



EERA

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[info@eswera.org](mailto:info@eswera.org)



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### **EDITORIAL**

It is with great pleasure and a profound sense of scholarly purpose that the Editorial Board of the Eswatini Educational Research Journal (ESWERJ) presents Volume 2, Number 1 (March 2026). This volume constitutes the second issue of a journal that was born out of a collective desire by the Eswatini Educational Research Association (EERA) to create a dedicated platform for educational researchers in Eswatini and across the broader Southern African region. Since the publication of our inaugural volume, the response from the scholarly community has been encouraging, and this second volume reflects the growing vibrancy and intellectual energy that ESWERJ is beginning to cultivate.

This special volume draws from the scholarly proceedings of the 59<sup>th</sup> SERA-DEASA-KEAS-RSTP Conference, a landmark regional gathering held at the University of Eswatini from 21 to 23 October 2025, held under the conference theme: *Education in the 21st Century: Access, Affordability, Sustainability, Innovation and Relevance*. The conference provided a fertile intellectual forum for researchers, practitioners and policymakers from Eswatini and neighbouring countries to engage with the most pressing challenges and emerging possibilities in contemporary education. Of the 158 papers originally presented at the conference, 31 were submitted for formal peer review, of which 24 met the rigorous standards of the ESWERJ review process and are presented in this volume. This demanding selection process reflects the journal's commitment to publishing only work of the highest scholarly merit.

In her keynote address at the conference, Inkhosikati LaMatsebula offered a compelling reflection on the heritage and trajectory of educational research in Eswatini. She underscored the long journey of EERA — from its roots in the early 1980s as part of the BOLESWA vision, through its evolution from the former Swaziland Educational Research Association (SERA), to its current standing as a nationally and regionally recognised body. Her address affirmed EERA's vital mission: to amplify local scholars' voices, foster rigorous inquiry, and shape educational dialogues despite persistent financial and logistical challenges. This volume honours that mission and is made possible through the continued partnership between EERA, the Distance Education Association of Southern Africa (DEASA), the Knowledge, Education and Advisory Services (KEAS), and the Royal Science and Technology Park (RSTP). ESWERJ is further grateful to the University of Eswatini's Institute of Distance Education for hosting the editorial office.

#### **Thematic Overview of this Volume**

The 24 articles presented in this volume collectively respond to the urgent demands of education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. They can be broadly organised into six thematic clusters, each addressing a distinct but interconnected dimension of the conference theme.

**Open Distance and e-Learning (ODeL): Access, Design and Transformation.** A significant cluster of articles in this volume engages with the theory and practice of Open Distance and e-Learning (ODeL) as a vehicle for expanding educational access. Prof Emeritus P. H. Gundani opens the volume with a provocative examination of how Open Universities can break the constraints of higher education's 'Iron Triangle' — the enduring tension between access, cost, and quality — arguing that the ODeL model, when thoughtfully implemented, can achieve mass education without sacrificing standards. Methula Hlobosile complements this by reporting on how lecturers at higher institutions in Eswatini are navigating evolving technologies in ODeL contexts, revealing both promise and persistent systemic gaps. Sithole and Ndlela examine digital teaching and learning in Eswatini's secondary schools, identifying structural inequalities that must be bridged if the country is to realise a resilient and transformative educational future. Chiwungwe, Pahwaringira and Tirivavi extend this discourse internationally with an integrative review proposing a conceptual framework for gender-responsive ODeL design, drawing attention to the disproportionate digital barriers faced by women and girls.

**Quality Assurance, Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning in Education.** As artificial intelligence reshapes every domain of human activity, education is no exception. Lubungu provides a timely case study examining how three Zambian universities are maintaining quality assurance standards in Open and Distance Learning amid the growing excitement — and anxiety — surrounding AI. Chirume offers a rigorous investigation into the application of machine learning as both a tool and a pedagogical method for mathematics and statistics instruction within ODeL contexts. Sifundza and Osodo present empirical findings on the lived experiences of university students in Eswatini with AI writing tools, raising important questions about academic integrity, pedagogy and institutional responsibility in the age of generative AI. Together, these three articles provide an essential empirical and theoretical compass for institutions grappling with the ethical and pedagogical implications of AI in education.

**Language, Equity and Inclusion in Digital Education.** Three articles examine the intersection of language, technology and equity. Siame and Chisenga contribute two complementary studies: the first reimagines the prospects for language equity and inclusion in 21<sup>st</sup>-century education in Zambia within the ODeL era; the second, through a discourse analysis of Zambia's digital education platforms, explores how language barriers can be transformed into linguistic bridges. Mkhonta and Malaza turn the lens to Eswatini, investigating the influence of social media on the teaching and learning of the siSwati mother tongue — a topic of particular national significance given the cultural imperative of preserving indigenous languages in an increasingly digitised world. These contributions collectively call for educational systems to place linguistic justice at the centre of digital transformation agendas.

**Student and Educator Wellness in Educational Environments.** A cluster of three articles addresses the crucial and often undertheorised dimension of mental health and wellness in educational settings. Hlatywayo and Dondofema propose a framework for enhancing student wellness and mental health specifically within ODeL environments in Zimbabwe, arguing for systemic institutional responses rather than ad hoc individual interventions. Lubungu and Lumwanga examine the role of health education in promoting mental well-being among university students in Zambia, stressing the need for proactive curricula and support structures. Motsa-Mthunzi contributes a rigorous empirical analysis of the correlations between mental health, performance and productivity in educational workplaces, providing compelling evidence that institutional well-being policies are not peripheral but essential to academic excellence.

**Curriculum, Pedagogy and Assessment Innovation.** Several articles focus on transforming what is taught and how it is assessed. Dlamini-Akintola offers a synthesis of cognitive, linguistic and pedagogical models to propose enhanced approaches to critical thinking and ICT integration through authentic assessment at the University of Eswatini. Kavetuna outlines transformative strategies for fostering self-directed learning in distance education, addressing the perennial challenge of learner autonomy in non-contact settings. Asogwa, Isiwu and Omoregie investigate the relationship between adult literacy and farmers' adoption of agricultural innovation in South-Eastern Nigeria, connecting education directly to rural development and economic transformation. Shabangu and Tsikati explore agriculture teachers' experiences in assisting learners through the Eswatini Learning Passport — a study with immediate practical implications for teachers and curriculum developers. Turugari examines the impact of insufficient action research skills on mathematics teachers' ability to diagnose learner challenges in Eswatini, making a strong case for embedding research competencies in initial teacher education. Cuamba closes the volume with a valuable regional perspective from Mozambique, examining how ICTs can serve as promoters of educational quality in under-resourced contexts.

**Policy, Equity and Institutional Transformation.** The volume's final thematic thread addresses the structural and policy dimensions of education. Ngcamphalala provides a rare insider analysis of how the EIMPA-IDM institutional merger has affected academic staff, contributing to the sparse literature on higher education restructuring in the public service sector. P.A. Dlamini presents a qualitative policy analysis of how college education programmes in Africa must be transformed for 21<sup>st</sup>-century relevance and equity. Fakude and Makondo offer a guidance and counselling perspective on the experiences of boy learners in single-sex high schools in Eswatini — a timely reminder that gender-responsive education must attend to all learners' contexts. Sifundza and Dlamini examine learners' perspectives on the reintegration policy for teenage mothers in the teaching-learning process, connecting the study to broader discourses of adolescent sexual and reproductive health rights (ASRHR). Magasu and Mundende round out this cluster with a study on leadership approaches to conflict management in educational institutions, equipping educators with practical frameworks for building healthy institutional cultures.

Taken together, the articles in this volume constitute a rich, multi-voiced and multi-national scholarly conversation. Contributors come from Eswatini, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Namibia, Mozambique, Nigeria and South Africa, reflecting ESWERJ's ambition to serve as a truly regional journal of African educational research. The disciplinary range — spanning distance education, teacher education, linguistics, mathematics education, health promotion, agricultural education and education policy — exemplifies the inter-disciplinary ethos that ESWERJ was founded to nurture.

The Editorial Board extends its sincere gratitude to the authors whose diligence, intellectual rigour and patience throughout the review process have made this volume possible. Our deep appreciation goes equally to the members of the Editorial Board and the wider community of peer reviewers whose thorough and constructive engagement has upheld the scholarly standards of ESWERJ. We also acknowledge the continuing institutional support of the University of Eswatini, and the commitment of our regional partners without whom the publication of this journal would not be sustainable.

ESWERJ remains committed to its founding objectives: to enhance educational knowledge, to encourage inter-disciplinary inquiry, to build the professional capacity of emerging scholars, and to amplify the voices of African educational researchers in regional and global scholarly

conversations. We warmly invite scholars, practitioners and policymakers to contribute to future volumes and to engage critically with the knowledge produced herein. We look forward to continuing to serve the Southern African educational research community with distinction.

**Professor Karen Ferreira-Meyers**

Editor-in-Chief

*Eswatini Educational Research Journal (ESWERJ)*

Institute of Distance Education, University of Eswatini

March 2026

### **Note to Contributors**

1. The *Eswatini Educational Research Journal (ESWERJ)* is a scholarly and trans-disciplinary research publication. Manuscripts to be considered for publication must be found very useful to both scholars and practitioners in Africa, Education and related fields.
2. Articles which should be typed in double spacing should not exceed 8000 words including references and abstracts using MS word 2003 format.
3. The title and institutional affiliation of the author(s) and an abstract of not more than 250 words should precede the title.
4. Manuscript under consideration by other journals must not be submitted.
5. Empirical reports must be written under the following distinctive headings:
  - (i) Introduction should incorporate background of study, statement of problem, significance of study and appropriate literature.
  - (ii) Purposes/Objectives/ Research Questions/Hypotheses.
  - (iii) Methodology - This should contain the following distinctive sub-headings: Area of study, paradigm, approach, method, design of the study, population, sample, instrument, data collection, and analysis techniques
  - (iv) Findings
  - (v) Discussion.
  - (vi) Conclusion.
  - (vii) References.
6. Non-empirical reports must have:
  - (i) Introduction - that shows clearly the focus of the article.
  - (ii) Main body - under distinctive headings that could have been reflected in the Introduction.
  - (iii) Conclusion with appropriate recommendations where necessary.
  - (iv) References.
7. Literature must be relevant, rich and current. References should be according to the American Psychological Association (APA) latest edition.
8. Tables *must* be in line with the *MS Word* table format

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University of Eswatini

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Agricultural Education and Extension  
University of Eswatini

### **Office:**

Institute of Distance Education  
University of Eswatini  
Private Bag 4, Kwaluseni, Eswatini  
Office Tel: +268 25170262

Website: [www.eswera.org](http://www.eswera.org) Email: [esweraeditorial@gmail.com](mailto:esweraeditorial@gmail.com)  
Eswatini Educational Research Journal (ESWERJ)

### **Editorial Board Members for the Issue**

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