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A Responsive Eswatini Secondary Schools Curriculum: What, How and Why Are We Teaching?

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ABSTRACT

The current Eswatini secondary school curriculum may not be fully optimized to foster graduates who actively contribute to the advancement of knowledge as observed in some developed countries. This research critically examined the Eswatini secondary school curriculum to determine its responsiveness to the evolving needs of the nation. It delved into the fundamental questions of "what," "how," and "why" teaching is done in Eswatini's secondary schools. Through a comprehensive analysis, the research explored the curriculum's alignment with national development goals, its relevance to 21st-century skills, and its effectiveness in preparing students for the world of work. Employing a descriptive research design through semi-structured interviews, this study identified strengths, weaknesses, and gaps in the current curriculum. The study used teachers in science, agriculture and consumer sciences (n=12). Data was analysed using framework analysis. The study's findings reveal a misalignment between the Eswatini curriculum, the evolving needs of the nation and global standards. The content appears to prioritize rote memorization of English terminology and basic concepts, lacking a clear progression toward higher levels of learning. Eswatini curriculum's potential obsolescence and lack of adaptation to theoretical advancements. Furthermore, the research highlights the necessity for curriculum reform. By advocating for a curriculum responsive to the demands of the 21st century, stakeholders can strive to equip future graduates with the necessary competencies and adaptability to thrive in a rapidly changing world. This study reveals a misalignment between the Eswatini curriculum and national development goals, 21st-century skills, and the demands of the modern workplace, advocating for curriculum reform to better prepare students for the future.

Keywords: *Responsive Curriculum, Curriculum Relevance, Curriculum Alignment, Project-Based Approach*

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of education and schooling has evolved over decades and is shaped by changing theories that define its existence and focus. These theories spun from the earliest theory of academic scientism (1890–1916) to technological functionalism (2010–present). These theories have seen education being broadly categorized into three primary types: formal, non-formal, and informal.

Informal Education is the most pervasive form of learning, occurring naturally within society. As defined by Loeng, it's the "massive, ongoing informal curriculum of family, peer groups, neighborhoods, churches, organizations, occupations, mass media, and other socializing forces.[1] Non-formal education

[1] Svein Loeng, "Self-directed Learning: A Core Concept in Adult Education," *Education Research International* 2020, no. 1 (2020): 3816132.

is more structured and focuses on specific skills or subjects, such as adult literacy, basic education, or job training. Lastly, **f**ormal education is the most structured type of learning, typically involving institutions like schools and universities. It follows a prescribed curriculum and often leads to academic degrees.[2]

A nation's economic strength is directly correlated to the effectiveness of its educational system, which, in turn, is largely influenced by the school curriculum. Given the current global challenges, it is imperative to innovate the school curriculum to align with the objectives of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) thus, a curriculum must directly address the contemporary and anticipated needs, challenges, and aspirations of learners.[3] Such a curriculum equips students with the skills necessary to navigate the rapidly evolving landscape of information and communication technology (ICT), global peace and conflict resolution, pressing health issues, and diverse social, economic, and political demands. It prepares learners to effectively address its challenges.[4] Such a curriculum serves the needs of society at large by producing graduates who are critical thinkers create employment and everything to make human life or the earth a better place to live. However, the curriculum has developed job seekers who only apply very old concepts.

The educational landscape in Eswatini and many African countries is characterized by a strong focus on theoretical knowledge, with a significant portion of the curriculum dedicated to memorization and recall.[5] Although this approach has produced a large number of educated individuals, it raises concerns regarding the applicability of their skills in real-world contexts. This research investigates the implications of this educational model on skill development, innovation, and overall progress within the continent. In Eswatini, the secondary school curriculum has come under scrutiny for its effectiveness in preparing students for the demands of the modern workforce and society. Despite the emphasis on education, there is a growing concern that the current curriculum primarily produces job seekers who lack the practical skills and innovative capacities to apply learned concepts in real-world scenarios. This challenge is particularly evident in scientific disciplines, where students are often restricted to applying and explaining theories developed in Western contexts, rather than engaging in original research or local problem-solving.

The purpose of the study is thus to explore the responsiveness of Eswatini secondary school curriculum with respect to societal needs and entrepreneurship. The objectives of the study are to:

1. To critically analyze the existing secondary school curriculum in Eswatini, focusing on its content, teaching methodologies, and alignment with local needs.
2. To ascertain reasons for schooling in the Swazi/African perspective

This research is vital for informing curriculum reform efforts in Eswatini. By highlighting the current shortcomings and exploring opportunities for improvement, the study aims to contribute to the development of a more responsive and effective secondary school curriculum. Such reform has the potential to empower students, fostering a generation of innovative thinkers and problem solvers who can address local challenges and contribute to the socio-economic development of Eswatini.

LITERATURE REVIEW

What We Are Teaching?

The "what" of teaching refers to the curriculum content, which encompasses the knowledge, skills, and values that educators aim to impart to students. According to Tyler, curriculum development should be guided by three fundamental questions: What educational purposes should the school seek to attain? What educational experiences can be provided that are likely to attain these purposes? And how can these educational experiences be effectively organized?[6] All curricula, formal or non-formal, are focused on

[2] Aloysius C Anyichie and Deborah L Butler, "Examining Culturally Diverse Learners' Motivation and Engagement Processes as Situated in the Context of a Complex Task," in *Frontiers in Education*, vol. 8 (Frontiers Media SA, 2023), 1041946.
[3] Ugur Dogan, "Student Engagement, Academic Self-Efficacy, and Academic Motivation as Predictors of Academic Performance," *The Anthropologist* 20, no. 3 (2015): 553–61.
[4] Rachel Parker, Bo Stjerne Thomsen, and Amy Berry, "Learning through Play at School–A Framework for Policy and Practice," in *Frontiers in Education*, vol. 7 (Frontiers Media SA, 2022), 751801.
[5] Julie A Gray and Melanie DiLoreto, "The Effects of Student Engagement, Student Satisfaction, and Perceived Learning in Online Learning Environments.," *International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation* 11, no. 1 (2016): n1.
[6] Ralph W Tyler, "Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction," in *Curriculum Studies Reader E2* (Routledge, 2013), 60–68.

standardized knowledge and skills, as highlighted by Schmidt et al., who argue that curricula should be aligned with international benchmarks to ensure competitiveness.[7] Conversely, in many non-western contexts, there is a growing emphasis on integrating local knowledge and cultural practices into the curriculum.[8] Lastly, beyond knowledge and skills, education also aims to instill values and ethics in students. according to Dewey (1916), education should foster democratic values and social responsibility.[9]

How We Are Teaching?

The "how" of teaching refers to the pedagogical methods and strategies employed by educators. Various instructional approaches have been developed and researched, each with its strengths and weaknesses. Traditional education often emphasizes direct instruction, rote memorization, and standardized testing. In the 1970s, Paul Freire criticized such an approach due to its lack of engagement and failure to promote critical thinking. On the other hand, progressive education believes in student-centered learning, where students actively participate in their learning process through inquiry, collaboration, and problem-solving.[10] The incorporation of technology in education has transformed teaching methodologies. According to Johnson et al., technology-enhanced learning environments can facilitate personalized learning experiences and foster collaboration among students.[11] However, the effectiveness of technology in education depends on how it is implemented and the pedagogical frameworks that guide its use.[12]

Why We Are Teaching?

The "why" of teaching encompasses the underlying purposes and goals of education. Various philosophical perspectives such as human capital development, social justice and equity and personal development inform these purposes. Other scholars refer to it as a teaching rationale. Human capital development is the most predominant rationale for education that claims that education enhances individuals' skills and productivity, contributing to economic growth. This perspective suggests that students ought to be equipped with the skills necessary for the workforce, thus aligning education with labor market demands. Secondly, social justice and equity is seen as a critical pursuit for teaching. Lastly, education is also viewed as a lifelong process that fosters personal development and self-actualization. According to Loeng, lifelong education focuses on the needs and experiences of learners thus promoting self-directed learning and personal growth.[13] It then stresses the need and importance of promoting a love for learning and encouraging individuals to pursue knowledge in their everyday lives.[14]

THE THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE OF EDUCATION QUEST

The Implications of a Non-Responsive Curriculum: A Literature Review

In the ever-evolving landscape of education, the curriculum serves as the backbone of teaching and learning processes. However, a growing body of literature highlights the challenges posed by non-responsive curricula—educational frameworks that fail to adapt to the diverse needs of students, societal changes, and advancements in knowledge. This essay reviews key literature on non-responsive curricula, exploring their characteristics, implications for student engagement and learning outcomes, and potential pathways for reform.

[7] William H Schmidt, Hsing Chi Wang, and Curtis C McKnight, "Curriculum Coherence: An Examination of US Mathematics and Science Content Standards from an International Perspective," *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 37, no. 5 (2005): 525–59.
[8] J. K. Nyerere, *Education for Self-Reliance* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967).
[9] Joseph A Durlak et al., "The Impact of Enhancing Students' Social and Emotional Learning: A Meta-analysis of School-based Universal Interventions," *Child Development* 82, no. 1 (2011): 405–32.
[10] John Dewey, "Experience and Education: Kappa Delta Pi," *International Honor Society in Education*, 1938.
[11] Larry Johnson et al., *NMC Horizon Report: 2016 Higher Education Edition* (The New Media Consortium, 2016).
[12] Peggy A Ertmer and Anne T Ottenbreit-Leftwich, "Teacher Technology Change: How Knowledge, Confidence, Beliefs, and Culture Intersect," *Journal of Research on Technology in Education* 42, no. 3 (2010): 255–84.
[13] Loeng, "Self-directed Learning: A Core Concept in Adult Education."
[14] Thomas Howard Morris, "Four Dimensions of Self-Directed Learning: A Fundamental Meta-Competence in a Changing World," *Adult Education Quarterly* 74, no. 3 (2024): 236–54.

Characteristics of Non-Responsive Curricula

While it is difficult to comprehensively conceptualize a responsive curriculum, it is always easy to characterize non-responsive curricula as they are often characterized by rigidity and a one-size-fits-all approach. According to Anyichie and Butler, a responsive curriculum is normally designed with the consideration of the varied backgrounds, interests, and learning styles of students.[15] Otherwise, lack of responsiveness is characterized by disengagement, as students perceive learning experiences as irrelevant or overly challenging. Furthermore, non-responsive curricula often prioritize standardized testing and rote memorization over critical thinking and creativity. This focus can stifle innovation in teaching and limit students' ability to apply knowledge in real-world contexts.

Research by Parker, Thomsen and Berry indicates that students subjected to rigid curricula often exhibit lower levels of motivation and engagement.[16] Students must see the relevance of the content learned, otherwise, they are less likely to invest effort into their education. Such disengagement is associated with poor academic performance and increased dropout rates. Moreover, a study by Gray and DiLoreto highlights that the most critical factor in students achieving high learning outcomes is student engagement.[17] They continue to register the detrimental effects of a curriculum that fails to respond to student needs of both learners and the educational system as a whole. Dogan advocates for integration of culturally relevant pedagogy as an approach to incorporate students' cultural backgrounds into the curriculum, making learning more relevant and engaging.[18]

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research approach, specifically utilizing action research to investigate the perceptions and reflections of teachers regarding the responsiveness of the secondary school curriculum in Eswatini. By focusing on the experiences of teachers, the research aimed to gather in-depth insights into how the curriculum is applied in practice, identify its strengths and weaknesses, and explore opportunities for improvement. The study involved a purposive sample of twelve secondary school teachers from three different subject areas: science, consumer science, and agriculture. Four teachers from each subject area were selected based on their experience and willingness to participate. This diverse selection ensured that the study captured a broad range of perspectives on the curriculum's effectiveness and responsiveness.

Data were generated using both reflective journals and semi-structured interviews. Each participant was provided with a reflective journal to document their thoughts and observations about the curriculum as they taught. The journals prompted teachers to reflect on specific questions, such as: What components of the curriculum do you find effective in engaging students? In what ways does the curriculum meet the needs of your students and the local community? Why do you teach your subject? The reflective journals were used as a primary data source, allowing the teachers to express their views honestly and at their own pace. Ethical considerations were paramount throughout this study. Participant dignity, rights, safety, and welfare were prioritized, reflecting the principle of avoiding harm and treating participants respectfully. Participants were informed of potential risks and benefits, and interviews/focus groups were conducted in safe environments. Informed consent was obtained, emphasizing voluntary participation and the right to withdraw. Confidentiality was maintained by limiting data access and anonymizing participant data, using identifiers like "Teacher 1." Attention was given to power dynamics, ensuring all voices were heard and minimizing potential influence from subject inspectors. Participants were also informed not to have unrealistic expectations regarding outcomes. Finally, permission was obtained from the Director of Education before data collection. The semi-structured interviews were conducted with each teacher after the successful completion of the reflective journal. The interviews explored further the themes that emerged in the journals and enabled teachers to elaborate on their experiences. The data generated through the reflective journals and interviews were analyzed using

[15] Anyichie and Butler, “Examining Culturally Diverse Learners’ Motivation and Engagement Processes as Situated in the Context of a Complex Task.”
[16] Parker, Thomsen, and Berry, “Learning through Play at School–A Framework for Policy and Practice.”
[17] Gray and DiLoreto, “The Effects of Student Engagement, Student Satisfaction, and Perceived Learning in Online Learning Environments.”
[18] Dogan, “Student Engagement, Academic Self-Efficacy, and Academic Motivation as Predictors of Academic Performance.”

thematic analysis. This process involved the following steps: familiarization, coding, theme development and validation.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. Analyses of existing secondary school curriculum in Eswatini, focusing on its content, teaching methodologies, and alignment with local needs.

The teachers were asked to reflect on the curriculum they are teaching on the basis of practices, teaching methodologies and systems that affect the responsiveness of the curriculum. The findings of the study reveal that the Eswatini curriculum does not respond to the needs of the learners and that of the field of work. Their response was synthesized into memorization over the application, limited practical training, insufficient support for creativity, language and categorization constraints and impact on the development.

Memorization over Application

The teachers continuously lamented how the curriculum emphasized rote learning, where students are expected to memorize content and failure to encourage critical thinking or problem-solving skills. Teacher 3 noted: *This approach limits the ability of students to apply their knowledge practically. The curriculum trains our students to absorb a wealth of content and be expected to regurgitate it during tests and examinations.*

The findings further reveal that the assessments predominantly focus on recalling as opposed to demonstrating understanding or creativity, leading to a lack of engagement with the learnt contents. Teacher 1 lamented. *A smart student according to our system is one that is able to recall learnt concepts during examinations, particularly external examinations*.

Lastly, the greatest and most significant criticism of the Eswatini educational curriculum is its heavy emphasis on rote memorization. Students are often required to memorize vast amounts of information without understanding how to apply this knowledge in real-world contexts. This information may be, for example, scientific names or names of viruses. This approach leads to a superficial understanding of subjects, with which learners can recite facts but struggle to utilize their knowledge creatively or practically. The teachers revealed that this observation is not limited to secondary school curriculum but even tertiary institution students. For instance, while students may excel in examinations that test their ability to recall information, they frequently lack the skills needed for problem-solving or critical thinking. Even a university professor cannot manufacture a simple plastic spoon but has memorized a vast of scientific terms that are never put into application.

Limited Practical Training

While it may be acceptable for secondary school students to lack practical training, the teachers observed that all the educational institutions lack sufficient hands-on training or experiential learning opportunities. Students from these tertiary institutions graduate with theoretical knowledge that lacks practical skills to implement their learning. Teacher 12 stated: *We were trained at the University of Swaziland, the esteemed institution of higher learning, but we were never equipped with practical skills. Even though I was trained in Agriculture which is normally considered to be a practical-oriented subject, the training I received is just enough to get me employment in the industry*.

Further findings confirm that even students trained in the sciences lack a real touch with the world as laboratory work and real-world applications are frequently underrepresented in scientific curricula, resulting in graduates who can explain concepts but lack the capability to conduct experiments or innovate. Teacher 8 narrated: *We are scientist by profession but the curriculum allows us to only play with given and known chemicals and their properties. It does not go beyond manufacturing those chemicals. Medical practitioners have learnt how paracetamol is a good pain killer but can never come to make their own*.

Lastly, the curriculum does not provide satisfactory opportunities for hands-on learning experiences. Subjects are often taught with practicals but without integrating practical applications that relate to everyday life or industry needs. This disconnects between theoretical knowledge and practical application results in graduates who may understand scientific concepts but cannot conduct experiments

or innovate based on those principles. The absence of laboratory work, field studies, and project-based learning diminishes students' ability to translate academic knowledge into tangible outcomes.

Insufficient Support for Creativity

The curriculum fails to attach and or encourage creative thinking or innovation, which are essential for advancements in science and technology. Students are not incentivized to think outside the box or to develop new ideas but to prove existing theories. Teacher 4 explained; *Our experiments are not truly experiments but verification of certain chemical reactions is known*.

Even in advanced academic settings or institutions of higher learning, such as universities, lecturers often focus on teaching established concepts rather than fostering a culture of research and innovation.

Language and Categorization Constraints

The predominance of English as the medium of instruction, coupled with the compartmentalization of subjects into rigid disciplines, limits interdisciplinary learning and collaboration. Teacher 9 noted: *One other thing that promotes memorization and rote learning in this curriculum is poor understanding of the language used to teach, English. Students thus fail to understand what's taught and resort to cramming and regurgitation content as is.*

This linguistic barrier can alienate students from engaging fully with their own cultural contexts and knowledge systems, further stifling creativity and localized innovation. Another aspect contributing to the ineffectiveness of skill development is the predominance of English as the medium of instruction across various disciplines. While proficiency in English is essential for accessing global knowledge and resources, overemphasis on language can detract from content mastery and critical engagement with subjects. Teacher 7 noted: *There are many students who couldn't make it to institutions of higher learning because they failed English. Most interestingly, these students could possibly major in disciplines that do not require English proficiency.* Students may become adept at discussing concepts in English but fail to engage deeply with the material itself due to linguistic barriers or a lack of contextual understanding relevant to their local environment.

Impact on Development

The inability of graduates to apply theoretical concepts learnt contributes to a broader sluggishness in economic and scientific development in the country. Teacher 9 observed: *I believe what has made us Africans is the failure to transition from theory to practice. Otherwise, we lack nothing in terms of resources and raw materials*.

While many African scientists and scholars are respected, their reliance on applying established knowledge from developed countries is a clear indication of a critical gap in original research, innovation, and development.

The current taught curriculum suppresses creativity by prioritizing standardized testing and uniformity over innovative thinking. Teachers and university professors are concerned with preparing students for exams rather than encouraging exploration and experimentation within their fields of study. As a result, even masters and PhD graduates may find themselves limited in their capacity for original thought or research contributions. The reliance on established theories from developed countries further exacerbates this issue; local scientists may apply existing knowledge without contributing new insights or advancements.

Lauwerier suggested that issues of curriculum relevance need to be tackled in African governments if national developments are to be preferred.[19] This suggests that the education system in Africa is not goal-oriented. Similarly, Sithole posits that extensive research is still needed in African states to reform education so that it reflects the needs of the society and leads to self-actualization.[20] While this paper details the dominance of English in classroom instruction and its negative impact on student learning, Ntombela laments how the English medium of instruction has been implicated in

[19] Thibaut Lauwerier, "Relevance and Basic Education in Africa," *Revue Africaine de La Recherche En Education* 7 (2015): 27–41.
[20] Mbongeni S Sithole, "Student Support: A Key to Educational Success," in *Handbook of Research on Creating Spaces for African Epistemologies in the Inclusive Education Discourse* (IGI Global Scientific Publishing, 2022), 358–68.

delaying access to knowledge for the great majority in Africa in order to cater for and safeguard the economic dominance of the elite minority.[21]

2. Reasons for Schooling in the Eswatini/African Perspective

It is undoubtful that education is a fundamental pillar of all human development and societal progress. In Eswatini and in the African context, the school serves numerous purposes that extend beyond mere academic achievement. This study explored the rationale for people pursuing education in Eswatini, drawing on several literature sources to highlight cultural, economic, social, and political dimensions. The findings of the study reveal that understanding these motivations is critical for addressing the challenges and opportunities within the African educational landscape.

Preservation of Heritage and Identity

The findings of the study reveal that in Eswatini just like in many other African countries, education is viewed as a means of preserving cultural heritage and identity. Teacher 3 noted: *Most of the topics in all the subjects we have in Eswatini, there is more or less cultural history and preservation of traditions. For example, our children learn how to dance than other Swati ceremonies and traditions. All these of got not nothing to do it development*. Literature dates back to the 1960s when a study by Nyerere revealed that education should reflect the values, traditions, and languages of the local communities.[22] Teacher 4 also noted, *There have been some attempts to have the local language as a passing subject yet all other subjects apart from SiSwati I taught in English.* This ideology emphasizes the importance of integrating indigenous and local knowledge and practices into the curriculum. By doing so, schooling becomes a vehicle for cultural transmission, ensuring that younger generations understand their roots and maintain a sense of belonging. However, the student may not learn from other developed countries and thus personal and societal development is stalled.

Socialization and Community Cohesion

Schooling also plays a vital role in socializing people within their societies. The teachers observed that most of the curricula are preparing students for socialization and interacting with their society or community. Teacher 11 stated: S*o, this curriculum has nothing to do with their personal development or preparing them for the field of work.* As highlighted by Begum, schools serve as social institutions where children learn not only academic skills but also social norms, values, and behaviors.[23] Students learn to co-exist and to manage and appreciate other people's differences. It also prepares and trains them on social and personal attributes, so these subjects or content or curriculum do not prepare students for any skill acquisition. Most content taught in the language is for communication. This socialization process fosters community cohesion and prepares individuals to participate actively in societal life. In many African cultures, education is seen as a communal responsibility, where the entire community invests in the schooling of its children but receives too little for their investment.[24]

Access to Employment Opportunities

One of the primary driving forces for schooling in Eswatini is the pursuit of better economic prospects. Parents send children to school with the belief that education will reward them in the future with white-collar jobs. History has it that the most educated people are the ones living a good life. Through education, they acquired high-paying jobs. The findings of the study reveal that parents still send their children to school with high hopes that their children will live a better life. So, this suggests that parents see education as an investment for their children. They also believe that educated children will in future support them financially once they graduate from college. Teacher 1 made this observation; *We once had a pre-vocational curriculum. However, since it had limited opportunities for progression to universities, it*

[21] Berrington Xolani Siphosakhe Ntombela, "The Sociolinguistic Problems of English Medium Instruction in the Middle East and North Africa: Implications for Epistemic Access," *Frontiers in Psychology* 14 (2023): 1084626.
[22] Nyerere, *Education for Self-Reliance*.
[23] Taslima Begum, "Parental Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices in Early Childhood Development among Low Income Urban Parents," *Universal Journal of Public Health* 7, no. 5 (2019): 214–26.
[24] Ute Steenkamp, "Cultural Diversity and Its Influence on Role Players in a Full-Service School in Soshanguve: A Wellness Perspective," *European Journal of Education* 4, no. 1 (2021): 23–39.

attracted negative attitudes from all stakeholders, teachers, learners and parents. These findings concur with the observation by the World Bank that education is often viewed as a pathway to employment and financial stability.[25] According to Mirowsky, people with higher levels of education are more likely to get better job opportunities and higher earning potential.[26] This economic rationale drives many families to prioritize education, despite the challenges posed by poverty and limited resources.

Skill Development and Entrepreneurship

In addition to formal employment, education horn individuals with necessary and essential competencies and skills for entrepreneurship. Students enrolling in the disciplines of Agriculture and consumer sciences have hopes of acquiring technical skills that they can use to start their own businesses and employ others. The minister of education and training in 2009 directed all schools to incorporate at least two skill-oriented subjects. These include consumer science, agriculture, and technical drawing. This directive was made after the government realized the high level of unemployment in the country. So, skill development was still a solution and thus graduates from these disciplines were also encouraged to create employment using the skills acquired from university training. Teacher 2 submitted: *At the university I majored in agriculture because I wanted to be a farm, I never believed in getting employment elsewhere but employing myself.* As noted by Patel and Oghazi, vocational and technical education curricula are increasingly recognized for their role in fostering self-employment and innovation.[27] Mabuza, Makhanya, Dlamini, and Dlamini noted that in many African countries, the formal job market is becoming saturated, meanwhile, technical education has provided the skills necessary for individuals to start their own businesses and contribute to local economies.[28]

Empowerment and Gender Equality

Education is a powerful tool for empowerment, particularly for marginalized groups, such as women and girls. The Eswatini education system is primitive At some point in time, education was meant for male children. Swazis believed that the female child needs to be trained for marriage and household work. Teacher 7, a consumer science teacher, submitted that *the consumer science curriculum is flooded with common sense skills and competencies needed in the kitchen.* This is a curriculum adopted from the western colonizers who were farmers and they began training females on how to be good housewives. This is in line with the observations of Mabuza that gender has for a long time been used in selecting subjects for secondary education.[29] Research by UNESCO indicates that educating girls leads to improved health, economic, and social outcomes for families and communities.[30] In many African societies, there is a growing recognition of the importance of gender equality in education, as it contributes to broader societal development. This change has not only been noticed in the classroom, females are taking up leadership positions in all disciplines. Initiatives aimed at increasing female enrollment in schools reflect this understanding and highlight the transformative potential of education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study therefore recommends that a curriculum redesign should focus on incorporating project-based learning and practical applications across various disciplines to enhance student engagement and skill development. To support this initiative, professional development for teachers is essential, offering training that equips them to facilitate creative teaching methods that promote critical thinking. Furthermore, establishing research opportunities with the industry will encourage students to explore original ideas and address local challenges, fostering a deeper connection with their communities. Language inclusivity should also be prioritized by considering multilingual education models that value

[25] World Bank, *World Development Report 2018: Learning to Realize Education's Promise* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2018).
[26] J. Mirowsky, *Education, Social Status, and Health* (London: Routledge, 2017).
[27] Pankaj C Patel and Pejvak Oghazi, "The Collectivist and Statist Vocational Training Innovative Institutions and Self-Employment Earnings Gaps," *Journal of Innovation & Knowledge* 9, no. 4 (2024): 100554.
[28] Dumisa Mabuza et al., "Investigating the Status of the Consumer Science Curriculum in Accommodating Learners with Special Educational Needs," *Canadian Journal of Educational and Social Studies* 4, no. 3 (2024): 34–49.
[29] E. Mabuza, "6, 791 Inmates Granted Parole under Lockdown Dispensation," Sunday Times, July 17, 2020, https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2020-07-17-6791-inmates-granted-parole-under-lockdown-dispensation/.
[30] UNESCO, *Global Education Monitoring Report 2020: Inclusion and Education* (Paris: UNESCO, 2020).

indigenous languages alongside English, thereby enriching the learning experience and promoting greater student engagement.

CONCLUSION

This research has critically examined the Eswatini secondary school curriculum to determine its responsiveness to the evolving needs of the nation. It has examined the fundamental questions of "what," "how," and "why" teaching is done in Eswatini's secondary schools. The findings have revealed that the current Eswatini educational curriculum requires significant reform to prioritize skill development, creativity, and practical application. By shifting focus from rote memorization to critical thinking, problem-solving, and hands-on experience, educational institutions can better prepare students to contribute meaningfully to their communities and drive innovation. Future policies should aim to create a more holistic educational approach that embraces local contexts, interdisciplinary learning, and practical skills, fostering an environment conducive to genuine advancement in various fields.

This study makes a significant contribution to scholarship by providing a critical evaluation of the Eswatini curriculum, specifically within the science, agriculture, and consumer sciences domains, and its alignment with national development goals, 21st-century skills, and preparedness for the world of work. Existing scholarship may address these elements individually, but this research offers a holistic perspective, examining the interplay between these crucial factors within the specific context of Eswatini's educational system. The study's contribution lies in its identification of a misalignment between the current curriculum and both national needs and global standards. This finding is crucial as it highlights the potential obsolescence of the curriculum and its lack of adaptation to theoretical advancements in education and the evolving demands of the job market.

A key contribution is the study's in-depth exploration of the curriculum's weaknesses. The research reveals a tendency towards rote memorization of English terminology and basic concepts, hindering the development of higher-order thinking skills. This emphasis on memorization over conceptual understanding limits students' ability to apply knowledge critically and creatively, a critical skill in the 21st century. By explicitly identifying this weakness, the study provides concrete evidence for the need for curriculum reform. Furthermore, the research contributes methodologically by employing a descriptive research design with semi-structured interviews and framework analysis. This approach allows for rich, qualitative data from teachers, providing valuable insights into the practical challenges and opportunities associated with the curriculum. The use of framework analysis ensures a systematic and rigorous approach to data interpretation, enhancing the credibility of the findings. The study's focus on the perspectives of teachers, those directly involved in curriculum implementation, is another significant contribution. Their lived experiences and observations provide invaluable data on the curriculum's strengths, weaknesses, and gaps. By giving voice to these stakeholders, the research offers a nuanced understanding of the curriculum's impact on teaching and learning. Finally, this study contributes to the broader discourse on curriculum reform by advocating for a curriculum that is responsive to the demands of the 21st century. It provides a compelling case for the need to equip future graduates with the competencies and adaptability necessary to thrive in a rapidly changing world, ultimately contributing to the development of a more relevant and effective education system in Eswatini.

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