

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

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<https://doi.org/10.54922/IJEHSS.2025.1113>

Received: 14 September 2025/Published: 29 October 2025

ABSTRACT

The integration of digital tools in English language instruction has transformed teaching and learning globally. However, in Kenya's public secondary schools, especially in Maara Sub-County, Tharaka-Nithi County, teachers continue to face numerous challenges in effectively utilizing these tools. This study aimed to examine the difficulties encountered by teachers in incorporating digital tools into English language teaching. Using a descriptive survey design, data was collected from 379 participants, including teachers, heads of departments, and students through questionnaires and interviews. Student and teacher questionnaires provided the research with quantitative data, while the interviews with head of English language subject in various schools provided qualitative data. Data cleaning, coding, and analysis were preformed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 26. For qualitative data, coding and thematic analysis were conducted. Research findings indicated. The study concludes that inadequate technical support, insufficient teacher ICT skills, negative teacher attitudes toward technology, poor network connectivity, large class sizes, and limited access to digital devices significantly impede the successful integration of technology in language instruction. It recommends enhanced technical support, continuous teacher training, cultivation of positive attitudes toward technology, and improved digital infrastructure to promote the effective use of digital tools in English language education.

Keywords: Digital Tools, English Language Instruction, Teacher Challenges.

1. INTRODUCTION

The incorporation of digital tools in education has changed the language teaching process in all parts of the world, providing new methods of learners' interaction, engagement, and understanding. The government of Kenya has been keen on the need to integrate Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the education system and has been seen to have made this move through the Digital Literacy Program and Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) policies that focus on the use of technology in education and learning (Opicho, Imonje, & Chepkonga, 2025). In the teaching of English language, digital media interactive software, online dictionaries, audiovisual, and learning management systems can be used to support the enhancement of the linguistic competence and communicative skills of the students. Nevertheless, teacher's ability to successfully use these tools is largely determined by their ability, availability of resources and institutional support which determine the overall effectiveness of English language teaching and learning. Although the potential of digital tools has been identified, a significant number of Kenyan secondary school teachers in the Kenyan public schools have expressed a lot of difficulty in

incorporating these technologies in their teaching. The lack of proper training, poor infrastructure, unstable internet connection, and failure to call on the technical support are some of the factors that make it hard to use digital resources in classrooms effectively (Salam et al., 2023). Such obstacles not only limit teachers' ability to apply contemporary pedagogical practices but also reduce students' motivation and academic performance in English. Consequently, these challenges compromise the overall quality and effectiveness of English language instruction in public schools, particularly in areas such as Maara Sub-county.

1.1. Research Objective

- To examine the challenges faced by teachers in their use of Digital tools in English language instruction in public secondary schools in Maara sub-county Tharaka-Nithi County, Kenya

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Challenges of Digital Tools in English Language Instruction

Technological advancements have played an important role in the incorporation of instructional technology in the teaching of English to improve the educational experience of the students and educators. However, the integration of informative resources into the teaching-learning process in English has raised several challenges. One of the challenges that have been faced by the educators in incorporating the use of technology in teaching English is in relation to technology access by students (Anggeraini, 2020). The issue of digital divide remains an important factor, especially with some students and schools in emerging markets who lack computing gadgets and/or internet connection which hampers the efforts by teachers to use digital tools in their class. Another major drawback that impacts the use of digital tools in teaching English is the lack of professional development on technology tools. Lack of adequate training on the best ways to leverage technology can impact the ability of teachers to adopt it in their teaching practice (Argawati & Suryani, 2020). The lack of technical content and process competence may range from the inability to recognize a technology to understanding of how it may be employed to enhance the educational experience. Many educators are not well enough prepared regarding the use of digital tools, and this ultimately limits their potential when it comes to implementing.

Another issue that affects the use of technology in delivering English language lessons is technological imperfection (Rahman, 2015). A technical problem like a slow internet connection or a bad piece of software can interrupt the normal learning processes of the class. Furthermore, there is the consideration of content choice which is another challenge teachers' encounter whenever they are employing electronic resources in teaching English, considering that language learning is unique. Since there are many materials available online, it becomes difficult for the instructors to find materials that are acceptable and relevant to their students. Moreover, students may have distractions when using digital resources while teaching English to students (Martin, Long, Haywood, & Xie, 2025). This raises the possibility of students going to other sites of interest, for instance logging into their Facebook account or playing some games during a lesson.

As stated in the article on language teaching in digital environment in Indonesia by Anggeraini (2020), despite the fact that the use of technology makes learning engaging, instructors face some challenges while adapting the technology in class. The aim of this qualitative research was to

explore the viewpoints of English teachers concerning the incorporation of digital resources in curriculum and concerning the challenges which should be addressed to successfully implement digital instructional approaches. Data collection was done through the use of structured and unstructured questionnaires. The findings of the study revealed that English teachers generally agreed that digital technology enhances teaching by creating an engaging classroom atmosphere and positively influencing the learning process. Teachers identified digital tools such as laptops, speakers, mobile phones, websites, and YouTube videos as key resources that support effective instruction. However, the study also highlighted several challenges, including lack of training, limited time, and inadequate facilities, which hindered teachers from efficiently implementing digital teaching and developing their own digital materials. The study recommended that teachers actively participate in professional development programs such as workshops, seminars, and collaborative discussions to strengthen their digital competencies and stay updated with emerging educational technologies.

Hashemi and Kew (2021) explored literature to identify challenges to using technology in the teaching and learning of English language. The aim of this research was to find out the common challenges that hinder teachers from integrating technology. The literature in the study was categorized according to teacher-level barriers and school-level barriers. The study established that resistance to change, the perception of the teacher on integration of technology in teaching and learning, lack of confidence and skills in use of technology for teaching and learning, lack of teacher training and lack of teacher competence as some of the challenges to using technology in the teaching and learning of English language. The challenges experienced at the school level, were mainly linked to administrative and institutional challenges such as the lack of ICTs, insufficient technical support, and the overall lack of properly equipped resources. The study revealed that the barriers to technology integration in teaching were often interconnected. For instance, limited access to ICT tools and applications not only hindered the use of technology in instruction but also reduced teachers' confidence in effectively utilizing these digital resources.

Alamri (2021) explored the difficulties teachers face when integrating technology in English as a second language in writing classrooms in the United States. The purpose of the research was to investigate the challenges and the factors that impede ESL teachers in implementing technological tools in the area of writing. The study also focused on the perception of the educators on the integration of technology within the writing curriculum. The research involved observing several writing classes at different levels in an English Language school located in the southwestern part of the United States. After that, an interview with one of the teachers who was under observation was conducted to explore how technology was embraced in learning and the factors that could limit it. The results of study highlighted that there are some barriers that prevent instructors from integrating technologies for the writing process. The study identified several difficulties, including teachers' negative attitudes toward adopting technology, time constraints, insufficient resources such as computers and related devices, and a lack of technical competence. Furthermore, the study showed that educators had positive perceptions towards the use of technology to improve instruction as a process. The study was meant to provide ESL/EFL writing teachers and policymakers with information on the teaching practice and technical solutions to the identified problems in the field.

Nnaka (2022) also did a study on the integration of digital technologies in the teaching and learning of English and literature in Nigerian schools. The aim of this study was to examine the integration of technology in the teaching and learning of English language and literature. The research delved into the methods and developments in digital teaching through offering clear guidelines on how affiliated digital technologies can be applied in the teaching and learning of English language and literature in educational institutions. The study also investigated on the constraints that have prevented effectiveness of digital technologies in teaching of English language and literature in Nigerian schools. Finally, the research results indicated that through training and supporting teachers on the use of tools and resources in the teaching of literature and English, it is possible to improve the technological knowledge of the teachers and at the same time allow them to incorporate various learner-centered approaches in their classrooms. Another recommendation that was made was that there is need for the federal government and other education stakeholders to invest in the development of the technological capital of education at every level in order to augment the learning of digital literacy and skills. Further, the study recommended that, in order to support educators using technology in teaching literature and English, technology specialists should supplement their practices.

Nyakito et al. (2021) was also involved in another study on the findings of the difficulties on the integration of technology teaching among schools in Uganda. The study looked at the challenges facing tutors in teacher education institutions when they sought to integrate ICT into their practice. The study used focus group discussion, interviews, and observations to collect data from the sample of 10 college lecturers from colleges and 4 Principals one from each college. The method of sample selection was through the Snowball purposive sampling technique. According to the conclusions of the study, some of the challenges that were highlighted showed that there were many barriers to adopting ICT in classroom teaching, even though college educators had a high level of awareness of the importance of ICT. Some of the challenges highlighted in the study are limited skills and knowledge on the use of ICT, lack of syllabus for ICT teachers' colleges, lack of clear and coherent policy direction from the government on integration of ICT in learning and teaching, inadequate ICT resources, outdated ICT facilities and equipment, congested teaching timetable due to examination pressures, large class size, lack of time, work overload, slow internet connection, irregular electricity supply and negative attitude from senior. The scholars therefore recommended government intervention through the establishment of a clear policy framework for ICT integration in the curriculum. This involves providing colleges with adequate and up-to-date equipment, offering regular training for lecturers, ensuring reliable and affordable electricity sources, hiring additional staff to reduce workload, and allocating government funds to support internet connectivity.

Kamau (2012) studied the challenges to ICT use in teaching and learning processes in secondary schools in Nyandarua-south Subcounty in Kenya. The research sought to establish some gaps in the integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in instructional teaching. These objectives were meant to establish the level of ICT infrastructure to enhance the teaching and learning. Also, it sought to establish the extent of ICT skills understood and implemented by teachers and students in education. The research used purposive sampling technique in recruiting the schools depending on some characteristics such as the type of school- boarding, day, mixed, boys or girls. The use of the survey design was appropriate for the study since it was basically

descriptive in nature and therefore sought to establish factual information from the respondents. To ensure an equal distribution of respondents within each group, an equal number of students, teachers, and principals were selected from the schools that were sampled. The data was collected with the use of questionnaires, interviews as well as observation. Descriptive analysis was conducted on the collected data using chi square and the Pearson's product moment correlation. The first findings showed that the number of inadequate informations and communication technology (ICT) resources in most of the schools does not allow the integration of ICT into teaching practices.

Where there were ICT resources, their proper deployment was compromised in some ways due to a lack of appropriate technical know-how. Furthermore, the observed majority of students used computers for entertainment instead of educational processes. In cases where resources were present but Internet was missing, this was pointed out as a significant factor. The research established that a large number of tutors lacked rudimentary computer literacy; therefore, the problem needed to be addressed. The study suggested that the government should offer assistance to schools in terms of electricity, staff ICT training and provision of extra computers to enhance the quality of education through the use of technology in learning. As indicated in all the above studies, the research generally involved a number of qualitative studies that focused on the Teacher's difficulties in the use of Digital tools in English language teaching and learning. This research adopted both quantitative and qualitative approach in a bid to establish the challenges of digital tools in teaching English.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Design and Methodology

The study applied descriptive survey research design. Asenahabi (2019) described that survey study design with following features: It is aimed to collect all the relevant and accurate information with regard to current state of affairs of specific phenomena and as far as possible, draw true conclusions from the facts gathered without interfering or controlling the conditions. It was a useful method for this study because it enabled the researcher to gather data on study parameters from different individuals at one time so as to describe their nature without any interference. The type of study used in this paper is mixed method, which entails the collection as well as analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data in a given study. Particularly, the use of a qualitative approach assists to gather the respondents' subjective opinions, which can enhance and explain the quantitative results (Peterson, 2019). Interviews and observations being quantitative in nature offer a richer understanding of people's experience, attitudes, and behaviors. In contrast, quantitative approaches of research, like questionnaires and experiments, enable collection of large amount of data that can be analyzed qualitatively. These produce figures that are useful in discovering relationship, correlation and sameness or gender. The qualitative and quantitative data together enhance the perception of the topic under study. Thirdly, the combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection methods gives a researcher a unique advantage with regard to the depth that this provides and increases the practical applicability of the conclusions and recommendations of this research.

3.2. Study Variables

The challenges affecting the use of digital resources in English language teaching in Maara Sub-county, Tharaka-Nithi County, Kenya, was the main focus of the study. English Language instruction was the study's dependent variable whereby the study looked at the integration of digital tools such as posts, websites, podcasts, YouTube, WhatsApp, and e-books, in teaching and learning English. Inadequate technical support, limited teacher ICT skills, negative teacher attitudes toward technology, poor network connectivity, absence of the needed equipment, and large class sizes were the independent variables and were perceived as the greatest obstacles toward the use of digital resources in English language teaching. The identified challenges were linked to the degree and efficiency of digital resources employed in teaching English, providing insight into the connection among the variables.

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

3.3.1. Data Collection

Following clearance, the research timetable was planned, and the dates communicated to the participants and the school administration. In order to obtain authorization to conduct data collection from the sample schools, the researcher set up meetings with the principals of those schools. The questionnaire took roughly twenty minutes to complete and was administered at the beginning of an English class. Students were advised to refrain from disclosing their personal information in order to maintain confidentiality. As participants completed the questionnaires, the researcher interviewed the head of English subject in the school. The researcher conducted the study over a period of two weeks. Throughout this time, the researcher devoted an entire week to collecting data from secondary schools within the study location and gathered data from two secondary schools every day.

3.3.2. Data Analysis

The data was analyzed as per the objectives of the study both through qualitative and quantitative methods of categorization, editing and analysis. Interview data was analyzed on the basis of emergent themes, while survey data was analyzed descriptively and inferentially using the computer software, Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). To establish the existing relationship of the variables some of the commonly used measures such as; frequency and percentage, mean and standard deviations were used. The hypothesis was tested at 95% confidence level using chi-square inferential statistics on the research objective. Information was reported in tabular form and percentage.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Challenges of Digital Tools usage in English Language Instruction

The objective was to establish the challenges of digital tools usage in English language instruction in public secondary in Maara Sub- County, Tharaka-Nithi county, Kenya. Frequencies and percentages were used to analyze the research question on the challenges of digital tools usage in English language instruction public secondary schools in Maara Sub-county, Tharaka-Nithi County, Kenya. The selected digital tools in this study were blogs, websites, podcasts, WhatsApp, Facebook, Tiktok, YouTube and E-books. Respondents were required to respond to a Likert rating scale on the frequency of use of selected digital tools. Five parameters were considered. Where 5

is Very Great Extent, 4 is Great Extent, 3 is Average Extent, 2 is Small Extent while 1 is None. The results obtained are shown in the table 19.

Table 1: Challenges of Digital Usage in English Language

Descriptive Statistics	N	Very Great Extent	Great Extent
Inadequate technical support	36	96.1	3.9
Teacher's ICT skills	36	86.1	13.9
Teachers attitude towards use of digital tools	36	80.0	20.0
Poor network connectivity	36	79.4	20.6
Lack of necessary gadgets	36	69.4	30.6
Large classes	36	89.4	10.6
Aggregate	36	83.4	16.6

According to data obtained, a majority of the teachers sampled believe that teachers inadequate technical support (96.1%) was the greatest challenge to use of digital media tools in English language instruction followed by large classes (89.4%) and lack of teacher's ICT skills at (86.1%). Other challenges included teachers' attitude towards use of digital tools (80.0%), poor network connectivity (79.4%) and lack of necessary gadgets (69.4%). Findings means that teachers agreed that there were a number of challenges that were acting as impediments to use of digital tools in English language instruction.

The data underlines some crucial issues faced by English teachers in the integration of digital tools into their teaching practice, and one can see several key areas of concern from the data. As many as 96.1% of the teachers identified a lack of technical support as the main challenge, and therefore, continued professional development and institutional support are viewed as being acutely needed actually to reap the benefits of using digital media tools. Moreover, the large class size (89.4%) makes it quite difficult for the teacher to involve all students in teaching using digital tools. Besides, lack of teachers' ICT skills displayed 86.1%, which impacts the integration of technology into the classroom since the instructors would easily revert to traditional methods if they are not well trained. Teachers' attitudes also play a crucial role in the integration of digital tools, with 80.0% of respondents expressing resistance or hesitation toward adopting new technologies. Poor network connectivity and a lack of necessary gadgets further aggravate these problems, limiting technology incorporation into lessons. Put together, these findings point to a complex issue that has to be addressed through specific training, infrastructure development, and the instillation of positive attitudes toward technology, providing an enabling environment that facilitates teacher work and furthers student learning.

These findings were in line with the information obtained from the HOS whereby they cited teacher's negative attitude towards the use of digital tool, lack of technical support and poor internet connectivity as the major challenges encountered by teachers in their use of digital tools in English language instruction:

According to interviewee H:

Most of the teachers in our school are adamant to use digital tools as they have a negative attitude towards the use of digital tools in English. One of the reasons for this is because some teachers

have strong beliefs in certain pedagogical approaches and prefer to stick to the traditional methods they are used to. Some of the teachers also cite lack of technical know-how as some of the challenges that hinder effective utilization of digital tools in English language instruction. other issues cited by teaches include poor internet connectivity and the fact that digital tools are expensive to acquire.

The findings are in agreement to a study by Chang et.al (2019) that showed lack of necessary gadgets and knowledge to effectively integrate these tools in instruction as some of the reasons that hindered effective utilization of digital tools in English language instruction. Also, a study by Kibe and Waithaka (2021) reported teacher's lack of training and professional development opportunities as barriers to use of digital media in ECDE language instruction.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Conclusions

The objective of this study was to find out the difficulties faced while implementing technology-enhanced learning in English language teaching. Based on the research findings we can conclude that inadequate technical support, Teacher's ICT skills, Teachers attitude towards use of digital tools as well as large classes were among the main challenges to the use of digital tools in English language teaching and learning in the 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:

- I. The study recommends that public secondary schools in Maara Sub-county, Tharaka-Nithi County, Kenya prioritize the strategic integration of diverse and accessible digital tools in English language instruction. This can be achieved through the development and implementation of clear guidelines for the frequency and methods of digital tool use, supported by ongoing professional development for teachers. By fostering a supportive environment that encourages innovation and collaboration, schools can effectively harness the potential of digital tools to enhance English language instruction and prepare students for success in a digital-centric world.
- II. The study also recommends that secondary schools management should Identify and address challenges faced by teachers in integrating digital tools into English language instruction. This may involve providing targeted professional development opportunities, technical support, and access to updated resources. Establishing peer mentorship programs and collaborative learning communities can also foster a supportive environment for teachers to share experiences and strategies.

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