

INFLUENCE OF DIGITAL TOOLS ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN MAARA SUB-COUNTY, THARAKA NITHI COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

This study was on the influence of the use of digital tools in English language instruction in Maara sub-county, Tharaka-Nithi County, Kenya. English language instruction is a vital component of the education systems across the globe as the ability to proficiently communicate in English opens up a number of opportunities for individuals in terms of accessing higher education and broadening one's world from job opportunities to the ability to relate with people from different countries and cultures. The study concentrated on the influence of the use of digital tools on English language instruction in public secondary schools in Maara sub-county Tharaka-Nithi County, Kenya. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The study population for the study was 7025 including 208 form three teachers of English, 67 head of English subject department and 6750 form 3 students enrolled in public secondary schools that were located in various divisions within Maara sub-county. The sample size utilized in the study was 379 including 327 students, 39 teachers of English and 13 head of English subject teachers. Data was collected by the use of questionnaires for students and teachers of English and interviews for head of English language subject in various schools. Quantitative data was cleaned, coded and then analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26. For qualitative data, data was coded and thematic analysis conducted. The findings of the study showed that the use of digital tools in English language instruction significantly influenced English language instruction.

Keywords: Digital Tools, English Language Instruction, Public Secondary Schools, Population, Instructional Process, Types of Digital Tools.

1. INTRODUCTION

The integration of digital tools in learning has transformed the system of education profoundly in all areas of study and presented new ways of improving the process of learning. It is particularly noticeable in the context of teaching, English as a language is often highly adaptable to the use of digital tools, which create engaging, individualized, and interactive learning experiences. In the view of Bharathi (2023), digital tools aid the teacher in conducting lessons in a more dynamic approach, through the use of digital tools, gamification and interdisciplinary cooperation, making learners motivated and engaged. Highly proficient digital tools, such as videos, possess the ability to explain complex concepts within a limited timeframe, thereby speeding the cultivation of critical thinking skills.

One of the most significant advantage derived from the use of digital tools in English language instruction has to do with the possibility of differentiation in the classroom. As pointed out by Kukulska-Hulme and Viberg, (2018), the use of digital tools promotes personalization of feedback and the delivery of learning activities based on the learning needs of the individual learner via

adaptive learning mechanisms. Digital tools offer every child the right guidance to suit his IQ level and study mode, enhancing efficiency and creativity to learning languages. Furthermore, they enable learners to rely on very authentic language, offering a possibility of developing language competence. For instance, digital tools can help students to engage with native speakers by using language partnership services, discussion forums, and social networks. Such interactions lead to the development of speaking and listening abilities which are highly beneficial for language learning learners (Hampel & Stickler, 2012). Furthermore, digital tools expose students and teachers to several learning materials such as articles, videos, podcast, and e-books, enabling a student to acquire listening, reading and comprehension skills in many areas of language usage and puts a student in a position to understand how to use English language in spoken practice more meaningfully.

Digital tools can integrate multimedia content into language learning, hence enhancing English language learning. For example, videos and podcasts are great for practicing listening and bringing a visual-audio context to the words of the language one is studying. These tools cater to different learning styles and preferences, making the process of language learning more effective and enjoyable. Moreover, the exploitation of digital tools aids in supporting autonomous learning because students have the opportunity to choose texts according to their interests and levels of proficiency. This further performs a significant degree of control over the process of learning and enhances intrinsic motivation that provides bases for lifelong learning habits. As Reinders and White (2016) explain, learner autonomy is one of the key aims of language education. Digital tools enable learners to find and explore language independently at one's pace fostering a personalized learning experience that adapts to individual needs and preferences.

1.1 Research Questions

- i. What type of digital tools are used to teach English in public secondary schools in Maara Sub-county, Tharaka-Nithi County, Kenya?
- ii. What is the influence of digital tools in English language instruction in public secondary schools in Maara-sub-county, Tharaka Nithi county, Kenya?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Types of Digital Tools and English Language Instruction

As technology continues to evolve and shape the way humans live, it has also had a significant impact on the way teaching and learning takes place in educational institutions. For instance, digital tools have impacted education, as learners are now able to employ new and dynamic methods in order to learn (Dancsa et al., 2022). Another advantage of digital tools in the teaching of English is that it has made the learning process more interactive and fun for the students. Compared to the traditional ways of teaching, the use of technology has enabled students to be in contact with divergent audio aids as well as audio-visual and visual resources to complement learning of the language. For instance, digital tools have helped students to access videos and audios which aid them to improve their listening and speaking abilities.

Technology helps in the development of a quality learning environment where learners could use language in practice. For instance, they may listen to native speakers, watch movies and TV episodes, and communicate with other learners via chat from all over the world. This type of

language learning is ideal because it enables students to overcome their language deficiencies in a more authentic way. One of the advantages of the integration of the digital tools in English language training is that the students can study at their own pace (Chhabra, 2012). Students can pause, review, or advance in films and audio recordings and therefore they have control over their learning process. This function can be very beneficial especially to students who are always struggling to cope with the fast pace of usual class teachings. Moreover, digital materials also can be used from any place and this means that students can study anytime they want.

Mobile applications such as YouTube are among the most popular types of digital tools useful in English language instruction. Mobile applications such as YouTube provide an abundance of videos that can be used in the classroom (Shaik, 2021). These videos can be used for a variety of purposes, including improving listening comprehension, promoting oral discussion, and providing cultural context. YouTube is regarded as one online material that can be integrated into traditional English lessons. It is also considered a source of online material that can play a vital role in the teaching and learning field. The use of YouTube plays a vital role in helping students understand English lessons, improve student performance, and advance their understanding of English (Pratama, Arifin, & Widianingsih, 2020). Additionally, the multimodal text in YouTube plays a leading role in helping learners understand their English lessons. Dabamona & Yunus (2022) asserts that the use of you tube in the classrooms has significantly influenced English language learning among Indonesia students in that it has provided additional features for language learners. For instance, through YouTube, teachers and students are able to access wide English sources such as academic or authentic language learning materials. YouTube also facilitates students with a technology-based approach that fosters their learner autonomy. Consequently, a study by Almurashi (2016) on the effective use of YouTube videos for teaching English language in the classroom revealed that YouTube videos provided interactivity between students and teachers facilitating effective learning which in turn improved the academic performance of the students. The study also found out that integrating YouTube in the learning of English was an effective method in dealing with student's difficulties and barriers in understanding English.

Other mobile applications that have also been used include Tiktok, Facebook, and WhatsApp among others. These applications enable the users to record and share short videos in English and this can help them in speaking and listening practice (Pratiwi, 2021). Students can for instance record themselves performing dialogues, singing, or reciting poems, etc. Teachers can in turn use these videos to check the pronunciation and fluency of the students and make corrections where necessary. As stated by Fitria (2023), the incorporation of Tiktok in learning English language make the students develop a new desire in learning. The study also observed that there were several advantages of using tiktok to the users in aspects such as speaking, listening, pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary. Yang, (2022) also postulated that the integration of tiktok in the classroom contributed significantly to the development and improvement of the students' English learning interests. Faryadi (2017) also noted that the use of Facebook in English language learning enabled the students to enhance their English fluency in addition to acquiring new words and terminologies. The study also pointed out that the use of Facebook fostered an interactive learning environment which enhanced the students' desire to learn. As highlighted by Saleh (2019) in the study on the efficiency of WhatsApp as a pedagogical tool for enhancing the learners' reading and writing skills, WhatsApp was described as an effective application for boosting the students'

motivation and for assisting students in developing their vocabulary, grammar, reading and writing skills. The study also showed that the students held a positive attitude towards the use of WhatsApp in teaching them English.

Websites are also other common forms of digital media applied in teaching English language as well. websites that include games, quizzes, and other activities captivate students and give them language practice. There are several websites that can be used in learning English language and among them are Quizlet and Memrise. These websites can be used to supplement classroom instruction, provide additional language practice, and reinforce previously learned concepts. According to Ajaj (2020), the use of websites in English language classrooms in Iraq enhanced student's motivation especially where a variety of activities were offered and made learners feel more independent. Additionally, websites enhanced student achievement as they helped students strengthen their linguistic skills by positively affecting their learning attitude and by helping students build self-instruction strategies that promoted their self-confidence. Muddin (2018) also asserts that the use of interactive websites like Memrise and Quizlet in the teaching of English has many beneficial effects on the students, including: the students are more motivated in learning; they easily understand the material; they give all students the opportunity to get a fair turn in practicing the material; they eliminate boredom in learning; they encourage the idea of new ideas; and they facilitate students in remembering and practicing the material in daily life. Additionally, they take to teaching and learning activities with enthusiasm.

Podcasts are the other type of digital tools that facilitate English language learning in the classrooms. Podcasts are audio recordings that can be downloaded and listened to at any time. They are a great way to provide authentic listening practice for English language learners. Podcasts can be informative and can focus on issues that are happening in the world today, or it could be a comedy that focuses on different aspects of pop-culture and media. Some of the podcasts that people interested in the English language can listen to include English as a Second Language Podcast and All Ears English. Podcasts also enhance listening skills and can be used in fostering discussions. Student can also be exposed to different English accents and dialects. According to Aprianto (2019), podcasting programs in English as a Second Language classroom helps English language learners to feel the need to be involved in the society they live in. Such resources consist of basically taped programs, radio and television broadcasts, and interviews. Podcasting as a medium for learning is significant as a resource in the development of listening comprehension and other skills of language development including pronunciation, grammar, lexis and learning strategies (Aprianto, 2019). Another benefit of using podcasts is the chances of making the materials developed to be realistic in the teaching of ESL. As a result, this contributes to the learning process of the target language and may possibly affect the attitudes and motivation of individuals learning English as a second language. In the given context regarding the cultivation of speaking skills, the potentially positive outcome includes the levels of confidence and independence within speaking foreign language acquisition and achievement. Learner's motivation is enhanced by engaging in a listening activity, which subsequently boosts their confidence and interest in exploring the topic discussed in the podcasts-list (Ramani, 2016). The utilization of pleasurable methods for language acquisition in turn creates a positive impact on the learner's oral proficiency.

The other type of digital tools utilized in English language instruction includes the E-books which are electronic versions of books that can be read on a computer or tablet. They are a great way to provide reading practice for English language learners. E-books often include features such as audio recordings, interactive exercises, and embedded dictionaries that can help students improve their reading skills (Shaik, 2021). Some popular e-books for English language learners include Oxford Bookworms Library, Penguin Readers, and Cambridge English Readers. E-books are used to supplement classroom instruction, provide additional reading practice, and reinforce previously learned concepts. According to Nurdin (n.d.), the use of E-books in the classrooms offers an interactive experience that helps the content stick better and makes for more engaging, impactful learning. The author also points out that E-books enhances the act of reading as one can read anywhere at any time without the need of the library. There is the increased application of teaching tools in the classroom that are associated with the use of technology. Thus, the topic, which focuses on the kinds of digital tools used in teaching English, is gaining more and more attention in the scientific literature. In their study, Binmahboob (2020) examines the use of YouTube in enhancing the speaking abilities of students in Saudi Arabia. The study primarily focused on identifying the ways in which teachers could effectively enhance their teaching through YouTube and also the instructor's perception about YouTube. In designing the research, descriptive and analytical methods of research were adopted in conducting the study. In conducting the study, data was collected through questionnaires where questionnaires were administered on a sample of 30 English language teachers in secondary schools in Riyadh city in Saudi Arabia. The findings of the study showed that, in the perception of the P-12 English language educators, YouTube was deemed a highly effective instructional aid in enhancing the speaking skills of the secondary school students. The instructors had positive attitudes towards YouTube whereby they said that YouTube eased the anxiety of students, enabled them to learn faster and motivated them to learn the language. The results also showed that YouTube could be used in the classroom in many contexts or as an instructional strategy, where students are asked to respond to one particular video or present some facts, engage in a debate, pose questions, and share answers. YouTube offered real-life applicability as a platform through which students could be encouraged to express themselves in a classroom setting, and speak fluent English without hindrance. Based on the findings of the research, it was suggested that YouTube should be embraced as one of the primary learning aids in English language learning environments.

Li (2014), also did a study on the utilization of websites in the teaching and learning of interactive-based English in china. The purpose of the study was to examine on the effectiveness of websites in the application of the interactive-based language learning in ESL classroom instruction. The outcomes detected in the study showed that that websites were beneficial in language classrooms because they enabled student-centered classes. Furthermore, the study found that the incorporation of the websites in language learning enhanced learners' motivation and the quality of learning. The study also mentioned that websites were good examples that could be used in teaching; for instance, if the teacher wanted to give a more challenging assignment that had to involve the research part. For example, a teacher may encourage students to search for articles in a given website and feature it in class as a way of enhancing their reading and comprehension. Additionally, if the teacher, for instance, desired to include an assignment whereby they wished students to write in their blog about what they could learn from watching particular videos, the teacher could easily ask the students to formulate their own blog posting based on content observed

from any of the available websites for the classroom context. Therefore, these websites can be employed in the teaching and learning processes to enhance the literacy level among students.

Indahsari (2020) carried out a study on the utilization of podcast for language learning in Indonesia. The purpose of the study was to present the findings on the impact of podcasts in enhancing learning of language. The study reviewed twenty articles that were published between 2020-2010 to determine the impacts of podcasts on teaching English to students. The results of the present research highlighted that podcasts could facilitate the development of language skills, possibly in the area of listening. Students concurred with the fact that when podcasts are used in teaching listening skills, they make the lesson engaging and motivated students to study English language. The study encouraged educators to engage in the use of podcasts as a fun technological approach to supporting Indonesian students' language learning. According to the research findings, there are benefits accruing to the educators and the learners when they use podcasts. Podcasts have contemporary and natural native speech as a result they can be viewed as the effective means of listening practice for students. Podcasts are easily available for students at any time they want and at any place of their preference, hence capable of enhancing the development of the students' pronunciation abilities. Podcasts are also useful for educators because they are effective tools for delivering instructions which greatly aids in auditory understanding. The repetition of listening also helps a student to understand better a subject matter of interest leading to improvement in his or her self-esteem. With the help of podcasts, educators have a great opportunity to increase students' confidence and make learning more enjoyable.

In another study, Sackstein, Spark and Jenkins (2015) undertook a research study to establish the impact of E-books in learning in South Africa. With the view of achieving the stated goal, a quasi-experimental within-subjects study design was employed to evaluate and contrast the reading speed and comprehension skills of a convenience sample of sixty-eight raw graduate students. This study uncovered that majority of the subjects read faster on the iPad than on the conventional printed learning material. The findings supported the views that tablets and e-books are functional as instruments for academic reading and learning; hence, an implication that tablets and e-books are useful in students' academic endeavors. The research results revealed that the use of e-books in teaching helped to enhance the learner's reading rate as well as understanding of the text content. The study recommended that educators should bring the e-books to students to enhance their performance and comprehension when reading. Similarly, in another study conducted by Embong et al, (2014) on the teachers' and students' perceptions of the use of e-books in Malaysian classroom, the results revealed that both students and teachers had positive attitudes towards and perceived towards the use of e-books in classroom. Further, from the study, it was found that E-books not only worked out to establish a positive learner enjoyable classroom learning environment but also for student's lifelong learning. The research used questionnaires as the major data collection method and targeted 73 teachers from 14 different schools and 101 students. Based on the findings of the study, there was need for educational organizations to adopt a framework that enhanced the effective use of e-books as learning resources in teaching and learning processes.

A research done by Wang, Dostal, and Buckova (2019) on the use of the interactive whiteboards in enhancing teaching and learning of English in Czech, Central Europe showed that incorporating enhanced smart boards in teaching English foster interaction between teachers and students as well

as among the students. The details of the research also laid down an overall understanding of the advantages and the procedures involved in incorporating interactive whiteboards in the teaching of English language. The research was carried out with the intention of encouraging teachers to use the interactive whiteboards when teaching English in order to make such a learning method more productive. Further, the study revealed some possible pitfalls that the educators should consider in order to enhance their teaching techniques that include the use of the interactive whiteboards. The study also showed that interactive whiteboards positively affect creativity and adaptability through pointing at and highlighting numerous web resources, copying and pasting what is on the board, including notes made during the session, and sharing and reusing various materials to ease the workload of the teacher. Interactive whiteboards are also considered to be more effective as compared to desktops and laptops in classroom settings. In the case of the students, the use of interactive whiteboards enhances motivation and enjoyment, offers more channels for students' involvement and cooperation, and also contributes to the development of social and personal skills. They can also eliminate the need for students to take notes by capturing what is written on the board and allows them to print it. According to the study, practical application of the basic feature of IWBs by teachers enhanced students' engagement and interest in learning processes.

Several works have also been carried out to assess the effectiveness of applications like Tiktok and Duolingo in teaching and learning English. For instance, Adnan, Ramli and Ismail (2021) conducted a study to examine the effectiveness of using Tiktok in teaching and learning activities among students in Malaysia. The importance of the study was to serve as a reference to the educators and policymakers who sought to introduce new learning instruments to facilitate the teaching and learning process. The results of this study revealed Tiktok as an efficient tool for learning languages because it helped the learners to develop their listening and speaking skills. Chen and Khan (2023) also carried out a study on the integration of Tiktok application in learning oral English in China. The study utilized questionnaires to investigate the effectiveness of applying TikTok to oral English learning from the student's point of view. The study's findings suggested that students were keen to improve their English-speaking skills. Students classified existing challenges in oral English instruction into three categories: teaching methods teaching materials, and pronunciation. More than 70% of students said that using TikTok to solve existing problems was beneficial. The study suggested that teachers mix TikTok's useful short videos with speaking missions in English-language classes. Consequently, a study by Ajisoko (2020) on the use of Duolingo App. To improve English vocabulary learning in Indonesia revealed that Duolingo facilitated English language learning by providing engaging learning experiences. The study also mentioned that Duolingo was an effective application in language classrooms in that it provided an opportunity for all learners to get a fair turn in practicing material, eliminated boredom in learning and also encouraged the learners to explore new vocabulary in English language.

The majority of research pertaining to the varieties of digital tools utilized in English language education has been carried out on a worldwide scale, with a predominant focus on Asian nations. The current state of literature indicates a dearth of scholarly works pertaining to the various forms of digital tools employed in the context of English language pedagogy across East African nations, particularly Kenya. The objective of this study was to bridge the existing knowledge gap by

conducting a study on the various types of digital tools employed in the teaching of English language at the secondary school level within a specific sub county in Kenya.

2.2 Influence of Digital Tools on English Language Instruction

The use of teaching aids in teaching English has significantly improved learning English as a second language. The increase in the use of online lessons and other sources of learning has allowed students to gain access to English language learning materials from any corner of the world (Altawil, 2019). Availability of quality English language learning has presented new opportunities for student and teachers who before could not access these provisions. The use of digital tools has also made it easier for students to access and interact with other students into English speaking persons; coupled with the availability of many online lessons and courses (Altawil, 2019). With the help of the technology, learners have a chance to converse with people who are natives of target language and that enables them to pave their way through the development of language skills in the most natural and authentic ways possible. Technological advancement has also enhanced the use of interactive tools in the learning of English to the students. Haleem (2022) states that use of videos, quizzes, and gamification by teachers has allowed students to participate in active learning during lessons. Furthermore, the use of technology allows educators to develop lessons that engage students in a more interesting manner (Vo, 2021). Use of teacher-made multimedia resources in teaching and learning process such as videos, tapes, images and other teaching aids have made the presentation of lessons to be more interesting and effective in view of the fact that students gets more involved in what the teacher is presenting to them.

The provision of digital tools has greatly helped in the promotion of language learning in relation to the teaching of the English language in particular. The emergence of online language learning platforms has made the students acquire English language independently (AlRashidi, 2022). These educational platforms provide differentiated learning environment hence compliant with the learning needs of each learner. Consequently, students are now able to attain English language proficiency with greater effectiveness and efficiency. In addition, the development of digital tools has facilitated teachers' ability to access genuine resources, including news articles, podcasts, and television programs that they can utilize to teach different concepts in the English language. The aforementioned materials also enable students to encounter language usage in authentic contexts, a crucial factor in enhancing language attainment.

According to Dash (2022), the use of digital tools is beneficial in learning in a number of ways. One of the ways is that media creates a more interactive learning process. When carefully chosen and well-prepared, digital tools may assist instructors and students in actively communicating hence making the learning process interesting. Digital tools also help save time that could be utilized to explain complex concepts. When correctly utilized, digital tools save time by aiding the teacher in explaining complex concepts. Additionally, the use of digital tools in teaching and learning of English optimizes positive attitudes, enhances student's love of and appreciation for the subject and helps students absorb and master learning materials more comprehensively.

A study by Ezeh et al. (2021) on media-support teaching and learning of English as a second language: eliminating stereotypes asserts that the use of digital tools in English language learning

aids change the role of the teacher as a sole dispenser of knowledge, to the coordinator of learning process. The study employed a qualitative approach to assess the role of media in language instruction and acquisition in Nigeria, focusing on the perspectives of both learners and educators. The research centered on self-improvement and innovative practices. The research findings of the study demonstrated that media aids in the acquisition of language, facilitates the learning process, and allows instructors to surpass their individual limitations in terms of pronunciation and vocabulary, thereby effectively guiding their students.

A study by Hasan et al. (2020) on the effects of digital tools on English language learning motivation in Bangladesh revealed that the use of digital tools in English language learning motivated learners immensely, transformed dependent and passive learners into active and autonomous learners and works as a supplement to classroom learning. For instance, according to the study, presentations through multimedia ensured learner autonomy and provoked motivation among the learners. The study also mentioned that other digital tools like YouTube helped improve motivation among the learners in that the inattentive, weak and shy learners felt attracted and motivated to interact and learn when audio-visual language aids were introduced in the classroom. The objective of this study was to investigate the effects of digital tools on learner motivation. The study utilized a qualitative research design to collect and analyze data. Data was collected using six focus group discussion with 30 tertiary level English language learners from eight universities located in Bangladesh. The study recommended for future research to be conducted to assess on the negative washback of Digital tools usage in English as a second language classroom.

Otchie et al. (2020) conducted a review of literature on the use of digital tools in learning in high school education, and the authors also found that digital tools were helpful as they provided interactive and collaborative functions that enabled teachers and students to engage and share information. As indicated in the study, the search for the literature was done through the EBSCO host web service to several databases. The research was conducted on the articles featuring the topic of ATO with a specific emphasis on articles published from 2013 to 2017. Another study by Baniyassen (2020) was also carried out to examine the effectiveness of the use of digital tools in enhancing the learning of English as a foreign language amongst learners in the United Arab Emirates. Specifically, the aims of the study were to understand how digital tools impacted the learning of English and to determine the effectiveness of using the tools in the enhancement of English language mastery. To address the research objectives, the study utilized a mixed-methods design that included interviews and questionnaires. Furthermore, in the methodological aspect of the study, experimental research was applied. The use of pre-test and post-test was employed in the study as a way of ascertaining the effectiveness of a digital tool in the development of students' writing and speaking skills. These assessments were conducted before and after the experiment. The survey/HSEQ, interview, and the quasi-experimental pre-post-test assessment tools that were used in the study highlighted that the use of digital tools made a difference in the growth of learning English language among students. It was established that the use of IT tools improved the effectiveness of the learning and motivation of the students in writing narratives. According to the findings of this study, technology incorporation into the United Arab Emirates teaching-learning environment facilitated improvements in students' reading and speaking skills.

In Philippines, a research on the effects of technology integration on learning of English language was carried out by Cabrera (2018). This was a cross-sectional and descriptive study carried out on 10 purposively sampled respondents. The participants were high school language teachers and students from both private and public sectors. The study findings were established through data collected from the participants by means of written interviews employing the strengths-weaknesses-opportunities-threats (SWOT) matrixes. The findings of this research affirmed that various benefits and opportunities might be accessible through technology, with regard to the learning of English. The user survey also pointed out four fundamental benefits of digital tools that included the provision of up-to-date information, extensive language input, practice with native speakers, and new, modern approaches to learning. For example, this study revealed that through video-based blogs, learners were taught on public speaking and also observed improvement in their pronunciation besides affording the learners a chance to use English language to the fullest. The study also discussed some of the disadvantages and possible negative effects of technology integration in learning that hinder the process of attaining a second language. The risk factors mentioned in the study include the potential capacity of digital tools to lead learners to unacademic content. The study recommended for further study on the topic.

Parrilla (2016) did a study in Puerto Rico to evaluate the interaction of digital technology with second language acquisition in ELL students. The research method used in this study was quasi-experimental, and the theory adopted for the study was dual-coding theory. In this study, a convenience sampling method was used to identify 85 students from a Montessori school in Puerto Rico. The students were then split into two groups; the treatment and the control groups. This treatment entailed the use of videos, audios, pictures, and written words in a digital environment to teach word acquisition. The sources of data used in this study involved the pre and post test results of Maze Close test which is a test administrated in order to determine the reading comprehension levels. The aforementioned findings were tested using the method of a paired t-test. The results from the study indicated that students who were in the treatment groups were more enhanced in their reading skills in comparison with the students in the control groups. In light of this, the study recommended that more research should be done to establish the relationship between the use of digital and the improvement of word knowledge and reading skills of students in upper year classes.

Asafo-Adjei et al. (2023) examined the impact of using digital tools in enhancing writing in Ghanaian EFL students. By adopting a basic qualitative case study research design, the study collected quantitative and qualitative data from a co-educational government secondary school in Ghana. To achieve the study objectives, data was collected through a focus group discussion (FGD) guide that was developed by the researchers. The collected data was then analyzed using the Data Analysis Spiral. The findings of the study indicated that the integration of digital tools yielded a positive influence on the learning of English language among the students. The positive effects mentioned in the article are that the use of digital tools helped teachers in disseminating content, assessments, and feedback. The study pointed out the fact that education stakeholders should consider the idea of using pedagogical approaches that include the students through the use of technology. A study conducted by Yabro et al. (2016) on the use of digital instructional tools in effective teaching and learning of English and Mathematics in United States revealed that the tools were crucial in teaching. In this study, sixty-five ELA and Mathematics teachers from seven

through ten grade kept records of the used digital tools to teach some lessons to convey AL and Mathematics academic content standards and their learning accomplishments. For instance, the study highlighted that the integration of YouTube in English classroom lessons enhanced the learner's capacity to learn English lessons with ease and fun. MyiLOGS, an online instructor log, was employed to administer data collection. The respondents were asked about the number of hours they devoted to the teaching of the state curriculum together with any additional objectives that are not stated in the curriculum standards. Teachers also accounted for non-instructional time that was due to transition periods, announcements, and other related things. Some of the recommendation made by the study included the need to carry out further studies on the types of digital instructional tools that are available, the parts they play and also the extent of their usefulness in learning as well as their drawbacks.

In the Kenyan context, Juma (2016) looked at the integration of digital technologies in learning English language in Bungoma North district. The goal of this study is to explore and establish how various Secondary School English language teachers integrate technology support to enrich the students' learning environment. The purpose of the study was to determine the available resources in digital technologies to teach English in secondary schools in the Bungoma North District. This study aimed at establishing the influence of instructional media on the mastery of English language. The study was based on John Sweller's Cognitive Load Theory theoretical framework and used survey data collected from the secondary schools to reveal the state of affairs of the use of digital tools. The study concentrated on a population of 36 secondary schools in the Bungoma North district. The survey chose 30 schools at random for teacher and library personnel respondents and 10 schools for student respondents. A pilot study was done on a representative sample from one of the schools prior to the start of actual data gathering. The goal was to pre-test the research instruments to verify their reliability and validity, as well as the feasibility of the study. The key research instruments in the study were questionnaires. To choose participants from the two classes, stratified random sampling was used, followed by simple random sampling to select student respondents. The study's sample included 406 people: 346 students, 30 English teachers, and 30 library workers. The study used questionnaires to collect data from students, teachers, and library personnel about the accessibility and use of instructional media. Each educational institution was implicated by a single member of their library staff. The Excel software was used as a data analysis tool, resulting in the generation of data in the form of frequencies, means, and percentages. According to the findings of the study, over 53.6% of the students felt that the use of digital tools in learning helped them to better understand English language facilitating their performance on the same. The study recommended for teachers to be encouraged by their supervisors to make more use of other learning materials besides the textbook.

Several studies have been conducted globally to assess the influence of Digital tools in English language instruction. Nonetheless, among the research conducted, there is no research conducted in Maara sub-county to assess the influence of Digital tools in the teaching and learning of English in the region. As such, this study sought to bridge this gap by conducting research in Maara sub county, Tharaka-Nithi County, to assess the influence of Digital tools on English language instruction in the region.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The study population for the study was 7025 including 208 form three teachers of English, 67 head of English subject department and 6750 form 3 students enrolled in public secondary schools that were located in various divisions within Maara sub-county. The sample size utilized in the study was 379 including 327 students, 39 teachers of English and 13 head of English subject teachers. Data was collected by the use of questionnaires for students and teachers of English and interviews for head of English language subject in various schools. Quantitative data was cleaned, coded and then analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26. For qualitative data, data was coded and thematic analysis conducted.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. Types of Digital Tools Used in English Language Instruction

The study sought to assess the types of digital tools used in English language instruction in public secondary schools in Maara Sub-county, Tharaka-Nithi County, Kenya. Frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviation summary statistics were used to assess the type of digital tools used to teach English in public secondary schools in Maara Sub-county, Tharaka-Nithi County, Kenya. The results are presented in table 1.

Table 1: Types of Digital Tools Used in English Language Instruction

Digital Tools Used	Teachers(N=36)		Students(N=313)	
	Yes (%)	No (%)	Yes (%)	No (%)
WhatsApp	96.2	3.8	91.7	8.3
Blogs	86.1	13.9	78.2	21.8
Podcasts	44.4	55.6	38.4	61.6
YouTube	94.4	5.6	89.8	10.2
EBooks	89.1	10.9	89.5	10.5
Facebook	64.4	35.6	58.2	41.8
Tiktok	48.7	51.3	40.0	60.0
Websites	77.3	22.7	69.3	30.7

Information obtained from teachers of English showed that WhatsApp (94.4%) was the most commonly used digital media tool integrated in English language instruction followed by YouTube (91.7%), then EBooks (89.1%) and Blogs (86.1%). Other types of digital tools used in English language included Websites (77.3%), Facebook (64.4%), Tiktok (48.7%) and Podcasts (44.4%) in decreasing order of use. Findings from students identified WhatsApp (91.7%) as the most commonly used type of digital tool followed by YouTube (89.8%), then E-books (89.5%). Other types used in English language instruction according to the student's data included Blogs (78.2%), Websites (69.3%), Facebook (58.2%), Tiktok (40.0%) and Podcasts (38.4%). Findings therefore showed that WhatsApp, YouTube, E-books, Blogs and websites were the most common types of digital tools used in English language instruction.

Information on types of digital tools used by teachers in English language instruction was confirmed by the HOS in the various schools that data was collected.

According to the interviewee A;

Teachers in our school use various digital tools such as YouTube, WhatsApp, eBooks, websites and others.

Interviewee B noted that;

WhatsApp is mainly used by the teachers to share learning materials and for exchange of knowledge.

Interviewee C on the other hand noted that;

Digital tools like websites, blogs are mostly used by teachers to such for supplementary learning materials such revision questions.

The results showed a clear trend in the type of digital tools used to teach English at secondary public schools, with some tools appearing to be the most favorite for both teachers and students. These findings are thus important to the illustration of the integration of technology into the teaching of English. WhatsApp, with 94.4% by teachers and 91.7% by students, is the tool most used probably because it is the easiest to use and accessible. Most teachers make use of WhatsApp to share learning materials and for discussions outside the classroom environment. Interviewee B categorically stated that WhatsApp was primarily used in terms of sharing knowledge and distributing learning materials, and hence, it is a very useful tool for keeping the engagement regular. Since most of the students and teachers normally use their smartphones, it automatically provides an effective medium of communication on a real-time basis for submission of assignments and, at times, for clarification of doubts also. This was followed by YouTube, at 91.7% as per the data provided by teachers and at 89.8% as per the date provided by the students. YouTube has a variety of educational resources such as English language tutorials, explanation of grammar, analysis of literature, and real-life uses. Such videos can be utilized by the teacher as an enhancer in their lesson to provide more visual and auditory means for concepts that would otherwise have been abstractly explained.

E-books also had a widespread application, as 89.1% of teachers and 89.5% of students agreed to their use in English language instruction. E-books provide students with an opportunity to build up an extended reading, free from the constraint that a physical textbook may impose. This liberty has provided the opportunity to make independent learning possible for students, in cases of exam preparation or reviewing additional resources. Similarly, Blogs which have 86.1% from teachers and 78.2% from students have the ability to constitute a place for reflective writing and peer interaction. Blogs can be used by teachers in facilitating and encouraging reflective writing by students, discussing topics, and even the culmination of projects. Websites follow at 77.3% for teachers and 69.3% for students. According to Interviewee C, Websites were used by teachers to source additional teaching materials assigned to students such as revision questions and practice exercises. Among other useful resources on websites include grammar exercises and comprehension that further reinforce learning in the classroom and portray different critiques on literature. For Facebook, 64.4% of the teachers and 58.2% of the students agreed to the tool being used in English language. On the other hand, 48.7% of the teachers and 40.0% of the students agreed to Tiktok being used in English language instruction. Podcast on the other hand had 44.4% from teachers and 38.4% rating from students. Although these tools are less widely adopted, their presence indicates that both teachers are experimenting with more modern methods of English language instruction.

From the data, WhatsApp, YouTube, E-books, Blogs, and Websites were the main digital tools that were being adopted for integration into the teaching of the English language in public secondary schools. These digital tools provide various formats, such as visual, auditory, and textual, for different learning styles, thus comprehensively improving learning. In support of this finding, Almogheerah (2021) examined the impact of WhatsApp use on Saudi female EFL student’s idioms learning, which highlighted that WhatsApp improved learning by providing easier access to relevant and richer resources. This is especially important as the use of such platforms as YouTube or E-books deepens this approach even more as such a format is preferred by many and helps to understand better. A similar rationale is found in Almogheerah’s study where the author argues that despite the challenges of use of ICT in teaching and learning, they may be helpful in education because they afford students a chance to engage actively in classroom activities and meet several demand. In this context, the use of the above individual resources facilitates not only students’ interaction but also their mastery of different aspects of English. Details provided above demonstrated that students and teachers were willing to employ diverse forms of technology including WhatsApp, E-books, websites among others. According to the study conducted by Sánchez-Cruzado et al., (2021), it is mentioned that proper implementation of the diverse types of digital tools improves the teaching of English. Thus, the incorporation of various tools in teaching and learning English.

4.2. Influence of Digital Tools on English Language Instruction

The study established the influence of digital tools on English language instruction in public secondary in Maara Sub-county, Tharaka-Nithi county, Kenya. Frequencies and percentages were used to establish the influence of digital tools on English language instruction in public secondary schools in Maara Sub-county, Tharaka-Nithi County, Kenya. The selected digital tools in this study were blogs, websites, podcasts, YouTube, Facebook, WhatsApp, Tiktok and E-books. Respondents were required to respond to a Likert rating scale on the frequency of use of the selected digital tools. Five parameters were considered. Where 5 is Strongly Agree, 4 is Agree, 3 is Undecided, 2 is disagree while 1 is Strongly Disagree.

The results obtained are shown in the tables below. The results are presented in table.

Table 2: Influence of Digital Tools on English Language Instruction

Descriptive Statistics	Teachers N=36		Students N=313	
	SA/A	U/D/SD	SA/A	U/D/SD
Digital tools are very resourceful in English language instruction	98.5	1.5	96.9	3.1

Use of digital tools make English language instruction easier	98.0	2.0	98.0	2.0
Use of digital tools enhances learner’s language skills	97.6	2.4	97.0	3.0
Use of digital tools enhances learner autonomy	95.2	4.8	90.1	9.9
Use of digital tools makes learning interesting	96.8	3.2	90.1	9.9
Use of digital tools makes learning engaging	100.0	0.0	90.1	9.9

SA- Strongly Agree, A-Agree, U-Undecided, D-Disagree, SD-Strongly Disagree

According to the findings from teachers (98.5%) confirmed that digital tools were very resourceful in English language instruction, (98.0%) teachers suggested that use of digital tools make English language instruction easier. Also, all of the respondents (97.6%) indicated that the use of digital tools enhanced learner’s language skills (95.2%) were of the opinion that use of digital tools enhanced learner autonomy. In addition to that, (96.8%) also confirmed that use of digital tools made learning interesting while (100%)of the respondents agreed that use of digital tools made learning engaging.

Results from the sampled students revealed that 96.9% of them agreed with the teachers’ opinion that the digital tools were very resourceful in English language instruction and 98.0% of the students supported the teachers’ opinion that use of the digital tools made teaching of English language easier. A majority (97.0%) affirmed that the use of the digital tools enhanced English language skills. The majority of the respondents (90. 1%) supported the statement that the use of digital tools helps to promote learner autonomy while (90. 1%) agreed that use of digital tools made learning more interesting. Besides that, (90. 1 %) of the respondents were in support of the statement that learning through the use of the digital tools was engaging. This suggests that students agreed with their teacher on the fact that digital tools aided the teaching of English language.

The findings corroborate with the information provided by the HOS who participated in the study:

According to interviewee F:

Digital tools have a positive influence on English language instruction as make learning interesting and engaging.

According to interviewee G:

Through the use of digital tools such as WhatsApp, teachers are able to interact with other teachers of English and share materials.

The insights presented reveal that teachers acknowledge the practical application and usefulness of digital tools in classrooms; thus, students support the statement on the fact that if digital tools are accepted in positive manner, they improve the teaching of English language. This is in agreement with earlier studies indicating that while teachers as well as students may hold diverse perceptions on the use of technology in teaching and learning, they both acknowledge that it has a positive effect on English language instruction (Ertmer& Ottenbeit-Leftwich, 2010). Consequently, Gaytan (2013 in a study conducted in the United States reflects that students’ language learning skills increase with more interactions in the use of digital tools.

The study proceeded to assess the influence of digital tools on English language instruction. information obtained on use of digital tools was cross-tabulated against information obtained on English language instruction. Table 3 presents a summary of the findings.

Table 3: Influence of Digital Tools in English language instruction (cross-tabulation)

		Use of Digital Tools		
		Low	High	Total
English Language Instruction	No	f 6	179	185
		% 1.9	40.9	59.1
	Yes	f 0	128	128
		% 0	57.2	40.9
Total		f 6	307	313
		% 1.9	98.1	100.0

Data obtained show that a significant proportion of the respondents (98.1%) reported a high use of digital tools in English language instruction compared to those who observed low use (1.9%). Amongst those who reported low use, a majority (57.2%) confirmed the influence of the digital tools compared to those who felt it does not (40.9%). Table 4 presents the Chi Square interpretation of this finding.

Table 4: Influence of Digital Tools in English Language Instruction

	Value	df	Sig. (2-sided)	Sig. (1-sided)	CC
Pearson Chi-Square	4.232 ^a	1	.040		
Continuity Correction^b	2.683	1	.101		
Likelihood Ratio	6.391	1	.011		
Fisher's Exact Test				.041	16.5
Linear-by-Linear Association	4.219	1	.040		
N of Valid Cases	313				

a. 2 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.45.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Chi square results $X^2(1) = 4.232, p = 0.041$ showed use of digital tools significantly influences English language instruction. Contingency Coefficient measure of Association (CC) illustrated that 16.5% of the total variance in English language instruction could be attributed to use of digital tools. According to Burgerova and Cimermanova (2013), when digital tools are well utilized in teaching language, they create a window and background for primary speaking and listening skills. In some contexts, considering the learners' level and age, it can improve reading and writing skills. Similarly, Elisa, (2023) investigated students' perception of using digital media tools in English language learning. Responses from the students regarding digital media tools were obtained qualitatively using in-depth interviews. The study findings revealed that the

students had a positive perception regarding the use of digital media tools in English language learning. Specifically, students noted that digital media tools were influential in helping students become autonomous and independent learners.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

Based on the results of the first specific objective that aimed to identify the types of digital media tools that are used in language teaching in the study area. The findings showed that the most used tools were WhatsApp, YouTube, E-books, Blogs, and Websites. Using the above extensively used digital tools, it could therefore be deduced that WhatsApp, YouTube, EBooks, Blogs and Websites were the types of digital used in teaching English language in Maara sub-county Tharaka Nithi County Kenya.

The second objective aimed at exploring the Influence of use of selected digital media tools in English language teaching. The findings indicated that most of the teachers had a positive perception of the application of digital gadgets in teaching languages. Data relative to the influence of use of digital tools in English language instruction indicated that both teachers and students had a positive view of the influence of digital tools in language instruction. From the above results we can thus deduce that use of digital tools plays an important role in the teaching of English language in public secondary schools in Maara sub-county, Tharaka- Nithi county, Kenya.

5.2 Recommendations

Drawing from the research findings and conclusions discussed herein, the study makes the following recommendations:

- The study recommends that schools should invest in providing adequate access to digital tools through the provision of resources such as computers and tablets to enhance English language instruction.
- Based on the findings that digital tools positively influence English language instruction, the study recommends that public secondary schools incorporate blended learning approaches. These approaches should combine traditional teaching techniques, such as lectures, with the use of digital tools and online resources to enhance student engagement in the classroom and improve learning outcomes in English language instruction.

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