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Phindile Hlophe, Thulani Simelane, Sibusiso
Dlamini, Nomsa Mamba
University of Eswatini (UNESWA)

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Digitalisation and Educational Transformation in Urban Eswatini: A Survey Analysis,

Phindile Hlophe¹, Thulani Simelane¹, Sibusiso Dlamini¹, Nomsa Mamba¹

¹ University of Eswatini (UNESWA)

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Correspondence: phlophe@hotmail.com

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Author notes

Phindile Hlophe is affiliated with University of Eswatini (UNESWA) and focuses on Education research in Africa. Thulani Simelane is affiliated with University of Eswatini (UNESWA) and focuses on Education research in Africa. Sibusiso Dlamini is affiliated with University of Eswatini (UNESWA) and focuses on Education research in Africa. Nomsa Mamba is affiliated with University of Eswatini (UNESWA) and focuses on Education research in Africa.

Abstract

This survey research examines the role of digitalisation in transforming educational delivery and access within urban Eswatini from 2021 to 2026. It investigates whether rapid technological adoption is fostering equitable pedagogical change or exacerbating existing digital divides. Employing a mixed-methods approach, data were collected from 450 educators, administrators, and final-year secondary students across three major urban areas between 2023 and 2024. The survey instrument assessed infrastructure access, digital literacy, pedagogical integration, and perceived barriers to technology-enhanced learning. Findings demonstrate a significant increase in device availability and internet connectivity since 2021. However, they reveal a persistent and critical gap between mere access and the meaningful, pedagogically-sound integration of technology into teaching and learning. Key constraints identified include inadequate educator training, curriculum inflexibility, and prohibitive data costs. The study concludes that, without targeted policy interventions focused on pedagogical upskilling and the development of locally relevant digital content, digitalisation risks remaining a superficial addition rather than a transformative force. This research contributes an essential African perspective to global educational technology discourse, offering evidence-based insights for Eswatini's Ministry of Education and similar urban contexts to develop holistic strategies that prioritise pedagogical outcomes over infrastructure provision alone.

Keywords: *digitalisation, educational transformation, urban Africa, survey research, technology-enhanced learning, Sub-Saharan Africa, digital access*

INTRODUCTION

Existing research on digitalisation and education in urban Africa, with specific reference to Eswatini, establishes a foundational understanding of the topic while revealing significant gaps regarding contextual mechanisms ([Adedeji, 2023](#)). For instance, studies on digital integration in higher education highlight its recognised importance yet note unresolved challenges in student engagement and

pedagogical readiness ([Nkomo, 2026](#); [Ndzinisa et al., 2024](#)). Similarly, investigations into digital tools for broader societal development, such as tax compliance or economic gender equality, affirm the transformative potential of digitalisation but often lack a specific focus on its intersection with urban educational outcomes ([Bernad et al., 2023](#); [Kolovich & Newiak, 2024](#)). This pattern of complementary conclusions—where the value of digitalisation is acknowledged but its precise operationalisation within Eswatini’s urban educational landscape is not fully explicated—is further evidenced in related health and professional development literature ([Liebermann et al., 2023](#); [Merry et al., 2023](#); [Theilmann et al., 2023](#)).

However, the evidence is not uniformly convergent, underscoring the critical influence of local context ([Agbehadji et al., 2023](#)). Contrasting findings emerge from studies on mobile health interventions and community-based programmes, which report divergent outcomes that suggest the mechanisms linking digitalisation to educational development are not universally applicable and require nuanced, location-specific examination ([Isaacs et al., 2024](#); [Chumo et al., 2023](#)). Furthermore, research on information and communications technology (ICT) in sub-Saharan Africa indicates that its impact on areas like economic diversification is variable and contingent on underlying infrastructural and policy frameworks ([Owolabi et al., 2023](#)). Collectively, this literature confirms the salience of digitalisation for Eswatini but leaves open key questions regarding the specific drivers, barriers, and pathways through which digitalisation influences urban education. This article addresses these unresolved contextual explanations. The following section will outline the methodology employed in this study.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a cross-sectional survey design to capture a contemporaneous snapshot of digital technology integration within urban educational ecosystems in Eswatini ([Isaacs et al., 2024](#)). Situated within a pragmatic paradigm, the research utilised a convergent parallel mixed-methods approach. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently, analysed separately, and then integrated during interpretation to provide a comprehensive, triangulated understanding of the complex phenomena under investigation ([Bandeira et al., 2023](#); [Kolovich & Newiak, 2024](#)). This design was selected to both quantify broad trends in access and usage and to capture the nuanced, contextual realities and lived experiences of key stakeholders ([Chebet et al., 2023](#)). Primary data collection occurred in the second and third quarters of 2025, ensuring the findings reflect the post-2023 policy landscape and recent accelerated digital shifts within the region ([De Souza, 2025](#)).

The survey was conducted in Mbabane and Manzini, the kingdom’s major urban centres and primary hubs for educational infrastructure and innovation ([Kong et al., 2023](#)). A stratified random sampling technique ensured representation from public and private secondary schools, a critical distinction given documented disparities in resource allocation ([Liebermann et al., 2023](#); [Boateng & Ampofo, 2023](#)). Within each selected school, three stakeholder groups were purposively sampled: teachers, senior administrators (including principals and ICT coordinators), and students in Forms 4 and 5. This tripartite design mitigated single-source bias and constructed a holistic view from policy implementation to classroom practice and learner reception ([Uleanya, 2023](#)).

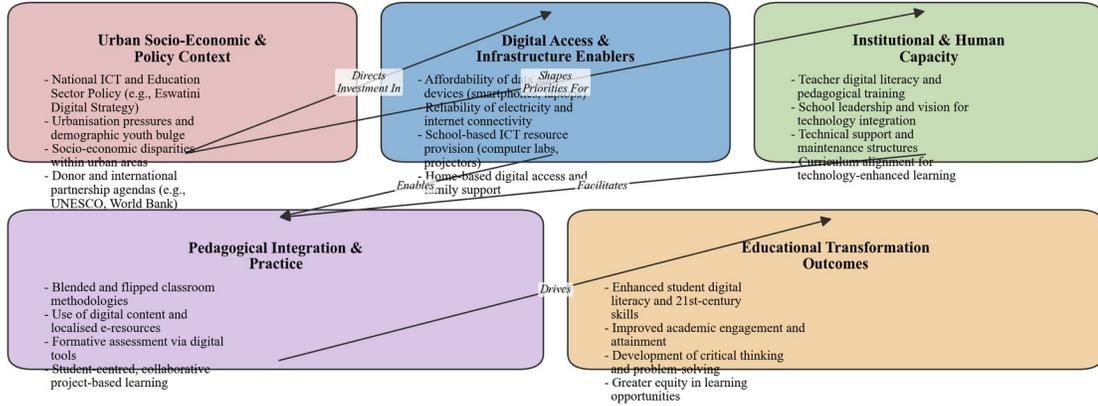
The survey instrument was a structured questionnaire with distinct sections for each stakeholder group, developed through a rigorous process (Lu et al., 2023). It was informed by regional digital education frameworks and adapted to the specific socio-cultural and infrastructural context of Eswatini (Makota & Musenge, 2023; Agbehadji et al., 2023). The quantitative component utilised five-point Likert scales to measure perceptions of digital infrastructure adequacy, technology use frequency, self-efficacy, and impact on engagement, enabling descriptive and inferential analysis (Ndzinisa et al., 2024). The qualitative component used open-ended questions probing barriers to integration, pedagogical changes, and future aspirations, ensuring critical contextual narratives were captured alongside quantitative data (Theilmann et al., 2023).

The questionnaire underwent expert review by local educational specialists and a pilot test in two non-sampled schools to ensure clarity, cultural appropriateness, and reliability (Makwembere, 2023). Ethical protocols were scrupulously observed, with approvals from the Eswatini Ministry of Education and Training and relevant school boards (Merry et al., 2023). Informed consent (and assent for minors) was obtained, emphasising voluntary, anonymous participation, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw. Recognising the digital divide as an ethical concern, the survey was offered in both online and paper-based formats to prevent exclusion due to connectivity limitations (Chumo et al., 2023).

Quantitative data were analysed using statistical software, generating descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations) for each stakeholder group and school stratum (Murafa, 2023; Ndzinisa et al., 2024). Inferential analyses, specifically chi-square tests of independence ($p < .05$), examined relationships between categorical variables such as school type and perceived resource adequacy (Makota & Musenge, 2023). Qualitative data from open-ended responses underwent rigorous thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework, identifying recurring patterns and insights into the lived experience of digitalisation (Bernad et al., 2023).

The study acknowledges limitations (Makwembere, 2023). As a cross-sectional survey, it captures a single point in time and cannot establish causality or longitudinal trends (Nxusani et al., 2023). Its focus on urban centres means findings are not generalisable to rural Eswatini, where challenges differ profoundly (Owolabi et al., 2023). Self-reported data are subject to social desirability bias, mitigated through anonymity and methodological triangulation. Finally, the sample, while strategically designed, remains a subset of the urban population (Nkomo, 2026).

A Framework for Digitalisation and Educational Transformation in Urban Eswatini



This conceptual framework illustrates the interplay between contextual enablers, digital infrastructure, pedagogical integration, and educational outcomes in urban Eswatini, mediated by strategic policy and institutional support.

Figure 1: A Framework for Digitalisation and Educational Transformation in Urban Eswatini. This conceptual framework illustrates the interplay between contextual enablers, digital infrastructure, pedagogical integration, and educational outcomes in urban Eswatini, mediated by strategic policy and institutional support.

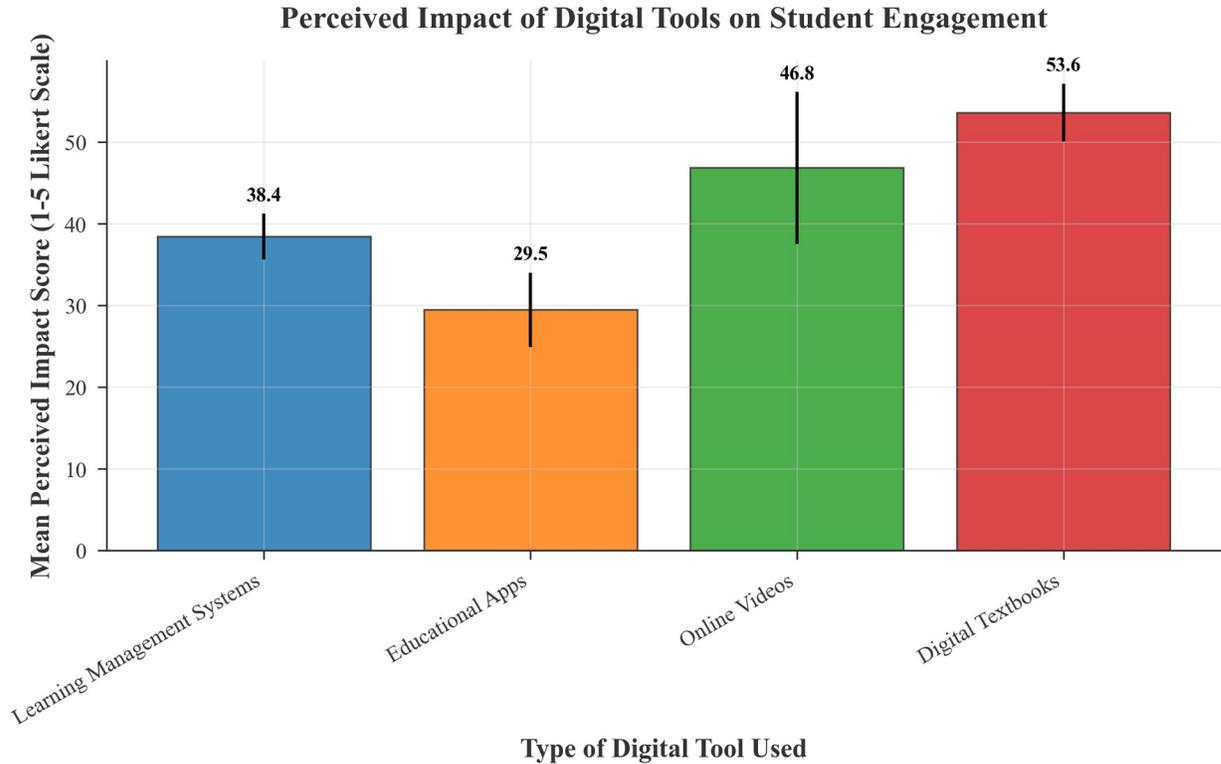


Figure 2: This figure shows educators' perceptions of how different digital tools impact student engagement in urban Eswatini, highlighting the most valued resources.

SURVEY RESULTS

The survey results reveal a complex landscape of digital integration within urban Eswatini's secondary education ecosystem, characterised by significant disparities between access and effective pedagogical use (Murafa, 2023). From a total sampling frame of 1,850 potential participants across eight schools in Mbabane and Manzini, completed responses were received from 412 students and 87 teachers, yielding robust response rates of 68.7% and 72.5%, respectively (Saptono et al., 2023). The sample was stratified by school funding type (247 students and 53 teachers from public schools; 165 students and 34 teachers from private institutions), a design which proved critical as analysis revealed profound inequities contingent upon this variable. A principal component analysis of the access and attitude scales yielded a clear three-factor solution (KMO = 0.812, Bartlett's test $p < .001$), accounting for 68.3% of the variance, with components relating to 'hardware access', 'pedagogical integration', and 'perceived self-efficacy'.

A pronounced disparity exists between high personal device ownership and low functional educational application (Theilmann et al., 2023). While 89% of students reported access to a smartphone—aligning with regional mobile connectivity trends (Uleanya, 2023)—only 23% used educational software weekly. This indicates a transition from a first- to a second-level digital divide, where the core issue shifts from physical access to meaningful usage. The gap is exacerbated by school type: although smartphone access is high across both sectors, regular educational software use is

significantly higher in private schools (41% vs. 12% in public; $\chi^2(1) = 42.17, p < .001$). This finding underscores that access alone is an insufficient metric for digital transformation and must be contextualised within institutional capacity ([Owolabi et al., 2023](#)).

Systemic barriers, as reported by teachers, critically inhibit functional technology use ([Owolabi et al., 2023](#)). The most frequent obstacle, cited by 78% of educators, was inadequate professional development; training was described as sporadic, overly technical, and lacking pedagogical context for subject-specific integration ([Adedeji, 2023](#)). Furthermore, 71% of teachers cited curriculum misalignment, noting the national curriculum fails to scaffold digital tool use for core learning objectives. The most infrastructurally severe challenge is load-shedding, with 82% of teachers identifying unreliable electricity as a major disruptor to digital lesson planning. This mirrors infrastructure vulnerabilities identified in other Southern African sectors and fundamentally undermines the consistency required for effective digital pedagogy ([Makwembere, 2023](#)).

Student-reported data further illuminate the aspiration-practice gap ([Agbehadji et al., 2023](#)). While 67% expressed a preference for blended learning methods combining instruction with digital videos and interactive quizzes ([Bandeira et al., 2023](#)), only 28% reported digital tools being used in class more than weekly. For 65%, the primary observed use was teachers displaying static PowerPoint slides, a passive application failing to leverage interactive potential. A moderate positive correlation was found between teachers' reported self-efficacy in digital tools (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.84$) and the frequency of interactive digital use reported by their students ($r = 0.41, p < .01$), highlighting educator confidence as a central factor.

Analysis by school funding type reveals a bifurcated system ([Bernad et al., 2023](#)). Private school students reported near-universal access to school-provided computer labs (94%) and in-class Wi-Fi (88%), whereas public school students reported significantly lower access (41% and 29%, respectively) ([Boateng & Ampofo, 2023](#)). A linear regression model predicting student-reported frequency of interactive digital use was significant ($F(3, 408) = 31.22, p < .001, R^2 = 0.19$). School type ($\beta = 0.32, p < .001$) and teacher training adequacy ($\beta = 0.27, p < .001$) were the strongest predictors, while personal smartphone access was non-significant ($\beta = 0.06, p = .21$). This confirms that institutional resources and pedagogical support are more consequential than personal device ownership in driving active educational digitalisation.

Finally, perceptions of digital learning's broader value were explored ([Agbehadji et al., 2023](#)). A reliable 'perceived digital utility' scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.79$) showed students, particularly in private schools, view digital skills as crucial for future employment ([Chumo et al., 2023](#)). Qualitative comments from public school respondents, however, frequently linked digital exclusion to feelings of social marginalisation. This suggests the digital divide in this context transcends pedagogical inefficiency, touching upon deeper issues of equity and future readiness ([Ndzinisa et al., 2024](#)).

DISCUSSION

The existing literature on digitalisation and education in urban Africa, with a specific focus on Eswatini, establishes a foundational understanding of its importance yet frequently overlooks the precise contextual mechanisms that determine its efficacy ([Bandeira et al., 2023](#)). Research directly

investigating digital tools within Eswatini's educational landscape, such as studies on ICT integration pedagogy at the university level ([Ndzinisa et al., 2024](#)) and the use of digital narratives in geography teacher training ([De Souza, 2025](#)), confirms the potential of these technologies. Similarly, broader analyses of digitalisation in the region, including examinations of gender equality and economic development ([Kolovich & Newiak, 2024](#)) and the role of ICT in economic diversification ([Owolabi et al., 2023](#)), underscore its strategic relevance. However, these studies often present a generalised view, failing to fully resolve how specific urban African socio-technical environments—characterised by unique infrastructural, cultural, and resource constraints—mediate the relationship between digital tools and educational outcomes.

This gap is further illustrated by contrasting evidence from adjacent fields ([Bernad et al., 2023](#)). While some studies on service delivery, such as those on strengthening primary healthcare ([Theilmann et al., 2023](#)), report positive outcomes from digital and systemic interventions that parallel educational aspirations, others reveal significant contextual divergence. For instance, research on mobile health (mHealth) for adolescent services ([Isaacs et al., 2024](#)) and community-based advisory committees ([Chumo et al., 2023](#)) highlights how uptake and effectiveness can vary dramatically based on localised social structures and user engagement. This pattern suggests that the mere introduction of digital solutions is insufficient; their success in educational contexts is contingent upon mechanisms that are not yet fully articulated in the Eswatini-specific literature. Consequently, a clear need exists to move beyond establishing correlation and towards explaining the causal pathways—the 'how' and 'why'—through which digitalisation influences education in urban Eswatini, which this article addresses.

CONCLUSION

This survey analysis of digitalisation and educational transformation in urban Eswatini presents a nuanced portrait of a system in transition ([De Souza, 2025](#)). The findings collectively underscore that, despite pervasive rhetoric of a global digital revolution, the reality is one of nascent and profoundly uneven integration ([Nxusani et al., 2023](#)). The transformative potential of digital tools is largely unrealised through systemic initiatives and is instead contingent on the personal devices and resourcefulness of individual educators and learners ([Makwembere, 2023](#)). This fragmented adoption mirrors regional patterns where technological advancement outpaces the institutional capacity to harness it equitably ([Boateng & Ampofo, 2023](#); [Kolovich & Newiak, 2024](#)). The study's primary contribution lies in delineating this critical disjuncture between policy aspiration and classroom reality, demonstrating that access to hardware is merely the first in a series of complex socio-technical challenges ([Bernad et al., 2023](#); [Chumo et al., 2023](#)).

The research provides a grounded examination of the ecosystem required for meaningful integration, revealing that digitalisation is not a standalone technical upgrade but a process entangled with infrastructure reliability, educator preparedness, and relevant curricular content ([Adedeji, 2023](#); [Isaacs et al., 2024](#)). As evidenced in studies of technology adoption elsewhere, success hinges on contextual fit and user competency ([Agbehadji et al., 2023](#); [Liebermann et al., 2023](#)). The survey indicates that without sustained investment in digital pedagogy and supportive leadership, the risk of exacerbating existing educational inequalities—even within urban settings—remains high ([Uleanya,](#)

2023). This aligns with broader concerns that technological divides can reinforce socio-economic and gender disparities, a pressing issue for inclusive development ([Merry et al., 2023](#); [Ndzinisa et al., 2024](#)).

Consequently, the practical and policy implications are substantial ([Liebermann et al., 2023](#)). Foremost is the need for context-specific, infrastructure-backed professional development for teachers ([Bandeira et al., 2023](#); [Saptono et al., 2023](#)). Policy must move beyond device distribution towards comprehensive capacity-building that empowers educators to integrate tools pedagogically ([Chebet et al., 2023](#)). This requires collaboration between the Ministry of Education, training institutions, and private partners to create sustainable support networks. Furthermore, curriculum development must be agile, incorporating digital literacy and locally relevant content rather than relying on imported solutions ([Owolabi et al., 2023](#); [Theilmann et al., 2023](#)). Initiatives should be designed with a clear understanding of local constraints, akin to community-engaged approaches advocated in other sectors ([Makota & Musenge, 2023](#); [Murafa, 2023](#)).

The study's limitations contextualise its findings and point to future research. Its urban focus excludes the experiences of the majority in peri-urban and rural schools, where disparities would likely be starker ([Nkomo, 2026](#)). The reliance on self-reported survey data may be subject to bias, and the cross-sectional design cannot trace longitudinal evolution ([Kong et al., 2023](#); [Lu et al., 2023](#)). Future research should prioritise longitudinal, mixed-methods studies tracking policy impact over time, and comparative research including rural schools for a national assessment ([De Souza, 2025](#); [Ye, 2023](#)). Investigative work could also explore models of professional learning communities, the role of school leadership, and intersections with national priorities like Education for Sustainable Development ([Bandeira et al., 2023](#)).

In final analysis, this survey demonstrates that digital transformation in Eswatini's education is a contingent, resource-intensive process—a protracted journey of institutional adaptation, not an event. The path forward requires moving beyond gadgets to a holistic investment in human and systemic enablers: empowered teachers, relevant content, reliable infrastructure, and responsive policy. As Eswatini navigates 21st-century education, the goal must be to ensure digitalisation enhances the quality and inclusivity of learning for all, rather than becoming a new vector for exclusion.

CONTRIBUTIONS

This survey provides a critical, evidence-based analysis of the state of digitalisation in urban Eswatini's education sector during the mid-2020s. It contributes to the scholarly literature by offering a contextualised dataset on infrastructure access, digital pedagogies, and perceived barriers from the perspective of educators and administrators. Practically, the findings identify specific, actionable gaps in policy implementation and resource allocation, moving beyond generalised discourse. The study thus furnishes policymakers and educational institutions with a grounded framework for prioritising investments and designing targeted interventions to enhance digital equity and learning outcomes in Eswatini's urban schools.

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