Access to Digital Media and Devices and their Impact on the Use of Technology in the Teaching of African Literature in Gauteng Classrooms

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the factors that enable or constrain teachers' access to digital media and devices and how these impact the use of technology in African literature lessons in selected Gauteng schools. The South African Department of Basic Education's (DBE) plan to incorporate technology in education coupled with their desire to include more African texts in the literature syllabus may be in tune with fast changing digital landscapes and a drive towards the decolonisation of teaching and learning, but the reality of some school contexts and how this impacts access to digital technology makes these ideas difficult to implement. The study is drawn from a larger one that examined the technology ideals, primarily how they related to the use of digital media and devices in the researching and teaching of African literary texts, of the Department of Basic Education and the disconnect between these and the existing realities in some school contexts. The study focuses on two teachers' use of technology in two very different contexts in the same province, Gauteng. The study used qualitative methodology, relying on interviews and contextual scans. The findings revealed a disharmony between the (2004) proposals by the DBE to transform learning and teaching using ICTs and, 20 years later, how the reality of teachers' contexts makes these proposals seem difficult to attain. Some teachers are resistant and appear frustrated by their access to both technology and information on the internet. In certain contexts, where the proposals are implementable, other societal ills counter the DBE's good intentions. Recommendations of this study are that there should be support and training of teachers to ensure that they develop the confidence to use technology generally and to use collaborative digital tools to bring an African lens to African literary texts. There needs to be support from the DBE to provide access and security, and there should be transparency in these processes.

Key words: *access, African literature, decolonisation, mindsets, technology in education*

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The South African Department of Basic Education (DBE) has, for some time, aspired to digitise classrooms to develop skills required by an increasingly digitally demanding workplace. In 2004, the Department (then known as the Department of Education) published the *White Paper on e-Education* titled "Transforming learning and teaching through information and communication technologies (ICTs)." It proposed an ambitious statement reflecting the intent of the Department: "Every South African learner in the general and further education and training bands will be ICT capable (that is, use ICTs confidently and creatively to help develop the skills and knowledge they need to achieve personal goals and to be full participants in the global community by 2013" (p.17). From the wording of the DBE document, this was a determined promise by the Department. However, an ambitious plan comes to fruition not through promises but by rigorous implementation.

In addition, the reported drive by the DBE to include more African texts in the literature syllabus (*Sunday Times,*

November 29, 2015, p.5) is a necessary move in light of calls for the decolonisation of teaching and learning and the need for curricula to tap into the thoughts, wishes, languages and practices of local communities and in this way create a sense of belonging to those who have been 'othered' in the past (Higgs, 2000; 2008; Tuhiwai Smith, 2018). This call is supported by the National Curriculum Statement for English Home Language and English First Additional Language (Grades 10-12), where the aim of the South African curriculum is set out as being to "to promote knowledge in local contexts, while being sensitive to global imperatives" (National Curriculum Statement, 2011, p.4). The desire for an inclusive curriculum, one that promotes African literature, is genuine and should be applauded. However, when coupled with the use of digital technology in the classroom, one might argue that access to digital commentaries, study guides and teacher guides that provide a South African lens for analysis, as well as being grounded in the South African context, might not be that prevalent or easily available to teachers on the internet. It is in the light of these two priorities asserted by the Department of Education that we consider the following research questions:

- What are the factors that enable or constrain teachers' access to digital technology?

- How does this limit or facilitate the teaching and learning of African literary texts?

Access to classroom technology

Classroom technology is understood to be any digital technology which is available and commonly used in classrooms, such as: digital texts, videos and games, wikis, blogs, e-books, podcasts, tablets, smartphones, and online resources (Howard, Ma & Yang, 2016). Some of these are more useful for teaching, such as a data projector or a smart interactive board, while others provide opportunities for learning, such as blogs or wikis.

While the Gauteng Province appears to be making steady progress with technology rollout, most visibly through smartboards, overall advancement seems to be slow (Mahao, 2019) considering that 2004, when this promise was made, is almost two decades in the past. The White Paper highlights six key factors in promoting ICTs in the classroom: 1. creating access to learning opportunities; 2. redressing inequalities; 3. improving the quality of learning and teaching; 4. delivering life-long learning; 5. accommodating differences in learning styles; and 6. removing barriers to learning (p.16). The first two factors imply that everyone has access to digital technology, despite the diverse socio-economic backgrounds that must be accommodated (Mahao, 2019).

The type of classroom technologies used in different learning contexts may depend on affordability and availability. In addition, the physical location of teachers and learners could mean unequal opportunities are available to access technology (Janks et al., 2014; Lembani et al., 2020), and this is a reality across the world, not only in the South African context (Waller, 2008).

A Botswana study also found some reluctance to use technology among pre-service teachers who were on Teaching Experience. They cited that the environment in the schools was not conducive as the technologies were not readily available for use in the classrooms but were housed elsewhere (Batane & Ngwako, 2017). The pre-service teachers found the process of gaining access to the technology tedious and discouraging. This demonstrates that even where technology

is available for use, if it is time-consuming to get it to the classrooms or there is not enough support in the use of it, such a context is not enabling.

Access to technology at school is even more important in contexts where socio-economic realities at home deny learners the opportunity for digital exposure, and schools should compensate for this unequal access (Reddick et al., 2020; Warschauer & Matuchniak, 2010). A digitally equipped school, therefore, can help break down the barriers that increase the digital divide. The DBE's proposals regarding the use of technology in schools is a way to ensure that teachers do not continue to teach in the same old ways but that they embrace the digital tools and pedagogy that learners can connect with (Jukes, McCain & Crocket, 2010). Apart from their lesson-based value, general skills and competencies in different technologies are sought after by the modern workplace (Karsenti & Kouawo, 2015) and this is another reason to strive for digitally rich classrooms. Sarker et al., (2019) suggest that "technology should be integrated at all levels of curriculum development, input of learning process, procedure of learning process, and delivery method for getting full benefits from technology leveraged learning methods" (p.457). This calls for alignment between government policies on technology and the school settings where they are implemented. Access to technology is complicated and schools might not have equal access to the physical, digital, human, and social resources necessary to impact the learning, skills and knowledge required to succeed in the 21st century globalised world (Buckingham, 2007; Jenkins et al., 2007; Seiter, 2005). The need for this alignment attained a much higher significance in 2020 when Covid-19 shut schools worldwide and heightened the prominence of digitalisation prompting teachers to adapt to online teaching to maintain connection with their learners (Konig, Jager-Biela & Glutsch, 2020).

The availability of technology at a school does not imply that everyone is adept at using it or that things can shift in positive ways. As Sutherland, Robertson & John (2009, p.6) observe, "truckloads of hardware (however shiny) arriving at a school will not necessarily change much for the better. Teachers are key and effective; professional development is the crucial element." Unless teachers are trained in the use of technology and are also willing to experiment with its use in their classrooms, its presence in schools means little.

Research shows that while some teachers in South African schools have received some digital professional development, others have never (Olika, Moses & Sibongile, 2019). The lack of assistance when needed adds to what has been termed 'technology anxiety' which has been observed to be one of the factors leading to non-use of technology by teachers (Adukaite, van Zyl & Cantoni, 2016).

Access to African literature online

African literature in this paper refers to texts prescribed by the DBE, written by African authors, and set primarily in Africa. Sometimes the settings may be transcontinental. An African writer in the context of this study is a citizen of the African continent regardless of colour or race. There is a perception that there are fewer online resources available relating to African and South African literary texts. One of the purposes of the PhD study on which this paper is based, was to examine the reality of this perception and to assess whether teachers of English can access texts and resources online to support their teaching of literature. If technology is linked to power in the ways in which it shapes knowledge (Janks et al., 2014) it should

play an important role in increasing access to knowledge of African literary texts, particularly providing access to African ways of analysing and focusing on these texts. To embrace decolonisation, critical questions about whose knowledge, history and creativity are important as these contribute to decolonial thinking (d'Abdon, Byrne & Newfield, 2021; Gray, 2017) and the availability of these African texts online, along with discussions on the context and history of these texts, are essential.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The DBE's proposal for technology use in schools is perhaps due to the realisation that the social realities and cultural experiences of young people have become increasingly digital and that their futures will involve technology, irrespective of career paths (Beavis, Dezuanni & O'Mara, 2017; Ra et al., 2019). This suggests that these realities and experiences of young people require technologically savvy teachers to tap into the opportunities provided by digital media and devices. Digitally connected educational communities further enhance these prospects as the theory proposes. Connectivism, although contested as a recognised learning theory, was drawn on to guide the study, as it was found to be able to accommodate teaching and learning where digital media / online resources are used. It creates a space to locate both in-school and out-of-school environments where teaching and learning can occur as long as the digital settings are conducive. According to Dunaway (2011), connectivism

> emphasizes the importance of networked information resources throughout the process of learning. Connectivism acknowledges the role of information technology in the process of accessing information from multiple sources and the development of skills for evaluating connections between different information sources in a dynamic information network (p.676).

Connectivism is situated in the belief that the digital environment requires a fresh perspective on how learning takes place in view of the non-linear manner in which it occurs, and the inextricable link between technology and today's lifestyle. Teachers are also able to harness the power and opportunities provided by digital media to prepare for and execute their lessons. Likewise, learners' access to multiple sources of information means that they develop the ability to weave together bits and pieces from all accessible digital sources to make meaning, provided they have been guided on how to do so and are aware of this benefit. In addition, they need to learn to be critical of the sources of the information they work with.

Siemens (2005), the originator of the theory, believes it is worth considering as a learning theory because, unlike other established learning theories, it shows the relevance of digital devices and media in the classroom. He believes that learning theories should reflect the age in which they are being applied and connectivism, in the context of this study, seems the most applicable theory, especially due to the prevalence of technology in education and life in general.

Although they do not refer directly to connectivism, Whitehead, Jensen and Boschee (2013) also recognise the need to review the common learning theories because of technology penetrating pedagogy like never before. They state that,

> What is required, perhaps, are modern technological pedagogies that are consistent with the technological space we now inhabit. A key for transformation is

> to research and discover how future educators will be able to learn and adapt to tomorrow's pedagogical challenges and opportunities (p.9).

Their stance supports what Siemens suggests, that established learning theories do not speak to the modern technologically assisted pedagogies hence the need to consider emerging theories which connect learning with the technologies that are becoming increasingly available in and outside of the classroom. While connectivism does not suggest that the older theories are obsolete, it appears to imply that a new angle could be more useful in teaching and learning considering current developments where technologies are becoming more common features of the classroom. It is for this reason that it was used to ground this study.

Another important aspect to consider theoretically is that of "mindsets" (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011) to describe how there are differences in competences and practices in relation to the use of digital technology. Some teachers and their learners might display the characteristics of an "insider mindset" in that they are open to the necessary changes and transformation in their practices and communication because of the use of digital technology. Others struggle to change their practice in meaningful ways and have an "outsider mindset." As more demands are made on teachers to become digitally literate, they are being asked to teach learners who have differing levels of digital skills and are often more adept at the use of digital technology than they, themselves, are. Prensky (2001, p.2) argues that teachers can be called "digital immigrants" in relation to their learners who are "digital natives." Brown and Czerniewicz (2010, p.357) however, argue that the binary and othering set up by Prensky's terms are concerning as "this polarisation makes the concept less flexible and more determinist in that it implies that if a person falls into one category, they cannot exhibit characteristics of the other category." Many teachers are anxious about their use of technology (Lei, 2009) and, because they are on the wrong side of the digital divide, do not feel comfortable in using classroom technology (Gennrich & Janks, 2013).

RESEARCH METHODS

As indicated, this paper is based on a larger study which explored the use of digital media and devices in the teaching and learning of African literature (in English) texts in selected Gauteng schools. The research method adopted for this study was a qualitative case study approach which follows the interpretivist paradigm. It constructs the experiences of individuals (Merriam, 2001) and positions these experiences within the field of the intended curriculum by the Department of Basic Education and the provision of digital equipment by the Gauteng Department of Education. Using the interpretivist paradigm allowed us to come to a deeper understanding of participants' perceptions (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). It helped us to understand how the teachers construct their own meanings from their experiences within their contexts and this gave us insight into the phenomena involved in teachers' engagement with digital technologies to research African literature and to help them in enabling learning about African literature using digital technologies (Sefotho & du Plessis, 2018).

Data collection and analysis

Data was collected primarily through semi-structured interviews and environmental assessments during 2017 and 2018. While the larger study had employed questionnaires and observations as well, the data focused on in this paper is

based on interviews and environmental scans. These environmental scans were conducted to establish both the digital tools available at the two schools under study and security issues around the tools. The interviews were recorded and analysed using thematic and content analysis.

The participants and study context

This study centres around the stories of two teachers working in different schools, Lephuthi and Justina, and their use of digital technology in the teaching of African literature. They were selected for discussion due to the differing nature of their schools' advances in digital tools and the fact that they have different challenges regarding technology implementation in their respective schools. During data collection, Lephuthi was 42 years old and had been teaching at Lepae Secondary School for nine years. Lepae is a public, no-fee-paying school in Orange Farm, a township situated 45 km south of Johannesburg. Lephuthi's highest qualification is a Bachelor of Arts (B.A) degree with a PGCE and also holds a qualification in Public Relations. Justina was 29 years old and holds a B.A in Psychology. She was teaching at a fee-paying school, Johnson High School, and had six years of teaching experience. Johnson High School is in Winchester Hills, about 10 km south of Johannesburg. The environmental scan showed that both schools were fenced and had security check points at the main gate where visitors had to report before proceeding to the office.

Being a no-fee-paying school, Lepae's financial requirements are catered for by the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE). During data collection, the school had the following digital/technological equipment:

- smartboards in Grade 12 classrooms
- media centre with two partitioned sections housing a library and a room with a digital projector; and laptops and tablets.

From the listed items above, it may appear as if Lepae Secondary School is well-equipped with digital devices, but the reality paints a different picture as discussed in the Findings section of this paper.

Johnson High School, unlike Lepae, is a fee-paying school. Fee-paying schools also rely on the fees they charge to provide additional equipment. The Wi-Fi connectivity at Johnson is subsidised by the GDE. Johnson High School invests heavily in technology. They have the following equipment:

- laptops
- well-resourced-computer laboratories with Wi-Fi access
- digital projectors – travelling and fixed
- desktops
- whiteboards.

Justina's view of the equipment provided at her school is as follows:

> *Our school management team works exceptionally hard to ensure that educators have all the electronic resources that they need. Whiteboards are available for installation should the educator need it. We have access to laptops and travelling projectors should our classrooms not have one installed.*

The technological gap between the two schools is clearly visible, especially regarding Wi-Fi connectivity which places Johnson High School at an advantage as far as quick access to information is concerned.

FINDINGS

Because this study focuses on the importance of access to technology and access to information about African literature on the internet in the way it enables teaching and learning, it is these themes that are emphasised in the following discussion.

Access to the Internet

Fees are an important variable in thinking about the capital the school has, as without them, it could mean a school could be wholly dependent on the DBE to supply and upgrade facilities and equipment. Additional income, in the form of fees, could give a school increased leverage to provide more digital facilities for staff and learners. The observation that wealthier schools (such as Johnson High School) spend more on technological resources than poorer schools (Zucker, 2008) is a relevant consideration in the discussion about these two schools and reflects what happens in terms of access more broadly.

Lepae Secondary School has no access to Wi-Fi or broadband internet. All facilities at the school are supplied by the GDE which, hierarchically, is answerable to the DBE. The undertaking made in the 2004 White paper on e-Education would reasonably raise expectations that internet connection would be one of the key priorities by the DBE to enable more meaningful and functional access to technology by teachers and learners. The access to technology, however, is limited by the fact that Lepae is a no-fee school implying it has a small pool of resources and is thus unable to finance internet roll-out. This could also be because Lepae is situated in a township where basic infrastructure is limited. The lack of internet access is reflective of the general environment in which the school is located. The poor infrastructure in the environment in which the school is situated and the mismanagement of resources is frustrating as Lephuthi indicates:

> *We are just entering the digital world in our schools and there are still challenges like electricity cuts, theft and general lack of management of the resources we already have.*

The image he creates in this statement is one of being new and only now *"entering the digital world"*. Also, instead of the environment being viewed as enabling he positions himself (and others) as being blocked by the many challenges faced in his context.

Lack of confidence and uncertainty

Lephuthi's confessed lack of confidence and uncertainty accompany his use of technology for teaching. This appears to be related to the level of access he feels he has to support and training. He says:

> *Since I am not very advanced, my confidence is still not very perfect. I do have a laptop and I use a smartboard but when I am using a smartboard, I feel like maybe I am not sure of certain things.*

The repetition of the words *"not very"* and *"not sure"* emphasise Lephuthi's insecurity in relation to the use of the smartboard. Upon being questioned further on whether his school provides any kind of assistance, he continued:

> *We were given some lessons in the past so that we could learn the basics of using the smartboards going forward, but the people who are here are not helping us. They are just here to control or manage the use of the smartboards.*

Judging by his tone and grim facial expression, Lephuthi mirrored a sense of frustration and helplessness that he and the other teachers were not able to get immediate assistance with the smartboards whenever they required it, suggesting reliance on others. The 'people' that he is referring to are those that teachers can call upon whenever there are technical issues or repairs required for the smartboards. Control of technology appears to be more important than support and development for teachers in the use of technology.

Justina, on the other hand, appears to find technology useful in both planning and delivery of her lessons:

> *These tools are extremely useful in lesson planning and delivery because they provide a perspective (at least some do) that is different to one's own and thus supplement what one already knows. This enables me to be fully prepared and to provide every opportunity for the learners to learn effectively*.

Her use of *"extremely useful*" and *"enables me"* suggest her confidence in the use of the technology and her mindset shows how she is open to the affordances the technology gives her. She also, however, hints at a critical stance she takes in relation to the information she accesses: *"they provide a perspective (at least some do) that is different to one's own."* This suggests that she does not blindly accept the views she reads and is able to assess whether the information she finds on the internet is useful – an important digital literacy skill. She goes into more detail about the importance of being discerning in dealing with information from digital sources: *"You always have to check the resources carefully because some contain false and misleading information as nobody regulates what is posted."* This suggests that access to material on the internet, in her view, might add to the teacher's workload as the concerted cross-checking and verification of the truthfulness of the information, before it can be disseminated in class, can be demanding.

Resistance to the use of technology

Apart from lack of technology in schools, open resistance to it may exist even where it is plentiful. Managing attitudes is another important variable apart from ensuring that all schools have access to technology. On whether there is any resistance to using technology among some teachers at his school, Lephuthi said the following:

> *Yes, I have seen it, it is there. They try to criticise the government or the department saying they are behind tenderpreneurship. But when they mention tenderpreneurship it shows that they are refusing but usually it's about ignorance that they don't use technology. Some teachers feel like it's hard to change. But once you are using it, it is interesting.*

Lephuthi raises some interesting issues here. Firstly, the use of the word *'tenderpreneurship'* reflects negativity, and the term usually refers to business dealings where certain people are favoured to supply government departments with goods or services. The belief is that suppliers win the tender because they are close to influential people in government. Whether or not this is true is another matter, but the fact that it is mentioned implies that the perception is held among some teachers that the introduction and provision of technology by the DBE is based on corrupt and opportunistic imperatives rather than those that lead to real change that can benefit teachers and learners. This seems to affect teachers' attitudes towards openly embracing government's attempts to provide technological facilities at schools. Lephuthi seems to imply that this attitude

is just an excuse used by teachers who find it *'hard to change'*, in other words, those with a "closed mindset" (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011). By using 'they' he appears to be setting himself apart from this kind of thinking. He ends by indicating that using technology '*is interesting'* suggesting a contrast in his view of technology as opposed to other teachers, 'they'.

The ubiquitous presence of technology, particularly powered by the wider accessibility of smartphones, may give the impression that everyone has embraced it and its use (Mahao, 2019). However, Lephuthi's response, even though it represents an individual viewpoint, shows that there is still some resistance to technology either driven by ignorance in teachers' use of it or more complex and underlying perceptions of the politics of tendering for the supply of digital facilities.

Justina discussed teachers' attitudes to technology in her school. When asked whether resistance to its use is related to the age of teachers, she responded:

> *I think that it is not age but proficiency that determines one's attitude towards the use of technology. People who do not have adequate knowledge of how to use it will be less enthusiastic about using it regardless of age. If a person is exposed to something and the benefits of using it, they will develop the confidence to use it as often as they can.*

Justina seems to link an "insider mindset" (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011) to proficiency, knowledge, exposure to benefits which will develop confidence, rather than age or what Prensky (2001) refers to as being a "digital immigrant." Because the management of the school invests in technology and appears to value it as a tool to enable connectivity and thus to facilitate teaching and learning, she focuses on teachers who can develop confidence. It appears that there is a link between the school's provision and attitude to technology and that of the teachers.

It is interesting to note the different attitudes and how they relate to whether the technology has been provided by the DBE or not. When provided by the DBE, the technology is viewed with suspicion but when the school management has shown a willingness to use fees to provide technology, the exposure to technology seems to enable a more positive mindset.

Crime and vandalism

While the situation at Lepae Secondary School suggests challenges with access to technology, the socio-economic reality of the school and its environment also appear to have their own negative ramifications. A follow-up email inquiry with the head of the English department at the school revealed a lot more on why digital facilities were lacking. The HOD wrote an email which shared the following information:

> *The school is well looked after by the state. The only hiccup that I have noticed is the scourge of vandalism. There have been multiple incidents of vandalism at Lepae. In 2012 to be precise, a security guard was shot dead, and sixty computers were looted. In 2016, fifty tablets were stolen. Basically, that is the reason why the school appears not to be improving in terms of technology or rather IT.*

It is ironic that the HOD starts by saying that the school is *"well looked after."* During the environmental scan taken at the school when data was collected, the dilapidation of classroom furniture, along with missing desks and

chairs, was visible. The explanation provided was that it was the result of vandalism by the community. This reflects the broader location in which the school is situated. What is noticeable in this account from the HOD is how vandalism and even violence seem to have become the norm. It is described as a *"hiccup."* The shocking details of the death of the security guard and the looting of so much equipment is almost glossed over and seen as part of the reality of the school's context. While the GDE was doing its bit to ensure the school was well-looked after, some community members seemed determined to deprive the teachers and learners of facilities they could not function optimally without, and this was seen as a norm.

Lephuthi's situation at Lepae Secondary School may represent many others where policies and goals at government level are unsynchronised with the realities on the ground where these have to be operationalised.

Access to African texts and information on these texts

Justina laments the scarcity of online resources on African literature in comparison to Western literature. She thinks the lack of resources on African literature works against its inclusion when it comes to selection of texts by the teachers:

> *When teachers choose set books, they usually choose basing themselves on availability of resources because it's very difficult to teach when you don't have resources as that means you are relying on your own interpretation and there is no standardisation for learners. We used to teach 'Four Plays' and 'Cry Freedom' and it was so difficult to get resources for those texts and when we did moderation with other schools, the answers differed.*

What appears to be at issue here is a perception that the lack of standardisation and differing answers are a challenge in the moderation of examinations and tests. Justina seems to think that having resources available on the internet on African literary texts might overcome this. She appears not to consider that there might be resources available with differing perspectives and interpretations.

This is seemingly contradictory of what Justina expressed earlier, that the online tools provide "*a perspective ... that is different to one's own and thus supplement what one already knows."* She seems to be conflicted between wanting to access different points of view and interpretations of the texts she teaches but notes the challenges this brings in standardisation of answers for examination purposes. She appears to advocate that the resources that teachers should refer to online should be provided by the DBE which would alleviate the challenges faced with the lack of consistency in interpretation.

Despite these difficulties, Justina is happy that the DBE has chosen more African texts:

> *Actually, I like that the department is prescribing more African literature, but what I have a problem with is not availing resources because if you prescribe something, you need to make sure that resources are available for teachers to use in the classroom.*

Justina, at the time of the study, was teaching *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe to the Grade 11 Home Language (HL) group, and *Mother to Mother* by Sindiwe Magona to the Grade 10 HL class. She claimed difficulty in accessing resource material on both texts. A random internet search on these two texts found that there are several resources and study guides available online for both texts. This

is understandable in the case of *Things Fall Apart* as it was written in 1958 and is considered a classic. The novel's long-time presence and status in African and world literature has resulted in various commentaries being available for it. For *Mother to Mother*, there are fewer guides available but there appear to be study guides posted by other teachers on the internet.

What these online searches demonstrate is that while there are many free study guides to download for some texts, others are not freely available and have to be bought. This means that teachers may be inclined to use free material if it is available and only buy if the schools assist financially to purchase material issued by publishing companies. Also, none of these study guides appear to be endorsed or supported by the DBE.

DISCUSSION.

The findings of this study confirm the importance of access to digital technology in supporting the inclusion of African literary texts in classrooms in South Africa. The well-intentioned policies of the DBE in South Africa are counteracted by the realities that exist in some schools. A school like Lepae Secondary School, which relies heavily on government subsidy due to its no-fee-paying status, may not be able to acquire much technology on its own without government assistance. Johnson High School on the other hand, is an example of a school with self-generated funds to spend. Although the school has access to fewer examples of classroom technology, it appears to thrive more because of the reliable provision of Wi-Fi and the internet and there also seem to be no noticeable examples of vandalism of property or the theft of the technology at this school. For this reason, the digital divide may continue to widen between the haves and have-nots with consequential realities of exposing learners to dissimilar technological contexts albeit within the same city or province.

One of the key factors in why not everyone has access considering this, is the physical location and socio-economic status of schools, which results in unequal opportunities for both teachers and learners to access technology (Ribble & Bailey, 2007; Akman & Mishra, 2010). In a poor socio-economic environment where schools are expected to support learners who may not have access to digital technology at home, schools need more than government support in the supply of technology.

Another important constraint is the exposure to crime and violence that comes from the increased use of digital technology in schools. Schools need support in dealing with the security issues that arise. They need support in protecting the technology from criminals and vandals.

Government support can be viewed with suspicion as corruption is associated with the acquisition of the technology and might extend to the provision of security. Teachers seem suspicious and this is used as an excuse to avoid using the technology with confidence. There needs to be more transparency in the processes followed to acquire technology.

Teachers' mindsets need to shift in relation to the availability of resources on African texts online. There needs to be more openness to collaboration in the creation of online texts and less reliance on being provided with standard, uniform answers. Teachers themselves should be enabled and given the confidence to provide insights from an African perspective on the history, context, and interpretation of the set texts. Teachers should tap into the learning that Connectivism argues is enabled by digital technology. One of the key principles suggested by Siemens (2005) is that learning and knowledge rests in the diversity of opinions and that teachers and

their learners should make connections between these information sources. Teachers who have long taught in environments where 'correct' answers are provided and clear guidelines given on how and what to teach might find themselves floundering when encountering the variety and wealth of information available online. It is the skill of making connections, evaluating sources, and creating knowledge and sources themselves that needs to be nurtured moving forward. Teachers need to shift from being reliant on others' knowledge to being co-creators (with their learners) of new knowledge of the interpretation of the African texts which is what the digital sphere enables. The use of collaborative digital tools such as Wikis, blogs and WhatsApp groups should be tapped into in order to build this knowledge and expedite the inclusion of African texts in literature lessons.

Whoever may end up taking the lead in this regard, it is observable – based on the sampled teachers' responses – that there is the general perception that there is a gap to fill to give African literary texts more online presence to help teachers and learners as they navigate their way through the texts. While government's decision to prescribe more African literary texts is a positive move towards affirming the significance of home-grown content, the snag could be that teachers may overlook their own power and continue to rely on others and so will choose to teach African texts where there is set and approved online resources available to avoid the frustration of having to choose a route that is filled with uncertainty and doubt.

CONCLUSION

This paper has recognised the value of the imperatives to include more African literary texts in the curriculum and the importance of the increased use of digital technology by teachers to support their teaching and learning. The connection between these two priorities is clear. However, the constraints faced by teachers in both the use of technology and the access to resources on African literary texts continues to constrain. Limited funding, limited support, crime and violence are contextual factors which continue to make the use of digital technology to support the inclusion of African literary texts difficult. The mindset shift that is required for teachers to embrace the use of digital technology is seemingly hampered by their perceptions on the integrity of the processes used to procure technology, their insecurities about the use of digital technology and a limited understanding of the value in accessing a range of resources, each presenting differing perspectives and lenses with which to approach the texts. It appears that government policies are not synchronised with the availability of resources and teachers' digital competencies. A lot more is required to translate the technology policy into a functioning document that is cognisant of South Africa's different socio-economic settings and teachers' mindsets and abilities.

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