



## THE FORMATION OF SWAZILAND AGRICULTURE TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION FROM 1978 - 2019

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### ABSTRACT

Subject teaching associations including Swaziland Agriculture Teachers' Association (SATA) rarely receive research attention; yet they contribute to teacher professionalism, subject knowledge and pedagogy. No study has been conducted on the history of SATA in Eswatini, hence the study sought to document the history of the formation of SATA. The study is a historical research design employing the interpretivism approach. The study utilised multi-methods in data collection, namely: document analysis, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). Primary sources were used in document analysis. Fifteen informants selected through snowballing were interviewed using the semi-structured interview guide. Nineteen agricultural education experts participated in two FGDs. Data from semi-structured interviews and FGDs were analysed using narrative analysis whereas content analysis was used on primary data sources. Findings revealed that working extra hours, stigmatization of both agriculture teachers and the subject, poor remuneration of agriculture teachers and overlooking of agriculture teachers during appointment to leadership positions in the schooling system were the reasons that justified the formation of SATA. The pioneers convened meetings, inaugurated SATA, held executive committee elections, and crafted SATA constitution. In conclusion, SATA was formed to serve professional development needs of agriculture teachers and the formation was spearheaded by pioneers. SATA executive committees must ensure the relevance of the association to agriculture teachers.

**KEY WORDS:** Historical research design; informants; participants; primary sources; Swaziland Agriculture Teacher Association; teacher professional development.

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## INTRODUCTION

The teaching profession can be described as hierarchical, classified according to the school level and subject taught. Teachers within the profession tend to form associations or bargaining networks based on collective identity. One common example is the formation of specialist organizations that represent teachers based through subject boundaries. Subject teaching associations are universally understood to provide leadership and professional support for teachers within a subject specific domain. Central to the mission and aims of most subject teaching associations is professional advocacy and representation of subject specific-teachers. The formative influences and developments of subject teaching associations are in constant flux across regions and nations. Reimers (2003) posited that the formation of subject teaching associations was a development subsequent to the formation of national teachers' associations, with the first national teachers' association formed in 1857 in the United States of America. Thereafter, a plethora of subject teaching associations either at national or international level became a common phenomenon across the landscape of the schooling system.

Generally, across the globe subject teaching associations fall under the auspice of Teacher Unions or Teacher Associations. Teacher unions are mainly bound by industrial relations acts, focusing mainly on teachers' working conditions and entitlements. Due to the diverse nature of the teaching profession, it is not surprising that issues of pedagogy, subject-specific constraints and subject content receive seldom attention from teacher associations. On the other hand, subject teacher association can be classified as specialist organizations catering for a distinct group of teachers and tend to have a specific area of focus. Subject teaching associations are borne from the assertion that teaching is not an individual career; thus, it is impossible to work as a classroom teacher and be entirely removed from your peers and colleagues (Williams, 2017). Hilferty (2000) articulated that the issue of subject teachers' working hours, access to professional development and study leave, deployment and promotion criteria and processes, and dealing with harassment, stress, victimization and apparent incompetency or less than satisfactory work may resonate with existence of subject teaching associations. These associations can also be described as not-for profit organizations, autonomous and mainly run by volunteer teachers.

Subject teaching associations tend to be commensurate with the number of subjects offered in the curriculum of any schooling system in any country. In the Kingdom of Eswatini subject teaching associations include: Swaziland Agriculture Teachers Association; Swaziland Science Association (S.T.A.); Eswatini Religious Education Association (E.R.E.T.A.); Swaziland History Teachers Association (SHTA); Swaziland Consumer Science Association; Swaziland Siswati Subject Teachers Association (S.S.S.T.A.); Swaziland Commercial Teachers Association (S.C.O.T.A.) and many others.

### **Theoretical framework of the study**

The study is framed on the Historical Theory (White, 1978). The Historical Theory was developed by Hyden White in 1978. The theory attempts to impose a unitary meaning on the past, often in a narrative style, in order to explain what happened or to structure the supposed meaning and to some degree make predictions about the future. Levels of conceptualization in the historical work include: chronicle, story, and mode of emplotment, mode of argument and mode of ideological implication. Chronicle and story refer to primitive elements in the historical account. Chronicle involves organizing the events to be dealt with in the temporal order of their occurrence. The chronicle is organized into a story achieved by further arrangement of the events into the components of a spectacle or process of happening. The chronicle is thought to possess a discernible beginning, middle and end which entails assigning events to specific functions within historical development of SATA.



According to the Historical Theory (HT), the primitive events are transformed into the historical work through emplotment, formal argument and ideological implication. Each mode of emplotment explains by giving a distinctive shape to the story as a whole. The informants constructed the emplotment of the history of SATA especially the role played by the pioneers of the association and the reasons that gave birth to the association. The time horizon for the history of SATA, stretched from 1973 to 2019 calendar years.

### **Statement of the problem**

Subject teaching associations are perceived as neutral organizations that pass on objective subject matter knowledge. Generally, information regarding subject teaching associations is largely absent from literature. Similarly, information pertaining to SATA being a subject teaching association cannot be easily found. SATA committees and the agriculture subject inspectorate offer piecemeal information about the history of the agriculture subject association. Leading personalities in the formation of the agriculture teachers' association, historical events of the subject association and SATA activities remain vaguely presented and largely anecdotal. Furthermore, there is no definitive documentation of the reasons and or needs that justified the formation of the agriculture subject teaching association in Eswatini.

### **Research questions**

The study sought to provide answers on the main question: What is the historical formation of SATA in Eswatini? The study was guided by the following research sub-questions:

1. What were the reasons for the formation of SATA in Eswatini?
2. What was the role played by the pioneers in the formation of SATA in Eswatini?

### **METHODOLOGY**

The study is a historical research design involving the synthesis and interpretation of past events from SATA pioneers and documents relating to SATA. The study used the interpretivism approach, hence employed multi-methods for data generation namely: face-to-face interviews, FGD and document analysis to develop a credible understanding of the historical formation of SATA.

SATA pioneers, SATA committees, and primary documents were used as sources of data. Snowballing was used to identify informants who were pioneers of SATA. The first informant was identified through the senior agriculture inspectorate. Of the 28 eligible informants identified, only 15 were purposively selected based on accessibility and participated in the face-to-face interviews. Selection of the most appropriate sample size is important for ensuring the credibility (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004), but the researcher sought a point of saturation from the informants' responses during the face-to-face interviews. The face-to-face interviews with all the selected informants were conducted by the researcher. After analyzing the interview transcripts, the informants were given the findings of the interviews to verify if they reflect their experiences. National executive committee members of SATA who served as president or vice president and secretary were purposively selected to participate in the two FGDs. The two FGDs were directed by one FGD guide and the participants of the FGDs were differentiated based on years of experience with SATA. The interactive nature of the FGDs ensured that chronology of events leading to the formation of the subject teaching association were verifiable.



Purposively selected primary sources included: hard copies of SATA minutes from workshops, Annual General Meeting minutes, and executive committee meeting minutes; subscription receipts; membership cards; constitution; invoices; letters; and newsletters. Personal diaries used by informants during their participation in the association were also used as primary sources of data. All primary sources of the study were obtained from the informants. Only primary documents which were relevant to the research questions and demonstrated richness of data were selected for content analysis.

The data generated from face-to-face interviews, FGDs and primary sources were analyzed using narrative analysis. Themes and direct quotes were used to present the narrative of the history of the formation of SATA as entity. In qualitative studies, researchers are expected to disclose their bias which arises from positions and or previous experiences regarding the research problem. The researchers had lived experiences of teaching agriculture and once held membership to SATA. Furthermore, though the historical information on SATA was communal and verifiable, it is also invariably subjective since it was filtered through the present-day mental lenses.

## FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The narrative of the historical developments of SATA in Eswatini were presented to answer the two critical research questions of the study namely: 1) What were the reasons for the formation of SATA in Eswatini and 2) What was the role played by the pioneers in the formation of SATA in Eswatini?

### Reasons for the formation of SATA

Fives themes emerged on the reasons for the formation of SATA namely: praxis shock of teaching agriculture, working extra hours, stigmatization of both agriculture teachers and the subject, poor remuneration of agriculture teachers, and inability of agriculture teachers to ascend into leadership roles in the schooling system.

#### ***Praxis shock of teaching agriculture***

Agriculture teachers faced reality shock in the placement school. Since agriculture as a subject was new in the school curriculum, there were no reference materials such as textbooks to assist in the delivery of subject content. Generally, agriculture teachers felt there was a disconnect between content learnt in pre-service teacher preparatory programme and content to be taught agriculture learners through the agriculture syllabus. Cognizant to the constrained ability of teachers to effectively teach the subject, the subject association was meant to serve as a professional learning community.

One informant stated that,

*“Teaching agriculture was a challenge because there was lack of teaching resources including reference materials. Agriculture teachers were unable to boost their subject content knowledge by seeking information from other books because the subject was new” (Informant 14).*

Informant 11 mentioned that; *“As the first group of teachers to graduate for a Diploma in Agriculture Education, we were a misfit in schools in terms of teaching the subject. The syllabus content was not aligned with what we were taught at University”.*

#### ***Working extra hours***

The participants reported that teaching and the supervision of agriculture required extra working hours in addition to the hours gazetted in the Employment Act of 1980. The teachers indicated they were expected to monitor livestock and



vegetables on weekends and during school vacations. This implied that an agriculture teacher would be the last person to leave school premises as he or she needed to ensure that the livestock such as broilers had food and water; and all tools are back in the tool shed. As indicated already, agriculture teachers reported for duty early, worked after school hours, and worked on during weekends and public holidays. Therefore, the association of agriculture teachers was to advocate for the remuneration of the extra working hours

Informant 6 stated that;

*“Agriculture teachers were expected to work for seven days per week and 365 days per year since could not neglect the vegetables and livestock during public holidays and weekends. Sometimes we had to travel from our residential areas or rented flats just to make sure livestock, vegetables and crops were ok”.*

Studies reiterated that agriculture teachers work more hours than other comparable teachers and work beyond the amount of time for which they are being paid (Dalgarno & Colgan, 2007; Mulkeen, Chapman, Dejaeghere & Leu, 2007). Hence, subject teaching associations may serve as appropriate platforms to agitate for compensation of level of difficulty encountered while serving professional responsibility.

### **Stigmatization of agriculture teachers and the subject**

From 1978 until 1990s agriculture teachers were stigmatized by the community, learners, subject teachers and school administrators. The stigmatization was borne from the dress-code of agriculture teachers (wearing jeans, overall and sometimes gumboots) yet their counterparts had a modest dress-code (putting neckties). There were many questions about the professionalism of agriculture teachers. The participants felt the agriculture subject was not taken seriously like other subjects. Other issues which compounded the agriculture teacher stigmatization narrative included designating the subject for slow-learners and timetabling the subject after lunch, at the time of day when learners are tired. Timetabling the subject was based on that the agriculture students will come from the garden dirty, hence it could not be taught during the early hours of school-day. Existing literature presents the role played by subject associations on fighting issues such as stigmatization. Hilferty (2008) justified the existence of subject associations as means for teachers to collectively assert their demands in the education system and advocacy for subject interests. Bascia (2001) concurred that professional associations have the responsibility to improve the public image and reputation of the membership.

Participant 2 in FGD1 emphasized that,

*“From 1978 until 1990s agriculture teachers were wearing jeans and sometimes gumboots yet other teachers were putting on neckties. Everyone in the school including learners looked down upon agriculture teachers. If you were an agriculture teacher there were a lot of questions about you. Are you really trained? Are you like any other teacher?”*

Informant 9 was quoted saying,

*“It was a norm to allocate agriculture after lunch in the time table and none in the morning to avoid learners and the school becoming dirty. It was like learning took place in the garden not in classroom during agriculture periods”.*

### **Poor remuneration of agriculture teachers**

Agriculture teachers were paid lower salaries relative to other members of the teaching staff with similar educational qualification. Diploma teachers were paid at Grade 14 while agriculture teachers who were diploma holders too, were paid at Grade 13 by the Government of Eswatini. This discrepancy meant that agriculture teachers had to speak from a collective



voice which was to be ventilated through formation of a subject association.

Participant 3 in FGD2 mentioned that,

*“The stigma emanated from our superiors, Teaching Service Commission (TSC), as agriculture teachers were paid at Grade 13 yet William Pitcher teachers and those from University of Swaziland, Kwaluseni Campus were paid on Grade 14 even though we were all diploma teachers”.*

### ***Inability of agriculture teachers to ascend into leadership positions in the school system***

Agriculture teachers were seldomly promoted into positions of deputy-headteacher and head teacher posts from 1978 until 1992. There was a need to form an association to advocate for agriculture teachers to be considered for promotion into leadership roles within the school system in the country.

One participant was quoted saying; *“Only teachers from William Pitcher College and University of Swaziland Kwaluseni Campus were promoted into deputy head teacher and head teacher posts. Not even a single agriculture teacher was promoted before the formation of the association”.* (Participant 6 in FGD1)

Subject teaching associations like SATA are formed to ensure that the professional voice of teachers is heard loudly. Though reasons for formation may vary from subject and country; generally subject associations are borne of teachers needs for professional representation (Bangs & MacBeath, 2012) and associations have legal obligation to be responsive to their members (Bascia, 1994)

### **Roles played by pioneers in the formation of SATA**

Five themes emerged on the roles played by pioneers in the formation of SATA. The themes included: convening the first meeting for agriculture teachers, inauguration of SATA, holding the first SATA executive committee elections and crafting the first SATA constitution.

#### ***Convening the first meeting for agriculture teachers***

The first agricultural education graduate cohort in collaboration with senior agriculture inspectorate, agriculture coordinators and lecturers in the Department of Agricultural Education and Extension (AEE) from University of Swaziland (UNISWA) organized the first meeting for agriculture teachers. The meeting was held in UNESWA, Faculty of Agriculture at Luyengo Campus. The coordinators were instrumental in providing venue for follow-up meetings at Emlaladini Centre and Schools Agriculture. An Agriculture teacher educator from the AEE department at the University of Eswatini was assigned patronage status of the Association but also represented the tenure department for pre-service agriculture teachers. Informant 4 stated that, *“The association was formed after we graduated from the university in 1978 to address most of the issues we came across. There was an agriculture teachers’ first meeting to discuss the challenges we faced in teaching agriculture.”*

Informant 11 elaborated that;

*“Present in the first meeting was a representative from UNISWA who was a lecturer in the AEE department, and agriculture Coordinators from the Ministry of Education. As agriculture teachers we individually voiced the need to come together to share challenges and propose relevant solutions”.*

The findings are in agreement with Cowgill and Warning (2017) that the formation of subject teaching associations is mainly conceptualized during meetings of stakeholders and such meeting are organized by a select leading personalities who can



be described as pioneers. Desimone (2009) referred to meetings as one of the platforms for active and collective participation that enable an effective subject teaching association.

### ***Inauguration of SATA***

The pioneers championed the inauguration of the agriculture subject teacher association. In the first meeting convened, all attendees unilaterally agreed to form the subject-based (agriculture) association. The meeting resolved that the association was the only vehicle to resolve the challenges faced by agriculture teachers. The meeting further resolved that the association be referred as, "Swaziland Agriculture Teachers Association (SATA)." Informant 9 was quoted saying; *"During the first meeting it was decided that the challenges were still going to prevail, so forming the association would help to discuss the challenges and our welfare, and share experiences and solutions"*.

### ***Holding the SATA executive committee elections***

The leading personalities of SATA successfully lobbied for the formation of an executive committee for the association. The committee members were elected through raising hands using the one man one vote principle. Members or office bearers in the executive committee included President, Vice-President, Organizing Secretary, General Secretary, Treasurer and two (2) members. The executive committee was expected to meet at least four times a year. The meeting resolved that in the event an office bearer becomes unavailable for service, a paid-up member would be co-opted into the executive committee. Informant 1 said:

*"The office bearers were elected by raising hands, not secret ballot and the meeting also suggested that regional committees were to be elected by the association's branches afterwards. During the first elections, we elected the president, vice president, organizing secretary, general secretary, treasurer and two additional members"*.

### ***Crafting the first SATA constitution***

Studies describes a constitution as an essential living document for any association, since it is an aggregate of fundamental principles or established precedents that institute the legal basis of an association and determine how that association is to be governed (Herlihy, 2017; Falcao & Szesztay, 2006; Dalgarno, & Colgan, 2007). A constitution is meant to describe clearly the nature of the association and spells out how it is to operate. The constitution for a subject association act as an organizational conscience guiding issues that cannot be ignored in formal discussions of committees and or committee members.

The first executive committee of SATA crafted the constitution of the subject association. The constitution was presented in subsequent general meeting of the association. Key elements of the constitution included: aim and objectives, committee members, membership, and elections. Among the several aims and objectives of the association, it sought to improve the teaching of agriculture in schools; facilitate professional meeting of members through Regional branches; organize teachers' workshops, seminars, lectures and educational tours to places of Agricultural interest; and publish a newsletter which was sent to all members of the association. Informant 12 stated that: *"Office bearers were tasked to craft a constitution and presented it to agriculture teachers during the next meeting. The key aspects of the constitution were objectives, committee members, membership and elections."*



## CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the Swaziland Agriculture Teachers Association was formed to address needs of agriculture teachers which involved professional development and labour-related (employment welfare). The subject-teaching association provided advocacy for the interest of agriculture as a subject in the curriculum of the Eswatini schooling-system. The formation of SATA was spearheaded by pioneers who were like-minded persons and agricultural education stakeholders that included agriculture teacher, educators, agriculture subject inspectorate. Patronage of SATA was a preserve of an appointed member from the Department of Agricultural Education and Extension in the University of Swaziland. The historical formation of SATA can be unequivocally narrated through the reasons that justified the formation of the subject association and the role played by the leading personalities (pioneers) in the inauguration of the association.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the power of action of SATA can be augmented if the executive committees are complicit of the reasons for the formation of the association and align reforms to suit the needs of agriculture teachers. Further research must be done on SATA chronology including the evolution of the association and its achievements.

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