E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (EHASS)
ISSN – Online 2720-7722 | Print 2821-8949
Volume 7 Issue 9 2026 pp 2746 - 2755
Available online at: https://noyam.org/journals/ehass/
DOI: https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.20267919

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Resource availability and its influence on Teachers' Content Delivery in secondary schools: A case study of the Chris Hani District, Eastern Cape, South Africa

Ayanda Ncokazi [1] & Lundi Nomlala [2]

[1] Faculty of Education, Business Management Education Department, Walter Sisulu University, South Africa.
[2] Faculty of Education, Humanities and Creative Arts, Education Department, Walter Sisulu University, South Africa.

ABSTRACT

The chronic shortage of teaching and learning resources in South Africa's historically disadvantaged schools remains a persistent barrier to educational equity and quality. This study examined the effect of resource availability on the effectiveness of secondary school teachers' content delivery in the Chris Hani District, Eastern Cape. Using a qualitative case study design within an interpretivist paradigm, semi-structured interviews were conducted with six purposively selected teachers. Thematic analysis of the data revealed three core findings: first, the absence of basic and subject-specific resources fundamentally cripples pedagogical practice and learner engagement; second, overcrowded and inflexible physical classrooms actively impede collaborative learning and effective classroom management; and third, these conditions create a demoralizing self-perpetuating pattern of systemic inadequacy, negatively impacting both teacher morale and learner performance. The study concludes that resource scarcity directly undermines the socio-cultural conditions necessary for learning and the school's capacity to implement the intended curriculum, thereby contributing a situated, experiential perspective to the literature on resource deprivation in rural Global South contexts. It is recommended that education authorities prioritize equitable, needs-based resource allocation, integrate training for resource-scarce pedagogy into teacher development, and establish transparent monitoring frameworks to ensure policy translates into tangible classroom support. This paper contributes a situated, experiential perspective on how resource scarcity undermines socio-cultural learning conditions and curriculum implementation in rural South African secondary schools, extending theoretical debates on educational inequality.

Keywords: Resource Availability, Teacher Effectiveness, Content Delivery, Rural Secondary Schools, South African Education

INTRODUCTION

In South Africa, the legacy of apartheid has left an education system in which resources are still distributed mainly along racial lines. Formerly Black schools, which are primarily located in the former homelands and rural areas, have been consistently under-resourced compared to their historically White

CORRESPONDENCE – Ayanda Ncokazi **Email:** ancokazi@wsu.ac.za
PUBLICATION HISTORY - Received: 21st February, 2026 | Accepted: 18th August, 2026 | Published: 29th October, 2026.
TO CITE THIS ARTICLE – Ncokazi, Ayanda, and Lundi Nomlala. "Resource availability and its influence on Teachers' Content Delivery in secondary schools: A case study of the Chris Hani District, Eastern Cape, South Africa." *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences* 7, no.9 (2026): 2746 - 2755. https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.20267919
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counterpart.[1] After 1994, the democratic government reorganized several education departments and implemented various reforms to address historical inequalities; however, resource shortages have persisted.[2] Learners at many schools in provinces such as the Eastern Cape still experience classes in deplorable conditions, such as mud schools or even under trees, and a lack of basic learning and teaching support materials (LTSM).[3] It is a contradiction that teachers are then expected to deliver a set curriculum and ensure equitable academic outcomes in a context that is highly challenging for effective pedagogy.

Numerous international and African studies on the general quality of education have verified the link between resource availability and learning outcomes.[4] In South Africa, existing studies also highlight this ongoing problem, particularly in rural schools.[5] However, there is still a need for more fine-grained and qualitative perspectives on how the lack of not only basic instructional resources but also sufficient physical infrastructure impacts the daily realities of teachers, their morale, and ultimately content delivery and learner performance, specifically at the secondary school level. Therefore, this study is intended to fill this gap by providing an in-depth, experiential perspective from teachers themselves, who are on the front line of this problem. This study aims to explore the impact of the availability of learning and teaching resources on the effectiveness of teachers' content delivery in secondary schools in the Chris Hani District, Eastern Cape, South Africa.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The importance of resources in supporting effective teaching and learning is well established. Resources are generally defined as valuable human, financial, physical, or information endowments.[6] In the educational sector, these resources may support services or systems, such as buildings, furniture, and administration, or the core of teaching and learning: books, libraries, laboratories, computers, and other pedagogical equipment and services.[7] Numerous studies have established the effect of the availability of these latter resources, which show, not surprisingly, a significant positive correlation between resource availability and learning achievement, as well as other desirable educational outcomes.[8] That is, having sufficient resources for preparation, access, and delivery allows for well-prepared lessons, smooth pacing, and a clear instructional pathway. However, the lack of resources is a fundamental impediment to effective pedagogical practice. The absence of chalkboards, desks, textbooks, workbooks, science and mathematics equipment, libraries, and computers prevents teachers from making content understandable to learners. The result is boredom and poor learner performance.[9] This is most serious in the sciences, where the absence of laboratories makes teaching and learning abstract and verbal descriptions.[10]

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1 Simon Bengover, *Educational Inequality in South Africa: A Legacy of Apartheid* (. Cape Town: Juta and Company, 2013).

2 Katherine Lawrence, "Post-Apartheid Educational Reform: Progress and Persistent Challenges," *South African Journal of Education* 42, no. 1 (2022): 1–12.

3 Thabo Mathase, "Infrastructure Deficits and Learning Outcomes in Eastern Cape Rural Schools," *Journal of Educational Development* 45, no. 3 (2021): 112–25.

4 Rekai Zenda, "The Importance of Teaching Resources on Physical Sciences Learners' Academic Achievement in Rural Schools: A Case of South Africa," *Social Education Research*, August 14, 2024, 407–20, https://doi.org/10.37256/ser.5220244624.

5 Lulama Mdodana-Zide, "Teacher's Pedagogical Strategies in under-Resourced Rural Schools in South Africa," *E-Journal of Humanities Arts and Social Sciences* 4, no. 12 (2023): 20–31.

6 Henriette Lundgren et al., "Conceptualizing Resource Integration as an Embedded Process: Advancing the Paradox Perspective on Resource Integration," *Human Resource Development Review* 22, no. 2 (2023): 219-243.

7 T. M. Ezumah, R. N. O. Ogbonna, and B. E. Afianmagbon, "School Resources And Teachers' Effectiveness In Private Secondary Schools In South-East States, Nigeria," *Open Journal of Educational Development (ISSN: 2734-2050)* 6, no. 1 (June 30, 2025): 54–67, https://doi.org/10.52417/ojed.v6i1.875.

8 Benjamin Bizimana and John Aluko Orodho, *Teaching and Learning Resources, as Well as Teachers' Effective Classroom Management and Content Delivery, in Secondary Schools in Huye District, Rwanda* (ERN: Government Expenditures & Education, 2014).

9 Jessica Meliang Belisario and James Lacsao Paglinawan, "The Relationship between Instructional Materials Availability and Student Engagement in Science," *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Applied Science* X, no. V (2025): 263–70, https://doi.org/10.51584/IJRIAS.2025.100500025.

10 Margaret Chesang Byomndo, Shadrack Cheplogoi, and Jacob J.J.O. Konyango, "The Relationship between the Availability of School Farms as an Instructional Resources Resource and Agriculture Curriculum Implementation in Secondary Schools in Bureti Sub-County," *East African Journal of Education Studies* 8, no. 2 (April 11, 2025): 105–15, https://doi.org/10.37284/eajes.8.2.2864.

The physical learning space, itself a physical resource, has a significant bearing on teaching and learning. Overcrowded classes with fixed, small tables and chairs make the collaborative, learner-centred pedagogies espoused in various curricula impossible to realize, inculcating passivity and rendering discipline and order near-impossible to maintain.[11] Thus, the actual nature of the classroom space contradicts the socio-constructivist pedagogical principles underlying its design, principles that view it as a place of peer interaction and collaboration.[12] A further implication of resource insufficiency is that its uneven distribution across and within contexts further cements geospatial inequity. That is, the farther a school is from an urban hub in Africa, the poorer its children perform, according to studies in Malawi and Nigeria, due to resource scarcity.[13] Teachers in poorly resourced contexts employ a range of pedagogical strategies to compensate for resource constraints.[14] However, these should not be viewed as a substitute for systemic adequacy. In addition to the obvious logistical challenges, the cumulative impact of working without basic resources is demoralising for teachers, which in turn may feed a self-fulfilling prophecy of failure on the part of both teachers and learners.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study draws on two theoretical frameworks to interpret the impact of resource availability on the teaching and learning environment. Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory of learning and the Theory of Curriculum Implementation were applied.[15] The socio-cultural theory of education, which emphasizes social interaction as the foundation of cognitive development, is particularly relevant to the research question, as it highlights the importance of cultural artifacts in the construction of knowledge.[16] In this case, resources (materials, space, tools) represent the physical manifestation of these artefacts, underscoring their importance to the study. Two primary principles underpin this theory: first, the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), and second, the assertion that tools and signs mediate learning. The ZPD principle (the difference between what a learner can do without help and with help) and the scaffolding of knowledge development within this zone become constraints when the resources that enable collaboration, both in terms of physical objects (textbooks, equipment) and instructional support (teacher, peer interaction), are unavailable. Vygotsky's emphasis on mediation by tools and signs further accentuates the centrality of resources. They are the cultural mediators, not neutral objects, but active elements that structure social interaction and, consequently, learning and cognitive development.

The second framework that informs this study is Rogan and Grayson's theory of curriculum implementation. This theory was explicitly developed to understand factors influencing curriculum change in South Africa and is relevant to this study's focus on transformation in the context of resource constraints. The theory identifies the Profile of Implementation (PI), the Capacity to Support Innovation within the school (CSI), and the Support from Outside Agencies (SOA) as interrelated constructs that influence curriculum implementation. The interplay between the realisation of the intended curriculum in practice (PI) and physical and human resources, teacher capacity, and other factors within the school environment (CSI), and support for implementation from government or outside agencies (SOA) affects whether and to what extent the intended curriculum can be implemented. It shifts the focus away from teacher performance or intention towards a broader evaluation of the enabling environment of the school. Critically, this theory directly links material resources to the school's capacity to support innovation and implementation. This creates a theoretical connection between the results and the conclusions. The lack of physical space, overcrowded classrooms, and missing textbooks are not presented as irritants but as

[11] Robert P Pangrazi and Aaron Beighle, *Dynamic Physical Education for Elementary School Children* (Human Kinetics Publishers, 2019).
[12] Lev Semenovich Vygotsky and Michael Cole, *Mind in Society: Development of Higher Psychological Processes* (Harvard university press, 1978).
[13] Mercy Khumbo Nyirenda, "Impact of Resource Distribution and Availability on Primary Schools Pupil Learning Outcomes: Case Study of Chintheche Education Zone, Nkhata Bay, Malawi," *Journal of Development and Communication Studies* 8, no. 1 (March 10, 2021): 239–60, https://doi.org/10.4314/jdcs.v8i1.12.
[14] Mdodana-Zide, "Teacher's Pedagogical Strategies in under-Resourced Rural Schools in South Africa."
[15] John M. Rogan and Diane J. Grayson, "Towards a Theory of Curriculum Implementation with Particular Reference to Science Education in Developing Countries," *International Journal of Science Education* 25, no. 10 (October 2003): 1171–1204, https://doi.org/10.1080/09500690210145819.
[16] Vygotsky and Cole, *Mind in Society: Development of Higher Psychological Processes*.

direct evidence of the CSI's failure and, by extension, the PI's. These theories were applied in an interrelated manner. Vygotsky's theory explained the pedagogical and learning consequences of resource unavailability. In contrast, Rogan and Grayson's framework illuminated the system and structure behind these failures.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research approach underpinned by the interpretivist paradigm. In the interpretivist paradigm, social reality is defined as something constructed by the people who create it and their interpretations of the world; because of this, studies that operate from this point of view focus on understanding the "lived experience" of participants in context. [17] Qualitative methods are recommended for "addressing the 'how' and 'why' questions related to a specific complex issue in depth and in context."[18] This recommendation motivated the researcher to select the same for this study, given the study's purpose and the similarity between the two studies. The study of rural schools in under-resourced contexts was also conducted within an interpretivist paradigm, with qualitative methods used for data collection.

The study design is a case study. A case study investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, where the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clear.[19] This study design is particularly relevant when a researcher seeks to understand complex social processes and is well-suited for formulating "how" and "why" questions.[20] As such, it was most appropriate for this study, as it best addresses the study questions and objectives, which were all based on exploring and understanding "how" and "why" resource availability and constraints influence teachers' daily activities.

Six (6) practicing teachers were purposely selected to participate in the study. In purposive sampling, experts and individuals with detailed knowledge of situations, events, and processes are selected to yield rich, valuable data.[21] Participants in this study were selected based on their expert knowledge, as they are teachers from the region, as well as their practical and firsthand knowledge of the problem, given that they work in the very system where the challenges of resource availability and content delivery are experienced. The sample size of six participants is justified by the qualitative case study design within an interpretivist paradigm, where the goal is deep contextual understanding rather than statistical generalizability; as Creswell and Poth note, small purposive samples are adequate when participants possess expert, firsthand knowledge of the phenomenon, and data sufficiency was achieved through thematic saturation, where no new insights emerged from the final interviews, consistent with Braun and Clarke's guidance on determining sample adequacy in thematic analysis.

Primary data were collected using semi-structured interviews. This data collection method is based on a conversation on a topic relevant to the research, with a structured framework of questions agreed on by the researcher and the interviewee. The researcher developed these questions based on the objectives of the study, and they are semi-structured, allowing new ideas to emerge.[22] Semi-structured interviews were used in this study because they allowed the collection of in-depth, contextual data, allowing participants to express themselves more freely than they could with a survey or questionnaire. Semi-structured interviews are a common qualitative data collection approach, as demonstrated by Wang, who used this method in their study of teaching and learning resources in rural Chinese schools.[23]

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[17] Nguyen Cao Thanh and T T Le Thanh, "The Interconnection between Interpretivist Paradigm and Qualitative Methods in Education," *American Journal of Educational Science* 1, no. 2 (2015): 24–27.

[18] John W Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches* (4th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications., 2018).

[19] Robert K Yin, *Case Study Research and Applications*, vol. 6 (sage Thousand Oaks, CA, 2018).

[20] J. W. Creswell and C. N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches (4th Ed.)* (Sage, 2018).

[21] 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, no. 5 (2015): 533–44.

[22] Alan Bryman, Edward Bell, and James J Teevan, *Social Research Methods*, vol. 4 (Oxford university press Oxford, 2012).

[23] Jing Wang et al., "Continuing to Teach in a Time of Crisis: The Chinese Rural Educational System's Response and Student Satisfaction and Social and Cognitive Presence," *British Journal of Educational Technology* 52, no. 4 (July 18, 2021): 1494–1512, https://doi.org/10.1111/bjet.13129.

The study used thematic data analysis. This followed the widely used approach proposed by Braun and Clarke.[24] The interview transcripts were analyzed in six phases as part of a rigorous, systematic process. The steps involved (1) data familiarization, (2) initial code generation, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing potential themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) reporting. This data analysis approach was selected because it provides a rigorous method for structuring and systematising the researcher's work in analyzing large amounts of qualitative data and is a common approach in educational research.[25]

Informed consent was obtained from all participants before the commencement of data collection. This process involved explaining the study details to the participants and then obtaining their informed consent by having them agree to and sign the consent form. The participants were made aware of and consented to the following: the purpose of the study and how the information will be used, their right to refuse participation, that their participation is voluntary, that they can stop participating at any time without penalty or prejudice, and that their privacy and anonymity will be maintained throughout the research process and that no information will be shared outside the research team. The participants are anonymized and referred to by pseudonyms throughout this report as T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, and T6. All electronic data are stored on password-protected computers and devices, and any paper-based documents are kept in a locked cabinet accessible only to the research team.[26]

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The analysis of the interview data yielded three primary themes that capture the core experiences of teachers regarding resource availability and its impact. The findings are presented below, accompanied by direct verbatim quotes from participants (T1–T6), followed by an interpretation and analysis of each theme.

Theme 1: The Crippling Effect of Basic Resource Scarcity on Pedagogy

T1: My class has neither a chalkboard nor a data projector. This makes for a good lesson; my learners understand the content when I present something they can see on the board. If I do not show and write on the board or project, they easily forget what they have learnt; sometimes, they do not even have writing material.

T4: How am I to be expected to teach science without a laboratory? We are supposed to do some experiments in the syllabus, but we have no equipment. I describe them from the textbook. The learners look confused and lose interest as they cannot see it or do it for themselves.

T2: Even the basics are not there, like textbooks. We are making some grades so that one book can be shared among five learners. You can neither give them proper homework nor expect them to read ahead. It slows down everything and forces me to constantly write notes on the chalkboard, taking up half the lesson time.

These quotes from the participants show that a lack of basic materials, starting from a chalkboard and going all the way to specialized equipment, completely cripple pedagogy. Both T1 and T2 illustrate that the lack of presentation boards and textbooks forced teachers to use time-consuming, less efficient methods to convey information to learners. It becomes apparent how resource scarcity prevents learners from receiving content effectively. T4's story about science exemplifies a discrepancy between the official syllabus and the practical conditions of school operation. Her inability to conduct the experiments required by the curriculum directly compromises her learners' engagement, attention, and cognitive clarity. The extract illustrates that a lack of resources does not just make life difficult for teachers but also degrades the quality of education they can offer.

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[24] Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77–101.

[25] Taranath Bhattarai and Narayan Belbase, "Inclusion of Local Resources in Secondary Level School Education in Rupandehi District Nepal," *International Journal on Science and Technology* 16, no. 1 (March 19, 2025), https://doi.org/10.71097/IJSAT.v16.i1.6937.

[26] Mark Israel and Iain Hay, *Research Ethics for Social Scientists* (1 Oliver's Yard, 55 City Road, London England EC1Y 1SP United Kingdom : SAGE Publications, Ltd, 2006), https://doi.org/10.4135/9781849209779.

Theme 2: The Physical Environment as an Impediment to Learning

T3: My classroom has desks for 35 learners, but I have 58 learners registered. We have managed to squeeze in extra benches, but there is no space to walk between rows. I cannot access the learners at the back to help them individually. Group work is impossible; there is literally no floor space. The noise level is unbearable; one is basically shouting.

T6: The seating arrangement is fixed and is a tight squeeze. I am unable to arrange learners into groups or form a circle to facilitate a discussion. The classroom layout itself tells them to be passive and listen. This is not how modern teaching is supposed to be.

The descriptions reveal the classroom environment. The physical space here is anything but a passive shell. The teachers' accounts (T3 and T6) present the classroom as a space that annihilates an entire arsenal of pedagogical concepts and principles. As described, individualized support for learners, collaborative learning, and learner-centered strategies are not feasible in an inflexible, overcrowded setting. These learning spaces are obviously fertile ground for passivity, increased noise levels, complicated class management, and a space that is a priori not conducive to genuine interaction and educational engagement.

Theme 3: Demoralization and the self-perpetuating pattern of systemic inadequacy

This theme further elucidates the downstream consequences of teachers working in environments with insufficient resources. This means that a lack of resources leads to teachers not teaching effectively at the desired level, directly affecting learners' performance at school and disengaging them from learning.

T2: It is demoralizing. You prepare a lesson knowing you do not have the tools to make it effective. You see the potential in the children, but the system is failing them because of these shortages.

T4: The lack of resources directly shows in their results. When we finally get past papers to practice, the most common feedback is 'we were not taught this' or 'we have never seen this apparatus'... The performance gap starts here."

T1: When resources are missing, you spend your energy improvising and managing chaos instead of teaching. The learners become frustrated and disengaged. Their performance drops, and then everyone asks what the teacher is doing wrong.

The theme further cements the notion that a lack of resources leads to teacher and learner failure by explaining the downstream consequences of these deprivations on the learning environment. T4 directly links these deprivations to a lack of knowledge and performance, whereas T2 and T1 paint a picture of a system so deeply flawed that it leads teachers to feel complicit in learners' failures in their care.

DISCUSSION

These findings paint a stark portrait of the critical role that resource inadequacy plays in derailing the educational project in this context. The data not only corroborate established theoretical and empirical understandings of these issues, but bring them into sharp relief.

Firstly, the lack of essential LTSM resources (such as chalkboards, textbooks, and science labs) directly impairs the quality of instruction. This aligns with the research findings of Zenda, who found that both the availability and quality of resources are key predictors of science achievement in rural South African schools, and of Bizimana and Orodho, who established a link between resource inadequacy and decreased capacity for classroom management and content delivery. When a teacher like T4 is compelled to describe experiments verbally rather than demonstrate or allow learners to try, it constitutes a clear breach of the tenets of experiential learning. It highlights a significant gap between curriculum policy and classroom reality.

Secondly, the data powerfully highlights that the physical infrastructure of learning (overcrowded, inflexible classrooms) is not a neutral backdrop to education but a major limiting factor. The teacher's sentiment (T5) that access to education is contingent on a lack of resources is a severe indictment of systemic inequity. This finding aligns with Rogan and Grayson's theory of curriculum

implementation, which posits that the capacity of the learning environment is a key determinant of the quality of implementation.[27] An environment that fosters the kind of collaborative, dialogic learning that Vygotsky argued is necessary for cognitive development makes it practically impossible to say that it is necessary for cognitive development, pushing back against such pedagogy and forcing a reversion to passive, teacher-dominated modes of instruction.[28]

Finally, perhaps the most far-reaching finding in this study is reported in Theme 3: the demoralizing psychological and systemic effects of resource scarcity. The vicious cycle of teacher demoralization and the apparent link between resource gaps and poor educational outcomes point to a self-reinforcing pattern of low expectations and low results. This finding aligns with studies in similar contexts, such as Nyirenda, who found that unequal distribution of resources directly impacts secondary school choice in Malawi and thus drives continued disadvantage.[29] It is essential to recognize that teachers exhibit agency through improvisation; however, this should not be conflated with the quality and effectiveness of teaching, which Ali and Ezumah argue requires both advanced infrastructure and adequate resources.[30]

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, which demonstrate the severe, multi-faceted impact of resource scarcity on teaching efficacy, classroom environment, and systemic outcomes, the following concrete recommendations are proposed for policymakers, educational authorities, and school management.

For the Department of Basic Education and Provincial Authorities: National and provincial education departments must take decisive action to transform into a more equitable and needs-based system of resource distribution. They need to develop and monitor the implementation of a transparent funding formula that directs resources to previously disadvantaged and rural areas, based not only on a per-learner amount but also on a "scarcity" weighting that accounts for current infrastructure backlogs. Departments must also require that all necessary LTSM – including textbooks, workbooks, stationery, and basic science equipment - be delivered, audited, and ready in schools before the start of each school year, to allow teachers to be fully prepared from the first day of teaching. Departments also need to speed up the roll-out of schools' infrastructure to address the problem of overcrowding, and new and refurbished classrooms must be built and furnished to accommodate new teaching practices (peer-learning, etc.) as required by the CAPS, with furniture such as movable desks and cluster tables that allow for flexible, collaborative learning.

For School Management Teams (SMTs): SMTs should both "look out" and "look in." For "looking out," SMTs need to design and implement systems of formal advocacy based on data and focused on targeted areas of need, working closely with district personnel. For "looking in," SMTs need to work with schools to ensure they have systems in place to prevent resources from being lost and to distribute them equitably. In parallel to these functions, SMTs should also focus on supporting contextual improvisation and collegiality by encouraging the formation of PLCs where teachers can help each other in identifying and sharing specific, locally adaptive teaching practices (such as for improvisation or low-resource, high-engagement activities) as a means of offsetting proximal limitations and decreasing teacher isolation and burnout.

For Teacher Training and Development: Teacher education (pre-service and in-service) programmes need to be radically re-oriented to the possibility of teaching in under-resourced classrooms. University

[27] Rogan and Grayson, "Towards a Theory of Curriculum Implementation with Particular Reference to Science Education in Developing Countries."

[28] Vygotsky and Cole, *Mind in Society: Development of Higher Psychological Processes*.

[29] Nyirenda, "Impact of Resource Distribution and Availability on Primary Schools Pupil Learning Outcomes: Case Study of Chintheche Education Zone, Nkhata Bay, Malawi."

[30] Ali Shoukat, "Impact Of Physical Infrastructure And Learning Resources On Teacher Quality," *Kashf Journal of Multidisciplinary Research* 1, no. 10 (October 27, 2024): 40–48, https://doi.org/10.71146/kjmr109; Ezumah, Ogbonna, and Afianmagbon, "School Resources And Teachers' Effectiveness In Private Secondary Schools In South-East States, Nigeria."

curricula and Continuous Professional Development (CPD) cannot continue to be based on ideal world situations. Instead, training all teachers in good practices for low-resource settings must be compulsory in all teacher education programs. Techniques for multi-grade teaching, creating low-cost and appropriate teaching aids, utilizing locally available resources to support learning, and managing large and overcrowded classes must all be included. For practical teachers, such as those in Physical Sciences and Technology, exceptional and sustained CPD is needed to enable safe improvisation in laboratory and practical work, so they can provide alternatives for demonstrating concepts and principles, as well as for practicing scientific inquiry with limited resources.

For Future Research and Policy Monitoring: To base policy on sound evidence and hold the system accountable, two actions are needed. First, independent longitudinal impact studies should be commissioned to monitor and measure the impact of a targeted package of resource interventions in specific, named disadvantaged districts, over time, on teacher practice and learner performance. These would provide hard evidence to inform policy and practice. Secondly, the Department of Basic Education must develop a publicly accessible national resource audit and monitoring framework. A national digital dashboard to monitor provisioning, infrastructure, and classroom conditions against prescribed norms for all schools will increase transparency, enable civil society oversight, and hold the system accountable for closing the gap between policy promises and classroom realities.

To address the resource crisis, action is required on multiple levels, coordinated and implemented at scale. The systemic urgent need for redress must be accompanied by resources to ensure the conditions for learning and teaching in the school, particularly for an already disadvantaged school system. Implementing these recommendations will help break the demoralizing cycle of failure, create conducive learning environments, and support teachers in providing the quality of education that all South African learners deserve.

CONCLUSION

This paper presents a contextualised, qualitative investigation of the effects of severe resource deficits on the fundamental purpose of schooling, as perceived and experienced by the teachers at a secondary school in a severely disadvantaged area. The research findings paint a grim picture of the pervasive, daily experiences of teachers who face severely inadequate resource levels of nearly every kind, including classroom furniture, materials, technology, and, more acutely, teaching and learning resources such as textbooks, chalkboards, and science laboratories. The resultant shortfall in resourcing directly affects what teachers describe as an impediment to meaningful pedagogy and the ability to teach creatively and effectively. The physical environment is defined as an 'active barrier to learning', with cramped, inflexible classroom spaces rendering group work and collaborative pedagogies impossible and effectively 'deciding who learns and who does not, based on where they are sitting'. In total, the acute lack of basic resources leads to an immediate 'cycle of impact' of substandard content coverage, low learner performance, and, most concerningly, severe teacher demoralization. The research findings, therefore, constitute a compelling and well-substantiated critique of the state of resource allocation in secondary schools in disadvantaged contexts. The impact of the stark resource deficit is a violation of the constitutional right to basic education for all, a dent in the ambitious aims of curriculum transformation, and a burden on teachers, who are held responsible for performance and outcomes despite the near-impossibility of achieving them. The critical lack of basic resources creates an impossible and unjust burden on teachers. The study findings also have severe, if more indirect, implications for teachers' professional agency and morale. It can therefore be concluded that access to and provision of sufficient and equitable resources are the critical first steps in levelling the playing field. This will be foundational not only to improving outcomes and teacher performance, but also to the effect this has on teachers' abilities and levels of investment in the school, which is currently in steep decline. All other support and initiatives will be ineffective, as a fundamental lack of resources will remain a structural inhibitor of the quality of education provided.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
The teachers who participated in this study are acknowledged.

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ABOUT AUTHORS

Mr. Ayanda Ncokazi is a lecturer in the Faculty of Education, serving in the Department of Business Management Education.

Dr. Lundi Nomlala is a lecturer in the Faculty of Education, Humanities and Creative Arts Education Department.