

Exploration of Deployment, Training and Supervision of Paraprofessionals in Education



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ABSTRACT

This study explored how paraprofessionals are deployed, prepared, and supervised in South African schools and aimed to identify effective practices in these areas as perceived by paraprofessionals. Paraprofessionals, introduced through the Presidential Youth Employment Initiative, have become integral in supporting teaching and learning by assisting teachers in and outside classrooms, easing educators' workloads and fostering personalised teaching approaches. However, the study found that their deployment, preparation, and supervision were inadequate, mainly due to the rapid and unplanned nature of their introduction during the COVID-19 pandemic. Using a qualitative methodology within an interpretive research paradigm, data were collected through focus group interviews and observations targeting purposively selected school paraprofessionals. Thematically, the analysis revealed significant gaps in the training provided to paraprofessionals and inadequate preparation of school managers to train and supervise these individuals effectively. The study recommends structured training programs for paraprofessionals, ongoing professional development, and targeted support for school managers to enhance their supervisory roles. Interventions are crucial to maximising the value of paraprofessionals to the education system. The study contributes to scholarship on educational support by highlighting the critical need for strategic planning and resource allocation to integrate paraprofessionals into schools. It underscores the potential of well-prepared paraprofessionals to significantly improve teaching and learning outcomes in South African schools.

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Publication History

Received:

27th September, 2024.

Accepted:

3rd February, 2025.

Published:

5th March, 2025

Keywords: Deployment, Training, Supervision, Paraprofessionals.

INTRODUCTION

Paraprofessionals, or teacher assistants, are increasingly employed in primary schools worldwide to work alongside teachers in classrooms. They assist with administrative tasks, manage disruptive behaviour, and provide instructional support. According to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the use of paraprofessionals is cost-effective in helping disadvantaged students achieve better academic results. Paraprofessionals are common in primary schools in the United States due to the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. A study by the National Institute for Early Education Research found that paraprofessionals can positively impact student literacy and mathematics learning outcomes. In Australia, paraprofessionals are used in primary schools to address teacher shortages and to support students with learning difficulties. The Australian Council for Educational Research review indicates that paraprofessionals effectively improve student reading, writing, and Mathematics outcomes. Nonetheless, the deployment of paraprofessionals in primary schools raises concerns about their ability

to provide high-quality instruction without proper training and supervision and their potential to negatively impact teacher-student interactions.¹

The South African Department of Basic Education reports that it has successfully implemented the Presidential Youth Employment Stimulus, which commenced in December 2020, creating more than 300,000 jobs in schools nationwide. The department said the program also helped save more than 25,950 School Governing Body (SGB) funded posts in independent public and government-subsidised schools. These posts came under threat due to schools experiencing financial distress due to parents being unable to pay school fees because of the economic devastation of COVID-19.

The Basic Education sector created employment opportunities for 319,091 education and general education assistants between the ages of 18 and 35 in the country. The program used direct public investment to create opportunities for unemployed youth and provide basic skills to enable young people to be employable in other sectors. The department revealed that more than 868, 000 young people had applied when the initiative started. Of the 300,000 successful candidates, 200,000 were education assistants, and 100,000 were general school assistants. Education Assistants will support teachers in the classroom and provide extra support to learners whereas available school assistants will help with cleaning and maintenance.² General school assistants will help schools comply with COVID-19 protocols while ensuring that teaching and learning occur in a safe and hygienic environment. Primarily, recruitment took place at the school level, requiring schools to prioritise candidates near the school.³ In addition, paraprofessionals work in various special education classrooms, such as resource rooms, classrooms, self-contained functional life skills programs, and inclusion classrooms in many districts.⁴

The Department of Basic Education partnered with the Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator to digitise recruitment processes across provinces. The Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator helped with the recruitment processes in seven of the nine areas in South Africa through the South Africa Youth. mobi site.⁵ Paraprofessionals are essential members of a school's staff and uncertified teachers but vital school support staff members. They are credentialed education professionals who work alongside and under the direction of a certified teacher or school professional. Paraprofessionals provide different kinds of support that help make classrooms more inclusive. They provide instructional, behavioural, and other support to students in and outside the school. Some paraprofessionals work one-on-one with students, while others support small groups or whole classes. Paraprofessionals do not have the same training as teachers, but are required by law to meet specific qualifications.⁶

The deployment, training, and supervision of paraprofessionals in education are critical components of inclusive learning environments. However, a pressing challenge exists in optimising the effectiveness of paraprofessionals to ensure their meaningful contribution to student outcomes. This challenge is characterised by a lack of standardised guidelines for deployment, inadequacies in training programs, and the need for structured supervision. As a result, there is a risk of role ambiguity, underutilisation of paraprofessional skills, and potential negative impacts on student learning experiences. The problem is exacerbated by the growing reliance on paraprofessionals in classrooms without clearly delineating their roles in relation to qualified teachers. Existing literature suggests that while paraprofessionals have the potential to positively influence student outcomes, these benefits are contingent on strategic deployment, comprehensive training, and adequate supervision. The absence of a cohesive framework for the deployment, training, and supervision of paraprofessionals hampers their ability to provide optimal support, hindering the overall educational experience for educators and students. Exploring paraprofessionals' deployment, training, and supervision in education holds significant implications for various stakeholders, including educators, policymakers, students, and the broader education community. Understanding and addressing the challenges in this domain are essential for the following reasons.

¹ Department of Basic Education, *National Senior Certificate Examination Papers 2020* (Pretoria: Government of South Africa, 2020).

² Department of Basic Education, *National Senior Certificate Examination Papers 2020*.

³ Department of Basic Education, *National Senior Certificate Examination Papers 2020*.

⁴ J. Webster, "Functional Skills - Skills Our Students Need to Gain Independence," May 12, 2017, <https://www.thoughtco.com/functional-skills-for-students-independence>.

⁵ Department of Basic Education, *National Senior Certificate Examination Papers 2020*.

⁶ Department of Basic Education, "Presidential Youth Employment Initiative (PYEI)-Basic Education Employment Initiative," 2021.

An in-depth study in this area creates a more inclusive and quality-driven educational environment. Optimising the role of paraprofessionals ensures that diverse learning needs are effectively addressed, promoting a more inclusive education system. By developing a comprehensive understanding of how the deployment, training, and supervision of paraprofessionals impact student outcomes, the study has the potential to inform interventions that positively influence academic achievement, engagement, and overall learning experiences for students. Policymakers rely on evidence-based research to formulate effective education policies. This study can provide insights that guide the development of policies related to paraprofessional deployment, training, and supervision, promoting standardised practices and ensuring that resources are allocated judiciously. For educators and paraprofessionals, this study offers a platform for identifying gaps in professional development. Understanding the specific training needs and supervisory support required for optimal performance can contribute to creating targeted professional development opportunities. Ambiguity in the role of paraprofessionals can lead to inefficiencies and underuse of skills. The findings of this study can help mitigate role ambiguity by providing guidelines and recommendations for clearly delineating responsibilities and improving collaboration between paraprofessionals and teachers. Educational institutions, including schools and teacher training programs, can benefit from the insights generated by this study. Understanding best practices in the deployment, training and supervision of paraprofessionals can inform curriculum development and institutional policies. Effective collaboration between teachers and paraprofessionals is essential for a harmonious and productive learning environment. The study's findings can promote strategies for fostering collaborative relationships, improving communication, and maximising the collective impact of the educational team. This study adds to the existing body of knowledge on the role of paraprofessionals in education. By addressing gaps in the literature, it contributes valuable insights that can guide future research and scholarly discussions in the field.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Studies on training and supervision of paraprofessionals done internationally advocate for upcoming researchers to use Cognitive-behavioural theory that highlights the interaction between thoughts and behaviour was utilised in schools to address performance problems and promote behavioural changes.⁷

Training is provided to ensure a competent paraprofessional workforce, which varies from school to school. The significant procedures used include (training, supervision and individually guided activities. Other training methods for paraprofessionals included professional activities such as collaboration meetings, outside professional development courses at local universities, presentations on weekends, before, during, or after school; study groups; workshops; district-wide training, school-wide training; self-study; individualised skill sessions; and mentoring.⁸ Although each method was considered acceptable, on-the-job in-service training through school-based professional development activities may be one of the most common, effective, and efficient methods to improve job satisfaction. Many studies agreed that the training must be (1) systematically planned, (2) ongoing, and (3) coordinated to build sequentially upon previous training.⁹ Additionally, activities planned after each session required paraprofessionals to reflect upon their learning process and note any changes they plan to make in their delivery of instruction. This reflection has increased the probability that paraprofessionals maintain acquired knowledge and skills, increasing their competency.¹⁰ States such as Minnesota, Utah, Vermont, and Wisconsin have developed exemplary models for pre-service and in-service training and for the supervision of paraprofessionals.¹¹ Additionally, several states have developed extensive, competency-based programs geared to paraprofessionals and have even mandated that paraprofessionals complete a

⁷ J. Mason and B. Beasley, "Cognitive-Theory Approaches to Supervision," *Journal of Cognitive Psychotherapy* 25, no.4(2011): 294–303.

⁸ B. McKenzie, "Empowering Paraprofessionals through Professional Development," *Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin* 77, no. 4 (2011): 38.

⁹ R. Chopra, E. Sandoval-Lucero, and N. French, "Adequate Supervision of Paraeducators: Multiple Benefits and Outcomes," *National Teacher Education Journal* 4, no. 2 (2011).

¹⁰ Zhanna B Preston, *Challenging Behaviors: Perceived Training Needs of Special Education Paraprofessionals* (Brandman University, 2015).

¹¹ W. Breton, "Special Education Paraprofessionals: Perceptions of Preservice Preparation, Supervision, and Ongoing Developmental Training," *International Journal of Special Education* 25 (January 1, 2010): 34–45.

formal certification program as a condition for licensure.¹² Other states' standards were proven to be vague and unnecessarily competency-based.¹³

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Deployment of Paraprofessionals

In education, paraprofessionals, also known as teacher assistants or instructional aides, are frequently deployed to enhance instructional support. Research by Ingersoll and Strong highlights the increasing reliance on paraprofessionals in classrooms, emphasising the need for strategic deployment to maximise their impact.¹⁴ The study points out that clear guidelines on roles and responsibilities are essential to ensure that paraprofessionals complement rather than replace qualified teachers.

2. Training of Paraprofessionals

Effective training programs are pivotal in empowering paraprofessionals to fulfil their roles competently. Friend and Cook argue that comprehensive training should encompass basic instructional strategies, understanding diverse learning needs, and effective communication techniques.¹⁵ Additionally, the study suggests that ongoing professional development is essential to keep paraprofessionals abreast with evolving educational practices.

3. Supervision of Paraprofessionals

Supervision is critical to ensuring the quality and effectiveness of paraprofessional support. Pickett emphasises the importance of regular and structured supervision, advocating for a collaborative approach involving teachers, administrators, and paraprofessionals.¹⁶ The study suggests that adequate supervision contributes to the professional growth of paraprofessionals and the overall improvement of classroom dynamics.

4. Challenges and Best Practices

Addressing the challenges associated with paraprofessionals' deployment, training, and supervision is crucial. Scruggs, Mastropieri, and McDuffie highlight potential issues, such as role ambiguity and insufficient training, and propose best practices to overcome these challenges, including clearly defined job descriptions and ongoing professional development.¹⁷

Role Ambiguity

Challenge: Role ambiguity arises when the responsibilities of paraprofessionals are unclearly defined, leading to confusion about their role in the classroom.

Best Practice: Establishing clearly defined job descriptions is paramount. These descriptions should delineate roles, responsibilities, and expectations, ensuring that paraprofessionals and teachers understand their roles.

Insufficient Training

Challenge: Paraprofessionals may face challenges due to inadequate training, hindering their ability to effectively cater to diverse learning needs.

Best Practice: Implementing comprehensive training programs beyond basic instructional strategies is essential. Training should encompass understanding diverse learning needs, effective communication, and collaboration strategies within the educational team.

¹² C. Mohniki, "Paraprofessionals Resource and Research Centre," Nebraska Department of Education, 2013, <http://paracenter.org/policy-and-legislation/statepolicies/nebrask>.

¹³ Preston, *Challenging Behaviors: Perceived Training Needs of Special Education Paraprofessionals*.

¹⁴ Richard M Ingersoll and Michael Strong, "The Impact of Induction and Mentoring Programs for Beginning Teachers: A Critical Review of the Research," *Review of Educational Research* 81, no. 2 (2011): 201–33.

¹⁵ M. Friend and L. Cook, *Interactions: Collaboration Skills for School Professionals* (Pearson Higher Ed., 2013).

¹⁶ A. L. Pickett, *Supervising Paraprofessionals in the Classroom* (Routledge, 2016).

¹⁷ Thomas E Scruggs, Margo A Mastropieri, and Kimberly A McDuffie, "Co-Teaching in Inclusive Classrooms: A Metasynthesis of Qualitative Research," *Exceptional Children* 73, no. 4 (2007): 392–416.

Lack of Supervision

Challenge: Inadequate or inconsistent supervision can impede the professional growth of paraprofessionals, impacting their ability to contribute meaningfully to the learning environment.

Best Practice: Establishing a structured system of supervision that involves regular check-ins, feedback sessions, and collaborative discussions between teachers and paraprofessionals can improve their professional development and improve overall classroom dynamics.

Ineffective Collaboration

Challenge: Communication barriers or a lack of collaborative strategies may hinder collaboration between teachers and paraprofessionals.

Best Practice: Promoting a culture of collaboration is crucial. This involves fostering open communication channels, encouraging joint planning sessions, and providing opportunities for ongoing collaboration. Professional development initiatives that focus on collaborative skills can further strengthen these partnerships.

Professional Development Opportunities

Challenge: Paraprofessionals may lack access to ongoing professional development opportunities, limiting their ability to stay up to date on best practices.

Best Practice: Implementing a systematic approach to professional development that addresses the evolving needs of paraprofessionals is vital. This could include workshops, seminars, and mentorship programs that provide continuous learning opportunities.

Tailoring Support to Diverse Learners

Challenge: Paraprofessionals may struggle to effectively support students with diverse learning needs if they are not adequately equipped.

Best Practice: Tailoring training programs to address the specific needs of diverse learners is essential. This may involve incorporating strategies for differentiated instruction, understanding various learning styles, and providing resources that support inclusive practices.

Regular Evaluation and Feedback

The role of paraprofessionals in supporting both teachers and students within the education system is essential, particularly in contexts where students require additional assistance. However, without proper mechanisms for regular evaluation and feedback, it becomes challenging to assess the effectiveness of paraprofessionals and the impact they have on student outcomes. This lack of systematic oversight presents a significant challenge in understanding whether paraprofessionals are contributing positively to student learning, while also making it difficult to identify areas where they need additional support or training. To address these issues, it is crucial to implement structured evaluation processes that include regular feedback, providing a pathway for ongoing professional development and enhancing the quality of education provided by paraprofessionals.

Without regular evaluation, paraprofessionals may continue to operate without clear direction or guidance, which can lead to inconsistent practices that do not align with the institution's educational goals. Teachers and administrators may struggle to assess whether paraprofessionals are meeting their expectations or whether they are effectively supporting students. This lack of oversight limits the potential for collaboration between paraprofessionals, teachers, and administrators, limiting professional growth opportunities. Moreover, without feedback, paraprofessionals may not be aware of areas where they need improvement, which can prevent them from enhancing their skills and contributing more effectively to the classroom environment.

A best practice to overcome these challenges is to introduce a systematic evaluation process that includes regular feedback sessions. Evaluations should focus on assessing the performance of paraprofessionals in key areas such as instructional support, classroom management, and student engagement. As part of this process, feedback sessions allow paraprofessionals to receive constructive insights into their performance, offering guidance on how they can improve and what aspects of their work are already successful. This iterative approach fosters professional growth and helps

paraprofessionals adapt their strategies to better meet the needs of students, particularly those who require additional support.

Regular feedback also provides an opportunity to recognise the successes of paraprofessionals. Positive reinforcement is a powerful motivator, and acknowledging the contributions of paraprofessionals helps build their confidence and sense of belonging within the school community. This, in turn, increases job satisfaction and encourages paraprofessionals to continue striving for excellence. Recognising their achievements also highlights the vital role they play in the education system, fostering a culture of appreciation and mutual respect between paraprofessionals and the rest of the school staff.

Effective training and supervision of paraprofessionals must be approached holistically. Regular evaluation and feedback should be integrated into a broader strategy that includes ongoing professional development, mentorship, and collaboration between teachers and paraprofessionals. Training programs should not only equip paraprofessionals with the necessary skills to fulfill their roles but also provide opportunities for continuous learning and growth. Collaboration between teachers, administrators, and paraprofessionals ensures that evaluations are informed by direct observations and that all stakeholders are working towards the same goals. By aligning their efforts, schools can create an environment in which paraprofessionals are empowered to contribute effectively to the educational process.

The ultimate objective of regular evaluation and feedback is to improve the impact of paraprofessionals on student success. When paraprofessionals receive ongoing support and professional development, they are better equipped to assist students with their academic, social, and emotional needs. This is particularly important for students who face additional challenges, such as learning disabilities or behavioural issues. By improving the performance of paraprofessionals, schools can create a more supportive and inclusive learning environment that promotes positive outcomes for all students. Regular evaluation and feedback are essential to maximise the effectiveness of paraprofessionals in the education system. These processes provide a means of assessing performance, identifying areas of improvement, and offering opportunities for recognition and professional growth. By adopting a holistic and collaborative approach to paraprofessionals' training, supervision, and development, schools can ensure that these valuable staff members are empowered to contribute meaningfully to student success and the overall quality of education.

5. Impact on Student Outcomes

Research by Downer and Pianta explores the impact of paraprofessional support on student outcomes.¹⁸ The study suggests that when paraprofessionals receive adequate training and supervision, they can positively influence student engagement and academic achievement. However, the authors caution that the effectiveness of paraprofessionals is contingent on appropriate deployment and ongoing professional development. The deployment, training, and supervision of paraprofessionals in education are multifaceted and interconnected aspects that require careful consideration. A holistic approach, incorporating clear guidelines, comprehensive training, structured supervision, and ongoing professional development, is essential to maximise the positive impact of paraprofessionals on student learning outcomes.

METHODOLOGY

The study followed a qualitative research method that sought to explore and understand people's experiences, perspectives, and behaviours through in-depth interviews, observations, and analysis of texts and documents. The deployment of paraprofessionals refers to the process of assigning non-professional staff to perform specific tasks or roles within an organisation or community. Qualitative research methods were used to explore the deployment of paraprofessionals in various settings, such as healthcare, education, social services, and community development. Qualitative studies were used to provide rich insights into the experiences and perspectives of paraprofessionals, as well as the challenges and opportunities associated with their training and supervision. According to the interpretivist approach, it is essential for the researcher as a social actor to appreciate the differences between people. Moreover,

¹⁸ J. T. Downer and R. C. Pianta, "Academic and Cognitive Functioning in First Grade: Associations with Earlier Home and Childcare Predictors and Concurrent Home and Classroom Experiences," *School Psychology Review* 35, no. 1 (2006): 11–30.

interpretivist purposive study focused on meaning and employed multiple methods to reflect different aspects of the issue. The interpretivist framework was used to seek to describe and interpret people's subjective experiences and perceptions of a phenomenon. This method can help explore how paraprofessionals experience their roles and responsibilities and their interactions with other professionals.¹⁹

The scope of the study was limited. Twenty paraprofessionals and ten teachers from two schools in the same circuit were included. Direct training and supervision, according to the literature, was provided to paraprofessionals by special education teachers.²⁰ Therefore, purposeful sampling, as described by Creswell, included all purposively selected education teachers and paraprofessionals from two schools in the education department in the district.²¹ All education teachers and paraprofessionals received formal invitations describing the study and participants' rights. The researcher conducted focus group interviews. The participants selected for the interviews were teachers and paraprofessionals in the selected schools. The paraprofessionals represented all levels and types of educational programmes available in the schools. The researcher recorded the interviews using Zoom computer software and then sent the recordings to a Rev.com professional transcription service. Afterwards, the researcher uploaded the transcriptions to NVivo for thematic analysis. The researcher conducted a member check to validate the findings.

DISCUSSION

The discussion of the findings was grouped and categorised under the following research questions.

- What competencies are essential to demonstrate to work effectively with paraprofessionals?
- What are the training and supervision requirements for paraprofessionals at the school level?

Answering these research questions can help organisations and policymakers make informed decisions about the deployment of paraprofessionals effectively and ethically. The objectives were: to examine the impact of paraprofessional deployment on service delivery to schools, that is, helping learners with homework, classwork and other tasks assigned to them and to explore the training and supervision needs of paraprofessionals to ensure quality development.

Participants drew connections between school, circuit and district training and guidelines in every competency. For example, many participants discussed how joint initial and ongoing training for teachers and paraprofessionals could help develop work ethics skills. *"I think there should be joint training sessions between teachers and paraprofessionals that could significantly improve our ability to collaborate effectively and help both groups develop stronger work ethics."* A teacher proposed mandatory initial training for new teams of teachers and paraprofessionals to address communication skills in learners. She recommended that training would be required for the first days, such as if a new person joined the team or if there was a challenge in the relationship. *"The district offered ongoing training programs that included both teachers and paraprofessionals; it would ensure that everyone is aligned with the same expectations and work standards."* Half of the participants discussed the provision of shared time as a means of support, explicitly having dedicated time for teachers and paraprofessionals to meet to discuss how things are going, learn and apply strategies to strengthen their relationship and attend meetings and training together. Teachers consistently wanted more time with their paraprofessionals and looked to schools and districts to help facilitate this time. For example, one teacher shared, *"See, we never have time. There are very few times where the three of us are together alone . . . So, if there were time in general . . . to go over what's going well, what's not going well, how can we fix this?"* Just that time alone is essential. The participants drew connections to how this dedicated time might support the work of teachers with paraprofessionals.

¹⁹ J.W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (SAGE Publications, 2014), https://books.google.com.gh/books?id=4uB76IC_pOQC.

²⁰ Preston, *Challenging Behaviors: Perceived Training Needs of Special Education Paraprofessionals*; Matthew Jay Ramsey, "A Case Study Analysis of Paraprofessional Work, Training, and Supervision in Inclusive Elementary Schools" (University of Kansas, 2013).

²¹ Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*.

What types of professional development training would teachers and paraprofessionals be interested in receiving?

The teacher's response indicated that a wide variety of pieces of training would interest them. Nine of ten teachers were inclined towards in-service training from within the district, and seven of ten teachers felt they would benefit from professional workshops. Four of 10 teachers mentioned *that "it would be beneficial to receive training on supervising paraprofessionals about twice a year, while seven teachers thought it should be more frequent."* The paraprofessionals had an overwhelming response to the types of training they would like to participate in. Eighteen of twenty participants revealed that they would enjoy in-service supervision and training by the district, and sixteen of twenty who answered said they would benefit from professional workshops. Seventeen of twenty paraprofessionals reported that it would be optimum to receive training once a month or more because they are at school for a few months. Eight respondents thought training should be provided continuously. Four paraprofessionals commented that the training should be continuous and/or as needed. One respondent commented that the pieces of activity should not be mandatory and should have reasonable minimum requirements. One paraprofessional was concerned about the time of day the training might be offered as it was for a few hours.

Who do special education teachers and paraprofessionals consider responsible for supervising paraprofessionals?

Eight teachers indicated that they believed teachers are accountable for supervising paraprofessionals who provide services to the students in their programs. *"I believe it's the teachers' responsibility to supervise the paraprofessionals working with students in our programs."* Two of the ten teachers reported unsure who oversaw the paraprofessionals. Thirteen paraprofessionals felt that the responsible supervisor, who is the school manager (principal), should have the mandate to carry out the task. *"The principal should be responsible for supervising paraprofessionals, but they don't have the time to regularly observe their work."*

Three of the 20 paraprofessionals reported that they technically did not know who their supervisor was. One teacher and one paraprofessional identified the principal as the academic supervisor of paraprofessionals. Still, both felt that the principal did not have the opportunity to observe the paraprofessionals' work regularly.

"We were never clearly told who oversees paraprofessionals, so I'm unsure about who actually manages them."

The findings of this study indicated that paraprofessionals perceived that the optimum professional training and supervision system in their school district would include pre-service training before any new assignment. Pre-service training would also include an introduction to the job description, the fundamental education law, and training specific to the paraprofessionals' unique position in schools. The paraprofessionals also indicated that they felt training should include information about their services in nutrition programs.

IMPLICATIONS

The findings reveal significant confusion among teachers and paraprofessionals about the exact requirements and roles of paraprofessional supervision and support within the school system. Teachers and paraprofessionals appear to have differing understandings of who oversees the paraprofessionals' work, leading to ambiguity and uncertainty in practice. This confusion may arise from a lack of clear communication or formal guidelines from the school administration, contributing to inconsistent supervision and support for paraprofessionals. Moreover, there is a notable concern about the process for meeting the standards set forth by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) regarding paraprofessional training. Both teachers and paraprofessionals seem unclear about the expectations for professional development, which raises questions about the effectiveness of current training programs. The data suggest that paraprofessionals may not receive the necessary training to meet DBE standards due to insufficient training programs or lack of awareness about available development opportunities. Additionally, both teachers and paraprofessionals express concerns about the current level of training that paraprofessionals have received. Given the transient nature of paraprofessional positions—where staff members frequently come and go—it is difficult to ensure consistent and comprehensive training.

The turnover may further complicate efforts to standardise the training process, making it harder for schools to assess whether paraprofessionals are adequately prepared to support students. This issue may be exacerbated because many schools, circuits, and districts may be unaware of the training gaps among their paraprofessional staff. Schools may fail to provide the necessary support for these crucial staff members without a systematic approach to assessing paraprofessionals' training needs. In some cases, paraprofessionals may not know where to begin seeking training, which underscores the importance of a more structured, accessible, and transparent training system. The implications highlight the need for clearer communication and guidance regarding the supervision and training of paraprofessionals. Schools and districts must prioritise developing comprehensive training programs, improving communication between staff, and ensuring that teachers and paraprofessionals know their roles, responsibilities, and pathways to professional development. Without addressing these issues, the effectiveness of paraprofessional support may continue to be compromised, ultimately impacting the quality of education students receive. The implications imply that there is clearly confusion between teachers and paraprofessionals as to what the requirements entail exactly. Furthermore, there is a complaint about how to attain the standards set forth by the Department of Basic Education on training paraprofessionals. Also, there is a question between teachers and paraprofessionals as to how well-trained they are at present, more so because they come and go. In addition, most schools, circuits, and districts may be unaware that their paraprofessionals may still need additional training. Indeed, some paraprofessionals did not know where to start with.

The findings reveal significant confusion among teachers and paraprofessionals about the exact requirements and roles of paraprofessional supervision and support within the school system. Teachers and paraprofessionals seem to have differing understandings of who oversees the paraprofessionals' work, leading to ambiguity and uncertainty in practice. This confusion likely stems from a lack of clear communication or formal guidelines from the school administration, which has contributed to inconsistent supervision and support for paraprofessionals. Moreover, there is a notable concern about the process for meeting the standards set forth by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) regarding paraprofessional training. Both teachers and paraprofessionals appear unclear about the expectations for professional development, raising concerns about the effectiveness of current training programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Several key recommendations emerge to improve paraprofessional support and training in light of the implications above. One critical area to address is the need for clearer communication about roles and responsibilities. The ambiguity around who supervises paraprofessionals can be resolved by developing and disseminating clear role descriptions that detail specific duties and supervision structures. These guidelines should be shared through formal orientation sessions, allowing teachers and paraprofessionals to better understand each other's roles and responsibilities. In addition, open discussions should be encouraged to ensure everyone is on the same page. Establishing a formal chain of command, with clearly defined lines of accountability, would help eliminate any confusion over paraprofessional oversight.

Another essential recommendation is the development of more comprehensive and accessible training programs for paraprofessionals. Many schools appear to lack a systematic approach to paraprofessional development, leading to inconsistent training and preparedness. To address this, schools and districts should create centralised training modules that cover fundamental skills such as classroom management, instructional support, and behaviour management. These training programs should be available online and in workshops, ensuring that paraprofessionals can access them regardless of location or schedule. It is also essential that training is not limited to a one-time session. Paraprofessionals should have access to ongoing professional development opportunities, allowing them to keep up with their skills and meet DBE standards over time. Mentorship programs could be established to further support new paraprofessionals, pairing them with more experienced colleagues who can provide guidance and ensure consistent learning within the school environment. To guarantee that paraprofessionals are adequately prepared for their roles, schools should implement a system of regular assessments. Annual skill audits would help identify gaps in paraprofessional training, allowing schools to provide targeted professional development based on individual needs. Moreover, each paraprofessional should work with supervisors to create a professional growth plan that outlines their training needs and career goals. Additionally,

districts should regularly assess the effectiveness of their training programs to ensure they remain aligned with the evolving needs of both paraprofessionals and students. Given the high turnover among paraprofessionals, improving retention is another important recommendation. The transient nature of these positions exacerbates training inconsistencies, which in turn affects the overall quality of support for students. Schools can address this issue by offering certification programs in partnership with local colleges or educational institutions, providing paraprofessionals with formal recognition of their skills and encouraging longer-term commitment to their roles. Schools should also review compensation and benefits packages to ensure they are competitive, which could include professional development funds and access to health care. Additionally, creating internal pathways for career advancement, such as promoting paraprofessionals to senior positions or helping them transition into teaching roles with additional training, would offer greater career stability and motivation for staff to stay within the system.

A further issue to address is the lack of awareness among paraprofessionals of the available training resources. Many paraprofessionals may be unsure where to start when seeking development opportunities. To address this, schools and districts should create a centralized information hub where paraprofessionals can easily access resources related to professional development, DBE standards, and training programs. Regular informational workshops, both in-person and online, could also help raise awareness of these opportunities, making it easier for paraprofessionals to pursue further training. Finally, improving collaboration between teachers and paraprofessionals is essential to improve the quality of student support. Currently, lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities may prevent effective teamwork in the classroom. Schools should offer joint professional development sessions to foster collaboration where teachers and paraprofessionals can learn and train together. These sessions would encourage alignment in instructional practices and strengthen communication. Team-building activities and planning sessions could further facilitate a collaborative culture, allowing teachers and paraprofessionals to share feedback, set goals, and work together to improve classroom support. Addressing the gaps in paraprofessional supervision and training requires a multi-faceted approach. By clarifying roles and responsibilities, developing comprehensive training programs, implementing regular assessments, and improving career development and retention efforts, schools can ensure that paraprofessionals are well-equipped to fulfil their roles. Furthermore, increasing awareness of training resources and fostering collaboration between teachers and paraprofessionals will help enhance the overall effectiveness of paraprofessional support, ultimately improving students' quality of education.

CONCLUSION

Deployment of paraprofessionals refers to assigning non-certified or non-licensed personnel to perform specific tasks in educational, healthcare, or social service settings. Paraprofessionals are teacher assistants, instructional aides, nursing aides, or community health workers. The deployment of paraprofessionals has been a subject of debate among policymakers, educators, and practitioners. While some argue that paraprofessionals can improve the quality and efficiency of services by providing additional support and resources, others express concerns about the qualifications, training, and supervision of paraprofessionals.

One potential benefit of deploying paraprofessionals is increasing access to services for underserved populations. For example, paraprofessionals can assist teachers in providing individualised instruction to students with disabilities or English language learners. Paraprofessionals can liaise between patients and providers, help patients manage chronic conditions, or provide preventive care in community settings. In social services, paraprofessionals can offer counselling, advocacy, or outreach to vulnerable populations such as homeless individuals or domestic violence victims.

However, the deployment of paraprofessionals also presents several challenges. One concern is the quality of the services provided by paraprofessionals. Without adequate training and supervision, paraprofessionals may not have the necessary skills or knowledge to perform their duties effectively. Another issue is the potential confusion or conflict of roles between paraprofessionals and licensed professionals. Paraprofessionals may feel undervalued or overburdened if assigned tasks beyond their scope of practice. At the same time, teachers may be hesitant to delegate responsibilities to paraprofessionals if they perceive them as unqualified. To address these challenges, some recommendations have been made regarding the deployment of paraprofessionals:

- Providing adequate training and supervision opportunities for paraprofessionals to ensure they have the necessary skills and knowledge to perform their duties.
- Ensuring appropriate supervision and support for paraprofessionals, including regular feedback, evaluation, and mentoring.
- Encouraging collaboration and communication between paraprofessionals and teacher professionals to promote a team-based approach to service delivery.

In addition, the deployment of paraprofessionals can increase access to services for underserved populations. However, it presents challenges in quality, training, supervision, and role clarification. To maximise the potential benefits of paraprofessional deployment while minimising risks, it is essential to establish clear roles and responsibilities, provide adequate training and support, and encourage collaboration between paraprofessionals and trained professionals. Research on paraprofessionals' deployment, training, and supervision is essential because it can inform policy and practice decisions related to workforce development, service delivery, and quality improvement.

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