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Institutional factors affecting teachers' effectiveness in rural primary schools

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Abstract

This study explored the institutional factors affecting teachers' effectiveness in rural primary schools in the Tshwane North District of Gauteng Province, South Africa. The qualitative study, which aligned to the interpretivist paradigm, adopted an inductive approach. Two rural primary schools were purposefully sampled, after which semi-structured interviews were held to gather data from 25 participants: one principal, one deputy principal, two heads of department, one acting head of department, and 20 teachers. The data were analysed using Tesch's method of open coding. The major findings of this study revealed that various institutional factors affect teacher effectiveness in rural primary schools, including a serious shortage of physical, technological, human and financial resources; poor infrastructure; inadequate teacher support; language barriers; and insufficient parental involvement. The study recommends rural primary school teachers be provided with the necessary educational resources, and that quality teacher development workshops be organised for educators at all levels.

Keywords: *learner academic performance, learning environment, rural school, teacher effectiveness*

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1. Introduction

Educational institutions globally are continuously under pressure to yield positive academic learner results (Tarhan et al., 2019). Failure to produce such results has put teachers on the receiving end of a great deal of criticism (Collins & Amrein-Beardsley, 2014), which has resulted in a considerable rise in educator attrition. It is generally believed that ineffective schools are associated with ineffective teachers (Shikalepo, 2020), with teachers being the main educational stakeholders to be held accountable for poor learner pass rates. Many other reasons for teacher ineffectiveness tend to be overlooked (Shikalepo, 2020; Wang et al., 2019). Their safety is not guaranteed either, as some have reportedly been attacked while on duty (Zuze & Juan, 2018), causing many to migrate to urban schools.

Researchers worldwide concur that insufficient educational resources in rural schools is a subject of concern (Biriescu & Babaita, 2014; Maniram, 2023; Paxton, 2015). Following research conducted in Romania et al. (2014) disclosed a myriad challenges related to the shortage of physical, financial and human resources in schools across that country. In Namibia, Shikalepo (2020) found that the government did not give rural schools adequate support. As these findings show, teachers working in rural schools face a severe lack of educational resources a deficit which negatively affects their effectiveness. The importance of equipping every child with a quality education cannot be overemphasized. Rural and urban learners should ideally receive equal and comparable education, but unfortunately the former tend to receive unequal resource allocations worldwide (Ajani, 2023; du Plessis, 2014; Sayed et al., 2016). The lack of sufficient educational resources imposes limits on education in rural schools (Dube, 2020).

A number of researchers have drafted a list of recommendations to address educational problems in South African rural schools (du Plessis, 2014; Masinire, 2015; Khumalo, 2019). The problem of poorly resourced and overcrowded classes in rural schools has endured since apartheid (Mabula et al., 2023). Among others, the state of school buildings is lamentable, with some learners still learning in shacks; most schools still have erratic electricity supply (if any) and poor communication systems (Dube, 2020; Smit, 2017). When learners are taught without the necessary resources, their academic performance is inevitably below par (Biriescu & Babaita, 2014; Kayange & Msiska, 2016; Tarhan et al., 2019). Quality teaching and learner academic achievement are thus highly dependent on the availability of educational resources (Kapur, 2018). Overcrowded classes mean there is no free circulation of air and not enough

desks and chairs, which is not good for learners' posture and physical wellbeing. Also prevalent are multi-grade teaching, a lack of parental support and poverty, which contribute significantly to poor learner performance (Smit, 2017; Zuze & Juan, 2018). Research suggests that high teacher turnover or multiple resignations has a negative impact on scholastic performance (Grissom & Bartanen, 2019; Hanushek et al., 2016).

Even though not all South African rural schools perform badly, their performance can surely be improved if some of the institutional factors that hamper teachers' effectiveness are attended to. This study therefore sought to investigate these institutional factors and put forward constructive recommendations that will benefit all educational stakeholders. The purpose of this study is to explore the institutional factors affecting teachers' effectiveness in rural primary schools in the Tshwane North District of Gauteng Province, South Africa. Specifically, the study aims to identify key challenges associated with these institutional factors and their impact on teachers' effectiveness. By examining these factors, the study seeks to develop strategies that, if effectively implemented, could enhance teachers' effectiveness in rural primary schools.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Inadequate Resources

Crucial physical, human, financial and technological resources are largely lacking in rural schools (Motseke et al., 2024). General shortfalls have been a thorn in South African educationists' flesh for a long time, but the situation is worse in schools in rural areas (Dube, 2020; Khumalo, 2019; Smit, 2017). This has raised eyebrows, considering that education is one of the highest budgetary expenses in this country. Teachers in many rural areas still serve in schools where electricity and water supply are erratic or non-existent, school buildings and other infrastructure are not up to standard, and teaching equipment and sports facilities are either inadequate or non-existent (du Plessis, 2014; Khumalo, 2019). According to Maniram (2023), rural schools struggled to operate during Covid-19 due to a lack of internet connectivity. As Taole et al. (2024) confirm, rural primary schools tend to face a serious shortage of financial and technological resources, teachers and classrooms, but this problem is, admittedly, prevalent world-wide. In China, a number of rural primary schools were found to have insufficient teaching staff, inadequate infrastructure, and a shortage of funding which resulted in some teachers not receiving their salaries (Hui et al., 2023). Worryingly, in her

study, Chisholm (2013) gave an account of textbooks having been found dumped in a river, on their way to being delivered at several South African rural schools.

In a study conducted in Ethiopia by Yizengaw and Nigussie (2023), it emerged that technology integration in teaching and learning activities remains a challenge for most rural teachers. This disadvantages learners, as technology integration enhances teaching and learning, paving the way for improved learner achievement (Dube, 2020; Yizengaw & Nigussie, 2023). In the findings of a study conducted in rural primary schools in the United States of America, Wawro (2024) emphasises the importance of exposing new information covered in professional development programmes (PDPs) to teachers on a regular basis, as it capacitates them to implement what they have learnt, in the classroom. In a similar study in rural primary schools in Iran, the study participants interviewed by Sahin et al. (2024) indicated that the PDP materials they were given were not only outdated, but also failed to meet their current teaching needs. In addition, discipline in South African schools has been a subject of significant concern for some time now (du Plessis & Mestry, 2019; Hlatshwayo, 2024; Mestry, 2017; Wolhuter, 2023). As Pretorius (2014) asserts, indiscipline is one of the characteristics of a dysfunctional school. Even though learners' freedom and basic rights should be respected, disorderly classrooms do not allow for effective teaching and learning to take place (Pretorius, 2014). As Mestry (2017) states, maintaining a positive classroom environment free of chaos has become extremely difficult since the abolition of corporal punishment in local schools.

2.2. Inadequate Teacher Professional Development Programmes

Several researchers have raised concerns about the low number of development workshops available to teachers in rural primary schools (Botha & Hugo, 2021; Siyaya et al., 2022; Wyatt, 2024). As du Plessis (2014) states, access to lifelong learning services for the teacher cohort at rural primary schools is scarce. Most teachers in these schools cannot digitise teaching and learning activities, as they have not been trained to do so (Siyaya et al., 2022). They also cannot effectively teach reading to their learners, due to a lack of training (Naidoo et al., 2014). Bass and Olson (2023) assert that meaningful and effective teacher PDPs can help to retain teachers in rural schools. While those primary school teachers do participate in the occasional PDPs, Mestry (2017:6) describes these as "one-size-fits-all" types of workshops.

Crucially, rural primary school teachers sometimes do participate in meaningful PDPs. Numerous scholars have confirmed the benefits of such programmes for rural primary school

teachers (Botha & Hugo, 2021; Christenson & Makokoro, 2023; Tep, 2024). Apart from many teachers having to adapt to the constrained environments in which they work (Mabila & Msana, 2023), in some cases they have benefited from successful PDPs. In South Africa, Botha and Hugo (2021) found a certain mentoring programme to have immensely helped beginner teachers, while in Cambodia, Tep (2024) reported that the performance evaluations which faculty management teams developed, improved teachers' professional and instructional practices at teacher education institutions.

2.3. Inadequate Training in Curriculum Changes

The curriculum has repeatedly been changed in South Africa since 1994 (Govender, 2018; Lemmer & van Wyk, 2014). In many instances, the majority of teachers have been made to implement a curriculum without being involved in its design (Govender, 2018; Tapala et al., 2020). As a result, each time a new curriculum is introduced it is poorly implemented by teachers, and this in turn affects learner performance (Govender, 2018; Ohadiugha, 2024; Tapala et al., 2020).

2.4. Lack of Parental Involvement

A number of researchers worldwide are in agreement on the significance of parental involvement in the education of their children (Ahmed, 2023; du Plessis & Mestry, 2019; Nkosi, 2024; Ngozwana et al., 2023; Pena et al., 2023). Parents are regarded as being involved in their children's education if they show a commitment to, and support for, those youngsters' learning (Caasi & Pentang, 2022; Epstein, 2018). A positive relationship between teachers and parents is not only crucial for learners' academic growth, but also for their personal development (Myende & Nhlumayo, 2020). It is unfortunate, however, that most parents do not play an active role in their children's education (du Plessis & Mestry, 2019; Tan et al., 2020). Some parents have gone so far as to admit that their contributions to their children's schoolwork is far below par (Pena et al., 2023). The problem of a lack of parental engagement and involvement is not restricted to South African rural primary schools, with primary schools in Romania also reportedly experiencing minimal parental support, according to Biriescu and Babaita (2014).

2.5. Theoretical Framework

This research is aligned to the theory of Cognitivism, which Jean Piaget (1896–1980), the Swiss psychologist, developed in the 1930s from his work with young children and infants (Cacioppo & Freberg, 2019; Woolfolk, 2015). Piaget, one of the greatest psychologists of all time, developed this theory after realising that the focus of Behaviourism was only on externally observable behaviours (Cacioppo & Freberg, 2019; Malik, 2021). The reason for applying Cognitivism as a theory, is that teachers need comprehensive knowledge of the different cognitive stages of their learners' development. This is important, as learners do not pass through these stages at the same time. Knowledge of the cognitive stages will therefore help teachers to know which type of learning activities to assign to which learners, in line with the stage of cognitive development of each child. Among other things, understanding cognitive learning can help teachers develop effective lesson plans. In a teaching and learning environment, educational stakeholders who apply the principles of Cognitivism are better equipped to understand not only how children's minds work, but also how they can learn more effectively. Cognitivism therefore has the potential to improve learner academic achievement across South African schools, and particularly those based in rural areas. The positive impact of Cognitivism theory on rural school learners is unfortunately obstructed by the adverse conditions under which many of them learn. These include severe resource constraints which put them at a disadvantage (Ajani, 2023; du Plessis & Mestry, 2019; Maniram, 2023).

3. Research Methods

3.1. Research Paradigm

This study adopted a qualitative methodology. With a qualitative approach, the emphasis is on the accumulation of data within naturally occurring situations or contexts (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). Qualitative research serves an important purpose in instances where data cannot be gathered using numbers (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). One outstanding characteristic of qualitative studies is the direct collection of data from the source (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014), which means there is no control over, or manipulation of, settings or participants' behaviours. Using a qualitative approach in this study therefore ensured that data were gathered in the field where educational stakeholders spend most of their time.

This study was further aligned to the philosophy or paradigm of interpretivism. The two outstanding beliefs associated with the interpretivist approach, are relativist ontology and subjective epistemology. The main concern of ontology is to determine the nature of the existence of a specific phenomenon (Alharahsher & Pius, 2020; Junjie & Yingxin, 2022), while epistemologists believe separating people from their knowledge is impossible (Ikram & Kenayathulla, 2022; Saunders et al., 2012). The interpretivist paradigm and its characteristics in terms of ontology and epistemology were deemed best suited for the qualitative methods used in this study, with the researcher interrogating the understandings and experiences of teachers working in a particular environment. The interview schedule used in this study enabled the researchers to gather data pertaining to the experiences of teachers working in the sampled schools, as they shared their reality.

3.2. Research Design

An instrumental case study research design was used, as these are known for their ability to provide insight into specific entities (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). To investigate the institutional factors affecting teacher effectiveness in two purposively sampled South African primary schools, the Tswane North district was identified. In a case study, a single entity is thoroughly analysed, with the case being an activity, group, individual, process or event (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014), notably, Mouton (2020) emphasises the importance of keeping the number of cases below 50.

3.3. Population and Sample

The population of this study comprised all school management team (SMT) members and teachers in rural primary schools. Since the total population size was not determined, the study focused on a sample drawn from two selected rural primary schools. The sample size of this research consisted of one principal, one deputy principal, two heads of department, one acting head of department and 20 teachers drawn from two rural primary schools (n = 25).

Sampling involves choosing participants from an entire population, in order for them to represent the larger group from which they have been selected (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). The current study used purposeful sampling, meaning participants were chosen for their particular characteristics, including their knowledge or experience of the topic under investigation. The selected participants were thus representative of the research topic

(McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). While this study included both experienced and inexperienced teachers, it excluded newly recruited teachers with fewer than three months' experience.

Table 1

Participants' biographical data

Position occupied in school	Type of school	Teaching experience (years)	Gender
Teacher 1	Primary School	30	Female
Teacher 2	Primary School	30	Male
Teacher 3	Primary School	29	Male
Departmental Head 4	Primary School	30	Female
Departmental Head 5	Primary School	30	Female
Teacher 6	Primary School	4	Female
Teacher 7	Primary School	10	Male
Teacher 8	Primary School	14	Female
Teacher 9	Primary School	30	Female
Teacher 10	Primary School	14	Female
Teacher 11	Primary School	30	Female
Teacher 12	Primary School	14	Female
Teacher 13	Primary School	30	Female
Teacher 14	Primary School	32	Female
Teacher 15	Primary School	27	Female
Principal 16	Primary School	16	Female
Teacher 17	Primary School	5	Female
Acting Departmental Head 18	Primary School	33	Female
Teacher 19	Primary School	15	Female
Principal 20	Primary School	30	Male
Teacher 21	Primary School	13	Female
Deputy Principal 22	Primary School	28	Male
Teacher 23	Primary School	32	Female
Teacher 24	Primary School	6	Male
Teacher 25	Primary School	31	Male
Total Teachers	**Total SMT**	**Total Females**	**Total Males**
20	**5**	**18**	**7**

3.4. Data-collection Instruments

Data were gathered using semi-structured interviews. When using this interview technique, researchers employ interview guides with topics outlined in advance (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). This method was chosen because it allows researchers to probe the initial responses of the participants, if greater clarity or more information is needed (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014; Roulston & Choi, 2018). The interviews with the teacher-participants were conducted during their lunch breaks and after school. Several teachers opted to be interviewed during their free periods, as they could neither sacrifice their lunch breaks nor after-hours time. Due to time constraints on the part of the participants, most interviews lasted less than 30 minutes. However, this was compensated for by increasing the number of participants from the initially anticipated 16 to 25. The participants were asked the following questions during the interview: What are the most institutional factors affecting your effectiveness during the teaching and learning activities? Could you please share your views on how the lack of parental involvement in school activities affects teacher effectiveness in rural primary schools? Could you please share your views on how lack of resources and infrastructure affect teacher effectiveness in rural primary schools?

3.5. Data Analysis

Tesch's method of open coding (Creswell, 2014) was used to analyse the data. This method of data analysis was chosen as it clearly details eight steps to follow when analysing data (Creswell, 2003). We began with data preparation, transcribing interview responses into written text. In stage 2, we identified themes as the unit of analysis. Stage 3 involved developing categories and a coding scheme. In stage 4, we assigned codes to text segments and tested a sample. Stage 5 refined coding by grouping related topics. In stage 6, we ensured coding consistency. Stage 7 involved drawing conclusions from the coded data. Finally, in stage 8, we reported methods, findings, and coding decisions to establish trustworthiness.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

A number of ethical considerations were adhered to, in an effort to protect all the participants. These pertained to anonymity, informed consent, confidentiality and voluntary participation. Ethical clearance was obtained from the University of South Africa (Ethics

certificate no: 2024/04/10/45126267/02/AM). Approval to conduct the research was granted by the Gauteng Department of Basic Education (DBE).

4. Findings

Theme 1: Institutional factors affecting the effectiveness of teachers in rural primary schools

This section examines what the participants cited as the main institutional factors affecting their effectiveness in rural primary schools.

Shortage of educational resources. All the study participants expressed their disappointment with the shortage of educational resources in their rural primary schools, deeming it one of the most institutional factors affecting the success of their teaching- and learning-related activities. The participants singled out physical, human, financial and technological resource shortages, as indicated in these verbatim quotes:

> T1*: Lack of teaching and learning resources is a problem in rural primary schools. This is because learners learn differently. We need support regarding [a] shortage of educational resources. Our buildings are old and inadequate and it's a problem.*
>
> T9*: Resources make it easier for learners to understand the learning content. Lack of resources affect[s] us too much.*

Reflecting on the views raised by T1 and T9, it is clear that both participants taught in primary schools with poor infrastructure and inadequate learning materials. Teaching takes place in old buildings with limited classroom space. Reinforcing the points made by T1 and T9, four other participants explained:

> ADH18*: Learners learn by touching, seeing, and so forth, and if there are no resources, it becomes a challenge.*
>
> P20*: … normal way of teaching is not possible if the necessary resources are not available.*
>
> DP22*: Subjects like Natural Sciences and Technology are practical subjects requiring experiments when teaching, and it becomes difficult if there are no resources.*
>
> T19*: Teaching without resources result[s] in objectives not being fully achieved.*

On the issue of shortfalls in educational resources, a number of participants specified resources that were either limited or totally unavailable in their rural milieu. Some participants identified a lack of technological resources to conduct experiments as negatively affecting their pedagogy. This limitation prevented them from demonstrating practical lessons, which are essential for enhancing learners' understanding of Natural Science as a subject. Two other participants added the following:

> T11*: Lack of technological resources is a problem, especially because this is an inclusive school. We don't have a library at our school. Learners share some of the textbooks.*
>
> T19*: Nowadays, technology is the best. We are still lacking technological resources.*

In modern society, the integration of technology in teaching and learning is vital. However, the interviewed participants lamented not having access to such resources, textbooks in particular, but also different devices and scientific equipment:

> T16*: The furniture, classes and the equipment [are] not [good] at this school. Classroom doors don't lock. Grounds are needed to exercise, especially during Life Skills.*
>
> ADH18*: If learners don't have tables and chairs, they sit on floors. Effective teaching and learning cannot take place. Funding is needed in rural schools to improve them. Sometimes we have a serious shortage of teachers. There is usually a delay in replacing teachers who are on leave.*

Based on the responses, it is clear that these rural primary school teachers are extremely concerned about the shortage of educational resources in their schools. Their responses show that they recognise the importance of physical, human, technological and financial resources. Rural schools often do not have sufficient budgets to purchase the equipment or supplies needed to create a conducive teaching and learning environment, such as tables and chairs, or even to buy locks for doors – this make their milieu vulnerable to criminals and delinquents. From these participants' responses it is evident that SMTs must be made more aware of the existence of a serious shortage of resources in rural primary schools, if teachers are to address these shortfalls.

Inadequate teacher support. For teachers to effectively implement teaching and learning, particularly in rural schools where the teacher cohort faces numerous challenges, they

need adequate support. However, during the interviews, the participants indicated that this is lacking. The absence of the requisite support—PDPs, workshops, and teacher incentives—has a negative impact on their sense of readiness and capability. The participants voiced concerns about the quality and number of teacher PDPs, as expressed in the following responses:

> T12*: The Department of Education should organise enough professional development programmes for teachers. We need workshops on learner discipline.*
> T10*: We need enough quality workshops and seminars to help us acquire knowledge.*
> T3*: Teacher development workshops are needed to increase [the] knowledge [of] teachers.*
> DP22*: Teacher development workshops, seminars and incentives are needed to improve teacher quality in rural primary schools.*
> DH5*: The Department of Education need[s] to be hands-on and organise quality workshops for teachers. Workshops give us the opportunity to share ideas with other teachers.*
> P20*: Workshops and developmental programmes are needed to enable teachers to acquire new techniques in terms of delivering subject matter.*

It is evident from these quotes; rural primary school teachers are in dire need of quality PDPs. This view was expressed by teachers and SMT members alike, proving that ineffective PDPs served little purpose. Besides participating in meaningful engagement and capacitating PDPs, the participants also voiced a need to be rewarded for their work, through various incentives.

Curriculum coverage. The participants were challenged by frequent curriculum changes and insufficient time to complete the syllabus or annual teaching plan (ATP), voicing concerns about the inadequate training they received on new curriculum implementation. Expecting curriculum implementation without offering teachers the proper training hampered teachers' effectiveness, as these comments confirm:

> T3*: Educators should be trained before new curriculum implementation. [The] curriculum changes after every five years, and we must acclimatise ourselves to the new curriculum.*
> T7*: The issue of ATP coverage is a problem. We don't have ample time to cover the ATP.*

Curriculum or ATP coverage, where teachers are expected to complete each school quarter's teaching and learning activities within a specified period of time, proved to be a huge ask for the participants, since they lacked the knowledge and skills to effectively implement curriculum changes because of inadequate training received in this regard.

Parental involvement. Almost all the participants interviewed in this study, cited a lack of parental involvement as one of the institutional factors hampering their efforts. The participants indicated that most parents were completely uninvolved in their children's schoolwork. The following are some of the participants' comments in this regard:

> T25*: Parental involvement is a problem. Parental involvement is crucial. Learners don't do their homework, and it retards our work as teachers. We find it very difficult to work with learners, without parents.*
>
> T10*: Some parents are in denial of some of the possibilities that their learners are coming through. Some parents refuse to come when they are invited to come and sign documents for learner referrals.*
>
> DH4*: Lack of parental involvement hampers teaching and learning. Teachers, learners and parents are [like a] three-legged pot. If one leg is broken, the pot cannot function anymore. They work as a three-legged pot.*

Adding to what was stated by T25, T10 and DH4 regarding the lack of parental involvement, the participants had this to say:

> T12*: Parents should help learners with homework. They should also participate in school committees and sport activities.*

Reflecting on the comments the participants made in respect of inadequate parental involvement, sadly the majority of parents are not involved in their children's education in rural schools. Teachers cannot be effective without assistance from the parents. The education learners receive in schools must be supported by home education, as this will improve learners' capabilities.

> T2*: Most parents have little education … they are uneducated. That is why they don't support [their children] with homework. Some of the learners don't have parents. They stay with guardians.*

Clearly, the sampled rural primary school teachers were not pleased with the extent to which parents were committed to helping with their children's schoolwork and scholastic achievement. Despite rural primary school teachers having an interest in working hand in hand with parents for the benefit of learners, it appears that teachers' wishes are far from being fulfilled, as parents are largely uninvolved in curricular matters, and do not support their children's extra-curricular school activities.

Poor infrastructure. When asked for their views on the state of infrastructure and how it affected their effectiveness during teaching and learning activities, all the participants cited related concerns:

> T21*: We have a problem [with] water. We don't have electricity in our classes. Sometimes we knock off early because of [a lack of] water.*
> T2*: We have a serious shortage of clean water. Electricity [supply] is sabotaged. Sometimes they bring trucks of water, but not always.*
> P20*: Lack of infrastructure affects both teachers and learners. [The] normal way of teaching is not possible if the necessary resources are not available.*
> T3*: Infrastructure is needed. We need clean water. We need electricity. We need more classes to be built. Nowadays, learners can't be expected to be taught under [a] tree.*

Evidently, the participants were dismayed at the state of the infrastructure at their schools, expressing similar concerns. They complained about a shortage of clean water and electricity, which are crucial for any education system to function properly. Teaching in rural primary schools that lack basics like clean water and electricity becomes difficult, given not only the physical wellbeing of the learners, but also the growing emphasis on technology uptake and implementation. Therefore, additional support from government and the relevant stakeholders, to ensure that rural primary schools have access to clean running water and electricity, would be welcomed.

5. Discussion

This study explored the institutional factors affecting teachers' effectiveness in rural primary schools in the Tshwane North District of Gauteng Province, South Africa. The sub-

themes discussed include shortage of educational resources, inadequate teacher support, curriculum coverage and lack of parental involvement.

The study revealed that rural primary school teachers face a serious shortage of resources, be these physical, financial, technological or human. The teachers reportedly continued to execute their duties in the face of financial constraints (see also Taole et al., 2024). The findings further revealed the participants worked under conditions characterised by a severe shortage of physical infrastructure such as classrooms, inadequate school grounds, as well as special materials and equipment. Among other things, the teachers lamented the shortage of furniture, laboratories, libraries, textbooks, computers and sports equipment. Rural primary schools in South Africa are indeed lacking in these respects, as Taole et al. (2024) confirm. Too few classrooms mean overcrowded classes and concomitant disciplinary issues. A shortage of furniture means some learners have to make do without desks or chairs. These findings confirm those of Dube (2020), Khumalo (2019) and Smit (2017), who stress that rural schools in particular battle to effectively implement teaching and learning. The findings also indicated that learners shared textbooks, which was problematic when receiving homework. The teacher participants noted that the absence of sports grounds and facilities prevented them from undertaking life skills-related activities. In some instances, however, rural schools' teachers have come up with innovative strategies to compensate for a shortage of resources: as Motseke et al. (2024) report, teachers set up classroom libraries in primary schools in Limpopo Province; of the 15 First Additional Language (FAL) teachers at 12 schools, seven had managed to establish classroom libraries for their learners, using their own resources.

Reportedly, some teachers are unable to carry out experiments and practical activities for certain subjects due to a lack of technological resources and equipment. By contrast, several schools in rural areas have access to the requisite technology, but a lack of access to the internet is a major barrier for implementing teaching and learning (Maniram, 2023). This study further revealed that teachers complained about the late replacement of teachers who were on leave, meaning they were overworked, as they were expected to stand in for their absent colleagues. This finding echo that of Hui et al. (2023), who highlight a shortage of teaching staff as a major issue in rural schools that curtails teachers' effectiveness. As regards insufficient financial resources, and the dearth of crucial resources, Hui et al. (2023) concur that rural schools often lack the financial means to sustain themselves, which affects the quality of the education on offer.

The findings of this study, in terms of a shortage of educational resources, are congruent with prior studies into all manner of deficits in rural South African primary schools (Dube, 2020; du Plessis, 2014; Maniram, 2023; Taole et al., 2024). The work of du Plessis (2014) highlights a shortage of appropriately trained teachers, with Sayed (2016) asserting that few student-teachers are interested in being placed at rural schools. Pretorius's (2014) study also reported serious shortages when it came to textbooks and furniture. Textbook provision in rural South African schools has not been as effective as one would expect as Chisholm (2013) notes, some textbooks do not ever reach the intended recipients but are subjected to vandalism. Textbooks are one of the most important resources that every learner is entitled to have.

The findings of this study further revealed that teachers' effectiveness in rural schools is undermined by a shortage of technological resources and a lack of funding for this purpose, and that aligns with the findings from other countries. In China, for example, a number of rural primary schools reported a shortage of funds and inadequate infrastructure (Hui et al., 2023).

The study's findings revealed that rural primary school teachers need support in the form of quality PDPs and workshops. The participating teachers indicated that while the workshops they received were limited in nature, they also rarely benefited from them, which meant the content taught did not enhance their roles as teachers. The findings of this sub-theme align with those of a number of scholars who found that teacher PDPs in rural primary schools were not fit for purpose (Botha & Hugo, 2021; Siyaya et al., 2022; Wyatt, 2024). Du Plessis (2014) states that educators' access to lifelong learning opportunities in rural areas is scarce. Most teachers cannot digitise teaching and learning activities, as they have not been trained to do so or lack the necessary tools and devices (Siyaya et al., 2022). This study further found that most workshops fell short of addressing the main issues in which teachers need upskilling. While rural South African primary school teachers have a chance to attend PDPs, Mestry (2017:6) describes these as cookie cutter-type programmes which are not only repetitive but are also not tailor-made for teachers. In a mixed-method study conducted in rural South African schools in KwaZulu-Natal, Wyatt (2024) examined the factors prompting teachers to undertake continuing PDPs. In that particular study, 93 per cent of respondents wished for quality programmes to improve or advance their careers.

The findings further show that South African rural schoolteachers severely lack effective PDPs, which leads to teachers being demotivated and disinterested in working in rural

schools. Bass and Olson (2023) assert that meaningful and effective teacher PDPs can help to retain teachers in rural schools. The issue of teacher PDPs which deliver little value, is prevalent the world over. In a study conducted in Ethiopian rural primary schools, Yizengaw and Nigussie (2023) found that most teachers had not been properly trained to use educational technologies as part of their pedagogy. In a similar study undertaken in rural primary schools in Iran, by Sahin et al. (2024), interview participants indicated that the professional development materials they were given were not only outdated, but also failed to meet their actual teaching needs.

The findings indicate that the teacher participants were not happy with the time allocated to cover the syllabus, noting that it was too short to cover the ATP for different subject content. Furthermore, the study revealed that teachers had not adequately been trained to implement the latest iterations of curricula. The findings in this sub-section are consistent with those of extant studies (Govender, 2018; Motsi & Makgato-Khunous, 2024). As Govender (2018) disclosed, a myriad challenges related to curriculum implementation confronted rural primary school teachers, with participants expressing dissatisfaction with both the quantity and quality of the training workshops on offer by the education department, to support them with curriculum reform. In addition, the researcher found that monitoring systems, and internal and external support for teachers' continued improvement in curriculum implementation, did not exist (Govender, 2018). Her findings were supported by Motsi and Makgato-Khunous (2024), who concurred that teachers did not receive the desired support to implement the new Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS).

In this study, the rural primary school teacher participants felt that parental involvement was almost non-existent. These findings align with those by other scholars (du Plessis & Mestry, 2019; Myende & Nhlumayo, 2020). Myende and Nhlumayo (2020) interviewed parents who indicated that they could only be fully involved in their children's schoolwork if they were empowered by the school. In addition, parents claimed not to know what was expected of them. This lack of parental disengagement does nothing but exacerbate the adverse conditions under which rural primary school teachers work. In a similar study, du Plessis and Mestry (2019) found a serious lack of parental interest in their children's education, as a result of socioeconomic issues such as poverty and unemployment.

The findings revealed that poor infrastructure negatively affected teaching and learning activities in rural primary schools, with notable issues including a lack of clean running water

and a consistent electricity supply. In Ethiopia, Yizengaw and Nigussie (2023) found that most rural primary schools were not electrified. These circumstances hampered teacher effectiveness and learner achievement, especially where teaching and learning time was lost when schools had to close early due to water shortages. Where clean drinking water was lacking, trucks sometimes delivered water to schools. This matches what several studies revealed (Ajani, 2023; du Plessis, 2014; Khumalo, 2019). Ajani (2023) found that 30 years post-apartheid, most rural primary schools have no electricity or running water, while their infrastructure is poor, confirming du Plessis's (2014) earlier research findings. Teachers serving in rural areas are still confronted with challenges in this regard, despite Khumalo's (2019) study confirming the results of earlier studies.

6. Conclusion

The study explored key institutional factors affecting the effectiveness of rural primary school teachers. A critical finding was the lack of parental involvement in children's education, particularly among rural parents who may not fully understand their role in supporting learning. Addressing this issue is essential for improving learner outcomes and teacher effectiveness. Therefore, schools and educational authorities should implement targeted parental engagement initiatives, such as workshops and community outreach programmes, to raise awareness about the importance of parental involvement in education. Despite efforts by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) to support schools, rural teachers continue to face overcrowded classrooms with limited teaching resources. These conditions negatively impact their ability to maintain discipline and deliver quality education. To mitigate this challenge, it is crucial that budget allocations prioritize the provision of essential educational materials, classroom infrastructure improvements, and digital learning resources. Additionally, professional development programs (PDPs) and workshops should be tailored to meet the specific needs of rural teachers, equipping them with strategies to manage large classes effectively and implement innovative teaching methodologies. Future curriculum changes must be implemented in consultation with rural teachers to ensure that they are adequately prepared and trained to deliver the revised curriculum successfully. The DBE, through its national budget allocation, must also address the critical shortages of physical infrastructure, human resources, technology, and financial support in rural schools. Ensuring that these gaps are filled will not only enhance the quality of education provided to learners but also reduce

teacher attrition rates, as improved working conditions can lead to greater job satisfaction and retention. Ultimately, the findings of this study highlight the urgent need for a holistic, multi-stakeholder approach to improving rural primary school education. Collaboration between the DBE, policymakers, school management, and communities is necessary to create an enabling teaching and learning environment. Without strategic interventions, rural learners will remain at a disadvantage, perpetuating educational inequalities and limiting future socio-economic opportunities.

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