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Mobile Learning Platforms for EFL and ESL Students' English Reading Skills and Practices: A Systematic Literature Review of Empirical Studies from 2018 to 2025

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Abstract. With the development of technology in language education, the proliferation of mobile learning has transformed reading habits in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) and ESL (English as a Second Language) contexts. While various mobile platforms are increasingly being integrated into English reading sessions, the understanding of their categorization and collective impacts remains fragmented. Thus, this study systematically reviewed mobile platforms aimed at supporting English reading skills and practices, following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) review method. By searching three databases, namely Scopus, Web of Science (WoS), and Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), 16 articles were selected from 208 articles published between 2018 and 2025. Along with thematic analysis, a qualitative method was used to analyze data. The findings revealed eight categories of mobile platforms that are commonly used for EFL and ESL reading. These platforms were found to be beneficial for students as they provide cognitive and linguistic gains, affective and motivational affordances, and instructional and logistical flexibility. It was emphasized that each platform's effectiveness depended on the integration of sound instructional design, cognitively demanding tasks, and user-friendly features. Challenges and problems that arose during the implementation process were also discussed. These findings indicate that more research is needed on the impacts of mobile learning platforms for English reading. Generally, this review offers valuable insights for students and educators to utilize mobile platforms more effectively, and for mobile platform designers and policymakers to modify and improve their products and policies.

Keywords: English reading; mobile platforms; EFL; ESL; systematic literature review

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1. Introduction

Recent advancements in modern information technology have sparked a revolution in education (Alakrash & Razak, 2022). The rapid development of digital technologies has profoundly reshaped educational practices across disciplines, offering learners unprecedented flexibility in terms of time, place, and access to learning resources (Khatoony & Nezhadmehr, 2020). With the widespread use of smartphones and tablets, mobile learning has become an integral component of contemporary education, playing a vital role in language education (Rafiqah et al., 2021), particularly in higher education contexts. The mobile learning platforms used in language education enable learners to engage with instructional content beyond traditional classroom boundaries, supporting more personalized and self-directed learning experiences (Jeong, 2022). As a result, educators and researchers have increasingly recognized mobile learning as an influential mode of instruction.

In the field of language education, the growing importance of English has further amplified global interest. Approximately 20% of the world's population speaks English (Zarina & Azimjon, 2023), indicating that proficiency in English is not only beneficial but arguably indispensable (Fenuku, 2024). Moreover, English remains the dominant language for academic publication, scientific research, and cross-cultural collaboration, enabling scholars and researchers to access and contribute to a shared knowledge base (Atasheva, 2024). Mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) refers to the integration of technology into language instructions through mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets (Che Mustaffa & Sailin, 2022) and is frequently used in English Language Teaching (ELT) contexts. A substantial body of research has examined the effectiveness of mobile learning platforms in supporting various aspects of English language acquisition.

Functioning as a multifaceted, fluid, and dynamic activity, reading English requires learners to acquire knowledge and gain experience, making it a crucial skill for students to master among the four basic English competencies (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) in both academic and everyday language use (Al-Qadi et al., 2025; Alshaye, 2021; Hsu et al., 2020; Syakur & Azis, 2020). The enhancement of reading skills also aligns with the fourth of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), which is concerned with ensuring "inclusive and equitable quality education" (Hanemann, 2019), in which reading proficiency serves as a core indicator of educational progress and is crucial for fostering lifelong reading habits and promoting continuous learning (Kheang et al., 2024; Zheng & Luo, 2023). Furthermore, adequate English reading abilities can support the development of other language skills including speaking and writing (Abid et al., 2023; Puripunyavanich & Waring, 2024).

It is worth noting that an excellent reader can usually comprehend the deep meaning of texts, which surpasses a more general understanding of the surface meaning of words, phrases, and sentences (Fatmawan et al., 2023). For EFL and ESL learners, academic reading in English is often perceived as challenging due to the complexity of texts, unfamiliar discourse conventions, and high cognitive demands (Eriksson, 2023). Such challenges highlight the importance of effective

instructional support for English reading development. In response to these challenges, mobile learning platforms have increasingly been adopted to support English reading instruction, offering flexible access to reading materials, instructional scaffolding, and interactive learning activities.

Existing empirical studies and systematic reviews related to English reading instruction have mostly focused on the use of pedagogical approaches for general (or literal) English reading (e.g. Imbaquingo & Cárdenas, 2023; Rosyidin et al., 2022). In recent years, researchers have investigated students' higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) in English reading (e.g. Pratama et al., 2024; Weerawong et al., 2025), especially focusing on students' critical reading skills development with the aid of technological tools (e.g. Fajriyah & Afifah, 2025; Gunadi et al., 2025). Nevertheless, such studies remain insufficient and fragmented, with researchers consistently discussing reading and higher-order cognitive thinking abilities separately (Indriani et al., 2025).

Compared with reliance merely on relevant pedagogies and learning models, integrating MALL in English language instruction has been proven to help improve EFL and ESL students' English proficiency and academic achievements (Martínez et al., 2025). Although MALL has been widely examined across multiple language skills such as speaking, listening, and writing, a specific focus on reading warrants further examination (Gutiérrez-Colón et al., 2023). For example, certain studies have explored technology-assisted English reading instruction, but the devices used have been computers rather than mobile phones, such as Li's (2025) study, which examined the use of a computer-assisted interactive reading model to enhance specific critical thinking skills.

With the exception of limited empirical studies, most systematic reviews involving MALL have predominantly focused on vocabulary acquisition (e.g. Okumuş Dağdeler, 2023) and pronunciation training (e.g. Metruk, 2024), reflecting the relative ease with which these discrete language components can be operationalized and quantitatively assessed. In contrast, systematic reviews that specifically address English reading within mobile learning contexts remain comparatively limited. Unlike vocabulary and pronunciation, reading is a complex and multi-dimensional skill involving cognitive processing and strategic engagement (Weerawong et al., 2025); this presents methodological challenges for researchers in conducting large-scale synthesis, which may partially explain the relative underrepresentation of reading-focused systematic reviews in MALL literature. As a result, the existing reviews tend to provide fragmented insights into mobile-supported reading practices.

In order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of mobile-assisted English reading and its targeted impacts, more focused systematic literature reviews are needed. Klimova and Zamborova's (2020) study offered a comprehensive review that synthesized empirical evidence on mobile learning platforms for English reading across diverse contexts and pedagogical designs. However, their review only covered the relevant literature on the use of mobile applications for ESL reading from 2018 to 2020. Additionally, their research only included articles from

two databases (Scopus and WoS). Furthermore, the exclusion criteria in their research resulted in book chapters and reports being overlooked. Therefore, further reviews of other mobile reading platforms used more recently with different inclusion criteria are needed.

Beyond the limited number of reading-focused systematic reviews, existing MALL research to date has also paid insufficient attention to the pedagogical principles underlying mobile-based reading instruction. Driven by developments in linguistics, cognitive science, psychology, and educational technology in modern language education, the existing literature emphasizes that traditional structural-based teaching has gradually given way to cognitively anchored, learner-centered, and meaning-based pedagogy (Noor et al., 2025; Nuri, 2025).

While some studies have adopted a learner-centered or active learning perspective in mobile-assisted language learning, focusing on student autonomy and interaction (e.g. Köseoğlu & Çobanoğlu, 2025; Yang et al., 2022), others have employed mobile platforms primarily as delivery tools for reading materials, with limited pedagogical restructuring. Moreover, research integrating explicit instructional scaffolding, strategy training, or reflective activities in mobile learning environments has tended to report more substantial cognitive and reading-related gains (Lin et al., 2020; Peng et al., 2025); on the other hand, studies with minimal pedagogical design often emphasize affective outcomes such as motivation or satisfaction.

Despite the growing interest in the subject, problems with mobile-assisted English reading persist. For instance, English teachers' insufficient use of mobile learning tools and lack of technological awareness have been identified as obstacles to students' progress. As Shohor and Hashim (2024) mentioned in their review of the use of MALL in ESL classrooms, many English language teachers' pedagogical styles reflect the traditional classroom teaching mode; furthermore, many teachers have reduced their utilization of mobile learning tools since the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, unclear instructional objectives and an overload of information on mobile reading platforms can also prohibit their wider adoption.

Taken together, the importance of mobile-assisted English reading and its integrated pedagogies, the challenges that emerge during its implementation, and the urgent need for relevant research call for more systematic reviews related to mobile learning platforms for English reading, in order to investigate the common features, advantages, and disadvantages in the findings of recent empirical studies. Therefore, to highlight the theoretical and pedagogical implications for teachers, students, policymakers, and mobile platform designers, and to get a comprehensive insight into mobile reading platforms, this systematic literature review was conducted to answer the following research questions:
RQ1: What mobile learning platforms are used in EFL and ESL reading?
RQ2: What are the benefits of using mobile learning platforms in English reading?
RQ3: What are the challenges and problems of using mobile learning platforms in English reading?

2. Methods

This study followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) 2020 guidelines, which include a 27-item checklist and a three-phase flow diagram (identification, screening, and inclusion) (see Figure 1), to review the relevant articles (Page et al., 2021). PRISMA 2020 provides a structured framework for conducting literature reviews, offering the clear advantages of transparency, completeness, and credibility (Sarkis-Onofre et al., 2021). This review aimed at exploring mobile learning platforms that are used for English reading to identify their advantages and potential limitations. The process of this systematic review is outlined in Figure 1 below.

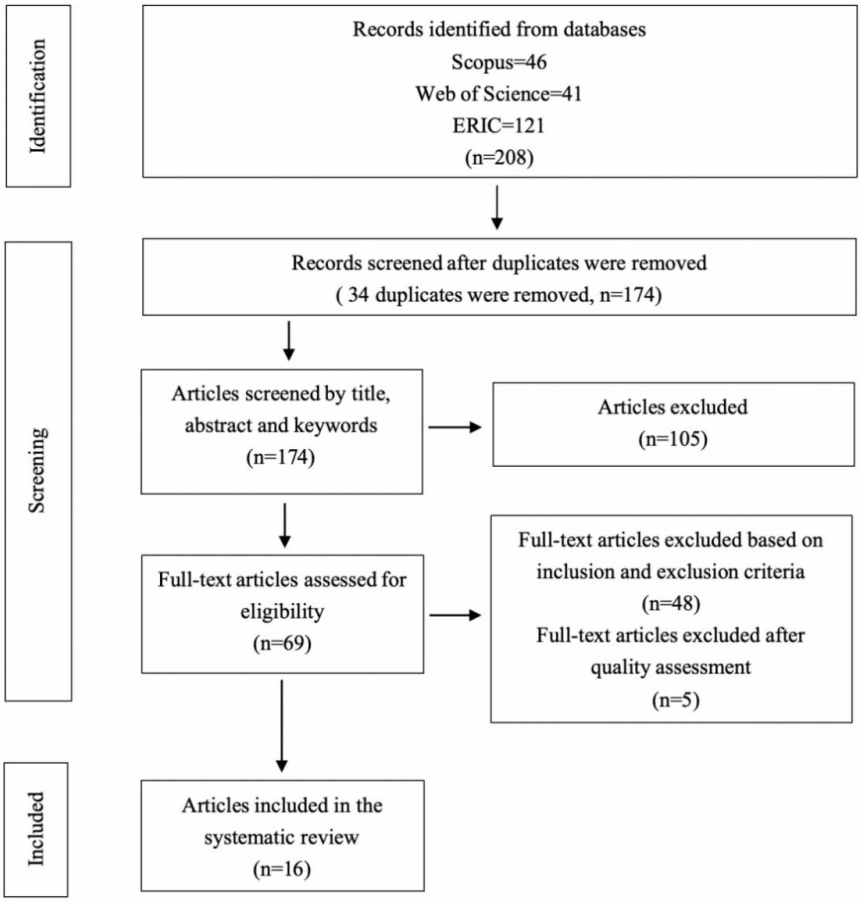

Figure 1: Flow of the systematic review process

2.1 Identification phase

Following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines, the first phase of the systematic review is the identification phase. The three databases chosen for this review were Scopus, Web of Science (WoS), and the Educational Resources Information Centre (ERIC). To address the three research questions, the keywords used for selecting articles from the three databases were carefully chosen, and only words that were relevant to mobile learning and English reading were included. Therefore, studies related to EFL and ESL students' use of mobile platforms for English reading were reviewed. Table 1 shows the search string of this article.

Table 1: Search string used in this study

Database	Search String
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY((“English reading” OR “English reading skill*” OR “English reading comprehension” OR “English literacy” OR “EFL reading” OR “ESL Reading”) AND (“mobile learning” OR “mobile assisted language learning” OR “m-learning” OR “mobile app*” OR “mobile device*”))
Web of Science (WoS)	TS=((“English reading” OR “English reading skill*” OR “English reading comprehension” OR “English literacy” OR “EFL reading” OR “ESL Reading”) AND (“mobile learning” OR “mobile assisted language learning” OR “m-learning” OR “mobile app*” OR “mobile device*”))
ERIC	“English reading” OR “English reading skill*” OR “English reading comprehension” OR “English literacy” OR “EFL reading” OR “ESL Reading” AND “mobile learning” OR “mobile assisted language learning” OR “m-learning” OR “mobile app*” OR “mobile device*”

2.2 Screening phase

The next phase was the screening process, during which the inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied (see Table 2). First, the researchers excluded any duplicate articles retrieved from more than one database. In this step, 34 duplicate articles were excluded, leaving 174 articles remaining for further screening. Subsequently, these 174 articles were carefully screened by title, abstract, and keywords to ensure that they were relevant to mobile learning and English reading. During this process, 105 articles were excluded due to their irrelevance to the key terms and research questions of this study. After this, the remaining 69 articles were further screened. Since there was no relevant literature published in 2025 and very limited literature in 2024 and 2020 in Scopus and WoS after the identification phase, articles from the most recent eight years (2018-2025) were chosen.

Table 2: The inclusion and exclusion criteria

	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
A.	Journal articles	Review articles, book chapters, conference proceedings, reports
B.	Articles published between 2018-2025	Articles that were not published between 2018-2025
C.	Articles written in English	Articles not written in English
D.	Articles related to mobile learning and English reading in EFL and ESL contexts	Articles not related to mobile learning and English reading in EFL and ESL contexts
E.	Free access	Not free access
F.	Empirical studies	Non-empirical studies
G.	Participants’ educational levels are in elementary to higher-educational range	Participants’ educational levels are not in elementary to higher-educational range
H.	Targeting EFL or ESL learners	Not targeting EFL or ESL learners

After further screening, 21 articles of high relevance to the research questions remained. Based on Liang et al.'s (2025) quality assessment criteria in the screening phase, after thoroughly reading these 21 articles, five low-quality articles were excluded because they were not related to the mobile-assisted learning of English reading in EFL and ESL contexts. Based on the quality assessment checklist shown in Table 3, the selected studies were rechecked by all three researchers until unanimous agreement was reached regarding the quality of the selected papers.

Table 3: Quality assessment checklist

Criteria	Description checklist	Grading of response
1. Does the author describe the research objectives of the study clearly?	No, the author does not describe the research objectives at all; Partially, the author describes the research objectives but not clearly; Yes, the author clearly describes the research objectives.	No-0; Partially-0.5; Yes-1
2. Does this article present a study which integrates mobile learning platforms into English reading?	No, this study does not integrate mobile learning platforms into English reading at all; Partially, mobile learning platforms are integrated, but not in English reading; Yes, this study integrates mobile learning platforms into English reading.	No-0; Partially-0.5; Yes-1
3. Does this study include EFL/ESL reading?	No, this study does not include EFL/ESL reading; Partially, this study includes English reading, but not in EFL/ESL contexts; Yes, this study includes EFL/ESL reading.	No-0; Partially-0.5; Yes-1
4. Does the author describe the research findings clearly and in detail?	No, the author does not describe the research findings clearly and in detail; Partially, the author describes the research findings clearly but not in detail; Yes, the author describes the research findings clearly and in detail.	No-0; Partially-0.5; Yes-1

2.3 Inclusion phase

Following the screening phase, 16 articles were selected from Scopus, WoS, and ERIC for this systematic review. Using articles from these three databases can provide reliable data because Scopus and WoS contain high-quality coverage and robust citation data across the fields of education, linguistics, psychology, and technology, while ERIC can provide targeted educational field articles (Newman & Gough, 2020). The combination of different databases also helped to maximize the article coverage and reduced potential bias from any single database. A summary of the locations, research aims, samples, main outcome measures, and research findings of the 16 selected studies is presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Summary of the selected studies

Study/ Location	Aims	Samples	Outcome Measures	Findings
Zamborova & Klimova, 2023 (Slovakia)	To determine the effectiveness of Blinkist; develop a protocol to evaluate books from the app and create rubrics for assessment.	40 freshman students from a university	English reading comprehension tests (Pretest-Posttest); SWOT analysis; Book analysis protocol	Integrating reading apps into English classes had no impact on students' English language proficiency; students' perceptions of mobile learning were positive.
Zhou et al., 2023 (China)	To compare face-to-face clinical teaching with WeChat teaching regarding students' learning quality, English reading proficiency, and learning satisfaction.	60 final year clinical medicine students	English reading tests (pretest-posttest); two Likert-scale questionnaires (learning quality, learning satisfaction)	Interns in the WeChat group had significantly higher learning quality and outperformed the f2f group in English reading, but no difference in learning satisfaction on medical skills was found.
Yu et al., 2022 (China)	To investigate the differences between mobile and paper-based EFL reading, and students' perceptions of mobile reading.	84 students from different disciplines from a university	Questionnaire surveys; semi-structured interviews	Students achieved better reading comprehension accuracy and more efficient strategy use when reading from paper than reading from mobile phones.
Yang et al., 2022 (Thailand)	To investigate the effects of MBALL on improving Thai high school students' English critical reading skills and their opinions on the use of MBALL.	25 high school students in Grade 11	English critical reading comprehension tests (pretest-posttest); questionnaire survey; semi-structured interviews	Thai high school students' English critical reading skills improved after implementing the MBALL curriculum; students were enthusiastic about the use of MBALL.
Guo, 2022 (China)	To construct a new teaching model for English reading courses through the teaching practice of the online English reading platform.	More than 5000 students covering more than 50 majors in a university	English reading comprehension scores; student evaluation questionnaire; teacher feedback	The teaching model improved teaching efficiency, improved the modernization, diversification, and convenience of teaching.
Kim, 2022 (Korea)	To examine the impacts of AI-integrated MALL on TOEIC compared with AI-integrated CALL.	486 college students at a university	TOEIC listening and reading test scores (pretest-posttest)	Both groups significantly increased listening and reading scores; AI CALL outperformed the AI MALL group in a reading test.
Davudova & Türel, 2022 (Turkey)	To evaluate the effects of mobile applications (Duolingo and	87 students studying in the second grade of a	English Achievement Test (EAT) as pretest and posttest;	The group using Memrise experienced a higher increase in achievement scores,

	Memrise) on foreign language learning in early years students.	primary school	semi-structured interviews	and their average score in the "Reading and Writing" section increased further.
Arias, 2021 (Costa Rica)	To elucidate the effects of mobile phones as tools for teaching reading in fostering motivation in EFL students.	15 second-year English language students from a university	Open-ended questionnaire; focus group discussions; reflective observation questionnaire	The use of mobiles enhanced motivation in classes, increased student investment in activities, and learners showed a high level of effort which boosted reading skills.
Zhou & Day, 2021 (America)	To explore the impact of online Extensive Reading (ER) on learners' attitudes in an EAP program and instructors' experiences in managing the online ER program.	57 undergraduate and graduate international students	Pre- and Post-Reading attitude questionnaire; students' and teachers' semi-structured interviews	ER significantly affected both intermediate and advanced students' reading attitudes in EAP courses; online ER improved different aspects of language proficiency.
Chiang, 2020 (Taiwan)	To understand Chinese students' attitudes toward the application of Kahoot!.	65 sophomore students from a private college	Questionnaire on students' perceptions (Likert-scale questions and open-ended questions)	Students perceived Kahoot! as a valuable and motivating tool for EFL reading instruction and seemed to accept the use of it as an evaluation tool.
Liu, 2020 (China)	To investigate whether the use of mobile learning can improve students' English reading self-efficacy.	294 non-English major students	English reading self-efficacy questionnaire; College English Test Band 4 (CET4) scores	The app helped enhance students' reading performance and effectively improved reading self-efficacy.
Sofiana & Mubarok, 2020 (Indonesia)	To identify the impact of an English game-based mobile application (EBMA) on reading achievement and learning motivation.	119 eighth grade students	English reading tests (pretest-posttest); students' learning motivation level questionnaire	The use of EBMA could increase students' achievement in reading; students' motivation in learning was higher.
Keezhatta & Omar, 2019 (Saudi Arabia)	To test the effectiveness of MALL, and identify whether teaching approaches integrated with MALL are effective in supporting reading.	120 students attending Grade 10 in four Saudi public secondary schools	English reading comprehension tests (pretest-posttest)	Mobile learning was effective in helping students develop their reading skills in relation to vocabulary recognition and retention; students in the experimental group improved their scores.

Valeeva et al., 2019 (Russia)	To investigate the effectiveness of mobile learning through using Quizlet in teaching ESP to ecology students.	290 Ecology students from a university	Questionnaire on students' impressions about mobile learning; usage and equipment monitoring	Students demonstrated improvements in their reading comprehension of a specialized text and active participation in discussions on professional topics.
Hazaea & Alzubi, 2018 (Saudi Arabia)	To investigate the role of mobile technology in enhancing learner autonomy in an EFL reading context.	An available EFL reading class of 30 students in a university	Student portfolios; semi-structured interviews	Participants were more motivated and interacted; increased sense of independence in choosing reading materials; extended self-study reading outside classroom.
Xu, 2018 (China)	To construct a mode for hearing-impaired students to increase their interest in learning and to improve their English reading and writing competence.	12 hearing-impaired students in grade 11 in special education school	English reading and writing tests (pretest-posttest); student and teacher surveys; informal observations, interviews, and self-reported surveys	New media intervention improved hearing-impaired students' English reading or writing skills; students and teachers were likely to use new media in their teaching and learning.

Based on the articles shown in Table 4, the research locations for most studies were China (n=5) and Saudi Arabia (n=2). In addition to these seven studies, one study each originated in Slovakia, Thailand, Korea, Turkey, Costa Rica, America, Taiwan, Indonesia, and Russia. Most of the selected studies (n=11) were conducted in higher educational settings, two were in high schools, and two were in secondary schools. Also, one study was conducted in an elementary school. The levels of educational settings in these selected studies are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Level of educational settings in the selected articles

Educational Settings	Study
Primary school	Davudova & Türel, 2022
Secondary schools	Sofiana & Mubarok, 2020; Keezhatta & Omar, 2019
High schools	Yang et al., 2022; Xu, 2018
Colleges and universities	Zamborova & Klimova, 2023; Zhou et al., 2023; Yu et al., 2022; Guo, 2022; Kim, 2022; Arias, 2021; Zhou & Day, 2021; Chiang, 2020; Liu, 2020; Valeeva et al., 2019; Hazaea & Alzubi, 2018

2.4 Data analysis procedure

Full texts of the 16 selected articles were downloaded and exported to a referencing software (Zotero). To identify and categorize the main themes related to the research questions, qualitative data analysis was conducted using a thematic analysis technique, which is used for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Braun & Clarke, 2023). To enhance

methodological rigor, the coding process involved iterative revisiting of the data and continuous refinement of themes to ensure coherence and consistency.

The emerging themes were as follows:
Themes of RQ1: (1) Social media, (2) Online education platforms, (3) Dedicated English reading platforms, (4) Extensive reading platforms, (5) Comprehensive language learning platforms, (6) Game-based learning platforms, (7) Vocabulary learning platforms, (8) Online search engines.
Themes of RQ2: (1) Cognitive and linguistic gains, (2) Affective and motivational affordances, (3) Instructional and logistical flexibility.
Themes of RQ3: (1) Pedagogical and learner-centered challenges, (2) Technical and usability constraints, (3) Environmental and instructional management obstacles, (4) Resource and systemic barriers.

By narratively synthesizing the textual data in the selected articles, the themes related to RQ1 were classified based on the mobile learning platforms used. For RQ2, the benefits of using mobile platforms in English reading were classified based on the positive impacts reported in each article's findings. Themes of RQ3 were also categorized based on the challenges and problems mentioned by the authors. The review results are presented in the following sections.

3. Results

3.1 RQ1: What mobile learning platforms are used in EFL and ESL reading?

This systematic review examines mobile learning platforms for English reading and aims to fill the research gap regarding the lack of review articles on these platforms in EFL and ESL contexts. Table 6 shows the number and percentage of each type of mobile learning platform used in the selected 16 articles. In total, there were eight types of mobile platforms classified by their primary functions, and 19 specific platforms were mentioned (although the names of the platforms used in Sofiana and Mubarok's (2020) and Keezhatta and Omar's (2019) studies were not provided). Unlike the systematic review conducted by Klimova and Zamborova (2020), which focused solely on apps for ESL reading, this review encompassed all types of mobile platforms and included both EFL and ESL reading contexts.

Table 6: The mobile learning platforms used in EFL and ESL reading

Types of platforms	Names of platforms	References
Social media (n=5; 26.3%)	WeChat	Zhou et al., 2023; Xu, 2018
	Facebook	Yang et al., 2022
	Hello Talk	Yang et al., 2022
	WhatsApp	Hazaea & Alzubi, 2018
	QQ	Xu, 2018
Online education platforms (n=3; 15.8%)	Soljam	Kim, 2022
	Iyangcong	Yu et al., 2022
	Haoce	Guo, 2022
	Blinkist	Zamborova & Klimova, 2023

Dedicated English reading platforms (n=2; 10.5%)	Whooo's Reading	Yang et al., 2022
Extensive reading platforms (n=2; 10.5%)	Xreading Library	Zhou & Day, 2021
	Vice News	Yang et al., 2022
Comprehensive language learning platforms (n=2; 10.5%)	Duolingo	Davudova & Türel, 2022
	English Liulishuo	Liu, 2020
Game-based learning platforms (n=2; 10.5%)	Kahoot!	Arias, 2021; Chiang, 2020
	QR code Treasure Hunts	Arias, 2021
Vocabulary learning platforms (n=2; 10.5%)	Memrise	Davudova & Türel, 2022
	Quizlet	Valeeva et al., 2019
Online search engine (n=1; 5.3%)	Google	Hazaea & Alzubi, 2018

As shown in Table 6, social media was most frequently used for English reading, corresponding to prior studies that similarly reported the widespread use of social media applications such as WeChat, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Telegram for English language learning (Meirbekov et al., 2024; Muftah, 2024), and particularly in EFL reading contexts (Gutiérrez-Colón et al., 2023; Tümen Akyıldız & Çelik, 2022). In contrast to studies that primarily focused on purpose-built learning management systems (Fajriyah & Afifah, 2025), this review highlighted a shift toward more informal and socially embedded platforms for English reading. For online education platforms, three specific platforms were used; these were Soljam, Iyangcong, and Haoce.

The other five kinds of mobile platforms often used for English reading were: (1) Dedicated English reading platforms (Yang et al., 2022; Zamborova & Klimova, 2023), which specifically offered selected reading resources and follow-up exercises to enhance English reading comprehension, (2) Extensive reading platforms (Yang et al., 2022; Zhou & Day, 2021), which provided readers with English graded readers and authentic reading contents to read (Janah et al., 2022; Puripunyavanich & Waring, 2024), (3) Comprehensive language learning platforms (Davudova & Türel, 2022; Liu, 2020), in which English reading was integrated as an essential component, (4) Game-based learning platforms (Arias, 2021; Chiang, 2020), and (5) Vocabulary learning platforms (Davudova & Türel, 2022; Valeeva et al., 2019); the effects of these on English reading comprehension were also tested because vocabulary knowledge and reading performance were strongly interrelated (Zhang & Zhang, 2020).

The above-mentioned seven kinds of mobile learning platforms were commonly used for English reading, as each category contained at least two specific platforms, and two of these (WeChat and Kahoot!) were used in more than one study. One online search engine platform, Google, was also used for English reading.

3.2 RQ2: What are the benefits of using mobile learning platforms in English reading?

In this section, the researchers reviewed the findings of the selected 16 articles. As illustrated in Table 7 (the order of the articles followed the reference order in Table 4), the benefits of using mobile platforms for English reading were categorized into three themes. These reported advantages helped to fill the research gap mentioned by Kessler et al. (2025), who noted that the effectiveness of mobile-assisted language learning on L2 learning outcomes remains limited.

3.2.1 Cognitive and linguistic gains

According to Table 7, five studies emphasized students' improvement in cognitive ability after using mobile reading platforms. Earlier studies have similarly reported improvements in reading comprehension and metacognitive regulation when learners took an active part in mobile-supported (Alshaye, 2021) and computer-assisted (Li, 2025) reading activities. The current review extended this line of research by synthesizing evidence across diverse mobile platforms and highlighted the development of higher-level cognitive processes, which are essential for academic reading.

3.2.2 Affective and motivational affordances

Higher learning satisfaction emerged as a key finding, as 13 of the articles reviewed in this study reported this positive impact. This was largely consistent with previous studies demonstrating that students with higher reading motivation and self-efficacy usually performed better in reading-related tasks (Kheang et al., 2024; Mohtar & Yunus, 2022; Zheng & Luo, 2023). The competitive mechanisms integrated into mobile platforms were also identified, aligning with previous studies' findings that gamified learning environments can help to boost learning outcomes (Liu, 2024; Liu et al., 2022). Furthermore, the reviewed articles also indicated that increased motivation was closely related to pedagogically meaningful task design.

3.2.3 Instructional and logistical flexibility

This study extended the existing literature by distinguishing between instructional flexibility (e.g. revisiting feedback, multimedia support, and navigation of reading content) (Chiang, 2020; Yang et al., 2022; Zamborova & Klimova, 2023; Zhou & Day, 2021), and logistical flexibility (e.g. portability and accessibility). This synthesis emphasized flexibility as a core mechanism through which mobile learning can support students' continuous participation in reading activities

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Table 7: Benefits of using mobile learning platforms in English reading

Benefits		Article															
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Cognitive & linguistic gains	Higher cognitive ability	✓	✓		✓	✓										✓	
	Better English reading ability	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓			✓	✓	✓		✓
	Development of overall language proficiency	✓						✓		✓							
Affective & motivational affordances	Improvement in interaction and collaboration	✓	✓							✓	✓			✓		✓	
	Higher learning satisfaction		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Competitive mechanism							✓	✓		✓						
Instructional & logistical flexibility	Exposure to multiple resources	✓			✓					✓	✓						
	Support of diverse learning modes	✓			✓	✓			✓	✓			✓		✓	✓	
	Flexibility and convenience of learning		✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓				✓			

3.3 RQ3: What are the challenges and problems of using mobile learning platforms in English reading?

The present review extends the existing literature by systematically synthesizing the challenges and problems that can arise during the implementation of mobile learning platforms in English reading into four interrelated categories, as follows: (1) Pedagogical and learner-centered challenges, (2) Technical and usability constraints, (3) Environmental and instructional management obstacles, and (4) Resource and systemic barriers. As depicted in Table 8, the findings indicate that the multifaceted obstacles at the pedagogical, technical, environmental, and systemic levels collectively shape EFL and ESL learners' reading experiences. Therefore, this thematic integration contributes to a clearer identification of persistent gaps in current practice and highlights areas requiring further pedagogical and institutional attention.

Table 8: Challenges and problems of using mobile learning platforms in English reading

Challenges and Problems		References
Pedagogical and learner-centered challenges	Students' lack of interest	Zamborova & Klimova, 2023
	Lack of fundamental and background knowledge	Yang et al., 2022; Guo, 2022
	Potential social anxiety	Guo, 2022
Technical and usability constraints	Poor internet connection	Zamborova & Klimova, 2023; Yang et al., 2022; Kim, 2022; Arias, 2021; Chiang, 2020
	Small screen for reading	Zamborova & Klimova, 2023; Yu et al., 2022; Kim, 2022
	Lack of user-friendliness	Davudova & Türel, 2022; Guo, 2022; Zhou & Day, 2021; Valeeva et al., 2019
Environmental and instructional management obstacles	Lack of teachers' supervision	Zamborova & Klimova, 2023; Arias, 2021; Xu, 2018
	Internet temptation	Yang et al., 2022; Arias, 2021; Hazaea & Alzubi, 2018; Xu, 2018
	Imperfect examination mechanism	Chiang, 2020
Resource and systemic barriers	Limited availability of reading resources	Zamborova & Klimova, 2023; Guo, 2022; Zhou & Day, 2021
	Obstacles from relevant policy	Sofiana & Mubarok, 2020

4. Discussion

This section presents a discussion of the research findings, focusing on the three research questions of this study.

4.1 RQ1: What mobile learning platforms are used in EFL and ESL reading?

This systematic review article identified eight categories of mobile learning platforms used to support English reading comprehension skills or English reading practices (see Table 6). Previous studies also demonstrated that English reading instruction can be supported by a wide range of mobile platforms, including reading-specific applications, general learning platforms, communication tools and game-based applications (Gutiérrez-Colón et al., 2023; Klimova & Zamborova, 2020). The classification of mobile learning platforms revealed a high degree of diversity in platform types. This diversity reflected the multifaceted nature of English reading, which involves not only the comprehension of texts but also interaction and engagement with a variety of learning resources.

Linking the reviewed mobile platforms directly to their functions, some platforms were more suitable for practicing skills, such as Blinkist (Zamborova & Klimova, 2023), Whooo's Reading (Yang et al., 2022), English Liulishuo (Liu, 2020), and Duolingo (Davudova & Türel, 2022), while others were more targeted at providing resource support; for example, Xreading Library (Zhou & Day, 2021) and Google (Hazaea & Alzubi, 2018). In contrast to previous studies, which have mainly focused on general reading skills (Imbaquingo & Cárdenas, 2023; Rosyidin

et al., 2022), a dedicated English reading platform named Whooo's Reading was specifically designed and used to improve students' critical thinking ability in English reading (Yang et al., 2022).

Findings also suggest that some platforms were not originally designed for English reading but have been pedagogically adapted by English teachers to serve reading-related needs. For instance, although the original and main function of Wechat (Xu, 2018; Zhou et al., 2023)—one of the most frequently used platforms—was sending messages for daily communication, it is now used for mobile teaching and resource sharing in English reading instruction. This pattern highlighted not only the flexible feature of mobile platforms, but also the potential lack of dedicated, pedagogy-oriented mobile platforms that have been specifically designed for English reading.

In summary, English reading on mobile platforms currently relies more on users' pedagogical adaptation rather than on pedagogy-driven design, leaving a research gap concerning the development more pedagogy-oriented mobile platforms specifically targeted to English reading skills, especially higher-order cognitive thinking skills. This may also partially explain the mixed findings reported across studies, because differences in platform design and pedagogical integration can lead to different learning outcomes.

4.2 RQ2: What are the benefits of using mobile learning platforms in English reading?

Synthesizing findings across the 16 studies, the reported benefits of mobile learning platforms for English reading can be grouped into three dimensions, as follows: (1) Cognitive and linguistic gains, (2) Affective and motivational affordances, and (3) Instructional and logistical flexibility.

4.2.1 *Cognitive and linguistic gains*

In this section, the cognitive and linguistic benefits that mobile learning platforms can offer for students' English reading are discussed from three perspectives, namely (1) Higher cognitive ability, (2) Improved English reading ability, and (3) Development of overall language proficiency.

Rather than merely facilitating surface-level understanding, several studies have suggested that mobile platforms can foster advanced cognitive engagement such as critical thinking, creative thinking, and metacognitive awareness. In addition to cognitive skills directly related to English reading, platforms containing foreign literary works can enrich students' horizons, expand their knowledge base (Guo, 2022), and foster their cross-cultural awareness (Atasheva, 2024). Moreover, students can exercise greater control over their reading materials, reading time, and reading places during this process (Hazaea & Alzubi, 2018; Zamborova & Klimova, 2023). These findings suggest that the cognitive benefits encompass broader intellectual and self-regulatory capacities, which can be attributed to the interactive and self-directed nature of mobile platforms (Jeong, 2022; Martínez et al., 2025).

Mobile learning platforms also contribute to developing learners' linguistic skills in multiple dimensions. By synthesizing findings across the reviewed studies, it can be seen that improvements in students' overall English language ability—such as comprehension skills, vocabulary acquisition, grammar and pronunciation knowledge, and language awareness—have been frequently reported (Davudova & Türel, 2022; Zamborova & Klimova, 2023; Zhou & Day, 2021). This suggests that mobile platforms can provide students with sufficient linguistic input and can expose them contextually to different language forms. This benefit aligns with Janah et al.'s (2022) review findings on digital reading, which state that using mobile platforms can support EFL students' extensive reading as well as overall language learning.

Focusing more specifically on reading-related outcomes, the reviewed studies suggest that mobile platforms play a facilitative role in enhancing students' awareness and use of reading strategies, improving their reading proficiency, as well as increasing their engagement with critical reading practices. The reviewed studies indicate that the functional features embedded in mobile platforms contribute to these outcomes. For instance, the online quiz function integrated in Xreading Library helped students to check their reading comprehension and recall the contents (Zhou & Day, 2021), indicating that mobile platforms are more effective for English reading when their activities and features are pedagogically designed to foster strategic reading.

4.2.2 *Affective and motivational affordances*

In this section, the researchers identified three main affective and motivational affordances of using mobile platforms in English reading: (1) Improved interaction and collaboration, (2) Higher learning satisfaction, and (3) Competitive mechanisms.

Across the reviewed studies, learners frequently reported higher levels of motivation, confidence, self-efficacy, enthusiasm, and enjoyment when engaging in mobile reading activities. Rather than perceiving reading as a demanding task, students tended to view mobile-based reading as a more interesting and effective way of learning English and developing reading skills. As a result, students showed higher learning persistence in classroom activities (Chiang, 2020; Davudova & Türel, 2022). This finding aligns with Köseoğlu and Çobanoğlu's (2025) active blended learning pedagogy, which is essential for sustaining learners' engagement and willingness to read.

A further affective and motivational affordance of mobile platforms is their incorporation of competitive mechanisms. In English reading instruction, well-designed competitive tasks can serve as a motivating force for students' active participation (Liu, 2024; Liu et al., 2022). Competitive features such as scoring systems, rewards, progress levels, and achievement badges embedded in game-based applications can offer a sense of challenge, goal orientation, and immediate feedback (Arias, 2021; Chiang, 2020; Davudova & Türel, 2022; Sofiana & Mubarok, 2020). As a result, reading is no longer perceived merely as an academic requirement, but also as an enjoyable game-like learning experience.

Another notable benefit concerned mobile platforms' potential to enhance interaction and collaboration. Mobile-social environments have been frequently used for sharing reading resources and promoting reading engagement, especially during COVID-19 (Muftah, 2024). Across the reviewed studies, students were found to demonstrate higher levels of participation and engagement in interactive reading activities (Hazaea & Alzubi, 2018; Zamborova & Klimova, 2023), and to foster collaborative skills such as organization, coordination, and shared responsibility in group work (Zhou et al., 2023). Through these interactive and collaborative processes, learners become more actively involved in meaning construction during the reading process.

Aside from student–student interaction, mobile learning platforms can also strengthen teacher–student interaction. To complete reading activities, students often need to consult teachers for clarification, feedback, or guidance (Keezhatta & Omar, 2019). Additionally, when doing mobile extensive reading, students may seek teachers' recommendations to select appropriate reading materials (Zhou & Day, 2021). Such interactions can support more personalized reading experiences and reinforce teachers' facilitating and guiding role in mobile learning contexts.

4.2.3 *Instructional and logistical flexibility*

The instructional and logistical flexibility of the mobile learning platforms used was discussed in relation to three dimensions: (1) Exposure to multiple resources, (2) Support for diverse learning modes, and (3) Flexibility and convenience of learning.

Compared with traditional reading materials, which often rely on a limited number of textbooks, mobile platforms offer access to diverse texts varying in genre, topic, length, difficulty, and authenticity (Chiang, 2020; Yang et al., 2022; Zamborova & Klimova, 2023; Zhou & Day, 2021). In addition to text resources, the use of picture resources in mobile platforms can reduce students' learning stress and help them to understand the relevant reading content more easily (Chiang, 2020). Such exposure enables learners to engage with reading materials that better match their interests, proficiency levels, and learning purposes.

Another advantage of mobile learning platforms is their ability to support multiple learning modes. Mobile platforms facilitate self-directed learning, which allows students to take responsibility for planning, monitoring, and evaluating their reading activities (Yang et al., 2022). Such functions support autonomous learning by giving learners more control over what, when, and how they read (Hazaea & Alzubi, 2018; Zhou & Day, 2021). According to the findings of the selected articles, mobile platforms can also encourage mutual learning (Zamborova & Klimova, 2023), independent learning (Arias, 2021; Guo, 2022), and personalized learning (Valeeva et al., 2019).

Flexibility and convenience represent another key advantage. Compared with traditional paper-based materials, which are limited by time and location, platforms such as WeChat allow students to consolidate their understanding of complex knowledge points and learn at their own pace by revisiting the

instructional videos, audio materials, and teacher-recorded feedback on mobile platforms multiple times outside the classroom (Zhou et al., 2023). Furthermore, the navigation function embedded in mobile platforms facilitates efficient movement across extensive reading materials, enabling learners to quickly locate relevant texts (Yu et al., 2022).

Overall, the reviewed studies indicate that mobile learning platforms offer multifaceted benefits for English reading and suggest that their effectiveness depends not merely on technological availability, but also on how instructional activities and platform functionalities are aligned with reading pedagogy to promote students' active learning in English reading.

4.3 RQ3: What are the challenges and problems of using mobile learning platforms in English reading?

Despite the reported benefits, the reviewed studies also identify a range of problems that may restrict the effective implementation of mobile platforms; these were: (1) Pedagogical and learner-centered challenges, (2) Technical and usability constraints, (3) Environmental and instructional management obstacles, and (4) Resource and systemic barriers. These themes highlight that the limitations of mobile learning platforms are not solely technological, but are also closely related to pedagogical design, learner readiness, instructional practices, and institutional support.

4.3.1 *Pedagogical and learner-centered challenges*

From a pedagogical and learner-centered perspective, the reviewed studies indicate that examination-oriented learning contexts can reduce some students' intrinsic motivation to engage deeply with reading tasks (Zamborova & Klimova, 2023), causing their reluctance to use mobile reading platforms (Zhang & Pérez-Paredes, 2021). Another identified problem is limited scaffolding as some of the reviewed platforms do not provide enough background knowledge of the reading materials; consequently, students with limited prior knowledge may experience frustration during the reading process (Guo, 2022; Yang et al., 2022). Additionally, shy and reserved learners' social concerns may further restrict their active participation in mobile activities if their responses are visible to others (Guo, 2022). Taken together, these findings highlight the need for mobile learning platforms to be more pedagogically grounded, cognitively scaffolded, and sensitive to learners' needs.

4.3.2 *Technical and usability constraints*

At the technical level, one commonly reported issue is unstable network connections, which can interrupt the reading process and prevent smooth reading (Arias, 2021; Chiang, 2020; Kim, 2022; Yang et al., 2022; Zamborova & Klimova, 2023). In addition, some usability challenges are associated with the physical and interface limitations of mobile devices. For example, using a small screen for reading may lead to eyestrain (Kim, 2022; Yu et al., 2022; Zamborova & Klimova, 2023). Furthermore, the reviewed articles also suggest that not all learners are able to fully understand or use the functions embedded in mobile platforms appropriately (Davudova & Türel, 2022; Guo, 2022). Therefore, in some cases,

students need explicit training or guidance on how to use platform features effectively. Meanwhile, complex login procedures or multi-step access processes may further discourage students' use of mobile platforms for reading (Valeeva et al., 2019). If these technical and usability issues are not addressed, learners' reading experiences and the pedagogical benefits of mobile platforms are likely to be limited.

4.3.3 *Environmental and instructional management obstacles*

In terms of environmental and instructional management, one recurring issue is the lack of consistent instructional requirements, as some teachers do not strictly monitor students' completion of reading tasks on mobile platforms (Zamborova & Klimova, 2023). Without clear requirements and scoring criteria, learners may engage with mobile reading activities in a superficial or inconsistent manner. Furthermore, some platforms are not well designed for assessment purposes. For example, the inappropriate time allocation for answering reading questions in Kahoot! may restrict the validity of learning evaluation (Chiang, 2020).

Unlike traditional reading, it is difficult for instructors to observe in real time how individual students interact with mobile reading tasks (Arias, 2021), especially when reading activities take place outside the classroom (Xu, 2018). In addition, the temptations of online environments may distract students' attention and interfere with their sustained reading focus (Arias, 2021; Hazaea & Alzubi, 2018; Xu, 2018; Yang et al., 2022). This issue is particularly salient for learners with limited self-regulation ability, for whom teacher supervision plays a critical role. Collectively, these challenges underscore the need for stronger instructional management and supervision features, as well as more appropriate assessment design.

4.3.4 *Resource and systemic barriers*

At a broader systemic level, the reviewed studies highlight resource-related and institutional barriers that affect the sustainable implementation of mobile learning platforms for English reading. Although many students perceive the available resources as generally sufficient, learners with higher proficiency levels or more demanding learning goals report that existing materials do not fully meet their needs (Zamborova & Klimova, 2023).

Additionally, there are concerns regarding the relevance and suitability of the reading content. Some platforms provide outdated materials that do not reflect learners' current academic or linguistic needs (Guo, 2022), while others primarily target specific user groups (e.g. children), so the reading content might be linguistically appropriate but topically unengaging for other groups (e.g. adults) (Zhou & Day, 2021). Institutional policies further constrain the use of mobile learning platforms as some schools prohibit the use of mobile devices in classroom settings (Sofiana & Mubarok, 2020). Therefore, systemic support and policy frameworks need to be updated in line with technological developments and pedagogical realities.

In this section, the challenges and problems that arise when using mobile platforms for English reading have been discussed. Some of the reviewed studies also demonstrate the ineffectiveness of mobile reading in boosting reading performance (e.g. Zamborova & Klimova, 2023), as well as its relative weakness compared to computer reading and paper reading (e.g. Kim, 2022; Yu et al., 2022). Future research should conduct more comparative analyses of mobile reading, computer reading, and paper reading. Zamborova and Klimova (2023) also suggest that their short-term intervention, which lasted only 13 weeks, could explain the limited effectiveness of mobile reading; they believe the results might be stronger after one school year. Therefore, while this review synthesizes the findings across a range of 16 studies, the heterogeneity in study design, sample size, and measurement tools warrants caution as it may account for some of the variations in findings.

5. Conclusion

Following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines, this study presents a systematic review of 16 articles selected from three databases (Scopus, WoS, and ERIC) that examined the use of mobile learning platforms for supporting EFL and ESL reading skills and practices, with a particular focus on platform types (RQ1), reported benefits (RQ2), and implementation challenges (RQ3). The present review extends existing MALL literature, which has largely focused on vocabulary and pronunciation, and addresses the relative lack of comprehensive reviews dedicated to English reading.

By conducting a narrative synthesis of the reviewed articles, the review identified that the most frequently used types of mobile platforms are social media and online education platforms, and found that a research gap remains in terms of the design and development of more pedagogy-oriented mobile platforms targeting students' higher-order reading skills. This study highlights the benefits of mobile platforms in providing cognitive and linguistic gains, affective and motivational affordances, and instructional and logistical flexibility. Findings also indicate that platforms' effectiveness depends on the integration of sound instructional design, cognitively demanding tasks, and user-friendly features. At the same time, this review identifies persistent pedagogical and learner-centered challenges, technical and usability constraints, environmental and instructional management obstacles, and resource and systemic barriers.

Moreover, this systematic review also yields several important implications. First, mobile learning platforms can better support students' English reading when they are used actively and strategically. Furthermore, it is important for English teachers to select platforms that incorporate pedagogically grounded task design and instructional scaffolding. Policymakers are recommended to formulate and update relative guidelines and policies to facilitate the effective integration of mobile technologies into reading instruction. Moreover, mobile product designers need to integrate more appropriate pedagogies for higher-order cognitive development along with user-friendly features in their mobile English reading platforms.

6. Limitations and Future Recommendations

With regard to the limitations of this study, the review included articles from only three databases. In future studies, additional databases such as ScienceDirect and SpringerLink could be included. Furthermore, the review did not conduct a detailed analysis of the specific reading skills used in each study. Therefore, follow-up studies could focus more narrowly on the impact of mobile platforms on specific reading skills, such as creative reading or critical reading. In addition, future research should concentrate on addressing the obstacles and challenges raised in this study. Finally, the reviewed articles primarily focused on the impact of mobile platforms on students. However, as a widely used educational tool, the impact of mobile learning platforms on teachers should also be systematically investigated.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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