

The Role of Instructional Media in Refining Pupils' English Language Proficiency: A Case of Wete District in Zanzibar, Tanzania

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Abstract

This study examines how effective use of instructional media contributes to refining primary school pupils' English language proficiency in Wete District, Zanzibar, Tanzania. It explores how English teachers utilise instructional materials to meet learning objectives, focusing on primary levels where integrating pictures and real objects is essential for building vocabulary and communicative competence. A convergent mixed-methods design was employed, combining qualitative and quantitative data collection, presentation, and analysis, with results compared to conclude. The target population comprised primary school English teachers, teacher-college tutors, and subject inspectors. Systematic random sampling divided the district's 28 primary schools into seven groups of four, selecting the first and fourth school from each group, yielding 14 schools (50% of the total). The same technique was used to select teacher respondents, except where schools had too few English teachers, in which case purposive sampling was applied. Tutors and inspectors were purposively selected due to their limited numbers. Data were gathered through teacher interviews, non-participant observation of 14 English lessons, and interviews with tutors and inspectors. Findings show that pupils' active participation and interaction with instructional materials signalled improved language proficiency. Effective use of instructional media stimulated curiosity, engagement, and learner-centred activities, leading to measurable gains in proficiency. The study recommends regular in-service training for primary English teachers to strengthen their capacity to use instructional materials effectively as an integral part of quality teaching.

Key terms: Cognitive load theory, cognitive theory of multimedia learning, instructional media, language proficiency, language skills.

INTRODUCTION

The role of instructional media in engaging learners and achieving effective teaching and learning is perceived positively in many scholarly works. The instructional media's evolution has simplified the teaching-learning process and improved the communication between teachers and learners (Lusiyan & Anindya, 2021). The world of teaching-learning has witnessed the process of teaching-learning entering the era of the industrial revolution, where the space for information and communication is massively open, requiring teaching staff to be able to effectively use instructional media, both conventional and digital instructional media (Ramzi & Asyari, 2023). Language proficiency involves being fluent and accurate in using such a language. In order to be fluent, proficient and accurate in a language like English, one ought to practice the four language skills-LSRW since English is a skill-oriented subject (Rao, 2016). The four important skills of language learning, listening, speaking, reading and writing provide the right key to success. Among these skills, the reading skill is the one which has been found to be much emphasised in terms of employing a number of instructional practices rather than instructional media in some regions of Tanzania (Ssekamanya, 2022).

English language proficiency among learners can be simply assessed through their demonstration of abilities to perform a variety of tasks based on various language skills. The influence and role of instructional media have been a topic under discussion in many Tanzanian scholarly works. The findings in some scholarly works reveal that using appropriate and modern instructional media in teaching significantly influences the success of students' understanding and learning. (Nzilano & Machumu, 2025). This gives an overview of how important it is for teachers to be knowledgeable enough about how to make an appropriate choice of instructional media for better comprehension of subject matter among learners.

The current trends in Zanzibar show that underperformance in science subjects among secondary school students is associated with inappropriate use of instructional media (Abdallah, 2017). In Wete district particularly, a study on teachers' pedagogical attitude towards digital lesson contents was conducted, and the findings reveal that the

overall teachers' attitudes towards using digital lesson contents are positive, but the implementation is still a challenging endeavour (Hamad et al., 2024). From the above-stated frameworks, the study finds the research problem and rationale for its investigation. Since learners at lower levels of education are more eager to use more senses to comprehend matters, it is significant to investigate and reveal the role of using appropriate teaching materials for refining their communicative competence. It is justifiable and significant to conduct this study because there is a knowledge gap on the role played by instructional media among primary school English teachers in Wete district that needs to be technically bridged.

The central objective of this study is to examine and explore the vital role played by instructional media in improving and refining pupils' English language proficiency and the extent to which proper and effective use of these important instructional materials enhances the overall comprehension of subject matters in English language lessons, which is the kind of knowledge that lacks sufficient literature from previous studies conducted. Eventually, the study seeks to provide a kind of knowledge on the symbiotic relationship between effective use of instructional media and the improvement and refinement of English language proficiency among pupils, which can be easily measured through classroom interaction with the aid of appropriate instructional materials.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The term language proficiency has been viewed differently by various scholars. Murali (2009), for example, argues that an individual should demonstrate four critical language skills in order to attain proficiency in a language. He mentions listening, speaking, reading and writing. Listening is the ability to understand the language of the teacher and instructions, extract information and follow instructional discourse through which teachers provide information. Speaking refers to the appropriate use of oral language during classroom learning, question-and-answer sessions, and social interactions. Reading entails understanding and interpreting text at an age- and grade-appropriate level. Writing entails producing written text that meets the content and format requirements of

classroom assignments at an age- and grade-appropriate level.

Sufficient scholarly sources have noted the role of Instructional media at school. Sane (2011) posits that Instructional media develop a strong language foundation among pupils, build long-term memories and improve communicative competence among pupils. Haryudin et al, (2020) observed that learning media are important tools in the classroom since they foster the delivery of the lesson content and help teachers to convey messages in a planned manner. In the same vein, Wahyuni and Yokhebed (2019), as cited in Asiyah and Haryudin (2020), argue in support of this position. They emphasise the utilisation of instructional media by teachers to provide motivation and cultivate interests among students to actively follow the teaching and learning process, providing a pleasant experience and improving learning outcomes. Richard et al. (2001) as cited in Ibrahim and Danladi (2024) hold similar sentiments. They assert that Instructional media play the role of visualisation of concepts and processes, fostering engagement during lessons as well as enhancing learning outcomes such as knowledge acquisition, transfer and retention. In the light of refining pupils' English proficiency, Newby (2000) asserts that teachers should embrace the participation of learners in their lessons through the use of Instructional media.

A portion of scholarly attention in Tanzania has been opening its eyes and paying attention to instructional practices rather than instructional materials when it comes to the improvement of students' and pupils' English language proficiency; instructional practices like group work, modelling for role play and assisted reading practice have been reported to have a positive impact on pupils' reading fluency (Ssekamanya, 2022). Using appropriate and modern instructional media has also been found to exhibit positive impacts on students' abilities to comprehend subject matter among secondary school students in southern districts of Tanzania (Nzilano & Machumu, 2025). The study asserts that students' characteristics and teachers' perception of ease-of-use totally affected the use of instructional materials during classroom instruction. This enlightens the role played by the integration of instructional media in achieving effectiveness during English language lessons and attaining instructional

goals at large. In Zanzibar, some evidence from literature shows that underperformance in science subjects among secondary school students results from poor usage of laboratory equipment among science teachers (Abdalla, 2017). Wete district teachers experienced being involved in the study on pedagogical attitudes towards using digital lesson contents in teaching and learning. However, the findings exhibit that insufficient in-service training among teachers and shortage of digital lesson contents contribute to discouraging teachers' pedagogical attitude towards integrating digital materials in their everyday teaching process (Hamad et al., 2024).

Theoretical Framework

Our study lays emphasis on the Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning (CTML) attributed to Richard E. Mayer (2005a). He asserts that multimedia learning often happens when we develop mental representations from words and pictures. He asserts that people can learn effectively in the presence of words and pictures compared to words alone. In Mayer's CTML, the issues of processing multimedia instructional activities and how to apply strong and effective cognitive techniques that help learners and instructors achieve effective teaching/learning are generously explained. Researchers argue that 'multimedia' is to do with a combination of texts and pictures.

Therefore, multimedia learning happens when the words are spoken or written, whereas pictures can appear in any form of graphical imagery, including illustrations, photos, animation or video (Mayer, 2005b). In this regard, it is emphasised that teachers, especially at elementary levels of teaching and learning, are expected to process their instructional designs that not only attempt to employ a maximum and proper use of words but also integrate visual aids to ensure effective and easy attainment of their instructional goals. The Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning is based on three underlying assumptions: the dual-channel assumption, the limited capacity assumption, and the active processing assumption.

The dual-channel assumption describes how auditory and visual channels work together. This means that

the visual channel holds pictures and written texts, and the auditory channel holds spoken words and sounds as auditory images. The limited capacity assumption, which is based on Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller, 1988; 1994), states that each sub-system of working memory has a limited capacity. The third assumption is the active processing assumption, which states that people construct knowledge in meaningful ways when they are attentive to the relevant material, organise it into a coherent mental structure and integrate it with prior knowledge. Hence, the Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning provides considerable insights on how human memory, especially in early ages, can be easily stimulated and activated through proper and effective use of instructional media during instruction. Since effective language teaching and learning require the correct application of appropriate instructional media which can foster pupils' engagement, the adaptation of this theory and its underlying assumptions as the most appropriate framework can help researchers in capturing better and more understandable results from the study.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed research design whereby convergent parallel mode was used to collect and analyse both quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously. Creswell (2014) outlines that convergent parallel is a mixed methods strategy in which a researcher collects both quantitative and qualitative data, analyses them separately, and then compares the results to determine if the findings substantiate or disconfirm each other. The reason behind using such a design is that there were some data that required to be analysed statistically and some justification from the results needed to describe and explain the other forms of data collected, and finally the results must ensure validity and reliability.

In order to have proper and successful attainment of the objectives of the study, the researcher collected data that can exhibit the extent to which instructional media used by teachers of English Language foster and refine pupils' English proficiency using two different kinds of data collection techniques, namely: semi-structured interviews and non-participant observations.

The target population in this study includes English language teachers from primary schools, tutors from teachers' training colleges and inspectors of the English language subject from the Directorate of Inspection.

The sampling techniques used to secure information from the respondents include systematic random sampling and purposive sampling techniques. The systematic random sampling was used through which twenty-eight (28) primary schools located in the area of the study were divided into seven (7) groups that contain four (4) schools each. The researcher then picked all first and fourth ones from each group. This constituted a total of fourteen (14) primary schools, which is 50 percent of the total primary schools in the area of the study. Two respondent teachers from each selected school were then purposively selected in accordance with their convenience, consent and prior permission from their school heads, making a total of 28 teacher respondents who were interviewed. Additionally, five English language inspectors from the Directorate of Inspection and three tutors from Pemba Islamic College were purposively selected and interviewed since their convenience and consent were highly observed.

Additionally, a total of 14 English language lessons were purposively selected and observed by the researcher by considering convenience among teacher respondents and supporting class schedules. A total of two data collection techniques, including semi-structured interviews and non-participant observation, covered the whole process of data collection. The reason behind choosing both methods is that they allow concise and consistent data analysis and the possibility to analyse the data in a more comprehensible manner. All Ethical considerations for human participant research were highly observed in that the respondents were informed and their consent to participate in the study was sought prior to their information provision.

The data collected were treated as confidential, and permissions were sought prior to respondent participation; they were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality, as they were informed that their information would remain confidential and would be strictly used for academic purposes only.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Examining pupils' improvement in four basic language skills during and after English lessons through effective use of instructional media was a statistical measure that indicates the role of these necessary instructional materials in refining their English language proficiency and overall attainment of the intended instructional goals.

Instructional media always play a vital role in ensuring communicative language use and upgrading the quality of classroom interaction and proper language use, especially when a teacher uses task-based materials such as cue cards, which encourage games, role plays, and pair communication, among others (Sane, 2011).

Since classroom communication to a large extent enhances improvement in language proficiency for young learners, teachers' effective use of instructional

media during lessons was strongly taken as a measure and an issue of concern on the role played by these instructional materials to upgrade the pupils' language mastery in all four basic skills.

Through interviewing a total of twenty-eight (28) teacher respondents, the researcher managed to collect data by examining how teachers of the English language managed to exhibit the role played by various kinds of instructional media to improve their pupils' English proficiency during their lesson presentations and practices.

Language Skills Improved Through Using Instructional Media

Two teachers were interviewed from each of 14 selected schools in Wete district, making a total of 28 (two from each selected school). The teacher respondents explained their experience as summarised in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Language Skills Improved Through Effective Use of IM

Sample size	S/N	Language skill improved	Highly improved		Partially improved		Total	
			f	%	f	%	f	%
N=28	I	Listening skill	19	67.85	9	32.14	28	100
	II	Speaking skill	24	85.7	4	14.28	28	100
	III	Reading skill	15	53.57	13	46.42	28	100
	IV	Writing skill	17	60.71	11	39.28	28	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The data presented in Table 1 above show how respondent teachers responded differently on pupils' improvement in four basic language skills in their day-to-day English language teaching. In the aspect of listening skill, a total of nineteen 19 teacher respondents argued that their learners often improve in listening skills when they teach English using instructional media since they demonstrate the ability to follow instructions and perform most listening based activities whereas a total of 9 among them said that the learners show low level of improvement in listening skills by assessing their low abilities to respond to oral questions and listening based activities. In the aspect of speaking skill, the number of teacher respondents shot up to 24 arguing that their pupils improve in speaking skill as they demonstrate the ability to practice oral tests and describe some

Instructional materials in terms of what they are made of, their use and functions and a total of 4 among them claimed that the ability to speak in English is under-performed among most pupils during their lessons as most pupils demonstrated poor performance in speaking activities.

Additionally, reading as a complex and complicated language skill in its teaching process was found to be partially improved since the data collected showed that a total of 15 teacher respondents argued that their pupils can demonstrate accuracy and some extent of fluent reading which indicates some improvement in pupils' English language proficiency by using instructional media in English lessons and the rest (a total of 13) among them argued in a different manner. The pupils were reported to improve in their

writing skills through effective use of instructional media since a total of 17 teacher respondents argued that their pupils demonstrate the ability to write neatly and spell correctly some newly introduced vocabulary items, which are indicators of some improvement in writing skills when they teach using instructional media, whereas a total of 11 among them gave negative responses.

The findings reveal that using various kinds of instructional media, learners can use the target language communicatively in that they can encourage classroom interaction and finally demonstrate their ability to use the knowledge in real-life situations. In this case, through interviewing English language teachers, the study findings revealed that speaking skill was the most improved language skill compared to other language skills in Wete district primary schools, and this might result from proper techniques of selecting and effective use of instructional media

which go in line with the contents of the lessons at hand.

In addition to that, interviews with five (5) English language inspectors from directorate of inspection of the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MoEVTZ) and three (3) English language tutors from Pemba Islamic College were held to gain more authentic data on what they often observe regarding the relationship between the instructional media used by English language teacher trainees who are posted to some schools in the area of the study for their block teaching practice. The focus was on how teachers and teacher trainees managed to associate the instructional media and the contents of the lessons at hand. The actual relationship between the selected instructional media, together with their effective use, and the lesson expected outcomes was an indicator used to measure the pupils' improvement and refinement in their English language proficiency. The results are summarised in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Relationship Between IM Utilised and the Lesson Contents Inspected

Sample size	Relationship between IM used and content of English lessons inspected/ assessed.				
	Respondents	Yes		No	
		f	%	f	%
N = 5	INSPECTORS	2	40.0	3	60.0
N = 3	TUTORS	1	33.3	2	66.6

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The data presented in Table 2 above show that 3 out of 5 English language inspectors responded that English language teachers quite often use instructional media that have no direct relationship with their lesson content, and the rest (2) responded that most instructional media used in English lessons have a direct relationship with the lessons taught. The second portion of the data presented in Table 2 above is concerned with the results of interview sessions held with English language tutors from Pemba Islamic College through which 2 out of 3 tutors respondents argued that their teacher trainees use mostly instructional media with no direct relationship with the content of the lesson at hand and hence the lesson outcomes of improving pupils' English language proficiency were found to be partially achieved. English language inspectors went further by

explaining that most English teachers at primary need more practical in-service training on how to properly integrate selected instructional media so as to reduce the possibilities for ineffective teaching that are sometimes observed during inspection. Additionally, some kinds of instructional media they often use in most cases are charts, pictures, and cards, which may actually be replaced by a radio or a digital player for more effective teaching and better comprehension among pupils.

These findings resonate with those found in the study by Müller (2007) as cited in Al-Nijaar (2012), who evaluated pronunciation teaching materials in Palestinian schools and suggested that recordings for pronunciation exercises that consist of words in isolation and phrases and sentences out of context,

and a few dialogues are to be used for better results of pronunciation teaching. The framework exposes the actual role of effective use of instructional media in improving and refining English language proficiency at the elementary level of education as a baseline to better language mastery among pupils.

Observation Schedules on Effective Use of IM During English Lessons

Apart from interview sessions, the study involved non-participant observations in some English language lessons to examine how effective use of instructional media can help improve and refine pupils' English proficiency. The indicators used to measure pupils' refinement in their English language proficiency here were their interaction with the instructional media brought/used by teachers during the lesson. Through

interacting with the teaching aids, pupils can acquire various skills and gain a widespread understanding and ability to demonstrate various kinds of intelligence in language learning. The gathered data through non-participant observations held during English lessons are elaborated in the subsection below.

Pupils' Opportunity to Interact with IM During English Lessons

For the sake of making the gathered data more authentic, the researcher successfully observed a total of 14 English language lessons (one from each selected primary school) in order to witness the extent to which effective use of instructional media can help improve pupils' English proficiency. The gathered data through non-participant observation conducted during English lessons are summarised in Table 3 below:

Table 3: Pupils' Opportunity to Interact with IM in English Language Lessons

Sample size	s/n	Pupils' chance to interact with IM	Observation	
			f	%
N= 14	1	Student got as many chances as possible	3	21.4
	2	Student got minimal chances	9	64.3
	3	Students got no chances at all	2	14.3
		TOTAL	14	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 3 above shows data on pupils' opportunities to interact with instructional media used during English lessons as observed during the study. The motive behind this was to find out the extent to which the instructional media used during lessons have promoted classroom interaction and communicative language use during instruction, which are key indicators of pupils' refinement in English language proficiency.

During non-participant observation, the gathered data show that in a total of 3 English language lessons, pupils got enough chances to interact with instructional media used during instruction. For instance, in primary school B, pupils were grouped and provided with models of clock faces and real clocks, which eventually promoted classroom interaction and communicative language use among pupils, which are indicators of improvement in their English proficiency. The findings are strongly supported in the study by Sane (2011), who argues that materials have a key role

in promoting communicative language use and improving the quality of classroom interaction as well as appropriate language use. Thus, task-based materials with a variety of games, role plays, simulations in terms of exercises, cue cards, pair communication, etc. are strongly preferable and advisable in ensuring pupils' English language proficiency is refined and improved, especially at the elementary level of education where learners use more senses to comprehend matters.

The second section of data collected through non-participant observations was collected from English lessons in which pupils got minimal chance to interact with instructional media. The data show that in a total of 9 lessons, the researcher observed that pupils got minimal chances to interact with the instructional media utilised during instruction. This indicates the result of an acute shortage or sometimes absence of instructional media in those lessons due to the fact that there were some English teachers who used to

teach the whole lesson with only a textbook, a piece of chalk and a hand-drawn chart, with no other additional kinds of instructional media which could foster pupils' communicative competence through curiosity and active participation.

The last section of data collected through non-participant observation exhibits those English lessons in which pupils lost a chance to interact with instructional media used during the lesson. The gathered data show that in a total of 2 observed English lessons, most pupils lost a chance to interact with the instructional media brought by the teacher during instruction. Taking an example from Primary School C, the teacher used to teach the concept of materials used to make various household wares and cooking utensils such as a thermos flask, a can, a frying pan, etc. However, the pupils were not grouped and provided with those real objects to discover what they are made of. Eventually, most pupils who sat distant from the teaching aids were not able to figure out the materials used to manufacture those household wares displayed and remained silent for the whole lesson.

Thus, the findings revealed that in a large number of English lessons observed, a reduced chance for pupils to interact with instructional media used during instruction was created through ineffective use of most instructional media. Most pupils seemed passive in the lessons in which teachers used inadequate or inappropriate instructional media, and the level of pupils' improvement in language proficiency seemed to be reduced as opposed to complete engagement. A few pupils got a chance to interact with instructional media in such lessons, and that was proof of the vital role of instructional media in refining pupils' English language proficiency.

By taking into account the findings extracted through interview sessions with English language teachers, inspectors, tutors as well as other findings extracted through non-participant observation on the extent to which effective use of various kinds of instructional media can help to improve and refine pupils English proficiency, it is obvious that proper and appropriate use of instructional media during instruction can help to upgrade pupils communicative language use, curiosity, creative abilities as well as enabling them to use language practically even after school hours.

Correlation Between Theoretical Framework and Findings of the Study

The major areas that correlate between Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning and the findings of the study at hand are that the theory gives adequate proof of improvement in second language proficiency through exposing learners to pictures, animations and videos that go in line with texts and the fact that learners can be capable of creating and performing rather than being bench-bound listeners.

Similarly, the findings of the study reveal that proper and effective use of instructional materials in English language lessons can refine pupils' mode of chunking and practising in vocabulary building as well as encouraging classroom interaction, which can easily enable communicative language use among them.

In addition to clearly showing the role of instructional media in refining pupils' English proficiency, Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning assumes the possibility of promoting inventiveness, creativity and interest in forming communicative utterances on the part of learners as they move from simple to complex structures with the aid of proper use of pictures and their integration with the texts at hand. This can be possible since the use of pictures, videos and animations can enable pupils to integrate prior knowledge with new knowledge. In the same way, findings of the study reveal that effective and appropriate use of forms of instructional media during English instruction is key to building their short-term and long-term memories and exhibiting the true refinement of their language proficiency in all four basic skills through correct pronunciation, accuracy in writing, as well as performing in active listening exercises.

Alternative contributions of the study at hand include the fact that communicative competence as an aspect of English language proficiency is an utmost important part in the learning process among pupils. Hence, whenever effective use of instructional media happened, the learners demonstrated their abilities and classroom interaction among them evolved.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: Effective use of instructional media in the teaching of English language, especially at the

elementary level of education, is a key to success and attainment of desired goals. Proper and correct application of these important instructional materials in English language teaching can involve the use of more senses such as visual, auditory, as well as kinaesthetic senses among learners, which can eventually enhance the attainment of desired lesson expected outcomes. Like other second and foreign language lessons, English language lessons can be easily and effectively taught if teachers effectively use and allow learners access to various appropriate kinds of instructional media. If English language teachers at primary levels of education need to build pupils' competence and enhance long-term memories among their learners, proper choice and effective use of instructional media remain inevitable.

Recommendations: Teachers need to take into account proper choices and effective use of these most important instructional materials since pupils need to interact and gain more appropriate knowledge of what they learn during lessons.

Stakeholders need to rethink creating a conducive environment for teachers to access all important instructional materials to foster quick refinement of pupils' English language proficiency at schools. This is owed to the harsh reality that most modern and advanced instructional materials are too expensive for teachers and school administrations to afford. The Ministry of Education and Vocational Training needs to factor into its budget the purchase of modern, accessible and more effective instructional materials. Adequate and constructive in-service training among English language teachers at the elementary level is strongly advised so that they will upgrade their knowledge and adopt proper applications of the most preferred instructional materials for easy attainment of their instructional goals. Finally yet importantly, in this contemporary world of higher advancement of science and technology, classroom connectivity needs to be taken into account to enable teachers to display some instructional materials directly from the internet or offline through PowerPoint presentations.

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