EXPLORING ESWATINI GENERAL CERTIFICATE OF SECONDARY EDUCATION SISWATI TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES ON ONLINE TEACHING

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ABSTRACT

The unprecedented lockdown due to COVID-19 pandemic has forced a rapid transition to online teaching and learning in Eswatini. The study explores EGCSE siSwati teachers' experiences on online teaching. The objectives of the study were to: determine the platforms EGCSE siSwati teachers used for online teaching; determine the extent at which online teaching platforms are used by EGCSE siSwati teachers; and the challenges EGCSE siSwati teachers faced during online teaching. The study utilised a mixed method. A close-ended online questionnaire and semi-structured online interviews were used to collect data. Out of the 225 siSwati teachers in eight (8) clusters in the Hhohho Region, the researchers sampled (N=40) teachers using stratified random sampling. Data collected through the questionnaire was analysed descriptively while qualitative data was analysed using thematic content analysis. Findings revealed that teachers used WhatsApp, Google classroom, Facebook, Microsoft Teams and Zoom. Most used platforms were WhatsApp (40%), Facebook (30%) while least used platforms were Google Classrooms (10%) and Zoom (5%). Non-authentic assessment, language barrier, lack of professional expertise in ICT use, and minimal learner participation are challenges of online teaching. The conclusions were: teachers used a variety of online teaching platforms to different extents, and the major challenge is that of language barrier. Recommendations were: online teaching should be flexible; platforms should be used according to learners' context; siSwati must be infused as a language of ICT and online assessment applications be improved in order to maximise learner participation.

KEYWORDS: Online platforms, Online teaching, EGCSE.

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INTRODUCTION

Whilst educational provision still remains a basic need and right for every child, all countries internationally were obliged to adhere to social distancing because of the "COVID-19" global attack. Social distancing is a popular term that describes a mitigation strategy and rapid response formulated to slow down the COVID-19 virus that is attacking countries globally (Basilaia & Kvavadze, 2020). Part of social distancing is limiting large groups of people from coming together. Thus, countries embarked on lock down. However, the United Nations Inter- Agency Network on Youth Development (UN IANYD) considered health and education as fundamental rights for children's survival during the COVID-19 era therefore, recommended the use of various technologies and communication tools as means to develop local solutions.

Online teaching has since become a remedial approach to support student learning in the times of school closure due to the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic. In the Kingdom of Eswatini, higher institutions of learning, secondary schools, primary schools and elementary schools have been forced to suspend face-to-face classes and transition to online teaching using online platforms. This study explored the experiences of Eswatini General Certificate of Secondary Education (EGCSE) SiSwati teachers' experiences on online teaching.

Background to the study

The invasion of the COVID-19 pandemic has brought challenges in all spheres of human life across the globe and the education sector remains no exception. The persistent pandemic has caused the closure of schools globally, with more than 1.57 billion children (90% of the total enrolled students) from more than 190 countries being unable to attend regular classes (UNESCO, 2020). Consequently, most governments around the world are nurturing education at home after educational institutions have been temporarily closed. Thus, the COVID-19 social distancing command has dramatically innovated the way we teach. It has unceremoniously stopped face-to-face interactions between teacher and learner, and paved the way for remote teaching done on digital platforms; eLearning. Li (2020) from the World Economic Forum declares COVID-19 as a catalyst to create new learning opportunities. In support of the move on ICT as a solution Lewin and McNicol (2015) assert that there are so many challenges that arise in the 21st century that require learners to use ICT to support their creative strategies. Rhalmi (2017) adds that young people have an innate enthusiasm for ICT that develops naturally; therefore, urge teachers not to hesitate but channel teaching and learning towards ICT. In the United States, to increase access to technology, the One Laptop per Child was adopted as a wide initiative to allow learners personal access to technology. Low-cost devices, notebooks and smart phones were initiated.

Like most parts of the world, the Kingdom of Eswatini has on the 17th March 2020, declared COVID-19 a public health emergency that led to the closure of all educational institutions in the country, as a measure to contain the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Teachers were thereafter forced to suspend face-to-face classes and adopt online teaching to ensure continuity of student learning (MoET, 2020). Teachers and students were immediately impacted because their homes became the new classroom. After a few weeks the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) allocated funds to the Eswatini government to plan for activities that will ensure that children continue with their learning during this unprecedented time while strategizing much safer practices when schools resume.

Online teaching is not a new phenomenon in Eswatini; the adoption of ICT as a teaching tool and platform was mainstreamed in 2006. Efforts made towards extending computer literacy and vocational ICT training for every child were initiated through the establishment of the National Development Strategy (NDS) vision 2022 and the Computer Education Trust (CET) (MoET, 2018). CET collaborated with SchoolNet Africa in installing computers for high schools and facilitated development of necessary pedagogic materials. Crucial elements of the NDS were appropriate education and training of staff beyond academic orientation towards technical and vocational orientation; thus, they also provided professional pre-service and in-service teacher training for all secondary schools during that time (Isaacs, 2007). Despite all these efforts, literature on the use of ICT for teaching and learning shows an increasing struggle between needs, resources, and teacher knowledge (Isaacs, 2007; Schleicher, 2012, Madzima et al., 2013; McNutty, 2017).

During the hype for online teaching, the government developed a contingency plan and swiftly established alternative learning methods through television, radio and newspapers. As of the 4th of June 2020, lessons were aired in English, the country's national language and siSwati, the mother tongue. The media lessons that targeted completing classes made an impact as more than 80% of the population has access to radios which gives most learners the chance to access learning. To ensure inclusivity, sign language interpretation was offered. Despite this rapid response, challenges remained observant since the alternative ways of learning were not available to all children (Daries & Valenzuela, 2020). Children from the poorest households do not have access to technology such as radios, televisions, let alone newspapers, thus were excluded from the programme.

As these media lessons were running, a number of teachers in the Kingdom, more especially those who were teaching final classes (Grade 7, Form 3 and Form 5), volunteered while some were mandated by their administrators to teach their learners online and monitor if they are getting hold of the government sponsored media lessons (Daries & Valenzuela, 2020). One of the researchers in this study is one of the teachers who voluntarily offered to teach EGCSE siSwati learners online through WhatsApp. Teachers organized lessons using either personal or school-owned computers, smartphones and the internet sharpening the learners in readiness for the final examinations they were to take between November and December 2020. The online lessons did not end after the 2020 examinations but are still on-going due to the persistence of COVID-19.

SiSwati, the main focus of the study, is the mother tongue and one of the official languages in Eswatini; the other being English. It is taught as a core subject in all schools and grades in the country (MoET, 2018). However, the study concentrates on senior secondary siSwati teaching, Form 5 to be precise. SiSwati as a mother tongue and core subject in Eswatini has to play a gigantic role as an instrument towards the promotion of literacy and national development because it is the language of the masses. Bamgbose (2011) posited that a mother tongue is crucial for literacy and socio-economic transformation including the development of new skills and change in attitudes and lifestyle. However, literature reveals that siSwati, as a mother tongue and core subject, is faced with a dilemma of being looked down upon by its native speakers due to its low utilisation in official business of the country (Dlamini, 2012; Mkhonta, 2017).

It is worth noting that some schools, especially urban schools have been using chat rooms provided by Zoom, Google and Microsoft Team to run classes (Daries & Valenzuela, 2020). Most organised and privileged schools run very quick and short training sessions to teachers, mostly online, focusing mostly on the features of the online platform, video conferencing apps, registration procedures to the system and delivering lessons through the new technologies. This unprepared and abrupt shift to online teaching raised questions not only about the effectiveness of online teaching itself but largely about the ways the technology is learned and adopted by the teachers and the ways the learning is delivered through this mode. This study sought to explore the experiences of Eswatini General Certificate of Secondary Education (EGCSE) SiSwati Teachers' experiences on online teaching.

Problem statement

Though mainstreaming of ICT into teaching and learning in Eswatini dates back to 2006 (MoET, 2018), the unprecedented global COVID-19 lockdown has fast-tracked the rapid transition to online instruction. The researchers view online teaching as an abrupt and drastic change considering the numerous challenges faced by the world at large, Eswatini inclusive. These challenges include, but are not limited to access to technology and internet connectivity, lack of training and resources for teachers to effectively deliver online instruction, and the need to adapt new pedagogical approaches for online teaching, exacerbating existing inequalities for students from disadvantaged background who may have limited access to technology and other resources necessary for online learning (Madzima et al., 2013; Bhebhe and Maphosa, 2016; OECD, 2020; Mengistie, 2020; Khanal, 2020). Fullan and Miles (2016), who are scholars on change, observe that change is met with different expectations and experiences by teachers.

Research objectives

1. To determine the platforms used by EGCSE siSwati teachers for online teaching
2. To ascertain the extent teaching platforms are used by EGCSE siSwati teachers
3. To establish the challenges EGCSE siSwati teachers faced during online teaching

Research questions

The following questions were answered by the study:

1. What are the platforms EGCSE siSwati teachers used for online teaching?
2. To what extent are teaching platforms used by EGCSE siSwati teachers?
3. What are the challenges EGCSE siSwati teachers faced during online teaching?

Theoretical framework

The study adopted the models of change by Fullan (1982), (1991) Educational Change Model. Fullan (1982, 1991) proposed four broad phases involved in the change process; initiation, implementation, continuation and outcome. The research is on the implementation of online teaching thus, from Fullan's Educational Change Model the researchers will specifically focus on the implementation stage. According to Fullan and Stiegerlbauer (1991) three areas greatly affect the implementation of change; characteristics of change, local and external factors (government and other agencies) simplified into physical resources, school ecology, teacher factor and learner factor. The model views every stakeholder in the education system as a change agent. Beyond that, the model motivates that all change agents have a greater potential for effective and meaningful implementation of change on condition they interact and collaborate with other change agents both in one's own group and across all groups (Fullan & Stiegerlbauer, 1991). This therefore sets the premise for the model to focus on how teachers as human participants take part in the change process; from face-to-face to online teaching of EGCSE siSwati.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Online teaching and learning

Different authors describe online teaching in different ways by giving descriptions and opinions based on the research field or experience. Online learning is the way that instructions, content and material are delivered through internet fast and easy. Tamm (2019) states that E-learning, also referred to as online learning or electronic learning, is the acquisition of knowledge which takes place through electronic technologies and media. In simple language, e-learning is learning that is enabled electronically. Bates (2016) claims that online learning is a form of distance education in which a course is intentionally designed in advance so as to be fully delivered online. Online learning is learning that is carried out using an internet connection as a liaison for communication between educators and students without any physical contact. Online learning has several weaknesses; namely, the use of the internet network requires adequate infrastructure, requires a lot of money, and communication (Bates, 2016). Online learning is distance learning which gives learners the opportunity to learn without their presence in the classroom. According to The Economic Times (2020) a learning system based on formalised teaching but with the help of electronic resources is known as E-learning. While teaching can be based in or out of the classrooms, the use of computers and the internet forms the major component of E-learning. For purposes of this study, online teaching is used to refer to a form of distance education in which course content, in this case EGCSE siSwati, is well prepared so as to be delivered through different online platforms.

To increase awareness and prevention of corona virus transmission in schools and campuses, teachers have assignments uploaded to students after determining the learning media such as WhatsApp, Email, Google Classroom, or any other learning media applications. There are quite a lot of choices for online learning applications that can be applied in the world of education. Ramadani and Xhaferi (2020) supported the use of online platforms such as Google Classroom, Google Meet, Skype, Zoom and many other technological tools in order to help learners to continue with their studies. One of the familiar applications implemented is the Google Classroom application. Teachers, lecturers, tutors and instructors open classes and invite students to the class. Online learning in the application can take place with various materials and assignments given by teachers to students. Teachers can also provide grades related to assignments that are collected neatly and well archived. The online learning that is applied allows teachers and students to carry out learning without going through face-to-face in the classroom by providing learning material in the form of PowerPoint slides, e-books, learning videos etc., assignments (independent or group), as well as assessment (Silalahi et al., 2020).

Due to the increase and advancement of ICT, teaching and learning was not hindered by the COVID-19 pandemic in higher institutions of learning, schools and pre-schools in the Kingdom of Eswatini. A myriad of platforms were used in differing extents depending on availability of resources. Pramana et al. (2020) conducted a research study and identified sixteen (16) online media platforms including WhatsApp, Zoom, Google Meet, Edmodo, Google Classroom, Video call, Email, E-Learning, WebEx, Facebook, Schoology, Padlet, Microsoft Teams, Moodle, Blog and You-Tube. The study revealed that WhatsApp was the most used platform with 51 users (25.5%), Zoom Meeting 44 (22%), Google Classroom 29 (15.5%), Google Meet 28 (14.0%), E-mail 18 (9.0%), E-Learning 12 (6.0%), You-Tube 4 (2.0%), Microsoft Teams 3 (1.5%), Facebook, Voice/Video call, WebEx with 1.0% each, and Blog, Edmodo, Moodle Padlet had 0.5% each. Another research study was conducted by Sahidillah and Miftahurrisqi (2019) in Ghana on social media platform preferences for online learning during the COVID-19 era among 467 students. A majority chose WhatsApp where 236 users (50.5%), Google Meetings 85 (18.2%), and Zoom 82 (17.6%) and some others used YouTube and Facebook. However, studies in Italy, Japan, the United States, and China showed that most teachers and students used Zoom for e-learning (Ramadani & Xhaferi, 2020).

In a survey conducted by Hassan (2014) most respondents agree that the advantages of Facebook are easy interaction, comfort in getting information, easy to use and easy to share information while most people view its only disadvantage of being too open to the public. Ramadani and Xhaferi (2020) postulated that using online platforms was very demanding because of many factors that influenced teachers. Although many teachers from different schools used many devices during the pandemic, Zoom was the main one. Teachers had different experiences and challenges during their teaching process through online platforms. They had many problems especially in the assessment and evaluation part; it was very difficult to evaluate learners through technology instruments and grading them correctly. Ayoub (2019) stated that Zoom is a very useful and effective online platform for both teachers and learners because learners work together and improve the language skills appropriately. Zoom platform makes learners more motivated and eager to learn the target

language through technology. Comparing Zoom with other tools such as Viber or WhatsApp, teachers had more difficulties during online teaching because these tools did not offer the opportunities for teaching as the Zoom platform did. Teachers had more challenges in using these tools because they could not teach learners properly until they began using Zoom. On the other hand, there are disadvantages of using Zoom because teachers have difficulties to assess and evaluate learners in an appropriate manner.

Challenges of effective online teaching

While technology is used widely across the globe for remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, its proper management and utilization has always been a concern. A recent survey conducted by OECD among 330 people working in the education sections in 98 countries revealed that the availability and management of technological infrastructure is a major challenge in the transitional pedagogy, with only 38 respondents (8.7%) said that there is no challenge at all in both access and management of the technology (OECD, 2020). Similarly, teachers also faced problems regarding the speed and cost of the internet while doing online teaching. A teacher has this to say, “My Internet frequently gets disconnected and while I re-join through using data, many of my students are already disconnected.” Perrotta and Bohan’s (2020) experiences of online teaching at higher education level, for example, are mixed, suggesting online teaching leads to an increased feeling of isolation from students, inconsistent teaching evaluations, and varying degrees of academic freedom.

The works of Dube (2020) and Mengistie (2020) also underscore the issues of social justice while adopting the technology-driven remote teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in the low-income regions. Referring to the South African government’s recent move to adopt online learning as the main alternative during the COVID-19 pandemic, Dube (2020) reveals that many rural learners in South Africa are excluded from teaching and learning due to a lack of resources to connect to the internet, the learning management system, and low-tech software. The key message therefore is that while the COVID-19 pandemic has created, if not widened the gap between the rich and the poor or urban learners and rural learners, any form of transitional approach to education during the time of COVID-19 should not violate the rights of learners, despite their geographical location. With a similar tone, Mengistie (2020) provides a situation of transitional online teaching in Ethiopian higher education which excludes almost 80% of university students who are rural-based without electricity, laptop, smart-phone, desktop, and internet. Chandra et.al, 2020 concurs with Mengistie (2020) that online teaching is largely inequitable as about 30% of families with school age children either did not have adequate home internet access or do not have the digital devices necessary to access remote learning resources at home.

Similarly, Khanal (2020) reports that teachers also faced problems regarding the speed and cost of the internet while doing online teaching. A teacher has this to say, “My Internet frequently gets disconnected and while I re-join through using data, many of my students are already disconnected.” Many teachers felt like the job they have known and loved for decades in some cases was lost in the transition to remote learning. As teachers lost connections with the students and colleagues while also losing a sense of professional

competence, efficacy, they described that experience as mourning, loss and sadness (Craft & Simon, 2020). Teachers would write lessons, they might make videos, but nothing came back from the students. It was like shouting in a void (Craft & Simon, 2020). Gon and Rawekar (2017) stated that message flooding, time consuming and eye strain were other technical disadvantages observed by teachers through WhatsApp teaching and learning. Some teachers also reported being swamped by too many messages, in a way that burdened and annoyed them, especially if they have more than one group or groups that are bigger than fifteen (15) students.

An analysis made by Azzi-Huck and Shmis (2020) of developing countries like Eswatini concluded that such countries lack infrastructure, expertise and motivation to implement technology integration in their education systems. Ngwenya et al. (2019) supports the above assertion as it is revealed that in the Kingdom of Eswatini, the availability and use of ICT tools for teaching and learning are inadequate and not accessed by all staff members and learners. Therefore, there is an urgent need to fast track the use of ICT for teaching and learning in Eswatini. Bhebhe and Maphosa (2016) in their examination of teachers' computer literacy and ICT utilisation in Eswatini reported that some schools lack digital tools to deliver lessons and that, teachers have limited digital skills and knowledge to use ICT in the classroom. Madzima et al. (2013) also mention lack of adequate planning for the introduction of ICTs in schools, inadequate teacher training or lack of expertise in using ICTs on the part of teachers, inequalities in ICT distribution, lack of technical support and inadequate infrastructure as key hindrances affecting the introduction, adoption and integration of ICTs in Eswatini schools.

Madzima et al. (2013) stated that English is the dominant language of the Internet and a big proportion of online content is in English yet for developing countries, such as Eswatini, where English language proficiency is not very high, especially outside urban areas, represents a serious barrier. On top of that, providing all the students and teachers with internet access is a very expensive proposition for most government schools. This is more so in the case of rural centres and remote areas, where internet connections are bound to be erratic, if available at all. Mkhonta and Nxumalo (2021) concur with Madzima et al. (2013) by stating that the reality of ICT applications not being designed in siSwati but English makes the use of ICT in the siSwati language classroom slow. Similarly, Mkhonta (2021) believes that parents or guardians are to act as scaffolds during this COVID-19 era through providing their children lifelong support accompanied with personal responsibility. In as far as learners need support and help; these should be provided when necessary and be removed when unnecessary.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a mixed method, highly qualitative and embedded a smaller strand of quantitative research design approach. The population of the study were teachers teaching EGCSE siSwati in the Hhohho Region of Eswatini. Stratified random sampling was used to select five (5) teachers (one per school) per cluster out of the eight (8) clusters in the Hhohho Region of Eswatini. The sample was forty (40) EGCSE

SiSwati teachers who were teaching online during the COVID-19 era; twenty eight (28) females and twelve (12) males. Data was collected through semi-structured online interviews as primary source and closed-ended online questionnaires as the secondary instrument. The researchers personally sent the online questionnaire and conducted the online interviews through WhatsApp call and recorded audios. Quantitative data obtained through the questionnaire was analysed descriptively using frequency tables and percentages while qualitative data obtained through the online interviews was analysed using thematic content analysis (as interpretations of statements that were made and summarised as opinions and suggestions where applicable).

RESULTS

Table 1: *Demographic data for pparticipants in the study*

Teaching Qualification		Age Range				Teaching Experience		
Qualification	Frequency	%	Range	Frequency	%	Experience	Frequency	%
STD	4	10	21-30	8	20	0-5 years	8	20
BA+PGC/DE	28	70	31-40	15	37.5	6-10 years	14	35
BED	8	20	41-50	10	25	11+ years	18	45
MED	0	0	51+	7	17.5			
TOTAL	**40**	**100**		**40**	**100**		**40**	**100**

Results from the online questionnaire revealed that from the forty (40) participants, eight (8) (20%) ranged between 21-30 years, fifteen (15) (37.5%) ranged between 31-40 years, ten (10) (25%) ranged between 41-50 years, while seven (7) (17.5%) ranged between 51 and above years. The findings of the study showed that a majority of the participants ranged between 31-40 years. According to the participants' qualifications, Secondary Teachers Diploma (STD) holders were four (4) (10%), Bachelors' Degrees and a teaching qualification (BA+PGCE/PGDE) were twenty eight (28) (70%), Bachelor of Education (B. Ed) were eight (8) (20%), and none of the participants had Masters' Degrees. The findings imply that a majority of the participants had BA+PGCE/PGDE. The results of the study on the teaching experience of the participants revealed that eight (8) (20%) had 0-5 years, fourteen (14) (35%) had 6-10 years, while eighteen (18) (45%) had 11 years and above. This meant that most of the participants had 11 and above years of teaching experience.

Research question 1: What are the platforms EGCSE siSwati teachers used for online teaching?

The study found that EGCSE siSwati teachers used different kinds of online platforms including WhatsApp, Google Classroom, Facebook, Zoom and Microsoft Teams. The norm was that the participants concentrated on a single platform due to a number of reasons including affordability, availability and avoidance of divided attention, among others.

Research question 2: To what extent are online teaching platforms used by EGCSE siSwati teachers?

Table 2: *SiSwati teachers use of online teaching platforms*

Platform	Number of Teachers	Percentage
Google Classroom	4	10
Facebook	12	30
Zoom	2	5
WhatsApp	16	40
Microsoft Teams	6	15
TOTAL	**40**	**100**

Table 2 above showed the data collected through the online questionnaire and online interviews revealed that WhatsApp was the mostly used online platform with a total of sixteen (16) 40 %, followed by Facebook with twelve (12) users 30%, Microsoft Teams with 6 users 15%, Google Classroom four (4) users 10% and lastly Zoom with two (2) users 5%.

Research question 3: What are the challenges EGCSE siSwati teachers faced during online teaching?
The study found that EGCSE siSwati teachers encountered various challenges during online teaching including non-authentic assessment, language barrier, lack of digital competence, minimal learner participation, lack of digital devices/resources and excessive workload.

1. Non-authentic assessment
The findings of the study revealed that teachers had difficulties in assessing and evaluating learners' work in an appropriate manner during online teaching. One of the Zoom users complained that it was difficult to assess learners through Zoom because "*you cannot actually tell if the work was done by the learner or there was someone by the side assisting the learner."* This shows that teachers were somehow concerned about the responses given by the learners on whether they were original or not.

Another participant lamented that "*It is not easy to mark and grade more especially learners' compositions or essays on the phone because I cannot tick, cross nor make in-text comments when grading these essay questions. I don't feel at ease when I simply place a score without making any comments on and about the work"*. This revealed the challenge that teachers had in giving learning effective and constructive feedback when assessing learners work. Some students, it was revealed, shared information and sent such to the teacher for marking. When this happened, the teacher was fooled into believing that the learners had mastered the concept under discussion yet that was not the case.

2. Language barrier

Teachers in the study mentioned that since the language of technology is English, it was difficult to utilise the different platforms when teaching siSwati because siSwati is foreign to technology. One participant said "*the moment you start typing siSwati words on the smartphone or laptop, they all get underlined indicating that they are wrong words or unacceptable. This makes it difficult to teach online because as you type the siSwati message, the spelling checker changes almost everything and if you don't revise your work, you are likely to send a whole lot of nonsense to the learners.*" Another teacher was quoted saying "*Nawutsi nje ubhala ligama siSwati, lucingo luvele nje ludvwebele noma lushintje leligama lumikise esiNgisini ngoba siSwati asatiwa lapha kuleti tebuchwephesha*" loosely translated "The moment you type a siSwati word, the phone starts underlining or else change the siSwati words to English because siSwati is foreign to technology".

The results further revealed that the lack of English language proficiency to both teachers and learners hindered the effective use of the online teaching platforms. One teacher was quoted saying "*Lokunye lokuyinkinga kutsi letincingo tisebentisa lulwimi esiNgisini lokululwimi labangaluva kahle bantfwana kantsi nami nje nginguthishela lokunye kugcina kungeca lokubese kuvimbela kulandzela kahle tinyatselo letibhekekile kuze sifike lapho kubhekeke kutsi sitfole lusito khona kuletebuchwephesha" meaning "Another problematic thing is that the phones use English language, a language the students do not understand and sometimes myself as a teacher do miss thus hindering gaining of certain steps that would lead to crucial details on the phone."* It is beyond doubt that if teachers and learners are not proficient with the technical terms used in technological gadgets, teaching online would be hampered.

3. Lack of digital competence

Another challenge faced by the teachers was a lack of digital competence or the lack of professional expertise in ICT use which hindered their effectiveness in online teaching. One participant said "*Yes I can manipulate the cell phone to do simple general stuff such as chatting, calculating, sending messages, recording audios and videos etc but when it comes to downloading, uploading, scanning, copying and pasting, it's a different story*". This is an indication that the participants lack the professional know-how in the operation of the digital devices yet knowledge of such is key. Another participant lamented "*Inkinga kute nalaba labasifundzisile kutsi kufanele sitisebentise njani letincingo nasifundzisa online. Uyati nje umntfwana angitfumelele umsebenti nga-PDF kutsi ngiwumake ukhandze kutsi mine angikhoni kuwuvula ngoba angati kutsi kufuna ngibe nale-APP, ngiphindze ngesabe nekumtjela lomntfwana kutsi kuyangehlula kuvula lomsebenti wakhe"*, loosely translated "*The problem is that we were not oriented on the use of the cell phones for teaching. Just imagine a child submitting an assignment on PDF and I don't know such an app and don't even have it. The worse thing is when it feels so embarrassing to tell the child that I can't assess the work".* This again was a clear indication that teachers were challenged by their lack of digital competence.

4. Minimal learner participation

The findings of the study further revealed minimal learner participation as a challenge faced by teachers during online teaching. Teachers stated that few learners were able to use the different online platforms to

the maximum for a number of reasons. It was noted that though some learners were online during the online classes, some just chose to be quit. "*Bayabindza nje bantfwana bangaphendvuli imibuto loyibutako noma ubona kutsi ba-online*" *loosely translated "Students simply don't answer questions posed yet you see they're online"*. Some teachers revealed that some learners do not respond to questions because they avoid being made fun of by their peers when they give incorrect answers. "*Labanye abaphendvuli ngenca yekwesaba kwentiwa inhlekisa nabaniketa timphendvulo letingesito*" *loosely translated "Some don't respond in fear of being mocked when they respond wrongly".*

Another challenge that perpetrated minimal learner participation was the fact that data was too costly for the learners. One participant decried that "*data for Facebook is way too expensive such that some learners are disconnected from the class before the end of the lesson due to the lack of data."* This finding implies that data costs are too high which leads to learners being left behind. Another participant mentioned that *"Ngalesinye sikhatsi ucala kufundzisa unebantfwana labanyenti kodvwa ngenca yekuntengantenga kwe-network ukhandze kutsi bafundzi labanyenti sebalahlekile noma abasekho seyibaphelele i-network. Ngalesinye sikhatsi iphelele mine nginguthishela ligcine litsikametekile li-class meaning "Sometimes the class begins with so many learners but due to the erratic network, more learners get disconnected. Sometimes I as the teacher loose the network and the class gets disturbed".* This finding shows that network challenges are a hindrance to maximum learner participation and teacher effectiveness. It was also revealed that minimal learner participation was a result of parents who did not understand online teaching and learners thus bombarded their children with home chores or else did not allow them space to attend to their online lessons.

5. Lack of digital devices/resources

The findings from the teachers revealed that the lack of digital devices or resources for both teachers and students is one major challenge faced. One of the teachers mentioned that "*Teaching online is one big trouble for me because the school did not buy me either a laptop or a smart-phone to use when teaching yet I didn't own one thus had to get into uncalled for expenses"*. Other teachers revealed that quite a good number of learners did not have cell-phones making it impossible for them to be part of the online lessons.

One other challenge under the lack of devices or resources is the unavailability of e-books. one teacher was quoted "*Kube mane akhona ema-ebooks etincwadzi tesiSwati, ikakhulu leti temibhalo njenga Khulumani Sive, Umsamaliya Lolungile noma-ke Lilungelo Lakhe ngabe kuncono ngoba ngabe ngiyabatfumelela labantfwana bafundze noma balemakhaya*" loosely translated "*only if there were siSwati e-books more especially the literature books such as Khulumani Sive, Umsamaliya Lolungile or even Lilungelo Lakhe it would be better because I would share with my learners so that they read while at home"*. This reveals a cause of concern for the digitalisation of siSwati books.

6. Excessive workload

The final challenge faced by teachers during online teaching revealed by the study was excessive workload. The workload came in a form of message flooding which the teacher has to read one by one without fail. One participant who used WhatsApp stated that "*It becomes so strenuous to read over two hundred (200) messages sent by my class of 120 students. Sometimes you find that some messages aren't related to the lesson but just jokes."* Another teacher lamented that "*Hha cabanga nje nasengibanike kutsi ababhale bachaze similo semlingisi lotsite! Cabanga letimphendvulo letingemashumi layimfica nemfica lekufanele kutsi ngitihlole tonkhe ngoba ngangakwenti loko batawubese baphela emandla bangasakhutsaleli kuphendvula ngemuso." loosely translated "Oh just imagine when I've assigned my learners to characterise a certain character! Think of the ninety nine responses that I'm expected to check because failure to do so the learners would get demotivated to attempt questions in the next lesson".* The findings revealed that teachers were faced with mammoth tasks of attending to large numbers of learners and also ensuring that immediate feedback was given to keep the learners motivated to learn.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the study revealed that EGCSE siSwati teachers utilised WhatsApp, Facebook, Google classroom, Microsoft Teams and Zoom for online teaching and learning. Such findings were in line with Ramadani and Xhaferi (2020) who identified and suggested a myriad of online platforms that can be used as a solution in the continuity of education during the persistent lock-downs perpetrated by COVID-19. It is high time different teaching platforms are incorporated into teaching because they prove to be replacing the four-wall classroom.

The study established that out of the five (5) online platforms that were used by the forty (40) EGCSE siSwati teachers sampled, WhatsApp was the mostly used platform with sixteen (16) (40%) users. Such a discovery concurred with Sahidillah and Miftahurrisqi (2019)'s study where out of 467 participants, a whopping 236 (50.5%) preferred WhatsApp over other online platforms. Similarly, WhatsApp had many users over other platforms in a study conducted by Pramana et al. (2020) by 51 users (25.5%). The findings establish that WhatsApp is a more effective platform due to its flexibility, affordability and availability. The researcher is of the view that social media platforms, including WhatsApp, are proving to be the best platforms to conduct classes because that is where nowadays tech-savvy generation is found. Considering such platforms as formal teaching sites will ease the burden of social distancing perpetrated by the persistent COVID-19 pandemic in many ways.

Facebook was discovered to be another platform that had more users in the study as twelve (12) (30%) out of forty (40) EGCSE siSwati teachers used it in their online teaching. This finding was in line with Hassan (2014) who agreed that Facebook enabled easy interaction and comfort in getting information. However, the findings contrasted with Sahidillah and Miftahurrisqi (2019) and Pramana et al. (2020) where Facebook had fewer users attributed to its openness to the public. On the other hand, Zoom, which was the least used

online platform, had two (2) 5% users in the study. Such a low utilisation of the platform contrasted with Ayoub (2019) and Ramadani and Xhaferi (2020) who hailed Zoom for being an effective and useful platform for both teachers and students. The findings of the study revealed six challenges that were faced by EGCSE siSwati teachers in their use of online platforms for online teaching, namely; non-authentic assessment, language barrier, lack of digital competence, minimal learner participation, lack of digital devices/resources and excessive workload. The first problem that emanated from the study was non-authentic assessment. Here teachers proved to have challenges in assessing and evaluating learners. The teachers mentioned that marking and grading compositions and essay questions was not easy. They stated that they could not make ticks, crosses and in-text comments when grading essays. What the teachers revealed aligned with Ayoub (2019) and Ramadani and Xhaferi (2020) that teachers experienced many problems in the assessment and evaluation part of learners. It is difficult to evaluate learners through technology instruments and grading them correctly. The digital incompetence also comes into play here (Bhebhe & Maphosa, 2016).

The second challenge that was revealed by EGCSE siSwati teachers was that of English Language being a barrier in the manipulation of technological gadgets and siSwati not being the language of technology. The participant here mentioned that cell phones are technological gadgets that use English, which sometimes becomes uneasy for learners and teachers to understand the terminology used resulting in missing out crucial steps and information. Such a happening hampers effective teaching and learning. The assertion aligns with Madzima et al. (2013) that a big proportion of online content is in English yet for developing countries such as Eswatini where the English proficiency is not very high represents a serious barrier. Teachers mentioned that typing siSwati words in the technological gadgets was a big challenge because the gadgets would underline and act as if all the typed data was wrong. Sometimes the spelling checker changed almost everything and if the teachers did not proof-read their messages, they were likely to send a whole lot of nonsense to the learners. Such depicted a serious problem brought about by the language used in technology thus compromising online teaching and learning because a teacher or learner might unknowingly send wrong information. Therefore, since the ICT applications are in English not siSwati, ICT use becomes very slow in the siSwati language classroom (Madzima et al, 2013).

The next challenge, lack of digital competence, which was established by the study focused on the professional expertise to manipulate ICT tools. Teachers teaching EGCSE siSwati mentioned that it was not a problem to operate their cell phones for personal or general everyday stuff but had challenges when they had to use these very same gadgets in teaching. The teachers revealed that downloading and uploading files among other things were a challenge. What the teachers mentioned concurred with Bhebhe and Maphosa (2016) that teachers have limited digital skills which hamper effective online teaching. It is pivotal that teachers are skilled in downloading and uploading files and documents because that is essential in the sharing of information with learners. Teachers should be adequately trained at teacher training on the use of ICT (Madzima et al, 2013) and should continue even after teacher training through in-service training.

Minimal learner participation was another hurdle that was experienced by EGCSE siSwati teachers during online teaching. The study reported that learners did not participate fully and meaningfully in the online lessons due to a number of reasons. Some learners just chose to be quiet while some remained silent in fear of victimisation by their peers when they give wrong answers to questions. The study's findings tallied with Croft and Simons (2020) who stated that teachers would write lessons, make videos and send to learners but nothing came back from the students. It was like shouting in a void. Another reason for not participating fully tallies with Khanal (2020) who reported that learners faced problems regarding the speed and cost of the internet. The teachers lamented that data was too expensive thus causing students to be disconnected from class in the middle of a lesson due to data shortage. Network was another hurdle that inhibited learners from participating fully in class. This experience is in line with Madzima et al. (2013) and Mengistie (2020) who stated that in rural centres and remote areas, the internet was bound to be erratic if available at all. Parents who did not understand online teaching and learning also posed a problem because they either assigned children too much home chores or did not allow them space to attend online lessons. Such a happening was against Mkhonta (2021) who asserted that parents or guardians should provide lifelong support and help to learners during this time.

Pertaining to the lack of digital devices/resources, teachers revealed that they were challenged by that the schools did not buy them the devices to be used, thus had to use their own money to buy the necessary gadgets. Such an assertion speaks to the lack of support experienced by some teachers and learners. The assertion was supported by Mengistie (2020) that teachers and pupils did not have necessary access to digital devices. On another note teachers decried the unavailability of e-books, more especially siSwati literature books that could be shared to students to read during their spare time while at home. The participants lamented the unavailability of such devices which would enhance their online teaching during this era of schools closure for social distancing. Such findings aligned with Ramadani and Xhaferi (2020) who unanimously suggested that to carry out learning without going through face-to-face in the classroom, the provision of e-books was paramount.

The final challenge revealed by the EGCSE siSwati teachers was that of excessive workload. Teachers mentioned that it was strenuous to read too many messages sent in a while by hundreds of students. One let down was when some of the messages had nothing to do with the lessons at hand. This was in line with Gon and Rawekar (2017) who stated that teachers reported being swamped by too many messages in a way that burdened and annoyed them more especially if the group or groups were larger than fifteen students. Students turn out to be unruly, especially if group expectations are not clearly communicated. Thus, communicating such crucial details at the beginning can exacerbate some wayward habits.

CONCLUSIONS

The study concluded that EGCSE siSwati teachers have experienced the use of platforms such as WhatsApp, Google Classroom, Facebook, Zoom, and Microsoft Teams for online teaching. WhatsApp was

the most used online platform with sixteen (16) (40%) while the least used platform was Zoom with two (2) (5%) users. Non-authentic assessment, language barrier, lack of digital competence, minimal learner participation, lack of digital devices/resources, and excessive workload were the challenges faced by the EGCSE siSwati teachers during online teaching.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that teaching platforms should not be prescriptive but flexible and based on the extent to which resources are available. Moreover, online assessment applications should be improved. The infusion of siSwati as a language of ICT, the sufficient and continuous training of teachers on ICT through teacher training institutions and in-service training and the digitalisation of curricular materials were recommended for effective implementation of online teaching.

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