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Teachers' Challenges in the Rural Schools in South Africa

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Research Article

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Abstract

Background/purpose. Rural schools in South Africa encounter numerous challenges as a result of the environment they are in. In this study, the researchers sought to identify the challenges teachers face in teaching practices in rural schools. This study can contribute to the existing body of knowledge to enhance the understanding of how to improve the standards of teaching and learning in rural schools. High-quality teaching has now become a primary objective for numerous education systems globally.

Materials/methods. The study comprised a qualitative research method conducted using interpretivist paradigms. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with teachers and principals.

Results. The study findings revealed that teachers in rural schools faced numerous challenges in their teaching practices. These included a lack of parental involvement in children's education, limited resources to support effective teaching and learning, overcrowded classrooms due to inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of technological devices caused by insufficient funding from the Department of Basic Education.

Conclusion. To address these challenges, the study recommends that the Department of Basic Education provide targeted support through comprehensive programs, such as infrastructure development, increased funding for teaching resources and technology, and initiatives to strengthen parental involvement. Including these support mechanisms will help improve teaching effectiveness and learner outcomes in rural schools.

1. Introduction

Teachers in rural schools in South Africa encounter numerous challenges as a result of the environment they are in (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019; Omodan,2022). Lack of parental involvement in their children's education, a lack of government funding, limited resources, and multi-grade classrooms are some of the challenges that teachers face in rural schools (Rambuda, 2023; Yebaah & Adam, 2016). In contrast to prevailing assumptions, Ngozwana et al. (2024) challenge the conventional narrative that rural schools are characterized by a lack of parental involvement as one of the challenges that teachers face in rural schools. Their study, conducted in rural schools in Giyani, Limpopo Province, South Africa, argues that these schools should not be perpetually associated with negative perceptions regarding parental involvement. The authors emphasize that contrary to stereotypes, parents in these rural communities are actively involved in supporting their children's education through various approaches. Previous studies show that teachers face many challenges in rural schools. However, these challenges still need to be understood in terms of how they impact quality education and how these effects can be addressed (Shikalepo, 2020). The purpose of this study is to explore the challenges teachers face in their teaching practices in rural schools. Previous studies on the challenges faced by teachers in rural schools, particularly in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, have predominantly focused on other districts. However, the Swayimana Circuit in Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal, remains under-researched in this context. This study aims to fill this gap by focusing on the challenges specific to this neglected district. The primary goal is to identify the unique challenges faced by teachers in the Swayimana Circuit and propose potential solutions that could improve the quality of teaching and learning in the area. The results of this study will present a compelling case for managers with the provincial Department of Basic Education in KwaZulu Natal. They will be urged to develop a professional development program specifically tailored to assist teachers in rural areas in schools who have the required teaching techniques and skills for practical teaching and learning, particularly within the framework of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. The study will contribute meaningfully to the established knowledge in rural education by highlighting teachers' challenges in these settings.

The recommendations proposed in this study will have broader applicability beyond the specific context of South African rural schools. While the focus is on equipping teachers with the skills and resilience needed for effective teaching in rural settings, these recommendations are equally relevant to educators in other parts of the world facing similar challenges. The professional development programs suggested in this study aim not only to enhance job retention and certification but, more importantly, to build teachers' capacity regarding pedagogy, adaptability, and well-being. By addressing these core areas, the study contributes to creating a more sustainable and effective rural education workforce, thereby benefitting the global education community. These insights can help inform policies and practices that support teachers in diverse rural contexts worldwide.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Challenges Faced by Teachers in Rural Schools

2.1.1. Limited Resources in Rural Schools

Limited resources refer to the situation when teachers often have restricted availability of resources like technology gadgets, textbooks, and stationery, which hinders their ability to engage learners and facilitate learning (Willaims, 2018; Howley et al., 2013; Naidoo, 2019; Ajani, 2022; Govender et al., 2023). According to Wisdom (2021) and Lance and Kachel, 2018). Furthermore, schools are essential to their communities and rely on residents for educational resources. Unfortunately, widespread poverty in many African nations has limited the community's ability to provide support (Ajani et al., 2018; Ajani & Govender, 2019; Fafunwa & Aisiku, 2022; Bantwini &

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Moorosi, 2018; Bashir et al., 2018; Du Plessis, 2014; Cavendish, 2016). Additionally, Mohapi and Netshitangani (2017) and Yulieana (2020) highlight the difficulties principals and school management teams face when implementing curriculum changes in rural areas due to limited resources, such as textbooks.

2.1.2. Overcrowding Classroom

Limited physical space in rural schools' results in teachers struggling to maintain an organised and functional learning environment, leading to clutter and disorganisation (Williams, 2018). Overcrowded classrooms in rural areas pose significant challenges for teachers, impacting student learning and teacher effectiveness. In Addition to that overcrowding exacerbates resource scarcity, affecting teaching quality (Howley, 2014).

2.1.3. Increased Workload in Rural Schools

The teacher workload in rural schools leaves teachers with heavier workloads due to the limited staff, leading to larger class sizes, multiple grade levels, and a more comprehensive range of subjects to teach (Williams, 2018; Miller, 2016).

2.1.4. Difficulty in Managing Learners' Behaviour

There is limited training for teachers in rural areas, which may have inadequate training and resources for managing complex behaviors and mental health issues (Floyd & Walker, 2015). Teachers in rural schools experience the challenge of learners coming late to school (Hills (2018)

2.1.5. Isolation and Lack of Collegial Support in Rural Schools

With limited staff and smaller staff sizes, rural schools offer fewer colleagues to collaborate with and seek support from (Halsey, 2017; Reeves, 2008;). Limited access to mentorship for rural teachers may lack access to experienced mentors or coaches to guide them in their teaching practice (Arnold & Griffiths, 2017). With limited professional development opportunities due to location and funding constraints, rural teachers may have restricted access to conferences, workshops, and training sessions (Arnold & Griffiths, 2017; Mncube, Ajani, Ngema & Mkhasibe, 2023).

2.1.6. Difficulty in Attracting and Retaining Teachers in Rural Schools

Remote locations in rural areas are frequently located far from urban centers, making it challenging for teachers to reach amenities and services (Masinire, 2015; Evans & Acosta, 2021). Lower salaries in rural schools often have limited budgets, resulting in lower salaries for teachers than in urban areas (Du Plessis, 2014). Teachers may experience burnout due to heavy workloads, limited resources, and lack of support (Arnold & Griffiths, 2017; Evan & Acosta, 2021).

2.1.7. Lack of Access to Training and Professional Development

Mncube, Ajani, Ngema, and Mkhasibe (2023) state that budget constraints often hinder professional development and training opportunities in rural schools. Remote locations are far from urban centers, and rural schools pose challenges for teachers attending conferences, workshops, and training sessions (Evan & Acosta, 2021; Johnson, 2017; Halsey, 2017; Arnold & Griffith, 2017; Reeves, 2008; Collin, 2017 & Latham, 2017)

2.1.8. Poverty

Learners from economically disadvantaged backgrounds may face challenges like food insecurity, limited access to healthcare, and inadequate housing (Smith et al., 2017). Poverty can translate into limited resources for educational needs, including school supplies, technology, and participation in extracurricular activities (Harkness & Newman, 2015). Most learners from poor backgrounds struggle

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to speak English in rural schools, which becomes a major challenge for teachers when working with these learners (Brock-Utne, 2015).

2.1.9. Lack of Access to Technology

Digital literacy gaps where learners and teachers in rural areas may lack proficiency in utilizing technology and internet resources effectively (Floyd & Walker, 2015). Limited availability of virtual learning for rural learners may have inadequate access to virtual learning opportunities such as online courses and degree programs (Lance & Kachel, 2018). Digital equity disparities for rural students may experience unequal access to technology and internet resources outside of school, perpetuating digital inequities (Howley, 2014).

2.2. Theoretical Framework

The theory of rurality was used to guide the research developed by Balfour in 2008. Overall, this theoretical framework highlights the interconnected nature of social, economic, and spatial factors in shaping the educational experiences of rural students (Agumba, Simpson & Ndofirepe, 2023). The rurality theory refers to studying rural regions' distinctive traits, challenges, and opportunities, considering the interplay of social, economic, cultural, and geographic factors (Cloke, 2006). The rurality theory offers an important framework for understanding the critical challenges faced by teachers in rural schools. It emphasizes that rural settings are shaped by unique social, cultural, and economic factors that significantly impact educational practices and experiences (Ricketts & Johnson, 2020). This research investigated the challenges teachers encounter in rural classrooms, and this theory helps contextualize these issues within the broader rural landscape, illustrating how geographic isolation, limited resources, and community expectations converge to create unique educational environments.

A central element of the rurality theory is its focus on social networks and community relationships, that are vital in rural education settings (Duncan & Cowell, 2021). Teachers in rural areas often work within close-knit communities where family ties and local expectations can affect their professional roles. For instance, teachers may feel pressured to engage with the community beyond their classroom duties, leading to additional responsibilities and stress (Zamani, Walker, Rollo, Ayers, Farah, O'Brien & Wright, 2022). Recognising these social dynamics is crucial for addressing teachers' challenges, as their roles extend beyond teaching to include community involvement and support.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Approach and Design

In the context of this study, a qualitative research approach was adopted. Qualitative research involves gathering and analyzing data to gain insights into participants' opinions, concepts, and experiences they encounter (Bhandari,2021). Qualitative research was used to assist the researchers in having a better understanding and knowledge of the challenges teachers face in rural teaching and learning environments. In this study, qualitative research helped participants open up and share their thoughts and feelings. The research design utilized in this qualitative study was explanatory. An explanatory research design is drawn up to explain why something occurs with limited resources (George & Merkus, 2023). An explanatory research design helps a researchers gain more understanding of the matter under investigation. This design was used to gather data through interviews with a specific group of teachers at the Umsilinga Primary School, the Dunveria Secondary School, and the Copesville Primary School.

3.2. Research Paradigm

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In this study, the interpretivist paradigm was employed. This paradigm involves qualitative research methods primarily focusing on individuals' beliefs, motivations, and reasoning rather than quantitative data. This approach enables researchers to gain deeper insights into social interactions (Nickerson, 2023). There are two characteristics of the interpretivism paradigm, which include ontology and epistemology. Within the framework of this study, the challenges faced by teachers in their teaching practices in rural schools vary from one school to another. Within this paradigm, reality (ontology) was examined and shaped through direct, face-to-face interactions with participant in their social setting. This study explored multiple realities through the participants' experiences during the interview. In the context of this study, the truth (epistemology) was known about the challenges encountered by teachers in their teaching practices in rural schools from teachers and school management teams with experience in rural schools.

3.3. Population and Sampling

The population was made up of 20 participants, which consisted of one principal, two deputy principals, two departmental heads, six teachers from the Umsilinga Primary School, one principal, two departmental heads, two teachers from the Dunveria Secondary School and one principal, one departmental head and two teachers from the Copesville Primary School. These schools were chosen to serve rural areas, where teachers were experiencing many challenges with regard to classroom teaching and learning.

Table 1. Bibliographical Information of Participants

Position in School	Phase	Nature of school	Experience in teaching	Gender
SMT 1: Principal	Foundation	Primary	24	Female
SMT 2: Principal	Foundation	Primary	30	Male
SMT 3: Principal	Foundation	Secondary	27	Male
SMT 4: Deputy Principal	Intermediate	Primary	17	Male
SMT 5: Deputy Principal	Intermediate	Primary	24	Female
SMT 6: Departmental head	Foundation	Primary	8	Female
SMT 7: Departmental head	Foundation	Primary	31	Female
SMT 8: Departmental head	Foundation	Primary	8	Female
SMT 9: Departmental head	Senior	Secondary	29	Female
SMT 10: Departmental head	Senior	Secondary	3	Female
Teacher 11	ECD	Primary	5	Female
Teacher 12	ECD	Primary	4	Female
Teacher 13	Foundation	Primary	2	Female
Teacher 14	Foundation	Primary	22	Female
Teacher 15	Intermediate	Primary	17	Male
Teacher 16	Intermediate	Primary	17	Female
Teacher 17	Intermediate	Primary	2	Male
Teacher 18	Senior	Primary	16	Male
Teacher 19	Senior	Secondary	8	Female
Teacher 20	Senior	Secondary	4	Male

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In this study, we utilized purposive sampling, where participants are selected based on specific population characteristics. Purposive sampling was used because it examines a real-life phenomenon. It helped the researchers view and experience the real-life situation of the teacher's facing challenges in rural schools. Purposive sampling will also give the researcher a chance to put oneself in the position of the participants. The inclusion criterion for this study allowed all participating staff members with more than six months of work experience at rural schools to participate in the research. The exclusion criterion was that any staff member employed less than six months at the school was not sampled to participate in this study.

3.4. Data Collection and Analysis

In this study, data were collected through semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews involve a two-way conversation where the interviewer encourages participants to share their ideas, beliefs, perspectives, and experiences (Maree, 2013). Semi-structured interviews were a perfect fit for this research. They have structured and unstructured interview guides that assist the participants in opening up about the challenges they face in rural schools. The participants were asked the following questions during the interview:

- What are the least challenges you have faced when teaching in a rural school?
- What do you find most challenging when teaching in a rural school?
- How do limited resources affect teaching and learning in the classroom?
- In what way is the lack of parental involvement considered to be among the challenges you face in teaching practice?
- Explain how multi-grade teaching affects your teaching practice.

Thematic analysis was used to analyse data in this study. The six phases of a thematic analysis are (Braun & Clark, 2013) was taken into account in this study.

Become Familiar with the Data: reading the data in an immersion and iterative cycle system. In the first phase, researchers need to familiarise themselves with the data. If the researcher has an audio recording, the researcher should make notes that can be used to work with the data. The researchers in the study implemented this phase by reviewing all the data and making notes to generate codes.

Generate Codes: Create codes for all topics and apply the codes. Codes are brief descriptions that are to be assigned to the data. Every time a researcher makes notes about the data, codes need to be generated. Codes are used to organize the data into meaningful groups. The researchers implemented this phase by generating codes for each topic created.

Generate Themes: The codes need to be sorted into higher-level topics. Themes involve the active interpretation of the codes. The researcher needs to link the codes created with the researcher. Some codes become themes. In this phase, the researchers sorted all codes that occur most frequently.

Review Themes: The researcher revisits the coded data. Themes need to be reviewed, and the main themes need to be identified by the researcher. The researcher should cohere data and themes together to find more meaningful research. During this phase, the researchers revisited all themes to identify the main themes.

Define and Name Themes: The researcher can create sub-theme border construction. These names need to be engaging and descriptive. In this phase, the researchers describe the essence of each theme and then give it names.

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Write the Report: At this last phase of thematic analysis, the researchers wrote the report of the findings presented in the results section in this study.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations such as informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation were addressed to protect the participants. In addition, ethical clearance was obtained from the College of Education Research Committee at the University of South Africa, and approval to conduct the study was granted by the Eastern Cape Department of Basic Education to conduct research within the province.

4. Results

In this section, the researchers present findings on the challenges faced by teachers in rural schools.

4.1. Challenges Faced by Teacher in Rural Schools in in the Swayimana Circuit

4.1.1. Teaching Vulnerable Learners

The participants emphasised that they found teaching in a rural school very challenging. Even though many teachers had served numerous years in the rural environment, they still saw little to no improvements being made, and as years went by, things worsened. The challenges included aspects such as teaching vulnerable learners coming from non-intact families. They emphasized that a rural school teaching would be much easier to work in if they received proper support.

"Teaching in rural schools is most challenging because some learners come from child-headed households, and it is unfortunate to watch these learners as young as ten years old be adults to younger siblings. It is very challenging to teach these learners, knowing that there is no parental involvement or adults around at home to help them with their studies. These child-headed learners don't have the provision of food and therefore make it their duty to be at school to get fed. The only meal they have is the meal the school provides."

"Many learners arrive late at school. Sometimes, they come during the break, having had chores to complete at home before school. Due to them coming late, teaching becomes a challenge as we have to return to those few learners and try to help them catch up with the work they missed. If we do not help them, they tend to fail. Even when we tackle the issue of late arrivals with parents, many parents state that school is not important and they need to finish their work before going to school. We, as teachers, need to help these learners eventually better themselves once they grow up and not live with the mentality that school is the least important thing."

Based on the above response, it is clear that teachers in rural schools are struggling with the challenge of learners arriving late at school, which negatively affects the quality of education in these areas. Despite their passion for teaching, some teachers go the extra mile by contacting parents to inform them about this issue. However, parents often show little interest in collaborating with teachers to address the problem of late arrivals

4.1.2. Limited Resources

Principals, deputy principals, and departmental heads cited limited resources as one of the challenges that teachers face in their teaching practice in rural schools. SMT members expressed their concern about the lack of adequate textbook supplies, especially the support they do not get from the Basic Department of Education. The following remarks were made by SMT members:

"The lack of resources has greatly impacted learners and teachers. There are never enough books for learners, and because we are in a rural school, the Basic Department of Education seems to forget

us. Our cries and pleas are rarely heeded. Learners have to share books; we do not get enough funding to purchase paper to make copies for each learner. This also disadvantages the teachers as they cannot teach to their full capacity, nor can they send work home."

"Due to limited resources, lesson planning is reduced, which leads to reduced learner engagement. In a secondary school, it is challenging when we do not have enough resources available as learners are at their early stages, and the year is usually not enough to complete teaching. Therefore, we have to have extra lessons on weekends, and at times, we even have to pay to make copies out of school."

Reflecting on the participants' responses, it is evident that teachers struggle to implement lessons that can enhance learners' engagement due to a lack of necessary resources. Teachers attempt to address this issue by raising their concerns with the Department of Basic Education, yet their needs remain unmet, affecting the quality of education adversely in rural schools.

"Due to the lack of or limited resources that our school gets, we cannot function to the best of what is required of us. Learners cannot perform to their full capacity. Learners feel they are not worthy of their teachers when they cannot perform to the fullest and tend to be absent or drop out of school. Urban schools function at full speed as they have all the available resources due to parents donating money or the required resources their children need. We cannot do that in rural schools as most parents do not care for their learners' education, are not hands-on parents, or are from poor backgrounds."

After reviewing the SMT reviews on the lack of resources, it is noticeable that teachers find it challenging to teach in rural schools due to a lack of resources and, at times, even no resources. The learners who cannot meet the requirements of teachers often have a low self-esteem and feel they are letting their teachers down. They tend to either be absent or drop out of school early.

4.1.3. Lack of Parental Involvement

The participants were asked for their views on the lack of parental involvement. Many expressed that parents were unfair to their children; some felt that some parents used the school as a creche so that their children were cared for during the day. The participants noted the following findings:

"Parents use the schools as a daycare center. In rural areas, many parents are illiterate and do not understand the importance of education. Some parents don't even have proper identity documents for themselves or even a birth certificate for the child they have. Many parents choose not to be a part of their child's education, and they shy away from the responsibility."

"I feel sorry for these learners. As much as it is a challenge to be in a rural school, but due to the absence of parental involvement, these learners come to school looking at you as an educator and a parent figure. Many learners have no parents in child-headed households, and some live with their old grandparents who cannot read, write or see. To get these parents to come and attend a meeting, we have to provide refreshments, and only then will they come and try to support their children."

The participants' findings above indicate that teachers in rural schools are overwhelmed by various challenges and often take on the role of caregivers due to parents' refusal to engage in their children's education. Additionally, parental illiteracy is a significant issue that prevents them from actively participating in their children's learning.

"Due to no parental involvement and interaction with the parents, it is tough to maintain discipline. Some learners do not have manners and respect. They tend to speak out of turn, are always aggressive and angry, and never want to listen to us teachers. When we call the numbers that were given in the office for the parents, the number is either wrong or does not exist."

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After a careful investigation regarding the lack of parental involvement, it is noted that one of the main challenges in rural schools is parental engagement. Many learners come from backgrounds without proper parents, and some of the parents choose to work in places that are far from home and leave their children with their grandparents who do not pay much attention to the grandchildren's schooling.

4.1.4. Limited Classroom Size

Limited classroom size emerged as one of the challenges teachers face in rural-based schools. The participants agreed that it is unbearable to teach in a rural classroom due to the limited classroom size. They emphasized the importance of having number of learners according to the size of the classrooms. However, the principals and deputy principals stated that it is impossible to have fewer learners in a class as the schools are the only schools in the area, and for a learner to get placement in another school, the learner will have to walk a mile.

"All the learners cannot receive constant monitoring and supervision due to the high classroom numbers. Due to the number of learners in rural areas, rejecting a learner's admission is impossible. Once a learner is rejected for admission, the parents will never seek admission elsewhere, and the learner is left to do household chores, become a thief, or even beg. Therefore, we try our best to accommodate as many learners as possible in the classroom, even if it means overcrowded classrooms. At times, learners have to share a desk."

The participants' remarks highlighted the significant challenge of limited classroom space in rural schools, which impacts the quality of education and the future of young people negatively. Teachers have no choice but to admit more learners despite the lack of classrooms. Another factor contributing to this issue is the shortage of schools in rural areas that can accommodate all the learners. Teachers are forced to admit additional students, even when no classrooms are available because denying them admission would leave them without educational opportunities.

"*Overcrowded classrooms is a major challenge as work monitoring is compromised. Homework is also compromised. Due to the large numbers in the classrooms, marking books and keeping them up to date is difficult as there is never enough walking space in the classes. Overcrowded classes also tend to have a negative effect when it comes to orals or presentations by learners as they cannot come to the front of the class to present."*

According to the discussion with the SMTs and teachers, they all agreed that teaching in an overcrowded class is unbearable, but they also have no other choice. If they refuse the admission of learners to the school, their lives are affected negatively.

4.1.5. Inadequate of Basic Needs

Participants in this study cited the inadequate basic needs as one of the challenges they faced in their teaching practice in rural schools. Many rural schools' basic needs were not fulfilled daily, making achieving a fully functional day without a crisis rare. Most rural schools also have a feeding scheme that the Basic Department of Education provides, but it is impossible to cook these meals due to limited or no water.

"There has never been a full proper day at school without disruption of a basic need. There was no water supply to the school recently, and we had to release learners early. They were also not fed. This caused a rift with the learners, who were absent from school as there was no feeding. It caused a problem in teaching and learning, and teachers were behind the syllabus. It is challenging for teachers to catch up with for the lost time."

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After carefully interviewing each SMT and teacher, it was recognized that basic needs also play a vital role in rural schools. Rural schools lack many basic needs, such as water, electricity, food, and ablution facilities, which makes it a massive challenge for teachers to teach under such conditions.

4.1.6. Inadequate Training and Workshops for Teachers

The participants noted that the Department of Basic Education provided minimal support, training, and workshops. They suggested that more training and guidance are needed in rural schools than in urban ones.

"The Department only workshops us, but it is a different ball game when we apply it practically in a classroom, especially in rural schools. The Department of Education invites us to attend workshops. However, it does not offer us guidance in the classroom regarding the curriculum, especially for rural schools, as we are teaching learners who are disadvantaged and who need extra support."

Participants need more support from their subject supervisors. Workshops and training are not enough to assist teachers in rural schools who encounter difficulties in the classroom, and increased support from the Department of Education would facilitate teaching learners in these areas.

5. Discussion

The study indicates that teachers in rural schools often teach learners from child-headed households, which poses a severe challenge as these learners require additional support. Many learners attending school do not have an adult caregiver, leaving them, sometimes as young as 10 years old, to head their households. Many also lack access to regular meals at home and rely on school meals for sustenance. These findings concur with the study by Smith et al. (2017), which argues that teachers in rural schools' struggle to implement effective teaching and learning due to the need to focus on learners from impoverished backgrounds who lack necessities like food, hampering their ability to concentrate on their education. The study further revealed that one of the many challenges teachers experience in rural schools is latecoming among learners. Latecoming ends up disrupting lessons where teachers have to return to and re-teach what they have taught, especially with time not being in their favour. According to Hills (2018), late-arriving learners can disrupt the flow of lessons, which makes it difficult for teachers to deliver a lesson effectively. To address this social issue, policy intervention is needed in rural schools to ensure the placement of youth workers and social workers who can offer social and psychological support services to child-headed households.

The study findings reveal that due to limited resources in rural schools, teachers often face a great challenge, which can impact the quality of education they provide. Compared to urban schools, rural-based schools do not have the resources necessary for effective teaching and implementation (Naidoo, 2019; Ajani, 2022). The study further revealed that rural schools struggle with insufficient funding, leading to outdated textbooks, inadequate technology, and a lack of extracurricular programs. These findings agree with the study by Willaims (2018), who argues that teachers in rural schools struggle to work effectively due to limited resources, such as textbooks. According to William (2018), limited resources mean that teachers often have restricted availability of resources like technology gadgets, textbooks, and stationery, which hinders their ability to engage learners and facilitate learning. The study revealed that teachers in rural schools feel that the Department of Education has also failed rural schools badly by not providing sufficient resources for teaching and learning to run smoothly. They offer more resources to the urban schools and tend to shy away from the rural schools. This is aligned with Bantwini and Moorosi (2018), Bashir et al. (2018), Ajani & Govender (2019), and Du Plessis and Mestry (2019) who stated that rural school districts often have fewer resources compared to their suburban or urban counterparts, resulting in disparities in

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educational opportunities. The study further revealed that inadequate access to basic necessities in rural schools is a significant barrier to a learner's success and well-being. Many rural schools struggle with insufficient facilities, including a lack of clean drinking water, sanitation, and adequate heating or cooling systems. This finding supports the work of Khumalo (2019), who says rural schools in developing nations like South Africa, do not have basic necessities such as electricity. This affects the comfort of learners and can lead to health issues that hinder their ability to focus on learning. Additionally, it was found in this study that many rural learners come from low-income households, which can mean a lack of access to necessary resources like school supplies, nutritious meals, and transportation. Without this foundational support, learners find it challenging to engage fully in their education, exacerbating the existing disparities and limiting their opportunities for future success. Smith et al., 2017) stress that learners from poor backgrounds in rural schools' struggle to buy the basic necessities. To tackle these challenges, it is vital to equip rural schools with the necessary resources and infrastructure for effective curriculum management. This includes increased financial support, training, and technical assistance. Ensuring a fair distribution of resources is essential to ensure that every school can thrive (Ajani, 2022). To address this issue, policy intervention is needed in rural schools to ensure they are provided with adequate resources

This study reveals that insufficient parental engagement in their children's education is one of the major concerns and challenges that teachers in rural schools face. Most parents in rural areas do not engage in their children's education, which is a serious concern; this is a result of most parents in rural areas not having a formal education (Bryson & Daniels, 2015). Cultural and socioeconomic factors present in rural areas can further contribute to diminished parental involvement. This aligns with poverty, limited education, and work demands that reduce parental participation in social and economic constraints (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jeynes, 2012). The findings highlight an urgent need for a teacher-parent relations policy in rural schools to facilitate collaboration between parents and teachers.

The study's findings show that one of the many challenges that teachers in rural schools face is limited classroom space. Limited classroom size in rural schools impacts the learning environment and the quality of education learners receive. This is aligned with large class sizes, which further reduce the ability of teachers to provide individual attention, negatively impacting learners' learning and potentially leading to academic struggles (Ajani, 2018). Giving instruction and personal attention is minimal to none. This is aligned with overcrowding, which limits teacher-learner interaction, hindering personalised instruction (Wachtel, 2011). While smaller class sizes are often associated with more personalized instruction and greater learner engagement, many rural schools face the challenge of larger numbers in a classroom due to no space for extra classrooms. Due to overcrowded classrooms, teachers tend to get burnt out quickly. According to Ingersoll and Merrill (2017), managing large classes exacerbates teacher stress and burnout. Policies are needed in rural schools to ensure they are provided with sufficient infrastructure.

The study's finding reveals that inadequate training and workshop opportunities for teachers in rural schools have diminished learners' quality of education. Many teachers in these areas have restricted access to professional development programs, which can impede their ability to remain up to date with the best practices, new teaching strategies, and emerging educational technologies. This aligns with Mncube, Ajani, Ngema and Mkhasibe (2023), who highlight the limited access to professional development and training in rural schools as follows: The budget constraints in rural schools often grapple with limited budgets, hindering their ability to finance professional development initiatives. This lack of training can make teachers feel isolated and unsupported, often leading to burnout and decreased effectiveness in the classroom. Additionally, rural teachers may miss out on valuable insights and resources that could enhance their teaching without opportunities for collaboration and networking with peers. Consequently, the overall educational experience of

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learners can suffer, as well-trained and motivated teachers play an essential role in promoting learners' engagement and academic success. Evan and Acosta (2021) argue that teachers in rural schools often do not attend professional development training because this training is done in urban areas, which are far from them. Rural schools lack the budget to cover the travel costs. To address this problem, education policy should stipulate that the Department of Education should offer targeted training and workshops in rural schools, enhancing the professional development of teachers. By organizing localized training sessions, SMTs can address the specific challenges and needs of rural teachers, emphasizing practical teaching strategies, classroom management, and the use of technology.

The findings of this study show that teachers in rural schools in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, face challenges similar to those experienced by teachers in rural schools in other parts of the world. These challenges extend beyond the classroom environment to include inadequate infrastructure, limited access to professional development, and insufficient parental involvement in learners' education. The policy implication of these findings is the need for a multidisciplinary policy approach that addresses the diverse and complex challenges faced by teachers in rural schools.

6. Conclusion

This study highlights a range of challenges that teachers face in their teaching practices in rural schools. These challenges include various socioeconomic issues that need to be addressed. Parental involvement is vital for the educational success of learners; however, the study found that parents in rural areas often do not participate in their children's education. As a result, teachers end up taking on caregiving roles that are meant to be fulfilled by parents, which impact their effectiveness in teaching. This study can contribute to the existing body of knowledge to enhance the understanding of how to improve the standards of instruction and education in rural schools. High-quality teaching has now become a primary objective for numerous education systems globally. Accordingly, attention is being paid to factors influencing teaching and education in rural schools. The limitation of the research is that participants were drawn from three different schools with a total sample size of 20 individuals. As a result, the findings cannot be generalized to other South African rural schools. A letter from the Department of Basic Education indicated that the study cannot occur during examination periods. Furthermore, it was stipulated that the research should not disrupt the normal functioning of the school, which means the researcher had limited time to interact with the teachers and school management teams.

7. Suggestion

To address some of the challenges teachers face in their teaching practices, this study recommends that the Department of Education provide vital assistance to teachers in rural schools by implementing comprehensive support programs tailored to their unique challenges. This can include offering targeted professional development opportunities that emphasize innovative teaching strategies, classroom management, and the incorporation of technology in education. In addition, establishing mentorship programs that connect experienced teachers with novice teachers can foster a collaborative learning environment that enhances teaching practices. Improving parental involvement in rural schools is essential for fostering a supportive educational environment, which can be achieved through various strategies. Schools can host regular community events, such as open houses, workshops, and family nights, inviting parents to engage with teachers and staff while providing valuable resources for supporting their children's education at home. The Department of Education can assist teachers in rural schools by implementing comprehensive support programs tailored to their unique challenges. This can include offering targeted professional development opportunities that emphasize innovative teaching strategies, classroom management, and the incorporation of technology in education.

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Declarations

Author Contributions. Maharaj N: Literature review, conceptualization. Chauke T.A: methodology, Maharaj N: data analysis. Maharaj N: review-editing and writing Chauke T.A, original manuscript preparation, Chauke T.A. All authors have read and approved the published on the final version of the article

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