interactive game rather than a task. Another pupil (L7) mentioned that the virtual assistant, Diya, plays a supportive role in their reading experience, reinforcing the idea that an encouraging guide makes reading more enjoyable.

Additionally, learners related the reading activity to their interest in mobile games, as one response (L10) highlights: *"I love playing games on my phone or laptop because they are fun, just like the reading activities that our teacher gave us."* This suggests that incorporating technology and interactive elements into reading instruction aligns with students' preferences, making learning more engaging and relatable to their daily activities.

Moreover, some students admitted that they initially did not enjoy reading but developed a newfound interest in reading thanks to the Read Along app. One student (L23) stated, *"I did not like reading before, but when our teacher used Read Along, I started to enjoy it."* This highlights the app's transformational impact, making reading a more pleasurable and rewarding activity for young learners.

The pupils' experiences highlight how digital tools can enhance the affective dimension of literacy learning, especially by increasing enjoyment and engagement. When learners perceive reading as playful and rewarding, their willingness to read increases, which can positively influence both frequency and quality of reading behavior. [Falloon \(2013\)](#) emphasized that educational apps designed with game-like features—such as immediate rewards, story-based engagement, and interactive feedback—create emotionally rich experiences that sustain learner attention and motivation in early grades. This aligns with pupils' responses, who equated Read Along with the fun and excitement they associate with mobile gaming. [Chuang and Jamiat \(2023\)](#) also reported that the use of mobile-assisted reading apps led to greater enjoyment and interest among young learners, which in turn promoted more independent reading. They noted that this emotional connection to reading often preceded improved reading performance.

Furthermore, [Jedi-Sari-Biglar and Liman-Kaban \(2023\)](#) found that learners exposed to mobile learning interventions developed more positive attitudes toward language learning, as the interactive format reduced stress and made learning feel less like an academic burden. [Helwa \(2017\)](#) supported this by arguing that motivation in literacy can be significantly enhanced when learners feel emotionally rewarded during reading. The appeal of digital environments, she noted, lies in their ability to blend entertainment with learning, particularly for children who struggle with traditional formats.

Consistent with this view, [Karimova and Csapó \(2021\)](#) demonstrated that affective reading self-concept is significantly associated with reading achievement, underscoring how emotional experiences shape academic engagement and persistence. These findings support the integration of emotionally engaging, gamified reading tools into early literacy instruction. When learners associate reading with enjoyment, they are more likely to develop the intrinsic motivation needed for sustained reading practice and long-term literacy development.

**Theme 2: Developed Learning**

Another significant theme observed was the students' improvement in learning, particularly in vocabulary and spelling. The responses indicate that the Read Along app played a crucial role in expanding their word knowledge and enhancing their ability to correct mistakes in real time.

For instance, one pupil (L18) expressed, *"I have learned a lot of new words."* This suggests that exposure to interactive reading materials through the app contributed to vocabulary enrichment. Additionally, the app's immediate feedback feature was particularly beneficial, as another learner (L25) stated, *"I know more now because the app immediately corrects me."* This reflects the scaffolding effect of the application, where learners can identify and correct their errors, leading to active learning and self-correction.

Furthermore, learners also demonstrated improved comprehension and spelling skills as a result of using the app. One response (L3) emphasized this by stating, *"I can answer correctly in spelling activities because I now understand the words our teacher uses."* This suggests that the app not only enhances reading fluency but also deepens comprehension, allowing students to apply their learning in other literacy tasks, such as spelling and answering questions.

These reflections demonstrate that the Google Read Along app served not only as a reading tool but also as an effective vocabulary-building platform. Learners benefited from its multimodal features—oral reading, visual word recognition, and contextual exposure—that are known to support vocabulary growth in early literacy.

Nation (2022) emphasized that vocabulary acquisition occurs most effectively through repeated, meaningful encounters with words in varied contexts. The pupils' ability to retain and apply new vocabulary suggests that the app provided the contextual learning opportunities recommended for effective vocabulary instruction. Webb and Nation (2017) further noted that learners need substantial exposure to both high-frequency and less common words to achieve measurable vocabulary gains. Apps like Read Along, which provide repeated oral and visual exposure, can meet this requirement by embedding vocabulary in story-rich environments.

Teymouri (2024) supported this view, demonstrating that mobile learning tools that incorporate interactive feedback and spaced repetition improve both vocabulary retention and learner confidence, especially when learners are active participants in the process—as evidenced by their ability to self-correct and apply new words. Koleini et al. (2024) added that vocabulary development is enhanced when learners are given opportunities to see and hear words in context and receive immediate feedback—features that are central to the Read Along experience. Their study found statistically significant gains in vocabulary among students who used digital flashcards and pronunciation tools embedded in learning apps.

In the Philippine context, Gatlabayan (2024) found that MALL tools significantly improved vocabulary scores among elementary pupils in a rural school, particularly when apps were aligned with learners' cognitive levels and provided regular opportunities for practice. Together, these studies reinforce the pupils' reflections that the Read Along app provided a supportive environment for vocabulary growth. When vocabulary instruction is integrated into engaging, interactive reading experiences—rather than delivered as isolated word drills—it can result in deeper retention, better comprehension, and increased learner confidence.

**Theme 3: Positive Reinforcement**

The third theme revolves around positive reinforcement and its impact on learner motivation. While fewer pupils explicitly mentioned this compared to the first two themes, the responses clearly indicate that external motivation and encouragement played a significant role in their reading progress.

One learner (L19) mentioned how Diya, the virtual assistant, acts as a guide and helps them

in reading, stating, *"I enjoy reading using Google Read Along because it is easy to understand, and Diya guides me on how to read words."* This suggests that having real-time guidance boosts confidence and fosters a supportive learning environment.

Additionally, the concept of goal-setting and rewards emerged in responses such as L12's, who said, *"I have mastered reading now because I practice at home so that when we read with Read Along, I can earn more points."* This shows that students are not only motivated by the rewards but also develop study habits and self-discipline to improve their reading skills.

Moreover, teacher recognition also serves as a strong motivator, as seen in L29's response: *"I was so happy when I got a high score because my teacher congratulated me."* This reinforces the importance of positive reinforcement from educators, as students feel a sense of accomplishment and validation when their progress is acknowledged.

The responses suggest that motivation in early literacy can be significantly enhanced through timely, personalized feedback and consistent encouragement. The Read Along app's reward-based system, combined with teacher affirmation, appeared to create a dual channel of support that reinforced positive learning behaviors and built learner confidence.

Burston (2015) noted that motivation is a key variable in the success of MALL, particularly when learners perceive the tool as both helpful and rewarding. When reinforcement comes in both digital and human forms—as it did in this study—learners are more likely to develop study habits and self-directed behaviors. Ji and Abdul Aziz (2021) found that students using mobile vocabulary apps with personalized feedback became more autonomous and motivated, especially when rewards or praise were tied to performance. In the current study, pupils reported actively practicing outside school in anticipation of earning points, echoing the link between motivation and self-regulation.

Similarly, Karimova and Csapó (2021) found that students' affective reading self-concept is strongly linked to their academic engagement and reading performance, suggesting that learners' beliefs about their competence play a crucial role in sustaining effort and progress in literacy development. Sari and Santosa (2024) found that motivation increased when Indonesian learners used mobile platforms like Padlet and Quizizz that included peer recognition and achievement tracking—features similar in function to Read Along's star system and progress feedback. Their findings reinforce the idea that learners thrive when they see measurable progress and feel acknowledged for their efforts.

Finally, McNiff (2021) argued that praise from teachers remains a strong motivational force even in technology-enhanced environments. Learners still seek and respond to human feedback, which complements rather than replaces the encouragement provided by educational software. This dual reinforcement can deepen engagement and foster a sense of accomplishment. Hence, these findings indicate that motivation is not an incidental outcome of literacy instruction—it is a foundational driver of it. Tools like Read Along are most effective when they blend responsive digital design with affirming teacher interaction, enabling young learners to feel supported, challenged, and celebrated in their reading journey.

## CONCLUSIONS

This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of Grade 2 pupils who used the Google Read Along application as part of an eight-week reading intervention. The findings revealed that learners experienced reading not just as a mechanical task but as an enjoyable, rewarding, and confidence-building activity. The app's interactive features—such as gamification, immediate feedback, and a virtual reading assistant—significantly shaped students' perceptions of reading and fostered positive learning habits.

Three major themes emerged from the data. First, learners described increased enjoyment

of reading, noting that the gamified features made the experience feel like play rather than work. Second, they reported noticeable gains in vocabulary knowledge and related literacy skills, with the app's corrective feedback and contextual exposure playing a crucial role in learning new words. Finally, motivation through positive reinforcement—both digital (via Diya and reward systems) and human (through teacher praise)—was identified as a strong influence on student engagement and sustained reading practice.

Beyond its practical contributions, this study offers important theoretical implications. First, the findings reinforce and extend the conceptualization of literacy as both a cognitive and affective process, demonstrating that enjoyment, confidence, and motivation function as integral components of literacy development rather than peripheral outcomes. Second, the study contributes to MALL theory by suggesting that the effectiveness of digital reading tools lies not solely in measurable performance gains but in how learners interpret and emotionally engage with their interactive features. In this regard, engagement and affective meaning-making may serve as mediating mechanisms between technology use and literacy growth. Third, by employing a phenomenological approach, the study advances learner-centered theory in educational technology research, positioning children's lived experiences as essential sources of theoretical insight rather than merely descriptive accounts.

Taken together, these findings affirm that mobile-assisted reading tools like Google Read Along can effectively support literacy development in young learners, particularly when the tools are designed to be interactive, emotionally engaging, and pedagogically aligned. More importantly, the study suggests that foundational literacy in technology-enhanced environments emerges from the dynamic interplay of cognitive development, emotional engagement, and motivational reinforcement.

Based on the findings, the following recommendations and action steps are given:

1. Teachers may consider a data-driven approach to strengthen the use of various reading strategies tailored to different types of learners to enhance reading skills.
2. Teachers may integrate interactive reading tools like Google Read Along into daily instruction, using them to complement traditional strategies and sustain learner motivation.
3. School leaders and curriculum developers are encouraged to support blended literacy programs that combine digital tools with face-to-face teaching, especially in diverse and low-resource contexts.
4. App developers may enhance customization features and incorporate culturally relevant, level-appropriate content to better address the needs of early-grade learners.

Future researchers are advised to explore the long-term effects of mobile reading applications on broader literacy outcomes and examine the role of teacher facilitation in maximizing their impact.

#### **LIMITATION & FURTHER RESEARCH**

This study is not without limitations. First, the research was conducted in a single public elementary school with a relatively small group of Grade 2 pupils. While this provided rich qualitative insights, the findings cannot be generalized to all learners or educational contexts. Second, the reliance on informal interviews with young children, though appropriate for their developmental stage, may have limited the depth of responses, as pupils' ability to articulate experiences was constrained by age and language proficiency.

Third, the duration of the intervention was limited to eight weeks, which may not fully capture long-term changes in reading behaviors, vocabulary development, or sustained motivation. Finally, the study focused only on learners' perspectives, without systematically incorporating the views of teachers, parents, or other stakeholders who could provide complementary insights into

the app's effectiveness and integration in literacy instruction.

Future research may address these limitations by expanding the sample to include multiple schools across diverse socio-economic and linguistic contexts, thereby enabling more comparative insights. Longitudinal studies are also recommended to examine the sustained impact of digital reading interventions on literacy skills and reading habits over time. In addition, mixed-methods approaches could integrate both learner experiences and quantitative measures of reading progress to provide a more comprehensive evaluation.

Further exploration of teachers' and parents' perspectives would also be valuable in understanding how digital tools can be better aligned with classroom practices and home literacy support. Lastly, researchers may investigate how culturally relevant or localized content in mobile-assisted learning tools influences engagement and comprehension among early-grade learners in multilingual settings.

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