Influence of School Closure on the Adoption of Digital Learning of English Language in Kapseret Subcounty, Kenya

[1*]Tuwei J. Ednah, [2]Okari M. Florence and [1]Omuse Emoit
[1]School of Education, Department of Curriculum Instruction and Educational Media, University of Eldoret, P.O Box 1125, Eldoret, Kenya

[2]School of Education, Department of Languages and Literature, University of Eldoret, P.O Box 1125, Eldoret, Kenya

***Corresponding author's email address:** ednajesang@gmail.com

Abstract

From time to time, school calendars have suffered disruptions due to a myriad of crises. Recently, COVID-19 led to abrupt and indefinite closure of schools globally forcing most governments and schools to embrace digital learning as a matter of urgency so as to mitigate the adverse impacts of prolonged school closure on learning. This study sought to determine the influence of school closure on the adoption of Digital Learning of English Language (DLEL) in Kapseret Subcounty, Kenya. Based on Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive theory, the study employed descriptive research design to collect the data. The study targeted a total of 2,173 respondents including 2,092 form three students, 49 Teachers of English and 32 head teachers from the 32 high schools in Kapseret Sub County. The schools included 13 private and 19 public with a student population of 458 and 1,634 form three students respectively. 32 schools in Kapseret were stratified as public (19) and Private (13) from which a sample of 11 schools, comprising 7 public and 4 privates, were derived proportionately. The samples size was 327 respondents. The data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) Version 20. Data was analysed descriptively and presented in tables and figures in form of frequencies and percentages. Results revealed that 95% of the respondents had access to some digital devices and 72.3% had access to internet even though 60.2% rarely or never used the accessible internet for academic purposes. Majority of the students, 46.9%, who interacted with their teachers during the school closure did so via social media, specifically WhatsApp, while 31.3% used the school portal. The rest interacted through phone calls and short message services. There is need to equip both teachers and students with the right digital platform and skills for academic purposes for effective content delivery, evaluation and interaction of English language learning.

Keywords: Covid-19, School Closure, English, Learning, Adoption

INTRODUCTION

English language occupies a pivotal position in global communication activities as Ghosh (2020) ranks English as number one global language with over 1.1 billion speakers, or roughly 15% of the global population. Consequently, proper acquisition of the language is as important as its effective use both as an instructional tool and for business transactions.

Non-English natives mostly acquire English as a second language in a school setting (McCaul, 2016). However, beyond the formal context of classrooms, digital learning

has enabled lots of people around the globe to acquire English language in a self-directed fashion with a chance to learn and practice. Digital learning has a great potential to address limitations of classroom instruction while helping with vocabulary development, English proficiency, affective and cognitive domains of language learning including willingness to communicate with confidence and competence (Lee, 2020). As Atmojo & Nugroho (2020) confirms, students positively perceive the use of digital technology as a means of language learning amidst the global pandemic and reveal that digital learning of English could potentially be conducted by means of available social networking sites such as YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, Google classroom, and Facebook, beside other dedicated English language learning websites. The versatile technology has made it possible for Teachers of English and learners to effectively engage by means of accessible digital devices and internet resources (Kawinkoonlasate, 2020). Besides, research has linked higher English proficiency, vocabulary outcomes and cross-cultural communication to digital learning of English (Lee, 2019).

Indefinite disruption in school calendar impairs the learners' efforts to acquire knowledge and the instructors' ability to impart the knowledge. Garcia, Franchino and Muñiz (2020) posit that the challenges may be exacerbated for English learners especially in addressing all the four domains of language development: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. More often, students learn English then use the same language to learn other subjects (Grabe & Stoller, 2002).

COVID-19 outbreak occasioned indefinite closure of schools in most parts of the world disrupting learning (Ngwacho, 2020). The pandemic forced learners and teachers out of school in an unprecedented manner (Onyema et al., 2020), presumably to continue to engaging remotely with a transition from the traditional brick-and-mortar classrooms to the virtual space (Primdahl et al., 2021). According to ADEA (2020) the pandemic brought a new reality that necessitates a rethink of how quality education can be effectively delivered in an inclusive and equitable manner using technology. While the developed nations may have experienced a smoother transition to virtual learning due to the existing supporting infrastructure, widespread digital devices, better internet connectivity and power supply, the struggle to keep students occupied and learning from home was real nightmare due to constraints related to access, knowhow, support and general preparedness to fully embrace digital learning (World Bank, 2018).

By mid-April 2020, Reddy et al (2020) put the number of students affected globally at 1.725 billion, including higher education institutions, accounting for 192 countries that were implementing nationwide closures affecting 99% world's student population. Statista (2020) estimates that 17,202,489 schools or school districts were closed in the USA by mid-March 2020 and more were scheduled to close. The National Centre for Education Statistics (2020) indicates that the USA student enrolment stood at 56.3million, 50.6 million in public schools and another 5.7 million in private schools while the number of teachers was 3.6 million. According to Collen (2020), all schools in England closed due to COVID-19 while Italy had 9 million learners out of school, China 233 million and in Japan, 16.5 million students were forced out of school due to COVID-19. 120 million children were out of school by early April 2020 in West and Central Africa due to COVID-19 response measures (Save the Children, 2020). UNICEF (2020) indicates that by May 2020 more than 127 million children were locked out of schools in Eastern and Southern Africa. By early March 2020 South Africa had also closed all her schools (Reddy et al, 2020). In the year 2000, Kenya had nearly 3000 secondary schools with a total enrolment of 620,000 students. Currently, Kenya has about 10,000 secondary schools with some 7,506,670 students enrolled in

high schools in Kenya (UNICEF, 2020). According to Wanzala (2015), Kenya had about 242,071 teachers employed by Teachers Service Commission and 40,449 by school boards of management. A total of 118,800 teachers were in secondary schools, 90.8% of whom were in public schools. It is logical to believe that the number of learners and teachers who were affected by the indefinite closure of schools due to COVID-19 is much higher.

Uasin Gishu County has 1,796 schools comprising 246 high schools of which 193 are public schools while 53 are private schools. Kapseret Sub County has 32 high schools of which 19 are public schools with student enrolment of 7208 and 13 private schools with 1873 students totaling to a population of 9081 students (Ministry of Education, 2020)

The sentiments by Sweney (2020) that learning should never be the same again after COVID-19 should be resounded in Kenya where over 52.06 million mobile connections were confirmed in January 2020, equivalent to 98% of the total population (Kemp et al., 2020). Earlier, Namunywa (2018) confirmed that Kenya was leading the African continent in smart phone penetration and internet usage due to the social media storm, affordable smart phones and data plans, network coverage with many internet service providers competing to woo the market. It is clear that the digital market in Kenya is on an upward trajectory and very capable of supporting learning in and away from schools. Aborode et al (2020) posit that COVID-19 presents irresistible wind of change forcing schools to restructure their operations and become more digitally forward.

This study sought to establish how adoption of Digital Learning of English Language (DLEL) is influenced by indefinite closure of schools due to coronavirus pandemic. The study was conducted in Kapseret Sub-County, Uasin Gishu County in Kenya. The researcher sought to bridge the knowledge gap by establishing the extent to which governments, educational institutions, teachers and learners have embraced use of digital media to ensure continuity when school system is disrupted. This study sought to determine the influence of indefinite school closure on the adoption of Digital Learning of English Language (DLEL).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was based on social cognitive theory as coined by Albert Bandura in 2009.The theory proposes that learning continually occurs through social interactions and influences from the community, media and the Internet. Numerous opportunities exist for people to enhance their learning through social interactions online. They include global networking, educational games, innovative apps and ebooks. Continual technological advancements enhance social learning in exciting and motivating ways. Experiments have proven that social influences including the media and internet have adverse effects on people because learning and meaning construction occur continually through one's lifetime.

The social cognitive theory was deemed relevant to this study due to the fact that it drew on both cognitive and behavior influences and benefits from technology. Indeed, the theory thrives on the advancement of new technologies because of their ability to provide new and innovative methods to create social learning environments whether immediate or distant. The rapid pace of informational, social, and technological change is placing a premium on personal efficacy for self-development and self-renewal throughout the life course (Bandura, 2001; 2009).

The researcher took note that the social cognitive theory had been widely applied in studies involving interdisciplinary areas including social, information sciences, health, education among others. Schunk & Mullen (2008) used the theory in their study on self-efficacy and student engagement while Zhang *et al* (2012) applied the theory on e-learning in education. Sattar (2017) elaborated the relationship between cognitive learning and modern techniques of education, denoting that web-based learning environments are not that different from a classroom environment and that students learn a lot from social interaction especially in instructor-led learning.

Bandura's decades' old theory underscores the importance of continuous teaching and learning even amidst indefinite closure of schools during a pandemic situation. Technology can be harnessed and leveraged to facilitate remote teaching and learning, enabling social interactions between teachers and learners and between colleagues. All learning activities including quizzes and exams can be facilitated using technology as an enabler. Again, the theory recognizes the existence of and continuous development of numerous technological resources, herein referred to as educational technologies, including digital devices and allied Apps as influencers of remote academic engagements. Finally, the rapidly changing educational, technological and social landscape calls for proper skills and knowledge buttressed with continuous training to enable users stay afloat. The COVID-19 pandemic period has indeed seen the emergence of numerous tech products geared towards assisting learners and teachers to continue with their academic pursuits. As such proper skills are invaluable in ensuring proper utilization of the resources and addressing attitude issue that may hinder proper adoption of Digital Learning of English Language.

Conceptual Framework

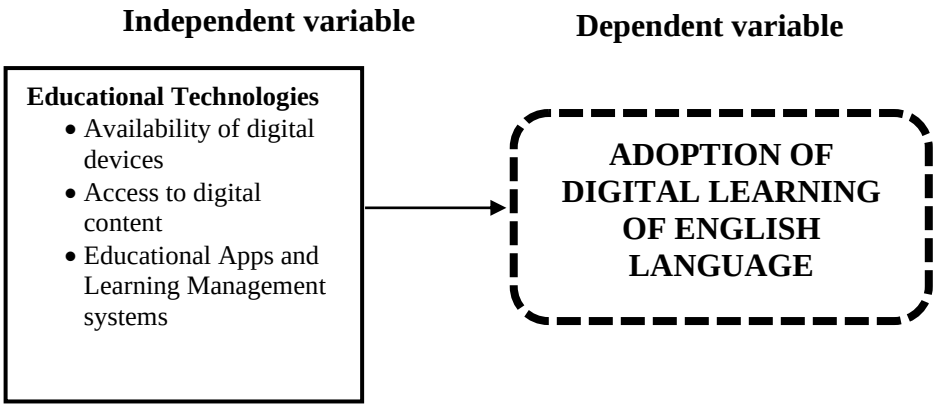

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework in figure 1 shows the independent variable as Digital technologies and the dependent variable as adoption of Digital Learning of English Language.

METHOLOGY

The study employed descriptive research design to collect data from form three students, teachers of English and head teachers in selected high schools in Kapseret Sub County. The study was conducted in Kapseret Sub County, Kenya. The Sub County is one of the six sub counties of Uasin Gishu County and is located Southwest

of Eldoret Town with its headquarters at Kapseret along Eldoret-Kisumu Road. It covers an area measuring 451KM^{2}with a population of 121,178 people. The Sub County has a rich mix of 19 public and 13 private secondary schools spread across urban, suburbs, rural and informal settings. The schools comprise 15 mixed day, 4 girls boarding, 1 boys boarding, 8 mixed day and boarding, 4 Mixed boarding. Kapseret Sub County has good road network, extensive coverage of mobile telephone network, electricity supply and fibre optic network along major roads (Uasin Gishu County, 2019). All these factors worked towards enabling successful data collection and timely completion of the study.

The study targeted a total of 2,173 respondents including 2,092 form three students, 49 Teachers of English and 32 head teachers from the 32 high schools in Kapseret Sub County. The schools included 13 private and 19 public with a student population of 458 and 1,634 form three students respectively. Using the formula provided by Nassiuma (2000), 11/32 schools were sampled for the study. This study utilized a sample of 327 respondents as recommended by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) who provided that a sample of 327 should be drawn from a population of 2000-2200. The respondents were distributed. Stratified random sampling procedure was employed to select 32 schools in Kapseret where (19) and Private (13) from which a sample of 11 schools, comprising 7 public and 4 privates, were derived proportionately. The schools were picked using simple random sampling. All the 11 head teachers of the schools included in the study automatically became respondents in line with purposive sampling. From the 327 sample respondents, the remaining 316 were then distributed proportionately between form three students (309) and Teachers of English (7). The teachers or English and the student respondents were selected using simple random sampling for the purposes of administering research questionnaire while the head teachers were identified purposively.

The study employed questionnaire and interview schedules to collect data from the respondents who were head teachers, teachers of English and form three students from the selected schools in Kapseret Sub County. Interview schedule was used to collect information from head teachers of the selected schools. The research instruments were developed in consultation with supervisors to ensure content validity of the instruments. A pilot study was undertaken in Kesses Sub County which is a neighbour to Kapseret Sub County where actual research was to be carried out. The correlation coefficient was then obtained using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient method. This yielded an r value of 0.74; this showed that there was a strong relationship between the first and the second scores obtained after the instruments were administered. The researcher engaged in data collection only after seeking permission of relevant authorities to conduct the research including University of Eldoret, NACOSTI, school management and the respondents. The data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) Version 20. Data was analysed descriptively and presented in tables and figures in form of frequencies and percentages.

RESULTS

Response Rate

This study targeted high schools in Kapseret Sub County, Uasin Gishu County; their head teachers, form three students and teachers of English. A sample of 327 respondents was used whereby students were issued with 309 questionnaires, with teachers of English getting 7. A total of 288 questionnaires were returned out of the 316 dispatched. 7/288 questionnaire were rejected due to incompleteness.

Age of Respondents

The researcher sought to establish the age of the respondents who took part in the study. To that effect the students and teachers of English were asked to indicate their age.

Table 1: Age of student respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentage
13-15 years	7	2.5
16-18 years	272	96.8
19-21 years	2	0.7
Total	281	100.0

Table 1 shows that majority of the student respondents (96.8%) were aged between 16-18 years. A paltry 2(0.7%) of the respondents were over 19 years while 7(2.5%) were aged between 13 and15 years. The age bracket of the respondents in this study predisposed them to be more adaptable to ICTs due to their eagerness, motivation, curiosity, readiness, better attitudes and ability to grasp new technologies faster (Morin et al., 2019)

Both the head teachers and teachers of English were asked how old they were at the time of data collection and the responses were as shown in table 2.

Table 2: Age of Staff respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentage
21-30 years	2	11.1
31-40 years	4	22.2
41-50 years	9	50.0
51-60 years	3	16.7
Total	18	100.0

Table 2 shows that majority of the teachers were aged between 41-50 years comprising 50% followed by those aged 31-40 years at 22.2 %. Minority of the respondents (11.1%) were aged 21-30 years. It was noted that all the principals were above 40 years of age. The study did not find any significant discrepancies betweent the age of teacher respondents and their adoption of DLEL but underscored the fact that increasing age impacted on attitudes and willingness to engage digitally academically (Heponiemi et al., 2022).

Gender of Respondents

The student and staff respondents were asked to indicate their gender and the results yielded as shown in table 3 and 4.

Table 3: Gender of student respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	134	47.7
Female	147	52.3
Total	281	100.0

Table 3 shows that majority of the student respondents, 147 (52.3%), were female while the male student respondents comprised 134 (47.7 %). The figures were consistent with the form 3 student enrolment in Kapseret Sub County where girls

generally outnumbered the boys (Ministry of Education, Uasin Gishu County, 2021). Though outnumbered, the study generally confirmed that the male students were more likely to adopt technology due to their aggrasiveness towards seek and experiment with new technologies as indicated by Ahmadi & Reza, 2018).

Table 4: Gender of Teacher Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	3	42.9
Female	4	57.1
Total	7	100

Table 4 indicated that most of the sampled teachers of English were female at 57.1% compared to the male counterparts who comprised 42.9%. Again, the data was consistent with the fact that English Subject tended to attract more female teachers than male. About the head teachers who were interviewed, 6 were male while 5 were female.

Category of School

The study sought to establish whether the student respondents were in private or public secondary schools.

Table 5: Category of School

Category of School	Frequency	Percentage
Public	189	67.2
Private	92	32.8
Total	281	100.0

As shown in table 6, 189 respondents (67.2%) were in public schools compared to 92 (32.8%) who were in private schools. Generally, data was collected from 4 private schools and 7 public schools. There were generally more public schools in Kapseret sub county as compared to the private ones (Ministry of Education, Uasin Gishu County, 2021).

The study sought to know how much time the students spent on study during the indefinite school closure.

Table 6: Time Spent on home Study

Duration of study	Frequency	Percentage
0 hours	37	13.2
1-2 hours	79	28.1
2-3 hours	128	45.6
3-4 hours	28	10.0
5 hours and above	9	3.2
Total	281	100.0

Table 6 shows that 37 (13.2%) of the student respondents did not engage in study at all during the school closure. 79 (28.1%) of the student respondents spent only 1-2 hours studying while 28 (10%) spent between 3-4 hours on study. Majority of the respondents, 128 (45.6%) spent between 2-3 hours a day on their academics while a negligible 3.2% spent 5 hours or more studying. The latter also largely comprised those who routinely started their day earliest. The findings confirm Raveendram (2020) that many learners are yet to consider studying on their own as normal learning.

The study sought to establish how often the students engaged in English Language Learning while at home

Table 7: English language learning

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Daily	27	9.6
Once a week	121	43.1
Twice a week	24	8.5
Once every 2 weeks	72	25.6
Never	37	13.2
Total	281	100.0

Table 7 shows that 37 respondents, (13.2%) did not engage in English Language Learning at all while 121 (43.1%) engaged once a week compared to 72(25.6%) who engaged once every two weeks. 24(8.5%) respondents indicated that they engaged in English Language Learning once every two weeks. Clearly the amount of engagement in ELL was not sufficient considering that English language is taught daily at school. The study considered the importance of learner supervision for focus, support, dedication and discipline to academic endeavor. As such the study sought to establish whether the respondents had any guidance from parents, guardians or teachers while at home.

Table 8: Study Supervision

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Parent/Guardian	44	33.5
Teacher	18	6.4
None	169	60.2
Total	281	100.0

Table 8 shows that 44 (33.5) respondents received guidance from their parents, 18 (6.4%) from the teachers while 169 (60.2%) had no guidance whatsoever. It is assumed that the later were self supervised. The responses also confirmed that the presence of a parent did not necessarily result in academic guidance for the learner. The findings confirm those of Kotirde (2015); Apolot (2018) and Jonyo & Jonyo (2019) who point that many learners may not have the self-drive and the discipline to engage effectively and keep focus on academic matters during home study.

Both the students and teacher respondents were asked whether they had any interaction that facilitated remote teaching/learning.

Table 10: Student/Teacher remote interaction

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	32	11.4
No	249	88.6
Total	281	100.0

Table 10 reveals that 32 (11.4%) student respondents interacted remotely with their teachers while the majority, 249 (88.6%) did not engage in any interaction throughout the school closure. The responses resonated well with those from the teachers as shown in table 11.

Table 11: Teacher/ Student remote interaction

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	2	22.2
No	5	77.8
Total	7	100.0

Table 11 indicates that majority of the teachers, 77.8%, did not interact with their students during the school closure and that only 22.2% did. The results confirmed that the school closure curtailed any meaningful interaction between the teachers and their students, an invaluable prerequisite for effective teaching/learning. As Hagan (2018) found out content can be digitized but learning is about connections and keeping learners connected to the school.

The respondents who answered affirmatively to the remote interaction question were then asked to indicate the mode they used for the interaction.

Table 12: Mode of Student/Teacher Interaction

Mode	Student Frequency	Percentage	Teacher Frequency	Percentage
Phone calls/ Messaging	7	21.9	1	14.3
Email	0	0.0	0	0.0
School portal	10	31.3	2	28.6
Social Media	15	46.9	4	57.1
Total	32	100.0	7	100.0

Table 12 indicates that majority of the students 15 (46.9%) interacted with their teachers via social media, specifically WhatsApp while 10 (31.3%) used the school portal. The rest interacted through phone calls and short message services.

By interviewing the head teachers, the researcher attempted to clearly understand the nature of the interactions. It was revealed that only 2 schools had subscribed to Learning Management Systems and used the same to upload school assignments, usually on a daily basis. The students or their parents/guardians would then sign in to the system using the provided password to download the assignments which they would print, attempt and upload back to the system or simply file for submission to the school at a later date. Class teachers were assigned the task to follow up with the parents on whether the learners could access the assignments through occasional phone calls and bulk messages.

The respondents were asked to indicate what digital devices they had access to that could facilitate learning away from school

Table 13: Access to Digital Devices at Home

Device	Student Frequency	Teacher Frequency	Percentage
Desktop computer	9	0	0.0
Laptop/tablet	26	3	0.0
Smartphone	43	7	100.0
Television	211	7	100.0
More than one device	176	7	100.0
None of the devices	14	0	0.0

Table 13 indicates that majority of the students had access to television, followed by smartphones and laptop/tablet, still most students could access more than one digital device at home. On the other hand, all teachers of English had access to television and smartphones and a combination of gadgets. The study noted that access was not synonymous with ownership and so dedicated use of the devices for academic reasons could not be guaranteed.

The findings agree with a study done by Johnson et al (2016) that recognized technology as the strongest factor shaping the educational landscape today and noted that tremendous development in technology made it possible to explore the new learning models using digital technologies like computers, laptops, tablets, internet, smart phones, TV and radio to remit learning content (ICT Authority, 2016).

The student respondents were asked whether they had access to internet connectivity while at home

Table 14: Access to Internet by students

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	196	69.8
No	85	30.2
Total	281	100.0

Table 14 shows that 196 (72.3%) of the student respondents had access to internet while 85 (30.2%) did not have access to internet. The implication of this is that both learners and teachers would easily harness the power of internet which was evidently widespread in Kapseret Sub County to facilitate learning away from school. It was interesting to note that some of the student respondents who had indicated that they didn't have access to digital devices responded affirmatively when asked about internet access. The researcher concluded that such students most likely interacted with friends who had such gadgets and could access internet.

Table 15: Access to Internet by Teachers of English

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	7	100.0
No	0	0.0
Total	7	100.0

Table 15 shows that all the teacher respondents had access to internet during the school closure.

The respondents were asked to indicate the strength of internet connectivity they had access to.

Table 16: Strength of Internet Connectivity

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Very good	21	10.7
Good	92	46.9
Poor	59	30.1
Very Poor	24	12.2
Total	196	100.0

Table 24 shows that most of the 196 respondents who had internet access 21(10.7%) enjoyed very good internet connectivity while 92(46.9%) had good connectivity.

However, 59 (30.1%) and 24 (12.2%) had poor to very poor connectivity respectively. As for the teachers of English, all the seven respondents indicated that the connectivity was either good or very good.

The study sought to establish how often the respondents who had access to internet used the same to academic reasons.

Table 25: Internet use for Academic Work

Response	Frequency (Students)	Percentage	Frequency ToE	Percentage
Daily	26	13.3	1	14.3
A few times a week	52	26.5	2	28.6
Rarely	81	41.3	0	0.0
Never	37	18.9	4	57.2
Total	196	100.0	7	100.0

Table 25 shows that 26 (13.3%) of the student respondents used internet daily for study while 52 (26.5%) did so only a few times a week, yet 81 (41.3%) rarely used the internet for study and another 37 (18.9%) never used the internet for study. Further, responses from the Teachers of English majority of the teachers, though had access to internet, never used the same for academic reasons, for instance, to facilitate remote teaching. The responses clearly confirm that access to internet does not always guarantee its use for academic purposes.

The responses confirm the argument by Otieno (2020) that even when learners have technology at home, they may not learn due to competing factors and that many students may use the digital devices and internet to disengage rather than engage in learning as Johnson (2019) also found out.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The study investigated the influence of school calendar disruption on adoption of Digital Learning of English Language (DLEL). The study was focused on Kapseret Sub County in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya. Concerning school closure and adoption of DLEL, the study established that there was a huge unexploited potential to harness existing technologies in order to keep students learning even in the midst of unexpected and indefinite closure of schools. That majority of the respondents had access to digital devices including television, radio, computers/laptops and smart phones at their homes means that with some deliberate planning and strategy, learning can be moved from the classroom to a virtual space to mitigate the negative impacts of disrupted school calendar.

Effective digital learning from a remote location calls for sensitization of parents, guardians and care givers to play an active role in guiding and supervising the learners while also instilling academic discipline. This must be buttressed by regular and well-structured interactions between students and their teachers to keep the learning on the right track. Serious consideration should be on how to keep the learners connected to the school, with continued relevant learning content for their level and timed appropriately for all, with sufficient monitoring, prompt feedback and evaluation as may be necessary.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher wishes to recommend as following:

1. All schools need to establish and equip functional digital skills labs manned by competent personnel to inculcate digital skills in all learners regardless of whether they take computer studies or not.
2. To bridge the digital divide, there is need to revitalize the digital villages initiative to provide an opportunity for learners who may not afford digital devices to access the same from the resource centre.
3. There is need to equip both teachers and students with remote learning/teaching skills for effective content delivery, evaluation and interaction
4. It is of necessity that the government, schools, teachers and parents anticipate a disruptive situation like the prolonged indefinite closure of schools and prepare adequately to minimize learning loss.
5. This study was carried out in Kapseret Sub- County; the same study needs to be done in other parts of the country for comparison purposes.

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