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LEAP
Learn English Audio Project

Supporting the learning and teaching of English language in Southern Africa during Covid-19:

An evaluation of the 'Learn English on WhatsApp' and 'Learn English on DBE TV' projects

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1 Executive summary

Funded by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), the British Council and Department of Basic Education's (DBE) *Learn English on WhatsApp* programme aims to contribute to a reduction in the negative impact on educational outcomes during the Covid-19 crisis, especially English language and literacy, in five Southern African countries: Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe. Quality learning materials are offered on WhatsApp, and have also been repurposed into multimedia for TV shows (for South Africa), aimed at EFAL learners through Grades R to 4.

This report covers the evaluation of the programme up to 31 December 2020. The programme is continuing in 2021; the findings reported on here therefore correspond to a mid-line evaluation.

Research question (RQ) findings:

- RQ1: Do the delivery platforms (WhatsApp and TV) enable those with limited digital access (e.g. urban and rural poor) to access the learning materials?
  The fieldwork findings indicate that the WhatsApp tool provides those with limited digital means access to learning materials.
- RQ2: What are the main barriers and enablers to accessing the learning materials for those with limited digital access?
  The main barriers are data poverty preventing access to the WhatsApp materials, and a lack of electricity and relatively low uptake of the TV channel. Enablers are the engaging, accessible and flexible nature of these multimedia materials.
- RQ3: Has the project helped women provide additional learning opportunities to children under their care during the pandemic, and if so, how?
  93 per cent of the remote fieldwork interviewees were female; almost all reported that the materials had provided additional learning opportunities to children under their care, and that they felt more confident to be directly involved in these children's learning. Parents/guardians in both urban and rural areas felt that the learning materials added value to their children's learning.
- RQ4: Have the learning materials helped women (including women from female headed households) face home-schooling challenges, and if so, how?
  Many of the female interviewees reported that *Learn English on WhatsApp* were the only materials they were able to use with the children under their care during the pandemic. Access to a learning tool that could be used easily and flexibly around their often demanding work schedules was a key aspect of this.
- RQ5: Have the learning materials provided support to those who had no or limited access to learning materials during the pandemic, and if so, how?
  The majority of respondents stated that the materials had been supportive during the pandemic, as they had received little, inconsistent or no materials from schools. In particular, the low data demands of the materials made access easier.
- RQ6: Are the learning materials themselves perceived as useful?
  All of the interviewees, and over 80 per cent of the survey respondents, found the WhatsApp learning materials to be useful. The audio materials, songs and lyrics and African Storybooks were perceived to be the most useful.

In addition:

- 100 per cent of interviewees reported accessing digital materials (WhatsApp), although data poverty was an issue for some.

- 84 per cent of WhatsApp survey respondents reported that the materials had helped their children learn during school closures.
- 100 per cent of interviewees reported that the WhatsApp materials had been useful, especially in improving children's reading comprehension, and approved of the learning content.

In summary, the evaluation findings indicate that:

Parents, guardians and teachers (particularly those in disadvantaged or remote areas) have been equipped with quality language and literacy learning opportunities through the WhatsApp materials and the TV show

AND ...	the resources have provided an accessible digital mechanism via WhatsApp, although access to the TV show has been more challenging to ascertain
AND ...	follow-up support for the WhatsApp service will be provided during the 2021 phase of the project
AND ...	children have had a greater chance of continuing their education during lockdown / partial school closures
BECAUSE ...	they have had access to high-quality resources delivered in a familiar format, and therefore more children may develop language and literacy skills more effectively

This suggests that the *Learn English on WhatsApp* programme has contributed to a reduction in the negative impact on educational outcomes during the Covid-19 crisis, especially English language and literacy, in a segment of the population to date. The WhatsApp materials had reached 22,714 users by the end of December 2021. The project could reach more beneficiaries in 2021 through a wider dissemination strategy, and suggestions for this are included in the Recommendations section of this report.

2 Introduction

The Consultants-E (TCE) has carried out the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of the British Council South Africa's *Learn English* materials offered via WhatsApp and a TV show during the time of the Covid-19 pandemic. The aim of this M&E is to evaluate "the use of WhatsApp service and a TV show as mechanisms for reducing education exclusion during lockdown and partial reopening with a focus on parents, guardians and teachers in vulnerable communities" [TOR, p.1]. The programme is currently ongoing and taking place in five countries in Southern Africa: Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe. The TV show is broadcast in South Africa only. This evaluation covers the period of January to December 2020 for the *Learn English on WhatsApp* materials, and December 2020 to January 2021 for the TV show.

This evaluation aims to identify to what extent the project managed to reduce education exclusion by a) formulating research/evaluation questions to measure this; and b) remotely collecting, analysing and triangulating quantitative and qualitative data from the two key groups of stakeholders (parents/guardians and teachers) to substantiate this. Data was collected and analysed separately for WhatsApp and for the TV show, and the effectiveness of each of these channels to reduce education exclusion is discussed in the Conclusion of this report.

The project is currently ongoing; therefore, this can be considered a mid-term evaluation rather than an end line evaluation, and the research questions (see below) are formulated with this in mind. Findings from this evaluation can inform future stages of the project. In addition, support strategies for users (e.g. regular webinars; regular notifications/prompts sent via the WhatsApp delivery platform Turn) are still to be rolled out, and these should form part of a later mid-term and/or end line evaluation. The next M&E phase (e.g. at end line) may be interested in comparing engagement metrics with the 'pre-support' data that is analysed in this evaluation.

3 Project information and aims

The UK FCDO (Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office) has provided funding for the remote delivery of English during the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent school closures via the *Learn English on WhatsApp* project. The main partners are the South African Department of Basic Education (DBE) and the British Council.

As part of its One-HMG strategy for engagement with South Africa's Covid-19 response, the British Council has built on existing content and networks and endeavoured to reduce the impact on the pandemic on learners, parents/guardians and teachers, particularly those from remote or disadvantaged areas. This involves resourcing parents, guardians and teachers with digital home education resources for English First Additional Language (EFAL) in Grades R–4, through a WhatsApp service and through animated TV shows. The project received £85,500 in funding from the FCDO and the DBE secured co-funding from UNICEF to develop the animated TV show. The digital home education resources include an entire curriculum of audio lessons for Grades R–4 EFAL and multilingual storybooks in 17 languages / dialects + English from the African Storybook Project, with accompanying audio developed by the British Council.

Together with the Department of Basic Education of South Africa and the Ministries of Education in neighbouring Southern Cluster countries, the British Council aims to contribute to a reduction in the negative impact on educational outcomes during the Covid-19 crisis especially English language and literacy.

Targets over the full timeframe of the project are:

- 25,000 WhatsApp audience across five countries
- Potential TV show viewership of 1 million (South Africa)
- 25,000 Facebook audience across five countries

The project's Theory of Change is stated as follows:

IF …	parents, guardians and teachers (particularly those in disadvantaged or remote areas) are equipped with quality language and literacy learning opportunities
AND …	the resources are provided through an accessible digital mechanism (e.g. WhatsApp, TV)
AND …	follow-up support is provided
THEN …	children will have a greater chance of continuing their education during lockdown
BECAUSE …	with high quality resources delivered in a familiar format more children will develop language and literacy skills more effectively.

The project outcomes, outputs, evidence and indicators (provided by the British Council) are summarised below.

Table 1: Summary of project outcomes, evidence and indicators

Project outputs	Evidence and indicators
Build the capacity of parents, guardians and teachers (particularly those in disadvantaged or remote areas) to access and use digital resources to provide remote delivery and home education support to children in English First Additional Language (EFAL) during the Covid-19 crisis	% of parents, guardians and teachers that report an increase in the frequency of use of digital materials to support home education and remote delivery after accessing the project resources % of parents, guardians and teachers that report an improvement in the development of children's EFAL skills after accessing the project resources
Develop quality digital language and literacy content: Repurpose and scale-up British Council content for Grades R–4 in English First Additional Language supported by Home language Literacy. Develop new content with DBE and MoEs to provide support to Grades 5+	% of parents, guardians and teachers (particularly those in disadvantaged or remote areas) who approve of the content provided
Establish effective digital content delivery: Set up and manage digital delivery mechanisms (e.g. WhatsApp, TV) that is accessible and user-friendly to South African parents, guardians and teachers (particularly those in disadvantaged or remote areas)	# of parents, guardians and teachers (particularly those in disadvantaged or remote areas) who access the digital content provided
Provide effective follow-up support: Provide parents, guardians and teachers with a successful introduction to digital resources and increase their confidence in using educational materials with children, including ICT troubleshooting, messaging and wrap-around support	% of parents, guardians and teachers (particularly those in disadvantaged or remote areas) who increased capacity to use digital content because of follow-up support
Promote the project to the audience and increase visibility of the intervention: Use social media channels to onboard parents, guardians and caregivers while raising the visibility of the intervention within appropriate channels including the DFID Ed-tech hub	# of parents, guardians and teachers (particularly those in disadvantaged or remote areas) who are introduced to the intervention # of stakeholders who are introduced to the intervention
Conduct and write a monitoring and evaluation: The M&E component will report on the achievement of objectives, value for money and innovation of the project	% of stakeholders that report having a clear understanding of the intervention after reading the monitoring and evaluation report

The M&E findings are presented against these indicators later in the report, and summarised in the Executive summary.

4 Research questions

In order to address the project aims, the following were identified as key research questions (RQs) to ask, in order of importance:

1. **Digital access:** Did this project help urban poor or rural poor?
2. **Impact on women:** Did the project help women battling with home-schooling while working and undertaking the majority of domestic and caregiving responsibilities; women from female headed households?
3. **General education exclusion due to the Covid-19 pandemic:** Did this project provide support to people who did not have access to learning content during pandemic?

Based on these priorities, the research questions for this evaluation were formulated as follows:

Digital access:

- **RQ1:** Do the delivery platforms (WhatsApp and TV) enable those with limited digital access (e.g. urban and rural poor) to access the learning materials?
- **RQ2:** What are the main barriers and enablers to accessing the learning materials for those with limited digital access?

Impact on women:

- **RQ3:** Has the project helped women provide additional learning opportunities to children under their care during the pandemic, and if so, how?
- **RQ4:** Have the learning materials helped women (including women from female headed households) face home-schooling challenges, and if so, how?

Education exclusion:

- **RQ5:** Have the learning materials provided support to those who had no or limited access to learning materials during the pandemic, and if so, how?
- **RQ6:** Are the learning materials themselves perceived as useful?

5 Methodology

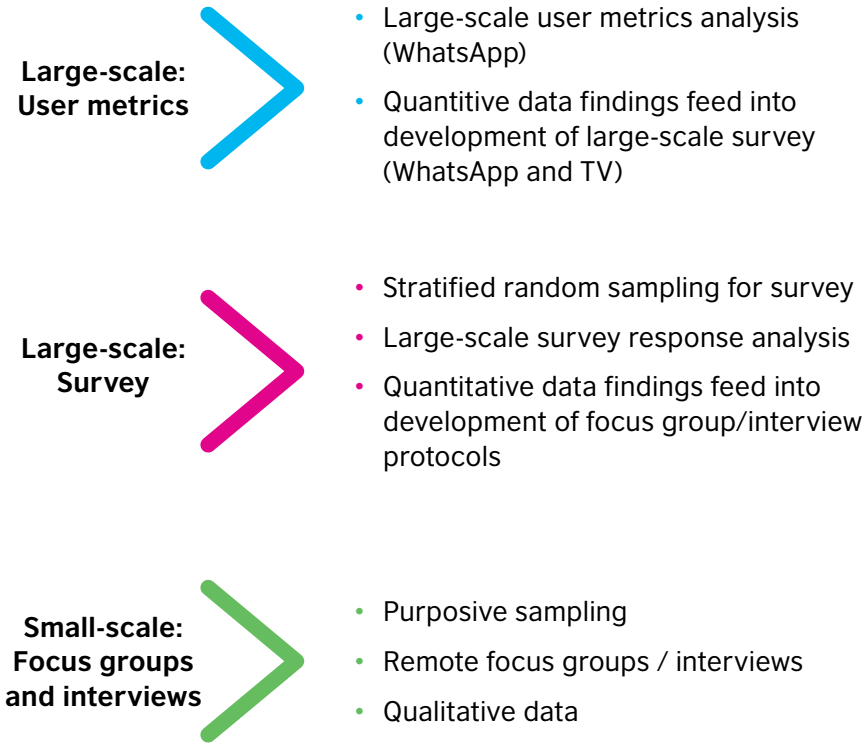
5.1 Research design

The M&E followed a mixed methods approach, within a research design that followed a staged approach. This involved an initial analysis of the user data available in the Turn platform, followed by the delivery of a simple but large-scale survey to identify individuals representative of the target groups, and to pursue relevant, surprising or interesting topics through qualitative fieldwork, including short structured telephone/WhatsApp interviews. The methodology underpinning this staged research design is as follows:

- Collection and analysis of large-scale quantitative user metrics from the WhatsApp Turn.io API. These metrics, along with the research questions, then informed the development of a large-scale survey delivered via the Turn platform (and via the TV show for viewers).
- The analysis of this large-scale quantitative survey data then allowed us to use stratified random sampling to select stakeholders for focus groups and interviews in each country, including stakeholders from both remote and vulnerable community groups.
- Interviews then enabled a more in-depth collection of qualitative data, and also allowed us to focus on the strengths and challenges in the project.

The overall research design is summarised in the figure below.

Figure 1: Sequential research design summary



5.2 Procedure

The procedure used to collect data for the M&E of the *Learn English on WhatsApp* part of the project consisted of the steps below.

Step 1: Analysis of Turn data

The Turn API collects a minimal amount of user data (username and phone number), and records users' interactions with the learning materials. Despite initial glitches on the Turn website that made downloading the data a longer process than anticipated, TCE's data analyst downloaded the data for 22,714 users up to and including the cut-off date of 22 December 2020.

SQL and R were applied to this large data set to find out the following about *users* and the *materials*, both globally and in the individual countries: numbers of users; numbers of active vs inactive users; monthly enrolment numbers; and user engagement with the various types of materials. These findings are reported in section 6 of this report. In addition, the British Council were interested in knowing to what extent their Facebook campaigns had resulted in sign-ups for the WhatsApp service/materials. Additional analyses of these data were carried out to correlate the impact of Facebook campaigns on uptake/enrolment for the WhatsApp materials.

Step 2: Survey

A short survey with seven multiple choice questions was developed to be delivered to current users of the *Learn English* materials via the Turn platform. A similar survey was developed for viewers of the TV show. The aim of this survey was twofold:

a) To act as a filter to identify people who fit the FCDO needs and RQs above (especially women and the digitally excluded), to then approach these candidates directly for interviews, with consent given by each user in the survey itself.

b) To elicit feedback from users on the perceived usefulness of the *Learn English on WhatsApp* materials, and in the case of TV viewers to elicit feedback on the TV show.

See Appendix 1 for the questions for the WhatsApp and TV show surveys.

The 'Threads' function in Turn allowed for multiple choice questions; when the user responded to one question, the next question was automatically delivered. To increase the survey response rate (typically expected to be between 5 per cent and 10 per cent), the survey was short, simple and clear, and delivered via WhatsApp in order to reach the digitally excluded.

The WhatsApp and TV show surveys were almost identical, and both offered through the Turn platform to enable cross-comparisons, e.g. percentage of rural vs urban users for WA materials vs TV viewers. However, the lack of responses to the TV survey meant that it was not possible to carry out such a comparison.

Step 3: Composition of the sampling frame

The WhatsApp survey activation message was sent via programmatic send in the Turn platform to a sample population of 18,181 WhatsApp users (80 per cent of the total user population of 22,714). The sampling frame was produced using Stratified Random Sampling to ensure proportionality per country, as per Figure 2 below. The sampling frame included users in bands of those who interacted with less than 10 per cent of the materials, on the assumption that those who suffer from digital exclusion are likely to access (and interact with) the materials less frequently. An analysis of all current users showed that the majority of users to date had interacted with less than 10 per cent of the materials overall. This does not necessarily reflect a lack of engagement, but rather that there is a large number of materials. However, to ensure that the sampling frame included mainly less engaged users, it was drawn only from those who had interacted with 10 per cent or fewer of the materials, to deliberately exclude the more highly active users. In short, less interaction was

taken as a proxy for digital exclusion; this was the only metric available in the Turn user data that could function as a proxy.

The user bands in the sampling frame were constituted based on a random selection of:

a) Users who interacted with less than 1% of the materials

b) Users who interacted with between 1% and 5% of the materials

c) Users who interacted with between 5% and 10% of the materials

d) Users who interacted with more than 10% of the materials

A detailed view of the composition of these user bands within the sampling frame is shown in the table below.

Table 2: Composition of user bands in sampling frame

Country	Proportions	Users < 1%	Users 1-5%	Users 5-10%	Users > 10%	TOTAL
Botswana	Total Users	1048	217	30	37	**1332**
	Users Survey	577	120	17	21	**735**
	%	78,68%	16,29%	2,25%	2,78%	**100,00%**
Lesotho	Total Users	1159	210	22	9	**1400**
	Users Survey	639	116	13	5	**773**
	%	82,79%	15,00%	1,57%	0,64%	**100,00%**
Namibia	Total Users	1860	243	26	25	**2154**
	Users Survey	1024	134	15	14	**1187**
	%	86,35%	11,28%	1,21%	1,16%	**100,00%**
South Africa	Total Users	4626	781	129	85	**5621**
	Users Survey	2545	430	71	47	**3093**
	%	82,30%	13,89%	2,29%	1,51%	**100,00%**
Zimbabwe	Total Users	5880	1299	234	261	**7674**
	Users Survey	3235	715	129	144	**4223**
	%	76,62%	16,93%	3,05%	3,40%	**100,00%**

The methodology used to create the sampling frame followed these steps:

a) An analysis of the total users in each country, dividing them into categories/levels of engagement (-1%; between 1% and 5%; between 5% and 10%; 10%+).

b) A random selection within each category that was proportional to the overall engagement figures for each country.

c) A random selection that was proportional to the overall engagement figures for all five countries combined, to compile a final list of 18,181 users for the sampling frame.

d) The usernames and phone numbers of the 18,181 users in the sampling frame were delivered to Turn in Excel format, for a programmatic send of the survey message over the period of a week.

Step 4: Analysis of the survey data

The survey data was analysed to identify users to take part in the interviews, with the data sorted to prioritise users who were closest to the target groups for this M&E, based on the FCDO criteria and RQs outlined in section 4 of this report (urban and rural poor; women; those suffering from digital and education exclusion). Criteria used to select survey respondents for interviews, in order of preference, were as follows:

a) Permission given to be approached for an interview or focus group

b) Living in a rural area

c) Female

d) Child receives school meals *(as a proxy for poverty)*

A list of suitable candidates for the interviews in each country was then shared with the field researchers in each of the five target countries. These users were approached by the remote field researchers via WhatsApp and invited to take part in individual interviews. Mobile data packages were delivered to interviewees a few hours before the scheduled interview calls, as compensation for data usage.

5.3 Limitations

Overview

The initial research design was built around a progressive refinement of queries and methods, each successive stage built on outputs from the previous stage. So we hoped that using a range of SQL queries to interrogate the data from WhatsApp traffic would reveal details of user engagement in terms of days, dates, durations, and content: which content, how much, how long, how often and so on. Typically, this kind of data might reveal gaps and trends. The next stage would have been a large-scale survey or structured questionnaire intended to get short factual responses to fill in the gaps and confirm the trends. The sample size would have guaranteed statistical confidence and meaningful correlations. It would also have provided insights into behaviour and activity and thus laid the foundations for interviews that could explore motivations and values driving the behaviours and activities. An additional analytic activity would have been to look for any responses or trends that were surprising or counter-intuitive in order to use interviews to seek explanations for these. This would then lead in to qualitative research such as semi-structured interviews or focus groups that would explore anomalies, surprises, attitudes and motivation. However, at every stage in the current project, this process was problematic.

There were multiple constraints imposed by the media – WhatsApp for the original data, and in the following stages by the context and lack of resources. However, these constraints do not necessarily undermine the findings, but do require some skill in achieving their maximum potential, and care in wording the findings.

In methodological terms, there are clearly concerns about the number and choice of the respondents. These were that only a very small number of respondents were engaged in the surveys and interviews compared to the total population of learners, though it was possible to identify respondents likely to align with the funder priorities and concerns. Whilst it is not credible to talk in statistical terms about 'averages' or 'standard deviations' of different aspects of behaviour, it is worthwhile to look for indicators of extremes, essentially the edges of the envelope rather the distribution within the envelope, for example any 'best cases' or 'worst cases' that might be instructive. To use an ornithological analogy, we know the range of penguins but not where most of them are. This means that findings have to be quite carefully nuanced in order to be trustworthy and relevant.

Also, in methodological terms, the medium for the interviews – individual WhatsApp audio calls – imposed constraints on organisation and duration of interviews. Longer times are considered

better since they allow a more leisurely approach in which trust and understanding are built up and responses go beyond the obvious. One criterion for choosing the topics, participants and analysis would be to prioritise those that could allow real changes in any aspect of the programme, as opposed to those that are merely descriptive or informative, but these can take long and often require knowledge of the context.

It is worth noting that evaluation is always better when built into a programme, that is, designed at the outset as an integral component, rather than added on once the programme is underway. This should not jeopardise any objectivity and would add a formative dimension as well as allowing the evaluation technologies and methods to be adjusted and refined as the challenges encountered by the programme and the evaluation emerge.

Turn data

The Turn platform is designed to push content to users via WhatsApp. It collects limited data on each user: personal data consists of username and mobile phone number, and user interactions with the materials are logged. This enabled us to analyse users' engagement/interactions with the materials, and which country they were from (by analysing the mobile phone international dialling code number). Geographical location cannot be collected via the Turn platform, so we were unable to identify whether users were rural- or urban-based (one of the key FCDO criteria) in the large Turn data set; instead, users were asked to identify themselves as living in rural or urban areas in the *survey*, to which only a small subset of the total users replied. In short, the data does not allow us to draw conclusions about how many urban versus rural users access the *Learn English* materials.

Interviews / Focus groups

The fieldwork was carried out remotely (online) due to Covid-19 and budgetary restrictions. From a purely logistical perspective a live focus group amongst say three or four people would always be more difficult to schedule and to conduct. The essence of a focus group – as opposed to a group interview – is the interaction amongst participants, each sparking ideas and reactions from each other and giving the facilitator the chance to probe for examples, counter examples and explanations. These can all be more difficult and more stilted online in compressed timescales. Given the demographic under consideration (those suffering from digital exclusion; the rural poor), digital access issues meant that the remote fieldwork had to be carried out via individual WhatsApp audio calls; thus, the fieldwork consisted of individual interviews rather than focus groups.

The interview facilitators were briefed and given a protocol, essentially a script that explained the context and purpose, gained their consent, worked through the topics and provided cues and prompts for digging slightly deeper. Ideally this kind of interview should last 40–50 minutes and allow a progression from straightforward questions to ones requiring some detail or reflection or recollection. Such a protocol ensures some consistency and comparability for a format that is richer than a questionnaire or structured interview. Keeping respondents engaged via a phone/WhatsApp audio call is more challenging than a video interview or a face-to-face interview, and so timescales were dramatically compressed, thereby reducing the value of the responses.

Data from TV viewers

It proved challenging to find participants who had watched the TV show. There were no valid responses to the TV show survey, which meant that participants for interviews could not be recruited by that means. Finding participants for TV show interviews or focus groups required the targeted recruitment of teachers to view and feedback on the show, which meant that random sampling was not possible. Unfortunately, there was little response to repeated requests sent by the British Council to teachers to take part in interviews or focus groups. However, after several weeks, one willing teacher was identified, and she took part in an interview in March 2021. In addition, it was challenging to access accurate data on estimated viewer numbers for the TV show.

These issues have implications for the delivery channels used to disseminate the LEAP materials in video format and are explored further in the Recommendations section.

Survey and self-reporting measures

The survey sent out via the Turn platform to WhatsApp materials users and TV viewers aimed to help identify candidates for the interviews who corresponded to the FCDO's desire to research vulnerable groups, as defined earlier in this report. At the same time, the surveys had to be short and simple to garner as large a response as possible. Identifying users who were a) rural and b) poor therefore had to rely on imprecise self-reporting in the first instance ('Do you live in a rural or urban area?') and a proxy for poverty in the second instance ('Does your child usually receive free school meals?'). The limitations in being able to precisely identify 'vulnerable' users by this means needs to be acknowledged.

Fieldwork

Remote fieldwork due to Covid had to be carried out via individual WhatsApp interviews. TCE used local field researchers in each of the five participating countries, so that interviewees were able to use their local languages in order to express themselves better if needed. This meant that interviews were carried out by five different field researchers (one researcher in each of the five countries) leading to issues of inter-rater reliability, and relative depth in both carrying out and reporting the interviews, especially when comparing fieldwork across the region. However, the interviews were carried out by a single local researcher *within* each country, making in-country comparisons of interview data more reliable.

Every attempt was made to include interviewees who fulfilled the FCDO criteria of female, rural, underprivileged and suffering from digital exclusion, in order to address the evaluation research questions. However, it was not always possible to contact users within this demographic; even though those identified as falling within these categories were identified via the long lists compiled from the survey data and had already given consent to take part in interviews, those approached did not always respond to requests for interviews.

6 WhatsApp and TV show data findings

This section reports on the WhatsApp / Turn platform data for 22,714 users, generated between January 2020 and 22 December 2020. SQL and R were applied to examine the relationships between the users and the *Learn English on WhatsApp* materials, globally and within the five participating countries. Based on the available data, the following areas were analysed:

- Numbers of users
- Numbers of active vs inactive users
- Monthly enrolment numbers
- User engagement with the various types of materials
- Facebook campaigns correlated with WhatsApp service uptake

This is followed by a section analysing reporting on the available TV show data.

6.1 Numbers of WhatsApp users and current engagement

The number of WhatsApp service users was computed by counting the total number of unique mobile phone numbers; the number of users from each of the five participating countries was identified through the prefix of these mobile phone numbers.

Table 3: Numbers and current engagement of WhatsApp users

1. Country	2. Total Users	3. % of Total Users*	4. Currently active	5. Active in last week
Zimbabwe	10631	47%	1385	3533
South Africa	6807	30%	194	1940
Namibia	2515	11%	7	1433
Lesotho	1407	6%	2	20
Botswana	1354	6%	2	16
TOTAL	**22714**	**100%**	**1590**	**6942**

* Percentages have been rounded up or down to whole numbers for ease of reference.

As reflected in columns 2 and 3 in the table above, the majority of users were from Zimbabwe (47 per cent), and the lowest numbers of users were from Lesotho and Botswana (6 per cent each).

To measure the current level of engagement with the materials on the platform, the number of users 'currently active' (i.e. defined as having interacted with the materials within the previous 24 hours on 22 December) was calculated through a timestamp analysis (column 4 above).

Engagement over the week prior to 22 December is shown in column 5 above. If we compare the number of users active in the last week with the total number of users for each country, we see the following engagement metrics for each country:

- Zimbabwe: 33% engagement
- South Africa: 28.5% engagement
- Namibia: 57% engagement
- Lesotho: 1.4% engagement
- Botswana: 1% engagement

The engagement metrics for Lesotho and Botswana are low, while the metrics for South Africa are average, and those for Namibia are high. Possible ways to increase engagement levels in the less engaged countries are discussed in the Recommendations section of this report.

6.2 Numbers of new WhatsApp users per month

The number of new users who joined the Turn platform every month is summarised in the table below in the form of a heat map. The highest number of monthly enrolments (i.e. new users) in each country is indicated in red, followed by orange and yellow; the lowest number of monthly enrolments is indicated in light green and dark green.

Table 4: Numbers of new WhatsApp users per month

Country	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	TOTAL
Botswana	0	6	1	0	1	904	431	11	1354
Lesotho	0	935	8	5	1	450	5	3	1407
Namibia	0	926	15	3	7	1155	253	156	2515
South Africa	279	936	297	2423	44	1595	111	1123	6808
Zimbabwe	4	24	2	15	1	6654	1113	2823	10636
TOTAL	283	2827	323	2446	54	10758	1913	4116	

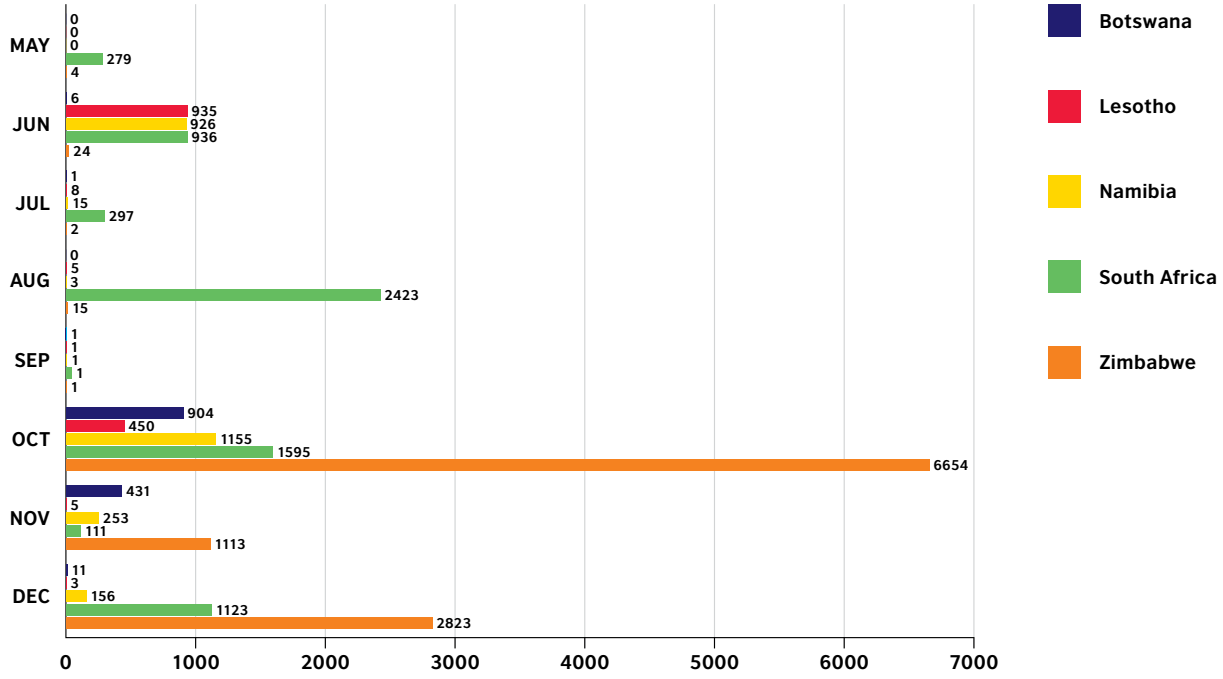
The heat map above indicates the following:

- In **Botswana**, the highest number of enrolments took place in October (904 new users), and the lowest number in July and September (1 new user in each month).
- In **Lesotho**, the highest number of enrolments took place in June (935 new users), and the lowest number in September (1 new user).
- In **Namibia**, the highest number of enrolments took place in October (1,155 new users), and the lowest number in August (3 new users).
- In **South Africa**, the highest number of enrolments took place in August (2,423 new users), and the lowest number in September (44 new users).
- In **Zimbabwe**, the highest number of enrolments took place in October (6,654 new users), and the lowest number in September (1 new user).

When viewed in graph format (see below), it becomes clear that at regional level, the greatest numbers of users enrolled in October, particularly from Zimbabwe; December also showed an overall increase in enrolment numbers. The lowest number of regional enrolments took place in

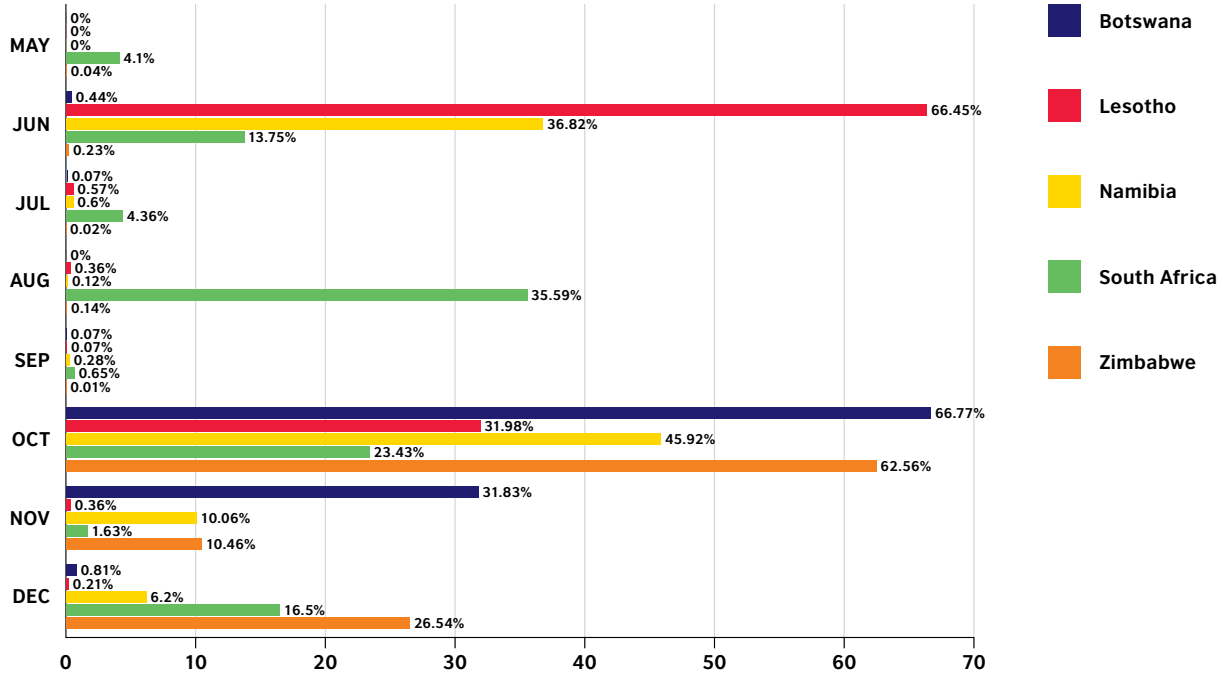
September, May and July. These enrolment figures are compared with British Council Facebook campaigns in section 6.6 below.

Figure 2: Enrolment numbers compared with British Council FB campaigns



In the graph below, percentages rather than absolute numbers are used to compare monthly enrolments; this allows for a more accurate comparison of uptake between countries.

Figure 3: Enrolment percentages compared with British Council FB campaigns



The graph with percentages above indicates the following:

- Of the five participating countries, Lesotho showed the greatest uptick in enrolments in June, followed by Namibia.
- South Africa showed the only significant growth in enrolments in August.
- All five countries showed an increase in enrolments in October, with the greatest growth shown by Botswana, then Zimbabwe and then Namibia.
- Botswana also showed significant growth in enrolments in November compared to the other four countries.
- In December the strongest growth in enrolments was shown by Zimbabwe.

6.3 Use of the WhatsApp materials

This section reports on how users interacted with the *Learn English on WhatsApp* materials on the Turn platform, indicating how many users accessed the various materials (i.e. the About section; songs; audio; stories; and lessons), as well as the level of engagement with each of these materials, up to the cut-off date of 22 December. The 'lessons' option is available in South Africa only, while the 'audio' option is available for the other four project countries.

The number and percentage of users per country who accessed the About section is summarised in the table below.

Table 5: Users who accessed the About section

Country	Users	% of Users
Zimbabwe	487	56%
South Africa	283	32%
Namibia	65	7%
Botswana	28	3%
Lesotho	14	2%
TOTAL	**877**	**100%**

The table above shows that the About section was reviewed most by Zimbabwean users (56 per cent), followed by South Africans (32 per cent). It was reviewed least by users from Lesotho (2 per cent) and Botswana (3 per cent).

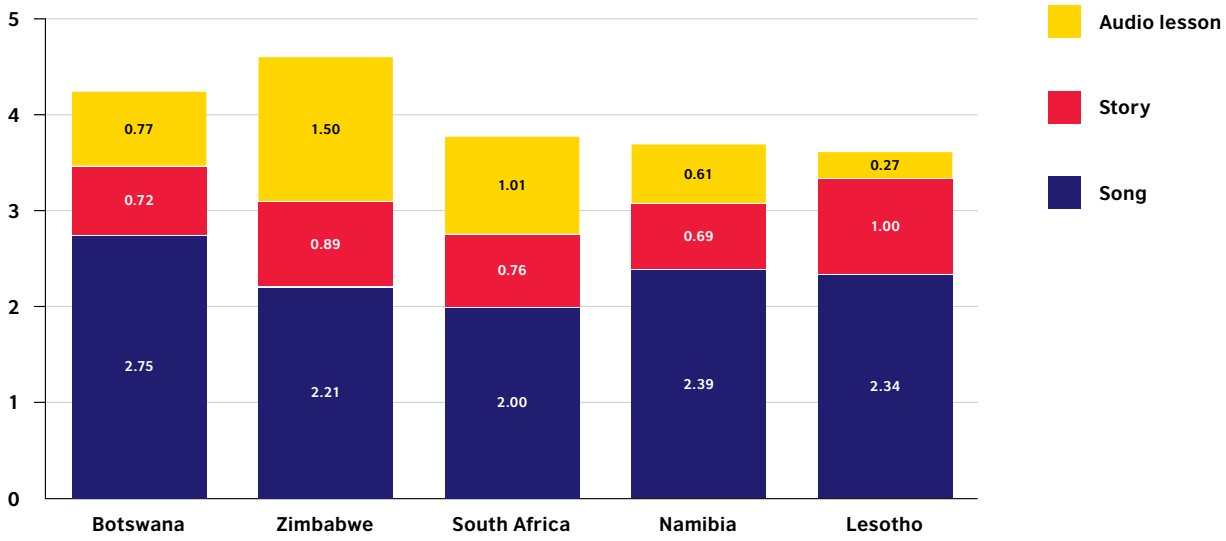
The table below summarises the total number of requests per media type on the Turn platform. In other words, it indicates that users interacted most with the audio materials, followed by songs and finally stories, across the region.

Table 6: Total number of requests per media type

Material format	Nº requests
Audio	28358
Song	17838
Story	7022

Below is a breakdown of user interaction with the materials per country. Note that 'Audio lesson' refers to the *same content* – referred to as 'Lessons' in the South African WhatsApp materials menu, and 'Audio' for the other four countries.

Figure 4: Average requests for materials (%)

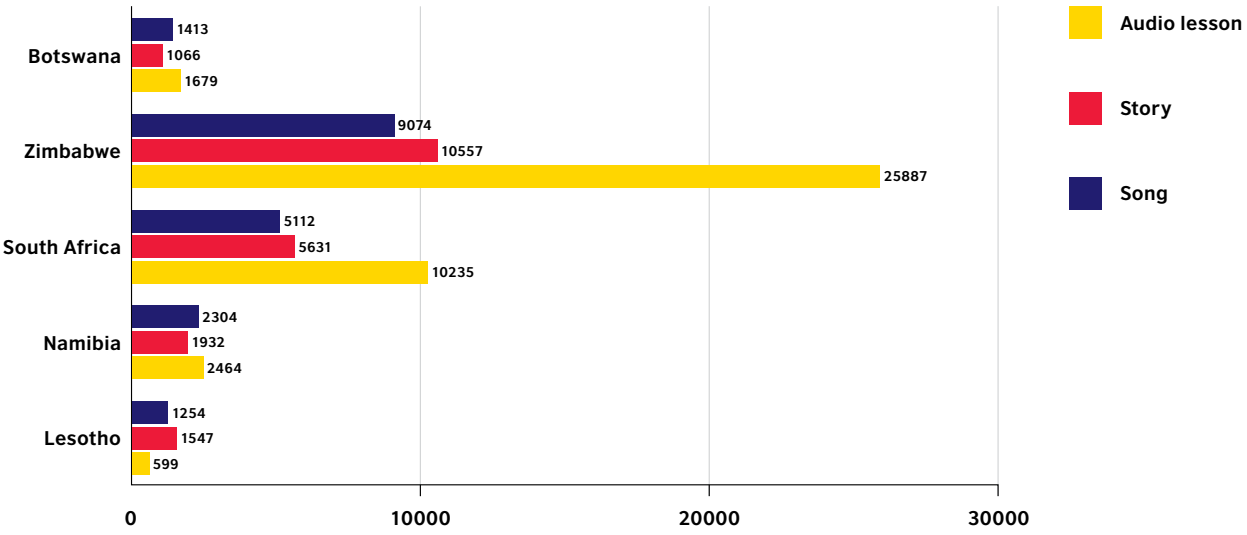


The graph above indicates the following:

- Songs were the most requested materials in all five countries; they were most requested in Botswana, although there was little variation overall between the countries.
- Stories were slightly more frequently requested than audio in Namibia, and in Lesotho. Stories were slightly less frequently requested than audio in Botswana and in Zimbabwe. However, overall, these are small differences, suggesting that stories and audio/lessons were more or less equally requested across the region.
- The audio/lessons were most frequently requested in Zimbabwe followed by South Africa. They were least frequently requested in Lesotho.

Below is a graph indicating the requests for the various types of materials in absolute numbers.

Figure 5: Number of requests for materials



Although the graph above indicates a much higher number of requests from Zimbabwe for audio/lessons material, this is due to the higher numbers of users from Zimbabwe. As we saw in the graph previous to this, viewing these numbers as percentages shows a fairly even distribution of requests for the materials when compared across the five countries.

6.4 Engagement levels with the WhatsApp materials

TCE's data analyst created an iterative script in R to calculate the frequency with which each user interacted with the materials in Turn. User levels of engagement were identified through whether each user had interacted little, moderately or a lot with the materials; the results were aggregated and then filtered by country.

The heat map below indicates the levels of engagement per country within five bands: the percentage of users who engaged with none (0 per cent) of the materials; those who engaged with less than 1 per cent of the materials; those who engaged with between 1 per cent and 5 per cent of the materials; those who engaged with between 5 per cent and 10 per cent of the materials; and those who engaged with more than 10 per cent of the materials. (Note that these engagement levels were also used to identify candidates for the WhatsApp survey.)

Table 7: Engagement level with materials

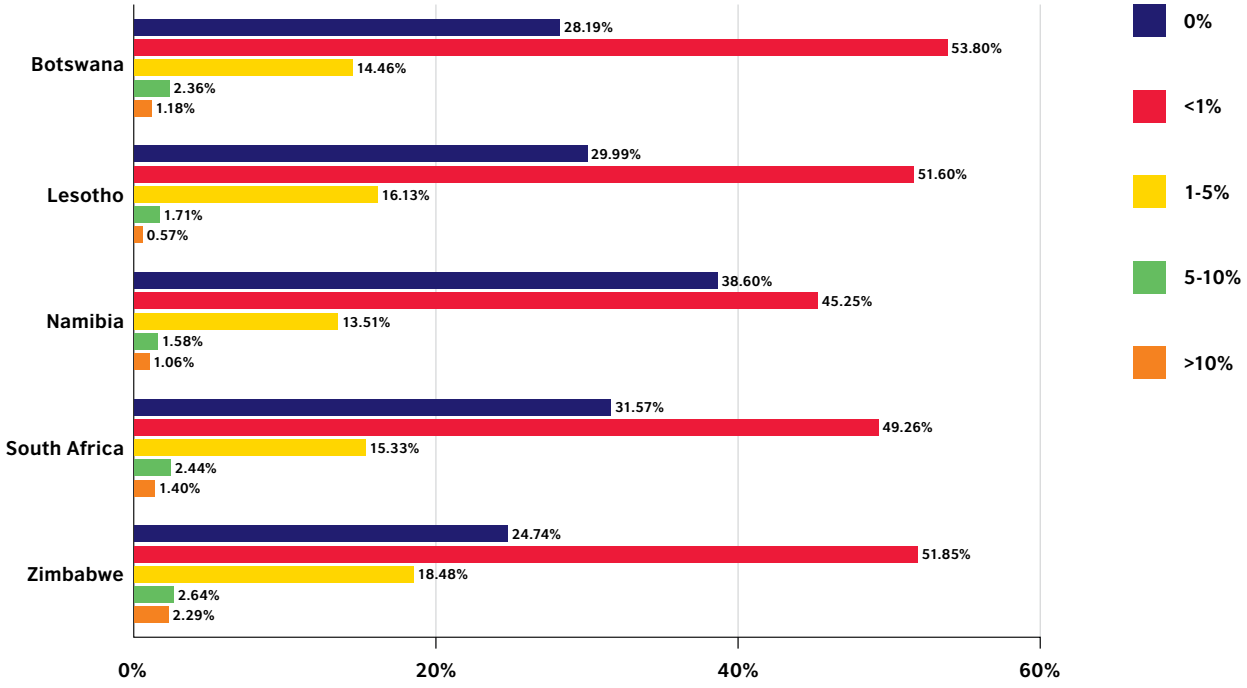
	Engagement level with materials (%)				
	0%	**<1%**	**1-5%**	**5-10%**	**>10%**
Botswana	28,19%	53,80%	14,46%	2,36%	1,18%
Lesotho	29,99%	51,60%	16,13%	1,71%	0,57%
Namibia	38,60%	45,25%	13,51%	1,58%	1,06%
South Africa	31,57%	49,26%	15,33%	2,44%	1,40%
Zimbabwe	24,74%	51,85%	18,48%	2,64%	2,29%

The heat map above shows that the majority of users interacted with less than 1 per cent of the materials, in all five countries. It is also worth noting that a relatively high percentage of users in all of the countries engaged with none of the materials, despite having enrolled in the programme. It will be worth exploring in a subsequent M&E whether engagement levels increase once support strategies are put in place in 2021.

It is also worth noting that for those users who did engage with the materials, the low overall percentages of materials viewed to date (less than 1 per cent; between 1 per cent and 5 per cent) may be due to many users only having joined the programme as recently as October. Given the large number of materials available, and the little time that users had between enrolment and the cut-off date for this M&E, it is reasonable to expect that engagement levels may be higher in a subsequent M&E, and once users have had more time to engage with the materials.

The graph below shows engagement rates in percentages rather than in absolute numbers, which allows for a more accurate comparison of engagement rates between countries.

Figure 6: Engagement level with materials (%)



The comparison graph above indicates that levels of engagement with the materials were broadly similar across the five countries within the five bands previously mentioned (0%; less than 1%; 1% to 5 %; 5% to 10%; more than 10%). The lowest overall engagement is shown by Namibia, and the highest by Zimbabwe, Botswana and Lesotho, with little overall differences between these three countries.

6.5 Hourly and daily engagement levels

This section summarises the numbers of hourly interactions between users and the learning materials in a single day, and the numbers of daily interactions in a single week, obtained by carrying out a timestamp analysis on the user data. Analysing the data in this way provides an understanding of *when* users are most engaged with the learning materials, both on a daily basis and within the week. This can provide valuable insights as to when to time specific engagement strategies, such as the optimum time of day, and day of the week, on which to send out reminders or calls to action.

Hourly engagement levels

The heat map below shows the hours of the day when users are most engaged with the materials in each country. Red indicates the highest number of engaged users, with dark green showing the lowest number.

Table 8: Hourly engagement with materials

	12:00	1:00	2:00	3:00	4:00	5:00	6:00	7:00	8:00	9:00	10:00	11:00
Botswana	58	53	98	190	405	521	666	787	736	747	959	1118
Lesotho	109	90	133	309	562	635	634	651	530	578	547	978
Namibia	110	136	191	197	385	895	1050	1283	1340	2056	1668	1741
South Africa	323	426	691	1128	2185	3148	3767	3631	4080	4122	3942	3919
Zimbabwe	554	632	1010	3190	5459	5779	5726	6136	6276	5863	5583	6183

	12:00	13:00	14:00	15:00	16:00	17:00	18:00	19:00	20:00	21:00	22:00	23:00
Botswana	953	758	683	768	473	681	854	561	333	131	163	38
Lesotho	616	557	542	663	760	741	857	865	729	295	154	77
Namibia	1507	1655	1840	1619	1040	1271	1396	1445	1266	701	387	235
South Africa	3797	3814	4139	4741	4702	4157	4917	4398	3279	2011	953	605
Zimbabwe	6234	6564	6112	7719	7527	7712	7641	6732	3949	1710	944	658

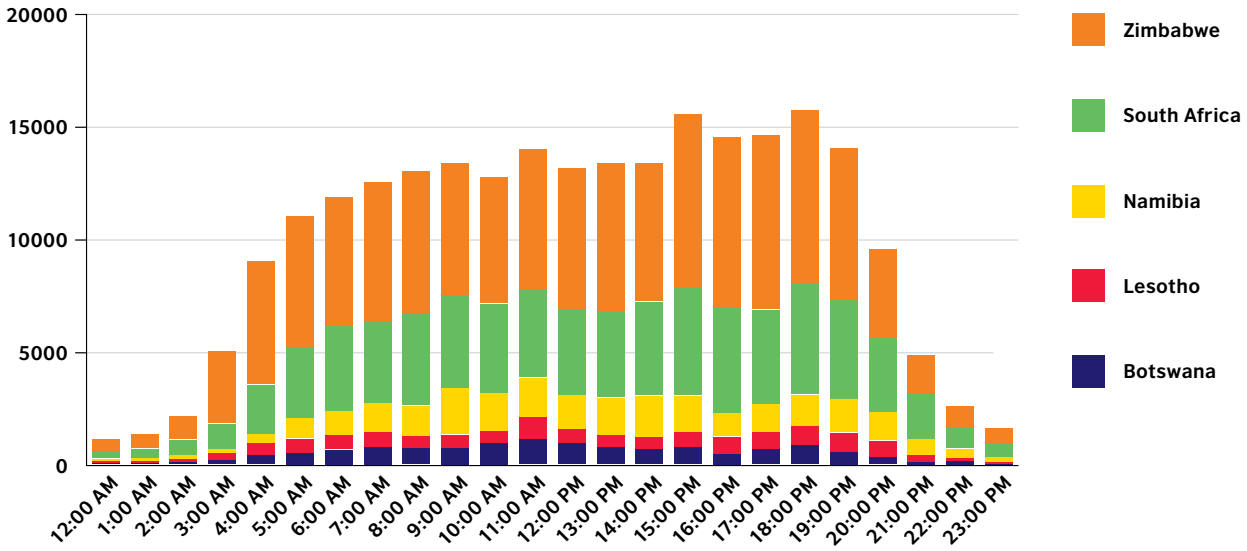
The two heat maps above show:

- In **Botswana**, users are most active between 7am and 6pm, with a 3-hour peak period between 10am and 1pm. 11am sees the most activity.
- **Lesotho** has a peak point at 11am, and another busy period from 6pm to 7pm.
- **Namibia's** peak point is at 9am, with the majority of activity taking place between 9am and 3pm.
- **South Africa's** peak point is at 6pm followed by 3pm and 4pm.
- In **Zimbabwe**, the peak period is between 3pm and 6pm.

As most of the daytime activity noted above took place during the time of school lockdowns due to Covid-19, these peak times may change once children go back to school. It may be worth carrying out regular daily/weekly analyses once that happens, in order to identify what may be different peak points for sending out support messages and calls for action at different points.

The bar graph of hourly use below shows that 3pm to 7pm are the most active times on the platform, with the highest numbers of users overall accessing the learning materials at this time.

Figure 7: Daily use



Daily engagement levels

The heat map below shows the days of the week on which users are most engaged with the materials in each country. Red indicates the highest number of engaged users, with dark green showing the lowest number.

Table 9: Daily engagement levels

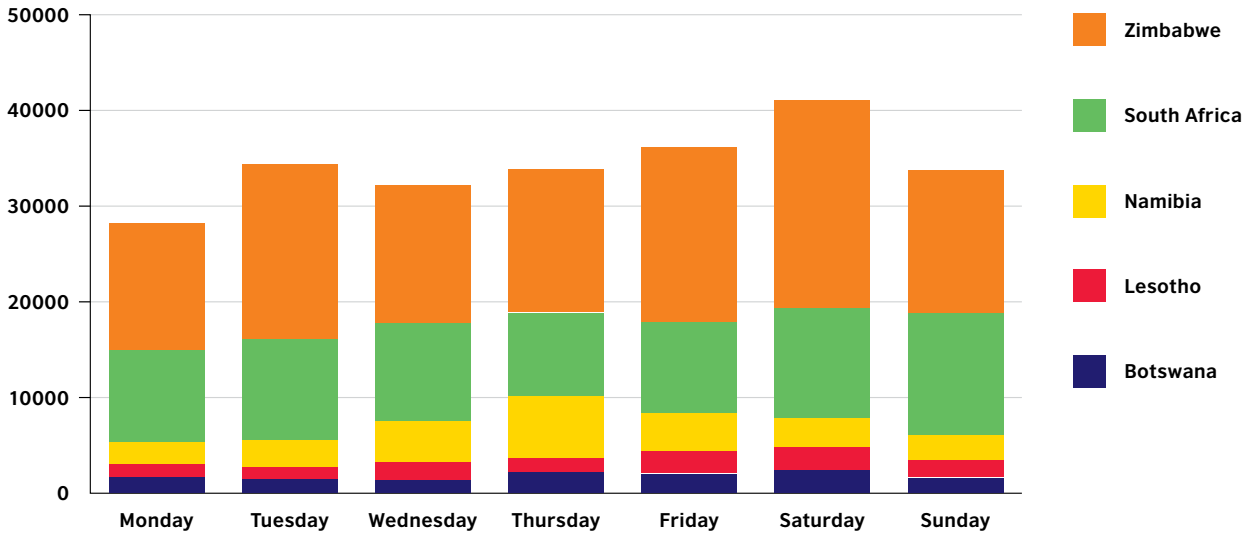
	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Botswana	1632	1488	1411	2161	2046	2379	1617
Lesotho	1426	1280	1850	1527	2335	2390	1804
Namibia	2291	2811	4269	6462	3937	3017	2627
South Africa	9634	10512	10193	8708	9467	11542	12784
Zimbabwe	13231	18303	14412	14917	18328	21749	14933

The heat map shows:

- In **Botswana**, users are most active on **Saturday**, followed by Thursday and Friday. Users are least active on Tuesday and Wednesday.
- In **Lesotho**, users are most active on **Saturday**, followed by Friday. Users are least active on Monday and Tuesday.
- In **Namibia**, users are most active on **Thursday**, followed by Wednesday and Friday. Users are least active on Monday and Tuesday.
- In **South Africa**, users are most active on **Sunday**, followed by Saturday. Users are least active on Thursday.
- In **Zimbabwe**, users are most active on **Saturday**, followed by Friday. Users are least active on Monday.

The bar graph of weekly use below shows that Friday and Saturday are the most active days overall.

Figure 8: Weekly use



6.6 Facebook campaign and WhatsApp enrolment metrics

The British Council ran a number of Facebook campaigns to increase uptake of the *Learn English on WhatsApp* materials, during the period corresponding to this evaluation. It is not possible to directly link individual Facebook click-throughs with WhatsApp enrolments, because we do not have the mobile phone number data in Facebook with which to identify these users. However, we can match Facebook campaign dates with user enrolment dates, to see whether there has been an uptick in enrolments following a Facebook ad. An increase in new users could be due to the Facebook campaign, but it could also be due to other factors (correlation does not equal causation). The methodology used to correlate Facebook campaign data with enrolments in the Turn platform included the following steps and data analysis:

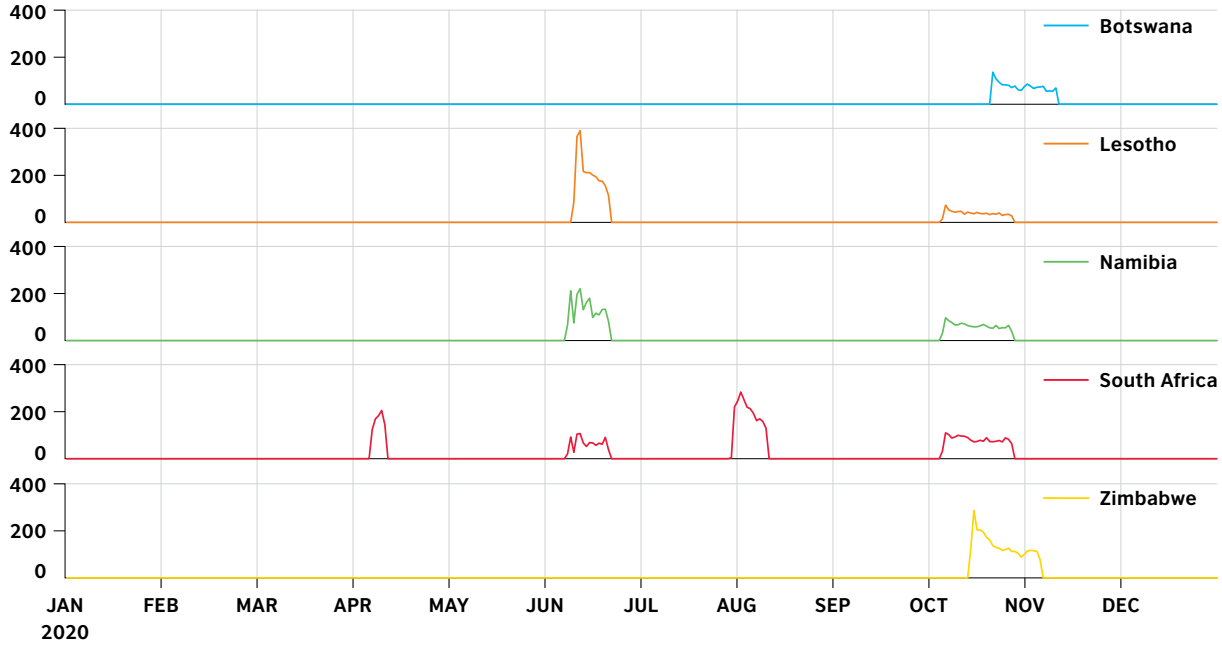
1. Facebook Ads campaigns were analysed by the country of the audience.
2. The difference between the number of people who clicked on an ad and the number of people who became Turn users was quantified.
3. Taking into account the start date of the campaigns, we checked whether there had been a significant increase in Turn users during that same week.

In order to analyse the Facebook campaigns, the TCE data analyst extracted and worked with two different sources of data:

- Facebook Report from the BC account – Extracted from Ads Manager (Facebook Business).
- Daily Active Users of the *Learn English on WhatsApp* materials – Extracted from BigQuery by using SQL.

The Facebook campaign **Link Clicks** (i.e. the number of users who clicked on a Facebook ad that directed them to the WhatsApp materials in Turn) is summarised in the plot below, for each country.

Figure 9: FB campaign – Link Clicks

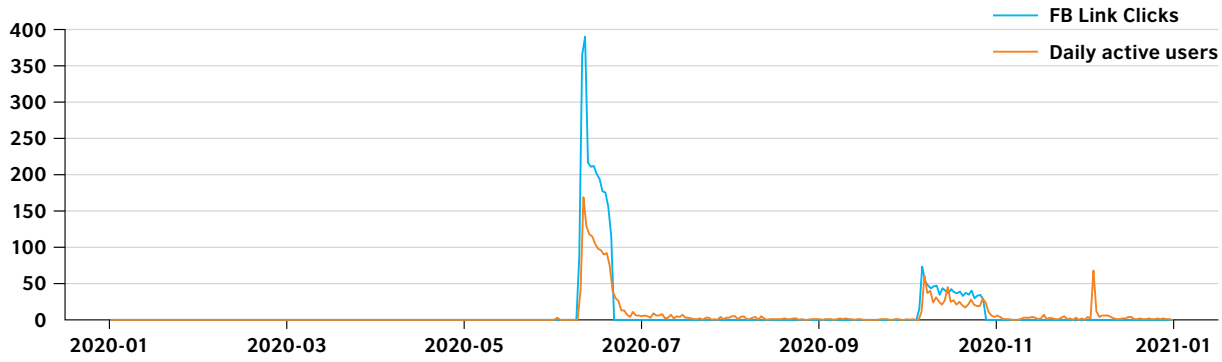


The above plots show the chronology of Facebook campaigns in each country as well as the success of these campaigns measured in Link Clicks (indicated by the peaks in the plots).

- South Africa had four Facebook campaigns during 2020.
- Lesotho and Namibia had two Facebook campaigns during 2020.
- Lesotho had a high number of link clicks in June.
- All five participating countries had Facebook campaigns launched simultaneously in October.

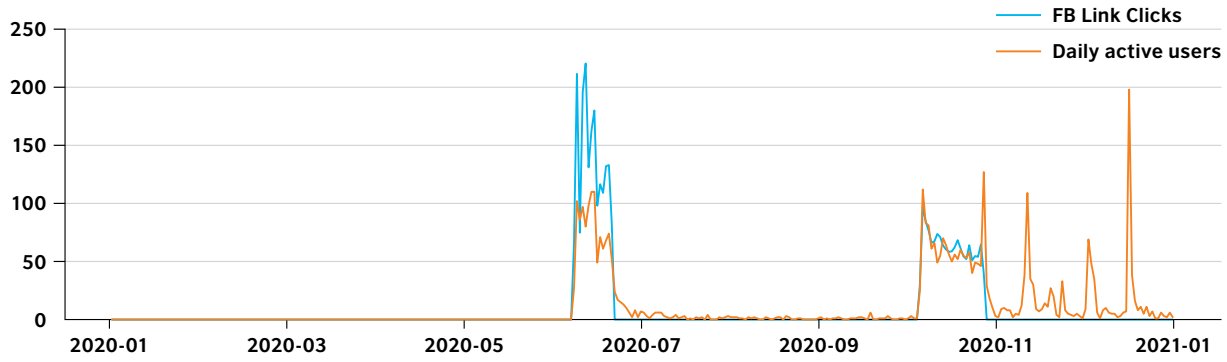
When the Facebook campaign click links plots are superimposed on the number of Turn enrolments for the same dates for each country, we see a close match.

Figure 10: Lesotho FB Link Clicks



As can be seen in the plot for **Lesotho** above, the shape of FB Link Click is almost identical to the shape of the Daily Active Users. In this case, it would be reasonable to assume that the main acquisition channel is Facebook and then treat the Link Clicks as a proxy variable of enrolment success.

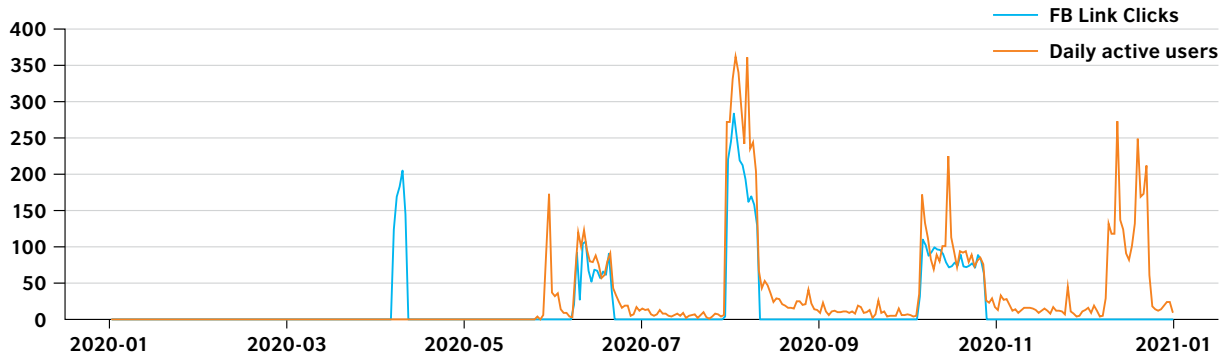
Figure 11: Namibia FB Link Clicks



For Namibia, the plot above indicates that the first Facebook campaign in June acted as the main acquisition channel for new users. However, as can be seen from the peaks after the end of the second Facebook campaign and until the end of the year, many active users engaged with the WhatsApp materials despite there being no Facebook campaign underway. This may be due to several possible factors:

- Facebook was not the main acquisition channel for Namibia during this period.
- The Active Users during this period were previous users who had engaged with project materials before and re-enrolled.
- A word-of-mouth campaign (e.g. within a school), or other dissemination channels (e.g. the WhatsApp materials showcased in a webinar; Ministry of Education circulars to teachers), resulted in peaks of enrolment.

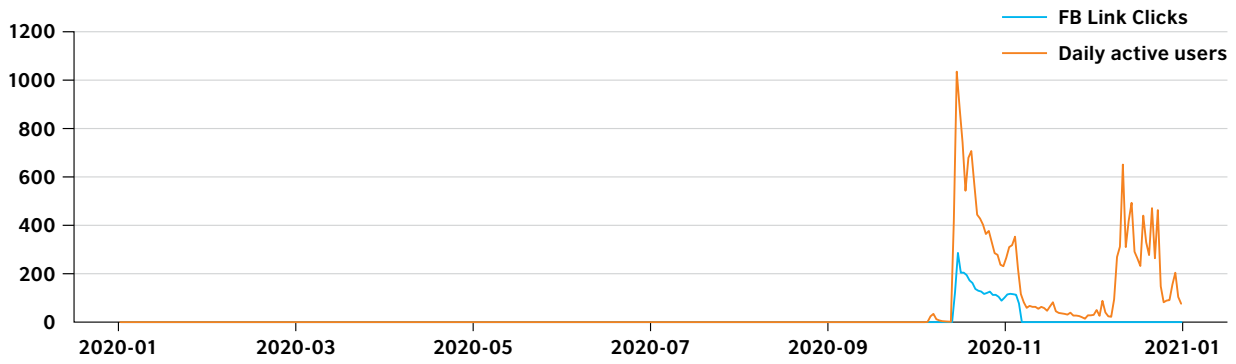
Figure 12: South Africa FB Link Clicks



South Africa was by far the most active country during the year. As the plot above indicates:

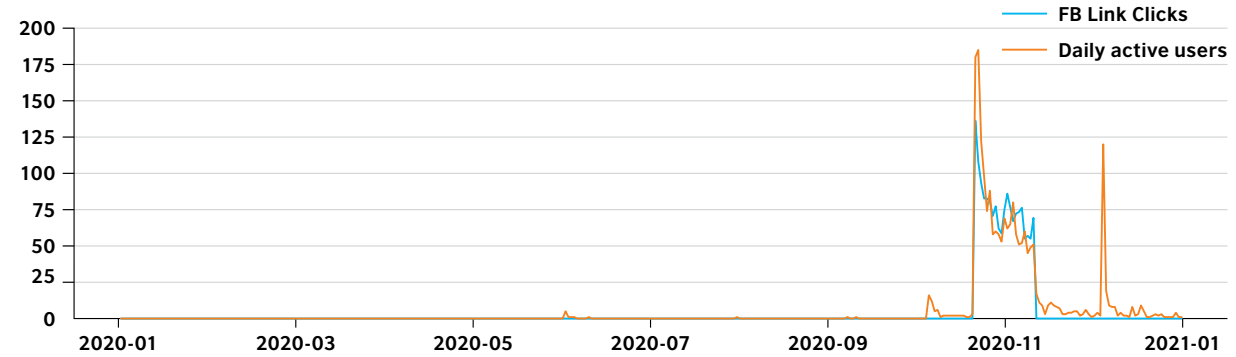
- The third Facebook campaign was the most effective, although quantifying its impact on Daily Users series is complex.
- The shapes of the plot for the second, third and fourth Facebook campaigns closely match the numbers of daily users.
- There appears to be no uptick in enrolments for the first Facebook campaign which suggests that there may have been an error in the campaign, or very few Facebook members were reached via the campaign.
- As with Namibia (and Zimbabwe and Botswana below), there was an increase in enrolments in December, despite there being no Facebook campaign underway. Other factors may be responsible for this increase.

Figure 13: Zimbabwe FB Link Clicks



For Zimbabwe, the plot above shows that Facebook has not acted as the only or even main acquisition channel. The marked increase in users in December is similar to that shown in the plots for Namibia, Botswana and South Africa, and may be due to other acquisition channels.

Figure 14: Botswana FB Link Clicks



For Botswana, there is a pronounced peak in active users at the end of the year that does not correspond to a Facebook campaign, as with several of the country plots above. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to assume that the Facebook campaign that was run in November was the main acquisition channel for Botswana, given how closely the two shapes in the plot match.

6.7 Summary of findings from the WhatsApp data

- As of 22 December 2020, there were 22,714 users enrolled in the *Learn English on WhatsApp* programme. 47 per cent were from Zimbabwe, 30 per cent from South Africa, 11 per cent from Namibia, and 6 per cent each from Lesotho and Botswana. The largest number of enrolled users was from Zimbabwe.
- Current engagement metrics (i.e. over the week prior to 22 December 2020) were highest for Namibia (57 per cent), followed by Zimbabwe (33 per cent) and South Africa (28.5 per cent). Engagement was noticeably lower for Lesotho (1.4 per cent) and Botswana (1 per cent). Users from Namibia showed the highest *current* levels of engagement with the materials; users from Lesotho and Botswana showed the lowest current levels of engagement.
- The greatest numbers of enrolments took place in October, coinciding with a regional British Council Facebook campaign to promote *Learn English on WhatsApp*.
- Songs were the most popular materials, for all five countries. Stories and audio were less popular than songs in all of the countries. South Africans had access to lessons, which proved more popular than stories, but less popular than songs.

- The majority of users interacted with less than 1 per cent of the materials, in all five countries. A relatively high percentage of users in all of the countries engaged with none of the materials, despite having enrolled in the programme.
- Levels of engagement *with the total numbers of materials on offer* were broadly similar across the five countries within the five bands previously mentioned (0 per cent; less than 1 per cent; 1 per cent to 5 per cent; 5 per cent to 10 per cent; more than 10 per cent). The lowest overall engagement with the total number of materials on offer is shown by Namibia, and the highest by Zimbabwe, Botswana and Lesotho, with little overall differences between these three countries.
- 3pm to 7pm are the most active times on the platform, with the highest numbers of users overall accessing the learning materials at this time. Fridays and Saturdays are the most active days.
- An analysis of British Council Facebook campaigns and enrolments indicates that the campaigns do result in the acquisition of new users. There appear to be additional acquisition channels though, and these may include word of mouth.

6.8 TV show data

Data for the animated TV show was solicited from 2enable, the company contracted to create and disseminate the audio visual learning materials offered by the DBE via Channel 122 on Open View. The TV show schedule and LEAP episodes are presented below.

Broadcast schedule and viewership

The LEAP TV show materials began broadcasting on 14 December, and the schedule for 14-31 December (Weeks 1 and 2) is indicated below. It is worth noting that broadcasting has continued during the first quarter of 2021.

Viewership figures provided by 2enable indicate 184 views of the LEAP programmes from 24 December 2020 to 25 January 2021.

Table 10: Broadcast schedule and viewership: weeks 1 and 2

Week 1

	14-Dec	15-Dec	16-Dec	17-Dec	18-Dec	19-Dec	20-Dec	21-Dec	22-Dec
	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday
06:00 - 06:30									
06:30 - 07:00									
07:00 - 07:15	Grade R: English	Grade R: English	Grade R: English	Grade R: English	Grade R: English	Grade R: English	Grade R: English	Grade R: English	Grade R: English
07:15 - 07:30	Grade 1: English	Grade 1: English	Grade 1: English	Grade 1: English	Grade 1: English	Grade 1: English	Grade 1: English	Grade 1: English	Grade 1: English
07:30 - 07:45	Grade 2: English	Grade 2: English	Grade 2: English	Grade 2: English	Grade 2: English	Grade 2: English	Grade 2: English	Grade 2: English	Grade 2: English
07:45 - 08:00	Grade 3: English	Grade 3: English	Grade 3: English	Grade 3: English	Grade 3: English	Grade 3: English	Grade 3: English	Grade 3: English	Grade 3: English
08:00 - 08:15	Grade 4: English	Grade 4: English	Grade 4: English	Grade 4: English	Grade 4: English	Grade 4: English	Grade 4: English	Grade 4: English	Grade 4: English

Week 2

	23-Dec	24-Dec	25-Dec	26-Dec	27-Dec	28-Dec	29-Dec	30-Dec	31-Dec
	Wednesday	**Thursday**	**Friday**	**Saturday**	**Sunday**	**Monday**	**Tuesday**	**Wednesday**	**Thursday**
06:00 - 06:30									
06:30 - 07:00									
07:00 - 07:15	Grade R: English	Grade R: English	Grade R: English	Grade R: English	Grade R: English	Grade R: English	Grade R: English	Grade R: English	Grade R: English
07:15 - 07:30	Grade 1: English	Grade 1: English	Grade 1: English	Grade 1: English	Grade 1: English	Grade 1: English	Grade 1: English	Grade 1: English	Grade 1: English
07:30 - 07:45	Grade 2: English	Grade 2: English	Grade 2: English	Grade 2: English	Grade 2: English	Grade 2: English	Grade 2: English	Grade 2: English	Grade 2: English
07:45 - 08:00	Grade 3: English	Grade 3: English	Grade 3: English	Grade 3: English	Grade 3: English	Grade 3: English	Grade 3: English	Grade 3: English	Grade 3: English
08:00 - 08:15	Grade 4: English	Grade 4: English	Grade 4: English	Grade 4: English	Grade 4: English	Grade 4: English	Grade 4: English	Grade 4: English	Grade 4: English
17:00 - 17:30									
17:30 - 17:45	Grade R: English	Grade R: English	Grade R: English	Grade R: English	Grade R: English	Grade R: English	Grade R: English	Grade R: English	Grade R: English
17:45 - 18:00	Grade 1: English	Grade 1: English	Grade 1: English	Grade 1: English	Grade 1: English	Grade 1: English	Grade 1: English	Grade 1: English	Grade 1: English
18:00 - 18:15	Grade 2: English	Grade 2: English	Grade 2: English	Grade 2: English	Grade 2: English	Grade 2: English	Grade 2: English	Grade 2: English	Grade 2: English
18:15 - 18:30	Grade 3: English	Grade 3: English	Grade 3: English	Grade 3: English	Grade 3: English	Grade 3: English	Grade 3: English	Grade 3: English	Grade 3: English
18:30 - 18:45	Grade 4: English	Grade 4: English	Grade 4: English	Grade 4: English	Grade 4: English	Grade 4: English	Grade 4: English	Grade 4: English	Grade 4: English

During Weeks 1 and 2, the LEAP TV shows were broadcast in two time bands, once in the morning and once in the evening. The morning broadcast lasted from 7h to 8.15h, and included five 15-minute episodes, each episode aimed at a different Grade (Grade R, then Grade 1, and so on until Grade 4). The evening broadcast lasted from 17.30h to 18.45h and included another five 15-minute episodes from Grade R to Grade 4.

Every episode for each grade broadcast a different LEAP 'story', and followed this playlist (the Weeks 1 and 2 dates are in columns D and E).

Table 11: Playlist for Grades 1–4 weeks 1 and 2

Grade R		
1	Dinosaurs	What dinosaurs ate.
2	Dinosaurs	What different dinosaurs looked like.
3	Birds and reptiles	Features of birds.
4	Birds and reptiles	Features of reptiles. Staying safe with reptiles.
5	Wild animals	Comparing wild animals.
6	Wild animals	The big five.
7	Sport	Different sports.
8	Sport	We love soccer.
9	Celebrations	Different celebrations.

Grade 1		
1	Animals	A goat eats my garden. The g sound.
2	Animals	Sea animals. The o sound.
3	Animals	Five little elephants. Who helps us.
4	Animals	The h sound. Fetch my cat.
5	Animals	The f sound. Opposites.
6	About town	Shopping, The u and r sounds.
7	About town	We go to town. The library.
8	About town	The k and d sounds. The months of the year.
9	About town	The j and i sounds.

Grade 2		
1	The food we eat	We cook our food. Let's start cooking.
2	The food we eat	Buying food. Goldilocks and the three bears.
3	Friends	It's Jabu's birthday. A birthday card.
4	Friends	Ann writes a letter.
5	Friends	Write a letter.
6	Outdoors	A night walk. Camping.
7	Outdoors	The storm. After the storm.
8	Outdoors	More about sounds. An elephant and its trunk.
9	Celebrations	It's nearly Christmas. About Christmas. Celebrations.

Grade 3		
1	Under the sea	We go deep-sea diving. Getting it right.
2	Under the sea	Make a shoe-box aquarium. I can make... What we will do.
3	Storybooks	Making up a story. Dragon and alien stories.
4	Storybooks	About the characters. Telling the Pooh story. Tear-out book.
5	About time	The months of the year. What we do.
6	About time	Telling the time.
7	About time	What we like to do.
8	Celebrations	Little Drummer Boy. Christmas time.
9	Celebrations	Words and sounds. Enter a drawing competition.

Grade 4		
1	People, creatures and the weather	Anansi and the talking watermelon. The elephant goes bananas. More about the watermelon. Planning a story.
2	People, creatures and the weather	It happened because... Writing a letter. Mike and Thabo go hiking. Reading and writing a story.
3	People, creatures and the weather	Around the world. Our world. Managing my time. What's in the news?
4	People, creatures and the weather	Dragons and dinosaurs. Real dragons. Protecting our wildlife. Can you remember?
5	Celebrations	A birthday. Birthday wishes. Birthday invitations. Birthday tales.
6	Celebrations	My cousin's wedding. Going to the wedding. The wedding. Writing about the wedding.
7	Celebrations	Celebrating our differences. What we can do for others.
8	Celebrations	What I did on Mandela Day. More about Mandela Day.
9	Celebrations	Celebrating our differences. Writing about our differences.

7 Surveys

As described in section 5.2, a large-scale survey was designed to identify WhatsApp and TV viewer candidates for in-depth interviews and was delivered via the Turn platform/WhatsApp. The exact wording of the survey questions for WhatsApp users, and for TV viewers, is included in Appendix 1.

7.1 Sampling frame

The survey was sent via the Turn platform to 18,181 *Learn English on WhatsApp* users, identified via Stratified Random Sampling. Using country and engagement level as proxy variables, the sampling frame was designed to keep the original proportions of the data to avoid biased results.

The table below shows, for each country:

a) The total number of users that constituted the sampling frame ('Users' column);

b) The total number of users who were invited to take the survey ('Users Survey' column); and

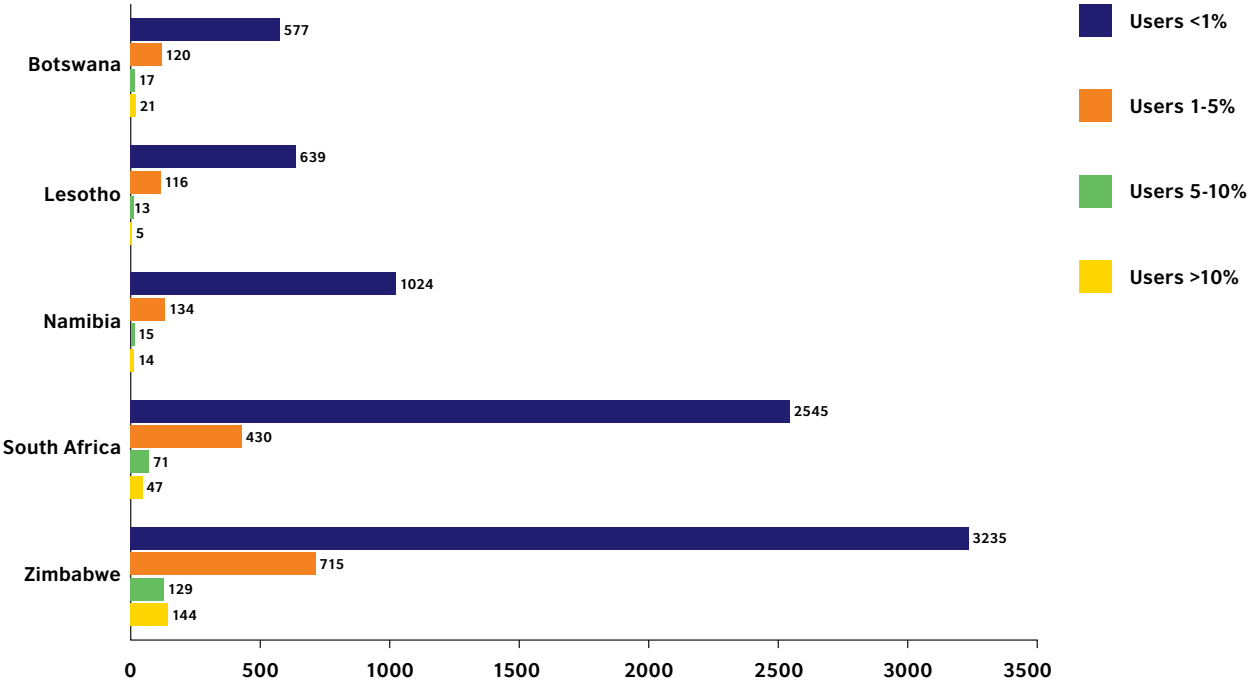
c) The percentage of users to whom the survey invitation was sent ('Total %' column). This percentage represents the percentage of overall users and ensures that the original proportions of the global data are kept when eliciting survey responses, to avoid skewing the data.

Table 12: Sampling frame of users

	Users	Users Survey	Total %
Botswana	1332	735	7,33%
Lesotho	1400	773	7,70%
Namibia	2154	1187	11,85%
South Africa	5621	3093	30,92%
Zimbabwe	7674	4223	42,21%
TOTAL	**18181**	**10011**	**100,00%**

The proportions of the sampling frame are also represented below as a bar chart. Here it is clear that users who interacted with less than 1 per cent of the materials are by far the largest percentage of users, in all countries, and therefore formed the largest proportion of the sampling frame.

Figure 15: Proportions of users in sampling frame



7.2 Survey response rate

The survey response rate is summarised in the table below. Due to issues with the programmatic send and limits on the number of invitations (known as 'message templates' in the Turn platform) that could be sent every day, the programmatic send took place over more than two weeks, between 4 and 22 December 2020.

Table 13: Survey response rate

Country	Surveyed users	Surveys started	Surveys completed	Completion rate	Response rate based on completed surveys
Botswana	735	152	79	51,97%	10,75%
Lesotho	773	83	33	39,76%	4,27%
Namibia	1187	367	127	34,60%	10,70%
South Africa	3093	1891	293	15,49%	9,47%
Zimbabwe	4223	4741	753	15,88%	17,83%
TOTAL	**10011**	**7234**	**1285**	**17,76%**	**12,84%**

The findings from the table above can be described as follows:

- **Botswana:** The survey was sent to a total of 735 randomly selected users. Of those 735, 152 users started the survey. Of the 152 users, only 79 completed it, which represents a completion rate of approximately 52 per cent, and an overall response rate of approximately 11 per cent.

- **Lesotho:** The survey was sent to a total of 773 randomly selected users. Of those 773, 83 users started the survey. Of the 83 users, only 33 completed it, which represents a completion rate of approximately 40 per cent, and an overall response rate of approximately 4 per cent.
- **Namibia:** The survey was sent to a total of 1,187 randomly selected users. Of those 1,187, 367 users started the survey. Of the 367 users, only 127 completed it, which represents a completion rate of approximately 35 per cent, and an overall response rate of approximately 11 per cent.
- **South Africa:** The survey was sent to a total of 3,093 randomly selected users. Of those 3,093 users, 1,891 users started the survey. Of the 1,891 users, only 293 completed it, which represents a completion rate of approximately 15 per cent, and an overall response rate of approximately 9 per cent.
- **Zimbabwe:** The survey was sent to a total of 4,223 randomly selected users. Of those 4,223 users, 4,741 users started the survey. Of particular note is that more users started then the survey than were sent the survey invitation in Zimbabwe. Users sharing the survey message or trigger ('FB') by word of mouth is the most likely explanation for this apparent anomaly. Of the 4,741 users who started the survey, only 753 completed it, which represents a completion rate of approximately 16 per cent, and an overall response rate of approximately 18 per cent.
- Overall, we see the highest response rate from Zimbabwe (18 per cent), a medium response rate from Botswana, Namibia and South Africa (between 9 per cent and 11 per cent), and the lowest response rate from Lesotho (4 per cent). The overall response rate for the five participating countries is 13 per cent, slightly higher than the 10 per cent response rate that typically applies to online surveys.

7.3 Summary of survey responses

This section summarises the responses to the six multiple choice survey questions (see Appendix 1). The real numbers and percentages of responses to the first four questions appear in the table below. As explained in the Methodology section of this report, these four survey questions were used to identify candidates for interviews.

Table 14: Summary of survey responses

Country	Location				Gender				Role				School meals			
	Rural		Urban		Male		Female		Teachers		Parents/ guardians		Yes		No	
Botswana	21	*27%*	56	*73%*	17	*22%*	61	*78%*	13	*18%*	61	*82%*	51	*69%*	23	*31%*
Namibia	56	*45%*	69	*55%*	30	*24%*	97	*76%*	32	*32%*	67	*68%*	21	*18%*	99	*83%*
Lesotho	9	*28%*	23	*72%*	8	*24%*	25	*76%*	5	*17%*	25	*83%*	7	*22%*	25	*78%*
South Africa	87	*31%*	197	*69%*	34	*12%*	250	*88%*	48	*17%*	230	*83%*	110	*40%*	167	*60%*
Zimbabwe	143	*19%*	605	*81%*	253	*34%*	489	*66%*	142	*20%*	566	*80%*	87	*12%*	648	*88%*
TOTAL	**316**	***25%***	**950**	***75%***	**342**	***27%***	**922**	***73%***	**240**	***20%***	**949**	***80%***	**276**	***22%***	**962**	***78%***

The demographic findings can be summarised from the survey data (questions 1-4) as follows:

- The majority of respondents were from urban environments in all five countries (75 per cent overall). Namibia had the closest ratio of respondents from rural versus urban environments (45 per cent versus 55 per cent respectively); Zimbabwe had the widest ratio of respondents from rural versus urban environments (19 per cent versus 81 per cent respectively).
- The majority of respondents were female in all five countries (73 per cent overall). Zimbabwe had the closest ratio of male versus female respondents (34 per cent male versus 66 per cent

female); South Africa had the widest ratio of male versus female respondents (12 per cent male versus 88 per cent female).

- The survey was answered by more parents/guardians than teachers in all five countries: 80 per cent of all those who responded were parents/guardians. Namibia had the closest ratio (32 per cent teachers versus 68 per cent parents/guardians). The other four countries had similar ratios of teachers versus parents/guardians who responded: between 17 per cent and 20 per cent teachers versus between 80 per cent and 83 per cent parents/guardians.
- Finally, the majority of respondents' children did not receive free school meals (taken as a proxy for poverty) – 78 per cent overall. The ratio between those who did receive school meals and those who did not was relatively close in South Africa (40 per cent of respondents' children did receive free meals versus 60 per cent did not). Botswana was the exception, where more than double the number of respondents' children received free school meals (69 per cent) versus those whose children did not (31 per cent).

The following two questions in the survey were designed to elicit quantitative data on two key research areas of this evaluation: the frequency of school attendance for respondents' children during lockdown (question 5), and the extent to which respondents found the *Learn English on WhatsApp* materials useful (question 6). The survey results for both of these key questions are presented in the table below.

Table 15: Responses on frequency of school attendance and usefulness of WhatsApp materials

Country	School frequency						Useful materials									
	Every day		Not at all		Some days		I don't know		Not at all		Not much		Some		Very much	
Botswana	61	*77%*	10	*13%*	8	*10%*	2	*3%*	3	*4%*	7	*9%*	17	*22%*	50	*63%*
Namibia	60	*47%*	10	*8%*	57	*45%*	7	*6%*	9	*7%*	12	*9%*	25	*20%*	74	*58%*
Lesotho	6	*18%*	12	*36%*	15	*45%*	1	*3%*	1	*3%*	5	*15%*	8	*24%*	18	*55%*
South Africa	69	*24%*	42	*14%*	182	*62%*	15	*5%*	10	*3%*	24	*8%*	70	*24%*	174	*59%*
Zimbabwe	249	*33%*	104	*14%*	399	*53%*	13	*2%*	23	*3%*	74	*10%*	165	*22%*	477	*63%*
TOTAL	**445**	***35%***	**178**	***14%***	**661**	***51%***	**38**	***3%***	**46**	***4%***	**122**	***10%***	**285**	***22%***	**793**	***62%***

The findings on school attendance (question 5) can be summarised from the survey data as follows:

- At the time of the survey, respondents reported that their children were attending school most regularly in Botswana (77 per cent). In this country, only 10 per cent were reported as attending school some days, and 13 per cent were reported as not attending schools at all. This corresponds with findings in our report on 'The impact of Covid-19 on school closures in Southern Africa' (see Appendix 3); based on data collected from Insight for Education's Live Covid-19 School Country Tracker, schools were reported as being mostly open in Botswana between September and November 2020.
- The lowest rate of school attendance was reported in Lesotho, with 45 per cent of respondents reporting that their children were attending school some days, and 36 per cent reporting that their children were not attending school at all. 18 per cent of children were reported as attending school every day. The Live Country Tracker reported a relatively long period of partial school closures in Lesotho between May and October 2020, although schools were reported to be mostly open at the time of the survey.
- South African respondents reported partial levels of school attendance. 62 per cent of respondents reported that their children were attending school some days at the time of the survey, and 14 per cent reported that their children were not attending school at all. 24 per cent of respondents reported that their children were attending school every day. South Africa went

through long periods of full and partial school closures during 2020, with the picture varying somewhat between schools and provinces, although it should be noted that detailed and reliable data on school closures is hard to come by.

- Zimbabwe presents a comparable although slightly improved picture to South Africa. 54 per cent of respondents reported that their children were attending school some days, and 14 per cent reported that their children were not attending school at all. 33 per cent of respondents reported that their children were attending school every day.
- Finally, Namibia presents a relatively even spread of respondents reporting that their children were attending school every day (47 per cent) and some days (45 per cent). Just 8 per cent of respondents reported that their children were not attending school at all. In Namibia, the Live Country Tracker reports that schools were closed three times in 2020 (mid-March to mid-April, mid-May to early June, and early August to early September 2020), with partially open periods in between, during this time; schools were reported as open at the time of the survey, however.

At regional level, the majority of survey respondents (51 per cent) reported that their children were attending school some days at the time of the survey, and 35 per cent reported that their children were attending school every day. 14 per cent reported that their children were not attending school at all. It should be noted that the numbers of survey respondents are low and should therefore not be taken as statistically significant.

The findings on whether respondents found the *Learn English* materials on WhatsApp helpful/useful (question 6 – 'Has *Learn English on WhatsApp* helped your children in this time?') can be summarised from the survey data as follows:

- A clear majority in each of the five countries found the materials very helpful for their children, with between 55 per cent (Lesotho) and 63 per cent (Botswana and Zimbabwe) very much agreeing with the statement. The regional average for this statement was 62 per cent.
- An average of 22 per cent found the materials somewhat helpful, with responses ranging from 20 per cent agreement (Namibia) and 24 per cent agreement (Lesotho and South Africa).
- Only 10 per cent on average felt that the materials had not helped their children much, and 4 per cent felt that the materials had not helped their children at all.

The findings on whether respondents felt that the *Learn English* materials had helped their children learn are very consistent across all five countries, with a clear majority agreeing that they had indeed helped (84 per cent responses agreed to some degree, overall).

7.4 Summary of findings from the survey data

With an overall survey response rate of 13 per cent, the survey enabled the evaluators to collect data that provided demographic information to carry out the interviews (see section 8 below). However, it should be noted that the numbers of survey respondents are low and should therefore not be taken as statistically significant. The survey was completed by a majority of urban female parents/guardians whose children do not receive free school meals, so are unlikely to be from the most disadvantaged segment of the general population. The exception is Botswana, where a larger proportion of respondents' children receive free school meals. This may suggest that the *Learn English on WhatsApp* materials are used primarily by a slightly less disadvantaged demographic overall, although it is difficult to extrapolate from a response rate of 13 per cent. In any event, it is not entirely unexpected that those with digital access would respond to a digital survey or take part in remote fieldwork. The very high rate of response among women as compared to men does appear to suggest that the materials are being used by women with their children, possibly reflecting wider gender-based roles for childcaring in Southern Africa.

At regional level, the majority of survey respondents (51 per cent) reported that their children were attending school some days at the time of the survey, with only 35 per cent reporting that their

children were attending school every day. 14 per cent reported that their children were not attending school at all. It was difficult to obtain an accurate picture of school closures at the time of the survey, but it appears that although countries may have claimed that schools were open, many were still partially closed, or at least children were not attending school every day. As discussed in more depth in TCE's report on school closures and Covid-19 (written separately for this evaluation), the results of prolonged school closures and children not returning to school, are likely to be pernicious and long-term in Southern Africa, as in other parts of the world.

Finally, there was a strong consistent positive response to the question of whether the *Learn English* materials on WhatsApp had helped children learn during this period, with a regional average of 84 per cent agreeing that this was very much or somewhat the case. This is a strong endorsement of the programme.

8 Remote fieldwork findings

8.1 Interviewees

The table below highlights the research demographics of the remote fieldwork. We can see that at present the respondents are as follows:

- 93% female
- 7% male
- 22% from urban areas
- 78% from rural areas

The rural areas tend to be places where the lack of data access is most severe. Therefore, our rationale for targeting these demographics was to gain a more holistic insight into data poverty, digital exclusion and learning access where materials are limited. The table below provides a numerical and percentage breakdown of these demographics.

Table 16: Demographics of remote fieldwork

Country	#interviews	#female	#male	#urban	#rural
South Africa	13	12	1	6	7
Namibia	7	5	2	3	4
Botswana	6	6	0	0	6
Zimbabwe	8	8	0	0	8
Lesotho	7	7	0	0	7
TOTAL (No)	**41**	**38**	**3**	**9**	**32**
TOTAL (%)	**100%**	**93%**	**7%**	**22%**	**78%**

8.2 Methodology

Remote field researchers

We engaged with five remote field researchers who worked with Matthew Johnson of the University of Wolverhampton, Education Observatory. They all received full briefings about the interview process, which covered areas such as informed consent, research techniques, scripting, the use of prompts/checklists, etc. The field researchers were remunerated according to a standard agreed rate per interview (1000 ZAR per interview).

Piloting and testing

The field researchers were invited to assess the draft interview questions in terms of their perceived suitability for this research context. The interview process was further developed during delivery. The main areas of change were in the questions regarding materials, where we probed respondents through follow-up questions to elicit more detail.

Communications

Matthew Johnson initially contacted each of the field researchers via email. Following this, they were added to a WhatsApp group which then became the primary mode of communications. This allowed them to provide their feedback, thoughts, ideas and challenges in an accessible manner, which was then fed into the overall interview process.

Contacting interviewees and obtaining written informed consent

Lists of candidates were compiled from the survey results for each field researcher's country. The field researchers were then each sent a list of candidates (in order of preference) for the interviews and focus groups. They contacted the candidates via WhatsApp or phone calls to confirm participation and provide information about dates, time, etc. They also phoned or texted an informed consent statement, to which the candidate replied 'Yes' if in agreement.

Quality assurance and follow-ups

Each field researcher was asked to submit written notes of each of the interviews, with the candidate's phone numbers and time taken for the interview. The reports were analysed by Matthew Johnson, and where necessary, follow-ups were done to gain more information.

Note that the research instruments are in the Appendix 2.

8.3 Fieldwork findings

Below are the findings of the remote fieldwork research in each of the individual countries. A link to the individual questionnaires can be found at https://bit.ly/3rv5Vhd.

Table 17: Fieldwork findings – responses to questions

Country	Findings
How easy did you find accessing the English learning programme?	
Zimbabwe	Every participant said the English learning programme was easily accessible, however one participant reported access to data as the key challenge.
South Africa	All participants said that they found the materials easy to access and most found the programme via Facebook.
Lesotho	All participants found accessing the programme easy. A parent also liked that the materials were in Sesotho.
Namibia	Those who had Wi-Fi found it easy to access, those without had difficulties due to a lack of data.
Botswana	All respondents said accessing the materials was easy.
Cross-cutting themes	Participants found the programme easy to access and the fact that it is received via a WhatsApp link helps a lot. However, data poverty poses the biggest challenge.
Were there any challenges you faced in accessing the digital materials?	
Zimbabwe	Almost every participant mentioned data as their key challenge to accessing the materials.
South Africa	Most respondents said they experienced no challenges, however space and data were mentioned as challenges.
Lesotho	The challenges were minimal. However, the difficulties related to some of the material being too easy for Grade 3 children. One participant also said that when they updated WhatsApp, they lost the link and had to start again.

Namibia	The challenges all related to data and most participants mentioned this.
Botswana	The main issues were a lack of electricity for one of the participants and access to data.
Cross-cutting themes	Access to data and digital poverty is the main issue.

Are you the head of your household/breadwinner?

Zimbabwe	Every respondent in Zimbabwe was the breadwinner.
South Africa	Most respondents were not the main breadwinners but lived with their parents. However, three participants said they were the main breadwinner.
Lesotho	Half were single parents, and half were housewives.
Namibia	Four were single parents, the rest were either married or lived with their parents.
Botswana	All of the participants lived with their parents or husband.
Cross-cutting themes	A broad diversity of household structures both within and across countries.

Has your child been able to access learning during the pandemic? If so, to what extent?

Zimbabwe	All respondents mentioned difficulties in accessing learning, particularly in terms of accessing books. Some reported being unable to afford hardcopies of materials and books.
South Africa	Half of the respondents mentioned that they have been able to access learning during the pandemic through materials provided by school or through Google Hangouts. However, half of respondents mentioned that they struggled to access learning.
Lesotho	Most parents said the school has been sending the children some work but not much. One parent also said the school had drawn upon WhatsApp to support learning too. One parent had received no materials from the schools.
Namibia	Most respondents said that they have been able to access some materials either from their schools or the internet. However, a parent said that they have not been able to access anything
Botswana	The responses were mixed with some referencing use of the British Council materials as those they were using. However, participants also mentioned that the school materials have been limited and in some cases no materials were received.
Cross-cutting themes	There have been limited materials from schools, which have been inconsistent and, in some cases, non-existent.

Has this English programme helped you to support the learning of your child? If so, how?

Zimbabwe	All the participants said that this programme helped their child. Most also reported significant improvements with the literacy and communication abilities of their children since engaging with the materials.
South Africa	Almost all parents said that they were more involved in their child's learning since using this programme. However, one parent felt that they did not have the ability to support their challenge due to lack of knowledge.
Lesotho	All respondents said that the programme had been helpful for their children. However, one parent mentioned that they stopped using it for their Grade 3 child because it was too easy. Another parent said that they stopped using it after their WhatsApp updated. The other respondents said that the materials were a vital source due to lack of materials from their schools.

Namibia	All respondents said that the materials had been useful, particularly in terms of improving reading comprehension.
Botswana	All participants said that this programme has been helpful. It improved the reading comprehension and one parent said that it improved their child's Grades at school. The programme was also referenced as being fun and enjoyable for children.
Cross-cutting themes	The programme has been helpful particularly with regard to reading comprehension.

What challenges have you faced with home-schooling?

Zimbabwe	Time: The parents who were frontline workers felt that they did not have enough time to adequately support their child's learning. Access: Data is also expensive and hardcopy materials are difficult to access. Knowledge: Parents reported significant gaps in knowledge in order to support home learning.
South Africa	Attention span of children, working long hours with a lack of time to support learning and lack of money to print materials were the key challenges highlighted. Poor communication from schools was also mentioned.
Lesotho	Almost all respondents mentioned that the attention span of their child was a challenge and getting them to settle down and learn can be a challenge. Also, lack of materials from schools was an issue.
Namibia	The key issues mentioned were lack of data and lack of confidence with the English language.
Botswana	The children generally did not associate home with learning and wanted to play. It was difficult to keep their attention. The children also need to do house chores and it's difficult to support them when they do this.
Cross-cutting themes	Children struggle to learn at home and do not associate home with learning. Data disparities pose a threat to learning.

Has this programme helped you with home-schooling? If so, how?

Zimbabwe	All participants said that the programme has significantly helped them. Due to the lack of access to materials, this programme provided an important source of learning.
South Africa	Parents highlighted that the programme offered more flexibility with learning and they could fit it around their schedules. It also helped them to be more involved in their children's learning.
Lesotho	All respondents said that the programme had helped them with home-schooling because their children are more invested and interested in these materials. They learn more independently and are enthusiastic.
Namibia	Respondents said that the programme helped them and their children with their English speaking skills. It also helped them to be more involved in their children's learning.
Botswana	Parents reported improved confidence and Grades with their children. They all said it has helped them and their children.
Cross-cutting themes	The programme has proved to be very helpful for respondents during the pandemic, due to the fun and engaging nature of the materials.

In general, how easy or difficult has it been to access learning materials in the pandemic?

Zimbabwe	All participants reported difficulties in accessing materials during the pandemic, particularly with books. Therefore, this programme has provided a much-needed resource.

South Africa	Those with internet access have been able to search for more materials. However, it has been more difficult for those without internet.
Lesotho	Most parents had seen some materials, however, they reported that these were not useful. One participant had not received any materials. All participants said that these learning materials were the best they had seen and recommended sharing more widely.
Namibia	All respondents said that it has been very difficult accessing learning materials in the pandemic due to a lack of data and money, and the fact that printing services are not inaccessible for many parents, particularly in the rural areas.
Botswana	Parents said that getting materials has largely been easy via the internet. Some used bookstores and other platforms. However, materials from schools were reported by one participant as lacking, while another participant said the schools provided materials regularly.
Cross-cutting themes	Materials are being provided in many cases, however the quality and consistency of these is lacking.

To what extent have you been able to access other learning materials (i.e. at school) that were not part of this programme during the pandemic?

Zimbabwe	Because the shops were closed it was hard to buy books and access materials. A respondent mentioned that some schools have provided WhatsApp materials too but these have been of poor quality.
South Africa	Parents reported difficulties with accessing the materials before the pandemic, particularly for those with less data. Participants mentioned a disparity between government schools and other schools. Some parents for example were able to use Google Hangouts with their school.
Lesotho	Most participants had been given materials from the school (although limited and not useful). However, one participant had received nothing.
Namibia	Participants largely received no materials or very limited materials that were not provided inconsistently.
Botswana	Most participants have been able to access other materials that were not part of the programme. However, one participant said they struggled to get materials from schools.
Cross-cutting themes	It's been difficult to access materials outside of this programme. However, in Botswana access seems to be easier.

Did you find these learning materials more accessible than others during the pandemic?

Zimbabwe	Participants highlighted that these materials were easier and cheaper to access than other materials during the pandemic.
South Africa	Participants found that these materials were more accessible than other materials. For some parents these were the only materials that they could access. For example, one parent mentioned they went three months without anything from the school.
Lesotho	No participant said that they found the materials more accessible than others because they either have not searched much for others or had been given some materials by their school.
Namibia	Most found these to be more accessible but wanted to be able to download the materials. One participant said that the materials were not enough for all the children.
Botswana	Respondents felt that these materials were more accessible as you can download them from a WhatsApp link rather than having to search through the internet to find materials.
Cross-cutting themes	The programme materials have been the most useful for the respondents.

What Grade have you completed thus far in school? For example, Grade 9?	
Zimbabwe	Most children were in Grade 2 or 3.
South Africa	Most children that used this were in Grade R or Grade 1. However, parents with children in Grades 3 and 4 also found this to be useful.
Lesotho	Most parents had completed a diploma, one had a degree however and another had studied up to secondary school.
Namibia	Most respondents had completed Grade 12 and one participant had completed Grade 10.
Botswana	The children were mainly at preschool level and most of the parents had a diploma. One had a degree.
Cross-cutting themes	Mixed levels of child and parental education influence extent of usage.

Did you/your child find the materials useful? Please explain why.	
Zimbabwe	They're useful because they're free and participants mentioned that they saw a visible improvement in their child's reading.
South Africa	Parents found them useful for their children and key themes were that the children were enthusiastic about learning and that the materials improved reading comprehension. The children also found the materials fun and enjoyable.
Lesotho	All participants found the materials to be useful as they improved reading comprehension skills.
Namibia	Most respondents had completed Grade 12 and one participant had completed Grade 10.
Botswana	Respondents found them useful because they built the confidence of their children.
Cross-cutting themes	The materials are useful for children, help to build confidence in reading and are fun to use.

What would you improve about the materials of this project?	
Zimbabwe	Local languages such as, particularly Shona. Currently it is only in English and isiZulu. A participant also mentioned that they need these materials consistently rather than as a one-off. Also, data bundles provided with these materials would be a significant help.
South Africa	The main feedback was to have the programme accessible to more people and to add videos to the sing-alongs. A parent also suggested adding a PDF with each lesson.
Lesotho	The key feedback was to make the materials downloadable, provide more writing exercises rather than just listening, animated/video stories with the songs and lyrics. Respondents also said that the level of difficulty of the materials could be increased.
Namibia	A wider collection of stories so the children do not get bored and lose attention. Videos, pictures and hardcopies.
Botswana	Videos and pictures could be added.
Cross-cutting themes	A more visual approach with videos, pictures and downloadable materials would be helpful.

When did you/your child use these materials the most? For example, in the evenings/afternoons? Why?	
Zimbabwe	Most respondents mentioned that they use these materials during the evening. However, two said the day was better as their young children sleep early.
South Africa	The times were mixed with slightly more during the evening. Those who work during the day use them in the evenings, while those who work in the evenings use them during the day, and those not working tended to use them during the day and evening.
Lesotho	Most parents preferred the evenings, for a variety of reasons. Some due to work commitments, others reported that their child likes to play more in the daytime and left learning to the evening, while those not working tended to use them during the day and evening.
Namibia	Respondents gave mixed times and most said they access materials equally in the afternoons or evenings. They accessed the materials when they were free and had time.
Botswana	The preferred time of use was mainly mixed because parents fit usage around their free time.
Cross-cutting themes	Mixed times of usage that were dependent on parental activity (i.e. work patterns) and free time.

Which types of materials did you find most useful? Why?	
Zimbabwe	All participants mentioned that the audio materials were particularly useful. Most of the respondents also said the African Storybooks were very helpful, however a participant wanted these to also be in Shona. These two materials were highlighted as being easier to understand and support their children with.
South Africa	All parents strongly preferred using the song lyrics and the African Storybooks. One parent also mentioned that they found the LEAP lessons useful. African Storybooks were easy to understand, and the audio materials were fun and enjoyable for children.
Lesotho	The song and lyrics African Storybooks and audio materials were repeatedly mentioned as the most useful. These materials were perceived as being more engaging for children, so parents tended not to use the other materials.
Namibia	All respondents said the song and lyrics, African Storybook and audio books were useful. Respondents found these materials to be enjoyable and easier to follow. However, two respondents did say that they found the LEAP lessons useful for teaching reading.
Botswana	The audio materials and song and lyrics were perceived as the most useful as children found them the most enjoyable which kept their attention.
Cross-cutting themes	The audio materials, song and lyrics and African Storybooks are the most useful.

Which types of materials did you find least useful? Why?	
Zimbabwe	The songs were most mentioned as the least useful. A participant highlighted that the children can get carried away with the songs and miss the point.
South Africa	Most parents did not download the lessons that they did not think were going to be useful. The one downloaded the least were the LEAP lessons. One parent mentioned that they did not find the lessons useful, while some said they were all helpful.
Lesotho	Parents did not download the materials that they perceived as not useful due to issues such as lack of space or interest.

Namibia	The LEAP lessons were largely seen as the least useful material. Parents tended to gravitate towards materials that they perceived would be most enjoyable for their children and left out the others.
Botswana	The LEAP lessons were perceived as the least useful and were not downloaded as much as the other materials.
Cross-cutting themes	The LEAP lessons were the least engaged with and were not downloaded much.

Did you have any issues/challenges/barriers with the materials? What and why?

Zimbabwe	The barriers mentioned were data, the advanced level of English and one participant could not access all of the materials at the same time.
South Africa	Most parents did not have any issues and found them accessible. The only challenge in some cases was data.
Lesotho	The level of the difficulty for the children was mentioned as an issue for some parents.
Namibia	One participant felt the content should be reviewed for those who live in the villages who have greater struggles with English. The main other challenge mentioned was access to data.
Botswana	Little was mentioned here aside from data and electricity issues mentioned by a participant.
Cross-cutting themes	Access to data is the primary challenge.

8.4 TV show interview data

It proved challenging to set up interviews with TV show viewers, as no responses to the TV survey were received. However, with help from the British Council, a few South African primary school EFAL teachers were approached to share their views on the TV materials. An interview was carried out by one of the project M&E team with a teacher in March 2021, in order to get her feedback on the TV show materials and their suitability for the target audience. This teacher had tried out some of the TV show materials with her own Grade 1 and 2 EFAL learners, so her views provide valuable insights from the perspective of the practitioner.

The interview questions and responses are summarised below.

How did you find the materials?

The materials were very good, and I particularly liked all of them. The language structure, tenses and comprehension aspects were very accessible and complementary to what I would use in the classroom. I even used this with my children who are in Grade 1 and 2 and they loved it. What is most useful is the fact that it is done using songs. The song aspect makes comprehension and retention easier, and it is also fun for the children to learn, which makes learning more likely.

You mentioned that these materials worked for your children in Grade 1 and 2, do you think these materials are appropriate for older children say in Grade 4?

Yes. One thing we have to understand is that children in public schools start learning English relatively late. They tend to be three years behind their mother tongue. Therefore, children in Grade 4 and 5 are often still learning the very basics of English therefore these materials are suitable even for them.

How accessible do you think these materials are for learners and mothers in the rural areas?

Well, there are some mothers who do not have electricity I think this would be the biggest challenge. However, in the case of South Africa the majority of people have access to electricity even in the rural areas and townships. If I was going to put a percentage on it I would say 60 per

cent in the rural areas would find it accessible and 40 per cent would not. There is also the issue of data which presents further challenges for those on low or no incomes.

The data issue has historically prompted more parents to prefer paper materials. However, due the coronavirus pandemic the association with technology is increasing and it has somehow forced parents even in rural areas to become more accustomed to digital. However, it is not always easy because of data.

And in terms of the content specifically, how accessible do you think it is for women in those in rural areas, particularly during school closures?

Schools are beginning to reopen now but in a phased way. However, the content is very accessible. If I am honest, I did worry that the English pronunciation would be a barrier. Sometimes you get online materials where the English accent is hard to understand. However, this one was very accessible. The songs and the video would be very appropriate for learners in urban, rural or township areas.

Do you think these materials would it make it easier for women in the rural areas to home-school?

For those who do not have such severe electricity issues yes, because as I said the content is very accessible and I can believe that it will be easier for them to get involved with their child's learning. However, it will be more challenging for those without electricity and for those who struggle with getting data consistently.

8.5 Research questions answered

Below is a summary of how the fieldwork findings relate to research questions (RQ) 1–5.

Digital access:

- RQ1: Do the delivery platforms (WhatsApp and TV) enable those with limited digital access (e.g. urban and rural poor) to access the learning materials?
  The above fieldwork findings clearly highlight that the WhatsApp tool provides those with limited digital access to learning materials. However, barriers do exist particularly in relation to data access. The method of sharing the learning materials through WhatsApp through providing a direct link was particularly welcomed in all countries. This reduced the time and burden on respondents to use their limited data searching for the right materials. It is important that interventions and products are designed to ensure that parents with limited digital access are able to access materials in a manner that is data efficient. However, as discussed below, there is a risk in there being a contradiction between scaling up the aesthetics of learning materials through videos and pictures (which naturally use more data) and achieving data efficiency for learners to adequately use the materials in these areas.

  Despite these data challenges respondents were able to access the WhatsApp materials that they believed were best suited to them. The menu of options afforded respondents the choice to use the limited data they had on the material they thought was most useful. Therefore, providing choice is key.

  Access to the TV materials appears to be more challenging, particularly in rural areas, requiring electricity and access to the TV satellite channel Open View. The challenges involved in finding viewers of the TV show suggest that it may not be widely known or viewed.

- RQ2: What are the main barriers and enablers to accessing the learning materials for those with limited digital access?
  As mentioned above, the critical barrier for the WhatsApp materials is access to data, however it is not the only barrier. We must also consider the content of these materials and assess whether they are fit for purpose. For example, the fieldwork shows us that language also provided some challenges and respondents appreciated when these materials were translated into local languages. The level of the content in some cases also provided barriers to learning as some parents felt it was

too easy for their children and thus did not find it useful (although these cases were in the minority).

The main barriers to accessing the TV show materials, especially in rural areas, are lack of electricity and lack of access to the Open View TV platform.

The enablers are clear. When the materials are fun, engaging, easily accessible, and can be used flexibly engagement with these learning materials will be higher. Parents often wanted to be involved in their child's learning but did not have the confidence. These materials were easily digestible and importantly stirred enthusiasm for their children as they were fun. A way to scale this up would be to provide videos and pictures with the materials (an issue frequently mentioned in the fieldwork). However, again there is a need to balance this with the knowledge that these will create more data-intensive challenges for respondents.

Impact on women:

- RQ3: Has the project helped women provide additional learning opportunities to children under their care during the pandemic, and if so, how?
  The vast majority of respondents were women (93 per cent) and almost 100 per cent of those engaged with the fieldwork said that it helped them to provide additional learning opportunities for children under their care. Women consistently mentioned that they felt more confident to be directly involved in their child's learning. They saw increased enthusiasm for the learning materials from their children. The materials were also pitched at a level whereby parents in both urban and rural areas felt that they could add value to their child's learning.
- RQ4: Have the learning materials helped women (including women from female headed households) face home-schooling challenges, and if so, how?
  The home-schooling challenges that women reported were difficult and in many cases, these were the only materials they were able to use. Many women who headed households worked during the day or the evenings, and they required a tool that could be used flexibly around their work patterns. All these women highlighted that the audio materials – songs and lyrics in particular – generated a fun experience for their children. Further, they reported a visible improvement in their child's reading comprehension. What is clear is that these women need a flexible and easily accessible option, because their time is limited due to work and childcare commitments. Therefore, having a convenient option where they can access a direct WhatsApp link proved to be key.

Education exclusion:

- RQ5: Have the learning materials provided support to those who had no or limited access to learning materials during the pandemic, and if so, how?
  Most respondents reported that accessing the learning materials has been difficult. In the vast majority of cases parents received little, inconsistent or no materials at all from schools. Importantly, these same respondents also stated that the materials had been supportive during the pandemic. Again, as mentioned above, the accessible nature through a direct link, the fun nature of the learning and the translation into some local languages was useful. In Zimbabwe, there was a consistent mention of the lack of translation into Shona. While these respondents found the materials useful, this could have been scaled up through adding further languages.

  The materials were also not too data intensive. While some respondents did highlight data challenges, the low-data nature of the materials meant that they were able to better engage with the materials.
- RQ6: Are the learning materials themselves perceived as useful?
  It is clear that the respondents did find the materials to be useful. However, some were considered more useful than others. The audio materials, song and lyrics and African Storybooks were perceived to be the most useful options. The LEAP lessons were not downloaded as often. The key issue that seems to be driving material choices is attention span. Parents understand that their children can be distracted easily and do not tend to associate the home with learning. Therefore, they tended to perceive usefulness in terms of materials that can keep their child entertained while

learning. The audio materials, songs and lyrics and African Storybooks met this goal more directly.

In short, the main delivery platform for the *Learn English* materials (WhatsApp) does appear to be well suited to those with limited digital access, despite the existence of important barriers (e.g. data access and costs). The materials themselves are perceived as engaging, accessible and flexible, and have frequently been the only language learning materials parents and children have had access to during the pandemic. Due to their flexibility and ease of access, the WhatsApp materials have helped women provide additional learning opportunities for their children during home-schooling.

8.6 Logframe findings

The findings from the quantitative and qualitative data are reported against the project's Theory of Change and logframe outcomes and indicators.

Theory of Change

IF ...	parents, guardians and teachers (particularly those in disadvantaged or remote areas) are equipped with quality language and literacy learning opportunities
AND ...	the resources are provided through an accessible digital mechanism (e.g. WhatsApp, TV)
AND ...	follow-up support is provided
THEN ...	children will have a greater chance of continuing their education during lockdown
BECAUSE ...	with high quality resources delivered in a familiar format more children will develop language and literacy skills more effectively.

The evaluation findings indicate that:

Parents, guardians and teachers (particularly those in disadvantaged or remote areas) have been equipped with quality language and literacy learning opportunities through the WhatsApp materials and the TV show

AND ...	the resources have provided an accessible digital mechanism via WhatsApp, although access to the TV show has been more challenging to ascertain
AND ...	follow-up support for the WhatsApp service will be provided during the 2021 phase of the project
AND ...	children have had a greater chance of continuing their education during lockdown / partial school closures
BECAUSE ...	they have had access to high-quality resources delivered in a familiar format, and therefore more children may develop language and literacy skills more effectively

This suggests that the project has contributed to a reduction in the negative impact on educational outcomes during the Covid-19 crisis, especially English language and literacy, in a segment of the population to date. The project could reach more beneficiaries in 2021 through a wider dissemination strategy, and suggestions for this are included in the Recommendations section.

Outcomes, outputs, evidence and indicators

The logframe indicators are reported on below. Due to the limitations of the Turn platform and the type of mass surveys that could be sent out to WhatsApp users, evidence for the project indicators was gathered through the remote fieldwork interviews. It is not possible to report on these indicators for the TV show as it proved challenging to gather that data (see the Limitations section).

Table 18: Outcomes, evidence/indicators and findings for WhatsApp users

Project outcomes	Evidence/indicators	Findings
Build the capacity of parents, guardians and teachers (particularly those in disadvantaged or remote areas) to access and use digital resources to provide remote delivery and home education support to children in English First Additional Language (EFAL) during the Covid-19 crisis.	% of parents, guardians and teachers that report an increase in the frequency of use of digital materials to support home education and remote delivery after accessing the project resources. % of parents, guardians and teachers that report an improvement in the development of children's EFAL skills after accessing the project resources.	100% of interviewees reported accessing digital materials (WhatsApp), although data poverty was an issue for some. 84% of the WhatsApp survey respondents reported that the materials had helped their children learn during school closures. 100% of interviewees reported that the WhatsApp materials had been useful, especially in improving children's reading comprehension.
Develop quality digital language and literacy content: Repurpose and scale-up British Council content for Grades R–4 in English First Additional Language supported by Home Language Literacy. Develop new content with DBE and MoEs to provide support to Grades 5+.	% of parents, guardians and teachers (particularly those in disadvantaged or remote areas) who approve of the content provided.	100% of interviewees approved of the content.
Establish effective digital content delivery: Set up and manage digital delivery mechanisms (e.g. WhatsApp, TV) that is accessible and user-friendly to South African parents, guardians and teachers (particularly those in disadvantaged or remote areas).	# of parents, guardians and teachers (particularly those in disadvantaged or remote areas) who access the digital content provided.	WhatsApp: 22,714 users TV show: 148 views (26 Dec to 25 Jan)
Provide effective follow-up support: Provide parents, guardians and teachers with a successful introduction to digital resources and increase their confidence in using educational materials with children, including ICT troubleshooting, messaging and wrap-around support.	% of parents, guardians and teachers (particularly those in disadvantaged or remote areas) who increased capacity to use digital content because of follow-up support.	This indicator can be measured in the next M&E stage, once support strategies for the WhatsApp service are in place.

Project outcomes	Evidence/indicators	Findings
Promote the project to the audience and increase visibility of the intervention: Use social media channels to onboard parents, guardians and caregivers while raising the visibility of the intervention within appropriate channels including the DFID Ed-tech hub.	# of parents, guardians and teachers (particularly those in disadvantaged or remote areas) who are introduced to the intervention.	22,714 WhatsApp users to 20 December 2020
	# of stakeholders who are introduced to the intervention.	22,862

9 Recommendations

As stated previously, this report reflects a mid-term evaluation of an ongoing project, and the findings should therefore feed forward into the continued rollout of the programme, in all five countries. Findings from this evaluation can inform future stages of the project, and the recommendations below are formulated with this in mind. The recommendations are divided into several areas for ease of reference.

Support strategies for WhatsApp users

- The British Council is planning to implement a number of support strategies, including regular webinars for users, and regular notifications/prompts sent via the WhatsApp delivery platform Turn.
- The findings related to hourly and daily engagement levels per country (see section 6.5) can be used to choose the optimal time for holding webinars and for sending out notifications via Turn. 3pm to 7pm are the most active times on the platform, with the highest numbers of users accessing the learning materials at this time. Friday and Saturday are the most active days across the region.
- Each country's peak engagement times are as follows: In Botswana, users are most active between 7am and 6pm, with a 3-hour peak period between 10am and 1pm. 11am sees the most activity. Lesotho has a peak point at 11am, and another busy period from 6pm to 7pm. Namibia's peak point is at 9am, with the majority of activity taking place between 9am and 3pm. South Africa's peak point is at 6pm followed by 3pm and 4pm. In Zimbabwe, the peak period is between 3pm and 6pm.
- It should be noted that much of the engagement with materials took place during the time of school lockdowns due to Covid-19, therefore these peak times may change once children return to school. It would be worth carrying out regular daily/weekly engagement analyses once that happens, in order to identify what may be different peak points for sending out support messages and calls for action in each country.
- Songs were the most popular materials in all five countries, and support strategies such as a weekly message via Turn with a 'song of the week' recommendation could help boost more regular engagement with the materials. Promoting the audio and storybook materials should also be considered, as these were reported by fieldwork respondents to be the most useful.
- It may be worth developing a separate support/engagement strategy for the least active users (e.g. those who currently engage with fewer of the materials, or who have not accessed the materials for some time). For example, regular messages could be sent to the less active users telling them which are the most popular songs, and encouraging them to try these. Note however, that the Turn platform's Dashboard does not readily provide these kinds of detailed data; identifying less engaged users would require data analyses with R scripts developed for the purpose.
- The fieldwork revealed that access to data is a major barrier to using the WhatsApp materials, especially in rural areas in disadvantaged communities. The funding of data packages for users is a strategy that may be worth exploring. To ensure that data usage is at least partly tied to accessing the WhatsApp *Learn English* materials, the use of data packages could be tied to a requirement to take part in regular competition/sharing activities (see below), which would also help disseminate the programme more widely.
- The fieldwork also revealed that users would appreciate a download option for the materials that would enable the materials to be accessed without always having to use mobile data. This is another strategy worth considering, and it would be particularly valued by the most disadvantaged.

Boosting uptake via Facebook

- Facebook campaigns do result in uptake of the materials (see section 6.6) and are worth continuing.
- Running regular Facebook competitions (with prizes) around the materials is another strategy to consider. For example, a weekly/monthly raffle with users sharing their favourite piece of WhatsApp *Learn English* material, and why they like it, as the raffle entry criterion. This kind of competition also provides a way of collecting informal user feedback on a regular basis, at least in terms of identifying which materials are popular.
- Prizes of mobile phone data would be relatively affordable, easy to administer and popular with users.
- Facebook could also be used to showcase a 'learner of the month'. For example, parents/teachers are invited to share examples of children who have engaged with the WhatsApp *Learn English* materials and as a result learned to do x (sign a song, draw a picture representing a story, etc). These learner 'products' (audio, picture) can be shared on the Facebook page rather than photos of the learners themselves, which raises safeguarding issues.
- Creating a detailed social media plan for promoting the materials over a specified timeframe, and analysing the results regularly, is important. At the moment, it is difficult to correlate the Facebook ads/activities with uptake of the WhatsApp *Learn English* materials; Turn could be encouraged to develop a more detailed and useful Dashboard interface for clients to help with this, along the lines of what many similar services already provide.

Boosting uptake with teachers

- Additional strategies for boosting uptake and engagement with the materials could include dissemination within *schools*, so that teachers are made aware of the WhatsApp and TV show (i.e. video) resources, and share these with their learners – and with parents – regularly. Ministry of Education circulars to language teachers informing them of the materials could help in this regard, in all five countries.
- The WhatsApp materials have already been integrated into several areas of the recently created COELT (Certificate in Online English Language Teaching), also developed for the British Council and DBE by TCE. However, the materials could be integrated into other teacher training courses too, and DBE support for this could be sought.
- Print leaflets or flyers providing key information about the WhatsApp *Learn English* materials and clear instructions on how to sign up could be provided in schools, funds permitting. This would help with raising awareness of the materials.
- Similarly, presence at (English language) teachers' conferences in each of the participating countries, in the form of talks and promotional material, would help raise the profile of the project. This can take place whether conferences are held in-person or online.

Boosting uptake via media outlets

- Evaluating the effectiveness of the delivery of the TV show proved to be problematic, as it was difficult to find any viewers to interview. Anecdotal evidence suggests that very few people in South Africa use the Open View TV channel at all, and that DSTV is in fact more popular. The viewership figures provided by 2enable for the period of 26 December 2020 to 25 January 2021 totalled just 148 views. Therefore, other distribution channels for these audio-visual/video materials should be considered. Adding the TV shows to a British Council YouTube channel, and also to the most appropriate British Council website, would help reach a wider audience. Teachers and parents are more likely to use their mobile phones to access content in their own time than to watch a scheduled show on a TV channel, so providing the videos *on demand* is an important step in widening access.

- TV as a dissemination channel is worth continuing if a *national* channel such as SABC is used, rather than a TV channel that is less commonly viewed. Reaching an agreement with a national TV channel would arguably be more likely to reach the target demographic of rural poor.
- In order to disseminate the materials more widely, agreements with other national media outlets could be sought, with the current materials repurposed for delivery via newspapers and especially via radio stations. Contracting a local media company for help with approaching media outlets is recommended.
- In the case of the *Learn English* materials repurposed for print and/or radio, a wrap-around for teachers could be developed to accompany these. For example, teachers' notes (for print), or a 'teacher' (actor) for radio talking about how he/she uses the materials with learners.

Other strategies

- The rich audio materials already available could be repackaged as individual podcasts, which users could then download via podcast apps. This provides yet another distribution channel.
- In addition, if it is possible to compress the videos to the smallest possible size, e.g. under 10MB or smaller, the video materials could be integrated into the existing WhatsApp materials delivered via Turn.
- In order to keep users engaged with WhatsApp and coming back for more, there needs to be the perception that the content is dynamic and evolving. Regular support messages highlighting, for example, a 'song of the week', could help with this, but the development of new content could also be considered.
- If there is an intention to develop more materials, it would be worth focussing on the types of materials that are proving most popular, i.e. songs.
- It is a challenge to onboard those who have limited digital access if promotion is primarily carried out online. One solution is to include non-digital promotional strategies, such as print posters in youth clubs or in schools that include a QR code and/or a mobile phone number for easy onboarding to the WhatsApp service. This kind of physical point for onboarding could help increase uptake.

Reaching the disability community

- The TV show materials include Sign Language for viewers with hearing impairment, providing valuable support for the FCDO's commitment to reaching disadvantaged sectors of the community (in this case, those with a specific physical disability – hearing loss). Partnerships with South African associations that provide support for disabilities can be explored, so that these materials can be brought to the attention of parents and teachers of children with hearing impairments.
- The video materials could be packaged separately for this potential audience, and shared as 'learning packs', for example on USB drives, and/or micro-SD cards.
- Contacting the South African National Deaf Association (https://www.sanda.org.za/) would be a good place to start in order to build relationships with the disability community.
- Several more South African associations for the deaf can be found here: https://www.gallaudet.edu/office-of-international-affairs/international-relations/world-deaf-information-resource/deaf-orgs/local-orgs/south-africa/national-orgs-in-south-africa/
- At the moment the TV shows are only targeted at audiences in South Africa, but associations for the deaf in the other four participating countries are also likely to be interested in disseminating the materials as free-standing video resources for children with hearing impairment. The following organisations could be approached in order to explore potential partnerships:
  - Botswana Society for the Deaf http://www.botswanasocietyforthedeaf.org/

  - Namibia National Association of the Deaf: https://millneckinternational.org/work/namibia-nad/
  - Lesotho National Association of the Deaf: https://millneckinternational.org/work/nad-lesotho/
  - Deaf Zimbabwe Trust: http://deafzimbabwetrust.org/
  - Africa Disability Alliance: https://www.africadisabilityalliance.org/
- Finally, the FCDO may be interested in supporting and then researching this part of the project in Southern Africa, as a separate research project.

Future evaluations

- This evaluation took place before support strategies were implemented for the users of the *Learn English on WhatsApp* materials.
- The next evaluation of this project (e.g. a second mid-line evaluation, or at end line) should compare current engagement metrics with the 'pre-support' data that is analysed in this evaluation. Such an analysis may contribute to understanding the impact of support strategies on user engagement.

Further research

Finally, given the limitations of this evaluation (described in section 5.3), we recommend that more research is carried out into the uptake of the *Learn English* materials, particularly within the target population of female rural poor in disadvantaged communities. This might involve in-person, rather than online fieldwork; it would, however, require a significantly higher level of funding to carry this out. It would also require greater participation and involvement upstream in the design of programmes, shifting the emphasis from summative to formative evaluation, and perhaps to a more incremental design, development and delivery.

This is important and challenging work given the intersection of the impact and volatility of the pandemic and of the responses to it, and the focus of the programme on aspects of disadvantage. It requires a focus on experience and expertise, because existing methods are inappropriate and new ones take time to be validated, but is clearly of global interest and relevance. Given the increased use of WhatsApp for informal language learning, and to a lesser extent for evaluation, a review of the literature would undoubtedly produce ideas, methods and tools for any subsequent programmes.

10 Conclusion

In conclusion, it is clear that access to learning materials during the Covid-19 pandemic has been extremely limited for respondents due to a range of factors. These include a lack of support from the individual schools, inconsistent or non-existent materials, and data poverty. The materials provided by the *Learn English on WhatsApp* programme were very well received by respondents and in many cases this was the only form of accessible learning available to them. Beyond the responses to the research questions highlighted in section 8, fieldworkers mentioned the significant enthusiasm for the programme shown by respondents. Parents were highly grateful for this programme and wanted it to be expanded to more people. However, barriers persist. A lack of data access posed a challenge to learning but the fact that the materials do not use too much data was key.

Providing efficient tools that are not too data-heavy does impose limitations on the nature of the materials. Respondents mentioned that they wanted to access more visual materials such as videos and pictures to aid their child's learning. While this would be a useful addition, there is the broader risk of not being able to access these materials at all because videos in particular use more data and thus increase the costs to the learners.

A way to address this may be to provide a downloadable option where the materials can be stored on their phones. Parents often mentioned that it would have been better to have an option where they did not have to constantly use their data to access materials. The ability to download and use these materials would reduce the data burden.

Some countries have better access to materials in their local language than others. Where the local language (i.e. Sesotho) was available, this was highly welcomed by the parents. However, where it was lacking in countries such as Zimbabwe with no Shona translation, parents desired this option.

Engagement with the learning materials tended to be highly dependent on their ability to maintain the attention span of children. The audio materials and song/lyrics appeared to be most effective in this regard as children perceived these as fun and provided a form of 'edutainment'. This is important because many parents highlighted that children do not associate their home with learning, but rather with play. This posed a significant challenge to parents as re-associating the home with a learning environment proved to be a difficult task for many parents.

However, these materials provided a hybrid option whereby the parents could merge play with learning via digital means. Going forward however, there is a need to explore how to scale these up through more visual methods without unduly compromising on data.

This brings us to the final point on accessibility. The *Learn English on WhatsApp* materials were perceived as useful as parents could flexibly use these around their schedules. The issue is not necessarily when parents can access the materials (mainly daytime and afternoons) but rather how. The WhatsApp option allowed parents to move beyond the traditional fixed time period for learning to a more dynamic, flexible approach that resulted in a more accessible option.

In conclusion, the fieldwork supports the hypothesis that the *Learn English* materials delivered by WhatsApp have provided (and continue to provide) much-needed language learning support to children and parents during the Covid-19 pandemic in all five countries. As such, we recommend that the programme continue, taking into account the recommendations where possible (see section 9), and that a further mid-term or end line evaluation is undertaken in due course.

Appendix 1

Survey questions

As explained in the report, seven survey questions were designed to fulfil the key M&E criteria, and also to elicit user feedback on the materials.

WhatsApp survey

An initial template message was delivered via the Turn platform:

> "Hi {{1}}! We would love to get feedback on your experience of learning with *Learn English on WhatsApp*. Text FB to help us improve."
>
> 1 = User's name

This activated a thread in Turn with the following contextual message, followed by the seven survey questions (see below). Progress through the questions was shown as a bar.

"We need 60 seconds of your time! Help us improve your learning experience. All data is confidential and will not be shared with third parties."

[Question 1] Do you live in an urban or rural area?
1. Urban
2. Rural
3. I don't know

[Question 2] What is your gender?
1. Male
2. Female
3. Other
4. Prefer not to say

[Question 3] Are you a parent/guardian or teacher?
1. Parent / Guardian
2. Teacher
3. Other

[Question 4] Do your children usually receive free school meals? *
1. Yes
2. No
3. I don't know

**This question was used as a proxy for poverty, in order to identify disadvantaged users.*

[Question 5] How often do your children go to school at the moment?
1. Every day
2. Some days
3. Not at all

[Question 6] Has *Learn English on WhatsApp* helped your children in this time?
1. Very much
2. A little
3. I don't know
4. Not much
5. Not at all

[Question 7] Can we interview you for our research? We will give you 500MB of data for your time, and you can use your own language if you prefer.
1. Yes
2. No

On completion of the survey, users received the following closing message:
"Thank you! Type MENU to try out the *Learn English on WhatsApp* materials."

TV show survey

A call-to-action message was displayed for 10 seconds on screen at the end of each TV show, as follows:

"Calling all parents/guardians and teachers!

We would love to get feedback on what you think of the **LEAP TV EFAL lessons**. Help us improve these lessons by texting **TV** in WhatsApp, to the British Council South Africa LEAP WhatsApp number: *0600 789 309*"

Texting 'TV' activated a thread in Turn with the following almost identical seven TV survey questions.

Questions 1–5 were the same as the WhatsApp survey questions above. Question 6 asked about the TV show materials, as below. Question 7 and the closing statement were the same as the WhatsApp survey above.

[Question 6] Do the LEAP TV EFAL lessons help your children learn English?
1. Very much
2. A little
3. I don't know
4. Not much
5. Not at all

Appendix 2

Fieldwork instruments

a) Discussion items and tips that will be communicated with field researchers

Use script to open and close the interview

This will allow you to share all of the relevant information about this research and critical details about informed consent before you begin the interview. It will also allow a space to close the interview and give the participant an opportunity to share additional thoughts that haven't yet been discussed in the interview.

Collect informed consent

As per above, written (i.e. texted) informed consent should be sought before the interview/focus group. Given that it is a verbal interview, simply read out the information consent statement again and ask them to agree.

Start with the basics

To help build a comfortable space for the participant, start out with questions that ask for some basic background information. This could include asking their name, how they are doing, whether they have any interesting things happening at the moment, their likes and interests, etc.

Use prompts

As we will be asking open-ended questions, the interview will give you an opportunity to provide you with interesting detail about their experiences. However, participants sometimes need prompts to get them going. Try to anticipate what prompts you could give to help someone answer each of your questions.

Checklist for answers

1. Has the participant given verbal consent? (Yes/No)
2. Has the opening script been read to the participant? (Yes/No)
3. Has the participant discussed their experience of accessing this programme? (Yes/No)
4. Has the participant discussed their experience of home-schooling? (Yes/No)
5. Has the participant discussed whether this programme has helped them with home-schooling? (Yes/No)
6. Has the participant discussed whether they have found these materials accessible during the pandemic? (Yes/No)
7. Has the participant said when they use the materials the most? (Yes/No)

After the interview think about what you might want to change

During the interview, you may notice that some additional questions might pop into your mind, or you might feel the need to re-order the questions, depending on the response of the participant and the direction in which the interview is going. This is fine, as it probably means the interview is

flowing like a natural conversation. You might even find that this new order of questions should be adopted for future interviews.

b) Opening interview/informed consent script

Introduction: Hello my name is [x]. I'm doing some research into the British Council Digital English Learning Programme. Can I tell you more about the study? [Await confirmation].

Project details and aims: In this study, we are trying to find out how useful this programme has been to people during the pandemic. We are also trying to get a better understanding of how people have found learning in this pandemic in order to highlight the best way to support. If you choose to be a part of this interview, here is what will happen:

I will [have a conversation with you that will last approximately 45 minutes where I will ask a range of questions about your/your child's (use where necessary) experience of learning during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Data sharing/access/confidentiality: The answers you give will form the basis of an evaluation in the digital learning tool for the British Council. On a practical level, the research team will have access to your responses, however you will not be named in any publication and your data will be confidential.

Rights: You don't have to agree to take part; you can ask me any questions you want before or throughout; you can also withdraw at any stage without giving a reason.

Recording: With your permission, I would like to make an audio recording of our discussion to make sure I'm getting an accurate record of your thoughts. Instead of recording you, I can take notes in my notebook. Which would you prefer?

Do you have any questions?

Are you ok to start? Ok let's go.

c) Interview/focus group protocol questions

- Open with script
- Ask for informed verbal consent/permission to interview.

Some suggested starter questions

- Start with some basic questions to make them feel comfortable such as:
- How are they doing?
- Whether they have any interesting things happening at the moment?
- Their likes, interests etc?

Digital access

1. How easy did you find accessing the English learning programme?
2. Were there any challenges you faced in accessing the digital materials?

Impact on women (Questions for female parent/carer participants only)

3. Has your child been able to access learning during the pandemic? If so, to what extent?
4. Has this English programme helped you to support the learning of your child? If so, how?
5. What challenges have you faced with home-schooling?

6. Has this programme helped you with home-schooling? If so, how?

Education exclusion

7. In general, how easy or difficult has it been to access learning materials in the pandemic?
8. To what extent have you been able to access other learning materials (i.e. at school) that were not part of this programme during the pandemic?
9. Did you find these learning materials more accessible than others during the pandemic?
10. What Grade have you completed thus far in school? For example, Grade 9?

Materials

11. Did you/your child find the materials useful? Please explain why.
12. What would you improve about the materials of this project?
13. When did you/your child use these materials the most? For example, in the evenings/afternoons? Why?
14. Which types of materials did you find most useful? Why?
    - The Song and Lyrics?
    - The LEAP lessons
    - The African Storybook
    - The audio materials
15. Which types of materials did you find least useful? Why?
    - The Song and Lyrics?
    - The LEAP lessons
    - The African Storybook
    - The audio materials
16. Did you have any issues/challenges/barriers with the materials? What and why?
17. Do you have anything else to add/any further comments?

Appendix 3

Report: The impact of Covid-19 on school closures in Southern Africa: Botswana, Namibia, Lesotho, South Africa and Zimbabwe

The general situation

This brief summary is intended to provide some context for current British Council language learning activities across Southern Africa, including using mobile phones with WhatsApp during the pandemic. It is a relatively light-touch rapid response and draws on recent and relevant work with other agencies. Such a summary of any aspects of education across different demographics and across different countries in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic is a significant challenge for a number of reasons, and these must be borne in mind in any reading and interpretations of the following reports, surveys, papers and research.

The statistics, country-by-country, of the pandemic are available online but these are at a national level for Low-/Middle-Income Countries, and the better the gathering of these statistics becomes, the more the rapidity of changes becomes apparent. The Johns Hopkins University Coronavirus Resource Center has emerged as a focal point for such statistics (https://coronavirus.jhu.edu) specifically the 'by region' display. Since most schools, colleges and universities across the world went into lockdown following the 'first wave' outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, education has been affected globally. So, by April 2020, nearly 90 per cent of learners were unable to go to school. In June of 2020, more than 1.1bn learners were still affected.

National education systems – especially in those aspects that are driven from the top-down and the centre-out – display a degree of consistency and uniformity across their respective nations, and perhaps to a slightly lesser extent, so do any smaller units of national educational organisation such as provinces, states or cities at a lower level. There are, however, limits to any such generalisations, findings or observations at a national level.

School closures, proposed re-openings and possible recovery plans would in theory be within this scope. In many countries we have seen coherent and compliant national lockdowns and closures in the face of the pandemic's 'first wave'. This has been followed by a far more fragmentary and unstable picture as outbreaks constituting a 'second wave' take place locally and incoherently, as government awareness of the complexity of the pandemic increases, as reserves and resources run down, as populations become less compliant, especially as governments oscillate/vacillate between prioritising lives and prioritising livelihoods, and as high-profile transgressions undermine popular buy-in. It is in any case probably simplistic to portray schools as merely 'open' or 'closed' because many might be admitting some year groups, cohorts or categories of learners but not others, admitting groups but in staggered shifts, admitting some subjects, for example those requiring laboratory access, but not others, or admitting the children of 'key workers' but no others. 'Curriculum trimming', as reported in South Africa, is another example of responses that do not show as simple closure or reopening.

These strategies may vary quickly as individual teachers go into/out of quarantine or hospital and as the transmission rate varies. There are perceptions that 'open' schools have been acting as 'super spreaders' and of the authorities needing to respond. There are informal accounts of enthusiasm waning for home-schooling. There are reports of home-schooling reinforcing

educational divides. The available sources do not make the necessary kinds of distinctions and there are bound to be other variables such as schools outside the state system, for example missionary schools, private schools and boarding schools, and communities funding or subsidising extra 'community' teachers. These would not necessarily show up in any reporting.

The target countries

This section specifically addresses the brief in relation to Botswana, Namibia, Lesotho, South Africa and Zimbabwe, and the impact of Covid-19 on school closures, reopening and recovery plans. One source includes the British Council report, *A global snapshot of Ministries of Education responses during the period of school reopening, in the state primary and secondary sector*, produced in late April/early May 2020 with an initial snapshot of how Ministries of Education were responding to the challenges of the educational crisis and a snapshot in September/October 2020. It seems to assume just one coherent first wave and an aftermath in which schools reopen. It was conducted at ministry level and is dependent on national ministry data. The foci were the current situation regarding school reopening, catching up on loss of learning, and current quality of and future priorities in remote delivery, followed by significant challenges from the start of the crisis to date and factors influencing the effectiveness of the response to school closures. In accordance with both the priorities and the findings of other international and global agencies, the major issues reported were ensuring access/equity (meaning issues of technology and infrastructure such as connectivity, availability of device, cost of data), teacher competence (meaning, for example, remote teaching skills, digital materials development) and providing teacher support. There was, perhaps predictably, a focus on the teaching of children within formal school systems, as opposed to, for example, informal community education, life-long learning, technical/vocational training or adult education, or education for marginal or transient communities such as nomads or refugees. The findings reflect the understandable lack of preparedness or resources for the sudden lurch to online learning or home-schooling.

The situation in Southern Africa

The information below and diagrams on pages 65–67 come from Insights for Education, specifically their *Live Covid-19 school country tracker* (2020a), using data derived from *Our World in Data* for Covid-19 daily infection data, UNESCO for school status and enrolment data, and the World Bank for country data, as well as rigorous daily review of ministry reports, country response plans and policies, press and social media.

Insights for Education also published a short report, entitled *Covid-19 and schools: what we can learn from six months of closures and reopening* (Insights for Education, 2020b), which summarises the country tracker outputs and reiterates some of our points made elsewhere, namely:

- No consistent pattern emerges between school status and Covid-19 infection rates.
- Most countries in a second Covid-19 wave have opened schools again.
- How to stay open is now the priority for many countries, with new approaches implemented to deal with Covid-19 in the classroom.
- Nearly all countries keeping doors closed to students are still in their first wave of the pandemic and tend to be lower-income countries.

The report indicates significant differences in policy responses, based on where countries are in the Covid-19 infection cycle: "Countries in a second or third wave of infection appear to act differently compared to those still in a first wave" (page 1). Other observations talk of Africa, of Sub-Saharan Africa and of Low-Income Countries; some of these are presented as 'myth busters',

one being the "Myth: Schools in most countries are now open", whereas "many countries are still closed, or only partially open, most from lower income and still undergoing an extended first wave of infection" (page 10) (Insights for Education, 2020b).

The classification of policy responses is explained as follows: "One pattern has been full reopening of all levels and full classes, full time. UNESCO categorises these school systems as 'open'. An alternative approach has been to rotate students, between in-person schooling for part of the week and remote instruction in other days. This is known as a hybrid system and UNESCO categorises these school systems as 'partially open'. In some countries and regions, remote learning has entirely replaced the classroom or students are simply out of school. In this case, UNESCO classifies these school systems as 'closed'" (page 4) (Insights for Education, 2020b). This shows the complexity behind the apparently simple three-fold classification.

UNICEF's *Supplement to framework for reopening schools* (2020) identifies a wide variety of responses from nations globally. These responses make any national classifications seem simplistic. However, there are many impressionistic and anecdotal accounts of the situation as it evolves and as schools respond, for example, TheirWorld's (2020) report, *Back to school – with face masks, hand sanitisers, smaller classes and no hugs.*

The figures below show schools currently open, days closed / partially closed, and days since peak.

Country/Days	Currently	Closed	Partial	Since Peak
Botswana	Open	48	91	36
Lesotho	Open	60	141	109
Namibia	Open	82	117	83
South Africa	Open	76	56	122
Zimbabwe	Open	104	56	105

There is a wide variety of national (and local especially in rural areas) contexts and a range of inputs into policy responses, for example impacts on public health and morbidity, on government resources, capacity and preparedness, and on local economic and labour market factors. So, there may not be much that can be inferred from these figures.

Lesotho

School status	Days closed / partially
Open	60 / 141
Population	**Days since peak**
2.1m	109
Enrolled students	**Income level**
0.58m	Lower middle

No.	Date	Event	Cases*	Trend
1	19 Mar	School status changed to Closed	0.0	
2	5 May	Reopening announced	0.0	
3	15 May	First Covid-19 cases reported	0.0	↑
4	18 May	School status changed to Partially open	0.0	↔
5	6 Oct	School status changed to Open	0.0	↔

**New daily cases per 100,000 of population, 7 day rolling average*

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, in its *Lesotho country brief* (UN, 2020a), mentions a typical government response in terms of school and other institutional closures, amid what at the time seemed a low number of reported cases, and some reports show the pandemic hitting Lesotho late and mildly. However, this may be deceptive. The UNDP's (2020b) *Assessment of the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on the Kingdom of Lesotho* is more pessimistic. It documents the declaration of a national emergency in March and the closure of all schools. The Government introduced television-based learning programmes for selected subjects and classes. For vulnerable children, making up 19 per cent of children in pre-primary and primary schools, the closure of schools meant termination of their feeding programme. The programme was resumed, and the most disadvantaged families take home monthly rations.

With prolonged school closures, some young people may not be able to return to school. Many families that rely on herding cattle and farming for their survival, income or both, may compromise the participation of boys in education. These latter remarks clearly apply to the older children but also to rural populations in other poorer countries in the region. The OECD's (2020) report, *Combatting COVID-19's effect on children,* adds domestic violence to probable consequences and explores the wider educational and social consequences amongst the poorer countries and poorer communities.

Botswana

School status	Days closed / partially
Open	48 / 91
Population	**Days since peak**
2.3m	36
Enrolled students	**Income level**
0.43m	Upper middle

No.	Date	Event	Cases*	Trend
1	20 Mar	School status changed to Closed	0.0	↑
2	1 Apr	First Covid-19 cases reported	0.0	↔
3	9 Apr	School status changed to Vacation	0.0	↔
4	5 May	School status changed to Closed	0.0	↔
5	16 May	Reopening announced	0.0	↔
6	2 June	School status changed to Partially open	0.0	↔

As elsewhere, government acted and reacted with various forms and lengths of national lockdown, and education systems closed and then lurched into online modalities. Schools closed in Botswana at the beginning of April, June and again in July. Some of these were limited to specific towns. At one point the Ministry itself was shut down although the general picture of infection and transmission seems more upbeat than elsewhere. There is not a great deal of recent reporting or coverage for Botswana.

South Africa

School status Open	**Days closed / partially** 76 / 56
Population 57.8m	**Days since peak** 122
Enrolled students 14.6m	**Income level** Upper middle

No.	Date	Event	Cases*	Trend
1	6 Mar	First Covid-19 cases reported	0.0	↑
2	18 Mar	School status changed to Vacation	0.0	↑
3	14 Apr	School status changed to Closed	0.0	↑
4	19 May	School status changed to Closed	1.4	↑
5	29 May	Government delayed reopening by 1 week to ensure schools are fully prepared and staff trained	2.0	↑

The picture in South Africa, compared to our other target countries, reflects its better infrastructure, capacity, media and international visibility, and demographic factors such its greater urban population. At one point, South Africa reportedly had the fifth-highest total of Covid-19 infections in the world, with more than 400,000. Consequently, in early June 2020, after a two-month Covid-19 lockdown, South Africa's schools just started reopening in a phased approach. However, as the pandemic headed for a peak at the end of July, the government announced a further four-week postponement of most learners' return to school. Other reports talk of this closure of public schools in South Africa from late July to late August, in addition to the earlier 10-week closure which took place from mid-March to early June. So, some children have not been at school since late March 2020.

According to the Human Sciences Research Council's report on the impact of school closures on Educational outcomes in South Africa (HSRC, 2020), the learning losses are short-term, long-term, unquantifiable, and downstream will result in social and economic consequences, much as elsewhere. And as elsewhere, the better off will suffer least, and the poor will suffer most. As elsewhere, the better off have resilience based on their superior educational capital, cultural capital, financial capital and digital capital. And as elsewhere, any interventions that are not targeted and tuned to specific disadvantaged people and communities, will only increase disadvantage because of the capacity of the better off to exploit interventions more effectively. The UNDP's report on the socio-economic impact of Covid-19 in South Africa (UNDP, 2020b), paints a broadly similar picture and reflects the type of analysis being produced by many international agencies as awareness of the pandemic first unlocked significant research resources. Documenting the pandemic, or even media coverage, has not been sustained and is perhaps a serious weakness in our understanding and conceptualising of the situation; 'first wave' was conceptually easy, 'second wave' is messy, fragmented, blurred and conceptually unsatisfying.

Namibia

School status	Days closed / partially
Open	82 / 117
Population	**Days since peak**
2.4m	83
Enrolled students	**Income level**
0.59m	Upper middle

No.	Date	Event	Cases*	Trend
1	15 Mar	First Covid-19 cases reported	0.0	↑
2	16 Mar	School status changed to Closed	0.0	↔
3	13 May	School status changed to Vacation	0.0	↔
4	14 May	School status changed to Closed	0.0	↔
5	26 May	Reopening announced	0.0	↔
6	3 June	School status changed to Partially open	0.0	↔

Schools nationally were apparently suspended twice for a month early in the pandemic and this measure affected early childhood development, pre-primary, primary and the first two grades of high school. Schools reopened in most parts of Namibia in early September after months of closure due to the coronavirus pandemic. There seems to have been no recent reporting on school closures for Namibia.

Zimbabwe

School status	Days closed / partially
Open	104 / 56
Population	**Days since peak**
14.4m	105
Enrolled students	**Income level**
4.1m	Lower middle

No.	Date	Event	Cases*	Trend
1	21 Mar	First Covid-19 cases reported	0.0	↑
2	24 Mar	School status changed to Closed	0.0	↔
3	3 Apr	School status changed to Vacation	0.0	↔
4	5 May	School status changed to Closed	0.0	↔
5	6 Aug	Peak of wave #1	1.4	↑
6	7 Aug	School status changed to Vacation	1.3	↑

The picture from Zimbabwe as reported in online media, is confused. Having closed in late March, schools were supposed to reopen for pupils in two Grades as part of a gradual process that should have seen all pupils return to class by early November. Individual schools are however currently being closed in response to local outbreaks, other schools are struggling to provide handwashing, many teachers are refusing to return to work and many parents are refusing to pay extra Covid-19 levies. A UN agency, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, at the end of October, gave a more comprehensive but no more coherent view (UN, 2020b).

Summary

In relation to our target countries, we have, from a different source:

Country	Full lockdown starting date	Full lockdown ending date	Schools reopening date
South Africa	27/03/2020	01/05/2020	01/06/2020
Zimbabwe	30/03/2020	16/05/2020	28/09/2020
Lesotho	29/03/2020	05/05/2020	15/05/2020
Botswana	30/03/2020	08/05/2020	02/06/2020
Namibia	28/03/2020	05/05/2020	02/06/2020

As mentioned elsewhere, these simple facts belie a more complex reality; South Africa, like many relatively countries and states, has several 'tiers' (levels) of lockdown, currently, apparently, in 'tier 1', the least stringent.

There is no systematic and comparative account of school closure in Southern Africa. There are, however, impressionistic pieces on Africa. For example, a survey for Human Rights Watch (2020) on the impact of Covid-19 on children's education in Africa includes Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the DRC, Kenya, Madagascar, Morocco, Nigeria, South Africa and Zambia. It shows that school closures caused by the pandemic exacerbated previously existing inequalities, and that children who were already most at risk of being excluded from a quality education have been most affected (underlining findings in our report for the DFID Edtech Hub). One South African respondent said she struggled with online learning, "I do not think I have the discipline to sit down and have no one teach me." And a 16-year-old South African boy said, "The time to think about stuff and being alone kind of sucks, I guess. Especially as a teenager... I was completely struggling for a whole two weeks, like crying every day. Um, yeah, so that was like a big thing for me, starting to think life was meaningless." There are many comparable remarks from participants in all the other countries involved.

The responses and the consequences

UNESCO (2020a) gives country-by-country headlines of educational responses for all our target countries presumably based on data from member state governments. There are other high-level pieces. UNESCO (2020b) also reports on the adverse consequences of school closures, including:

- Interrupted learning
- Poor nutrition
- Confusion and stress for teachers
- Parents unprepared for distance and home schooling
- Challenges creating, maintaining, and improving distance learning
- Gaps in childcare
- High economic costs
- Unintended strain on health-care systems
- Increased pressure on schools and school systems that remain open
- Rise in dropout rates
- Increased exposure to violence and exploitation
- Social isolation
- Challenges measuring and validating learning

This list does not focus on Southern Africa and when compared with other reports is certainly not exhaustive. It does however make the familiar point, "School closures carry high social and economic costs for people across communities. Their impact however is particularly severe for the most vulnerable and marginalized boys and girls and their families. The resulting disruptions exacerbate already existing disparities within the education system but also in other aspects of their lives." The work of BETER, for example *COVID-19 EdTech research mapping* (2020), shows the volume of work ongoing on these issues and also illustrates the technical and methodological difficulties involved in this work.

Given the nature of the data, including the apparent absence of much that relates to our target countries, and the fact that our priorities, namely various marginalised communities, are generally reported as the worst affected by the pandemic, it is safest to assume the worst case, that is that the consequences reported by UNESCO above are all relevant to our five target countries.

Priority categories

Addressing the priority categories, namely, vulnerable groups, teenage girls, children with disabilities and digital exclusion, is more problematic for various reasons. For example, specific and accurate data at a country level may not be available, even before the pandemic; definitions may be vague or subjective; subjects may be 'hard-to-reach'; and disclosure may not be assumed. This is more problematic partly because of the issues identified above (inconsistent and informal reporting, a changing situation in terms of the incidence of the pandemic and in terms of the responses to it) plus the uncertainty around how some vulnerable groups are defined and documented, and the observation that many are submerged/invisible and 'hard-to-reach', and the ways in which Covid-19 has compounded these challenges and barriers.

Limitations of the data

We have already mentioned a variety of reasons why data for the countries and communities in question is problematic; it is patchy, it is changing, it is inconsistent and for the most disadvantaged these observations are most relevant. This does however lead to our conclusion below.

Conclusion

It is safe to assume that our priority communities, many characterised by multiple disadvantages, will be affected by all or the majority of the 'adverse consequences' outlined by UNESCO and that generalised initiatives to mitigate these may well merely advantage the advantaged far more than re-advantaging the disadvantaged. There is therefore an imperative to reach out to those most hard-to-reach even on the basis of poor data. There is however a challenge. Some of the priority communities are well-defined and well-researched. 'Learning loss' should be easier to document and thus targeted interventions can be based on trustworthy and precise data. Other communities are however less well-defined and less well-researched. Interventions for each community must be as different and distinct as the communities themselves, and based on the best possible data. This is the way to level them up. Anything less precise or less specific merely maintains the existing divisions and disparities.

It is also quite conceivable that some of these communities will have dropped through or fallen out of the systems by which states and governments gather data and supply services, including educational services. Remediation delivered by those same systems could also continue to ignore or overlook these communities, thus perpetuating disadvantage in another way; and so alternative or supplementary channels or media could be explored, perhaps building capacity within these communities to articulate their own situations and needs.

If anything is clear from the rather imprecise picture of the impact of Covid-19 on our five target countries, it is this: more targeted and timely research is needed to ascertain with some degree of accuracy and currency the impact of Covid-19 on education for those in our priority communities.

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All links live at 21 December 2020

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