



Research Article

CRITERIA OF DIGITAL BOOK DEVELOPMENT FOR PRIMARY STUDENTS IN VIETNAM

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ABSTRACT

The study aims to suggest new criteria for quality digital books as a guide for publishing and selecting eBooks for primary students. The study uses qualitative research methods to analyze the current different sets of criteria for children's ebooks from a variety of theories and the currently published ebook platforms. The study develops a new framework of standards of digital book collection supporting primary students' reading literacy. The study helps the selection and publishing of quality ebooks to prepare the digital reading resources to meet the needs of primary education in the digital transformation.

Keywords: ebooks; publishing criteria; primary students; selecting criteria; Vietnam

1. Introduction

In a world where the boundaries between the real and virtual realms are blurred, the concept of literacy “has been updated, interacting across a range of platforms, from traditional to digital social networks” (UNESCO, 2004). With the ongoing digital transformation impacting both libraries and education (MOET, 2022), information resources must adapt to this transliteracy environment. As Vietnamese primary schools transition from traditional models, they face challenges in preparing their digital collections to align with this digital shift. The success of this transition depends on understanding the roles of e-books, ensuring accessibility to e-resources, and developing effective digital collections that help primary students improve their literacy skills. This paper analyzes the benefits of digital books, the availability of e-books for primary students, and the current criteria used in publishing and selecting digital books. It also recommends establishing more comprehensive criteria for developing digital books that support primary students.

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2. Methodology

2.1. Conceptual framework

This research aims to identify a set of criteria for digital book collections, supporting primary students' reading literacy. To achieve that goal, three objectives were set: 1) identification of the roles of digital books in supporting primary students' reading literacy, 2) assessment of the availability of e-resources suitable for primary schools, and 3) exploration of the criteria for developing digital collections suitable for primary children's needs. This study therefore was conducted to answer three following research questions:

- 1) How can digital books help primary students develop reading literacy?
- 2) What kinds of digital books are currently available for primary children?
- 3) What criteria should be considered when developing an authentic digital book collection that supports the reading literacy of Vietnamese primary students?

2.2. Methodology

The research reviewed related studies, including research articles, past papers related to ebooks, and guidelines or standards for digital books aimed at children. The data analysis focused on exploring the roles of digital books in supporting primary students' reading literacy, investigating the availability of digital books suitable to primary students, and identifying existing criteria that can help schools more effectively develop Vietnamese e-book collections.

The article conducted a review of literature based on the three thematic areas outlined in the above three research questions. Keywords in both the English and Vietnamese languages were used to navigate the research, such as "digital books," "electronic books," "e-books," "online resources," "primary education," "selection criteria," "digital publishing," "children's books," "reading literacy." The sources included a variety of commercial sources, Vietnamese scholarly journals, international open resources, proceedings of workshops or seminars, and other official documents from international, non-governmental, and governmental organizations. The sources selected for review encompassed a range of relevant references, such as ResearchGate, Academia.edu, ERIC, Sage Journal, Reading Rockets, Educational Science Institute, Library Journal of the Vietnam National Library, Magazine of Documents and Information of NACESTI, Magazine of Information and Communication, Institution of Educational Science, in addition to several public journals. The majority of the selected sources were published between 2010 and the present, allowing the research to capture the latest developments in innovative education, emerging trends in e-book publishing, and school library development.

After the review, a total of 50 most relevant sources were selected - 26 in English and 24 in Vietnamese. They were arranged into the main subdivisions, including the need for digital collection to help primary students develop their reading literacy, the analysis of the current ebook sources for primary children, articles on criteria applied in digital books and

children's books, and the potential and challenges of Vietnam in developing digital learning resources. This facilitated analysis, discussion, and recommendations for developing more suitable and efficient digital collections for primary-aged children. In addition to the insights and theories derived from scholarly journals and workshops, the article also examined models of existing digital libraries designed for children. The analysis aimed to provide a deeper understanding of the features and characteristics that make e-books more appropriate for primary students.

2.3. Literature Review

Reading literacy is defined by PRILS (2021) as *“the ability to understand and use those written language forms required by society and/or valued by the individual. Readers can construct meaning from texts in a variety of forms. They read to learn, to participate in communities of readers in school and everyday life, and for enjoyment.”* (p.6) Reading literacy of children is established by three essential factors such as reading habits, reading skills, and reading motivation. To build upon foundational literacy and develop lifelong reading habits, students need continued access not only to textbooks but also to relevant, diverse, and interesting reading materials. Information resources are a fundamental ingredient in creating and maintaining literate environments. Schools need to prepare good information resources that can nurture reading habits, improve skills of reading and build reading motivation in both traditional and digital learning environments (Ashom & Akintunde, 2018; Barber & Klauda, 2020; Kathleen & Newman, 2014; Roni & Merga, 2019; UNESCO, 2014).

Bozkurt and Bozkaya (2013) said that the term “digital books” refers to books in digital forms, books converted into digital formats, digital reading materials, books in computer file formats, electronic files containing words and images displayed on device screens, or electronic files formatted for display on dedicated e-book readers, as well as digital forms integrated with various multimedia formats and communicated via the internet and websites. According to Taylor (2019), digital books have been available for children to read since 1992. Since that invention, the numerous mobile electronic devices such as mobile phones, tablets, and e-readers that host digital books are more popular to read on screen.

The digital transformation in education encourages schools around the world to collect electronic books to meet the needs of children's reading literacy development. However, D ang Duong (2020) stated that Vietnam has a relatively high internet usage rate, but the country still ranks low in terms of national reading rankings. Many Vietnamese children primarily use the Internet for entertainment purposes such as accessing music, movies, and games, rather than for reading or learning. That issue shows that understanding and the availability of e-resources are not popular in Vietnam's primary education sector. To encourage positive internet usage, it is important to provide young children with a substantial collection of digital books that support them in both recreational and educational

reading. Recently, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of digital resources in supporting literacy skills and promoting reading engagement among children. To prepare the quality e-resources for schools, there are different legislative documents, such as the Law on Libraries issued in 2019, Circular 206/2021/MoCST on the digital transformation in library sectors issued in 2021, the Circular 16/2022/BGDĐT on the new standards of libraries. They help schools more proactively set up their digital collections to be more modern, more appropriate to students' ages, and widely shared among the school networks to meet the needs of teaching and learning in the digital environment (MOET, 2022). The Plan of Reading Promotion from 2021-2025, target to 2030 emphasizes the importance of designing digital reading materials in various formats to cater to different e-devices and enhance accessibility for readers. Along with the government's navigation and leading, there have been many efforts from local publishers and international organizations supporting literacy development in Vietnam, and schools are being made to provide a wide range of digital reading materials that are accessible, culturally relevant, and aligned with the primary educational curriculum. In recent research by Đinh Tiến Dũng and Nguyễn Thanh Trình (2022), digitalization in schools is identified as a key factor in reshaping literacy, helping both learners and educators adapt to the evolving teaching and learning environment. Schools must recognize the importance of having a variety of digital books, recognize the availability of e-resources for primary students, and how to develop a good digital collection to foster students' reading literacy development. Those elements are the main objectives of this article. (Dinh & Nguyen, 2022).

3. Discussion and Recommendations

3.1. *The roles of digital books to support primary students' reading literacy*

The text types can be presented in many forms and combinations of forms, from traditional written forms to digital forms. New digital reading forms are vital sources for students to meet their reading needs. Digital reading materials offer a chance to train student's skills in searching through a web of multiple texts, using navigation strategies, and setting their own choice to read. Digital reading involves being able to use reading comprehension skills and strategies in contexts that are very different from those encountered in reading traditional printed materials (PRILS (2021, pp. 6-7). According to Escribano, Valverde-Montesino, and Garcia-Ortega (2021), although there are some doubts about the side effects of digital books which may cause some problems for children, such as distractions, lack of social interaction skills, some bad effects on children's eye sights and other mental health problems, digital reading represents a potential strategy for primary children's reading skill development. The increasing availability of digital books that cater to the needs of primary students provides several new advantages. The impact of technology-enhanced books on young children's reading literacy development is supported by the following evidence.

Firstly, ebook interventions are highly recommended to improve primary students' reading skills, regarding concepts about print, phonological awareness, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. Besides that, the digitally designed elements enrich young more enjoyment through the activities of reading aloud, shared reading, or guided reading which assist children in improving their reading skills effectively (Furenes et al., 2021; Taylor, 2019).

Secondly, there has been discussion about the developing concept of interactive ebooks, a new generation of static digital books. The interactive add-ins of digital books include video clips, sounds, voices, music, animation, movies, subtitles, quizzes, games, crosswords, puzzles, and riddles embedded within the texts. It is recognized that the links in digital book collections help young readers increase their engagement in reading because they easily find further reading materials, which personalizes the reading experience and motivates young students to evoke different senses to play, learn, and grow (Furenes et al., 2021; Taylor, 2019).

Thirdly, Spjeldnes and Karlsen (2020) mentioned that accessing digital literature in text or audio or links expanded students' reading choices to make them more engaged, and new habits of reading were established. Digital books have developed and personalized their reading habits to optimize their outcome of reading at different reading mediums and in different situations.

With the strengths of the above digital features, ebooks are confirmed to play a vital contribution to supporting primary children's reading literacy by enhancing their reading skills, reading motivation, and reading habits.

3.2. *The availability of digital books for primary children*

The rise of e-publishing in the 21st century, which has been boosted by the Covid-19 pandemic, has been driven by the recognition that digital texts are a strategic educational resource and an opportunity to develop digital literacy (Đài Sơn, 2022; Merga, 2022). Ebooks for children have evolved to deliver the value of traditional printed books enhanced with digital features. Walker (2018) said that the content of most digital children's publications reflects curriculum updates such as reading levels, STREAME (Science-Technology-Reading-Engineering-Arts-Entrepreneurship), and all topics of SDGs (17 Goals of Sustainable Development).

It is evident from the information you provided that there are several popular commercial and free digital information resources available for primary schools, catering to various literacy skills and reading preferences of children. These resources include platforms like Epic for Educators, myOn, Vooks, Reading Eggs, Reading A-Z, Oxford Owl, PM Benchmarks, Phonics Read Write, Inc, Let's Read by Asia Foundation, Global Digital Library by the United Nations, Storyweaver by Pratham Books, and Literacy Cloud by Room to Read.

By examining the arrangement, structure, and features of the digital reading materials mentioned above, several key criteria have been identified for developing e-resources for primary students.

Some common criteria for the contents and languages of e-digital collections

	Arranged by reading levels	Arranged by phonic levels	Arranged by topics	Arranged by subjects	Arranged by genres	Arranged by formats
Literacy Cloud	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes
Storyweaver	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Global Reading	Yes	No	Yes, not clearly	Yes, not clearly	No	No
Let's Read	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Reading A- Z	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Oxford Owls	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
PM Benchmark	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
Phonics Read Write Inc.	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Vooks	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Epic for Educators	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

These above resources offer a wide range of formats, genres, and subjects to provide children at different stages of reading literacy for their reading choices. They aim to address digital inequality by making educational materials accessible to children in disadvantaged economic or low-tech environments. Some platforms, like Let's Read, focus on providing qualified materials in specific languages, such as Vietnamese, by collecting books from various sources, including Storyweaver. These platforms offer numerous advantages, including updated content, high-quality illustrations, interactive designs, logical structures, effective search capabilities, easy navigation, adjustable text sizes, and cross-linking between texts. However, some disadvantages need to be addressed, such as inconsistent reading leveling systems, improper usage of authentic local languages in translation, a lack of local culture and perspectives, and a mismatch with the national primary curriculum (UNESCO).

Before promoting publishing ebooks for children, publishers should analyze good e-resources available in the global market to analyze existing high-quality e-resources to understand what makes them effective and engaging. This analysis can serve as a reference for developing criteria for designing digital books that meet the needs of Vietnamese primary students, focusing on the needs of different levels of reading literacy. Publishing houses should also invest in authentic digital resources that align with the criteria established for

designing digital children's books. These local resources empower children to learn the local values, language, culture, and perspectives of children who use Vietnamese and Vietnamese ethnic languages as their mother tongue languages.

There should have more research is needed to understand the specific needs and preferences of primary students in Vietnam regarding digital resources for literacy development. This research can help identify the gaps and areas that require attention in publishing techniques and arts to get alignment to the need for primary reading literacy development and primary educational practices.

When developing a collection of digital information resources, publishers and schools should establish clear criteria for designing or selecting digital children's books that are suitable for different stages of reading literacy. These criteria should consider factors such as content, language, writing structure, format, genre, technical features, and artistic elements that motivate children eagerly to read, more tools to support them to enhance skills of reading and nurture the habit of reading on different e-devices.

3.3. The criteria of digital books supporting primary students' reading literacy development

The research of Landoni (2020) suggests that the reading materials for primary students should be designed differently than resources to serve adult readers. Most young readers do not choose reading texts for purposes of reading for pleasure or learning. Digital children's books need criteria that balance an evaluation of the printed books with the enhancements afforded by features of digital media. Landoni strongly focused that: 1) The collection should be designed as a hub of contents, formats, and genres of texts, supporting the needs of reading for pleasure and reading for learning and for personal development; 2) Digital books should meet high technical and artistic standards. They should be visually appealing, interactive, and designed with features that can attract and engage primary children effectively; 3) Digital collection should be designed to accommodate these behaviors and provide a seamless reading experience for primary children; and 4) Check all permission of free- sources to avoid the violation to use or re-use the e-resources available in the Internet, careful consideration in the contract of ebook sharing in any library networks.

Walker (2018) suggests that there are four core elements for children's digital reading materials: 1) The content is useful and matches the curricular topics to support primary children's needs of reading to learn and expand knowledge; 2) Student-centered design relates to writing and language and illustration suitable to range of student ages to ensure books appropriate to primary students' reading literacy development stages; 3) Interaction between students and reading materials is fostered to evoke children's reading engagement and style of learning through playing of young children; and 4) Respect for ethical values and children's rights to eliminate barriers to the equal accessibility. Besides the above factors, Landoni (2020) clarified digital books should have more digital features more

beneficial for children's interests: 1) Multifunctional utilities should be embedded in reading texts, e.g., dictionaries, note-taking tools, navigational aids, downloading, reading tests, game – like tools as riddles, puzzles, crosswords, etc that are functional to support students to practice reading skills and fit to their reading interests; 2) Visual interfaces to attract students' attention to reading activities should be included; 3) Organization of digital books should be accessible using different searching options like titles, authors, series, keywords, subjects, and reading levels to provide children more optional in information navigation; 4) Reading materials should be divided into different collections and linked each other for easier and more convenient in book searching; and 5) A range of options for the delivery of ebooks should be available to readers, such as printables, downloads, digital distributions to support children in different special needs and living conditions. Bozkaya and Bozkurt (2015), and Lopez-Escribano, Valverde-Montesino and Garcia-Ortega (2021)_also suggested that other technical elements need to be considered including the software or hardware used, type of applications, integrated display in different e-devices and operating systems, fees for subscription, ability to provide multiple readers to access at the same time to consider which ones are more and suitable and sustainable to acquire for primary children's usage.

Those mentioned criteria are not only to help Vietnam publishers more actively prepare a digital collection that is attractive and more suitable to primary students' needs and aids primary schools in developing digital collections to support students' reading literacy development.

4. Conclusion and recommendations

In 2020, the digital transformation, the reading culture programme, and the new curriculum opened a great opportunity for the development of digital reading materials to support children's literacy. The analysis in this article recognizes the essential roles of digital books in the significant contribution to attaining primary students' literacy. The article also suggests that publishers design ebooks or schools can apply in developing e- collections based on the set of criteria, including, 1) diverse collection, 2) standards of technical and artistic elements, 3) design to accommodate reading behaviours of primary children, 4) careful consideration in the contract of ebook sharing in any networks and copyright, 5) mapping collection to the curricular topics, 6) styles of writing and language and illustration suitable to reading literacy development stages, 7) enrich interactive factors to evoke children's reading engagement, 8) respect for ethical values and children's rights, 9) consider the multifunctional utilities to support reading skills, 10) visual interfaces to attract students' engagement, 11) designing different searching options to give children more tools to navigate what they want to choose to read, 12) dividing different collections by subjects, topics, or reading ages; and make them linked each other logically, 13) options of ebook delivery, and 14) other technical elements need to be considered for developing more

suitable and sustainable to acquire for primary children's usage. The demand for digital children's books in Vietnam is growing, driven by active policy support and emerging development trends. This research aimed at developing a more comprehensive set of criteria for designing and acquiring e-books will help create a higher-quality digital book collection, better aligned with achieving reading literacy goals in primary education.

❖ **Conflict of Interest:** Author have no conflict of interest to declare.

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TÌÊU CHÍ PHÁT TRIỂN SÁCH ĐIỆN TỬ DÀNH CHO HỌC SINH TIỂU HỌC Ở VIỆT NAM

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TÓM TẮT

Bài báo đề xuất bộ tiêu chí mới dành cho sách số chất lượng để hướng dẫn việc phát triển tài nguyên thông tin số cho học sinh tiểu học. Đề xuất được thực hiện bằng cách phân tích các bộ tiêu chí khác nhau từ các tài liệu nghiên cứu khác nhau và từ thực tế của các nền tảng sách điện tử hiện nay, và sau đó tổng hợp thành bộ tiêu chí toàn diện hơn cho tài liệu số cho học sinh tiểu học. Kết quả nghiên cứu này giúp định hướng việc xuất bản và lựa chọn sách số chất lượng để chuẩn bị tài liệu điện tử đáp ứng nhu cầu giáo dục tiểu học Việt Nam trong giai đoạn chuyển đổi số hiện nay.

Từ khóa: sách điện tử; tiêu chí xuất bản; học sinh tiểu học; tiêu chí lựa chọn; Việt Nam