

## The Influence of Social Media on the Teaching and Learning of the SiSwati Mother Tongue

**Mkhonta, Portia Phindile**

*Department of Curriculum and Teaching,  
University of Eswatini*

*Email: [portiaphindy@gmail.com](mailto:portiaphindy@gmail.com)*

*<https://orcid.org/0009-0004-9529-7026>*

**Malaza, Gcebile Happiness**

*Department of African Languages and  
Literature, University of Eswatini*

*Email: [pizomalaza@gmail.com](mailto:pizomalaza@gmail.com)*

*<https://orcid.org/0009-0006-1448-8053>*

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### Article History

*Received: 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2025*

*Accepted: 9<sup>th</sup> January 2026*

*Published: 30<sup>th</sup> March 2026*

**Keywords:** Influence, public data, social media platforms

### \*Corresponding Author:

[ppmkhonta@uniswa.sz](mailto:ppmkhonta@uniswa.sz) Contact:  
(+268) 76038138

### Abstract

*The 21st-century learning paradigm enforces education outside the traditional classroom. It gave way to social media platforms as alternate learning spaces. The primary objective of this paper was to investigate the impact of social media on the teaching and learning of the siSwati mother tongue. It adopted a qualitative, observational research approach, and data were generated through an observation guide with six items that were designed by the researchers. Purposive sampling was used to identify physical and online platforms where the SiSwati language was the medium of communication. These platforms included WhatsApp, SMS message threads, street drama recordings, community presentations, as well as TikTok and YouTube videos. The data were analysed using thematic content analysis. The generated data were compared to the curriculum content taught to learners in the SiSwati subject by utilising thematic analysis. The findings indicated that social media content has positive and negative effects on the SiSwati language. The conclusions drawn were that, advancement of technology has led to new forms of social media platforms, which have increased participation and interaction in the SiSwati language. This trend enforced creative expression in siSwati among the youth, although it often resulted in compromised spelling. Social media platforms facilitated learning the SiSwati language and promoted its use in various contexts. However, this trend compromised originality of the language and cultural values modelled. Therefore, it is essential for Emaswati to embrace AI language tools such as Grammarly. Additionally, language experts must provide guidance on the proper usage of the siSwati language.*

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### Introduction

Digital technologies have revolutionized education into a 21st-century paradigm. They have led to the emergence of social media platforms that enable learners to connect to what they learn and become co-producers of knowledge (Ledgerwood, 2022). This shift extends learning beyond the conventional classroom as social interactions on these platforms, whether physical or online, greatly influence language and culture. This study explored how social media influenced the use and teaching of siSwati.



## **Background**

Social media are online platforms and technologies that allow users to generate, create, share, and exchange ideas and information (content) with other users (Davis, 2016; Oxford Reference, 2023). The content can be in any format, such as text, photos, videos, and audio. According to Davis (2023), social media is part of physical reality. The rise of technology has not only brought about new forms of social media platforms but also enhanced participation and interaction. Munyadziwa and Mncwango (2021) observe that social media users often invent new meanings for existing words or coin neologisms at the interface of English and indigenous languages. The idea is echoed by Nowbattula, Florence, and Sridevi (2024), who mention that cultural practices posted on social media help learners improve their vocabulary.

There are two main types of social media platforms: online and physical. Although they were initially designed for social interaction, social media platforms have now become an integral part of language teaching and learning. Statistics show that the number of people who use social media to communicate is generally higher (Butabayeva & Mohammadi, 2024). Learners are no exception to this trend. In social media platforms, learners not only engage in communication with their peers but adults and native speakers of the language. Scholars regard that chances of retention are high for learners who use language in collaborative forums (Nowbattula et al., 2024).

The main advantage of social media communication is that users generate the content on their own and are informed by knowledge from many backgrounds, such as books, the internet, experience, school, and other platforms. Users choose to become either content creators, consumers, followers, viewers, readers, or the audience (Filippas, Horton, Lipnowski, & Parasurama, 2021). All these roles expose them to creative use of their language. The idea is supported by Nhlabatsi and Mosweu (2022), who revealed that social media extends classroom discussions. In short, social media creates new learning spaces where active participation and peer interaction can reinforce language practice. The main aim of the study was to explore the influence of social media in the teaching and learning of siSwati.

## **Social media in Eswatini**

In Eswatini, social media became popular in the years 2002-2003. It was received with great excitement by both the young and the old and has since become the easiest and fastest mode of communication. However, how the siSwati language is used in social media greatly impacts the teaching and learning of siSwati as a mother tongue.

The most popular online social media platforms are WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok. Though these platforms are not locally designed, Emaswati use them greatly, and they have since been motivated to invent their own. An example is the Ministry of Health, which is on the move to introduce “*Notsa*”, an online platform for health issues (N. Gwebu, personal communication, August 16, 2025). Most interestingly, the Times of Eswatini dated Sunday, 17 August 2025, reported that the Honourable Minister for Information and Communication Technology, Savannah Maziya, is introducing “Government in Your Hand” (GIYH). This application will allow the government to offer services around the clock, 24/7. These two initiatives are social media platforms in which the siSwati language will be in full use.

Indigenous social media platforms among Emaswati include cultural gatherings and societal presentations such as *umtsimba*, *bayeni*, and *sitsinjana*, among others. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, new

forms have emerged, including street drama, baby showers, kitchen parties and bridal showers. These social media performances greatly influence Eswatini's behaviour, identities and personalities. During these presentations, the siSwati language and cultural values are expressed in different ways. This study analysed how language is used in these platforms to evaluate its contributions to the teaching and learning of siSwati.

### *The SiSwati Subject*

In the Kingdom of Eswatini, the mother tongue is siSwati, and it is an official language, alongside English. It is taught under the Eswatini General Certificate of Secondary Education (EGCSE) syllabus as a compulsory subject for all learners at all levels. In addition to the skills of reading, writing, speaking, listening and cultural transmission, the EGCSE syllabus outlines several skills to be taught to learners in the siSwati subject. These skills include technological awareness and application, effective communication, critical thinking, numeracy, literacy, work and study skills, problem solving, independent learning and collaboration with others (EGCSE SiSwati Syllabus for 2024-2026).

Though siSwati is fully entrenched in the school system, recent research reports highlight marginalisation and negative attitudes towards the language (Mngomezulu, 2017; Mkhonta-Khoza, Nxumalo & Mohammed, 2022). Such findings emphasise the need to preserve and sustain it. A recommendation proposed by Mkhonta, Dlamini, and Mohammed (2023) is that "siSwati must be readily available in ICT forums, otherwise it will soon become a perishing/diminishing language" (p.57). According to them, infusing siSwati online can broaden its scope and use on social media platforms. Giving siSwati the status of an official language means it should be used in both formal and informal settings. Since social media is the most popular and widely used forum of communication, this study explored the influence of social media on the teaching and learning of siSwati.

The teaching and learning of the mother tongue is also widely recognised as essential. Scholars found that learning the mother tongue makes easy assimilation of concepts taught in the foreign language and helps preserve cultural heritage (UNESCO, 2022; Mkhonta, Mkozi, & Mohammed, 2025). It also helps maintain linguistic originality and cultural values, which are pillars of national identity. Social media is a powerful force that greatly restructures the creation, sharing and use of knowledge. In social media, people communicate in various ways through the use of emojis, abbreviations and hashtags. They also engage multilingual approaches to communication such as code switching, code mixing, translanguaging, and the interference between First Language (L1) and Second Language (L2). Language ways are fully utilised on social media platforms. For example, emojis are employed to communicate people's emotions or tones effectively reflecting humour, criticism or doubt regarding the information presented.

An instance of code switching was observed in the Times of Eswatini dated 17 August 2025. It reported that during the Police Pass Out day hosted on the 15<sup>th</sup> of August 2025, the police force adopted the word "*Kasongo*" that was currently viral online and used it to name their armoured vehicle. Though it is from a Congolese song, social media users used it to refer to warthogs. This practice by social media users supports the learning of word formation strategies in siSwati, which allows borrowing of words from another language. The formation behind the social media use of the word "*Kasongo*" to mean a warthog is that warthogs are so tactful that they challenge elephants by running in zigzag style. The police force ironically used it to describe their tactics. The above example shows that social media expedites social change by bringing new methods of social communication which impart the siSwati language positively

and negatively. However, researchers on social media engagement are worried about misinformation (Butabayeva & Mohammadi, 2024).

### ***Problem statement***

The motivation behind this paper is that language comes from and is used in society. Schools also teach it to be used in society. In the past, Emaswati would use the siSwati language in physical social media platforms; lately, they also use it online. While this is a much-needed innovation, it also poses threats to the use of the siSwati language. There is therefore a need to explore the influence of social media in the teaching and learning of siSwati.

Amongst studies conducted on social media, Nhlabatsi and Mosweu (2022) reviewed the status of managing social media records at the Government Press Office (GPO) in Eswatini. The synthesis revealed that proper measures are not in place to manage information on social media. People post content arbitrarily. They cited an example of images uploaded without appropriate captions.

### **Theory**

The ideas presented in this study are informed by the triangulation of social media engagement theory and social constructivism by Lev Vygotsky (1978). Social media engagement theory explains how users of online platforms engage with content. It assumes that people interact with content in social media platforms in different ways, verbally and non-verbally (Malouf & Bahemia, 2025). It can be through sending likes, nodding, comments, laughter, and dance moves. Through these different reactions, people exchange some form of language. This makes their social presence meaningful because, in the process, their beliefs, practices, norms, values, and ethics are either reinforced or reshaped.

The other tenet of social media engagement theory is social influence. The main argument is that people use content they are exposed to or have seen or heard from others. This is networking that spreads knowledge or information and consists of beliefs and ideas about life. Examples include dress codes and gender beliefs.

No one can claim to have founded social media engagement theory, as it is used across various disciplines, including media studies, marketing, communication, and psychology. Notably, Brodie, Hollebeek, and Jurić (2011) have contributed to this field. Social media theory examines the different ways in which social media platforms impact individuals, as a society and as a whole, ultimately influencing their cultural beliefs and practices (Filippas et al., 2021). The theory suggests that people's engagement with content on social media can have both positive and negative effects on language use. While interactions on social media can enhance educational content, they may also reinforce informal or incorrect usage if such content gains traction. In this study, it is used as a lens to examine how the content posted on social media platforms influences the teaching and learning of siSwati.

The second theory that frames the concepts of the study is social constructivism by Lev Vygotsky (1978). It posits that knowledge is built through social interaction, implying that learning is a social process that happens through the support of the teacher, peers, and technology, among others. In this regard, social constructivism assumes that learners co-construct understanding through dialogue, collaboration, and shared cultural tools like language. Social constructivists consider social media as a platform that provides a collaborative environment for language learning. It is a forum for people to communicate with friends and other speakers of the language and solve problems together. They post messages in various formats (visuals, audio and lingual), react to others, and remix language forms.

According to Vygotsky (2011), artefacts and societal presentations that come in the form of visuals, audio, and audio-visuals serve as scaffolds, and more knowledgeable others (MKOs) that aid language learning. These resources facilitate language development by allowing learners to engage in discussions and share content in siSwati, thereby becoming part of a knowledge community that enhances their linguistic skills. However, since interactions are often informal, the language learned and reinforced may deviate from traditional norms. By triangulating these theories, we investigate whether social media interactions in siSwati support authentic learning or introduce distortions.

## Methodology

The study was done using a qualitative observational research approach. Data was generated through collecting public siSwati language data from various physical and online forums. Non-participant observation was used. Purposive sampling identified six data sources where public siSwati content was posted, which are WhatsApp groups, SMS message threads, street drama recordings, community presentations, YouTube and TikTok videos. An observation guide with six items that we designed guided the collection of data, such as colloquial messages, scripts, and transcripts of performances. We used content observation to examine language practices in various forms of online interactions, including comments, captions, posts, hashtags, videos and memes. These data were examined to determine how siSwati language was used, adapted, or altered in contemporary communicative spaces. The online content was in the form of images, videos, or text, often copied, remixed, and shared to elicit a joke, humour, or satire. We focused on behavioral, discourse, language use, visual or multimodal elements, interactional networks, as well as sentiment and emotional responses. We also focused on various topics, the language or expressions used, as well as emerging trends. We used discourse analysis and multimodal observation, and techniques. The analysis included speeches, songs, poems, posts, cultural performances, audio recordings, videos and comments to examine the use of the siSwati language. We assessed whether these media promote or hinder correct language use.

The process of data collection lasted for almost four weeks because the study is qualitative therefore, it did not require large volumes of data. We were more particular about data saturation. Such action is supported by J. W. Creswell and J. D. Creswell (2023), who emphasise that qualitative research prioritizes data saturation rather than time limits. Our observations of use of the siSwati language typically ended once we learnt that no new patterns, themes, or discourse features were emerging.

Thematic content analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006) was used to analyse data. All data from the platforms that we observed were compared against the content of the formal siSwati curriculum syllabus for relevance. Data were iteratively coded to identify patterns in language use such as abbreviations, code-switching, spelling conventions, and cultural references. Themes were identified regarding positive impacts, like increased participation and negative impacts, such as spelling errors. We found it unnecessary to seek individual consent because the data were in the public domain therefore poses minimal risks. Although the social media data used in this study were publicly accessible, ethical research principles, as cited in the University of Eswatini (UNESWA) Policy on Research Ethics Involving Human Subjects section 5.5.1 and 5.5.2, and 5.7.3 (c) require careful treatment of such data (p.5 and 6). It indicates that publicly available social media posts still carry ethical considerations related to privacy, user expectations, and the potential for harm, and these should be addressed even when formal informed consent is not obtained. In that regard, we ensured anonymity during the reporting stage by removing the names of the users, their profiles and any locations identifiers in accordance with ethical guidelines for public data. During the extraction of data from social

media platforms no names of authors or account names were taken. Only the messages they wrote were used without linking them to authors. During data presentation and analysis, posts are labeled as “the user”, “users”, “the response”.

We also considered the reality that the study is qualitative, is therefore prone to our biasness as researchers in that we played an active part during data generation. We acknowledged our positionality as siSwati language educators and members of the Emaswati community. This insider status provided deep cultural and linguistic insight, which enhanced the interpretation of social media discourse. However, it also required conscious reflexivity to minimise bias, particularly in evaluating informal or non-standard language forms against formal curriculum norms. To address this, interpretations were anchored in the EGCSE siSwati syllabus and supported by established theoretical frameworks rather than personal linguistic preferences.

### ***Limitations***

The study is limited to online social media platforms that were easily accessible and physical media platforms which we attended.

### **Presentation of findings**

The findings of the study were analysed and presented using thematic content analysis. The main research objective of the study was to investigate how social media influenced the teaching and learning of siSwati. The findings were divided into positive and negative influences, from which two themes emerged. On the positive side, social media promotes creativity in the siSwati language. Conversely, on the negative side, it compromised the credibility of the knowledge and information being shared and transmitted.

Below is a table that outlines the sub-objectives, themes and sub-themes of the study.

**Table 1:***Themes that Emerged from the Study*

| Sub-objective      | Theme   | Sub-theme  |
|--------------------|---|--|
| Positive influence | Promotes creativity in the siSwati language   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourages the use and inventiveness of the siSwati language</li> <li>• Encourages the ability to communicate using ICT</li> <li>• Flexibility and adaptive use of the siSwati language</li> <li>• Promotes sharing of cultural ideas</li> <li>• It draws attention to sign language</li> <li>• Promotes inclusive language practices</li> <li>• Enforces the skill of collaboration</li> </ul> |
| Negative influence | Compromises the credibility of the information and knowledge being shared and transmitted | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduces the precision of language (compromises language accuracy)</li> <li>• Dilutes the originality of the siSwati language</li> </ul>   |

***Theme 1: Social media promotes creativity in the siSwati language******Encourages use and inventiveness in the siSwati language***

The findings showed that in some of the analysed speeches and conversations, there are elements of code switching between English and siSwati. Such leads to the creation of new words and expressions. Amongst others, there was a post that read “*Inkantolo isetha a bad precedent la...*” What drew our attention to this post is the newly designed word “*isetha*”, which is a product of the creative ability of the user to formulate this siSwati word using assimilation. The English word is “set”, then the user assimilated it to “*isetha*”.

***Enhances the ability to communicate using ICT***

We also observed effective communication methods by users, which enhance their ability to use language and technology. For instance, on the WhatsApp platform, in a group chat, when a user sends a message, the next person responds directly to that specific message by long pressing or holding on the message, then typing their response or comment. This approach is the easiest and fastest way of sending content across multiple social media platforms. We admire this practice because it improves the users’ ability to use ICT platforms for communication.

### ***Flexible and adaptive use of the siSwati language***

The findings also showed that users use slang, jokes, coded phrases, shortened abbreviations and acronyms as well as dropped/mangled prefixes to give input to other people's ideas, ask questions and respond to shared information. Such plays a major role in reinforcing participation, especially for the youth, because it makes them comfortable interacting with one another. SiSwati learners were able to access wider linguistic contexts through social sharing. Our participants watched YouTube and TikTok clips of cultural events (translated into siSwati) and commented on them, using simple siSwati language. Though they used informal language to communicate, it reinforced listening and comprehension skills as well as improved the user's thinking capabilities. It is a sign of creative adaptation of the siSwati language to digital norms.

#### ***Promotes the sharing of cultural ideas***

The findings showed that cultural ideas are posted in different ways, and such makes Emaswati culture significant to the world. People post videos, audiovisuals, Word documents and others that reflect Emaswati culture or captions. An example is an invitation to the paying of the dowry ceremony, a card was posted, it contained information on culture, the title of the event, the dress code and starting time. There were also some videos of national cultural events, and those from the community, which were noted on YouTube and TikTok. Some were postings on folk-tale presentations shared online. All these enhance the cultural depth of the siSwati language. There was also content on other cultures enjoyed by Emaswati on social media. This initiates Emaswati into other cultures as well.

#### ***Draws attention to the use of emojis***

The analysis indicated the use of different emojis to show different feelings, responses and communication. The observation was that very few users respond to such posts; however, those who believe in it used it frequently. Some used emojis to add tone, personality and emotions to text-based communication. Other people use them to emphasise their ideas. An example was a post found in a religious group. The response was "*Siyabonga nceku...*" (we thank you, Pastor) and ended with an emoji that emphasised the idea. There was another comment observed, "*Angeke kungiphindze*" (it will never happen to me again), followed by an emoji to express the tone. We noted that the use of emojis is helpful since it helps people connect and communicate more effectively online.

#### ***Promotes inclusive language practices***

The data analysis revealed that users express themselves comfortably through the use of social media language. The inclusive nature of social media platforms like YouTube, TikTok, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter allowed participants to joyfully use the siSwati language to create content in various formats, including videos, written posts, audio, and audiovisual material.

#### ***Enforces the skill of collaboration***

The growing number of users on social media increases the ability to communicate with others about specific ideas, topics or themes. This practice promotes collaboration toward achieving common goals and promotes a sense of unity through shared language. We noted a pool of responses and posts from users on various social media platforms with large audiences, like WhatsApp, YouTube, TikTok and Facebook. The collaborative nature of social media

platforms leads to extensive use of the siSwati language. People connect with other speakers of the language and share common discourse, which is an opportunity for them to learn and use the language in real-world situations. This gives them room to learn accents and grammatically correct expressions.

***Theme 2: Social media compromises the credibility of the information or knowledge shared and transmitted***

***Compromises the accuracy of the siSwati language***

The findings indicated informal language habits that certainly compromise the accuracy of the language. Some of the easy-to-use words used were “*ntombo*”, “*lokwagas*”, “*bafo*”, “*asomshayele*”, “*kwakosa kutsi...*”, “*lena-instead of leni*”. These are examples of quotes with inconsistent spelling, typos, mixed codes, and siSwati words combined with English contractions done by some users.

***Dilutes the originality of the siSwati language***

Social media is facilitating the emergence of a new dialect of the siSwati language. Users are introducing many new words and expressions, demonstrating their familiarity and comfort level with the evolving language. An analysis of both audio and written content revealed examples such as “*ntombo*”, “*asome wena*”, “*uze nenyeye*” and “*mntase*”. While many users enjoy the playful use of these expressions, it can negatively impact literacy in the siSwati language. Additionally, the findings indicated that participants often share cultural performances, including songs and dances, some of which do not align with the culture of Emaswati.

**Discussion of findings**

***Theme 1: Social media promotes creativity in the siSwati language***

The findings indicated that social media is a tool that enables the development of new vocabulary and the creation of new expressions through code switching. This is helpful to young users, especially because vocabulary formulation rules are a concept that is taught in schools in the siSwati subject. The findings aligned with the perspective of Nowbattula et al. (2024), which suggests that social media helps learners acquire new vocabulary. According to Munyadziwa and Mncwango (2021), some of these words have existed before their usage on social media.

Additionally, the findings revealed that users were able to heighten their use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) skills through activities such as posting, copying and pasting text, sharing links, and using multimedia content. This exposure not only improved their digital literacy but also demonstrated effective uses of ICT in formal communication. One significant advantage noted was the ability to share information quickly without the need to retype or recreate content.

Besides saving time, this enables the rapid spread of ideas, news, and resources. These are the practices that enable digital communication that is required in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is the most effective way of broadening and encouraging the use of the siSwati language, as suggested by Mkhonta et al. (2023).

The data revealed that social media allows the youth to use playful language. This makes social media an informal platform that gives the learners opportunities to develop practical language skills in a relaxed manner, unlike in the formal four walls of the classroom (Butabayeva &

Mohammadi, 2024). Learners' interaction with others online and physically enables them to gain confidence and be more motivated to use the siSwati language when communicating with their peers.

The variety of ideas that were shared through audio, visuals and audiovisual and word formats on culture shows that social media plays a significant role in promoting the culture of Emaswati. According to Vygotsky's theory of social constructivism, such social media content is MKOs that enhance learners' understanding of the culture of Emaswati. It makes people visualise and listen to many cultural events and practices. This reduces the workload for the siSwati subject teacher, who is compelled by the curriculum to teach these.

The sharing of cultural information is increasingly beneficial and educational in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as many people are multitasking and too busy to attend cultural events in their communities. By uploading cultural content to platforms like YouTube and TikTok, traditional media is seamlessly integrated into the digital realm. This allows a wider audience to appreciate the rich cultural practices and customs that are showcased on social media (Nowbattula et al., 2024). These activities create a connection between home culture and modern tech, aligning with Vygotsky's idea that knowledge is developed through social contexts. Consequently, the social influence exerted by social media leads to changes in people's cultural formulations. This positions social media as a platform for promoting, preserving and observing Emaswati cultural practices, from which the siSwati language is also embedded.

There were indications that social media has a wider reach. This exposed learners to other languages and cultural ideas. It mostly happens on Facebook, YouTube, TikTok and Instagram, where there are many users who come from other cultures. Though such exposure is as good as intercultural competency that enables learners to communicate with people from various socio-economic backgrounds, it only works well for linguistics or people who have developed language skills fully. It is unhealthy for people who are still in the process of learning the language, as the language structures may be confused (Butabayeva & Mohammadi, 2024).

The analysis of data showed that some content creators used emojis to share their ideas. Social media engagement theory describes the participant's practice as social presence that has the same language value as other forms of communication. We were elated to note this because our observation is that the use of emojis can also be beneficial for Deaf or hard-of-hearing individuals who may not have access to video calls or sign language interpreters. The findings align with the idea shared by Malouf and Bahemia (2025) that social media allows people to communicate their beliefs and practices in different ways. The new knowledge brought by the findings of this study, therefore, is that social media enabled easy access for all by promoting awareness and understanding of sign language.

We also noted that the strength of social media lies in its ability to allow users to share content based on their abilities, which is a principle of inclusive language use. Sharing of information in different modes allows the learners room to adjust their communication within their contexts and affordability (Butabayeva & Mohammadi, 2024). For example, if they are too busy, they communicate through an emoji; if they are unable to type at all, they send an audio. Such openness to intelligent styles is a feature that increases participation in the mother tongue. Other than that, it allows users flexibility to communicate using their diverse communication skills, which is considered to be a form of personalised learning and a key driver of communication in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Inclusivity is a pedagogical approach emphasised by the EGCSE curriculum currently offered to learners in the secondary school curriculum in Eswatini.

Social media enhances group communication skills by allowing content posted in groups to go viral. Learners learn the siSwati language skills by interacting with others. This is in line with observations made by Butabayeva and Mohammadi (2024) and Nowbattula et al. (2024), who noted that using a language in group forums promotes greater retention of the language. This indicates that social media plays a vital role in developing collaboration, which is an essential 21st-century skill outlined in the siSwati syllabus. Vygotsky (1978) describe group communication as a form of social interaction that enables learners to learn from one another and enhance their individual language abilities.

### ***Theme 2: Social media compromises the credibility of the information and knowledge shared and transmitted***

The main disadvantage of social media platforms that we observed is that they are very informal, as people use language as they please. We noted that some users post casual forms of the siSwati language, which leads to people despising the spelling and grammatical rules of the siSwati language. The consequences of such are polluted grammar of the siSwati language and writings that do not adhere to the conventions of the language. Though dialects are normal for any language, they risk erosion of formal language structures taught in school. Butabayeva and Mohammadi (2024) describe such social media practice as misinformation.

The other negative effects that social media can have on the learning of siSwati are the potential to dilute the originality of the siSwati language. This trend leads learners to adopt non-standard forms of siSwati. People frequently use slang, abbreviations, and informal grammar, which can result in misinformation and negatively affect their understanding of the language. Unfortunately, these bad habits are evident in both spoken (recorded) and written posts. This disadvantage of social media was highlighted by Nowbattula et al. (2024), who noted that the vast amount of content shared on these platforms makes it difficult for learners to filter relevant information. We viewed this situation as detrimental to siSwati, as it leads to poor writing and recording, even though we hope social media would enhance the language. Linguistic purists are concerned that these informal trends might ultimately impact a larger segment of the population of the citizens of Eswatini.

We examined the dances and songs that were shared on the platforms and found that some of them were foreign to the society of Eswatini. We then support the idea by social media engagement theory and observation by Filippas et al. (2021) that sometimes social media influences people's cultural values negatively by leading to negative language use.

### **Conclusions**

Social media exerts both positive and negative influences on siSwati learning regardless of whether learners are followers, creators, viewers, consumers, readers or the audience. Social media makes learners feel empowered to write and speak in siSwati anywhere, and this is appreciated as a major step for a previously marginalized language. On the other hand, this freedom comes at the cost of language precision.

Social media enhances the language skills of learners beyond what is taught in textbooks. Platforms like WhatsApp, TikTok and YouTube provide engaging opportunities for learners to use siSwati creatively and frequently, extending their practice beyond the classroom. However, the informal nature of these platforms can lead to compromised spelling and syntax.

The language used on social media impacts learners' understanding and use of siSwati in different ways, mainly regarding the siSwati literature and culture. For example, poems recited on YouTube and TikTok have gained a huge following. Apart from the enjoyment these

activities bring, learners can develop language skills such as poetry recitation, critical thinking, pronunciation, and creativity.

In addition to the language skills mentioned, social media also supports learners in developing the general skills that are outlined in the syllabus, such as communication, technology, critical thinking, collaboration and others. The findings indicate that the inclusive nature of social media platforms is a key factor in their broad appeal, as they facilitate communication for individuals with varying literacy levels. Furthermore, social media platforms not only expose learners to the siSwati language and culture but also to other cultures. This exposure enables learners to evaluate their own cultural orientation in comparison to that of others.

The use of siSwati on social media platforms aligns well with the educational goal proposed by the EGCSE siSwati syllabus. It is also in line with the goal of the upcoming competency-based education (CBE) curriculum, a practical application of the learnt knowledge, skills, attitudes and values. Social media platforms help bridge the gap in language use, ensuring the continuity, development and innovation of siSwati. This is particularly true for collaborative social media platforms as they encourage learners to use their mother tongue in both structured and unstructured formats. This, in turn, fosters language learning.

### **Recommendations**

The strengths offered by the use of social media to promote the siSwati language far outweigh its weaknesses. SiSwati teachers should utilise social media as a valuable resource and a powerful and effective ally in preserving and advancing siSwati. It is important to maintain linguistic standards. To maximize the pedagogical potential, Emaswati should embrace new technologies to transform their language teaching practices, including the integration of AI writing tools. For example, using grammar checkers like Grammarly as well as spell checkers adapted for siSwati can help ensure correct spelling and adherence to the standard forms of the siSwati language.

Additionally, siSwati teachers and content creators should actively model correct language usage on social media. By sharing properly written siSwati content and politely correcting frequent errors in community forums, experts can scaffold the language norms. This approach aligns with Vygotskian guided learning principles. In this way, social media can transform into a collaborative classroom that engages learners while preserving the integrity of the siSwati language.

### **Acknowledgement**

This work did not receive any special grant from any funding agency. The authors did not use AI in writing this article. All intellectual content belongs to the authors.

### **Conflict of Interest**

Authors declare that there is no conflict of interests regarding the publication of the paper or otherwise.

### **Authors' contributions**

Author, Mkhonta Portia Phindile: Conception/design, development of data collection instrument, analysis, interpretation of data, revised manuscript (50%)

Author, Malaza Gcebile: Conception/design, data collection, analysis, interpretation of data, editing and first draft (50%)

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