Journal of Pedagogy, Andragogy and Heutagogy in Academic Practice (JPAHAP)
ISSN: 2708-261X, *Vol 5. No.2 (2024) pp 91 - 101* http://uonjournals.uonbi.ac.ke/ojs/index.php/pedagogy

INFLUENCE OF TEACHERS' DIGITAL CONTENT EVALUATION SKILLS ON SECONDARY SCHOOL LEARNERS' ENGAGEMENT IN ENGLISH LESSONS IN MWALA SUB-COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

The growing integration of digital content in education has significantly influenced teaching and learning. As digital resources become increasingly accessible, the ability of teachers to critically assess and effectively utilize the resources is important in ensuring learner participation and improved learning outcomes. The purpose of this study was to explore the influence of teachers' digital content evaluation skills on learner engagement in English lessons within secondary schools in Mwala Sub-County, Kenya.

The study's objective was to assess how digital content evaluation skills influence learner engagement in English lessons. The study adopted purposive sampling to obtain and select schools equipped with necessary infrastructure such as electricity and availability of digital tools that enabled access and use of digital content and resources in teaching and learning. The study targeted a sample of 247 teachers from 80 secondary schools. The study employed a mixed method research design. Quantitative methods provided statistical evidence of the relationship between teachers' skills in evaluating digital content and the level of engagement among learners while the qualitative methods captured the teachers' practices such as accessing and selecting digital content and their perceived effect on learner engagement in English lessons. Data collected was analyzed with the aid of the SPSS software for both descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings revealed a statistically significant relationship between teachers' digital content evaluation skills and learner engagement in English lessons.

Digital content evaluation skills explained 44.2% of the variation in learner engagement ($R^2 = 0.442$, $\beta = 0.196$, $p = 0.012$). Supported by these findings, the study concluded that teachers digital content evaluation skills are integral for improving learner engagement in English lessons. In view of the findings, the study recommends that ongoing professional development programs should be implemented to improve teachers' digital content evaluation skills, focusing on advanced proficiency and effective integration into instructional practices.

Keywords: Digital content, Digital content evaluation skills, English lessons, Learner engagement

INTRODUCTION

In today's digital age, the integration of technology in teaching and learning has become increasingly important especially in enhancing the learning experiences and outcomes. Haleem et al. (2022) opine that integrating technology into education provides students with an engaging learning experience, allowing them to remain more interested in the subject. Digital content ranging from multimedia resources to interactive applications are now readily available on various digital platforms such as websites, blogs, online articles, open digital libraries, social media and multimedia sharing sites among others.

The pervasiveness of digital devices, platforms, applications and content demand that teachers develop relevant digital skills and competences requisite for selecting and utilizing the resources to enhance learning experiences (Mhlongo et al., 2023). The digital content evaluation skills entail a critical assessment of quality, credibility, accuracy, relevance and reliability of digital resources for instructional purposes. The teacher's ability to evaluate and utilize digital content effectively is paramount in enabling learner engagement in English lessons.

When teachers possess the ability to critically assess and select appropriate digital resources, they can tailor their teaching strategies to meet the diverse needs of their students (Eden et al., 2024). Among teachers of English, the importance of content evaluation skills cannot be underscored. This is because English is a strategic subject in some countries since it influences learning in other learning areas, hence the need to ensure its effective and efficient use in teaching and learning. For instance, English is the language of instruction in almost all subjects taught in Kenya right from pre-primary education level to higher education level. Besides its use for academic purposes, it is an official language of communication (Roy-Campbell, 2015).

Thus, the proficiency level in English for an individual goes a long way in enabling one to effectively communicate and perform related tasks in the world of work (Kotut, 2016). As such, teachers of English should use relevant, authentic and appropriate content and resources to aid learning and achievement of the desired learning outcomes in the subject. Such resources include the variety of content available in digital devices and online media. For instance, a simple search on the internet about figures of speech, a learning area in English and Literature in the Secondary School Kenyan curriculum, displays over 415 million results in images, videos, books, PDF, news and more in just 0.25 seconds.

In this case, a teacher of English requires some level of digital content evaluation skills to select the appropriate content among the millions of the search results, that which will enhance learner engagement during the teaching and learning sessions.

A study by Erwin & Mohammed (2022) revealed that a person with highly proficient digital skills is likely to become a productive member of the digital society they live in and is likely to evolve as technology does. Concurring with this study, Chama & Subaveerapandiyan (2023) posit that digital content evaluation skills empower teachers to navigate the complexities of online information and positions them to better impart necessary digital skills on learners to help them utilize the vast digital landscape responsibly. When teachers possess the ability to critically assess and select appropriate digital resources, they can tailor their teaching strategies to meet the diverse needs of their students. This is especially important in English lessons, where language development, comprehension, and critical thinking are core objectives.

The selection of high-quality digital content can make lessons more interactive, relevant, and relatable, thereby fostering a more engaging learning environment.

Learner engagement is considered a critical factor in educational success for its significant impact on learner academic achievement and overall satisfaction with the learning experience. According to Blumenfeld & Paris (2004), higher levels of learner engagement correlate with improved retention rates and better academic outcomes, thus making it a key focus for teachers who are aiming to enhance student success. In a study exploring the relationship among student engagement, academic motivation and academic performance among elementary school learners, Fuertes et al. (2023) asserts that engaging students in meaningful ways not only supports their cognitive development but also fosters a positive emotional connection to learning, which is necessary for sustained academic growth.

Learner engagement has been defined by various experts in different ways. In this particular study, learner engagement entails participation, interaction and enthusiasm of learners during the learning process. A teacher's ability to evaluate relevant content to use for instruction in the classroom is key in steering a learning experience to be engaging for learners. For example, identifying a thought provoking digital image as a focus for a writing activity is likely to have learners actively engaged in a lesson. Pham (2022) in a study on the effect of using technology to engage students in learning English in Kien Giang province, found out that there were high levels of interest in learning, when lecturers used Kahoot games and PowerPoint presentations during lessons. Similarly, Ahmadi (2018) while reviewing literature on the use of technology in English language learning, established that the appropriate use of technology can make learning more engaging and meaningful for learners, while

facilitating self-paced learning, high teacher-student interaction and fostering high motivation among learners. Ghavifekr & Rosdy (2015) acknowledge that integrating technology enhances learners' learning experiences with a positive impact on classroom management and learner engagement. However, while numerous studies have focused primarily on the integration of technology generally in teaching and learning, they have not explored the effect of particular digital skills, such as the digital content evaluation skills on learner engagement. This study sought to assess how digital content evaluation skills influence learner engagement in English lessons in Secondary Schools in Mwala sub county, Kenya.

English is a crucial subject in the Kenyan secondary education curriculum. It equips learners with knowledge and skills to effectively communicate and handle various academic tasks as well as the work world. A mastery in the English language is likely to make one gain social, academic and professional benefits. Despite its importance, the test scores in the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (K.C.S.E) in English for the past five years in Mwala sub county as shown in table 1, have indicated dismal performance.

Education stakeholders have deliberated on the use of innovative strategies in teaching English such as the integration of digital content and resources in the teaching process. While research outputs from other counties have reported that the use of digital content has improved the teaching and learning experiences of English mainly through making learning interactive and engaging, (Kotut, 2016; Muriungi & Mbui, 2015; Mwangi, 2022; 2017; Wandera, 2012) studies have not investigated how teachers' digital skills influence learner engagement in English lessons. It is based on this fundamental criterion that this study aims to explore the influence of teachers' digital content evaluation skills on learner engagement in English lessons in the context of Mwala sub county whose English performance at KCSE has been, in the last few years, below par as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education Examination performance of English in Mwala sub county from 2019 – 2023.

Year	**2019**	**2020**	**2021**	**2022**	**2023**
Mean score	4.632	4.352	4.260	4.646	3.751

Source: Mwala Sub County Education Office (2023)

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study was to explore the influence of teachers' digital content evaluation skills on learner engagement in English lessons within secondary schools in Mwala Sub-County, Kenya. The study's objective was to assess how digital content evaluation skills influence learner engagement in English lessons.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted the mixed method research design to assess the influence of teachers' digital content evaluation skills on learner engagement in English lessons in Secondary Schools in Mwala Sub County, Kenya.

This research design was adopted based on Dawadi et al. (2021) findings that the mixed method research design allows a researcher to have a pluralistic stance of gathering all sorts of data to best answer the research questions. The study's target population was 247 teachers from 80 secondary schools in Mwala sub county, Kenya.

The qualitative methods were used to capture insights on learner engagement during English lessons while the quantitative methods were employed to quantify the influence of the teachers' digital skills on various tasks that enhanced learner engagement in English lessons. Classroom observations were conducted to determine learner participation levels in English lesson tasks and activities instructed and facilitated by the teachers, learner access to digital tools and use of digital content and resources to complete lesson tasks. Additionally, the classroom observation also enabled the determination of a teachers' selection and use of appropriate digital content aligned to the curriculum and the learning outcomes. The Mobile Teacher's Sense of Efficacy Scale was used to capture the teachers' level of comfort with various classroom tasks when integrating technology-based resources and content in the learning process. The interviews captured data on the teachers' perception on their proficiency and skill in digital content evaluation and its influence on their instructional practice. Regression analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between teachers' digital content evaluation skills and learner engagement in English lessons.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The teachers' responses on their opinions about their digital content evaluation skills and learner engagement are as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Digital Content Evaluation Skills and Learner Engagement

Statement/ Question	Nothing (%)	Very Little (%)	Some Influence (%)	Quite a Bit (%)	A Great Deal (%)	Mean	Standard Deviation
How much can you do to get through to the most difficult students?	1.60	10.50	25.00	30.60	32.30	3.8 15	1.054
How much can you do to control disruptive behavior during collaborative learning activities?	7.30	7.30	23.40	28.20	33.90	3.7 42	1.209
How much can you use alternative (technology based) resources to motivate students who show low interest in school work?	4.90	6.60	21.30	27.90	39.30	3.9 02	1.146
How much can you gauge student comprehension of content delivered using technology resources?	7.30	7.30	19.40	26.60	39.50	3.8 39	1.232
How much can you use alternative (technology-based) resources to get through to the most difficult students?	6.40	4.80	25.60	28.80	34.40	3.8 00	1.157

How well can you respond to difficult questions from your students?	4.80	8.00	12.80	37.60	36.80	3.936	1.120
How much can you do to adjust your lessons to the proper level for individual students?	8.10	9.70	17.70	29.80	34.70	3.734	1.257
To what extent can you craft good collaborative learning activities for your students?	4.80	8.10	16.90	33.90	36.30	3.887	1.135
How well can you provide appropriate challenges for very capable students?	5.60	8.80	21.60	22.40	41.60	3.856	1.216

Table 2 shows that most of the teachers (62.9%) reported that they could do "Quite A bit" or "A great Deal," resulting in a mean score of 3.815 with a standard deviation of 1.054.

This suggests that many teachers felt confident in their ability to reach challenging students through digital resources, though some variability in responses indicates differing levels of confidence among the teachers. Regarding controlling disruptive behavior during collaborative learning activities, 62.1% of the teachers indicated that they could do "Quite A bit" or "A great Deal," with a mean score of 3.742 and a standard deviation of 1.209.

This finding implies that while many teachers felt capable of managing classroom behavior during technology-enhanced activities, there was still some uncertainty, as reflected by the relatively higher standard deviation. Teachers also expressed a strong ability to use alternative (technology-based) resources to motivate students who showed low interest in schoolwork. Approximately 67.2% of respondents felt they could do "Quite A bit" or "A great Deal," resulting in a mean score of 3.902 and a standard deviation of 1.146. This high level of confidence suggests that teachers believed digital tools could effectively re-engage students who might otherwise be disinterested in traditional learning methods. The ability to gauge student comprehension of content delivered using technology resources was another area where teachers felt confident. With a mean score of 3.839 and a standard deviation of 1.232, 66.1% of teachers believed they could effectively assess student understanding when using digital tools.

This indicates a positive perception of the effectiveness of digital content evaluation skills in monitoring and enhancing student comprehension. When asked about their ability to use technology-based resources to reach the most difficult students, 63.2% of teachers responded positively, resulting in a mean score of 3.800 and a standard deviation of 1.157. This suggests that teachers viewed digital resources as valuable tools for overcoming challenges in reaching certain students, although the standard deviation again points to some variability in comfort levels.

The teachers also demonstrated confidence in responding to difficult questions from students, with 74.4% indicating they could do "Quite A bit" or "A great Deal," leading to a mean score of 3.936 and a standard deviation of 1.120. This reflects a strong belief in their ability to handle challenging inquiries, potentially bolstered by their digital content evaluation skills. Adjusting lessons to suit individual student needs was another area where teachers felt moderately confident, with a mean score of 3.734 and a standard deviation of 1.257.

Although 64.5% of teachers felt they could make these adjustments "Quite A bit" or "A great Deal," the higher standard deviation suggests that some teachers still faced challenges in personalizing instruction. Teachers' ability to craft good collaborative learning activities also received positive responses, with 70.2% of teachers indicating they could do so "Quite A bit" or "A great Deal." The mean score of 3.887 and a standard deviation of 1.135 reflect a generally high level of comfort with designing collaborative activities that integrate digital tools. Finally, when asked about their ability to provide appropriate challenges for very capable students, 64.0% of teachers felt confident, resulting in a mean score of 3.856 and a standard deviation of 1.216.

This suggests that while teachers felt equipped to challenge high-performing students, there was still some variation in their perceived ability to do so effectively. These results indicated that teachers in Mwala Sub County generally feel capable of using digital content evaluation skills to enhance learner engagement in English lessons. The relatively high mean scores across all the statements suggests a positive attitude toward integrating digital resources into teaching practices. However, the varying standard deviations indicated that while many teachers were confident in their abilities, others may require further support and training to fully realize the potential of digital tools in engaging learners.

These descriptive statistics results concur with the observations by Xie et al. (2017) that training teachers to evaluate digital content can be an effective professional development approach to improve teacher's capacity in learning technology integration. However, the buck should not stop at the acquisition of digital content evaluation skills by teachers, but rather at the exploration of the impact of the digital content evaluation skills in enhancing teaching effectiveness, promoting learner engagement and facilitating meaningful learning experiences. To establish how teachers' digital content evaluation skills influence learner engagement in English lessons in secondary schools in Mwala sub-county Kenya, regression analysis was conducted as shown in table 3, table 4 and table 5.

Table 3

Model Summary of the Regression Analysis

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.665[a]	.442	.438	.51593

a Predictors: (Constant), Digital Content Evaluation Skills

Table 3 shows a coefficient of determination (R squared) of 0.442, and the adjusted R squared is 0.438. This implies that teachers' digital content evaluation skills explain 44.2% of the variation in learner engagement in English lessons in secondary schools in Mwala Sub-county, Kenya. The adjusted R squared of 0.438 indicates that, excluding the constant variable, teachers' digital content evaluation skills explain 43.8% of the variation in learner engagement. The remaining 56.2% of the variation in the dependent variable can be attributed to other factors not included in the current model.

Table 4 shows the analysis of variance results. Analysis of Variance was used to determine the overall significance of the regression model. It helped to compare the model's explained variance to the unexplained variance, assessing whether the digital content evaluation skills had a statistically significant impact on learner engagement.

Table 4

Analysis of Variance Results on the Digital Content Evaluation Skills

Model		**Sum of Squares**	**Df**	**Mean Square**	**F**	**Sig.**
1	Regression	31.400	1	31.400	117.961	.000[b]
	Residual	39.662	239	.166	189.157	
	Total	71.062	240			

b. Predictors: (Constant), Digital Content Evaluation Skills

The results in Table 4 indicate that the model was statistically significant in explaining the influence of teachers' digital content evaluation skills on learner engagement in English lessons in secondary schools in Mwala Sub-county, Kenya, as evidenced by a p-value of 0.000, which is less than the threshold of 0.05.

Table 5

Regression coefficient results

Model		***Unstandardized Coefficients***		***Standardized Coefficient***	***T***	***Sig.***
		B	**Std. Error**	**Beta**		
1	(Constant)	0.677[a]	0.253		2.672	0.009
	Digital Content Evaluation Skills	0.196	0.077	0.221	2.547	0.012

a. Dependent Variable: Learner Engagement

The regression model therefore became;

Y = 0.677 + 0.196X

Where:

Y = Learner Engagement

X= Digital Content Evaluation Skills

Table 5 shows that digital content evaluation skills had a positive and significant effect on learner engagement in English lessons in secondary schools in Mwala Sub-county, Kenya ($\beta = 0.196$, $p = 0.012 < 0.05$). This is supported by a calculated t-statistic of 2.547, which is greater than the critical t-statistic of 1.96, further confirming the significance. The result implies that a unit improvement in digital content evaluation skills among teachers is expected to lead to an increase in learner engagement by 0.196 units. This suggests that teachers' proficiency in evaluating digital content significantly enhances learner engagement in the classroom.

These findings are consistent with the findings of a study by Theodorio, (2024) which underscored the vital role that provision of technical support such as furnishing teachers with digital tools and resources and modeling their use for instruction play in equipping teachers with relevant digital evaluation skills.

In addition, the respondents were asked to provide instances or examples where they used their digital content evaluation skills in lesson preparation and implementation.

One respondent said,

> *"One example that stands out for me is when I used my digital content evaluation skills to prepare a lesson on literature about the play, Parliament of Owls. I selected a combination of video analyses, interactive quizzes, and digital copies of the texts, all of which I carefully evaluated to ensure they were accurate and engaging. I was able to integrate these resources seamlessly into the lesson, which not only made the content more accessible to the students but also encouraged them to explore the materials further on their own. This use of digital content really brought the lesson to life and made it more interactive."*

Another respondent indicated that:

> *"There was an instance where I used my digital content evaluation skills to create a flipped classroom experience. I evaluated and selected a song that had relevant thematic concerns, for students to engage with at home. In class, I then facilitated discussions and activities based on that song, which allowed for deeper exploration of the themes in the song. This approach not only made the lesson more dynamic but also helped students take more ownership of their learning."*

The study established that most teachers in Secondary Schools in Mwala sub county generally felt confident in their ability to use digital content evaluation skills to enhance learner engagement in English lessons. The findings demonstrated that teachers' digital content evaluation skills significantly influence learner engagement in English lessons. Teachers with good to excellent digital content evaluation skills exude confidence in using digital content during lessons, elect the appropriate pedagogical approach in order to seamlessly integrate technology in teaching and learning of English, motivate and actively engagement learners during the lesson.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that teachers' digital content evaluation skills play a critical role in engaging learners, particularly in enabling active engagement in lesson tasks and motivating learners who may be disinterested in traditional learning methods. The positive relationship between these skills and learner engagement suggests that enhancing teachers' ability to effectively evaluate and use digital content has the ability to lead to more interactive and engaging learning experiences, ultimately improving learning outcomes and eliciting interest in learning of English.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommended the need to incorporate digital content evaluation training in teacher induction, retooling and ongoing professional development programs. The trainings should not only cover the technical aspects of using digital tools but also critically explore the importance of content evaluation skills in alignment with the curriculum. The study also recommended the allocation of sufficient technological infrastructure in schools to allow for access to digital content and utilization of the content frequently for learning.

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