




We have a Plan: Voices from the Peripheral to Address Poor Academic Performance in the Vhembe East District of South Africa

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ABSTRACT

This empirical paper engages voices from the periphery to address poor academic performance in Vhembe East district, Limpopo province, South Africa. This study was prompted by the absence of stakeholders' voices in monitoring and support of school learners, which lead to poor academic performance. The bricolage theory as developed by Lévi- Strauss (1966) was used as lens for this study. Bricolage emphasises the use of available materials and resources in a creative and adaptive way to solve problems. A qualitative approach was employed to investigate how the voices from peripheral communities can address the poor academic performance of matric learners in the Vhembe East district through monitoring and support. Participatory action research was used to engage four principals and four departmental heads to collaboratively develop practical solutions. The findings reveal that marginalised stakeholders have untapped knowledge and skills, which, when harnessed, can bring about profound change to address the academic challenges through a tailored monitoring and support model. This study recommends empowering local, marginalised communities, so that they have a voice in the education of their children, and calls on government to improve stakeholders' engagement in rural schools. This study contributes to the scholarship by foregrounding the voices of marginalised stakeholders in rural education demonstrating their potential to create relevant solutions for academic improvement.

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INTRODUCTION

The South African apartheid government was authoritarian and left little room for stakeholder voices in the education of their children.¹ Today, the education system is still marked by profound inequalities, with notable discrepancies in education quality between urban and rural areas.² Learners at rural schools do not have access to good quality education.³ It has been argued that one of the major traits of rural schools that contributes to learners' poor academic performance is a lack of stakeholder

¹ Fred Bidandi, Ambe Nofor Anthony, and Claudia Mukong, "Collaboration and Partnerships between South African Higher Education Institutions and Stakeholders: Case Study of a Post-Apartheid University," *Discover Education* 1, no. 1 (December 12, 2022): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s44217-022-00001-2>.

² Bhartendu Pandey, Christa Brelsford, and Karen C. Seto, "Infrastructure Inequality Is a Characteristic of Urbanization," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 119, no. 15 (April 12, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2119890119>.

³ Bekithemba Dube, "Rural Online Learning in the Context of COVID 19 in South Africa: Evoking an Inclusive Education Approach," *REMIE: Multidisciplinary Journal of Educational Research* 10, no. 2 (2020): 135–57.

engagement.⁴ Although there have been attempts to engage parents in rural schools, few parents realise that they have a role to play in their children's education.⁵ National efforts to improve academic standards have not been successful in alleviating persistent issues at rural schools, such as lack of parental engagement, inadequate infrastructure, limited access to resources, inadequately qualified teachers and insufficient support systems.⁶ Even though it has been found that public engagement is key to increased civic engagement and democracy, parental engagement in education is still a challenge because the majority of parents are illiterate because of apartheid.⁷

This paper did not emerge from a vacuum; in fact, several studies have reported on the way the voices of marginalised people can be heard in order to address poor academic performance. Gamede and Uleanya explored the impact of stakeholder participation in rural education in South Africa and found that the challenges posed by shortages in infrastructure and other resources are mainly the consequence of the absence of stakeholders from engagement in schools. They conclude their study by suggesting that schools should absorb and manage all the stakeholders in the community to solve the challenges of inadequate infrastructure and other resources.⁸

A study by Myende and Nhlumayo argues that there is a need to engage traditional leaders and parents who understand the need for their involvement. These scholars believe that schools should invest in empowering stakeholders and suggest that schools should review how they can improve their ability to utilise community assets such as traditional leaders and other stakeholders to support them.⁹ A study conducted outside South Africa, in Romania, argues that parents, community leaders and civic organisations should be encouraged to support various school programmes to improve learners' performance.¹⁰

In another study, Smith and Benavot argue that involving the voices of different stakeholders, including parents, increases trust between schools and stakeholders, which improves school performance.¹¹ Sibanda suggests that, if teachers want to enhance stakeholder participation, they need to understand the sociocultural and economic factors that stand in the way of stakeholders, such as parents participating in the academic affairs of their children.¹²

While the studies reported on above have made contributions to the field, there is a noticeable research gap related to plans to increase the voices from the periphery for monitoring and support to address academic performance in rural areas such as Vhembe East district. Several studies have explored the involvement of stakeholders in schools; however, few have examined how stakeholder involvement can improve academic performance of the matric learners in rural areas.¹³ This study aimed to fill that gap by going beyond a general discussion on stakeholders' involvement to making a plan to involve voices from the periphery to improve matric learners' academic performance in Vhembe

⁴ Mkatoko Raymond Maluleke, Zeleke Worku, and Mammo Muchie, "Partnership with Major Stakeholders Having Impact in Improving Mathematics and Science in Vhembe District in Limpopo Province (South Africa): EPP Mhinga High School, Jim Yingwane High School, Mahlefunye Primary School and Holy Rosary Combined School," *Educational Research (IJM CER)* 4, no. 4 (2022): 68–79.

⁵ Isabella Margaretha Labuschagne, *The School Governing Body's Role in the Academic Performance of Learners in the Further Education and Training Phase* (University of Johannesburg (South Africa), 2021).

⁶ Servaas Van der Berg et al., "Learner Flows through Schools: Using High Quality Administrative Data to Understand Education System Performance," *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2021, 1–27, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4009654>.

⁷ Theresa Healy and Annie L. Booth, "The Importance of Being Taught: Improving Public Engagement in Resource Management through Learning by Doing," *Socio-Ecological Practice Research* 5, no. 1 (March 14, 2023): 111–21, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42532-023-00141-1>.

⁸ Bongani Thulani Gamede and Chinaza Uleanya, "Review of the Impact of Stakeholders' Participation in Rural School Education," *Multicultural Education* 7, no. 5 (2021): 18–25.

⁹ Phumlani Erasmus Myende and Buhle Stella Nhlumayo, "Enhancing Parent-Teacher Collaboration in Rural Schools: Parents' Voices and Implications for Schools," *International Journal of Leadership in Education* 25, no. 3 (May 4, 2022): 490–514, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2020.1731764>.

¹⁰ Hiba Khadja, "Stakeholders in Education," *The Annals of the University of Oradea. Economic Sciences* 31, no. 31(1) (July 15, 2022): 425–35, [https://doi.org/10.47535/1991AUOES31\(1\)040](https://doi.org/10.47535/1991AUOES31(1)040).

¹¹ William C. Smith and Aaron Benavot, "Improving Accountability in Education: The Importance of Structured Democratic Voice," *Asia Pacific Education Review* 20, no. 2 (June 27, 2019): 193–205, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12564-019-09599-9>.

¹² Rockie Sibanda, "'I'm Not a Teacher': A Case of (Dys) Functional Parent-Teacher Partnerships in a South African Township," *South African Journal of Education* 41, no. 3 (2021).

¹³ Oluwatoyin Jumoke Adelabu and Vusi Mncube, "Narratives of Parents' Participation in Their Children's Education," *South African Journal of Education* 43, no. 1 (2023): S1–8.

East district. The paper is arranged as follows: First, a theoretical framework is provided, then, the methodology the study used, is discussed, after which the findings and a conclusion are provided.

The research questions are as follows: How can the voices from peripherals be integrated into a plan to address the poor academic performance in the Vhembe East district? How can the monitoring and support model be evaluated?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded in bricolage theory as introduced by Lévi-Strauss for the field of anthropology.¹⁴ The theory describes how marginalised societies can creatively and adaptively use available materials and resources to solve existing problems.¹⁵ Bricolage theory was developed to understand how societies use ‘what is at hand’ to create solutions to problems.¹⁶ Bricolage means ‘to make do with what is at hand’.¹⁷ Available resources in a society are key to addressing its challenges. The central assumption of bricolage is that, in a resource-constrained environment, societies can solve persistent problems by adapting existing resources in new, creative ways. This adaptive approach highlights the capacity of individuals and communities to innovate despite the limitations they face. Bricolage reflects a resourceful approach, in which solutions are developed by reusing and recombining available materials rather than by relying on traditional, structured problem-solving methods. The flexibility and creative nature of bricolage enables communities to solve their problems through locally sourced solutions that are contextually relevant.

This theory is relevant for this study, which explored how marginalised stakeholders can creatively adapt limited resources to address community challenges. The focus of this research was to highlight the role of marginalised stakeholders, such as traditional leaders, civic organisations, local business people and parents. These people have a deep understanding of their environment and of the resources at their disposal.¹⁸ Local stakeholders possess knowledge and resources that are likely to enhance monitoring efforts and provide support to alleviate poor academic performance. Their engagement aligns with the resourcefulness highlighted by bricolage theory, which emphasises the effective and innovative use of available resources to address challenges.¹⁹ The voices of these various stakeholders can be harnessed in a new, untapped way to address challenges such as lack of infrastructure, inadequate monitoring and shortage of resources by forming a community education forum.²⁰ Engaging stakeholders in this trial-and-error approach involves continuous feedback, which is necessary for ongoing improvement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section focuses on the literature on developing a monitoring and support model by engaging voices from the periphery to address poor academic performance. A number of subheadings were identified from the literature, and each will be discussed.

Resources and Infrastructure Related to Learner Performance

Infrastructure and resources play an important role in teaching and learning; these are the tools teachers need to execute their teaching role, and without which effective teaching and learning cannot be realised. Learning and teaching are meant to take place in a given place or environment and, for

¹⁴ Claude Lévi-Strauss, “Anthropology: Its Achievements and Future,” *Current Anthropology* 7, no. 2 (April 1966): 124–27, <https://doi.org/10.1086/200688>.

¹⁵ Emel Karabıyık Özkesekek and Gökçe Ketizmen, “Exploring the Elements of Bricolage as Creative Product,” *Journal of Architectural Research and Education* 5, no. 2 (2023): 139–56.

¹⁶ Ted Baker and Reed E. Nelson, “Creating Something from Nothing: Resource Construction through Entrepreneurial Bricolage,” *Administrative Science Quarterly* 50, no. 3 (September 1, 2005): 329–66, <https://doi.org/10.2189/asqu.2005.50.3.329>.

¹⁷ Martin Andrew and Mawera Karetai, “Bricolage as a Method in Professional Practice,” *Scope: Contemporary Research Topics (Work-Based Learning)*, no. 3 (2022): 95–103, <https://doi.org/10.34074/scop.6003002>.

¹⁸ Alessandra Lotteri et al., “The Holistic Bricolage Research Approach and Disaster-Risk Reduction,” *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction* 97 (October 2023): 104031, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijdrr.2023.104031>.

¹⁹ Hugo Santiago Sanchez, Meltem Eski, and Ioannis Costas Battle, “Bricolage for Innovative Qualitative Social Science Research: A Perspective on Its Conceptual Hallmarks,” *Qualitative Inquiry*, July 26, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1177/10778004241265987>.

²⁰ Christian Busch and Harry Barkema, “From Necessity to Opportunity: Scaling Bricolage across Resource-constrained Environments,” *Strategic Management Journal* 42, no. 4 (April 28, 2021): 741–73, <https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.3237>.

effective teaching and learning to yield results, educational infrastructure must be provided to aid education.²¹

Adequate infrastructure and suitable class sizes contribute to improving the performance of learners.²² Studies on how infrastructure affects learners' performance maintain that co-curricular infrastructure such as good quality classrooms, laboratories and libraries improve learners' performance.²³ Physical infrastructure creates a conducive atmosphere for teaching and learning that fosters improved performance.²⁴ The nature and conditions of the infrastructure in the whole school affect the learners' academic performance.²⁵ Consequently, schools with better resources have a better chance of performing well than those with infrastructure that is lacking. A study by Mwikali to determine the utilisation of school infrastructure and its influence on academic performance of secondary school learners found that inadequate infrastructure and resources are reasons for the poor performance of matric learners at schools similar to those in rural areas such as Vhembe district.²⁶ There is little equivalence in the learning experiences of rural and urban areas; urban areas learners are advantaged because of the better provision of resources.²⁷ Infrastructure and resources play a role in improving performance; however, resources alone do not improve performance – the way resources are utilised in teaching and learning affect learner performance.²⁸ Special attention should be paid to the learning process and how infrastructure and resources influence learning, instead of first focusing on the output, which is performance.²⁹

Continuous Teacher Professional Development

Rapid technological change in industry exerts pressure on the output of education departments, particularly on matric learners.³⁰ Learners who matriculate should be able to fit in in an ever-changing world. In South Africa, too, the Department of Education is faced with pressure to align the curriculum to meet the needs of the labour market.³¹ School resources are not aligned to equip learners with the necessary knowledge and skills to meet the standards of the labour market.

Teachers, in turn, lack relevant knowledge and skills to work with advances in technology; keeping teacher knowledge updated calls for continuous teacher development.³² In this rapidly transforming technological era, teachers need to constantly upgrade their teaching skills, knowledge

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- ²¹ Obed-Chukwuka Anthonia Nnenna and Rowell Ubogu, "Inadequate Infrastructural Distribution in Public Primary Schools in Delta State: Implication for National Development," *ATBU Journal of Science, Technology and Education* 8, no. 4 (2020): 54–62.
- ²² Peter Barrett et al., *The Impact of School Infrastructure on Learning: A Synthesis of the Evidence* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1596/978-1-4648-1378-8>.
- ²³ Prince Dacosta Anaman, Deborah Morpkorpkor Zottor, and Julius Kumi Egyir, "Infrastructural Challenges and Student Academic Performance: Evidence from a Developing Nation," *International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology* 7, no. 11 (2022): 1189–1200.
- ²⁴ Matthieu Yangambi, "Impact of School Infrastructures on Students Learning and Performance: Case of Three Public Schools in a Developing Country," *Creative Education* 14, no. 04 (2023): 788–809, <https://doi.org/10.4236/ce.2023.144052>.
- ²⁵ Cristina Elena Ion (Stroe) and Ramona Oana Hamburda (Bauer), "The Impact of School Infrastructure on the Performance of Pupils," *LUMEN Proceedings*, April 1, 2020, 362–67, <https://doi.org/10.18662/lumproc/gidtp2018/40>.
- ²⁶ Dr. Agnetta Mwikali, "Utilization of School Infrastructure and Its Influence on Students' Academic Performance in Public Secondary Schools in Makueni County, Kenya," *Journal of Education* 4, no. 6 (August 11, 2024): 53–73, <https://doi.org/10.70619/vol4iss6pp53-73>.
- ²⁷ Bunmi Isaiah Omodan, Cias T Tsoetsi, and Bekithemba Dube, "Decolonising Rural-Urban Dichotomy in South Africa: An Asset-Based Approach," *Progressio: South African Journal for Open and Distance Learning Practice* 41, no. 1 (2019): 1–17.
- ²⁸ Mwikali, "Utilization of School Infrastructure and Its Influence on Students' Academic Performance in Public Secondary Schools in Makueni County, Kenya."
- ²⁹ Anang Amiruddin Nugroho and Udik Budi Wibowo, "The Influence of School Infrastructure on Student Learning Activeness: A Research Study," in *Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on Learning Innovation and Quality Education (ICLIQE 2019)* (Paris, France: Atlantis Press, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.200129.076>.
- ³⁰ Mathias Decuypere, Emiliano Grimaldi, and Paolo Landri, "Introduction: Critical Studies of Digital Education Platforms," *Critical Studies in Education* 62, no. 1 (January 1, 2021): 1–16, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2020.1866050>.
- ³¹ Godsend Tawanda Chimbi, "Darting from Pillar to Post: Policy Inconsistency and Stakeholder Contestations in Curriculum Review," *Interdisciplinary Journal of Education Research* 6 (February 14, 2024): 1–14, <https://doi.org/10.38140/ijer-2024.vol6.02>.
- ³² José Manuel García-Vandewalle García et al., "Teacher Training for Educational Change: The View of International Experts," *Contemporary Educational Technology* 14, no. 1 (November 26, 2021): ep330, <https://doi.org/10.30935/cedtech/11367>.

and attitudes so that they meet the needs of the learners.³³ In rural schools that experience resource shortages and that lack access to effective teacher training and development, teachers become less effective, fail to achieve their purpose and to develop their careers.³⁴

Furthermore, workshops for teachers are usually arranged in the form of ‘one-size-fits-all’ events. The presentations in workshops fail to consider the uniqueness of individual teachers. This is usually the case because the organisers failed to do a needs analysis, which would enable them to organise workshops that are informed by the needs of teachers.

In attempts to catch up with the demands of a changing labour market, curriculum advisers from district offices and the Limpopo Department of Education organise workshops and training sessions to equip educators with skills and relevant pedagogical knowledge in areas of need. The challenge is that some of the curriculum advisers themselves lack sufficient knowledge and skills to monitor and support teachers.³⁵ Rammuda confirms that the failure of the Department of Education to provide training for curriculum advisers has resulted in poor monitoring and support; furthermore, the support they offer is not regular.³⁶

Continuous teacher development progress is affected by time constraints that teachers experience.³⁷ The curriculum is packaged in such a way that there is not much time available to be utilised for teacher development.³⁸ Additionally, few programmes on teacher development are ever evaluated for their effectiveness.³⁹

There is a need for an approach to professional development that is customised to address educators’ need for professional growth and training. Addressing gaps, unique needs and skills is a priority. Continuous professional development aims to address the needs and gaps of individuals, instead of generalising to all the teachers of different schools with their different needs. Continuous professional development differs from the way curriculum advisers from the district currently implement teacher development programmes for schools in different contexts. Currently, teachers complain that professional development programmes are implemented without their consultation, so that the programmes are either too general or too advanced, with the effect of neglecting whole groups of teachers.⁴⁰

Differentiated instructions are implemented as a result of personal motivation and tailored professional development programmes, which may strain the resources of the Department of Education, because they focus on individual teachers’ needs.⁴¹ Nevertheless, school principals and departmental heads can play a vital role in ensuring continuous professional development by identifying the needs of individual teachers. A programme should be designed to accommodate the training needs of an individual or a group of teachers with similar needs. Developing teachers according to their unique needs will impart unique skills and improve the performance of each teacher and, in turn, the

³³ Shirin Nooruddin and Shelina Bhamani, “Engagement of School Leadership in Teachers’ Continuous Professional Development: A Case Study,” *Journal of Education and Educational Development* 6, no. 1 (May 25, 2019): 95–110, <https://doi.org/10.22555/joeed.v6i1.1549>.

³⁴ Emma García and Elaine Weiss, “The Role of Early Career Supports, Continuous Professional Development, and Learning Communities in the Teacher Shortage. The Fifth Report in ‘The Perfect Storm in the Teacher Labor Market’ Series,” *Economic Policy Institute*, 2019.

³⁵ Phamela Brenda Malumbete, “Exploring the Challenges of School Curriculum Advisers in a Selected District in Limpopo, South Africa” (North-West University (South Africa), 2021).

³⁶ Mulatedzi Rammuda, “Challenges Faced by Curriculum Advisers When Offering Curriculum Support to Schools in Rural South Africa,” *International Journal of Research in Business and Social Science* 12, no. 5 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.20525/ijrbs.v12i5.2582>.

³⁷ Raj Mestry, “The Principals Obligation to Advance Equity in No-Fee Public Schools,” *Alternation Interdisciplinary Journal for the Study of the Arts and Humanities in Southern Africa* 39, no. 1 (December 1, 2023): 171–92, <https://doi.org/10.29086/2519-5476/2022/sp39a8>.

³⁸ Janet C. Fairman et al., “The Challenge of Keeping Teacher Professional Development Relevant,” *Professional Development in Education* 49, no. 2 (March 4, 2023): 197–209, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2020.1827010>.

³⁹ Leicha A. Bragg, Chris Walsh, and Marion Heyeres, “Successful Design and Delivery of Online Professional Development for Teachers: A Systematic Review of the Literature,” *Computers & Education* 166 (June 2021): 104158, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2021.104158>.

⁴⁰ Fairman et al., “The Challenge of Keeping Teacher Professional Development Relevant.”

⁴¹ Wouter Smets and Katrien Struyven, “A Teachers’ Professional Development Programme to Implement Differentiated Instruction in Secondary Education: How Far Do Teachers Reach?,” *Cogent Education* 7, no. 1 (January 1, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2020.1742273>; Fairman et al., “The Challenge of Keeping Teacher Professional Development Relevant.”

performance of learners. The quality of professional teacher development determines the quality of teachers, which subsequently improves the performance of learners.⁴²

Teachers have different skills and levels of pedagogical knowledge, even if they were trained by the same institution of higher learning. Their approaches to teaching and learning differ, hence their professional development needs are different. Context-specific approaches to professional development are key. This approach is flexible because it enables each teacher to approach their professional development at their own pace. By reflecting on progress and requesting feedback, adjustments can be made where necessary.⁴³ Applications and follow-up are possible, because the materials that are used were developed locally. The principal and departmental heads can review the progress made. This type of approach offers a practical solution for teacher development that is aligned with their school context, provided the Department of Education invests in training school management teams and reduces the administrative duties of principals and departmental heads. The success of this approach is challenged by the overwhelming administrative duties of the principal and the departmental heads, that erode time that could be spent on professional development of the teachers under their supervision.⁴⁴

Stakeholder Involvement

In South Africa, the education system is marked by profound inequalities, with notable discrepancies in education quality of urban and rural areas.⁴⁵ Despite national efforts to improve academic standards, rural schools face persistent issues, such as inadequate infrastructure, limited access to resources and insufficient support systems.⁴⁶ A link between poverty and poor matric performance has been established, indicating that socioeconomic status significantly affects education results.⁴⁷ Maluleke et al. explain that the apartheid government was authoritarian by nature, and there was little or no room for parental involvement in the education of their children.⁴⁸ When South Africa's democratic government came into power in 1994, parents were given a voice in the education of their children. According to Healy and Booth, 'Public engagement is key to increased civic engagement and democracy', however, parental involvement in education is still a challenge, because the majority of parents are illiterate – an effect of apartheid.⁴⁹ Communities need to have ownership of their schools, otherwise academic improvement will be slow. School governing bodies were introduced in schools as a way of encouraging community engagement and to improve performance. However, at rural schools, few parents realise their role in the education of their children.⁵⁰

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a transformative paradigm, which holds that knowledge is not neutral and is shaped by human interests and social relationships. This paradigm also asserts that constructing knowledge can aid in improving society. By adopting this paradigm, this study aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the current state of affairs and to explore ways to improve society.

⁴² Xin Zhang, Wilfried Admiraal, and Nadira Saab, "Teachers' Motivation to Participate in Continuous Professional Development: Relationship with Factors at the Personal and School Level," *Journal of Education for Teaching* 47, no. 5 (October 20, 2021): 714–31, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2021.1942804>.

⁴³ Gökhan Hınız and Aysun Yavuz, "Real Needs, Tailored Solutions: Developing Customized Online Professional Development Programs for Teachers—A Case Study," *Journal of Digital Learning in Teacher Education* 40, no. 2 (April 2, 2024): 97–114, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21532974.2024.2325972>.

⁴⁴ Muhammet Emin Türkoğlu and Ramazan Cansoy, "School Principals' Opinions on the Meaning and Sources of Workload," *International Journal of Contemporary Educational Research* 7, no. 1 (October 30, 2022): 177–91, <https://doi.org/10.33200/ijcer.657994>.

⁴⁵ Pandey, Breilsford, and Seto, "Infrastructure Inequality Is a Characteristic of Urbanization."

⁴⁶ Van der Berg et al., "Learner Flows through Schools: Using High Quality Administrative Data to Understand Education System Performance."

⁴⁷ Eric A Hanushek and Ludger Woessmann, *The Knowledge Capital of Nations: Education and the Economics of Growth* (MIT press, 2023).

⁴⁸ Maluleke, Worku, and Muchie, "Partnership with Major Stakeholders Having Impact in Improving Mathematics and Science in Vhembe District in Limpopo Province (South Africa): EPP Mhinga High School, Jim Yingwane High School, Mahlefunye Primary School and Holy Rosary Combined School."

⁴⁹ Healy and Booth, "The Importance of Being Taught: Improving Public Engagement in Resource Management through Learning by Doing."

⁵⁰ Labuschagne, *The School Governing Body's Role in the Academic Performance of Learners in the Further Education and Training Phase*.

The researcher used a qualitative research approach to engaging the voices on the periphery to address poor academic performance in the Vhembe East district. This methodological approach is fundamentally aligned with gaining an in-depth understanding of the meanings and experiential dimensions of human lives and social contexts.⁵¹ The study applied participatory action research and purposively selected eight participants: a principal and a departmental head from each of four different secondary schools in Vhembe district that participated in the study. Purposive sampling involves selecting individuals according to specific criteria relevant to the research focus, to enhance the depth and relevance of the collected data.⁵² The participants had to have been appointed by the Department of Education and have served as members of the school management team for at least two years. It was assumed that experience and expertise of the school management team in monitoring and support would be critical for addressing the research questions effectively.⁵³ The group was not intended to represent the population at large.⁵⁴ The discussions of the participants focused on two research questions: How can the voices from periphery be integrated into a plan to address the poor academic performance in the Vhembe East district? How can the monitoring and support model be evaluate? The researchers met with the participants four times for two hours every time, and used qualitative data collection techniques such as focus group discussions and interviews to collect data.

Before commencing the research, permission was obtained from the University of the Free State and the Department of Education. Ethical clearance was granted by the General/Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of the Free State (Ethical Clearance No. UFS-HSD2023/1637). This study complied with ethical standards established by the university, which include obtaining informed consent, ensuring confidentiality, and respecting participants' rights throughout the research process. Measures were implemented to protect participants' privacy and to ensure that data were handled and reported in a manner that safeguards anonymity and confidentiality.⁵⁵ Credibility was established through triangulation and member checking. The data were analysed using thematic analysis, a method described as involving a systematic approach that proceeds by following seven steps to identify and interpret patterns in qualitative data:⁵⁶

- Step 1: Read and reread the collected data. The researcher examined the data to obtain the essence of the plan for hearing the voices from the periphery to address poor academic performance in the Vhembe East district.
- Step 2: Draw up a preliminary list of themes. Major themes were identified and arranged according to the study's research question.
- Step 3: Reread the data. The researcher checked if the identified themes corresponded with the participants' responses and addressed the research question.
- Step 4: Link themes to question and notes. The themes were linked to various scholarly views.
- Step 5: Peruse the categories of themes to interpret them. The researcher remained cognisant of the research questions during interpretation.
- Step 6: Design a tool to discern patterns in the data. Through triangulation, the researcher determined patterns in the data during analysis.
- Step 7: Interpret the data and derive meaning. The identified themes became the subheadings.

⁵¹ Sharai B Merriam and E J Tisdell, "Dealing with Validity, Reliability, and Ethics," in *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, ed. E. J. Tisdell, Sharan B. Merriam, and H. L. Stuckey-Peyrot (Jossey-Bass San Francisco, CA, 2009), 209–35.

⁵² Ilker Etikan, Sulaiman Abubakar Musa, and Rukayya Sunusi Alkassim, "Comparison of Convenience Sampling and Purposive Sampling," *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics* 5, no. 1 (2016): 1–4.

⁵³ Mark Mason, "Sample Size and Saturation in PhD Studies Using Qualitative Interviews," *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 11, no. 3 (2010).

⁵⁴ Lawrence A Palinkas et al., "Purposeful Sampling for Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis in Mixed Method Implementation Research," *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research* 42 (2015): 533–44.

⁵⁵ Rose Wiles et al., "The Management of Confidentiality and Anonymity in Social Research," *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 11, no. 5 (December 2008): 417–28, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645570701622231>.

⁵⁶ Sophie Laws et al., *Research for Development: A Practical Guide* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781529681406>.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This research paper outlines a plan to engage voices on the periphery to address poor academic performance in the Vhembe East district. Based on insights gathered from interviews and focus group discussions, the study aimed to answer two key questions: How can the voices from periphery be integrated into a plan to address poor academic performance in the Vhembe East district? How can the monitoring and support model be evaluated? The analysis was informed by relevant literature on monitoring and support strategies. Two key themes emerged from the data: integrating peripheral voices into a tailored monitoring and support model, and the evaluation of the monitoring and support model.

Tailored Monitoring and Support Model

Regarding developing a tailored monitoring and support model, the following elements were identified: information collection and insight extraction, regular assessment and feedback, and support and resources.

Information Collection and Insight Extraction

The study found that information collection and insight extraction form the basis of the monitoring and support model by determining the challenges and then developing strategies to address them. Learners' reports and attendance registers are examples of valuable information that was collected and analysed. In this regard, Taherdoost argues that the information collected gives the researcher insight into the nature of the problem.⁵⁷ Information collection and analysis are inseparable and can show the relationship between elements of the problem under investigation.⁵⁸ Participants shared their views on information collection and insight extraction. In an interview, Participant 1 stated:

We collect the data from the results. We look at the performance. If the performance has improved, it will mean that data is giving us information that this monitoring and support is doing well. If there is no improvement, then it will mean that the kind of monitoring and support that we are giving is not effective. Therefore, we must come up with some changes so that we can bring the results.

In a focus group discussion, Participant 2 commented that:

I think we can do ongoing monitoring and data analysis where we get a continuous track of what is the progress in terms of this model which has been applied.

In an interview, Participant 3 said:

The issue of analysing data is necessary. Suppose now we are in Term 3 if we can analyse our data well, it can show us where we are and how best can we support these learners.

In light of the utterances of participants, it is clear that information collection and insight extraction provided an understanding of the nature of the challenge and provided a blueprint for strategies that could enhance academic performance. Data analysis provided insight into learners' performance and provided a holistic approach to learning by reflecting on parts of that work that were easy or difficult for learners.⁵⁹ Information collection and analysis inform decision-making to improve educational effectiveness.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Hamed Taherdoost, "Sampling Methods in Research Methodology; How to Choose a Sampling Technique for Research," *International Journal of Academic Research in Management (IJARM)* 5 (2016).

⁵⁸ Esubalew Aman Mezmir, "Qualitative Data Analysis: An Overview of Data Reduction, Data Display and Interpretation," *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences* 10, no. 21 (November 2020): 15–27, <https://doi.org/10.7176/RHSS/10-21-02>.

⁵⁹ Ninda Lutfiani and Lista Meria, "Utilization Of Big Data in Educational Technology Research," *International Transactions on Education Technology (ITEE)* 1, no. 1 (November 29, 2022): 73–83, <https://doi.org/10.33050/itee.v1i1.198>.

⁶⁰ Christian Fischer et al., "Mining Big Data in Education: Affordances and Challenges," *Review of Research in Education* 44, no. 1 (March 21, 2020): 130–60, <https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X20903304>.

The implication of these results for education is that they provide insight for developing strategies to improve poor academic performance. These results agree with the bricolage theory, which suggests that available resources, such as records of learners' performance and attendance, can be analysed to identify relationships and come up with strategies to address identified gaps. In light of the ongoing argument, this author is of the view that information collection and insight extraction are starting points of the monitoring and support model, by providing essential information for decision-making.

Regular Assessment with Feedback

The findings reveal that regular assessments provide feedback to teachers and learners, and enables them to identify areas of strength and weakness. Regular assessment is vital for improving learners' performance,⁶¹ and for learners to identify their strengths and weaknesses.⁶² Participants identified regular assessment and feedback as important elements of a tailored monitoring and support model and shared their views. During a focus group discussion, Participant 1 commented:

As we indicated earlier on regular assessment and feedback, it's very much important. While continuing to assess, formative assessment and informal assessment, we check the progress of the learners, how they are performing, and we are able to identify and profile them.

Participant 4, in an interview, highlighted the danger of failing to provide feedback:

If there is no feedback, there won't be any improvement because we may repeat the same mistakes.

In a focus group discussion, Participant 3 added to this view by referring to the importance of regular assessment:

I find it very much useful, and it was indeed improving the results, because learners are regularly assessed on topics that have been taught within a short space of time, and these things have helped a lot in upbringing the performance of the learners.

Based on the participants' input, it is clear that regular assessment provides feedback that enables teachers to track performance and profile learners in order to provide better support and to improve performance. These findings concur with that of Irons and Elkington, that formative assessment helps teachers to improve teaching and learning experiences.⁶³ Feedback on regular assessment helps learners to identify gaps in their learning and refine strategies to improve their performance.⁶⁴

In light of the contributions of the participants, the results align with the bricolage theory, which advocates for utilising locally available resources to address current challenges. Regular assessment is flexible within the context and strengthens monitoring and support while ensuring continuous evaluation of learners' progress despite resource constraints. In light of the ongoing arguments, this author is of the view that regular assessment with feedback would shed light on teachers' and learners' strengths and weaknesses, so that they reflect on their teaching and learning approaches and refine their teaching and learning strategies to improve academic performance. However, care should be taken to ensure that regular assessments are based on quality tasks, because poor quality tasks may result in poor academic performance.

⁶¹ András Vass and Péter Szikora, "The Importance of Regular Assessment in the Higher Education of Hungary," *Serbian Journal of Engineering Management* 3, no. 1 (2017): 14–23.

⁶² Abelardo Pardo et al., "Using Learning Analytics to Scale the Provision of Personalised Feedback," *British Journal of Educational Technology* 50, no. 1 (January 6, 2019): 128–38, <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjet.12592>.

⁶³ Alastair Irons and Sam Elkington, *Enhancing Learning through Formative Assessment and Feedback* (London: Routledge, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781138610514>.

⁶⁴ Ezezi Isaac Obilor, "Convenience and Purposive Sampling Techniques: Are They the Same," *International Journal of Innovative Social & Science Education Research* 11, no. 1 (2023): 1–7.

Support and Resources

The findings reveal support and resources as fundamental elements of the monitoring and support model. Three subthemes emerged during discussions: stakeholder engagement, continuous teacher development and improving resources and infrastructure.

Stakeholder engagement

The study found that the success of the monitoring and support model depends on the engagement of a variety of stakeholders. Stakeholders refer to all institutions and individuals who are interested in learners' education, and include learners, teachers, parents, traditional leaders, civic structures, education department officials and business people. Collaboration between stakeholders has been found to be instrumental for improving learners' academic performance through the provision of resources and support. Karimi et al. claim that stakeholder engagement improves learners' academic performance.⁶⁵ Schools that regularly meet stakeholders build mutual trust, leading to quality education and improved performance.⁶⁶ Participant 1, in a focus group discussion, commented:

I think what is important is to come together, identify the problems that these learners are experiencing and in a way, they will come up with a joint structure that will work on solving such particular problems.

Participant 3 agreed with Participant 1 and said the following in an interview:

For collaboration to be smooth, there should be good communication between those different stakeholders.

In an interview, Participant 4 added:

Then we can have regular communication and planning.

In light of the data provided by participants, it is clear that collaboration between stakeholders is essential. A structure involving stakeholders at different levels should be established to enable them to plan and solve problems together, to ultimately enhance academic performance. The findings emphasise the importance of continuous communication to enhance collaboration. Participants expressed the same views as Sulthani and Thoifah, who suggest that meetings, good communication and planning with stakeholders transform schools into excellent centres of learning that are distinguished by high performance.⁶⁷ Stakeholders play a major role in supporting schools to improve performance, though many learning institutions still lack capacity-building efforts for stakeholders, which schools should provide to enhance stakeholders' capacity to support schools.⁶⁸

These results correspond with the bricolage theory, which advocates for using available resources creatively and adaptively. Local stakeholders can be trained to collaborate with schools to monitor and support learners, thereby improving academic performance. In light of the ongoing arguments, this study takes the position that collaboration between schools and various stakeholders can reduce challenges faced by learners, by offering them support to improve their academic performance. The Department of Education should initiate efforts to bring all influential stakeholders together and to establish a structure to mobilise resources and support to improve learners' academic performance. Challenges such as infrastructure shortages and the absence of continuous professional development can be addressed more effectively through such collaboration. To achieve this, the

⁶⁵ Stela Silas Karimi, Angeline Sabina Mulwa, and Dorothy Nduge Kyalo, "Stakeholder Engagement in Monitoring and Evaluation and Performance of Literacy and Numeracy Educational Programme in Public Primary Schools in Nairobi County, Kenya," *Journal of Educational and Developmental Psychology* 10, no. 2 (June 10, 2020): 10, <https://doi.org/10.5539/jedp.v10n2p10>.

⁶⁶ Smith and Benavot, "Improving Accountability in Education: The Importance of Structured Democratic Voice."

⁶⁷ Dinil Abrar Sulthani and Ianatut Thoifah, "Urgency of Stakeholders in Improving the Quality of Education," *Riwayat: Educational Journal of History and Humanities* 5, no. 2 (August 22, 2022): 443–51, <https://doi.org/10.24815/jr.v5i2.27600>.

⁶⁸ Chibuikwe Daraojimba et al., "Technology And Innovation To Growth Of Entrepreneurship And Financial Boost: A Decade In Review (2013-2023)," *International Journal of Management & Entrepreneurship Research* 5, no. 10 (October 29, 2023): 769–92, <https://doi.org/10.51594/ijmer.v5i10.593>; Stela Silas Karimi, Angeline Sabina Mulwa, and Dorothy Nduge Kyalo, "Stakeholder Capacity Building in Monitoring and Evaluation and Performance of Literacy and Numeracy Educational Programme in Public Primary Schools in Nairobi County, Kenya," *Higher Education Studies* 11, no. 2 (2021): 186–200; Myende and Nhlumayo, "Enhancing Parent-Teacher Collaboration in Rural Schools: Parents' Voices and Implications for Schools."

Department of Education and schools should take the initiative to educate stakeholders on their roles as they relate to monitoring and supporting learners.

Continuous professional development of teachers

The study found that continuous professional development for teachers is crucial for providing effective monitoring and support to the learners. Rapid technological advancement in various industries exerts pressure on school curricula to meet the current needs of the labour market. Teaching methods and resources must be aligned with these demands to adequately prepare learners for employment opportunities. In this rapidly transforming technological era, teachers must constantly upgrade their skills, knowledge and attitudes to meet the evolving needs of learners and the job market.⁶⁹ In an interview, Participant 1 said:

We must also have the training for teachers. Teachers can be trained to use the method which suits the present learners.

In a focus group discussion, Participant 2 expressed the same view:

The professional development of teachers is also very important because they are the ones who deliver this curriculum, so they need to be constantly or continuously developed so that they can use the modern technologies to teach.

Similarly, Participant 3, in a focus group discussion, agreed that teachers found it difficult to incorporate technology in their teaching:

Some teachers lack technological skills. So we find that the syllabus is changing or the curriculum is changing with the moving from these old methods to these new technological methods. So for a person like myself to teach using this technological equipment, it needs retraining so that I can adopt it in order to bring good results.

According to the data provided by participants, it is evident that technological advancements in industry exerts pressure on school curricula to align with industry-specific technologies. This highlights the necessity for continuous professional development of teachers, to enable them to integrate digital technologies in teaching and learning. Failure to meet job market demands could result in graduates who are ill-prepared for employment and who, consequently, contribute to the high unemployment rate and poverty. All participants agreed that technology is advancing at a rapid pace and suggested that schools must adapt by incorporating technology in teachers' teaching practices.⁷⁰ Teachers should realign their teaching methods to meet the current academic needs. This resonates with Dube and Ndaba: 'We also recommend making continuous professional development opportunities available, to enable educators to acquire new online skills'.⁷¹ The lack of technological proficiency of teachers impairs the effectiveness of their teaching methods. Consequently, learners struggle to understand questions relating to modern information, leading to poor performance.

These results align with the bricolage theory, which advocates for the creative and adaptive use of available resources to solve problems. Teachers' skills, knowledge and experiences serve as the foundation for their adaptation to new digital technology. In light of the ongoing arguments, this study argues that continuous professional development is essential for teachers if they are to remain aligned with new developments in education. This approach ensures that teachers' knowledge remains relevant for the current generation of learners, who are accustomed to technology through smartphone use. By embracing such advances, learning becomes accessible to learners, and ultimately improves their performance.

⁶⁹ Nooruddin and Bhamani, "Engagement of School Leadership in Teachers' Continuous Professional Development: A Case Study."

⁷⁰ Ekaterina Petrovna Rusakova and Edgar Young, "The Importance of Using Technology in Education," in *Conference Proceedings. The Future of Education 2020*, 2020.

⁷¹ Bekithemba Dube and Xolisile P. Ndaba, "Educating Progressed Learners in Times of COVID-19: How Can Bricolage Help?," *Research in Social Sciences and Technology* 6, no. 2 (September 9, 2021): 22–36, <https://doi.org/10.46303/ressat.2021.9>.

Improvement of Infrastructure and Resources

The study found that infrastructure and resources are fundamental for effective teaching and learning. Without adequate infrastructure and resources, teaching and learning becomes suboptimal. Infrastructure refers to classrooms, laboratories and libraries, and resources refer to textbooks, chairs desks, stationery and digital technology. Monitoring and support are significantly hindered in environments with inadequate infrastructure and resources. The persistently poor performance in Limpopo is largely attributed to inadequate infrastructure and a lack of resources. A lack of infrastructure leads to overcrowded classrooms, which makes it difficult for teachers to offer the necessary monitoring and support.⁷² Adequate infrastructure and good class sizes create a conducive environment for monitoring and support, which, in turn, affect learners' performance positively.⁷³ Participants shared their perspectives on the elements of the monitoring and support model that are context-specific. In a focus group discussion, Participant 1 commented:

We have the issue of large classes' size. So most of the classes, they are overcrowded. So we don't find the time to look at individual learner performance.

In an interview, Participant 2 said:

These days, we are in the world of technology. So these technological gadgets are needed ... We don't have such kind of gadgets. So if we do not have adequate resources like textbooks, technological things, it's not easy for us to support and mentor our learners in an effective way.

In an interview, Participant 4 expressed a similar view:

Even the resources, if we can have enough resources like textbooks, computers, and all of the necessary requirements, I think the learners can perform well. Even if there can be improvement in terms of infrastructure, things will go well.

In light of the data provided by participants, it is evident that inadequate infrastructure and resources significantly limit the provision of the support that is required to improve poor learner performance. The shortage of adequate classrooms and too few teachers directly contribute to overcrowded classrooms, which affects teaching and learning negatively. Teachers struggle to monitor and provide support to individual learners. Moreover, maintaining discipline becomes increasingly difficult, and bad behaviour, combined with inadequate monitoring and support, leads to poor academic performance. This finding underscores the need to improve infrastructure and resources.

These results agree with the bricolage theory, which advocates for the repurposing of available resources to address prevailing challenges. For instance, community structures such as halls and churches can be used as classrooms to alleviate overcrowding.

In light of the ongoing argument, I am of the view that inadequate infrastructure and resources are significant barriers to improving learners' performance. Tailored monitoring and support can only be effective if challenges related to infrastructure and resources are addressed. Therefore, prioritising classrooms, libraries, laboratories and digital resources is necessary for achieving sustainable academic performance at a high level.

Evaluation of Monitoring and Support Model

The study reveals how the monitoring and support model can be evaluated. Information collection and insight extraction could be used to provide feedback to evaluate the progress of the monitoring and support plan. Evaluation provides information about a programme so that progress can be checked, challenges can be identified and intervention strategies can be developed.⁷⁴ In evaluating the proposed

⁷² Corinne Meier and Joyce West, "Overcrowded Classrooms—the Achilles Heel of South African Education?," *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 10, no. 1 (2020): 1–10.

⁷³ Barrett et al., *The Impact of School Infrastructure on Learning: A Synthesis of the Evidence*.

⁷⁴ Marvin C Alkin, Anne T Vo, and Christina A Christie, *Evaluation Essentials* (Guilford Publications, 2024).

monitoring and support model, participants expressed their views. In an interview, Participant 2 reported:

We monitor continuously and we analyse the data that we have.

In a focus group discussion, Participant 3 elaborated on the role of extracting insight from information collected:

I think we can do ongoing monitoring and data analysis where we get a continuous track of what is the progress in terms of this model which has been applied. And another thing, we can use the feedback from the stakeholders where we get different input from learners, teachers, the district and also from the parents. And check if there is an improvement in the performance of these learners.

Participant 4, in an interview, highlighted the need to ensure sustainability of this model:

Then we can do the ongoing monitoring. Then we must also have the periodic evaluation. This periodic evaluation will help to give us the progress of the model to compare the performance of learners during the previous years.

In light of the participants' findings, it is clear that a contextualised monitoring and support model can be sustained through continuous information collection, insight extraction and evaluation.⁷⁵ Feedback from this process will provide valuable information that is necessary to ensure the model's sustainability. Hollmann et al., like the participants, refer to the need to engage stakeholders to provide data that give feedback to the model; this data is crucial to the success and sustainability of the model.⁷⁶

These results align with the bricolage theory, which advocates for repurposing available resources and ideas to address challenges. Stakeholder engagement could provide meaningful feedback to sustain monitoring and support models. In light of the ongoing argument, this author is of the view that, to ensure the success of this model, information collection, insight extraction and regular evaluation play crucial roles in providing feedback, so that the necessary resources and support can be provided and continuous academic performance improvement can be ensured. For sustainable performance to be achieved, there should be continuous adjustments, which, in turn, calls for information collection and insight extraction. Figure 1 illustrates elements of the monitoring and support model.

⁷⁵ Rosmalina Rosmalina and Elfrianto Elfrianto, "Evaluation And Monitoring as An Effort to Improve the Quality of Education," *Indonesian Journal Education* 3, no. 1 (February 29, 2024): 8–15, <https://doi.org/10.56495/ije.v3i1.567>.

⁷⁶ Susanne Hollmann et al., "Ten Simple Rules on How to Develop a Stakeholder Engagement Plan," *PLOS Computational Biology* 18, no. 10 (October 13, 2022): e1010520, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pcbi.1010520>.

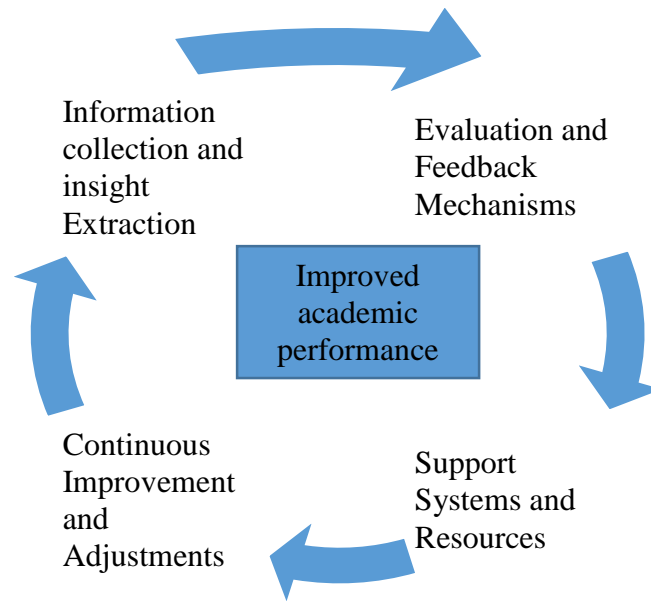


Figure 1: Monitoring and support model

Furthermore, this model involves continuous feedback, which enables the model to be more relevant to the people who are directly affected by the challenge of learners' poor academic performance, which requires continuous improvement.

Discussion Summary

The integration of voices from the peripheral stakeholders has shown to be important in addressing challenges of learners' poor performance. The engagement of various stakeholders will play a role in addressing challenges such as lack of continuous teacher professional development, infrastructure and resources. The development of a monitoring and support model will assist in gathering information that can be analysed and provide feedback that can be used to develop strategies for continuous improvement and adjustment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, several recommendations are made to inform a plan to engage voices of the marginalised stakeholders in monitoring and support.

- In the first place, the Department of Basic Education should prioritise engaging voices of marginalised stakeholders in the planning and implementation of academic improvement strategies.
- Secondly, the Department of Basic Education should foster stakeholder collaboration by creating a formal structure to coordinate stakeholder engagement through consistent communication with joint planning.
- Thirdly, there is urgent need to invest in infrastructure and resources to create a conducive environment for teaching and learning. The absence of infrastructure and resources has a negative impact on teaching and learning achievement.
- In the fourth place, the Department of Basic Education should prioritise continuous professional development of teachers. This will improve their teaching methods and the skills they need to use digital technology, to improve teaching.

CONCLUSION

This article discussed a plan to engage the voices of marginalised rural stakeholders in monitoring and support to improve poor performance of matric learners. Bricolage offers a valuable theoretical framework to understand the engagement of local stakeholders to strengthen collaboration, foster

shared responsibility and improve access to resources and support. Resources such as proper classrooms, laboratories and libraries are important for supporting teaching and learning in order to improve learners' performance. Continuous teacher professional development is necessary for improving teaching methods and skills, which has an impact on learning outcomes. The success of monitoring and support model is dependent on continuous evaluation, which provides feedback that can be used to sustain good academic performance.

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