

Assessing English Teachers' Adherence to Criteria for Selecting Visual Instructional
Materials for Comprehension Lessons in Secondary Schools in Nkhata-Bay District, Malawi

By

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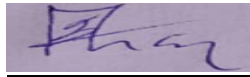
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November, 2025

DECLARATION

I, Sangwani Chiuke Mhango, do hereby declare that, this thesis is my own work and it has not been submitted for any academic award in any other university for a similar or any other degree award.



Signature

6th January, 2026

Date

This research Project is submitted for examination with my approval as university supervisor

.....

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.....

Date

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my wife, **Fukazi Mhango (née Ngwira)** and my daughter, **Urunji Mhango** above all others, for their deep love and their care for my development and who at times had to force me to sit and work on the thesis. They provided all the support I needed to focus on my work and they were my best and most frequent audience.

ABSTRACT

This study investigated how English teachers in secondary schools in the Nkhata-Bay District of Malawi select visual instructional materials for comprehension lessons and assessed their adherence to the established selection criteria of visual materials. Recognising that visual materials play a crucial role in translating abstract textual content into accessible learning experiences, this study examined the decision-making processes as well as the pedagogical strategies that teachers employ to enhance student comprehension. Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected from four secondary schools through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with teachers who are actively engaged in the selection of visual materials. The study's findings revealed a dynamic, multi-step selection process where teachers systematically review lesson plans, identify key concepts, and seek visuals that align with curriculum objectives and contextual realities. While many teachers demonstrated a knowledgeable understanding of benchmark of visual materials criteria such as clarity, simplicity, relevance, and cultural appropriateness, it was established that resource limitations, time constraints, and inadequate professional development sometimes compel deviations from ideal practices. These challenges not only affect the quality of the visual materials but also have a direct impact on student engagement as well as overall comprehension of lessons. Following the findings of this study, the study recommends the provision of training to the teacher in order to advance their knowledge on the visual materials. There is also a need to implement digital platforms that could be providing accessibility to various digital visual materials. At the same time, promote collaboration among teachers to be sharing the best means of selecting the visual materials. Ultimately, the insights from this study contribute to a deeper understanding of visual literacy in low-resource educational environment and offer practical recommendations for enhancing English comprehension instruction.

Key words: ADDIE model, Comprehension Lessons, English Teachers, Instructional Design, Nkhata-Bay District, Secondary Schools, Selection Criteria, Visual Materials, Visual Literacy.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADDIE	: Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation
EFL	: English as a Foreign Language
MoE	: Ministry of Education
MANEB	: Malawi National Examinations Board
MEDTE	: Master of Education in Teacher Education
MZUNIREC	: Mzuzu University Research Ethics Committee
NSO	: National Statistical Office
NKT	: Nkhata-Bay Teacher (participant code prefix, e.g., NKT001)
PLC	: Professional Learning Community
UNESCO	: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
VARK	: Visual, Aural, Read/write, and Kinesthetic

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter lays the foundation for the study by introducing its context, and significance of this study. It begins by situating the research within the educational landscape of the Nkhata-Bay District in Malawi, where the effective use of visual instructional materials in English comprehension lessons is vital. The chapter provides a detailed background that explains how visual materials serve as bridges between abstract textual content and students' real-world experiences, thereby enhancing comprehension, retention, and engagement. It then clearly states the problem highlighting inconsistencies in how English teachers select visual materials and the potential negative impacts on student outcomes.

1.2 Background of the Study

Visual materials, encompass any imagery used to support the understanding of written and audio text. This can include photographs, paintings, info-graphics, diagrams, and even films or short videos (Chan & van den Bergh, 2009). They act as a bridge between the abstract world of language and the concrete realm of our visual perception (Mayer, 2014). Studies have consistently shown that visuals can improve student engagement, retention of information, and overall comprehension, particularly for struggling readers or learners with different learning styles (Ainsworth, 2006; Schnotz & Yannias, 2013). However, the effectiveness of visuals lies not just on their presence but also on their selection. Simply including any image alongside text does not guarantee improved learning outcomes. In fact, poorly chosen visuals can distract learners or even lead to misinterpretations (Mayer, 2005). Thus, the question of what criteria English teachers use when selecting visual materials for comprehension lessons became paramount.

The effective use of visuals in language learning has a long and well-established history. From the ancient Egyptians using hieroglyphics to the contemporary classroom with its interactive whiteboards, visuals have played a crucial role in conveying meaning and enhancing comprehension (Dirks, 2008). Recent decades have witnessed a surge in research on multimedia learning, highlighting the cognitive benefits of integrating visuals with text (Mayer, 2014). This trend toward embracing visuals in education extends to the African continent. Many African countries, including Malawi, are actively seeking ways to improve the quality of their education systems. A key focus is on promoting learner-centred approaches that cater to diverse learning needs (UNESCO, 2015). The integration of visuals into language lessons aligns with this goal by offering a valuable tool for engaging students and making learning more accessible.

Within Malawi, the national curriculum emphasises the importance of using a variety of teaching methods, including visuals, to enhance comprehension (Ministry of Education, 2017). However, research suggests that the effective use of visuals requires careful consideration (Chan & van den Bergh, 2009). Simply including any image alongside text is not enough. Visuals need to be strategically chosen to complement the learning objectives and avoid creating confusion or cognitive overload (Mayer, 2005).

Despite the established value of visuals in language learning and the national curriculum's emphasis on their use, limited research exists on how Malawian English teachers actually approach visual selection. A 2019 report by the Malawian Ministry of Education highlights large class sizes and limited resources as major challenges faced by schools (Ministry of Education, 2019). These challenges can potentially limit teachers' ability to effectively integrate visuals into their lessons.

This study focused on Nkhata Bay District in Malawi. The district, located in the northern region of the country, offers a microcosm of the broader challenges faced by Malawian schools. According to a 2020 report by the National Statistical Office of Malawi, Nkhata Bay has an average class size of 78 students, exceeding the national average of 63 (National Statistical Office, 2020). Understanding how English teachers in Nkhata Bay District, Malawi approach visual selection can provide valuable understanding into the potential gaps that may exist between established best practices and actual implementation. This knowledge can then be used to inform the development of targeted professional development programmes that equip teachers with the necessary skills to make greater use of the power of visuals for effective language comprehension instruction.

In Malawi, English language proficiency is of paramount importance due to its status as one of the official languages and its widespread use in various domains including education, government, business and communication. In Malawi's educational system, English serves as the medium of instruction in many subjects. This makes it essential for students to acquire proficiency in the language to succeed academically (Chimombo, 2005). Furthermore, English proficiency is increasingly recognized as a crucial factor in accessing higher education opportunities and employment prospects both within Malawi and internationally. Proficiency in English opens doors to further education, scholarship and employment opportunities, as many higher education institutions and employers require competent English skills (Kachepatsonga & Chikungwa, 2016). Moreover, Kachepatsonga and Chikungwa (2016) further note that as Malawi continues to engage in global interactions and partnerships, English proficiency facilitates communication and collaboration with individuals and organisations from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. It enables Malawians to participate

effectively in international forums, conferences and trade negotiations, thereby contributing to the country's socio-economic development (Kachepatsonga & Chikungwa, 2016). Visual materials therefore serve as crucial resources in the comprehension of English lessons.

Comprehension skills acquired in the English lessons are essential for secondary school learners in Malawi as they navigate through various academic subjects and real-world situations. Proficient comprehension skills enable students to understand, analyse and interpret written and spoken texts effectively. These skills empower the students to extract essential information, make informed decisions and communicate their ideas coherently (Mwambari & Khunga, 2020b). Students need to comprehend English texts across different subjects, including mathematics, science, social studies, and literature, to grasp complex concepts and succeed academically (Mwambari & Khunga, 2020a).

Acquiring comprehension skills also enhances students' critical thinking abilities and fosters lifelong learning. Through the process of comprehending various texts, students develop analytical skills, logical reasoning and the capacity to evaluate information critically (Mwambari & Khunga, 2020a). These skills are invaluable for academic success, professional growth, and civic engagement in Malawi's rapidly evolving society. Proficient comprehension skills thus empower students to engage with a wide range of texts, including academic articles, literary works, government policies and media reports which enables them to stay informed, express their opinions and participate actively in democratic processes (Mwambari & Khunga, 2020b). Teaching and learning resources, for instance, visual materials play a crucial role in the educational process like comprehension lessons by shaping the quality of instruction and students' academic outcomes (Mwambari & Khunga, 2020b).

Despite the recognised significance of visual materials in the comprehension of English lessons, there exists a lack in understanding how English teachers select these resources, particularly within the context of Malawi's educational system. Prodromou (2000) notes that despite the current rich array of English language teaching materials commercially available, many secondary school teachers in Malawi continue to produce their own materials for classroom use. Indeed, most teachers spend considerable time finding, selecting, evaluating, adapting and making materials to use in their teaching. Thus, this research aimed to assess English teachers' criteria for selecting visual materials for comprehension lessons with a look at selected secondary schools in Nkhata-bay District in Malawi.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

The process of teaching and learning English in secondary schools has been ineffective, largely due to challenges in the use of appropriate instructional materials. In particular, studies show that the selection of visual materials for comprehension lessons remains inconsistently applied among English teachers which is compounded by limited adherence to the established selection criteria (Chan & van den Bergh, 2009; Prodromou, 2000). This inconsistency has contributed to students' poor comprehension and performance in national examinations (Agufana et al., 2017; D & D, 2015; MANEB, 2020; 2021; 2022; 2023). Despite the significant role visual materials play in enhancing students' understanding (Mayer, 2005; Schnotz & Yannias, 2013), little research has been done in Malawi to examine how teachers select these materials and the criteria they follow. It is not known therefore, whether or not teachers in Malawi are aware and follow the criteria set for the selection of visual aids. This study aimed to address the gap by investigating the extent to which secondary school English teachers in Nkhata-bay District, Malawi adhere to the criteria for selecting visual materials for comprehension lessons.

1.4 Aim of the Study

To assess the adherence of English teachers to the criteria for selecting visual instructional materials for comprehension lessons in secondary schools in Nkhata-bay District, Malawi.

1.5 Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of this study were as follows:

1. To identify ways that secondary school English teachers use to select visual materials for comprehension lessons.
2. To analyse the adherence of teachers to the selection criteria of visual materials for English comprehension lessons.
3. To find out the knowledge of teachers on the selection criteria of visual materials for English comprehension lessons.

1.6 Significance of the Study

The outcome of this study would benefit different stakeholders in education; teachers, learners, schools, curriculum planners, and governments in the following ways: the study's findings would assist teachers in the field of English to adhere to and be conversant with the prerequisites in criteria for the selection of visual materials for teaching-learning encounters; students stand to benefit as their performance is expected to improve, if teachers start using visual materials appropriately. The Ministry of Education (MoE) is also provided with more reliable information, which would enable it to formulate an English curriculum that is well-rooted in the use of visual materials; and it would provide a path for further research, creating an avenue for the curriculum planners to make necessary changes in the English language curriculum to meet the needs of the students and for effective teaching activities.

1.7 Scope of the Study

The study focused exclusively on four secondary schools within the Nkhata-bay District in Malawi, limiting the geographic area of investigation. It did not extend to schools outside this district. It primarily involved English teachers within the selected secondary schools who are responsible for teaching students comprehension lessons using visual materials. Other school staff, students, or external stakeholders were not the primary focus of the research. This study utilised a case study approach to delve deeply into the selected schools, emphasising qualitative data collection methods such as interviews and observations. The research specifically assessed the criteria used by English teachers to select visual instructional materials for comprehension lessons. The criteria themselves are a significant aspect of the study. Therefore, understanding the scope of the study was crucial for both the researcher and the readers, as it set clear expectations for what the study aimed to achieve.

1.8 Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework in research is defined as a set of concepts, theories, ideas, and assumptions that help you understand a specific phenomenon or problem (Cohen, 2007). It was considered a blueprint that was borrowed by the researcher to develop the research inquiry. Furthermore, it helped in resisting getting off track by digging into information that had nothing to do with the topic in question. This study adopted the ADDIE model which is comprised of five interrelated phases namely; Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation. This model offered a systematic framework for guiding the selection of visual instructional materials for English comprehension lessons (Branch, 2009). The adoption of ADDIE as the theoretical lens for this study moved beyond the descriptive accounts of practices of teachers to a more structured process that enhanced both material quality and pedagogical effectiveness of the materials being used (Molenda, 2015).

Analysis: In this initial phase, the instructional problems are identified whereby learner characteristics are profiled, and environmental constraints are documented (Smith & Ragan, 2020). The Analysis involved gauging the needs of students with regards to visual aids, examining curriculum objectives, and auditing available resources. Khrais (2021) notes that needs assessments can be conducted through classroom observations and interviews in order to reveal gaps in students' comprehension when abstract texts lack concrete visual support. The contextual factors such as class size, technological access, and cultural relevance were also analysed to ensure visuals align with local realities.

Design: With a benchmark on the Analysis of findings, the Design phase specifies instructional goals by mapping out lesson sequences, and develops the selection criteria for the relevant visual materials (Spector, 2015). In this case, "Design" entailed articulating the SMART objectives for comprehension (e.g., "Students must be able to infer character motivations from illustrated storyboards") and thereafter defined the criteria such as clarity, cultural resonance, and alignment with Bloom's taxonomy that visual materials had to meet (Khrais, 2021). From here, different storyboarding as well as low-fidelity prototypes of charts, diagrams, and infographics were created to visualise how each image supported specific learning outcomes.

Development: Here, prototypes designed in the previous phase evolves into finalised visual materials. According to Molenda (2015), teachers create visuals such as photographs, hand-drawn diagrams, and digital info-graphics that adhere to Design specifications. At the same time, Development also included interactive pilot testing whereby teachers introduced sample visuals in small groups, collected formative feedback, and refined graphics for readability as well as pedagogical impact (Khan, 2019). For example, a timeline diagram that illustrated a

historical text was revised to use locally familiar icons and simplified colour schemes that enhanced student engagement without cognitive overload.

Implementation: At this phase, the prepared visuals are integrated into real classroom settings. During the Implementation, teachers deployed selected materials within the comprehension lessons, following a detailed facilitation plan that included introductory framing, guided practice, and also independent activities (Smith & Ragan, 2020). Teachers ably managed logistics which included projector setup, print distribution, and framed student interaction that prompted learners to describe, analyse, and relate visuals to the text at hand. This phase emphasised fidelity of use that ensured that the given visuals served their intended instructional roles.

Evaluation: The final phase assesses both learner outcomes as well as the material effectiveness (Spector, 2015). Summative evaluations such as post-tests and comprehension quizzes measured gains in student understanding attributable to the visual materials. Concurrently, teacher reflections provided qualitative data on usability and engagement of the used visual materials. According to Khrais (2021), the central point of this evaluation was that data had to inform future revisions whereby the visuals that failed to clarify key concepts were redesigned or replaced, while highly effective images were maintained and possibly scaled for broader curricular use.

In this context, the ADDIE model assumed a rigid and linear phases from analysis to evaluation. Being the case, such linear phases might not be fully implemented in areas of limited resources. However, the adoption of ADDIE into the theoretical framework for this study foregrounded a cyclical process of continuous improvement, whereby each phase

informed the next in a data-driven loop. Such a structured approach not only enhanced adherence of teachers to the selection criteria but also fostered reflective practice and capacity building in resource-constrained environments (Molenda, 2015; Smith & Ragan, 2020). Ultimately, the ADDIE provided a robust skeleton for optimising visual instructional materials, thereby advancing both scholarship and practice in English comprehension instruction.

1.9 Operational Definitions of Key Terms

i. Adherence: refers to the degree to which English teachers conform to or follow the prescribed criteria and guidelines for selecting visual materials for comprehension lessons (Richards & Renandya, 2002).

ii. Criteria: are a set of specific standards, guidelines, or benchmarks that serve as a basis for evaluating or making decisions about the selection of visual materials for comprehension lessons (Richards & Renandya, 2002).

iii. Visual Materials: refer to materials such as images, charts, diagrams, videos, and other visual aids that are used to enhance and support the teaching of English comprehension (Mayer, 2001).

iv. Comprehension Lessons: are educational sessions designed to improve students' understanding and interpretation of written or spoken English texts, including their ability to extract meaning, infer information, and critically analyse content (Grabe, 2009).

1.10 Thesis Structure

This thesis has five chapters. Chapter one introduces the study on assessing English teachers' adherence to criteria for selecting visual instructional materials for comprehension lessons in secondary schools in Nkhata-Bay District, Malawi. It outlines the background of the study, states the problem, presents the research aim and objectives, and explains the significance of the research for improving teaching practices and informing educational policy.

Chapter two critically examines the existing research on visual instructional materials in education. It reviews the empirical studies on the selection of visuals in teaching comprehension lessons. It also discusses the benefits and challenges associated with visual materials and highlights gaps in the current literature.

Chapter three is on research methodology which details the qualitative research approach and case study design that was used in this study. It outlines the research setting, participant selection, and data collection methods (including classroom observations and semi-structured interviews). The chapter also stipulates the data analysis procedures (thematic analysis) and discusses ethical considerations to ensure participant rights and confidentiality. Ultimately, the chapter depicts the limitations of the study.

Chapter four presents and discusses the key findings of the study which was structured around the research objectives. It includes insights into how teachers select visual instructional materials, their level of adherence to the recommended selection criteria, and their knowledge of these criteria. The findings were analysed in comparison with the literature reviewed, highlighting key patterns, challenges, and discrepancies. The chapter also discusses the

implications of the findings for teaching practices and policy. They offer a critical examination of the strengths and weaknesses of the current material selection process.

This final chapter summarises the key findings and their significance. It draws conclusions regarding the extent to which teachers adhere to selection criteria for visual instructional materials and the factors influencing their decision-making. The chapter provides recommendations for improving instructional material selection in secondary schools, including policy recommendations and teacher training initiatives. Finally, it identifies limitations of the study and suggests areas for future research.

1.11 Chapter Summary

The chapter presents the background to the context from which the title of the thesis is borne. The statement of the problem and rationale for the study is discussed, along with the aim of the study, specific objectives, the significance of the study, the scope of the study, the operational definitions of key concepts used in the study, and the thesis structure. Finally, the chapter outlines the thesis structure, covering the chapters and the assorted elements in each chapter.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Chapter Overview

There are so many researches which have been carried out in connection with visual materials. This chapter, thus, provides a review of pertinent literature relating to teaching of comprehension lesson with a particular emphasis on issues relating to criteria used when selecting visual materials for the lessons. It looks at the criteria for selecting appropriate visual materials in English comprehension, importance of visual materials in language teaching and comprehension lessons and related studies on the challenges teachers face when using of visual materials for teaching comprehension lessons.

2.2 Empirical Review

2.2.1 Criteria for Selecting Visual Materials for Comprehension Lessons

This section discusses the findings from the study on the criteria used by teachers when selecting visual materials in teaching comprehension lessons. When selecting visual materials for comprehension lessons, teachers often consider a variety of criteria to ensure that the materials are effective in aiding student understanding. The study managed to suggest relevance to the subject matter, complexity of the material and cultural relevance as some of the criteria used by teachers when selecting these materials.

One important criterion that teachers considered was the relevance of the visual materials to the text being studied. With respect to a study done by Shuang (2014), it has shown that using visual materials that are closely related to the text is of paramount importance as it enhances students' comprehension and retention of the material covered. Similarly, a study conducted by Johnson et al. (2019), which investigated the impact of visual relevance on students'

comprehension of text, found that when visual materials are closely mirrored to the content of the text, students demonstrated higher levels of comprehension and retention. Thus, from this end, researchers concluded that selecting visually relevant materials can enhance students' understanding of the text. This simply illustrates how crucial relevance of the visual materials to teaching of comprehension to its selection. In addition to that, a study by Brown and Smith (2018) also highlights relevance and authenticity as critical criterion in selecting visual materials for English comprehension lesson. Researchers stipulate that when visual materials are closely aligned with the context of the learning content, it enhances comprehension by providing learners with real-world examples (Irasuti & Bachtiar, 2024). With respect to the above findings, this study used the understanding to critically analyse the criteria used by teachers in selecting visual materials for teaching comprehension.

Additionally, teachers also consider the complexity of the visual materials when selecting them for comprehension lessons. Studies have shown that visual materials that are too complex or too simplistic can actually hinder students' comprehension of the text (Medina & Belmonte, 2018). The study stipulates that teachers tend to look for visual materials that are at an appropriate level of complexity for their students. In a study by Wang and Zhang (2020), the researchers explored the relationship between visual complexity and students' comprehension of text. The study found that visual materials with an appropriate level of complexity, neither too simple nor too intricate, were most effective in supporting students' comprehension. From this end, researchers highlighted the importance of selecting visually appropriate materials for comprehension lessons. In agreement with the above point, the study borrowed this understanding to deduce criterion used by teachers in selecting visual materials for comprehension lesson.

A study by Lee and Garcia (2018) stressed on the role of cultural relevance in visual materials for comprehension lessons. Their research revealed that when visual materials reflect students' cultural backgrounds and experiences, students were more engaged and demonstrated improved comprehension of the text. The study, thus, put much emphasis on the importance of considering cultural relevance when selecting visual materials for teaching comprehension. Similarly, a study by Zhiqiang (2016) also stressed on adherence to cultural relevance of the visual materials used. It highlighted that using visual materials that are culturally relevant to students increases their engagement with the material and improves their comprehension. Lastly, cultural relevance criterion in selecting visual materials is also highlighted by Gonzalez and Lee (2018). Their study advocates for the incorporation of visuals that represent diverse cultural contexts, ensuring inclusivity and relevance for a varied student population. They claimed that, by addressing cultural aspects through visual content, educators can create a more inclusive and engaging learning environment that resonates with the diverse backgrounds of English learners. Thus, this study utilised this understanding to assess cultural relevance which was also used as a criterion for selecting visual materials for comprehension lesson in Nkhata-Bay secondary schools.

Selection of visual materials is not enough rather selecting appropriate visual instructional materials is critical in enhancing English comprehension lessons, as the visuals bridge abstract textual content with experiential knowledge of students. Recent research underscores that the visual material selection process is complex and also influenced by several key factors such as curriculum alignment, learner needs, cultural relevance, and availability of resources (Wang et al., 2021). Several studies highlight that mostly teachers begin by aligning visual materials with established curricular goals as well as the specific learning outcomes of a particular lesson. For instance, a study by Mokobe, Badenhorst and Schlebusch (2025) found that teachers in South

African secondary schools rely on curriculum guides and also standardized benchmarks when choosing visuals to support reading comprehension. This approach ensures that the selected materials are directly relevant to the content being taught which in turn facilitate a more coherent learning experience. Similar to that, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE, 2021) emphasized that visual materials should be age-appropriate, culturally responsive, and also engaging. Thus, teachers are encouraged to consider whether a visual can stimulate interest, clarify difficult concepts, or provide concrete examples for abstract ideas before actual sessions of lessons.

Beyond curriculum alignment, teacher's choice also influences the understanding of students that in most cases that one possesses diverse learning needs. In a recent qualitative study by O'Leary (2020), they demonstrated that normally the experienced teachers use a combination of informal assessments as well as classroom observations to determine what types of visuals best resonate with their learners. For example, teachers reported preferring dynamic images such as info-graphics, videos, and even interactive digital media when addressing complex texts as these tools help students build mental models and retain more information. The use of multimedia sources is also fundamental in low-resource settings where traditional textbooks may not provide sufficient visual support (Wang et al., 2021).

Another important aspect in the selection of visuals is the cultural relevance. Teachers are increasingly aware of the need to incorporate images that reflect the cultural as well as the social contexts of their students (Schachner et al., 2021). When visuals mirror the backgrounds and everyday experiences of students, they tend to be more likely to engage with and internalise the content of the lessons. Such culturally responsive selection process not only increases

comprehension but also validates the identities of students which enhances motivation and participation in class (Mokobe et al., 2025; Abdulrahaman et al., 2020).

On the other hand, the process of selecting visual materials is also influenced by the personal experiences as well as professional development of teachers. According to a study by Albaqami (2019), professional development programs that focus on digital literacy and also visual pedagogy improve the ability of teachers to curate effective visual resources. Mostly, these programs introduce educators to various digital platforms and online repositories where high-quality visuals are available. Furthermore, teachers who engage in collaborative planning with their colleagues tend to share resources and strategies which leads to a more systematic and reflective selection of visual materials (Vangrieken et al., 2015). Peer discussions and professional learning communities serve as critical forums for exchanging ideas and reviewing the pedagogical merits of various visual aids.

In addition to the formal criteria, the pragmatic considerations also shape the selection process of visual materials. In this regard, availability of resources is a substantial factor more particular in underfunded schools. Sometimes teachers must rely on readily available materials rather than the ideal ones (Albaqami, 2019; Jayaraman & Aane, 2024)). This pragmatic approach reflects the adaptive strategies that teachers can employ to maximize limited resources. For instance, when digital tools are scarce, teachers may use printed photographs or recycled visual aids from previous lessons that modifies them to fit the current curricular needs.

Moreover, the advancements in technology have broadened the spectrum of available visual materials. The rise of educational technology has made interactive whiteboards, tablets, and online educational videos more prevalent in classrooms (Haleem et al., 2022). These tools

allow teachers to select visuals that are not only engaging but also interactive which in turn promote active learning and immediate feedback. In a study by Schachner et al. (2021), teachers reported that interactive digital visuals helped to bridge the gap between abstract concepts and concrete understanding mostly in comprehension lessons where students struggle with inferential thinking.

Below is a concise summary of the six key criteria normally used when selecting or designing visual instructional materials;

Table 2.1: Summary of Visual Selection Criteria

Criterion	Description
Relevance to Objectives	Direct alignment with stated learning goals and outcomes (Smith & Ragan, 2020).
Clarity & Simplicity	Use of straightforward, unambiguous imagery that minimizes extraneous detail (Mayer, 2009; Nnko & Kalokola, 2023).
Cultural Appropriateness	Inclusion of visuals that resonate with learners' cultural experiences and avoid stereotypes (Khrais, 2021).
Cognitive Load Optimization	Design that limits unnecessary mental effort by segmenting information and balancing text such as image integration (Sweller et al., 2011).
Alignment with Bloom's Taxonomy	Selection of visuals that support targeted cognitive levels (e.g., analysis, application) (Forehand, 2010).

Technical Quality & Accessibility	High-resolution, legible graphics formatted for available media, with accommodations for diverse learners (Khan, 2019).
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2.2.2 Teachers' adherence to selection criteria for Visual Materials

Research in this area highlights the importance of examining not just the presence of visuals but also their quality and alignment with learning objectives. Several studies have explored the criteria teachers consider when selecting visuals. Chan & van den Bergh (2009) conducted a study in Hong Kong that involved interviewing secondary school English teachers. Their findings revealed that teachers prioritised visuals that were relevant to the text content, clear and easy to understand, and visually appealing to students. This aligns with the cognitive theory of multimedia learning proposed by Mayer (2005), which emphasises the importance of coherence between visuals and text to avoid information overload.

However, research also suggests that teachers may not always be aware of all the relevant selection criteria or may struggle to implement them effectively. A study by Schnotz & Yannias (2013) examined the use of visuals in science textbooks. Their analysis identified instances where visuals included extraneous information that distracted from the key concepts being taught. This highlights the potential for visuals to be counterproductive if not carefully chosen. Furthermore, cultural context can play a role in how teachers approach visual selection. Studies conducted in Western countries may not necessarily translate directly to African classrooms. For instance, Alibakhshi and Graber (2018) investigated the use of visuals in Iranian EFL (English as a Foreign Language) textbooks. They found that teachers often prioritised visuals that reflected traditional cultural values, even if those visuals did not necessarily align with the specific language learning objectives. This underscores the need for research that considers the specific context of Malawian classrooms.

While the studies mentioned above provide valuable insights, there is a gap in research regarding how well teachers actually adhere to established selection criteria in practice. Many studies focus on identifying the criteria themselves, with less emphasis on analysing how those criteria are applied in real-world settings using multimedia (Skulmowski & Xu, 2022). This study aims to address this gap by examining the visual materials used by English teachers in Malawi, and analysing them against established criteria for effective selection.

In order to ensure visual instructional materials positively impact student comprehension, adherence to established selection criteria is equally essential. Recent studies have explored how closely teachers follow guidelines related to relevance, cultural appropriateness, and pedagogical effectiveness when choosing visuals for English comprehension lessons (Carter & Bradford, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 2023). Empirical research indicates that while many teachers are aware of selection criteria, the practical challenges still hinder full adherence. For instance, a study by Agustina (2017) conducted a mixed-methods study in Southeast Asia and reported that teachers intended to select visuals based on curricular relevance and cultural appropriateness. However, factors such as limited access to quality resources and time constraints sometimes led to compromises in their choices. In such cases, teachers opted for what was more immediately available rather than what ideally met the pedagogical criteria which at large affects the quality of instruction.

Furthermore, a study by Idowu (2017) in Nigerian secondary schools found that although teachers recognised the importance of using visuals that are aligned with learning objectives, their actual practice varied on the adherence. Using classroom observations as well as teacher interviews, the study revealed that adherence to criteria such as clarity, simplicity, and cultural

relevance was mostly inconsistent to the given set of adherence criteria (Ladson-Billings, 2023). For example, some teachers would select visually appealing images without critically evaluating whether these images supported the key concepts of the lesson. Such discrepancy between intent and practice suggests that the adherence process is equally influenced not only by teacher knowledge but also by the external constraints such as resource limitations and institutional support.

Another critical dimension that influences the adherence is the role of professional development. Studies show that teachers who participated in targeted training programmes on visual literacy as well as instructional design were found to adhere more closely to selection criteria than those who had not participated (Agustina, 2017; Lofthouse & Thomas, 2017). These professional development initiatives focus on equipping teachers with strategies for evaluating and curating visual resources. According to a study by Darling-Hammond et al. (2005), teachers who are engaged in such programmes reported greater confidence in their ability to select and implement visuals that met pedagogical standards. In contrast, teachers that lack such training were more likely to rely on conventional methods, which in some instance led to the selection of suboptimal visual materials.

The adherence to the selection criteria also appears to be mediated by the school environment compounded by the administrative policies. For example, in a study by Bennell and Akyeampong (2007) conducted in urban South African schools, it was found that schools with clear guidelines as well as supportive administrative structures tended to have higher levels of teacher adherence to instructional material standards. In these environments, teachers had access to approved digital libraries and resource banks that facilitated the selection process in turn making it easier to adhere to quality standards. Conversely, in schools where such

structures were absent, teachers mostly resorted to adhoc methods which resulted in lower overall adherence to the visual materials.

Quantitative analyses further support the notion of variable adherence to the visual materials. In a recent survey of secondary school English teachers in Zimbabwe, Gumede (2018) reported that while 78% of teachers indicated awareness of the criteria for selecting visual materials, only 56% reported consistent adherence to the standards in practice. The gap between knowledge and application suggests that even when teachers are knowledgeable about the established criteria, still systemic as well as contextual factors can hinder consistent implementation. Moreover, the analysis of classroom artefacts, such as lesson plans and teacher-made materials, has shown that adherence is sometimes compromised by the need to adapt materials to the setup of local environment (Hockett & Brighton, 2021; Budoya et al., 2019). For instance, teachers in resource-constrained environments may intentionally modify approved materials to better suit the available technology which in some instances might deviate from the original selection guidelines (Bennell and Akyeampong (2007).

2.2.3 English Teachers' Awareness of Selection Criteria for Visual Materials

Research in this area shows a potential gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, especially in environments with limited resources and teacher education. Several studies have explored the factors that influence teachers' use of visuals in the classroom. A key theme is the role of teacher knowledge and pedagogical beliefs (Kress, 2000; Kempe & Grönlund, 2019). Teachers who possess a strong understanding of the cognitive benefits of visuals and the principles of effective selection are more likely to integrate them strategically into their lessons (Ainsworth, 2006). Conversely, a lack of awareness or confidence in using visuals can lead to their underutilisation or even misuse (Moeller, 2004; Tibane et al., 2024).

Studies by Chan and van den Bergh (2009) and Schnotz and Yannias (2013) discussed previously provide examples of how teacher knowledge can impact visual selection. While both studies identified established criteria for effective visuals, they also highlighted instances where teachers may not have been aware of these criteria or struggled to implement them effectively (Carpenter et al., 2024; Beltran et al., 2025). This suggests a potential disconnect between theoretical knowledge and practical application in the classroom.

Furthermore, research suggests that factors beyond individual teacher knowledge can play a role. Limited access to high-quality visuals, large class sizes, and competing curriculum demands can all create challenges for teachers who wish to integrate visuals more effectively (McCowan et al., 2022; Alibakhshi & Gräber, 2018; Dong, 2021). These challenges may be particularly pronounced in developing countries.

A study by Mtegha and Mkandawire (2014) investigated the use of instructional materials in Malawian primary schools. Their findings revealed a reliance on traditional textbooks and a lack of readily available visual resources. This limited access to appropriate materials can restrict teachers' ability to implement best practices in visual selection, even if they possess the necessary knowledge. Additionally, the national curriculum in Malawi emphasises a student-centred approach (Ministry of Education, 2017). However, research suggests that effectively implementing such approaches requires adequate training and professional development opportunities for teachers (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Limited access to professional development programmes focused on visual literacy could be another factor contributing to a potential gap between teachers' awareness and application of selection criteria (Sithira et al., 2021).

The studies reviewed on this section provide valuable insights into the factors that influence teachers' use of visuals and the potential gap between knowledge and application. However, it is important to consider some limitations. Firstly, many studies rely on self-reported data, which can be susceptible to bias. Teachers may not accurately represent their own knowledge or practices. Secondly, the cultural contexts of the studies reviewed may differ significantly from the context of this study in Malawi. Teachers in different settings may have unique challenges and perspectives. These limitations form the basis for this study.

2.3 Research Gap

Although substantial research has been conducted on the integration of visual instructional materials in language comprehension lessons, still several gaps remain more especially in the settings of secondary education in resource-limited settings like Nkhata-Bay District, Malawi. Prior studies have consistently emphasised the importance of visual materials alignment with the curricular goals that ensures cultural relevance and also addresses the diverse learning needs of students (Kusmawan et al., 2025; Wijngaards-de Meij & Merx, 2018). However, much of this research has been undertaken in more resourced or developed settings, which has left a void in understanding of how these practices translate to environments with scarce of resources like Malawi (Thelma et al, 2024; Kutoane et al., 2021). In addition to that, teacher knowledge about the selection criteria for visual materials is another underexplored area. Existing literature indicates that while many teachers are aware of the theoretical underpinnings of effective visual materials such as relevance, clarity, and cultural appropriateness. However, this knowledge does not always translate into classroom practice (Moore, 2014). Remarkably, there has never been a study on whether or not teachers in Malawi are aware and follow the criteria set for the selection of visual aids that involve English comprehension. Hence, this study centred to assess

how secondary school English teachers in Nkhata-bay District in Malawi adhere to the criteria for selecting visual materials in comprehension lessons.

2.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed the basic variables of the study were examined in line with existing research and aligned with the objectives of the study. Much emphasis was placed on expanding the understanding of the selection and use of visual instructional materials in English comprehension lessons. The main areas covered include an overview of visual instructional materials, teachers' adherence to established selection criteria, teachers' knowledge of these criteria, and the challenges and contextual factors that influence the effective use of visuals in secondary school classrooms. In addition to that, the chapter pinpointed the research gap for the study.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter mainly discusses the methodology used to collect data in the study. It also focuses much on the research setting, the research design and its components, procedures for data collection, techniques for data analysis, and the research work plan. The term methodology refers to the way researchers approach problems and seeks answers. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011) refer to methods as a range of approaches used in educational research to gather data which is to be used as the basis for inference and interpretation, explanation, and prediction.

3.2 Research Paradigm

Bryman (2010) defines paradigm as a cluster of beliefs and dictates that influence what should be studied, how it should be studied, and how results should be interpreted. This research study was informed by a constructivist paradigm. The constructivist paradigm emphasises understanding the world through human experience and social interaction (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Therefore, in approaching this research, priority was placed in exploring the perspectives, experiences, and interactions of English teachers in selecting visual materials for comprehension lessons.

This approach involved engaging with teachers in a way that allowed them to actively contribute their insights and interpretations, aligning with the constructivist view of knowledge construction (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Secondly, given the emphasis on understanding complex phenomena from participants' perspectives, qualitative methods to be used in this research were well-suited to the constructivist paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Qualitative

methods: interviews and observations allowed for in-depth exploration of teachers' knowledge, experiences and practices. These methods enabled the researcher to capture the richness and contextuality of teachers' decision-making processes and interactions with visual materials (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Additionally, the constructivist paradigm emphasises the importance of considering the context and social interactions in knowledge construction (Dewey, 1938). Therefore, the choice of participants in this study prioritised English teachers who are actively involved in selecting visual materials for comprehension lessons in the specific educational context of Nkhata-bay District, Malawi.

Moreover, in alignment with the constructivist paradigm, the research methodology applied in this study prioritised active engagement, contextual understanding, and the construction of knowledge through personal experiences and interactions (Dewey, 1938). This involved adopting an approach that allows for flexibility, reflexivity, and sensitivity to the social and cultural dynamics of the research. Through embracing these principles, the methodology facilitated a well-grounded exploration of English teachers' adherence to criteria for selecting visual materials in comprehension lessons which contributed to a deeper understanding of teaching and learning processes.

3.3 Research Approach

According to Kumar (2011), research can be classified based on the perspectives of applications of the findings of the study, objectives of the study, and model of inquiry used in conducting the study. This study was qualitative since it sought to understand complex phenomena by exploring participants' perspectives, experiences and meanings. Certainly, the need for qualitative data in the context of four secondary schools was grounded in several key considerations. First, qualitative data, obtained through methods such as interviews and

observations allowed the researcher to gain a deep contextual understanding of the practices and experiences of English teachers.

This was crucial in comprehending the unique educational environment and specific challenges faced by teachers (Merriam, 2009). Furthermore, qualitative data collection methods enabled the researcher to directly engage with teachers, and understand their perspectives, motivations and challenges. This insight into the lived experiences of teachers contributed to a more comprehensive interpretation of the data (Merriam, 2009). Lastly, qualitative data provided rich, descriptive data that could capture the complexity of the phenomenon under study. This depth was essential for generating a comprehensive and detailed account of how English teachers navigated the criteria for selecting visual materials in comprehension lessons (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

To that effect, the use of qualitative data was essential in this research to uncover the details of teachers' practices, decision-making processes, and the contextual factors that influenced the selection of visual materials for comprehension lessons.

3.4 Research Design

Trochim (2006) defines a research design as a way of organising a research project from its inception to maximise the likelihood of generating evidence that provides convincing answers to the research questions for a given level of resource. In other words, a research design refers to the overall plan or structure that guides the process of collecting, analysing, and interpreting data in a research study. It outlined the strategy and framework for investigating a research problem.

This study employed a qualitative case study design which comprised four selected secondary schools. Qualitative research, particularly the case study approach, was well-suited for exploring complex phenomena in natural settings and gaining an in-depth understanding of the experiences and perspectives of participants (Merriam, 2009). A qualitative case study design, with the chosen four secondary schools as the cases, offered several strengths for the research topic. This approach allowed for deep exploration of teachers' selection processes within their natural school environments (Merriam, 2009). This could reveal rich details and contextual factors influencing their choices, which might be missed by more standardised methods. However, a downside was that the findings from these four schools might not be generalised to a wider population of teachers or schools.

3.5 Research Setting

The study was conducted at four selected secondary schools in Nkhata-bay District, Malawi. Nkhata-bay District is located to the East of Mzuzu City in the northern part of Malawi. There are fifty-five secondary schools - forty-eight public schools and seven private ones. The setting was chosen for its convenience.

3.6 Study Population

Bryman (2004) defines population as the universe of units from which the sample is drawn. Meanwhile, Kombo and Tromp (2006) define a population as a group of individuals, objects, or items from which samples are taken for measurement. In this regard, this study had a population comprising English teachers in selected secondary schools in Nkhata-bay District. A purposive sampling technique was used to select the participants.

These teachers were a crucial target population in this study for several reasons: first and foremost, English teachers play a central role in the selection of visual materials for comprehension lessons. They are the primary decision-makers when it comes to choosing teaching aids, and their choices significantly impact the learning experiences of students (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Secondly, Yin (2014) states that teachers' perspectives are necessary for understanding how closely they adhere to established criteria when selecting visual materials. Exploring their decision-making process provided insights into the factors that influence their choices and whether these align with recommended criteria.

Besides, teachers brought unique perspectives and experiences to the study. Exploring their lived experiences allowed the researcher to uncover their knowledge and innovative strategies they employed in adhering to or deviating from criteria in the real-world classroom context (Merriam, 2009). Moreover, teachers are embedded in the specific educational context. Studying their practices provided a contextually rich understanding of how criteria for selecting visual materials were interpreted and applied in a real-world setting (Merriam, 2009). Lastly, teachers' decisions regarding visual materials had a direct impact on students' comprehension and learning outcomes. By focusing on teachers as the target population, the study shed light on the potential implications of adherence (or lack thereof) to criteria on student learning experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Therefore, the selection of English teachers in selected secondary schools was based on the idea that they were the key actors in the process of selecting visual materials for comprehension lessons, and their insights contributed significantly to understanding the dynamics of adherence to criteria in the given educational context.

3.7 Sample Size

A sample is a subgroup of the population (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). In this case, a sample was a group of people who were taken from the target population for research purposes. The researcher engaged a sample size of four teachers. As a qualitative study, the sample size of four was quite enough for an in-depth understanding of the experiences and perspectives of participants (Merriam, 2009). In this qualitative research, the appropriateness of sample size was often determined by the depth and richness of data required to answer the research questions rather than statistical representativeness (Trochim, 2006).

In the context of a case study focusing on four secondary schools, starting with the sample size of four was considered sufficient for several reasons. To begin with, this qualitative research, especially in case studies, prioritised in-depth exploration of specific cases. By studying four schools, the researcher thoroughly investigated the unique characteristics, practices, and contextual factors related to the selection of visual materials for comprehension lessons in each setting (Yin, 2014). Secondly, the emphasis in qualitative research was on obtaining rich, detailed data that allowed for a clear understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. With a smaller sample size, the researcher dedicated more time and resources to collecting comprehensive data within each case, ensuring a thorough analysis (Merriam, 2009). In this qualitative research, the goal was to reach data saturation, which occurred when no new information or themes were emerging from the data. Based on the scope of the study and the research objectives, four teachers were expected to yield a rich and diverse data were sufficient to achieve saturation without unnecessary redundancy.

Thirdly, the study aimed to provide insights into the specific context under study. By selecting four schools, the researcher captured the diversity of practices and this allowed for a more

contextually rich interpretation of the findings (Stake, 1995). In addition, conducting qualitative research, especially in-depth case studies, was resource-intensive. A smaller sample size was more feasible in terms of its convenience while still providing meaningful insights (Cohen et al., 2011). Finally, in this qualitative research, the concept of data saturation was crucial. Saturation occurred when new data ceased to provide additional insights, indicating that the sample size was adequate for addressing the research questions. With four schools, saturation was achieved more efficiently, ensuring that the study captured a comprehensive range of experiences and practices (Cohen et al., 2011).

Participants for this study were drawn from four secondary schools in Nkhata-Bay District, Malawi, specifically focusing on teachers that are directly involved in teaching English comprehension lessons using visual instructional materials. Each teacher was selected based on their active engagement in the selection, application, and evaluation of visual aids within their classrooms, thereby providing rich and varied insights into the processes and challenges associated with this practice. To ensure anonymity and facilitate clear identification during data analysis, each participating teacher was assigned a unique code, prefixed with “NKT” (e.g., NKT001, NKT002, NKT003, and NKT004). Data for this study was collected from four schools in Nkhata-Bay, with one teacher representing each school. These teachers offered comprehensive perspectives on their approaches on selecting visual materials, adherence to established selection criteria and their overall knowledge and experiences regarding the integration of these tools into their instructional practices. The table below highlights the profile of all four participants used by the study;

Table 3.2: Participants Profile

Teacher Code	Years of Experience	Qualifications	Category of Secondary School
NKT001	11	Bachelor of Education (Language)	Conventional Secondary School
NKT002	17	Bachelor of Education (Language)	Private Secondary School
NKT003	9	Bachelor of Education (Language)	Private Secondary School
NKT004	13	Bachelor of Education (Language)	CDSS

3.8 Sampling Procedure

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2018), a sampling procedure is a definite plan determined before any data is collected for obtaining a sample from a given population under study. In line with Guba and Lincoln (2005), this study used purposive sampling to identify research participants. This purposive sampling aligned with the research objectives because it allowed the researcher to select participants who had direct experience with the topic of interest: selecting visual materials for comprehension lessons. By focusing on this specific group, the researcher gathered in-depth insights into their knowledge, ways of selection, and practices in a targeted manner. Key informants of the study were English teachers who had experience with comprehension lessons and the selection of visual materials. According to Kumar (2011) and Creswell (2013), purposive sampling was useful when identifying participants who provided rich and relevant data to the study.

The sampling procedure considered the following factors: teachers with a range of experience levels to capture a variety of perspectives; considering whether they had relevant qualifications or training in teaching English; participants from different locations and types of schools (e.g., public, private; urban, rural) to account for potential variations in teaching contexts; participants' willingness to engage in interviews, observations; and all the cases that provided rich data and population that shared common characteristics which were useful to the purpose of the study. Diversity among the participants was also considered to capture a wide range of experiences and perspectives. This diversity included differences such as gender, and cultural backgrounds. This enriched the depth of the study and made the findings more meaningful.

In the context of selecting one teacher from a pool of teachers at a school for research participation, purposive sampling called criterion sampling was used. Criterion sampling involved selecting participants based on specific criteria that were relevant to the research objectives (Cresswell, 2017). In this case, selecting teachers who met certain criteria that were essential for the study: 1) teachers who had experience in the teaching of English comprehension lessons, 2) teachers who were actively involved in selecting visual materials for their lessons, 3) teachers who had a range of experience levels to capture diverse perspectives and 4) teachers who were willing to participate in interviews or observations. By using criterion sampling, it ensured that the selected teachers had the knowledge and experience necessary to provide valuable insights into the research questions. In addition, this approach allowed the research to target participants who contributed most effectively to the study based on their qualifications, experiences, and roles within the school.

In selecting the four schools, purposive sampling and convenience sampling techniques were used. Purposive sampling involved selecting schools based on specific criteria that were

relevant to the research objectives: 1) Schools located in Nkhata-bay District, 2) Schools with a diverse student population. 3) Schools with varying levels of English language proficiency among students, 4) Schools with a mix of urban and rural settings, and 5) Schools with English teachers who had experience in selecting visual materials for comprehension lessons. Convenience Sampling involved selecting schools that were readily accessible and willing to participate in the study: 1) Schools that were easily reachable for data collection purposes, 2) Schools whose administrations were cooperative and supportive of research activities, and 3) Schools where English teachers were willing to participate in interviews and observations. Therefore, the convenience sampling allowed for selecting schools that are most convenient for logistical reasons, while still ensuring that they met the basic criteria for inclusion in the study.

3.9 Data Collection Methods

3.9.1 Classroom Observations

Observations of comprehension lessons were conducted to assess how teachers select visual materials for their teaching. Classroom observations were essential for gaining a real-time understanding of how teachers selected and integrated visual materials into comprehension lessons. Cohen, et al., (2007) cite that the observations provide insights into teachers' instructional practices, the use of materials, and student engagement. This method helped to validate and complement the information obtained through interviews.

The researcher conducted twelve lesson observations; three lessons for each teacher to capture a range of selection practices. The lessons provided a more holistic view of how teachers select and incorporate visual materials into comprehension lessons over time. The researcher also took field notes on the types of materials, their alignment with criteria, and teacher-student

interactions. This therefore allowed the researcher to identify patterns, trends, and variations in instructional practices, contributing to a richer understanding of teachers' decisions in selecting visual materials for comprehension lessons.

3.9.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

English teachers were interviewed to understand their knowledge about the criteria for selecting visual materials and the challenges they encountered in the process. Interviews were a valuable data collection method for exploring teachers' knowledge, experiences, and perspectives in-depth (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The interviews allowed the researcher to engage in open-ended conversations with participants, probe for details, clarify responses, and gain a comprehensive understanding of their views regarding the selection and use of visual materials in comprehension lessons (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). It should also be noted that every interview was audio-taped to ensure the interaction between the interviewer and the respondent was captured and preserved.

In summary, the methods above had been used to explore teachers' practices, perceptions, and challenges in various contexts. They offered the depth and breadth needed to address the multifaceted nature of the research objectives. Being the case, by combining interviews and observations, the researcher triangulated data from multiple sources to enhance the validity of the findings. This triangulation allowed the researcher to cross-verify information and provide a more distinctive understanding of teachers' knowledge and practices related to visual materials in comprehension lessons (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2013).

3.10 Data Collection Tools

3.10.1 Interview Guide

This is where the semi-structured interviewees were presented. It served as a framework for conducting interviews in a systematic and consistent manner, ensuring that relevant topics were covered and allowing for comparison and analysis of responses across different interview sessions. The data was also collected using note pads by jotting down some field notes. Not only that, data was also collected using a recorder (phone) which was later transcribed into written words.

3.10.2 Observation Guide

During the lessons, classroom observations were systematically conducted to capture how teachers selected and integrated visual materials into their English comprehension lessons. The researcher attended each session and used a structured observation form to record the types of visuals used, their alignment with lesson objectives, and also subsequent teacher-student interactions. Three lessons per teacher were observed, which allowed for a comprehensive view of both routine practices and any variations over time. Detailed field notes were taken to document the sequencing of visual aids, and the overall classroom dynamics. The observational data was triangulated with interviews to ensure a robust understanding the decision-making processes of teachers in selecting visual materials.

3.11 Trustworthiness

Ensuring the trustworthiness of this study was crucial for establishing the credibility and validity of the research findings. Trustworthiness in this study was achieved through several strategies. Firstly, the research instruments were pre-tested before the actual implementation of the study. This was done by having all the instruments checked by a research expert and

undergone pilot testing in two secondary schools before the collection of real data. The pieces of advice given by teachers in schools where pilot testing was carried out were considered and incorporated into the instruments that had been developed. All this was done to ensure trustworthiness.

According to Creswell (2016), when data is not trustworthy, decisions made from such data become invalid and meaningless. Secondly, multiple data sources, for instance, interviews and observations provided different perspectives on the topic. Multiple data sources provided room for triangulating data from various sources which helped validate the findings and increased the robustness of the conclusions. The researcher also collaborated with other researchers and involved a research team in data analysis to minimise individual biases and ensure the validity of interpretations.

3.12 Data Analysis and Interpretation

This study adopted a thematic analysis approach for analysing qualitative data collected from classroom lesson observations and interviews. Thematic analysis was well-suited for qualitative research as it enabled the identification, analysis, and reporting of patterns (themes) within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process involved the following steps:

1. **Familiarisation with Data:** The first step involved transcribing interview recordings and reviewing observation notes. The researcher thoroughly read the transcripts and notes to familiarise oneself with the data and gain an overall understanding.
2. **Generating Initial Codes:** The researcher systematically coded the data by highlighting key phrases and patterns that were relevant to the research objectives, such as adherence to selection criteria, effectiveness of materials, and teacher knowledge.

3. Searching for Themes: Once all data had been coded, the researcher grouped similar codes into broader themes that aligned with the research questions.
4. Reviewing Themes: The researcher then reviewed the themes to ensure they accurately reflected the data and were coherent. Any overlapping or unclear themes were refined.
5. Defining and Naming Themes: At this stage, the researcher clearly defined each theme and described how it related to the research questions.
6. Writing the Report: Finally, the results were presented in a narrative format, integrating direct quotes from participants to illustrate the identified themes.

3.13 Ethical Considerations

Research is a moral task. This means the interest of participants should not be harmed. According to Cohen, et al. (2007), ethics refers to the avoidance of violations of the rights of people while observing a good practice and respect for human dignity. Unethical conduct might expose the research participants to detrimental effects on their lives (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). In this research, ethics referred to what was proper and improper when dealing with participants or accessing archival data. Wiersma (2012) states that in educational research the participants are to be protected and their rights and welfare should be treated with confidentiality. Ethically, this study first sought ethical clearance from Mzuzu University's ethical body, MZUNIREC, in order to conduct the research. To ensure confidentiality, the names of the participants and schools were not mentioned in this report. Instead, data notes from observations and interviews from participating schools and individuals were compiled by assigning each of them with a unique code, prefixed with "NKT".

In this research, the principle of informed consent was applied. According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2009), informed consent refers to a freely given agreement on the part of the researcher

to become a subject of the research process. The researcher obtained the informed consent forms from the University's Research Ethics Committee. In addition, the researcher wrote letters of consent to the school heads to ask for permission to carry out the research at the institutions. This was done after the researcher got permission from the University's Education Department and the Education Division Manager (North) to conduct research in the chosen sites and a letter of introduction was presented to the researcher which was later submitted to the District Education Manager (Nkhata-bay) and other gatekeepers like head-teachers of the selected schools.

Individual participants' willingness to be part of the research respondents was sought too. Participants were informed that participation was voluntary and that they had a right to withdraw from the research process anytime they felt like doing so. Through visits, the researcher communicated with the head-teachers of the participating schools to introduce the study and set up appointments for data collection. In summary, ethical approval was sought from the relevant education authorities, and informed consent was obtained from all participants. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured throughout the research process. This was achieved through the use of pseudonyms and the details of participants were not shared to third parties.

3.14 Limitations of the Study

This study faces limitation of relying on classroom observations. While classroom observations provided valuable qualitative insights, they were inherently susceptible to observer's bias and the Hawthorne effect, where teachers might alter their behaviour due to being observed (Creswell, 2014).

3.15 Chapter Summary

This chapter covers the research design which is a qualitative case study method. The constructivist paradigm has also been explained and reasons for its use have been stated. The researcher has in the chapter highlighted who the population and sample of the study are as well as explained the sampling techniques used. Further, the chapter has discussed the data collection methods and instrumentations; these include interviews and observations. The trustworthiness of the data collected has also been discussed together with data collection and analysis procedures. In the last part of the chapter, ethical considerations have also been highlighted.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

4.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter presents the findings and discussion of this study, which assesses English teachers' adherence to the criteria for selecting visual instructional materials for comprehension lessons in secondary schools in the Nkhata-Bay District, Malawi. The presentation is structured around the three main objectives of the study: (1) identifying the ways in which teachers select visual materials; (2) analysing the teachers' adherence to established selection criteria; and (3) finding out the teachers' knowledge regarding these criteria. In addition to detailing these findings, the chapter engages in a discussion that interprets the findings of the study. The approach not only reveals how teachers' practices align with or diverge from recommended guidelines but also examines the broader impact of these practices on teaching and learning in resource-constrained settings.

4.2 Ways of Selecting Visual Instructional Materials for Comprehension Lessons in Secondary Schools, Nkhata-Bay District, Malawi

The findings of this study established that the process of selecting visual instructional materials for English comprehension lessons is both complex and dynamic. It was observed that the process involves a deliberate analysis of lesson objectives, adherence to formal curriculum guidelines, adaptation to resource constraints, and ongoing evaluation through various collaborative practices.

4.2.1 The Selection of Visual Materials for Comprehension Lessons

The findings of this study showed that the selection process for visual materials commences with a thorough review of the lesson plan. Participants pinpointed that they first identify key

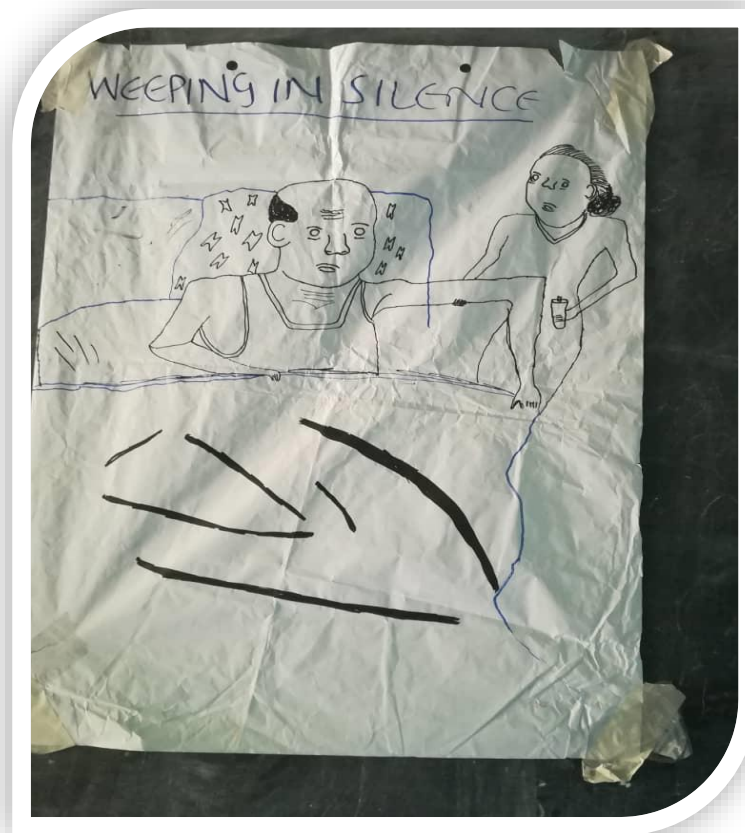
concepts and learning objectives that are essential for effective comprehension in order to ensure that the visual aids directly support the intended learning outcomes. It was observed that teachers in Nkhata-Bay District invest time in reviewing their lesson plans as well as identifying the essential concepts that require visual support. This pre-assessment phase ensures that the chosen visuals are not only relevant but also serve to clarify and fortify the texts in use. The pre-assessment of visual materials among English teachers in Nkhata-Bay concurs with the ADDIE specifically the analysis phase where the needs are first analysed in order to design appropriate visuals. The structured nature of this process was supported by classroom observations where visuals were arranged in a sequential manner reflecting the progression of lesson. For example, an interview with one teacher on 05th November, 2024 stated the following remarks:

“Before I decide on any visual aid, I carefully go through the lesson plan to isolate the key ideas. I then search for images that can vividly illustrate these concepts so that students immediately connect the visual with the text”.

(Participant NKT002)

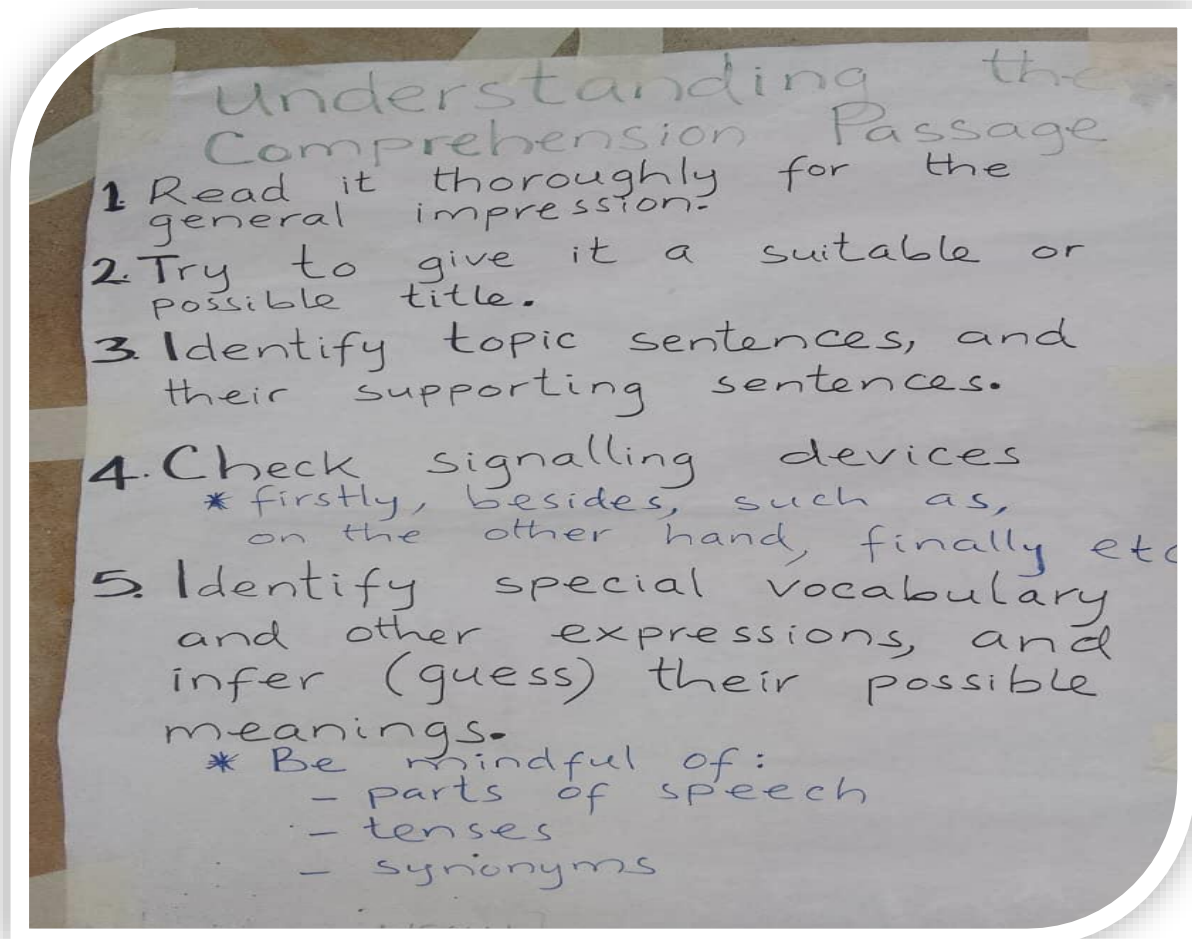
In support of this, a classroom observation on 14th January, 2025, depicted how English teachers select an appropriate visual material to match the passage. For instance, the comprehension lesson was covering issues of gender-based violence, one of the teachers used the below visual material. The teacher expressed that selection involved a careful selection of the visual material in order to portray the intended lessons which was gender-based violence at home. This depicts the ADDIE model that posits that before the actual use of the visual material a careful analysis must be done that is compounded by design as well as development.

Figure 4.1: An Observed Chart Used During the Lessons



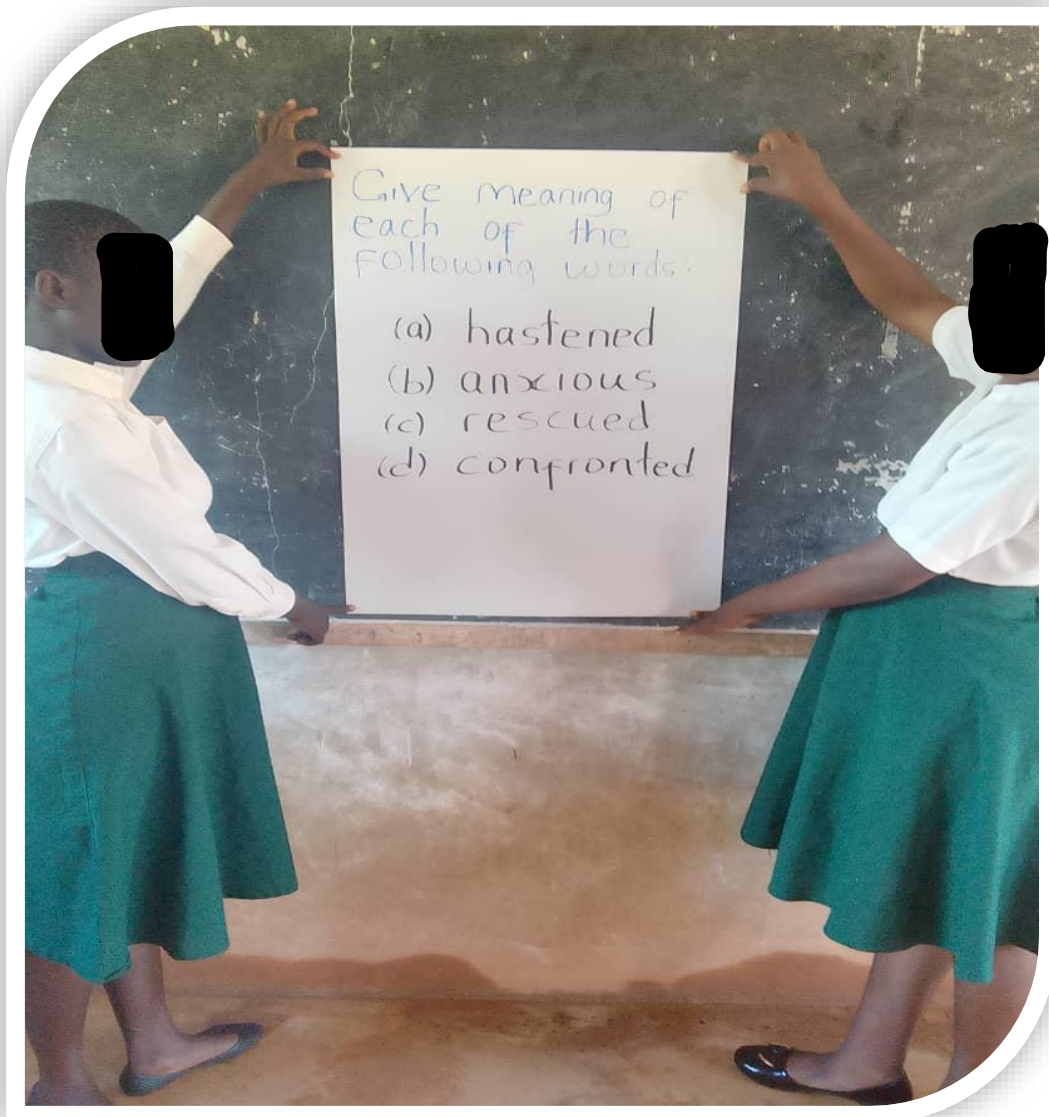
At the same time, subsequent observations revealed that in classrooms where a systematic approach is followed, visual aids were arranged in a sequential manner that mirrors the progression of the lessons. However, it was noted that such methodical process was sometimes restrained by the resource availability. In many cases, teachers were forced to adapt by using readily available materials even if they are not ideally suited per the objectives of lesson. During the lessons on 05th November, 2024 one participant used a chart to help elaborate the understanding of English comprehension. The teacher stressed that the visual material was selected involved analysis of the needs of students, whereby the teacher observed that students easily forget the read passage hence the visual material was selected to guide and keep the student's alert of the passage at hand.

Figure 4.2: An Observed Chart Used During the Lessons



Another teacher (Participant NKT002) on 16th January, 2025 used a similar visual material that was used to depict meanings of words after reading a comprehension text. The teacher highlighted what was selected in order to make the class interactive such that students participate in giving the meanings of words. The teacher expressed that using such selected visual material makes students easily remember the terminologies when the lesson passes.

Figure 4.3: An Observed Chart Used During the Lessons



Such duality illustrates that while there is a preference for structured decision-making, teachers remain flexible and resourceful in amid of practical constrictions. The study revealed that the process of selecting visual instructional materials is not a simple and linear task rather a complex and dynamic one at the same time. The findings showed that, teachers begin by precisely reviewing their lesson plans to extract key concepts and learning objectives. Such systematic approach underlines the intentionality behind visual selection that teachers are not merely choosing images at random but are aligning their choices with pedagogical goals.

These findings are consistent with recent studies on instructional design and multimedia learning. For instance, a study by Irasuti and Bachtiar (2024) revealed that effective teaching requires the integration of multiple representations of information and that teachers must carefully consider how each visual element contributes to the learning objectives at hand. Correspondingly, a study by Jayaraman and Aane (2024) highlighted that the deliberate alignment of multimedia resources with curriculum goals usually enhances comprehension and retention among learners. Such emphasis on lesson planning and objective alignment in this study reflects the broader trends in educational practice (Albaqami, 2019).

The emphasis on structured decision-making has substantial implications for instructional quality. Studies by Abdulrahaman et al. (2020) and Mokobe et al. (2025) both established that the systematic approaches to multimedia selection can lead to improved cognitive processing among students when crafted properly. Unusually, when visuals are carefully matched to lesson objectives, learners are better able to form mental models that bridge the gap between abstract language and concrete understanding.

While the ideal process of visual materials selection involves a methodical selection of visuals based on clear pedagogical criteria, this study also highlights a substantial challenge of resource limitations. Observations indicated that, in many cases teachers adapt their planned approach due to the limited availability of high-quality materials. This leads to the duality between a desire for methodical planning and the need to be flexible in the face of resource limitations which has also been documented in similar educational contexts. For instance, studies by Dong (2021), and Alibakhshi and Gräber (2018) found that teachers in resource-constrained

environments mostly develop adaptive strategies such as repurposing existing materials or creating their own visuals to meet instructional needs.

Similarly, in a study conducted in rural settings in East Africa by Tibane et al. (2024) noted that while teachers understand the importance of high-quality visuals, financial and infrastructural limitations frequently force them to compromise. These findings suggest that the limitations of resources are not unique to Nkhata-Bay District but are a common challenge in many low-resource educational settings. Normally, when teachers are forced to use suboptimal materials, it risks the intended learning outcomes that in one way or the other may not be fully achieved. However, this study also showed that teachers are resourceful and resilient as they innovate by pre-preparing visual aids during quieter periods and by forming informal networks for resource sharing among themselves (Chan & van den Bergh, 2009). Such strategies highlight the importance of institutional support and targeted interventions aimed at improving resource availability in secondary schools.

4.2.2 Factors and Criteria for Visual Material Selection

Participants for this study pointed several factors that influence the criteria that teachers use when selecting visual materials. One key factor was curriculum alignment; such that visuals must complement the syllabus and help clarify complex textual content. A key aspect of the findings of this study was the identification of factors that influences the criteria used for visual material selection. Largely, curriculum alignment emerged as a primary criterion whereby teachers stressed that visuals complement the syllabus and simplify complex textual content. This concurs with the ADDIE model that articulates those materials need to be analysed before the actual usage in order to evaluate its relevancy before actual implementation. One participant on 07th November, 2024 stated the following:

“I ensure that any visual I select is directly linked to the syllabus. If it doesn’t help to simplify the text or reinforce the lesson, then I simply don’t use it”. (Participant NKT001).

It was also established that the contextual relevance is equally important in offering lessons. Teachers are much more inclined to choose images that resonate with the surrounding environment and the everyday experiences of their students, thereby enhancing the overall engagement and relatability of the lessons. As one participant on 05th November, 2024 expressed:

“Students connect better with images that reflect their own community and surroundings. It makes the lesson feel more personal and understandable”. (Participant NKT004).

Furthermore, while official guidelines from the Ministry of Education serve as a foundational criterion for many, it was noted that teachers blend these directives with their professional judgment. Such individualised assessment ensures that the selected visuals are not only pedagogically sound but also tailored to the specific needs and realities of their classrooms.

The importance of curriculum alignment is supported by recent literature. For example, a study by Irasuti and Bachtiar (2024) argued that visual materials that are congruent with curriculum objectives help create a coherent learning experience, making it easier for students to draw connections between different parts of the lesson. In addition to that, studies by Pulukuri and Abrams (2021) suggest that when visuals are directly tied to learning outcomes, they can enhance student comprehension and engagement during lessons.

Teachers in this study reported a strong preference for visuals that reflect the students' local environment and daily experiences. Such emphasis on local relevance ensures that the materials are not only pedagogically sound but also culturally responsive. This aligns with studies by Carter and Bradford (2019) and Ladson-Billings (2023) which stressed the need for culturally relevant pedagogy in diverse classrooms.

Comparatively, studies in other settings show similar trends. In a study conducted in Southeast Asia found that students' engagement and comprehension improved when visuals depicted familiar cultural contexts (Sithira et al., 2021). Such findings stress the universal importance of contextually appropriate materials, mostly in the multilingual as well as multicultural classrooms where bridging the gap between abstract content and lived experiences is critical for unified lessons.

From the findings, it was also revealed that a critical element of the selection process was the continuous evaluation of the chosen visual materials. Participants argued that teachers assess effectiveness through a variety of measures including direct observation, student feedback and performance on comprehension assessments. It was noted that an essential component of the selection process was the continuous evaluation of the visual materials' effectiveness. The findings of this study revealed that teachers assess visuals through a variety of measures, including direct observation, student feedback as well as comprehension assessments. This reflective practice of ongoing evaluation that ensures only effective visuals are retained and reused while those that fail to meet expectations are reconsidered and amended accordingly.

One teacher on 14th January, 2025 described this evaluative process:

“I know a visual is effective when I see a marked improvement in student participation and understanding during class discussions. It’s not just about having a nice picture or a diagram; it’s about the immediate impact it has on learning the lessons”. (Participant NKT001)

Remarkably, collaborative practices among teachers further enrich the selection process. It was observed that many teachers not just those teaching English lessons participate in discussions with colleagues to share experiences, exchange resources and validate their choices of selections. One teacher on 16th January, 2025 highlighted the importance of these interactions:

“Discussing the merits of different visual aids with my colleagues not only brings fresh ideas to the table but also reassures me that my selections are effective. It creates a supportive environment where we can all learn from each other”. (Participant NKT002)

At large, such collaborative networks contribute to a more standardised approach in selecting visuals, mostly for schools where resource limitations necessitate shared efforts to overcome the challenges. This practice of continuous evaluation aligns with the principles of formative assessment and reflective teaching as described by Carpenter et al. (2024). Their study suggests that formative assessment when applied to multimedia selection, it usually permits teachers to fine-tune their instructional approaches based on real-time feedback. Similarly, a study by Ladson-Billings (2023) demonstrates that continuous assessment and reflective practices in the selection of visual materials lead to improved teaching efficacy and better student outcomes.

Moreover, collaborative practices among teachers further enrich the selection process of visual instructional materials. The findings indicated that teachers sometimes engage in discussions

with colleagues to share insights, validate their choices and explore alternative strategies is the usage of visual materials. More often, the collaborative approach fosters professional learning communities whereby teachers are able to collectively refine their practices and overcome individual limitations in the usage of the visual materials. A study by Loft house and Thomas (2017) supports this notion that professional collaboration improves instructional practices. The same study cites that collaborative environments enable teachers to pool resources, share best practices, and collectively solve problems. In this context, the informal networks observed among teachers in Nkhata-Bay District, Malawi not only mitigate resource limitations but can also enhance the overall quality of visual selection.

When comparing the findings of this study with recent studies conducted in similar settings several parallels and divergences emerge. A study by Nnko and Kalokola (2023) in Tanzania notes that the systematic selection of visual aids coupled with robust teacher collaboration improve comprehension outcomes in English language classes. Similarly, a study by McCowan et al. (2022) in Kenya, Botswana and Ghana revealed that resource limitations often force teachers to innovate which is a challenge echoed in the current study. On the other hand, while these studies primarily focus on resource limitations, the present findings provide a more detailed view by also emphasising the role of teacher training and digital integration.

In contrast, studies in more developed countries such as those by Thelma et al. (2024) indicate that while resource availability is generally higher, the challenges lie in the effective integration of technology into the curriculum at large. In the Nkhata-Bay District, teachers face a dual challenge; for instance, overcoming resource limitations and adapting to the rapid evolution of digital tools. This dual challenge necessitates a versatile approach that includes targeted

professional development, institutional support, and collaborative networks strategies that have been shown to be effective in similar low-resource environments (Kutoane et al., 2021).

4.3 Adherence to the Selection Criteria for Visual Instructional Materials for Comprehension Lessons in Secondary Schools, Nkhata-Bay District, Malawi

The findings indicated that many English teachers in secondary schools within Nkhata-Bay District employ a systematic, criteria-based approach when selecting visuals for comprehension lessons. However, observations also revealed that a subset of teachers do not consistently adhere to these established procedures, mostly due to challenges such as limited time, resource constraints, or insufficient professional development.

4.3.1 The Adherence of Selection Criteria among Teachers

Participants described a deliberate, multi-step process for selecting visuals materials. It was noted the process typically begins with an in-depth review of the lesson plan to identify key concepts and learning objectives. The findings revealed a dual storyline whereby while other teachers employ a systematic, criteria-based approach in choosing visual materials, at the same time, a notable subset of teachers digress from these procedures due to external limitations such as limited time, resource shortages as well as insufficient professional development. As one teacher on 16th January, 2025 explained the following sentiments:

“Every time I prepare for a lesson, I first identify the core ideas that need to be communicated. I then search for visuals that can bring these ideas to life, ensuring that each image or diagram is directly linked to the learning objectives of that lesson”. (Participant NKT003)

At the same time, teachers also reported consulting various sources from textbooks and online repositories to locally available materials to find the best matches of visual materials. Such practices demonstrate a commitment to maintaining high standards in instructional material selection among teachers. However, in some cases, it was noted that not all teachers follow such systematic process. It was observed that in some instances teachers were using visual materials that was not clearly depicting the subject matter. Notably, teachers were using visual materials that has indirect meanings to the English comprehension at hand. Such indirect visuals could distract learners to grasp the central ideal of the lessons. This study established that a systematic selection is normally followed among teachers when selecting visual instructional materials. Although not all, it was established that educators begin by reviewing their lesson plans to identify core concepts and learning objectives which in turn guide them in selecting appropriate visual materials.

Within the selection process of visual materials, it was established that a core element of the selection process is the use of benchmark criteria which normally emphasise clarity, simplicity and direct relevance to the lesson at hand. As noted by one participant, on 21st November, 2024, an effective visual should simplify complex ideas:

“For me, an effective visual is one that is not overly complicated. It should simplify a complex idea and make it immediately understandable. I always ask myself if the image adds clarity rather than confusion”. (Participant NKT004)

It was observed that some teachers under pressure from lacking access to diverse resources, they choose visuals that do not fully meet these criteria. In such cases, overly complex or oblique images have led to confusion among students which highlights the importance of following established benchmarks in selecting the visual materials. This process aligns with

the findings of a study by Hockett and Brighton (2021) that stipulated the first principles of instruction that pinpoint the importance of aligning the teaching materials that clearly define the intended learning objectives. Notably, given the deliberate and reflective nature of this approach it mirrors the instructional design process outlined in models such as ADDIE which stipulates the analysis of learning needs as a critical first step (Budoya et al., 2019). Furthermore, such systematic approach is underpinned by the principles of multimedia learning as articulated by a study by Skulmowski and Xu (2022). Skulmowski and Xu's study established that the use of effective visuals can enhance learning among students by reducing extraneous cognitive load and it also facilitates the integration of new information on prior knowledge.

This study's findings discovered that teachers who adhered to established criteria normally reported improved engagement and comprehension among students. This is also supported by dual coding theory developed by Hodes (1994) that stresses that the combination of verbal and visual information can enhance memory retention and understanding among learners. The study provides practical examples that highlight both successful and problematic uses of visual materials in Nkhata-Bay District, Malawi. A teacher's account of using a well-organised diagram to illustrate sequencing events highlights the constructive impact of aligning the visuals with the assorted instructional objectives. Such success story is in line with the findings of a study by Park (2022), who found that when visuals are clear and directly related to the content at hand, they help frame students' understanding that enables them to grasp and retain new information more effectively. On the other hand, the use of overly complex visuals, as depicted by other participants stipulates how deviations from customary criteria can adversely affect classroom dynamics as well as the learning outcomes of students.

The comparison of these given illustrations stresses a critical point that is the effectiveness of visual materials in enhancing comprehension is mostly contingent upon their design as well as the alignment with the stipulated learning objectives. Studies by Hattie (2009) and Schnotz and Bannert (2003) similarly both emphasized that the cognitive benefits of visual materials are maximised when the visuals are directly relevant and usually free from unnecessary involvedness. The empirical evidence from Nkhata-Bay District, Malawi thus supports the broader body of research advocating for meticulous design and selection of instructional visuals before usage.

In particular a compelling aspect of the findings of this study was the observed impact of visual material selection on classroom dynamics and student outcomes. Most teachers reported that in classrooms where visuals were carefully selected by following the established criteria, such classes experienced higher levels of student engagement and improved overall interaction. Such noteworthy observation is essential in light of social constructivist theories which normally highlight the role of active engagement and interaction in the learning process (Wu et al., 2022). Remarkably, it was observed that when students are presented with clear and well-aligned visual materials, they tend to participate more in discussions. Besides, they normally ask inquisitive questions and are able to form connections between the visual information and the textual content in a given lesson.

Equally, it was also noted that in environments where the selection process was compromised by factors such as resource limitation or time pressures, it was negatively impeding the interactions and comprehension in the classroom. The lessened student engagement in such cases can be attributed to the increased cognitive load as well as the resultant confusion normally caused by misaligned visual materials. This finding is in agreement with the study of

Skulmowski and Xu (2022), who demonstrated that inappropriate cognitive load usually as a result of poorly designed visual materials can extensively impede learning outcomes. Notably, the nonconformity between systematic adherence and deviations from selection criteria has its own implications for professional development as well as educational policy. The findings of this study suggest that targeted training programmes are needed to equip teachers with strategies to enable their skills to effectively select and utilise visual materials even in resource-limited settings like Nkhata-Bay. Tailor made professional development initiatives that focus exactly on multimedia literacy, instructional design, and cognitive load management could easily empower teachers to overcome external pressures and adhere more closely to predetermined criteria.

Thus, educational policymakers should consider these findings when designing curricula and teacher support programmes. This can be done through the allocation of resources for training and provide free access to a wider range of visual materials that could mitigate some of the challenges highlighted in this study. Moreover, policies that foster collaboration among teachers could facilitate the sharing of best practices and innovative approaches to visual material selection, thereby enhancing overall instructional quality.

4.4 Teachers' Knowledge about the Selection Criteria for Visual Materials in Comprehension Lessons in Secondary Schools, Nkhata-Bay District, Malawi

The study's findings revealed that secondary school English teachers in the Nkhata-Bay District possess a sophisticated and versatile understanding of visual materials, as well as the criteria that guide their effective selection. This section details teachers' conceptualisations, their views on the contributions of visual aids to comprehension and the methods through which they learn and implement selection guidelines. In addition, this section explores the

challenges that teachers face and the support they require to maintain high standards in their respective instructional practices.

4.4.1 The Awareness and Understanding of Visual Material Selection Criteria

When asked the participants to define “visual materials” in the context of teaching comprehension lessons, teachers provided rich, expansive definitions that went well beyond the idea of static images. Participants described visual materials as encompassing a wide range of resources that include photographs, diagrams, charts, illustrations, info graphics, and digital media such as videos and interactive content. One teacher on 19th November, 2024 stated:

“For me, visual materials are dynamic educational tools. They include everything from printed pictures and hand-drawn sketches to digital animations that help bridge the gap between abstract concepts and students’ real-world experiences”. (Participant NKT003)

At lesson inception, it was noted that some teachers articulate precise comprehension objectives and identify which visual features best align with those goals. One participant on 12th November 2024 explained:

“Before choosing any diagram or photo, I list what I want students to learn, whether it’s inferring themes or understanding sequence, and then I match visuals that emphasize those points” (Participant NKT002).

This mirrors the focus of ADDIE on defining needs and establishing selection criteria (Smith & Ragan, 2020). Participants stressed that such materials help in contextualising content, making it more relatable and easier to understand. Participants noted that the multidimensional nature of visuals caters to different learning styles, thereby enhancing overall classroom

inclusivity at large. In sketching lesson plans and storyboards, it was established that teachers translate their selected benchmarks into specifications. For example, visuals must employ simple, labelled graphics that avoid extraneous detail and use locally familiar symbols (Khrais, 2021). On 18th November 2024, one teacher noted:

“I draft small mock-ups of charts, ensuring each label is clear and each icon resonates with our students’ everyday lives” (Participant NKT004).

Participants exhibited a comprehensive conceptualisation of visual materials which was recognised by their critical contributions to comprehension lessons. In addition to that, the findings highlighted the role of formal training, self-directed learning, and reflective practice in shaping teachers’ knowledge and application of these criteria. It was noticed that most teachers in the district conceptualise visual materials in an expansive way. Specifically, rather than viewing visual materials as limited to static images, teachers defined them to include photographs, diagrams, charts, illustrations, info graphics and in some cases even the videos and interactive digital content. Such broader definition aligns with the multimodal theory of learning that stresses that learners easily grasp the information presented in multiple formats (Kempe & Grönlund, 2019).

This conceptualisation supports the idea that presenting visual materials in diverse ways can cater to different learning styles a view that was also depicted by the findings of Fleming’s VARK (Visual, Aural, Read/write, and Kinesthetic) model (Beltran et al., 2025). As lessons were enacted, visuals were introduced alongside explicit learning objectives. Teachers guide students to interpret by prompting connections between image and text, thus operationalising pedagogical utility and cognitive-load optimisation. A 22nd November, 2024 observation revealed a teacher asking; *“How does this timeline help you predict the character’s next*

action?” (Participant NKT001) which in turn create a link between the visual design directly to critical thinking.

A fundamental aspect of teachers’ knowledge is their familiarity with the specific criteria or guidelines for selecting visual materials. Classroom observations indicated that although teachers were able to mention the criteria they use to select various visual materials, actual implementation lacked connection to the lessons at hand. It was observed that teachers could just use the available visual materials. At the same time, none of the teachers conducted a post evaluation of visual materials used during the lessons. As articulated in the ADDIE model, evaluation is one of the key phases that help to adjust the visual materials used or to check its effectiveness. Participants affirmed that they are aware of several benchmarks that define an effective visual aid. Commonly mentioned criteria included:

- Clarity and Simplicity: Visuals must be free of clutter and should clearly represent the intended concept.
- Relevance: The visual should directly relate to the lesson content and the learning objectives.
- Cultural and Contextual Appropriateness: Visuals should resonate with students’ experiences and cultural backgrounds.
- Pedagogical Utility: The image or diagram should enhance critical thinking, support discussion, and simplify complex ideas.

One participant on 05th November, 2024 elaborated with the following sentiments:

“I always look for visuals that are clear and not overly complex. They need to be directly tied to what we are teaching, and ideally, they should be something

the students can relate to, based on their own experiences or local setting”

(Participant NKT002).

Such detailed awareness demonstrates that teachers are not only conversant with formal guidelines but have also internalised these criteria through practical application in the classrooms. Teachers uniformly recognised that visual materials play a focal role in fostering comprehension. Participants reported that visuals serve as concrete representations of abstract ideas, thereby making it much easier for students to infer meanings and connect textual information with prior knowledge. On 07th November, 2024, participant stated that:

“Visuals are like a window into the text; they transform abstract ideas into images that students can grasp and remember. When students see a relevant picture or diagram, the text becomes much more engaging and easier to decode”. (Participant NKT001)

Moreover, teachers reported that the integration of visual aids stimulates critical thinking and discussion. In addition to that, classroom observations supported this notion with lessons that featured well-chosen visuals resulting in heightened student interaction, increased participation in discussions, and improved performance in comprehension assessments. In many cases, teachers noted that the use of visuals sparked spontaneous questions from students, indicating a deeper engagement with the material. From the findings of this study, teachers uniformly recognised that visual materials play an exceptional role in enhancing comprehension lessons by transforming abstract ideas into tangible representations. The perception that visuals act as “windows into the text” fortifies the cognitive theory of multimedia learning which argues that dual channels (visual and auditory) are much more effective in facilitating understanding among students (Beltran et al., 2025). Findings shown that when visual aids are directly tied to the content of lessons, they stimulate critical thinking, promote discussion, and enable students

to connect new knowledge with prior experiences. These observations are consistent with studies by Wijngaards-de Meij and Merx (2018) that have documented the positive effects of well-chosen visual materials on enhancing engagement and conceptual clarity among students.

Moreover, the teachers' view that visual materials foster interactive and reflective environments in classrooms which in turn resonates with social constructivist perspectives (Beltran et al., 2025). Usually, when students engage with visual content, they are much more prompted to ask questions and participate in discussions that lead to a deeper understanding of the lessons. This highlights the importance of aligning instructional strategies with students' cognitive as well as the social needs, thereby promoting a more inclusive and engaging learning environment.

Another critical aspect of the findings of this study was teachers' deep awareness of the specific criteria that define an effective visual material. The criteria clarity and simplicity, relevance, cultural and contextual appropriateness, and pedagogical utility pinpoints the principles found in instructional design literature. For example, a study by Beltran et al. (2025) emphasised on the need for principles of simplicity to reduce cognitive load among students. This awareness is further supported by the study of Wijngaards-de Meij and Merx (2018), who found that teachers in various contexts tend to favour visual materials that are directly related to learning objectives and that resonate well with students' cultural contexts. The emphasis on cultural and contextual appropriateness noticeable in the context of Malawi, where visual representations that reflect local realities enhances relevance and engagement of the lessons.

The study found that teachers' understanding of selection criteria has been shaped by a combination of formal training, professional development workshops, curriculum guidelines,

and self-directed learning. Participants recounted that sometimes they attend specialised training sessions focused on multimedia integration and the effective use of visual aids in instruction. For instance:

“Our professional development workshops were instrumental in teaching us how to evaluate visual materials. We received practical checklists and learned techniques to ensure that every visual we choose adds value to the lesson”

(Participant NKT003).

In addition to formal training, participants also highlighted the role of self-study, peer observation and informal discussions with colleagues in enhancing their knowledge about visual presentations. Such interactions provide opportunities for sharing best practices and updating one’s understanding of emerging trends and technologies in visual pedagogy. This blended approach to learning helps ensure that teachers remain current with both traditional and innovative methods of selecting and using various visual materials.

The findings of this study also indicated that teachers acquire their knowledge about visual material selection through a blended approach that includes professional development workshops, curriculum guidelines, and self-directed learning. Such multidimensional acquisition process is consistent with the notion that lifelong learning and professional growth is essential in enhancing teaching skills (Wijngaards-de Meij & Merx, 2018). It noted that teachers that attended workshops that covers the usage of visual materials, it provided them with practical checklists and evaluation techniques that enhances their capacity to select visual materials that meet established benchmarks.

In addition to the workshops, self-study and peer collaboration were also noted as essential in typifying the knowledge about visual materials. Briefly, the informal discussions and peer

observations among teachers create a community of practice where teachers exchange ideas, share best practices, and stay updated on emerging trends in visual pedagogy (Beltran et al., 2025). Such blended approach ensures that teachers remain current with both traditional and innovative methods, thus strengthening their knowledge base and adaptability in usage of visual materials during lessons. At the same time, the findings showed that teachers utilise a systematic process to ensure that their chosen visual materials align with the established criteria. The process typically involves a pre-assessment phase, where teachers evaluate potential visual materials against benchmarks of clarity, relevance, and simplicity. Such reflective process is in line with the findings of Beltran et al. (2025) that articulated a concept of reflective practice that teachers analyse their instructional choices and make necessary adjustments based on feedback and outcomes.

4.4.2 Knowledge Gap and Needs on the Selection Criteria of Using Visual Materials

Despite the teachers' strong foundational knowledge with selection criteria, teachers pinpointed several challenges that affect the consistent application of selection criteria of visual materials. A recurrent issue is the limited availability of high-quality, contextually relevant visual resources. One participant on 05th November, 2024 commented the following:

“There are times when the resources we have are outdated or do not fully align with the lesson's objectives. This scarcity forces me to make compromises that can affect the quality of the learning experience”. (Participant NKT001)

At the same time, it was established that time constraints act as barrier affecting the process of acquiring the visual materials. Participants pointed the pressures of extensive lesson planning and multiple teaching responsibilities that make finding time to source and evaluate visual materials thoroughly be daunting. On the other side, it was observed that to overcome such

challenge, teachers adopt several practical solutions such as forming resource-sharing networks, maintaining personal libraries of vetted visuals and dedicating specific periods for resource preparation. These strategies help mitigate the challenges while ensuring adherence to high standards in selecting the visual materials.

Despite the extensive knowledge and adherence to selection criteria among teachers, it was observed that still teachers face several challenges in assimilating and using high-quality visual materials. One of the most frequently mentioned challenges was the limited availability of resources that is impeding the usage of appropriate visual materials. It was noted that teachers are forced to use outdated or misaligned resources that compromise the quality of lessons and affects the overall learning experience. This challenge is not unique to Malawi rather other studies have also hinted the hurdle of resource in using apposite visual materials in most developing countries (Wang et al., 2021).

4.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter presents the empirical findings and discussion of the study which offer a comprehensive examination of how English teachers in secondary schools in Nkhata-Bay District in Malawi select visual instructional materials for English comprehension lessons. The chapter explores the dynamic, multi-step selection process employed by these teachers the process starts with a thorough review of lesson plans to identify key concepts and learning objectives, followed by the search for visuals that align with these goals. The findings also reveal that teachers utilise a combination of formal curriculum guidelines and personal judgment to ensure that the selected visuals are both relevant as well as appropriate contextually. In the discussion, these practices are analysed in relation to existing literature

which highlight areas of alignment and divergence, and considering the implications for student comprehension and engagement.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter finalises the study. The chapter begins by summarising the key findings drawn from the study in accordance to the prior objectives of this study. Subsequently, the chapter presents the conclusion of the study. This is followed by the recommendations of this study based on the findings. Ultimately, the chapter finishes by highlighting the areas of further studies.

5.2 Summary of Major Findings

5.2.1 Ways of Teachers Selection of Visual Materials

The findings for this study indicate that the selection of visual instructional materials is a dynamic yet a multi-step process that begins well before the actual delivery of the lesson. Teachers in Nkhata-Bay District, Malawi initiate the process of visual material selection with an in-depth review of their lesson plans to identify key concepts as well as learning objectives. Ideally, this initial phase is critical as it lays the foundation for choosing visuals that are directly linked to the content which in turn ensure that the selected materials not only enhance comprehension but also align with overall curricular goals. At the same time, the findings also highlight that this selection process is not uniform across all teachers. In some instances, the practical constraints such as limited resources force teachers to adapt their ideal selection strategies. Some teachers reported the use of readily available materials even if those visual materials do not perfectly match their pedagogical intentions.

5.2.2 Adherence to Established Selection Criteria

The empirical findings revealed that adherence to established selection criteria for visual materials is variable among teachers in the Nkhata-Bay District, Malawi. While many teachers expressed an understanding of key criteria such as relevance, clarity, simplicity, and cultural appropriateness, it was noted that the extent to which they consistently apply these standards in practice varied significantly. Both classroom observations as well as interviews indicated that teachers who follow a systematic approach in reviewing lesson plans and selecting visuals tend to produce materials that closely align with curricular goals. However, the practical challenges frequently impede ideal adherence to the selection criteria. Specifically, due to limitations of resources such as the unavailability of high-quality or diverse visual materials, mostly compel teachers to resort to materials that are less than optimal. In some observed cases, teachers had to modify their selection process by using alternative visuals that were readily accessible, even though these choices might not fully meet the established pedagogical criteria. In addition to that, time limitations as well as heavy teaching workloads further contribute to inconsistencies in adherence to the selection criteria of visual instructional materials. Literature suggests that while adherence to selection criteria is critical for maximising the impact of visual materials on student learning, still other external factors such as funding, access to technology, and institutional support play a decisive role in whether teachers can implement these criteria consistently. Moreover, the variations in adherence to the selection criteria may also be linked to the level of professional development that teachers have received.

5.2.3 Teachers' Knowledge about Selection Criteria

The findings of this study on the teachers' knowledge of the selection criteria for visual materials revealed both strengths and areas that require further improvements. Overall, teachers

demonstrated a foundational understanding of the key principles for effective visual material selection which included relevance to the lesson content, cultural appropriateness clarity as well as simplicity. Many participants were able to articulate why these criteria are important by noting that visual materials that align with curricular goals and reflect the cultural contexts of students, it enhances comprehension and engagement. Despite such general awareness, the findings also suggest that the depth of knowledge varies considerably among teachers in Nkhata-Bay District, Malawi. Predominantly, some teachers relied on conventional methods and easily available materials rather than assessing whether a visual met the ideal standards. Classroom artefacts such as teacher-made visual materials, further highlighted discrepancies between stated knowledge and actual practice of these materials. In support of this, literature underscores that gaps exist between the theoretical knowledge of selection criteria and its practical implementation in resource scarce areas. The factors that contribute to this gap include limited access to updated instructional resources, insufficient ongoing professional development, and the pressure of adapting to rapidly changing classroom conditions.

5.3 Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that while secondary school English teachers in Nkhata-Bay District, Malawi understand the theoretical importance of selecting high-quality visual materials to enhance comprehension lessons, still challenges hinder the consistent application of these criteria in practice. The findings revealed that teachers generally initiate the selection process with a careful review of lesson plans as well as identification of key learning objectives, which is followed by an attempt to align the visual materials with curricular as well as cultural aspects. However, limitations of resource, time constraints and inadequate professional development substantially compromise their ability to adhere to the established guidelines

which altogether result into a gap between the intended best practices and actual classroom practices.

5.4 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations emerge that could improve the selection of visual instructional materials in secondary schools in the Nkhata-Bay District, Malawi. Firstly, there is a pressing need for ongoing professional development. Specifically, regular workshops and refresher courses that could focus on multimedia literacy, instructional design as well cognitive load management would equip teachers with up-to-date strategies and tools for selecting effective visual materials for a given lesson. At the same time, training should not emphasise only on the technical aspects of visual selection but also foster reflective practices so that teachers can continuously adapt and improve their approaches based on classroom feedback.

In addition to formal training and resource development, creating structured platforms for teacher collaboration is equally essential for effective craftiness of visual materials. Efforts should be made on encouraging the formation of professional learning communities (PLCs) within and across schools to allow teachers to share best practices, exchange ideas, and collectively solve collective challenges. Through such collaborative networks, teachers can share success stories and strategies for mitigating resource limitations and other challenges surrounding the effective adoption of visual materials.

In addition to that, policymakers should consider investing in modern digital infrastructure. The improved internet connectivity and access to digital devices would not only expand the range of available visual resources but also facilitate the integration of dynamic and interactive

media into the classroom. Such investments can have far-reaching benefits, ultimately leading to improved student engagement and learning outcomes.

In essence, there should be a focus on continuous feedback and evaluation of the adoption and usage of visual materials. Schools should implement mechanisms for both formative and summative assessments of visual material effectiveness. On the same, regular classroom observations, student feedback sessions, and performance assessments can help identify areas where visual materials are making a positive impact and where adjustments are necessary. Such ongoing evaluation process is crucial for ensuring that visual materials continue to meet the evolving needs of both teachers and students.

5.5 Areas for Further Study

While this study provides valuable insights into the selection of visual instructional materials, several areas warrant further investigation. Future research should be conducted in the following areas;

1. A longitudinal study should examine the impact of sustained application of ADDIE-based visual selection on student comprehension and teacher practice over multiple academic terms.
2. Research is needed on developing and evaluating locally curated digital repositories of visual materials to enhance cultural relevance and technical quality in secondary school lessons.
3. Comparative studies should assess the effectiveness of different professional development models targeting the Analysis and Evaluation phases of ADDIE in improving teachers' use of selection checklists and rubric.

4. Mixed-methods research should explore students' perceptions of and engagement with visuals chosen according to explicit criteria and link these patterns to gains in inference, critical discussion, and higher-order comprehension skills.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Mzuzu University Research Ethics Committee (MZUNIREC)

Informed Consent Form for Research in

Assessing English Teachers' Adherence to Criteria for Selecting Visual Instructional
Materials for Comprehension Lessons in Secondary Schools in Nkhata-bay District,
Malawi

Introduction

I am Sangwani Chiuke Mhango from **Mzuzu University**. I am doing research on Assessing English Teachers' Adherence to Criteria for Selecting Visual Instructional Materials for Comprehension Lessons in Secondary Schools in Nkhata-bay District, Malawi. This consent form may contain words that you do not understand. Please ask me to stop as we go through the information and I will take time to explain. If you have questions later, you can ask them of me or of another researcher.

Purpose of the research

This research aims to investigate the adherence of English teachers to criteria for selecting visual instructional materials for comprehension lessons in Malawian secondary schools with a case study of four secondary schools in Nkhata-bay District. It seeks to identify ways English teachers use to select visual materials for comprehension lessons, analyze the selected materials if the teachers adhere to the selection criteria, and also ascertain the teachers' knowledge about the selection

criteria. The ultimate goal is to contribute to the broader discourse on the adherence to selection criteria for visual materials in Malawi's educational context, eventually aiming to improve teaching practices particularly in selecting visual materials and student comprehension in English language education.

Type of Research Intervention

This research will involve your participation in an individual interview format.

Participant Selection

You are being invited to take part in this research because you are one of the English teachers at this school, as such you possess the much-needed knowledge about adherence to selection criteria.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. It is your choice whether to participate or not. If you choose not to participate nothing will change. You may skip any question and move on to the next question.

Duration

The research takes place for a period of four months.

Risks

You do not have to answer any question or take part in the interview if you feel the question(s) are too personal or if talking about them makes you uncomfortable.

Reimbursements

Note that you will not be provided any incentive to take part in the research.

Sharing the Results

The knowledge that we get from this research will be shared with you and your community before it is made widely available to the public. Following, we will publish the results so other interested people may learn from the research.

Who to Contact

If you have any questions, you can ask them now or later. If you wish to ask questions later, you may contact: Dr. Lydia Kishindo Mafuta, Mzuzu University, P/Bag 201, Luwingu, Mzuzu 2, Phone: 0999435402.

This proposal has been reviewed and approved by Mzuzu University Research Ethics Committee (MZUNIREC) which is a committee whose task is to make sure that research participants are protected from harm. If you wish to find out more about the Committee, contact Dr. Chrispin Mphande, The Mzuzu University Research Ethics Committee (MZUNIREC) Administrator, Mzuzu University, P/Bag 201, Luwingu, Mzuzu 2, and Phone: 0999953313.

Do you have any questions?

Part II: Certificate of Consent

I have been invited to participate in research about Assessing English Teachers' Adherence to Criteria for Selecting Visual Instructional Materials for Comprehension Lessons in Secondary Schools in Nkhata-bay District, Malawi.

I have read the foregoing information, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have been asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study

Print Name of Participant _____

Signature of Participant _____

Date _____

Day/month/year

If illiterate ¹

I have witnessed the accurate reading of the consent form to the potential participant, and the individual has had the opportunity to ask questions. I confirm that the individual has given consent freely.

Print name of witness _____ **Thumb print of participant**

Signature of witness _____

Date _____

Day/month/year

Statement by the researcher/person taking consent

¹ A literate witness must sign (if possible, this person should be selected by the participant and should have no connection to the research team). Participants who are illiterate should include their thumb print as well.

I have accurately read out the information sheet to the potential participant, and to the best of my ability and made sure that the participant understands the research project. I confirm the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

Signature of Researcher / person taking the

consent_____

Date _____

Day/month/year

APPENDIX 2: ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER (CO-ORDINATOR)

MZUZU UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF POSTGRADUATE COORDINATOR

MEMO

To : Ethics Administrator, Mzunirec

From : Coordinator, Master of Education programmes

Date : 12th July 2024

Subject : **Approval to submit research proposal for ethical Clearance**

I write to confirm that Mr Sangwani Mhango, a student in the Master of Education (Teacher Education) has been authorized by the supervisor and the Faculty of Education to submit his research proposal for ethical clearance with MZUNIREC.

Kindly assist his accordingly



Dr Margaret Mdolo
(Programme coordinator)

APPENDIX 3: ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER (RESEARCHER)

TO: Mzuzu University Research Ethics Committee Administrator,

Mzuzu University,

P/Bag 201,

Luwinga,

Mzuzu 2,

mzunirec@mzuni.ac.mw

Date: 23/07/2024

RE: Letter of Introduction.

Dear Sir,

I am **Sangwani Chiuke Mhango**, a postgraduate Master of Education in Education (Teacher Education) student at Mzuzu University (Student Number: MEDTE 2022). I am reaching out to submit my research proposal titled “*Assessing English Teachers’ Adherence to Criteria for Selecting Visual Instructional Materials for Comprehension Lessons in Secondary Schools in Nkhata-bay District, Malawi.*” for clearance.

I would like to confirm that I have secured the consent of my **Supervisor**, Dr. Lydia Kishindo Mafuta, for the submission of this research proposal.

Please find my contact details below: Contact Number: 0999716079

Email: sangwanicmhango@gmail.com

I appreciate your attention to this matter and look forward to any further guidance or instructions regarding the clearance process.

Sincerely,



Sangwani Chiuke Mhango (**Investigator**)

APPENDIX 4: APPROVAL LETTER (NORTHERN EDUCATION DIVISION)

Telephone: +265 1 312 144
+265 1 312 107
Fax: +265 1 312 640



Communications should be addressed to
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY
EDUCATION DIVISION MANAGER (NORTH)
P.O. BOX 133
MZUZU

Ref No: NED/2/1A

25th October, 2024

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Dear Sir,

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION: MR SANGWANI MHANGO

The letter serves to allow Mr Sangwani to collect data for Research Study he is conducting in the Northern Education Division, specifically in Nkhata Bay District.

Assist him with information he requires.

Yours faithfully,

Jhone 25 OCT 2024

Jane Mhoni 0995 45 68 10
For THE EDUCATION DIVISION MANAGER (N)

APPENDIX 5: APPROVAL LETTER (PROGRAM COORDINATOR)



MZUZU UNIVERSITY

Department of Teaching, Learning and
Curriculum Studies

Mzuzu University
Private Bag 201
Luwingu
MZUZU
MALAWI

Tel: (265) 01 320 575/722
Fax: (265) 01 320 568
mdolo.mm@mzu.ac.mw

19th October 2024

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Dear Sir/Madam,

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION MR SANGWANI MHANGO

Mr Sangwani Mhango is a registered Master of Education (Teacher Education) Program student at Mzuzu University. He has been cleared by the Mzuzu University Research Ethics Committee (MZUNIREC) to collect data for the research study he is conducting as a requirement for the program.

Kindly assist him accordingly.

Yours faithfully,

Dr Margaret M. Mdolo
Program Coordinator

APPENDIX 6: APPROVAL LETTER (MZUNIREC)



MZUZU UNIVERSITY

DIRECTORATE OF RESEARCH

Mzuzu University
Private Bag 201
Luwingu
Mzuzu 2
MALAWI
TEL: 01 320 722
FAX: 01 320 848

MZUZU UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (MZUNIREC)

Ref No: MZUNIREC/DOR/24/174

17/10/2024.

Sangwani Chiuke Mhango,
Mzuzu University,
P/Bag 201, Luwingu,
Mzuzu 2.

Email: sangwanicmhango@gmail.com

Dear Sangwani,

**RESEARCH ETHICS AND REGULATORY APPROVAL AND PERMIT FOR
PROTOCOL REF NO. NO. MZUNIREC/DOR/24/174: ASSESSING ENGLISH
TEACHERS' ADHERENCE TO CRITERIA FOR SELECTING VISUAL
INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS FOR COMPREHENSION LESSONS IN
SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN NKHATA-BAY DISTRICT, MALAWI.**

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Having satisfied all the relevant ethical and regulatory requirements, I am pleased to inform you that the above referred research protocol has officially been approved. You are now permitted to proceed with its implementation. Should there be any amendments to the approved protocol in the course of implementing it, you shall be required to seek approval of such amendments before implementation of the same.

This approval is valid for one year from the date of issuance of this approval. If the study goes beyond one year, an annual approval for continuation shall be required to be sought from the Mzuzu University Research Ethics Committee (MZUNIREC) in a format that is available at the Secretariat. Once the study is

finalised, you are required to furnish the Committee with a final report of the study.

The Committee reserves the right to carry out compliance inspection of this approved protocol at any time as may be deemed by it. As such, you are expected to properly maintain all study documents including consent forms.

Wishing you a successful implementation of your study.

Yours Sincerely,



Wanangwa K. Mawoya
MZUNIREC Secretariat
FOR: MZUNIREC CHAIRPERSON



Mzuzu University Research Ethics Committee
Directorate of Research
Mzuzu University
P/Bag 201
Luwinga
Mzuzu 2
Email: mzunirec@mzuni.ac.mw
Cell: +265 (0) 99 5 48 32 93

APPENDIX 7: CLASSROOM LESSON OBSERVATION FORM

Teacher Information:

- Teacher's Code: _____
- Date of Observation: _____
- Class Level: _____
- Lesson Topic: _____

1. Pre-Observation:

- Review the lesson plan to understand the objectives, activities, and use of visual materials.

- Note any specific criteria or guidelines mentioned for selecting visual materials in the lesson.

2. General Observations:

- Classroom Environment:

- Is the classroom conducive to learning, with appropriate seating arrangements and visual aids?

- Are there any visual materials already displayed in the classroom?

3. Use of Visual Materials:

- Types of Visual Materials:

- Identify the types of visual materials used in the lesson (e.g., images, charts, videos, diagrams).

- Relevance to Lesson:

- Assess the relevance of visual materials to the lesson topic and learning objectives.

- Integration:

- How is the teacher integrating visual materials into the lesson activities and discussions?

- Engagement:

- Note the level of student engagement with the visual materials and their impact on comprehension.

4. Instructional Strategies:

- Clarity of Instructions:

- Evaluate the clarity of instructions provided by the teacher for using visual materials.

- Differentiation:

- Look for evidence of differentiated instruction using visual materials to cater to diverse student needs.

- Interaction:

- Observe teacher-student interactions related to the use of visual materials and comprehension tasks.

5. Student Participation:

○ Participation Levels:

- Assess the level of student participation in activities involving visual materials.

○ Understanding:

- Note any indications of improved comprehension or engagement due to the use of visual aids.

6. Assessment and Feedback:

○ Assessment Methods:

- Identify how the teacher assesses student understanding of the lesson content with visual materials.

- Feedback:
 - Observe the feedback provided by the teacher on students' use of visual materials and comprehension skills.

7. Reflection and Follow-Up:

- Teacher Reflection:
 - Engage the teacher on the criteria of visual material selection
 - Engage the teacher to reflect on the effectiveness of visual materials in enhancing overall comprehension.

APPENDIX 8: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Qualifications:

Years of experience:

Class responsible:

Age range:

Gender:

School:

Objective 1: Identifying ways that secondary school English teachers use to select visual materials for comprehension lessons.

Interview Questions:

1. Would you describe the process you go through when selecting visual materials for comprehension lessons?
2. What factors do you consider when deciding which visual materials to use in your English comprehension lessons?
3. What criteria or guidelines do you follow when selecting visual materials?
4. How do you ensure that the visual materials you select align with the learning objectives of your comprehension lessons?
5. Would you please provide examples of the types of visual materials you commonly use in your English comprehension lessons?

6. How do you assess the effectiveness of the visual materials you use in enhancing students' comprehension?
7. Do you collaborate with other teachers or educational resources when selecting visual materials? If yes, how does this collaboration influence your decision-making process? If no, why do you not collaborate with other teachers?
8. What specific resources or tools do you rely on when searching for visual materials for comprehension lessons?
9. In your opinion, what role do visual materials play in facilitating comprehension and engagement among students in English lessons?

Objective 2: Analysing teachers' adherence to selection criteria

Interview Questions:

Selection Process:

1. Would you please walk me through the process you typically follow when selecting a visual for a comprehension lesson?
2. What are some of the key factors you keep in mind when choosing a visual resource?
3. How do you ensure that the visual you select aligns with the learning objectives of the lesson?

Criteria for Effective Visuals:

4. In your opinion, what makes a visual effective for supporting comprehension?
5. Have you encountered any specific criteria for selecting visuals in your professional development or training?

6. Can you think of an example where you chose a visual and then later realized it wasn't as effective as you initially thought? If so, what made it less effective?

Analysis of Teacher-Selected Materials:

7. Please tell me a bit about the visual you included in this lesson plan? What learning objectives were you hoping it would support?
8. Would you be willing to walk me through the thought process behind choosing this particular visual?

Objective 3: Ascertaining teachers' knowledge about the selection criteria

Interview Questions:

1. Would you please describe what you understand by the term "visual materials" in the context of teaching comprehension lessons?
2. How do you think visual materials contribute to the comprehension of English texts?
3. Are you aware of any specific criteria or guidelines for selecting visual materials for your comprehension lessons?
4. If yes, can you list some of these criteria or guidelines that you follow?
5. How did you become aware of these criteria? (e.g., training, professional development, self-study, curriculum guidelines)
6. How do you ensure that the visual materials you select align with these criteria?
7. Can you provide an example of a visual material you recently used and explain how it met the selection criteria?
8. Have you received any formal training or professional development on selecting and using visual materials in your lessons?
9. If yes, can you describe the nature of this training and how it has influenced your selection process?

10. What challenges do you face in selecting appropriate visual materials for your comprehension lessons?
11. How do you address these challenges?
12. What kind of support would you find helpful in improving your selection of visual materials?
13. In your opinion, how effective are the visual materials you currently use in enhancing students' comprehension?
14. Have you noticed any difference in student engagement or understanding when you use well-selected visual materials compared to when you do not?
15. Do you think it is important to adhere to specific criteria when selecting visual materials? Why or why not?
16. How strictly do you adhere to the criteria in your selection process? Can you give reasons for your answer?