

Chapter 15

Designing Effective E-Learning Environments in Gweru, Midlands Province, Zimbabwe: An E-School's Community Engagement Case Study

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the qualitative case study reported on in this chapter was to assess the extent to which a high school located in the Midlands province of Zimbabwe could be classified as an e-school by exploring which and how information and communication technologies (ICTs) have been integrated by educators and administrators. The main focus of the research study also included understanding the various community engagement activities that the school in Gweru was running, which supported them in designing effective e-learning environments using the school ICT infrastructure. However, educators were not adequately skilled to apply ICTs as work tools, and as a result, the school was still to implement a number of solutions and recommendations in order to attain the status of an e-school that had integrated ICTs in its teaching and were designing effective e-learning environments.

INTRODUCTION

The past two decades have been characterized by an increased use of new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in almost every sphere of the economy, transforming practices and cultures everywhere around the world, including in the particular context of Zimbabwe (Ndlovu & Sibanda, 2021).

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Enterprises have had to adjust in order to remain competitive (see e.g. Bolton, Goosen and Kritzing, 2021), social media networks have had a great impact on the lives of society and even most gadgets used in the home are heavily digitalized. The education sector has not been left behind in this revolution and has seen many governments across the world crafting policies that encourage the incorporation of ICTs into teaching and learning. The main aim is to adequately equip students with the skills required to operate in the knowledge age (Dale, Robertson, & Shortis, 2004; Department of Education, 2004; Evoh, 2007; Isaacs, 2007).

Today, as the world is facing the global pandemic of COVID-19, declared as a health emergency by the World Health Organisation, teaching, learning and research in schools and institutions of higher learning have been disrupted due to ... extended closures and national lockdowns (Sibanda & Muyambo, 2020, p. 157).

As the COVID-19 pandemic is thus completely upending the 2020-2021 school years (see e.g. Kekana & Goosen, 2021; Ndhlovu & Goosen, 2021), it had quickly become apparent that online learning is not only an asset, but is also critical to the continued and sustainable education of students towards the post-COVID-19 era (Ngugi & Goosen, 2021). Education in Grades R(K) through 12 thrives on in-classroom teaching methods suited for children and adolescents that are still developing vital social, communication, and developmental competencies (Goosen, 2019b), as well as digital ones. The **challenges** that K-12 educators have **encountered when integrating ICTs in teaching and learning** during this pandemic—having to transition to complete online learning nearly overnight—have been overwhelming, as it was realized that the resources needed to quickly and effectively set up and implement an online class were, for many, very limited. With some questioning the **future** of education and whether it will return to ‘normal’ (traditional classroom learning), there is an urgent need for technology-supported teaching and research methods (Goosen, 2019a), written by K-12 educators and administrators for their peers in K-12 education, while also providing much-needed **context** and real-world experiences, based on **designing effective e-learning environments in Gweru, Midlands province, Zimbabwe in an e-school’s community engagement case study**.

Target Audience

As for the book as a whole, the target audience of this chapter will be composed of groups of professionals and researchers working in the fields of K-12 education and Information Technology (IT) classes (Mentz & Goosen, 2007), particularly superintendents, curriculum developers, professional learning designers, school principals, instructional technology specialists, and educators.

Recommended Topics

In line with the **recommended topics** for the book, this chapter will make contributions regarding:

- Effective instructional *strategies* designed and implemented by educators across subject areas and grade levels.
- Leadership *strategies* to design and implement school e-learning plans.
- Academic research on best practices in especially e-learning.

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