



Exploring Factors that Affect Performance of Grade One Learners in Rural Primary Schools in the Rural Settings of South Africa

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ABSTRACT

This empirical paper discusses challenges that affect grade one learners' performance in rural schools. These learners in rural schools cannot read and write with comprehension. Despite various interventions, they struggle to read and write concepts in their Language of teaching and learning (LoLT). Consequently, they struggle to write creatively and perform in other subjects. This paper was couched into social learning theory, which argues that learning is a social process that comes out of observation, interaction and modelling with others. In this qualitative paper, focus group interviews were conducted with eight participants, comprising principals and teachers. They responded to two questions, which are: What are the challenges affecting grade one learners, and What can be employed to mitigate poor performance in grade one? The findings revealed that grade one learners' performance in rural schools is highly affected by their background, their relationship with other people, and the school context. In light of the findings, the study suggests that learners' backgrounds, relationships and the school context should be considered by the state from policy inception, distribution of resources and establishment of support systems. This paper provides a deeper insight into the unique challenges of rural schools and can inform the educational policies regarding the allocation of resources, teacher training, and support services to be provided to rural primary schools.

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INTRODUCTION

The provision of quality education in rural schools is disturbing compared to the performance of their counterparts in urban areas. Officials from the Department of Basic Education (DBE) while monitoring rural schools as district officials found that primary schools in rural areas are faced with a myriad of challenges that militate against the effective provisioning of the envisaged quality education. Policies, programmes, and strategic plans of the DBE talk about the monitoring, support, and maintenance of all public schools without differentiating between rural and urban schools.¹

Barret et al., argue that teachers who produce good results in urban schools are already committed to their work.² Additional resources become an advantage to improve more. They, therefore, suggest that

¹ Aregash Abebayehu Zerga et al., "Impact of Malnutrition on the Academic Performance of School Children in Ethiopia: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis," *SAGE Open Medicine* 10 (2022): 205031212221122400.

² Nathan Barrett et al., "Working with What They Have: Professional Development as a Reform Strategy in Rural Schools," *Journal of Research in Rural Education (Online)* 30, no. 10 (2015): 1.

it can be imperative that even the good and committed teachers in rural schools can be exposed to content-based reskilling that accommodates the context of rurality. This means that rural teachers need additional support on the interpretation of the curriculum for application in the rural context. Their understanding of the curriculum and its application in the rural context may help to bring up their voice at all stages of curriculum development and implementation. Their involvement may also influence how teachers are allocated in rural schools to reduce the workload caused by many subjects they teach or overcrowded classes and their deservedly remuneration.

The performance of grade one learners in rural schools is a concern, as it has a bearing on their progress to other higher grades. Wolf et al., affirm that high-quality Early Childhood Education (ECE) has a high potential to improve learners' early learning skills.³ Teachers in the higher grades, if their learners experience barriers to learning, always complain about learners who lack the foundation that was supposed to be laid in the lower grades, especially grade one. Taiwo & Tyolo note that there is more concern about this learning foundation in rural schools.⁴ They claim that lower-grade learners in the low quintile schools perform lower than their counterparts in the higher quintiles. This shows the disparity in the disadvantaged areas (including rural schools) and the town and township schools that are relatively advantaged. Zerga et al., concur with the notion that learners in rural schools are performing relatively lower than learners in town schools.⁵ In their study that was conducted in Ethiopia, they added malnourishment as one of the causes of lower performance at the lower grades. Their study confirmed that the academic performance of learners in elementary schools is also affected by stunting, underweight, and inadequate iodine intake, which are the result of malnutrition. Kalam et al., added that the factors affecting learners' performance do not start with learners in class but are influenced by the context of the school.⁶ They noted that in rural schools, lack of resources, lack of parental involvement, illiterate community members and language difficulties are highly prevalent. The listed factors have a bearing on the structural being of the school and affect the kind of management, governance, development and support for the school, teachers and learners. Van der Berg et al., believed that while implementing grade R in schools could boost first-grade performance, it also causes a performance gap between students in the low and high quintiles.⁷ They observe that due to a lack of resources, a lack of parental involvement, illiterate community members, and language barriers, grade R classes in rural schools have little effect on a child's readiness to study.

Although the above studies have made contributions to the subject under discussion, none of the studies has a direct focus on the external factors that affect grade-one performance in rural schools, thus, this study is unique in the sense that it argues for an emphasis on the importance of addressing the contextual factors that hinder good performance in grade one in rural schools. In light of this, the aim of the study is to discuss the challenges that affect grade one learners and suggest how they can be addressed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Globally, ECD is now a top priority. In South Africa, ECD incorporates pre-grade R and grade R which are meant to lay the foundation for grade one which is the beginning of formal schooling. The framework for rural education in South Africa acknowledges that ECD is one of the main pillars of efficient rural education.⁸ In Ghana, Wolf, *et al.* posited that grade one is preceded by kindergartens one and two which are pre-primary education which is equivalent to the Education levels in the United States of America

³ Sharon Wolf et al., "Experimental Impacts of the 'Quality Preschool for Ghana' Interventions on Teacher Professional Well-Being, Classroom Quality, and Children's School Readiness," *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness* 12, no. 1 (2019): 10–37.

⁴ A A Taiwo and J B Tyolo, "The Effect of Pre-School Education on Academic Performance in Primary School: A Case Study of Grade One Pupils in Botswana," *International Journal of Educational Development* 22, no. 2 (2002): 169–80.

⁵ Zerga et al., "Impact of Malnutrition on the Academic Performance of School Children in Ethiopia: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis."

⁶ Aziza Kalam et al., "Exploring Educator's Perceptions of the Challenges Affecting Grade One Learners' Academic Performance in Two Low Socio-Economic Schools," *South African Journal of Occupational Therapy* 46, no. 2 (2016): 59–64.

⁷ Servaas Van der Berg et al., "The Impact of the Introduction of Grade R on Learning Outcomes," *University of Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch*, 2013.

⁸ Department of Basic Education, *National Framework for the Teaching of Reading in African Languages in the Foundation Phase* (Pretoria: DBE, 2020).

and the United Kingdom.⁹ However, they argue that despite the introduction of pre-primary education and high enrolment at this level, education lacks quality and the performance of learners in the kindergartens is low. They add that 250 million children younger than 5 years of age are compromised and are at risk of not reaching their developmental potential due to extreme poverty which is a scourge in developing countries. DBE considers the formation of 'edu- villages' that are meant to provide holistic support to the rural primary schools.¹⁰ These villages will facilitate that teachers and learners have easy access to all type of resources and support such as ICT, specialised units for inclusive education and School Governing bodies as well as infrastructures for grade R in all rural schools. Zerga et al., affirmed that poverty and malnourishment have a major negative bearing on the academic performance of learners.¹¹ The study that was conducted to draft a policy on rural education in South Africa agree that in order to improve rural education, there should be intense collaboration between several sister departments such as health, social development, transport and economic development.¹²

Despite the identified challenges that impact learners' performance in grade one and the trend of low performance in grade one learners, Taiwo and Tyolo claimed that their study revealed that learners with preschool education significantly out-perform their counterparts who have never attended preschool or grade R.¹³ DBE concurs with Taiwe and Tyolo that the performance in one proceeding phase have a bearing on other phases, hence the need for reform in the entire rural education system.¹⁴ This argument shows the importance of grade one education in the entire education system. This shows that challenges of the grade one learners do not just appear in that particular year but show that they are inherent from what was not done well in the previous years. For example, the type of grade R the grade one learners attended has a bearing on how learners perform in their grade one. Consequently, low performance recurs to all other grades.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The paper is anchored on the Social Learning Theory (SLT). The theory was developed by Albert Bandura. He contends that there is a tendency to look at the behaviour from a single side and confine only to rewarding and punishment stimuli (behaviourism). Bandura propounds that behaviour is now commonly viewed as a product of personal and situational influences.¹⁵ He believes that the behaviour can be also influenced by non-social stimuli which may curb the disadvantages of trial and error but lead to the emulation of competent models.

Rumjaun and Narod view SLT as a bridge between the traditional theory of behaviourism and cognitivism which are based on rewarding and punishment stimuli and analysis and mind of interpretation of mental processes to yield the process of learning, respectively.¹⁶ Bandura posits that the behaviour can be provoked in the subconscious a person, by inner forces in the form of needs, drives, and impulses.¹⁷ Bandura further asserts that people's behaviour cannot be seen only as self-directing their own motivation and action through self-influence but also as an influence of the external environment.¹⁸ The SLT is a theory that explains how people learn new behaviours, attitudes, and new knowledge. SLT emphasises learning is a social process in which people learn through interacting with others whereby they observe, model and imitate.¹⁹ Consequently, , the behaviour can be reinforced or punished. Learners in rural schools are expected to learn and achieve the same learning outcomes as learners in town and township

⁹ Wolf et al., "Experimental Impacts of the 'Quality Preschool for Ghana' Interventions on Teacher Professional Well-Being, Classroom Quality, and Children's School Readiness."

¹⁰ Department of Basic Education, *National Framework for the Teaching of Reading in African Languages in the Foundation Phase*.

¹¹ Zerga et al., "Impact of Malnutrition on the Academic Performance of School Children in Ethiopia: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis."

¹² Department of Basic Education (DBE), *The South African National Curriculum Framework for Children from Birth to Four* (Pretoria: Department of Basic Education, 2015).

¹³ Taiwo and Tyolo, "The Effect of Pre-School Education on Academic Performance in Primary School: A Case Study of Grade One Pupils in Botswana."

¹⁴ Department of Basic Education (DBE), *The South African National Curriculum Framework for Children from Birth to Four*.

¹⁵ A Bandura, "(1977b). *Social Learning Theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall," 1977.

¹⁶ Anwar Rumjaun and Fawzia Narod, "Social Learning Theory—Albert Bandura," *Science Education in Theory and Practice: An Introductory Guide to Learning Theory*, 2020, 85–99.

¹⁷ A Bandura, "Self-Efficacy: Toward a Unifying Theory of Behavioral Change," *Psychological Review*, 1977.

¹⁸ Albert Bandura, "Model of Causality in Social Learning Theory," in *Cognition and Psychotherapy* (Springer, 1985), 81–99.

¹⁹ Bandura, "Model of Causality in Social Learning Theory."

schools. There are limited teachers at school and even fewer residents to model in the area. SLT uses all stimuli to enhance learning in learners. While learners observe and imitate teachers and some peers, the environment influenced by community mores and culture can also shape their behaviour.

In light of the above SLT advocates for multiple ways of enhancing learning through social and asocial interactions. SLT acknowledges multiple ways of learning in a very limited environment and recognises self-motivation that can lead to conquering factors that affect the performance of grade one learners.

SLT is relevant for this study since it promotes dynamic processes to improve learning. The researcher chose this SLT theory because it helped to explore the attitudes, views and experiences of the participants to identify the diverse challenges that affect the performance of grade ones that are unique to the rural schools and to develop strategies to be employed to mitigate poor performance in grade one.

METHODOLOGY

Interpretivism was used to navigate the study. This paradigm is suitable for this qualitative study that is based on the concept which assumes that truth and knowledge are subjective.²⁰ Interpretive paradigm as the compass guided the researcher throughout the study to explore differences in the unique rural context that has its own culture, environment and life experiences. The study was qualitative and used focus group interviews.

Participants and Settings

Eight participants were sampled from two schools, and comprised the principals and teachers, who participated in focus group interviews. All participants purposefully sampled, deal directly with rural schools and all in their duties. They are directly involved in making sure that grade one learners perform well. The research process attempted to answer the following questions: What are the challenges affecting grade one learners, and What can be employed to mitigate poor performance in grade one? The researcher aimed to hear participants' perceptions, attitudes, and experiences about the performance of grade one learners and the possible challenges. Focus groups were arranged and conducted once in individual schools, for a maximum period of an hour. Four participants in each group voluntarily participated with enlisted written consent.

Data Collection and Ethical Considerations

The researcher used the same research instruments in both focus group interviews. This was done to increase the confidence, validity, and reliability of the findings and to obtain a broader understanding of the phenomenon. Questions were first tested before the actual interviews. Peers were given questions to review them to eliminate ambiguity. The Department of Education granted permission and all participants signed the consent forms.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data from the interviews. Codes, categories, sub-themes and themes were developed. Data that were irrelevant to the research questions were eliminated, and each of these themes was considered and the evidence for it was analysed.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The paper aimed to respond to the following two research questions; a) What are the challenges affecting grade one learners and, b) What can be employed to mitigate poor performance in grade one? The first question sought to identify challenges affecting the performance of grade one learners in rural schools and the second one sought to come up with strategies that may mitigate the challenges. The following themes were generated from the thematic analysis. They are discussed below.

²⁰ Gemma Ryan, "Introduction to Positivism, Interpretivism and Critical Theory," *Nurse Researcher* 25, no. 4 (2018): 41–49.

Theme 1: Learner's background

Bandura advocated for the Social Learning Theory that does not limit performance only to the intellect but also acknowledges the impact of external factors that add to self-capability.²¹ The background of learners entails several factors that influence the learning and achievement of the learners. For example, the officials who were interviewed made the following comments:

Offic-1 stated, "*Learners' abilities are first nurtured at home, that is why the background of the child is so important.*"

Offic-2 said, "*Children are a reflection of what is happening at home*".

Offic-3 also agreed that "*what the parents do at home affects the learning ability of children. Children adopt the culture of their homes and if the home has a culture of reading, the child starts very early to have a love for books.*"

Foc-1 responded by saying, "*We are failed by parents who do not play their part in the education of their children. They do not prepare their children for schooling.*"

Foc-2 added, "*Parents do not understand their responsibility in supporting their children. Parents are not home when learners come back from school and also do not make sure their school necessities are available.*"

Foc-3 alluded to the point that "*parents in the farmsteads do not have money to buy what we need to use for their children. If you insist, learners stop coming to school.*"

Responses from focus groups emphasised the bearing of the home background on the performance of the learner. Mumba and Mkandawire affirm that the home environment in which the learner resides has a bearing on how the learner performs at school.²² They argue that children acquire considerable knowledge about language, reading, and writing before coming to school. Horner noted that learners who get exposed to letter signs and symbols by their parents at home are able to read, spell, and print words.²³

The study also indicated the socio-economic status of the homes of learners in the farmsteads. Foc-4 indicated, "*Parents do not have money because they earn peanuts from the 'piece jobs' they get in the farms. They cannot earn more to support their children; they are not documented. That makes their children not to receive grants because they are not documented.*" Offic-2 said, "*Few parents work permanently. Their jobs are seasonal, so there is unreliable income to support their kids*".

Foc-1 added, "*The socio-economic status of rural communities affects schools and learners in class. Our learners do not attend creches because parents do not have money to pay for them.*"

Offic-4 had this to say; "*Rural schools rarely have creches nearby. This is why the majority of learners do not attend creches. The Department of Education introduced grade R in all public schools but took time to include grade Rs in Nutrition and transport schemes. Learners could not reach schools because of distance. So it is multiple factors that make the context of rural schools unique.*"

These responses show how difficult it is for parents to participate in school programmes for support in schools. Cooper & Stewart have noted that the low income earned by the parents compromises the support envisaged to nurture a learner emotionally and academically.²⁴ They support Zerga et al., when they showed how poverty, hunger and malnutrition affect learners' health and their academic performance.²⁵ Van der Berg et al., emphasised the impact of the well-equipped grade R class on the good performance of a grade one learner and other grades.²⁶ This means grade one learners' performance is affected by factors that are not directly in class but come from their background. Offic-2 noted, "*There*

²¹ Bandura, "Model of Causality in Social Learning Theory."

²² Morgan Mumba and Sitwe Benson Mkandawire, "Reading Achievements of Pupils with Preschool Background and Those without at a Primary School in Lusaka District of Zambia.," 2020.

²³ Sherri L Horner, "Categories of Environmental Print: All Logos Are Not Created Equal," *Early Childhood Education Journal* 33 (2005): 113–19.

²⁴ Kerris Cooper and Kitty Stewart, "Does Household Income Affect Children's Outcomes? A Systematic Review of the Evidence," *Child Indicators Research* 14, no. 3 (2021): 981–1005.

²⁵ Zerga et al., "Impact of Malnutrition on the Academic Performance of School Children in Ethiopia: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis."

²⁶ Servaas Van der Berg, "What the Annual National Assessments Can Tell Us about Learning Deficits over the Education System and the School Career," *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 5, no. 2 (2015): 28–43.

are limited resources in rural schools due to the few number of learners. The school does not have money.”

Foc-2 responded, “It is difficult to expect parents to support their children when it is difficult to support themselves.”

Foc-3 indicated, “Learners do have necessary resources for us to bridge the gap between us and town schools, but we support learners with what we have.”

These responses show that learners in rural schools are taught with very minimal financial support from the department and from the community of parents. This indicates that there is no sufficient influence of the community towards learners’ exposure and enthusiasm of learners to learn. Kalam, *et al* that learners from rural schools lack both material and human resources as well as emotional support from parents²⁷ lack of parental involvement, illiterate community members and language difficulties which consequently impact their academic performance.

Theme 2: Learners' Relationship with Others

Osher et al., assert that the context and the relationships with other people such as parents, siblings, peers, caregivers, and teachers in early care and childhood determine how the human brain develops.²⁸ This theme emerged from the following Sub-theme 1.1 Home environment, Sub-theme 1.2 Socioeconomic status and Subtheme 1.3 Access to resources

Martin and Dowson asserted that high-quality relationships with teachers boost human needs for autonomy, belonging and competence which promote learners’ efforts to participate and strengthen academic performance.²⁹

Foc-4 noted, “In our school, we are always challenged by high absenteeism. Learners lose a lot of time at school and a lot of content. We only manage to trace learners if we have a direct relationship with learners because parents are not helping us”.

Foc-1 added, “In some cases, we stay with those learners that are not taken care of and exposed to abuse.” It is clear that learners’ welfare is highly dependent on the support of teachers. They become their source of motivation.

Offic-2 indicated that “teachers in the rural schools really play their role of parenting in the absence of parents. Many learners depend on teachers in so many ways.” Teachers in *loco parentis* have a great influence on learners. Teachers become their role models. Ettekal & Shi and Ansari, Hofkens, & Pianta argue that the quality of children’s interpersonal relationships with their teachers reduces risks of the number of social and barriers is very crucial for social-emotional support and its impact on academic outcomes.³⁰ Grade 1 learners still have to learn to trust their teachers for them to be able to engage and cooperate in the learning process, so to attain good academic performance.

Foc-3 indicated that, “parents do not take it well if their children have to repeat the grades however, they are unable to support the school when we need them. They want their children to pass regardless of the performance.” Foc- 4 added that, “parents are unable to even show their affection towards their children because they know they cannot provide. That is why it is easy to allow a grade one learner to stay with a neighbor or teachers or any person they do not know.” Offic-2 concurred with the participants in the focus group that, “parents hardly give support, but it is due to the long hours they work and the little income they earn.”

Parents who are stressed are generally unable to perfect their parenting and this impacts negatively on the performance of children, especially in grade one where it is their first year to attend school. Wilder asserts that the total involvement of parents in their children’s lives has a positive bearing on the academic

²⁷ Kalam et al., “Exploring Educator’s Perceptions of the Challenges Affecting Grade One Learners’ Academic Performance in Two Low Socio-Economic Schools.”

²⁸ David Osher et al., “Drivers of Human Development: How Relationships and Context Shape Learning and Development 1,” in *The Science of Learning and Development* (Routledge, 2021), 55–104.

²⁹ Andrew J Martin and Martin Dowson, “Interpersonal Relationships, Motivation, Engagement, and Achievement: Yields for Theory, Current Issues, and Educational Practice,” *Review of Educational Research* 79, no. 1 (2009): 327–65.

³⁰ Idean Ettekal and Qinxin Shi, “Developmental Trajectories of Teacher-Student Relationships and Longitudinal Associations with Children’s Conduct Problems from Grades 1 to 12,” *Journal of School Psychology* 82 (2020): 17–35; Arya Ansari, Tara L Hofkens, and Robert C Pianta, “Teacher-Student Relationships across the First Seven Years of Education and Adolescent Outcomes,” *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology* 71 (2020): 101200.

performance of the learners.³¹ Mumba and Mkandawire noted that parents' education also has an impact on the learner's cognitive performance especially reading and understanding of concepts.³² They argue that before learners get to grade one, they should have some knowledge and some skills taught by their parents.

Sethi and Scales noted that relationships with parents and teachers are crucial in supporting learners toward better achievement.³³ Relationships with peers are associated with emotional support and belonging. The participants indicated that in rural schools' peer influence is more positive and assists learners to cope.

Foc-1 stated, "*effectiveness of our teaching in our grade one involves peer teaching where learners learn deliberately from older or more capable learners.*"

Foc-4 added that, "*the influence of peers on grade one learners makes them to catch up with more work in class. It helps also in helping grade one learners to get used to the school environment.*"

Offic-4 highlighted that "*peer learning is one of the important elements of multigrade teaching which is mostly used mainly in grades 1 to 3 in rural schools. Therefore, teachers also encourage this relationship between able learners and those who still struggle with the environment and learning.*"

This means that peer learning is one of the pillars of grade one learning and good performance.

Theme 3: Context of the School

Osher, *et. al* assert that human development occurs through reciprocal interaction between the individual learner and their contexts.³⁴ This context entails environment, culture and relationships around the learner. The participants responded as follows:

Offic-3, "*rural schools are unique. It is unfortunate that rural grade one learners are not supported as in other public schools. In rural schools, teachers are neither sufficient nor appropriately qualified, there is acute poverty, absenteeism is rife, parents do not support their children, a lot can be mentioned and all affect the performance of the learners.*"

Foc-1 added that, "*the socio-economic status and the politics of these areas affect learners and teachers. Grade one learner requires diversified support to build strength for the emotional, behavioral, and academic development of the child. Unfortunately, in rural schools, teachers need to improvise.*" Foc-4 said, "*When other schools admit grade one learners from creches and grade Rs, we admit older learners who never attended a creche or grade R.*"

Tieken and Montgomery confirm that even the western states policies do not fit the rural context.³⁵ Similarly, in South Africa, the context of rural education is not fully integrated in the education policies. Mumba and Mkandawire; Kalam, *et al* and Zerga, Tadesse, Ayele and Ayele have noted that the performance of a grade one learner is not affected by what the learner has done or has not done but the context has a mammoth influence on the learner performance in grade one.³⁶

The performance of grade one learners in rural schools is affected before the learner enters the classroom. The background of the grade one learners, the relationship with people surrounding them, and the context of the school have a bearing that should not be ignored by the state from the inception of the policies, distribution of resources, and establishment of support systems. Grade one in rural schools should be supported by considering the context of the school.

³¹ S. Wilder, "Effects of Parental Involvement on Academic Achievement: A Meta-Synthesis," in *Mapping the Field* (London: Routledge, 2023), 137–57, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003403722-12>.

³² Mumba and Mkandawire, "Reading Achievements of Pupils with Preschool Background and Those without at a Primary School in Lusaka District of Zambia."

³³ Jenna Sethi and Peter C Scales, "Developmental Relationships and School Success: How Teachers, Parents, and Friends Affect Educational Outcomes and What Actions Students Say Matter Most," *Contemporary Educational Psychology* 63 (2020): 101904.

³⁴ Osher et al., "Drivers of Human Development: How Relationships and Context Shape Learning and Development 1."

³⁵ Mara Casey Tieken and Mary K Montgomery, "Challenges Facing Schools in Rural America.," *State Education Standard* 21, no. 1 (2021): 6–11.

³⁶ Mumba and Mkandawire, "Reading Achievements of Pupils with Preschool Background and Those without at a Primary School in Lusaka District of Zambia.," Kalam et al., "Exploring Educator's Perceptions of the Challenges Affecting Grade One Learners' Academic Performance in Two Low Socio-Economic Schools"; Zerga et al., "Impact of Malnutrition on the Academic Performance of School Children in Ethiopia: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis."

RECOMMENDATIONS

Strategies to address the relationship of all stakeholders: Parent learners, teachers, and community: To assess how much the school encourages parental and community involvement in the learners' education and how it uses their contributions to support learners' progress, the DoE should make sure that all rural schools have a basic infrastructure for academic and extracurricular activities and a dedicated classroom (including libraries, laboratories, and media centers) to optimally support curriculum delivery. The department should have a budget dedicated to ensure that officials meant to support rural education are well-equipped and supported to easily access rural schools.

To ensure that officials tasked with promoting rural education have the tools and resources they need to visit rural schools with ease, the department should have a dedicated budget. To best support curriculum delivery, the DoE should ensure that all rural schools have access to basic facilities for extracurricular and academic activities, as well as a dedicated classroom with media centers, libraries, and laboratories. Strategies to address the relationship of all stakeholders. Parent learners, teachers and Community: To examine the extent to which the school supports parental and community involvement in the education of the learners and how it makes use of their contributions to assist learners' progress. Learners who attend remote schools should receive extra academic support. To bridge the divide between rural and urban areas. For instance, schools should be given all the resources necessary to expose rural learners to the outside world, taking into account the characteristics of rurality, such as low economic status, remoteness, and inadequate infrastructure. The specific rural setting of the schools should be taken into account and accommodated in curriculum content, assessment, and learning and teaching materials. Since the inappropriateness stems from the school's setting and is therefore impractical, the department should provide extra support to provisioning and resources, school infrastructure, parents and the community.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined issues that impact the performance of first graders in rural schools. These learners are unable to read and write with comprehension, and despite different interventions, they have difficulty reading and writing concepts in their language of instruction and learning (LoLT). This study has also examined issues that impact the performance of first graders in rural schools. These learners are unable to read and write with comprehension, and despite different interventions, they have trouble reading and writing concepts in their LoLT. The fact that most parents in rural areas work on farms is evidence of this. In addition to herding livestock, they are laborers who work in the fields, plowing and harvesting crops. Some work as truck and tractor drivers. Other people are wives who do not make any money. In the same way that one may consider the learning capacity and past achievements of students, the socioeconomic position is essential to improve teaching and learning. Parents do not often participate in rural schools, according to the report, and their involvement is limited. Inadequate parental involvement and support, which has an impact on students' academic achievement. According to the findings, rural schools have fewer opportunities to receive important teaching and learning resources like computers, lab equipment, chemicals, and library volumes when they have inadequate infrastructure. For rural schools, the concept of internet access—which is so important in the 4IR—is unrealistic. South Africa's rural communities lack the appropriate resources. Some educators lack computer skills and are not prepared to use the internet in the classroom. Some rural schools are so far away that internet access is unavailable. For the purpose of the students' education, extra attention must be paid to the absence of relationships between parents, students, and teachers.

This demonstrates that the curricula offered in rural schools are not aligned. The political and socioeconomic issues plaguing rural areas may be resolved by empowering rural schools. Rather than relying on the farming community, rural learners can actively contribute to their villages' economies. The perceptions of learners in rural schools can be changed by the farming community. Being the offspring of laborers who quit the farms as they advance can lead to a new invention for the farming community. Only until rural schools are well-resourced and regarded as special educational establishments will this paradigm change be possible.

LIMITATION

This study was qualitative in nature and relied on participant responses from focus groups and individual interviews. To understand the participants' perceptions and experiences of the participants, the researcher relied on their responses. The participants had the option of focusing on the current situation or responding with examples from their past. It's possible that time constraints prevented the participants from giving their entire responses.

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