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Teacher Preparedness for Social Media Integration in Early Childhood Language Instruction in Mandera County, Kenya

By

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Abstract
The integration of social media tools into early childhood education (ECE) presents a transformative opportunity to enhance language acquisition, yet its success is fundamentally contingent on the preparedness of teachers. This is particularly critical in marginalized, resource-constrained regions where digital divides are most acute. This study investigates the preparedness of pre-primary teachers to integrate social media tools into language activities instruction in Mandera Central Sub-County, a remote and underserved area in Kenya. Despite national policies advocating for digital literacy, the on-the-ground capacity of ECE educators to leverage these tools remains largely unexamined in such contexts. Grounded in the Technology-Organization-Environment (TOE) framework, this study employed a descriptive survey design with a mixed-methods approach. A census of all 82 pre-primary teachers in the sub-county was conducted, with a final response rate of 87.8% (N=72). Data were collected using a structured questionnaire with Likert-scale items and an observation checklist. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and regression analysis, while qualitative data from open-ended questions underwent content analysis. The findings reveal a significant "preparedness paradox": while teachers demonstrate a strong and positive attitude towards social media integration, with a majority (51.4%) demanding training, their self-assessed competency is critically low. A regression analysis showed a statistically significant relationship between teacher preparedness and the quality of language instruction ($p < .001$). However, descriptive data indicated profound deficits, with teachers reporting low confidence in their technical skills (M=2.58), subject matter knowledge of digital content (M=2.06), and ability to incorporate instructional media into lesson planning (M=1.89). Qualitative insights highlighted systemic barriers, including a lack of continuous professional development, inadequate institutional support, and severe infrastructural challenges. The study concludes that teacher preparedness is the primary bottleneck to effective social media integration in Mandera's ECE sector. It recommends an urgent policy shift towards designing and implementing context-specific, continuous professional development programs that are job-embedded, focus on pedagogical application rather than just technical skills, and are supported by investments in essential digital infrastructure.

Keywords: Teacher Preparedness, Social Media Integration, Early Childhood Education (ECE), Language Instruction, Digital Literacy, Mandera County, Kenya

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1. Introduction

The dawn of the 21st century has heralded a digital revolution that is reshaping every facet of human interaction, with education being no exception. The proliferation of social media platforms has transformed them from mere communication channels into dynamic ecosystems for learning and knowledge sharing (Gorgoretti, 2019). For early childhood education (ECE), these tools offer unprecedented opportunities to enrich language instruction. Interactive videos, animated storytelling, digital phonics games, and collaborative platforms can create immersive and engaging learning experiences that cater to the unique cognitive and developmental needs of pre-primary learners (Liu et al., 2024). The potential of these tools to foster foundational literacy skills listening, speaking, and vocabulary development is immense, particularly in an era where digital fluency is increasingly recognized as a core life competency.

Global trends indicate a growing movement towards integrating digital technologies into ECE. In developed nations, educators are increasingly leveraging social media and Web 2.0 tools to enhance language and literacy development, design captivating learning experiences, and foster crucial teacher-parent collaboration (Zhao et al., 2022; Donohue & Schomburg, 2022). Even in emerging economies, the strategic use of digital platforms is seen as a powerful tool for bridging instructional gaps and democratizing access to quality educational content (Salakhova et al., 2021).

In Kenya, this global imperative is enshrined in national policy. The government's Vision 2030 blueprint identifies ICT as a key enabler for transforming the nation into a knowledge-based economy. This vision has been operationalized through initiatives like the Digital Literacy Programme (DLP) and the integration of digital literacy as a core competency within the new Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) (Opicho, Imonje, & Chepkonga, 2025). For the ECE sector, this policy direction implies a fundamental shift in pedagogical practice, demanding that teachers move beyond traditional methods to embrace technology-enhanced instruction.

However, the successful integration of any educational innovation is not guaranteed by policy alone; it is fundamentally dependent on the preparedness of the teachers tasked with its implementation. Teacher preparedness is a multi-dimensional construct encompassing not only technical skills but also pedagogical knowledge, confidence (self-efficacy), and positive attitudes towards the innovation (Simiyu, Masibo, & Mutsotso, 2020). Without adequately prepared teachers, even the most promising technological tools risk becoming ineffective or, worse, a source of pedagogical disruption.

This challenge is particularly acute in marginalized and resource-constrained regions like Mandera County. Located in Kenya's arid north-eastern frontier, the county grapples with a unique confluence of challenges, including historical underdevelopment, severe infrastructural deficits (with internet penetration at a mere 15%), and socio-cultural barriers to formal education (MoE, 2023; Communication Authority of Kenya). While the potential benefits of social media integration are arguably greatest in such contexts where it could

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bridge resource gaps and connect isolated communities the barriers to achieving it are also at their most formidable. A recent Ministry of Education report indicated that only 22% of ECE teachers in Mandera have received any formal ICT training, highlighting a critical capacity gap at the very foundation of the education system.

This study, therefore, addresses a critical and under-researched problem. While a growing body of literature explores the benefits of social media in education, there is a significant lack of empirical research focused on the foundational issue of teacher preparedness, especially within the unique and challenging context of ECE in Kenya's marginalized counties. This study seeks to fill this gap.

Objective of the Study

The primary objective of this paper is to examine the preparedness of teachers to integrate social media tools in language activities instruction among pre-primary learners in Mandera Central Sub-County, Kenya.

2. Literature Review

This study is anchored in the Technology-Organization-Environment (TOE) framework, a widely recognized organizational-level theory developed by Tornatzky and Fleischer (1990). The TOE framework posits that the adoption and implementation of a technological innovation are influenced by the interplay of three distinct but interrelated contexts: the technological context, the organizational context, and the environmental context. This framework provides a comprehensive and systemic lens for analyzing the multifaceted nature of teacher preparedness for social media integration.

The Technological Context refers to the characteristics of the technologies themselves, both those already in use and those available in the market. For this study, this includes the perceived usefulness, ease of use, and compatibility of social media platforms like YouTube, WhatsApp, and TikTok with the pedagogical goals of ECE language instruction. A teacher's readiness to adopt these tools is shaped by whether they perceive them as genuinely beneficial for teaching phonics or storytelling, and whether the tools are user-friendly enough to be integrated without a steep learning curve (Baker, 2012).

The Organizational Context encompasses the internal characteristics of the organization, including its size, structure, resources, and human capital. This is the most critical context for examining teacher preparedness. It includes factors such as teachers' existing digital skills and knowledge, the availability of institutional support in the form of training and technical assistance, and the presence of adequate infrastructure (computers, internet, reliable power). A teacher cannot be "prepared" in a vacuum; their preparedness is a direct function of the organizational environment's capacity to support them (Saedi & Iahad, 2013).

The Environmental Context relates to the external arena in which the organization operates, including the industry, competitors, and the regulatory and policy environment. In this study, this includes national education policies like the CBC which create a demand for ICT integration, the socio-cultural norms of the Mandera community, and the broader availability of digital infrastructure in the region. The TOE framework argues that these external pressures and opportunities significantly shape an organization's (in this case, a school's) decision and ability to adopt an innovation.

By applying the TOE framework, this study moves beyond a narrow focus on individual teacher skills to a more holistic analysis of preparedness as a product of the

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interaction between the technology itself, the organizational capacity of the school, and the broader environmental pressures. It allows for a systemic diagnosis of why, despite policy mandates, teacher preparedness in Mandera Central remains a challenge.

The empirical literature consistently identifies teacher preparedness as the linchpin for the successful integration of technology in education. Research across diverse contexts highlights that even with significant investment in hardware and software, the ultimate impact on learning outcomes is mediated by the competence and confidence of the teacher.

Global and Regional Perspectives on Teacher Competency

Globally, studies have shown a persistent gap between teachers' basic digital literacy and their ability to use technology for transformative pedagogy. A study in Saudi Arabia by Albaqami (2019) found that while teacher trainers had positive attitudes towards using digital visual media, they lacked the practical, hands-on experience to effectively train future educators. This highlights a critical break in the chain of knowledge transfer. Similarly, a study in the Philippines by Hero (2020) established a direct and significant correlation between teachers' preparedness and the extent of their ICT integration, concluding that investment in professional development is essential for technology adoption.

In the African context, the challenge of preparedness is often more acute. A study in Tanzania by Pambas and Ndijuye (2019) found that a vast majority of pre-primary teachers had a very limited and often incorrect understanding of what ICT integration entails, frequently confining it to the use of basic media like television or printed materials. The study linked this directly to a lack of adequate training and pedagogical knowledge. Malekani (2018), also in Tanzania, found that even when teachers were aware of the benefits of ICT, they were hamstrung by a lack of in-service training, poor internet connectivity, and the absence of school-based ICT policies. These studies underscore that preparedness is not just about individual skill but is deeply intertwined with the organizational and infrastructural context, a core tenet of the TOE framework.

The Kenyan Context

In Kenya, research has repeatedly flagged teacher preparedness as a major bottleneck in the country's digital education ambitions. A study in Bungoma County by Simiyu, Masibo, and Mutsotso (2020) revealed that most primary school teachers had not received any school-supported in-service training on ICT integration. Teachers' own perceptions of their skills were often negative, a factor they attributed to a lack of qualified trainers and insufficient training duration. This points to a failure in the delivery of continuous professional development, a crucial component of preparedness.

Omboto (2022), in a study on the Digital Literacy Programme (DLP) in special needs schools in Nairobi, found that a lack of reliable power and inadequate ICT equipment directly contributed to teachers' inability to integrate social media and other digital tools. This finding is particularly relevant to a marginalized context like Mandera, where such infrastructural deficits are even more severe. The study also highlighted the issue of technophobia among some teachers, who feared equipment failure or theft, suggesting that preparedness also has a crucial psychological dimension related to confidence and risk aversion.

Specifically within the ECE sector, the challenges are pronounced. A study in Mavoko Sub-County by Musyoki, Marima, and Mwangi (2018) found that while digital media were available in some centers, their utilization was very low, particularly in public schools. The study concluded that teachers faced significant challenges in effectively using

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these tools for language instruction, pointing to a clear preparedness gap at the pre-primary level.

While this body of literature confirms that teacher preparedness is a critical issue, a significant gap remains. Most studies on ICT in Kenya have focused on primary or secondary schools, with very little empirical attention paid to the unique context of Early Childhood Development and Education (ECDE). Furthermore, almost no research has been conducted in the marginalized, semi-arid regions of northern Kenya, like Mandera. The preparedness of ECE teachers in such a unique and challenging environment to integrate a novel tool like social media for a core competency like language instruction remains a largely unexplored and critically important area of inquiry. This study is designed to fill this specific geographical, sectoral, and conceptual gap.

3. Research Methodology

This study employed a descriptive research design, which is appropriate for systematically documenting and describing the current state of teacher preparedness for social media integration in the target population (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). A mixed-methods approach was utilized to provide a triangulated and comprehensive analysis.

The study was conducted in the 30 public pre-primary centers within Mandera Central Sub-County, Mandera County. The target population comprised all 82 pre-primary teachers employed in these centers. Given the relatively small and accessible size of the population, a census method was adopted, where all 82 teachers were included in the sample. This approach was chosen to eliminate sampling error and provide a complete picture of teacher preparedness across the entire sub-county (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Data were collected using two primary instruments. A structured questionnaire with 5-point Likert-scale items and open-ended questions was administered to the teachers. The section on teacher preparedness included statements such as, "I have the technical skills needed to use social media in teaching," and "I need training on how to use YouTube and WhatsApp to support learning in class." An observation checklist was also used by the researcher to physically assess the availability and use of ICT infrastructure in the centers.

A pilot study was conducted with 8 teachers in the neighboring Mandera East Sub-County to test the instruments' validity and reliability. The questionnaire demonstrated high content validity following review by university supervisors and digital media specialists. The reliability of the questionnaire scales was confirmed using Cronbach's Alpha, achieving a coefficient of 0.886, which indicates excellent internal consistency.

Quantitative data from the questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS (Version 28). Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means) were used to summarize the data related to teacher preparedness. A simple linear regression was conducted to determine the predictive relationship between teacher preparedness and the quality of language instruction. Qualitative data from open-ended questions were analyzed using content analysis.

4. Findings

This section presents the findings of the study, integrating the quantitative results from the survey of 72 teachers (87.8% response rate) with qualitative and observational data to provide a multi-faceted view of teacher preparedness.

The quantitative analysis sought to measure teachers' self-perceived preparedness and identify specific areas of strength and weakness.

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Overall Preparedness Rating:
Teachers were first asked to give an overall rating of their preparedness to integrate social media into their teaching. The results, presented in Figure 1, indicate a predominant sense of moderate, but not high, readiness.

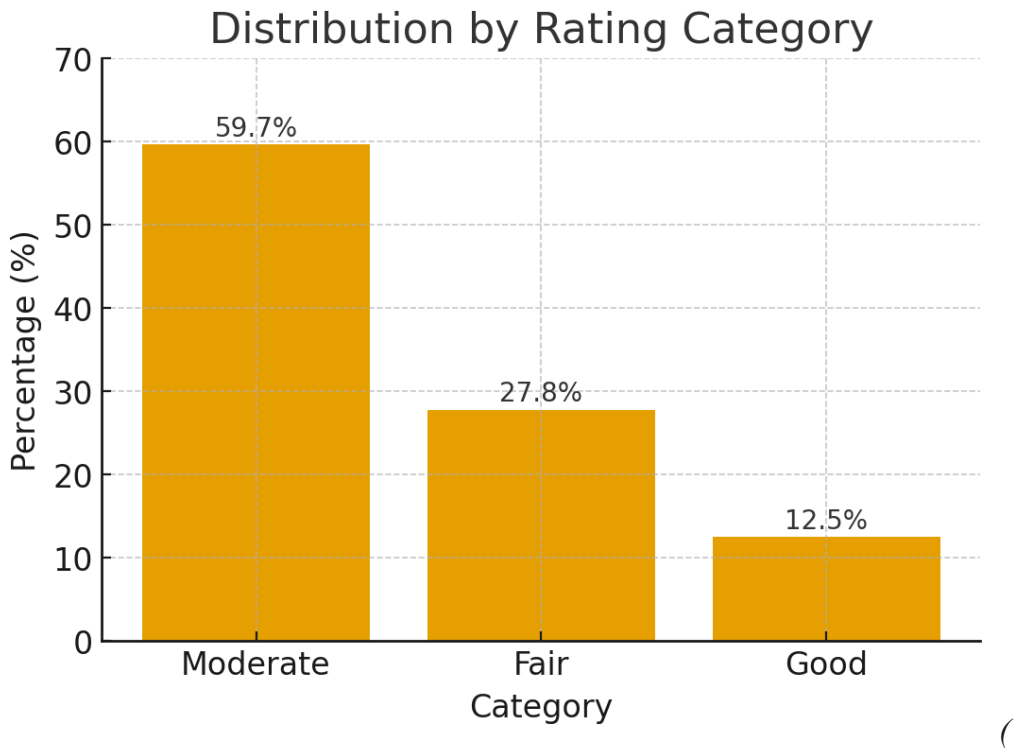

Figure 1: Teachers' Overall Rating of Preparedness (N=72)
Source: Field Data 2025

A majority of teachers (59.7%) rated their preparedness as "moderate," while 27.8% rated it as "fair." Only a small minority (12.5%) felt their preparedness was "good." Critically, no teachers rated their preparedness as "very good" or "excellent." This finding suggests that while teachers are not entirely unprepared, there is a clear and widespread lack of deep confidence and mastery.

Specific Competency Gaps:
To understand the specific dimensions of this moderate preparedness, teachers rated their agreement with several statements. The results, detailed in Table 1, reveal significant gaps in both pedagogical and technical skills.

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Table 1: Teachers' Self-Assessment of Preparedness (N=72)

Statement	Mean	Std. Dev.
I need training on how to use YouTube and WhatsApp to support learning.	4.28	0.74
I can download images from YouTube and use them in class.	3.58	0.96
I have the technical skills needed to use social media in teaching.	2.58	1.02
I can integrate social media video into my lessons.	2.57	0.98
I can use web-based resources in class.	2.26	0.87
I have sufficient subject matter knowledge in social media educational content.	2.06	0.92
I incorporate instructional media when making lesson notes for Language.	1.89	0.85

Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree
Source: Field Data 2025

The descriptive statistics reveal a "preparedness paradox." On one hand, there is a very strong and clear demand for training, with the statement "I need training on how to use YouTube and WhatsApp" receiving the highest mean score (M=4.28). This indicates a high level of awareness and willingness to learn among the teachers.
On the other hand, their self-assessed current abilities are critically low. The mean scores for key pedagogical and technical skills fall well below the neutral point, indicating strong disagreement.

Teachers reported low confidence in:
(i) Having the necessary technical skills (M=2.58).
(ii) Knowing how to integrate videos into lessons (M=2.57).
(iii) Having sufficient knowledge of educational content available on social media (M=2.06).

The most damning finding is the extremely low mean score for incorporating instructional media into lesson planning (M=1.89). This score, approaching "Strongly Disagree," suggests that the integration of digital tools into the core pedagogical practice of lesson design is almost non-existent. This finding statistically confirms that the use of social media, if it happens at all, is likely ad-hoc and not systematically planned as part of the instructional process.

The qualitative data from open-ended questions and the researcher's observations provided rich, contextual explanations for these quantitative patterns. Four primary themes emerged: (1) Acknowledged Skills Gaps, (2) Lack of Continuous Professional Development, (3) The Attitude-Practice Dichotomy, and (4) Pervasive Infrastructural Barriers.

Theme 1: Acknowledged Skills Gaps
Teachers' written responses consistently highlighted a self-awareness of their digital limitations. Many teachers stated that while they used platforms like WhatsApp for personal communication, they felt lost when it came to using it for educational purposes.

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> I use WhatsApp every day to talk to my family. But I was never trained on how to use it to teach children. How do you share a story? How do you manage a group with parents? These are skills we don't have (Teacher Respondent #14).

Theme 2: Lack of Continuous Professional Development

A dominant theme was the absence of relevant and ongoing training. Teachers reported that the few professional development sessions they attended were generic and rarely addressed the specific needs of ECE or the challenges of their local context.

> The training we get is always for primary school teachers. They talk about things that don't apply to our small children. Nobody has ever organized a workshop specifically on using technology for ECDE in Mandera (Teacher Respondent #28).

Theme 3: The Attitude-Practice Dichotomy

Despite the skills gaps, a strong positive attitude and willingness to learn were evident. However, some older teachers expressed a degree of "techno-resistance."

> I am willing to learn. If the county can train us, I will be the first to attend. Our children see these things on their parents' phones; we should use them for learning (Teacher Respondent #45).

> For me, the old ways are better. A book and a chart are what these children need. This technology is a distraction (Teacher Respondent #61).

Theme 4: Pervasive Infrastructural Barriers

The researcher's observations, detailed in the observation checklist, confirmed that the organizational context is a major constraint on preparedness. In over 80% of the centers visited, there was no reliable source of electricity, with teachers relying on charging their personal phones at home. Internet connectivity was unreliable or non-existent in 72% of the centers. While all teachers had personal smartphones, there were no school-provided devices like tablets or projectors in the vast majority of centers. This infrastructural poverty makes any discussion of teacher preparedness for digital integration almost theoretical. A teacher cannot be prepared to use tools that do not exist or cannot function in their work environment.

5. Discussion

The triangulated findings of this study converge on a clear and compelling conclusion: the preparedness of pre-primary teachers in Mandera Central Sub-County for social media integration is critically low, and this deficit constitutes the primary bottleneck to leveraging digital tools for language instruction. The study reveals a "preparedness paradox" where teachers possess a high degree of willingness and a positive attitude towards technology but are simultaneously constrained by profound deficits in technical skills, pedagogical knowledge, and a near-total lack of institutional and infrastructural support.

The quantitative data powerfully illustrates this paradox. The high mean score (M=4.28) for the expressed need for training is a vital finding. It refutes any simplistic

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narrative of teacher resistance and instead points to an unmet demand for capacity building. This aligns with the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which suggests that a key driver of technology adoption is Perceived Usefulness. The teachers in Mandera clearly perceive social media as potentially useful, which is a crucial first step. However, the other pillar of TAM, Perceived Ease of Use, is evidently missing, as reflected in the low mean scores for technical skills and confidence.

The extremely low mean score for incorporating media into lesson planning (M=1.89) is perhaps the most significant finding. It suggests that technology integration is not yet seen as an integral part of the pedagogical design process. This aligns with the work of Mishra and Koehler (2006) on the TPACK framework, which argues that effective technology integration requires a deep synthesis of technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge. The findings from Mandera suggest that teachers' knowledge is currently siloed: they may have some content knowledge (language activities) and some pedagogical knowledge (how to teach young children), but they lack the technological knowledge and, crucially, the skill to weave the three together. This deficit in TPACK is a direct consequence of the inadequate professional development opportunities identified in both the quantitative and qualitative data.

The qualitative findings, particularly the themes of inadequate professional development and pervasive infrastructural barriers, firmly situate the problem of preparedness within the Organizational and Environmental contexts of the TOE framework (Tornatzky & Fleischer, 1990). The teachers' lack of preparedness is not an individual failing but a predictable outcome of an educational ecosystem that has failed to provide them with the necessary tools and training. The observation that training is generic and not tailored to ECE is a critical insight, corroborating literature that argues for the importance of context-specific professional development (Simiyu, Masibo, & Mutsotso, 2020).

Furthermore, the observational data on infrastructure highlights the futility of discussing pedagogical preparedness in a "digital desert." A teacher cannot be prepared to use a projector in a classroom without electricity, or to stream a YouTube video without reliable internet. This finding provides a stark, ground-level reality check to ambitious national policies like the DLP and CBC, underscoring the vast chasm that often exists between policy rhetoric and implementation reality, particularly in marginalized regions (Omboto, 2022). The lack of resources forces teachers to rely on their personal devices, which raises significant equity and sustainability issues.

In summary, the discussion reveals that teacher preparedness is the central, unresolved challenge for social media integration in Mandera's ECE sector. The issue is not one of teacher attitude, but of systemic failure in the provision of relevant training, institutional support, and basic infrastructure. Until these foundational elements of the organizational and environmental contexts are addressed, the transformative potential of social media for language instruction will remain locked, and the digital divide will continue to widen for the youngest learners in one of Kenya's most underserved regions.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study concludes that the preparedness of pre-primary teachers in Mandera Central Sub-County to integrate social media tools for language instruction is fundamentally inadequate, despite their positive attitudes and willingness to learn. This lack of preparedness is not an issue of individual teacher deficit but a systemic failure characterized by three critical gaps: a competency gap in both technical and pedagogical skills; a professional development

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gap due to the absence of continuous, context-specific training; and a profound infrastructural gap, with most ECE centers lacking reliable power, internet, and institutional devices. This tripartite failure creates a "preparedness paradox" where teachers are expected to implement 21st-century pedagogy within a 20th-century resource environment. Until these systemic issues are addressed, teacher preparedness will remain the primary bottleneck, preventing the effective use of social media to enhance early childhood language learning and perpetuating the digital divide for the region's most vulnerable learners.

Based on the study's findings, the following targeted recommendations are proposed:

1. For Policymakers (Ministry of Education, TSC, County Government of Mandera):
    (i) Develop a Context-Specific ECE Digital Literacy Framework: It is recommended that a national framework for teacher professional development be adapted for marginalized contexts like Mandera. This should prioritize funding for continuous, job-embedded training programs that are delivered locally, focus on pedagogical application (TPACK), and use a blended learning approach to overcome logistical barriers.
    (ii) Launch a "Digital Start-Pack" Initiative for ECE Centers: Based on the finding of severe infrastructural deficits, it is recommended that the County Government, in partnership with NGOs, initiate a program to provide each ECE center with a basic, sustainable technology package, such as a solar-powered charging station, a school tablet, and a subsidized internet connection.
2. For School Administrators and ECE Leaders:
    (i) Establish School-Based Professional Learning Communities (PLCs): Principals and ECE coordinators should facilitate the creation of PLCs where teachers can collaboratively learn, share best practices, and solve problems related to social media integration. This leverages peer learning, which is a low-cost, high-impact intervention.
    (ii) Develop a Simple School-Level ICT Integration Policy: Each school should develop a clear policy that guides the use of social media, outlines ethical considerations, and provides support for teachers attempting to innovate. This provides the institutional backing that teachers currently lack.
3. For Future Research:
    (i) An action research study that co-designs, implements, and evaluates a context-specific TPD program for ECE teachers in Mandera would provide valuable, practical insights.
    (ii) A comparative study examining teacher preparedness in a well-resourced urban ECE setting versus a marginalized rural setting like Mandera would further illuminate the impact of the organizational and environmental contexts.

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