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### The Role of Media in Teaching and Learning of Reading and Writing Skills in Dodoma Early Primary Schools, Tanzania

Edna G. Maeda & Zawadi Richard Juma Education Department, St John's University of Tanzania Email: <u>ednamaeda2020@gmail.com</u>

Abstract: The Tanzanian government has enacted policies aimed at ensuring that children attain a level of proficiency in reading, writing, and arithmetic by the time they finish either their second or third grade. Nevertheless, empirical research suggests that a section of children is completing the obligatory seven-years' duration of primary education without attaining essential proficiencies in reading and writing. However, it has been noted that the utilization of digital technology has a positive impact on the advancement of reading and writing abilities. This study examined the impact of digital media on the educational practices of lower-grade classrooms, specifically in relation to the enhancement of reading and writing abilities. The research encompassed a total of 36 individuals, comprising 12 teachers in the early grades, 6 school administrators, and 6 professionals specializing in information technology. These respondents were selected from 6 primary schools located in Dodoma City. The investigation focused on 3 government-run primary schools and 3 nongovernmental primary schools. The research included a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches within a contemporaneous triangulation methodology. The study's primary findings indicate that digital media is frequently employed for educational objectives. Students are not just utilizing technology, but also developing literacy competencies, and this early integration can be perceived as advantageous for further scholarly pursuits. Educators commonly hold the belief that various multimedia tools, including cartoons, instructional videos, digital media such as projectors, and online platforms like as YouTube, Twinkly, Akili, and Pinterest, have the potential to augment students' literacy abilities. This study proposes that educational institutions should prioritize the selection of digital resources that are specifically developed for educational purposes, in accordance with the curriculum, incorporate diverse media formats, and cater to various learning styles.

Keywords: Digital media, Literacy Development, Early grade pupils, Reading, Writing.

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### **1. Introduction**

Education in the pre-20th century era was predominantly characterized by conventional classroom teaching approaches that heavily depended on printed textbooks, chalkboards, and direct interpersonal instruction. Reading and writing skills were imparted by educators through the utilization of handwritten activities and printed resources. Dodiya (2019) asserts that throughout the early 20th century, there was an initial endeavour to integrate multimedia components into the educational environment aided by the advancement in information technology. Nevertheless, the resources constraint restricted scope and wider coverage. According to Akbar (2016), the widespread adoption of personal computers in households and educational institutions during the 1980s and 1990s had a crucial role in establishing the groundwork for the integration of digital media. According to Cote (2018), the advent of early educational software and CD-ROMs facilitated the involvement of students in interactive learning experiences. In the field of education, the availability of learning opportunities is rising due to the emergence of various technologies. During the latter part of the 1990s and the early years of the 2000s, the internet brought about a significant transformation in terms of facilitating access to digital information. The integration of educational websites, e-books, and online resources emerged as supplementary tools to complement conventional classroom materials. During this era, there was a notable rise in the development of instructional software and multimedia CD-ROMs that were designed to cater to certain literacy skills. According to Kaynar (2020), the COVID-19 epidemic expedited the integration of digital media into the field of education, as remote and hybrid learning became the prevailing methods of instruction. Educational institutions and educators promptly adopted online platforms, video conferencing tools, and digital resources in order to maintain educational continuity (Muftah, 2022). The Tanzanian government created an ICT Policy for Education in 2007, acknowledging the significant contribution of information and communication technology (ICT) in enhancing the provision, results, and influence of education. The Tanzanian government acknowledges the potential of information and communication technology (ICT) in enhancing the education sector, as well as improving teaching and learning through the integration of new skills and pedagogical approaches that align with the demands of the 21st century. There is a need to transition from a significant reliance on textual resources for educational instruction and acquisition of knowledge to a more inclusive approach that incorporates Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for broader accessibility. The use of digital media into the instruction of reading and writing abilities in lower-grade classrooms in Tanzania is a component of the wider endeavour to enhance the quality of education within the nation. According to Mmasa (2016), the Tanzanian government has implemented measures aimed at ensuring that kids achieve proficiency in reading, writing, and mathematics by the completion of their second or third grade. Hence, given its significance, the objective of this paper is to investigate the role of digital media in fostering literacy skills among primary school students in Dodoma City, Tanzania.

### **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

As stated by Mmasa (2016), the Tanzanian government has enacted policies with the objective of guaranteeing that children attain advanced levels of competence in reading, writing, and mathematics by the time they reach the second or third grade. Implemented by the Tanzanian government, these interventions aim to improve learning outcomes and literacy instruction. In essence, the present efforts are predominantly concentrated on acquiring traditional literacy abilities, which include the capability to understand and generate written materials. Furthermore, apart from the aforementioned strategies, it is noteworthy to mention that Tanzania has encountered a substantial obstacle in the form of insufficient literacy proficiency (Semali, 2014). Uwezo (2019) reports that a proportion of children complete the compulsory primary education of seven years without attaining rudimentary literacy abilities.

Notwithstanding various interventions that have been executed, illiteracy remains a pervasive problem within society (Literacy and Numeracy Education Support LANES, 2021). A multitude of academic inquiries have been conducted to scrutinize literacy abilities, yielding a variety of recommendations. For example, Senkande, Mugyenyi, and Achola (2022) and TWAWEZA (2019) argue that educators ought to possess specialized education in the domain of literacy instruction. As stated by John (2017), the integration of multimedia into literacy instruction has the potential to significantly aid in the elimination of inadequate literacy abilities in primary educational environments. Limited research has been conducted in Tanzania regarding the utilization of digital media as an instructional tool to improve reading and writing abilities. Hence, the present research investigated the impact of digital media on the reading and writing proficiency of young students in the first grade of Dodoma City, Tanzania.

### 2. Literature Review

The utilization of digital media by teachers in the facilitation of reading and writing skills has exhibited noteworthy impact as observed by various scholarly works. Raja (2018) conducted a study that, aimed to assess the impact of modern technologies on the domain of education. The study reached the conclusion that the importance of technology within educational institutions cannot be overlooked. Undoubtedly, the use of computers within the realm of education has greatly eased the transfer of knowledge by teachers and the acquisition of knowledge by students. The integration of technology has significantly improved the educational process, resulting in a more enjoyable and engaging learning environment. Digital media plays a crucial role in the spread and exploitation of digital technology for processing various forms of information within online environments and their associated applications.

In a recent study, Kadyrov (2020) investigated the importance of media education and social media in the context of modern pedagogy. The examination conducted by the researcher demonstrated that the incorporation of media within the educational environment is a successful strategy for promoting student engagement and improving the overall learning experience. Furthermore, the research findings indicated that media play a significant role as effective teaching tools, enhancing students' understanding through the provision of concrete visual representations of the content being taught. The study observed that, interactive media, such as smart boards, enable the manipulation of things on a digital display, providing students with the opportunity to deepen their comprehension through visual representation. Numerous students hold the perception that media serves as interactive instructional instruments that augment the process of learning by offering amusement and alleviating tedium. Furthermore, the incorporation of media into instructional environments has been shown to actively engage students, augment their capacity to remember information, cultivate their curiosity in the topic at hand, and illustrate the practicality of diverse concepts.

Crook's (2018) study aimed to investigate the influence of computers on the collaborative aspects of the learning process. The findings of the study illustrate that the incorporation of computers inside educational environments vields a multitude of consequences. Students have the chance to engage in instructional activities that facilitate their learning process. Furthermore, the author employs an original standpoint by analysing the potential of developing technologies to enhance, rather than lessen, the social elements of the This method additionally educational process. investigates the potential of these technologies to enhance the effectiveness of educators in the classroom environment. The author argues that computers possess the potential to establish a favourable environment for fruitful collaboration and enhance the social dimension of educational encounters.

In 2014, an experimental study was undertaken in Bagamoyo District by the research team of the Grapho Game (GG) at Sebastian Kolowa Memorial University in Tanzania. The objective of this study was to assess the efficacy of GG in enhancing the development of essential skills required for achieving reading competency. The preliminary data analyses of the pilot project suggested that the inclusion of phonics-based literacy instruction training for teachers is of utmost importance and has a significant effect on the acquisition of knowledge. However, the results indicate that there is a more significant improvement in outcomes when learners are provided with guided guidance (GG) as well.

Cheung (2021) examined the efficacy of incorporating an educational game into the learning process for first- and second-grade students, with the aim of enhancing their academic progress. The author proposed that the incorporation of educational video games can be a beneficial tool for enhancing learning in an academic environment. Students possess the capacity to engage in educational games that assist the learning of knowledge and skills. Moreover, there is a wide array of educational games accessible, which effectively engage the interest of youngsters to the extent that they are unaware of the fact that they are acquiring knowledge during their participation in playful activities. Therefore, if the software incorporated into the games contains instructional content, it has the potential to enhance the literacy skills of children in the absence of a teacher.

Nevertheless, the review of various literature undertaken by the current researcher has demonstrated that the role of digital media on the alleviation of poor literacy rates among children in Tanzania, particularly in Dodoma City, remains unknown. Hence, this research delved into an extensive examination of the role of digital media on the instruction and acquisition of reading skills within the initial years of education among children in elementary schools located in Dodoma, Tanzania.

### 3. Methodology

The research design utilized in this study was a mixedmethods approach. The research employed a concurrent triangulation approach to examine the impact of digital media on the advancement of reading skills among young students in Dodoma City, Tanzania. This study incorporates both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies to investigate the same subject matter.

The research encompassed six elementary schools located in Dodoma City, consisting of three governmentrun schools and three non-government schools. Stratified sampling was implemented to distinguish between public and non-public schools, while purposive sampling was utilized to identify schools that possessed prior experience in utilizing digital media for instructing earlygrade kids. A convenience selection method was employed to recruit a sample of 24 early-grade teachers for the study. Four teachers were selected from each school based on their availability and willingness to participate. The researchers employed purposive sampling in order to specifically pick head teachers, as they were deemed to be dependable and knowledgeable sources of information pertinent to the study.

The data gathering methods employed in this study encompassed the use of questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observations. The methodology employed in this study encompassed the practice of classroom observation, wherein the researcher actively and directly observed the manner in which educators utilized digital media, as well as the level of student engagement with this media. A set of questionnaires was distributed to a sample of 24 instructors who work with students in the early grades. This method facilitated the collection of data from a sizable population within a limited timeframe. A series of semi-structured interviews were carried out with a sample of 5 information technology professionals employed in schools, as well as 6 head teachers. The approach presented herein offers a comprehensive analysis of their viewpoints regarding the impact of digital media on the advancement of reading skills.

The process of data analysis entails the systematic arrangement and categorization of the gathered data in order to derive meaningful insights and make informed inferences. The replies obtained from the questionnaire were carefully examined, revised, and assigned codes. Subsequently, the data was imported into the statistical program, namely SPSS Version 22. The findings were conveyed through the utilization of tables and figures. The interview data was transcribed from audio recordings and subsequently condensed into written documents. The transcribed material was analysed to identify themes and sub-themes that shed light on the use of digital media in elementary schools in Dodoma City, Tanzania. The data obtained from the observations conducted in the classroom were subjected to manual analysis subsequent to a thorough examination of the researcher's checklist.

## The use of digital media in teaching and learning of reading and writing skills

The respondents provided their responses pertaining to the degree to which digital media is employed in the instruction and learning of reading and writing abilities. The survey utilized a Likert scale in order to collect individuals' perspectives regarding the incorporation of digital media into educational environments. Batterton (2017) endorsed the Likert scale having stated that it is a suitable method utilized for the assessment of attitudes.

#### **Definition of Likert scale items**

In this study, the Likert scale is defined as indicated in the table below:

### 4. Results and Discussion

Likert item	Strongly Disagree (SD)	Disagree (D)	Agree (A)	Strongly Agree (SA)
Range	<1.5	1.5-2.4	2.5-3.4	3.5-4

The results were categorized into three distinct groups. Each area encompasses a set of questions pertaining to the utilization of digital media, the influence of technology on reading and writing proficiencies, and the application of media in the context of literacy teaching. The forementioned rating scale is frequently employed as a means for participants to express their degree of agreement or disagreement with a predetermined set of items. Additionally, additional data was gathered via interviews and observations conducted within the classroom setting.

Question	SA	Α	D	SD	Average	
Pupils use digital media to watch on-screen content.	8	11	2	1	3.2	
Pupils use digital media to complete on-screen exercises.	5	16	1		3.2	
Pupils are dependent on technology for their reading and writing lessons and homework in early grade.	5	12	2	3	2.9	
I encourage my students to maintain their reading and writing skills while integrating current technologies into their classrooms.	9	12	1		3.4	
The integration of modern technologies has impacted students' reading and writing skills.	9	12	1		3.4	
Cartoons inspire my pupils reading and writing and pupils literacy skills.	10	11		1	3.4	
Video games inspire my pupils to read	14	6	1	1	3.5	

Table 1: The impact of digital media on students reading and writing

#### Source: Field Data

# 4.1 Use of digital media by pupils to complete on-screen content

Based on findings in Table 1, a significant proportion of teachers, specifically 86.4% (19 out of 22), concur with the assertion that pupils employ digital media platforms for the purpose of consuming on-screen materials. This finding indicates that a significant proportion of teachers hold the belief that children utilize digital devices for the purpose of consuming on-screen information. However, it is worth noting that a minority of teachers, namely 2 out of the total sample size of 22, do not concur with this assertion. Additionally, a conducted interview with a teacher from school E revealed:

... "Pupils become much more interested on acquiring learning information from the screen than seeing the teacher alone (Teacher, School E, 15th May 2023)

This suggests that digital media has the potential to be exploited as an effective educational tool in engaging pupils in the tasks connected to reading. The present study provides support for the conclusions drawn by Sung et al. (2016), who found that the utilization of digital media had a beneficial impact on both learning outcomes and academic performance. Furthermore, the results suggest that teachers possess the ability to exert an impact on these characteristics in order to augment the proficiency of pupils in multimedia literacy, a skill set that is progressively crucial in the era of digital technology. If there is a slight disagreement with the assertion, it may be necessary to implement teachers' training and professional development programs to guarantee that teachers have the necessary skills and confidence to properly utilize digital media for literacy education.

## 4.2 Use of digital media by pupils to complete on-screen exercises

According to the results summarized in Table 1, a significant proportion of teachers, namely 17 out of 22, concur that pupils in the early grades heavily depend on technology for their reading, writing instruction, and completion of assignments. This finding indicates that a significant proportion of teachers have recognized the necessity of digital media usage among pupils for these specific assignments. The prevalence of the belief among teachers that primary school pupils heavily depend on technology for tasks such as reading, writing, and

completing assignments underscores the growing significance of technology in the realm of education. This implies that technology has emerged as a noteworthy component of the educational process, especially among young learners. This discovery suggests that young pupils are not merely utilizing technology, but also acquiring fundamental digital competencies at an early stage of their educational journey. Engaging in this practice has the potential to vield advantageous outcomes for individuals in terms of their future academic and career achievements. In a similar vein, Mahlknecht (2022) examines the utilization of digital media in the context of the COVID-19 epidemic and observes that its adoption has resulted to notable transformations in the organization of educational activities.

### **4.3 Integration of current technologies** in reading and writing skills' activities

The findings of this study reveal that, a significant proportion of teachers (86.4%) concur with the notion of promoting and nurturing their students' reading and writing abilities, while simultaneously integrating contemporary technologies within the educational setting. Among the sample of 22 teachers, it is worth noting that just one teacher disagrees with the aforementioned remark. This finding suggests that the majority of teachers are in favour of integrating conventional forms of teaching media with contemporary technology as a means of enhancing literacy instruction. According to Imran (2023), the integration of traditional literacy with modern technology yields favourable outcomes in the realm of education, enhancing both the teaching and learning experiences. According to the findings of interviews conducted with a sample of six teachers, a majority of five teachers reported the use of various instructional systems to facilitate the teaching of spelling, phonetics, and reading skills. One of the teachers expressed the following viewpoint:

> ..." I always utilize programs such as YouTube to teach my pupils vocabularies and Twinkly educative materials which help to enhance their literacy skills. (Teacher, School D, 10<sup>th</sup> May 2023).

Another teacher declared that,

"In contemporary educational settings, digital media such as P interest, Akili and I, fictional games and cartoons have emerged as prevalent tools employed in classrooms. These resources are utilized to enhance the reading and writing skills of students". (Teacher, School E, 11<sup>th</sup> May 2023).

Additionally, a teacher from school E said,

"The utilization of projectors to display tangible objects has proven to be quite beneficial in facilitating the academic progress of students with slower learning abilities. Furthermore, the errors in intonation can be readily detected and rectified through the utilization of these technological advancements". (Teacher, School E 15th May 2023).

The results described above indicate that there is a wide variety of digital media apps that early primary teachers might employ in education to improve reading skills. The findings suggest that the commonly utilized software applications include Twinkly, Youtube, Akili, and Me and P Interest. The results of this study are consistent with assertion that free applications might serve as a valuable resource for showcasing the incorporation of block coding in literacy education.

Similarly, a comparative investigation carried out in Latin America aimed to analyse the perspectives of elementary education instructors concerning the opportunities and obstacles stemming from the pandemic in relation to media education (Simamora, 2020). The teachers who took part in the study placed significant emphasis on the prioritization of fostering students' capacity to engage in critical analysis of media and to appreciate its role in distributing information about society (Simamora, 2020). The acquisition of these abilities was considered crucial for students to proficiently leverage the opportunities afforded by media platforms.

# 4.4 Cartoons inspiration to pupils for reading and writing skills

Based on the findings presented and presented in Table 1, it can be observed that a significant proportion of teachers (21 out of 22) concur that cartoons have a positive impact on the development of their pupils' reading, writing, and overall literacy abilities. This finding suggests that a significant proportion of teachers hold the belief that cartoons are perceived as a valuable resource for fostering the development of reading, writing, and literacy abilities in pupils. According to Ogier (2018), the reception of cartoons as a learning tool by both teachers and pupils was predominantly positive. Cartoons serve as a significant medium for fostering pupils' involvement because of the strong affinity young children have for them (Afrilyasanti, & Basthomi, 2023).

Cartoons can have a substantial impact on the enhancement of reading and writing abilities, particularly among youngsters and adolescents. Nevertheless, it is imperative to maintain a harmonious equilibrium between the consumption of cartoons and engaging in other literary pursuits, such as reading and writing, in order to foster a comprehensive development of these aptitudes. According to Zarifa (2021), integrating activities like reading books, writing essays, and participating in creative writing exercises with the act of watching cartoons might optimize the advantages derived from both visual and textual learning encounters. Hence, it is imperative to use this approach within the realm of education in order to captivate pupils' interest and ignite their passion for literacy acquisition.

# 4.5 Video games' Inspiration to Pupils' Literacy Acquisition

Based on the findings presented in Table 1, it can be observed that majority of teachers (90.9%) expressed agreement with the notion that instructional video games had a positive impact on their students' development of literacy skills. This observation indicates a favourable indication and implies that teachers possess a firm conviction regarding the beneficial influence of these games on the acquisition of literacy abilities, and recognize the worth of utilizing these games as an educational instrument. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that a minority of individuals, namely two out of the total of twenty-two participants, have dissenting viewpoints. These opposing perspectives consist of one teacher who falls under the "disagree" category and another teacher who falls under the more extreme "strongly disagree" category. Furthermore, an instructor expressed the following viewpoint:

> "In my classroom observations, I have noticed that students who lack interest in writing might be encouraged and inspired to participate in writing assignments by utilizing games such as *P-Interest*". (Teacher, Private School A, 11<sup>th</sup> May 2023).

This suggests that the results of the study provide evidence to support the notion that digital media has the potential to positively impact the development of reading skills in pupils. Hence, teachers who recognize the educational merits of video games have the potential to be offered guidance and training to facilitate the smooth incorporation of these games within their instructional settings.

### 4.6 Use of digital media for children with difficulties in reading and writing

An interview conducted with an IT specialist affiliated with one of the schools involved in the investigation has shown that digital media has the ability to assist teachers in identifying students who may be experiencing challenges in reading and writing. This assertion is also supported by one of the teachers engaged, who stated that: "Through the utilization of a projector as a medium for storytelling and visual presentation, we successfully identified a child exhibiting symptoms of hearing impairment. Before utilizing this gadget, the students in question were unable to respond to any question posed by the teacher regarding the orally read story. Nevertheless, subsequent to utilizing the projector, this pupil showed the capacity to respond to the question posed with precision, having understood the subject of the narrative through the visual aids presented by the projector".' (IT teacher, School ..., 16<sup>th</sup> May 2023).

This finding demonstrated that the utilization of digital media has a significant influence on teachers, particularly in the creation of various instructional resources. However, certain challenges were encountered by some teachers in the implementation of digital media.

### **5.** Conclusion and Recommendations

### 5.1 Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, digital media are commonly used for education purposes. Pupils are not only using technology but also acquiring reading and writing skills and this early adoption can be seen as beneficial for future academic achievements. Teachers generally believe that cartoons and instructional video games have a positive impact on pupils' literacy skills. Additionally, digital media such as projectors and other platforms such as YouTube, Twinkly, Akili, Pinterest and educational games enhance pupils' literacy skills.

### **5.2 Recommendations**

The study recommends that school administration must choose more digital resources that are designed for educational purposes and align with the curriculum and utilize a variety of media, including videos, audio, interactive simulations, and graphics, to appeal to different learning styles. This can make the learning experience more engaging and inclusive.

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