

DEVELOPING ECED TEACHERS' KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS TO MEET THE DEMANDS OF QUALITY EDUCATION IN A RURAL CONTEXT

Ayesha CARRIM^{1*}Tebogo Jillian MAMPANE²

Received: June 2025 | Accepted: August 2025 | Published: December 2025

Please cite this paper as: Carrim, A., Mampane, T.J. (2025). Developing ECED Teacher' Knowledge and skills to meet the demands of Quality Education in a Rural Context, *Holistica Journal of Business and Public Administration*, Vol. 16, Iss. 2, pp.81-97

Abstract

South Africa's rural environment makes quality Early Childhood Education and Development difficult. Poor teacher qualifications, curriculum implementation and school management make rural ECED susceptible (Aubrey, 2017; Adebunmi, Aina, & Bipath, 2022; Hannaway et al., 2019). Palmer's (2011) theory of lived experience in flexible education is used to examine ECED instructors' educational expectations in a remote Northwest Province. The qualitative technique comprised individual and focus group semi-structured interviews with four ECED teachers and classroom observation of teaching activities and resources. This research was part of UNISA's Community engaged Scholarship. This research found that departmental assistance focusses on curriculum completion, teacher progress and teaching accountability. This ignores more pressing issues including bad infrastructure, congested classrooms, school location and a lack of assistance for multi-level students. With high expectations and little support, teachers feel mentally exhausted trying to balance classroom realities with expectations. The study recommends prioritising teacher voices and community realities in planning, funding infrastructure improvements and providing relevant, context-sensitive professional development. It also suggests that future research focus on practical support strategies and models specifically designed for the unique challenges of rural ECED environments.

Keywords: curriculum completion; departmental support; community partnerships; child development resource; quality education demand and rural context

1. Introduction

According to Biersteker (2012) and Naudeau et al. (2012), quality Early Childhood Education and Development (ECED) requires further investment to ensure the availability and efficient use of relevant teaching and learning tools. Nevertheless, each year has unexpected challenges that really affect the ability to achieve every outcome stipulated in the curriculum, specifically in the rural areas. These areas are where early childhood

¹ University of South Africa; Department of Early Childhood Education, South Africa, Ecarria1@unisa.ac.za

² University of South Africa; Department of Early Childhood Education, South Africa. emampatj@unisa.ac.za

development is most compromised due to language barriers, socioeconomic differences, lack of infrastructure and general family problems that affects learning (Aubrey, 2017; Adebunmi, Aina, & Bipath, 2022). The inability of ECD teachers to carry out the curriculum as intended is greatly hampered by these shortcomings (Madondo, 2021). These inability makes it extremely difficult for teachers to carry out all educational expectations to the book and results in low learner achievement and demoralises teachers (Hannaway, Govender, Marais, & Meier, 2019).

The early years are crucial for lifelong learning, as highlighted in international frameworks like the Sustainable Development Goals (Urban et al., 2012). However, ongoing inequities and resource gaps in South Africa's rural areas critically weaken the quality of early childhood education, putting children's developmental progress at risk (Visser, Grossmark, Krüger, Smith, van Zyl, Willemse, & Wright, 2021). This is mainly due to insufficient space in classrooms coupled with lack of access to age-appropriate resources and infrastructure (Diale & Sewagegn, 2021). Moreover, teachers need more time for professional development and practical support from the department to overcome these obstacles (Yang & Rao, 2021).

These needs should be taken seriously and call for urgent departmental intervention support systems to improve early childhood education in rural areas. With the vastly differing learning abilities, qualified teachers struggle to apply new teaching strategies in these under-resourced contexts (Schwartz, Cappella, Aber, Scott, Wolf, & Behrman, 2019). Research always highlights the Foundation of ECD in promoting both cognitive and social development for long term educational success (Naudeau et al., 2012). However, not addressing the unique challenges in rural communities will further impede the achievement of departmental educational outcomes. It is also important to understand that rural schools have to carry on with what they have. This also highlights inadequate teacher qualifications, poor curriculum implementation, and ineffective school management that weakens the ability to deliver quality education (Hannaway et al., 2019).

These ongoing setbacks in rural areas require a balanced leadership approach that combines both leaders' and teachers' insights to really understand the unique challenges of the school community (Murray & Rudolph, 2019). In this way, departmental support can be adapted to address the needs and contexts of specific rural communities, ultimately improving or adapting the level of support and expectations based on the needs and reality of the school community.

2. Problem Statement

Rural teacher needs are critically undermined when more attention is not paid to professional development and working around the lack of resources. The question is how teachers are able to meet the demands of quality education if their knowledge, skills and context are not being developed. Despite the pivotal role of ECED teachers in shaping early learning experiences, there has been insufficient focus on enhancing their

preparedness, particularly in rural contexts. This study aims to investigate the current state of teacher preparedness and its influence on educational quality, with a focus on identifying strategies to improve ECED teachers' capacity to deliver quality education in rural settings.

3. Methodology

2.1 The Challenges of ECED in Rural Contexts

The challenges in providing quality Early Childhood Education and Development (ECED) are endless in rural schools in South Africa. The hinderance of quality education lies in different socioeconomic backgrounds, insufficient infrastructure, and family issues. This in turn impacts the preparedness of teachers and their ability to cover the curriculum amidst all these disparities.

The scarcity of resources and lack of basic classroom facilities include teaching aids and technological tools. These factors make it very difficult for teachers to stay motivated and leads to high absenteeism just to avoid the stress (Schwartz, Murray, & Scherer, 2019). In addition, these rural schools deal with multi-grade teaching in overcrowded classrooms with language barriers, which creates further complexities in the teaching and learning process (Hannaway, Nel, Govender, & Khan, 2019).

These complexities cannot be overlooked especially in a rural setting. As highlighted by Madondo (2021), educational outcomes can only be successfully achieved by supporting teachers through the process. Moreover, if teachers are more worried about meeting departmental standards and complying with the monitoring framework, it will further weaken the quality of education in these settings (Mesa, Nores, & Vega, 2021). These issues could also be increased due to rural areas employing insufficiently qualified ECD teachers who have no training on dealing with young children (Hu, Roberts, leong, & Guo, 2016). This is besides the fact that rural communities have limited access to early childhood education services, which already impacts the overall quality of education (Yoshikawa & Kabay, 2015). Unfortunately, this environment makes it near to impossible to achieve and maintaining basic quality standards in early childhood education becomes a formidable challenge. Addressing these issues requires a focused and sustained effort to provide rural ECED teachers with the resources, support, and training necessary to overcome the systemic barriers they face.

2.2 Teacher Professional Development in Rural Areas

Helping teachers grow professionally is key to improving the quality of education, especially in rural areas where Early Childhood Education and Development (ECED) often faces unique challenges. Research highlights the need for training programmes that are designed specifically for rural teachers and the realities they face. This section looks at how teachers are currently being trained - both before they start teaching (pre-service) and while they are working (in-service). It also points out the gaps in how well this training prepares them for working in rural schools.

There's a growing understanding that rural teachers need support that fits their specific context. However, studies focused on what truly works in rural professional development (PD) are still limited (Glover et al., 2016). To be effective, PD programmes must consider both the strengths and challenges of rural communities (Skyhar, 2020). Unfortunately, many of the current programmes are too general and miss the mark when it comes to the real needs of rural teachers (Speight Vaughn & De Beer, 2020).

Rather than trying to bring in new teachers, research shows it's often more effective to support the ones who are already there (Barrett, Cowen, Toma, & Troske, 2015). These teachers have valuable local knowledge and community connections that are hard to replace. It's also difficult to attract and keep new teachers in rural areas. That's why universities and training providers play a crucial role in offering professional development that's accessible, relevant, and grounded in the local context (Mollenkopf, 2009).

Rural teachers face real barriers to professional development - like being far from training centres, having heavy workloads, and not having many chances to collaborate. These challenges show why it's essential to offer training that's made for their situation (Bonilla Medina & Cruz Arcila, 2013). Recent studies support this, stressing the importance of customised training that speaks directly to the realities rural teachers deal with every day (Şahin, Soylu, & Jafari, 2024).

2.3 Impact of Resource Constraints on Curriculum Implementation

Many rural schools face serious challenges when it comes to delivering the curriculum. A major issue is the lack of funding, learning materials, and proper teacher training, which directly affects how well teachers can do their jobs and how much students learn (Ugwu, 2023). The shortage of resources like textbooks, classrooms, and trained staff continues to be a major obstacle. However, having resources alone isn't enough. What matters just as much is how those tools are used in daily teaching (Mugendawala & Muijs, 2020). If teachers are not trained to use the materials they have, even well-equipped classrooms may not lead to better learning.

In rural areas especially, limited budgets and weak infrastructure create even bigger obstacles. Schools often lack basic teaching tools, proper buildings, and enough support to carry out lessons successfully (Gasva, Mutanana, & Goronga, 2019; Ngwenya, 2020). This makes it difficult for teachers to use effective methods or keep learners. The situation becomes more serious when practical subjects like science are involved. Poor infrastructure and a lack of equipment not only limit what can be taught, but also raise safety concerns during hands-on lessons (Chuene & Teane, 2024). Many schools don't have enough textbooks, internet access, or functioning laboratories, which adds to the already heavy burden faced by schools in poor communities (Mncube, Ajani, Ngema, & Mkhasibe, 2023; Malaikosa & Sahayu, 2019).

2.4 The Role of Community and Stakeholder Engagement

Getting communities and local stakeholders involved plays an important role in improving inclusive education, especially in rural schools where resources and support are often

limited. Their involvement can make a real difference in helping teachers choose teaching methods that actually work in their specific context (Mabasa-Manganyi, 2022). It's not just about helping teachers directly, it's also about building a stronger education system overall.

By working together, schools and communities can address key problems like shortages of materials and limited access to teacher development opportunities. These partnerships often bring fresh ideas and practical help that come from people who understand the local challenges. Research has shown that these kinds of partnerships are powerful. For example, when local people get involved, they often come up with creative solutions that are rooted in their understanding of the area. They also use strong community networks and leadership to help rural schools in meaningful ways (Jordan, Gibson, Stinnett, & Howard, 2019).

Involving groups such as parents, local businesses and NGOs can also help close the gap between what schools have and what they need (Blease & Condry, 2014). When everyone works toward the same goal, schools are more likely to get the right kind of support—and learners benefit the most.

3. Theoretical Framework

Palmer (2011) argues that flexible education goes beyond written policies and official systems, it's shaped by the everyday realities of teachers and learners on the ground. This idea is especially important in the context of Early Childhood Education and Development (ECED), where local conditions, especially in rural areas, play a major role in shaping educational outcomes.

Clark, Cahill, and Ansell (2022) also emphasise the need to adapt early childhood services to reflect the specific needs of disadvantaged communities. Standardised approaches often fall short in these settings. Instead, solutions that are developed with the local context in mind tend to be more effective. For instance, Sincovich, Harman-Smith, and Brinkman (2019) found that early interventions like playgroups can help reduce developmental challenges, especially when they are tailored to meet the needs of the communities they serve.

These kinds of solutions are not only affordable but also really make a difference, exactly the kind of impact Palmer (2011) was talking about. Palmer also points out that educational strategies need to reflect the language and culture of the students and teachers involved. Similarly, Tucker and Morris (2011) argue that true flexibility in education comes from understanding the lived experience of people in the classroom, not just from applying generic standards.

This idea is echoed by Andrade and Alden-Rivers (2019), who stress that learning approaches must be tailored to different environments. In rural areas especially, flexible models are essential to respond to the wide range of needs (Graham, McLean, Read, Suchet-Pearson, & Viner, 2017). As de Klerk and Palmer (2021) note, adapting strategies

to suit local conditions plays a key role in helping teachers grow and meet the specific demands of rural ECED settings.

4. Methodology

This study used a qualitative research design, which was well-suited for exploring the lived experiences of Early Childhood Development (ECD) teachers working in rural areas. Data were gathered through casual conversations, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations. This mix of methods provided a detailed and meaningful view of the challenges these teachers face in their day-to-day work (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019).

Four Grade 2 teachers from two rural schools in the Northwest Province took part in the study. They were purposefully chosen because of their direct experience in early childhood education, which made them well-placed to share valuable insights related to the study's focus (Palinkas et al., 2015; Tecau, Dimitriu, Marinescu, Tescasiu, & Epuran, 2020).

After collecting the data, the conversations and interviews were transcribed and analysed using a thematic approach. This helped to identify common patterns around the demands placed on ECD teachers and the kinds of support available to them, staying aligned with the aims of the study (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019).

The study also included a two-day case study that involved observing lessons and interacting with members of the local community. This helped to add context to the data and gave a clearer picture of what teaching looks like in a rural setting (Tecau et al., 2020).

5. Results

5.1. Theme 1: Challenges in Curriculum Implementation and Classroom Management

5.1.1. Overcrowded Classrooms and Resource Shortages

Overcrowded classrooms and limited resources are persistent challenges highlighted across the transcripts from both schools. School 1, Participant 1, emphasised the difficulty in meeting lesson objectives due to overcrowded classrooms, noting, *"The most challenge is keeping up with the timetable and time allocations as it doesn't accommodate learners with learning difficulties. Classrooms are overcrowded, making it a problem as well as other paperwork that needs to be done, e.g., lesson preparation, model books and hard booklets."* School 2, Participant 1, echoed these challenges, particularly emphasising the ineffectiveness of e-learning in such environments: *"E-learning mostly is not conducive because of the language barrier and learners are many; the classes are fully packed."*

School 2, Participant 2, added further nuances to this discussion by highlighting how overcrowding directly impacts student outcomes: *"Objectives of the lesson not achieved, which results in poor performance."* The participant also mentioned the specific difficulties in managing large numbers of students: *"Managing large number of learners in a classroom."* These insights align with the literature on the challenges of teaching in overcrowded classrooms but diverge by providing specific examples of how these

conditions impede lesson objectives and student performance. This suggests that the literature could benefit from a more detailed exploration of how overcrowding affects specific teaching goals and learning outcomes, especially in rural settings where resources are already strained.

5.1.2 Language Barriers in Multilingual Classrooms

Language diversity continues to be a significant challenge in rural classrooms, particularly when there is a disconnect between the languages spoken at home and those used for instruction. School 1, Participant 1, described this struggle, *"Most learners in our school are from cultures speaking different languages. It is a challenge because they use their home languages at home and we use English and Setswana in the classroom. As a teacher, I try to communicate and teach in Setswana as much as possible."*

In contrast, School 2, Participant 1, highlighted an adaptive strategy to overcome these barriers: *"Most of the time, learners learn from each other in the classroom; two or three are using different languages. I send instructions instead of the home language they usually rely on the pictures."* Similarly, School 2, Participant 2, shared how they use visual aids to support language learning: *"Language differences is addressed by using pictures so that to familiarise learners with words to sentences."* These practical approaches align with the literature on language barriers in rural education but extend it by showcasing specific strategies, such as the use of visual aids that teachers use to manage these challenges effectively. This suggests a potential gap in the literature regarding the practical solutions that teachers employ to overcome language barriers, particularly in resource-limited settings.

5.1.3 Administrative and Workload Pressures

Both participants from School 1 and School 2 expressed concerns about the excessive administrative workload and its impact on their teaching effectiveness. School 1, Participant 1, remarked, *"The department normally focuses on curriculum coverage, forgetting that curriculum coverage doesn't mean learners have achieved the learning outcomes."* Similarly, School 2, Participant 1, noted, *"The teaching is not conducive. The workload, the paperwork is too much."*

School 2, Participant 2, further highlighted the burden of excessive paperwork, stating, *"More/much paperwork required from the educator."* They also expressed frustration with the inadequacy of training provided, which does not compensate for the overwhelming administrative demands: *"Not so helpful since we are trained in one day for 4 subjects."* These responses suggest that the current literature may not fully capture the balance or imbalance between teaching and administrative responsibilities in rural settings. The participants' experiences underscore the need for a more in-depth examination of how administrative pressures detract from effective teaching, particularly in environments where resources and support are already limited.

5.2 Theme 2: Inadequacies in Professional Development and Training

5.2.1 Mismatch Between Training Content and Classroom Needs

The professional development programmes available to rural teachers often fail to meet their specific needs. School 1, Participant 1, observed, “PSF workshops we receive attend on a quarterly basis whereby subject advisers read the ATPs in English and Setswana without demonstration on how to tackle learner activities. This is also a disadvantage to new teachers because they do not gain any information which they can use in the classroom.” This sentiment was echoed by School 2, Participant 1, who noted, “I don’t need any training. The training is not helpful because of the teaching load; too much workload for one teacher.”

School 2, Participant 1, raised similar concerns, noting, “The training is not helpful because of the fullness in the classroom.” The overcrowded classroom environments make it hard for teachers to implement what they learn in training sessions.

School 2, Participant 2, added a critical perspective on the content of the training they receive: “Ways of introducing reading to learners.” The participant expressed that the training they received was not enough and didn’t really prepare them for the day-to-day challenges they face in the classroom. Their frustration with the surface-level nature of the training, along with the heavy administrative workload, points to a major gap that isn’t often addressed in the literature. What’s needed is practical, hands-on training that speaks directly to the realities of rural classrooms—instead of broad, one-size-fits-all programmes that miss the mark

5.2.2 Impact of Workload on Professional Development

The professional development programmes available to rural teachers are often undermined by the heavy workload they carry. School 1, Participant 2, shared their frustration, saying there aren’t enough resources for teaching reading, which makes it hard to follow a consistent method in the classroom. School 2, Participant 1, explained, “The training is not helpful because of the fullness in the classroom.” The large number of learners makes it hard for teachers to apply anything they’ve learned during training.

Echoing this, School 2, Participant 2, added, “Given extra days for training and minimise paperwork.” This shows how admin duties take up time that could be spent on planning and learning. Both teachers highlighted the same challenge, too much is expected of them with too little support. Their experiences show that professional development needs to be more practical and realistic, taking into account the everyday pressures rural teachers deal with, like packed classrooms and heavy admin work.

5.3 Theme 3: Teacher Well-being and Lack of Support Systems

5.3.1 Physical and Mental Health Challenges

Two teachers spoke about how the demands of the job are affecting their health. School 1, Participant 1, said, “Our job is very demanding and unrealistic, this affects us negatively physically and mentally. There is no support offered for us teachers.” School 2, Participant 1, shared a similar experience: “No time to rest, can’t cope at home. There is no support with this.”

What the teachers shared makes it clear that teaching in rural areas takes a serious toll, both emotionally and physically. They're not just tired; they're worn out and feel like they're doing it all alone. When there's no real support to help them cope, it doesn't just affect how they feel, it also makes it harder for them to stay in the job or give their best in the classroom.

5.3.2 The Impact of Overwork on Personal Life

Teaching in rural areas is exhausting, and the stress doesn't stop when the school day ends. School 1, Participant 2, said, "No time to rest, sleep at midnight just to cover the curriculum demand. There is no support in such instances." With so much to do and no one to turn to, teachers are left running on empty. This kind of nonstop pressure can easily lead to burnout, with teachers feeling drained and unable to recover from the stress of each day.

School 2, Participant 1, echoed these concerns, emphasising the lack of time for rest and the inability to manage work-related stress: "There are no facilities, the materials are not free. There are no libraries for the learners to make some research." The absence of time for rest and recuperation is a critical issue that is often overlooked in discussions about teacher well-being, suggesting that the literature may need to place greater emphasis on the personal impact of overwork on teachers in rural settings.

5.4 Theme 4: Community and Parental Engagement

5.4.1 The Role of Parental Involvement in Student Success

Parental involvement plays a big role in a child's success at school, but both teachers from School 1 and School 2 shared how hard it is to get parents involved. School 1, Participant 1, said, "Parental involvement in our school is the major issue. I have been sending letters requesting to see the parent since January till to date they do not even collect report cards." School 2, Participant 1, shared a similar concern: "The parents are not involving themselves in their children's education. They don't help their children in their homework."

These experiences show just how important it is to have parents on board, especially in rural areas where extra support is already limited. When parents are not involved, the load on teachers becomes even heavier. There's a clear need for better ways to bring families into the learning process and to build stronger connections between schools and communities.

5.4.2 Community Partnerships as a Support Mechanism

Parental involvement is a challenge, but there's a chance for the wider community to help. Although participants from School 2 didn't mention this directly, teachers at School 1 suggested that stronger community involvement could help lighten the load for teachers. Building stronger links with the community could give both teachers and learners access to extra help and resources, especially in schools where parents aren't very involved. This

is something that could be looked at more closely, as it may be a useful way to improve education in rural areas.

6. Discussion, and Conclusions

6.1 Addressing the Complexities of Curriculum Implementation in Rural ECED Contexts

This study clearly shows just how difficult it is for teachers working in rural Early Childhood Education and Development (ECED) settings. One of the biggest challenges they face is trying to teach effectively in overcrowded classrooms with very limited resources. Overcrowded classrooms and resource shortages were consistently highlighted by participants as major obstacles to achieving lesson objectives. These findings are in line with the existing literature, which identifies overcrowded classrooms and inadequate resources as critical barriers to effective education in rural areas (Schwartz, Murray, & Scherer, 2019; Hannaway et al., 2019).

What this study adds is real-life examples that show exactly how these problems make teaching harder and negatively affect children's learning. The gap between what learners need and what teachers have to work with is clear. As Madondo (2021) explains, when resources are so limited, it becomes nearly impossible to carry out the curriculum properly. These findings also show that there's room for the literature to go deeper—to look more closely at how these challenges affect daily teaching and learning in rural classrooms where support is often stretched thin.

6.2 Navigating Language Barriers: Practical Strategies in Multilingual Classrooms

Teaching in multilingual classrooms was another big challenge raised by the participants. Many learners speak one language at home and are taught in another at school, which makes it harder for them to follow lessons and engage fully. This supports what other research has found is that language differences are a major barrier in rural education (Hu et al., 2016).

Even though teaching in different languages was a big challenge, teachers still found simple, practical ways to help learners understand. Some used drawings or pictures to explain their lessons, while others got learners to help each other. These small strategies show how teachers are doing their best with what they have. This links to Palmer's (2011) idea that teaching should be shaped by the real lives of both teachers and learners. He explains that lessons should match the language and culture of the students. That's exactly what these teachers are doing. These teachers are making learning happen with very little, even when their students speak different languages. It shows how smart and adaptable they are. It also shows why research should focus more on the real, everyday ways teachers are managing in classrooms with very little support.

6.3 The Burden of Administrative Pressures: A Barrier to Effective Teaching

Another big issue that came up in this study was the heavy admin load that rural teachers have to deal with. Participants shared how frustrating it is to be buried in paperwork, which takes time and energy away from actual teaching. This reflects what Bonilla Medina

and Cruz Arcila (2013) also found, rural teachers often struggle to access proper training and manage their classroom responsibilities because of these extra demands.

Research doesn't often talk about how hard it is to juggle teaching and admin work, especially in rural schools where support is already limited. The teachers in this study made it clear that too much admin work gets in the way of teaching. Their stories show how this extra pressure affects their energy and focus in the classroom. It also shows that we don't talk enough about how admin work affects teachers personally. There's a real need to find simple, practical ways to reduce this burden so that rural teachers can focus on what they're really there to do which is teach and support their learners.

6.4 Professional Development: Bridging the Gap Between Training and Classroom Needs

This study clearly shows that professional development (PD) programmes often fall short for rural teachers. The participants shared that the training they receive doesn't speak to the real challenges they face in their classrooms, making it feel unhelpful and out of touch. Other studies have said the same thing, teachers in rural areas need training that actually fits their situation (Glover et al., 2016; Skyhar, 2020).

In this study, teachers explained that the training they get feels too general and doesn't really help with what they face every day. On top of that, they're already dealing with so much work that it's hard to even make use of the training. Their frustration highlights a gap in the research, PD needs to be more than just topic-based. It needs to be built around the real, lived experiences of rural teachers, just as Palmer (2011) suggests. Training should be hands-on, practical and focused on the everyday challenges rural teachers face, so that it actually helps them grow and feel supported in the classroom.

6.5 Teacher Well-being: The Overlooked Dimension of Rural Education

The findings about teacher well-being are concerning. Teachers spoke honestly about how the stress of the job is affecting their physical and mental health. All four said they felt exhausted and burnt out, with almost no support to help them manage it all. This side of teaching is often left out of the conversation, as research usually focuses more on student performance than on how teachers themselves are doing (Mollenkopf, 2009).

Palmer (2011) reminds us that the experiences of teachers matter too and that their well-being is a key part of education. When teachers don't get help with the stress and pressure they face, it starts to take a real toll. Some end up leaving the job, and those who stay often struggle to give their best in the classroom. This shows how important it is to check in on how rural teachers are really coping-and to make their well-being part of the bigger picture, not an afterthought.

6.6 Community and Parental Engagement: Essential but Underutilised Resources

The findings also show how important parents and the wider community are for helping learners succeed, but in rural areas, getting that support is still a big challenge. Teachers shared their frustration about the lack of parental involvement, which makes their work in the classroom even harder. This matches what other research says too: strong

community partnerships are key to tackling the struggles rural schools face (Mabasa-Manganyi, 2022).

Even though it's a challenge, there's a real opportunity here. If schools can build better relationships with their communities, it could take some pressure off teachers and bring in extra support and resources. Palmer (2011) talks about how education should grow out of the real life of the community. If schools worked more closely with parents and people in the area, they could find better ways to deal with the problems they're facing and give learners more of the help they need.

7.Limitations, Recommendations and Conclusion

7.1 Limitations

This study helped to shine a light on the real challenges rural teachers face every day and - the ways they are trying to cope, often without enough support. Although the findings confirm a lot of what has been said in past research, they also show new layers that the literature often misses. Their resilience stands out, showing that rural teachers are constantly finding ways to manage, even with limited resources.

Professional development came up as a major gap. While training exists, it often feels disconnected from the real needs of rural classrooms. This study had a few limits. It was part of an engaged scholarship project and was only done in two rural schools from the same province, so the results might not be the same in other areas. Most of the teachers had been part of the project for a while, but some were moved around because of changes with the Grade 2 classes. The study only looked at what teachers had to say, so it missed the voices of parents, community members, and officials. The project is still going. We followed the teachers for two years, but in the first year, they didn't talk much about these challenges. It took time for them to open up. This shows how important it is to build trust over time when studying lived experiences. Because of that, we are still learning about how these issues might play out over time.

Overall, these findings confirm much of the existing research, but they also extend it by giving a closer, more personal look at the day-to-day realities of rural education. They show the urgent need for more practical support, better training, real community partnerships and serious attention to teacher well-being if we want real change for rural schools.

7.2 Recommendations

The teachers in this study were clear - real change is needed if they're going to be properly supported in rural schools. First, training has to be different. Teachers aren't asking for more theory or paperwork. They want practical help that makes sense for their classrooms and the challenges they deal with every day. Teachers need training that matches what's really happening in their classrooms - too many learners, language differences and not enough materials. They don't need more paperwork or documents like the ATP handed to them. They need someone to show them real examples and practical ways to teach that they can actually use.

On top of that, the amount of paperwork teachers are expected to do needs to be cut. All the extra paperwork is leaving teachers tired and taking away time they should be spending with their learners. It's just too much. If the paperwork was made simpler, teachers could put more of their energy into teaching and helping learners properly. Third, schools need stronger support from parents and the wider community. Teachers spoke about the loneliness of trying to manage everything on their own, with very little parental involvement and no real community partnerships. Schools should find ways to bring parents in, even through small steps like homework support meetings or local resource drives and build real partnerships with community organisations to share the load. Without these changes, rural teachers will continue to carry too much, with too little support and the quality of education for learners will keep suffering.

7.3 Conclusion

This study makes one thing very clear, we cannot keep treating rural education the same way as everywhere else. Teaching in rural areas comes with its own real, daily struggles: overcrowded classrooms, language barriers, endless paperwork, poor training and almost no real support for teachers. This is why we should understand this through Palmer (2011) who reminds us that real change happens when we pay attention to what teachers and learners go through every day. We can't expect the same results from every school - we need to understand each school's reality and the community it belongs to. The department needs to stop treating all schools the same and start building support that fits the real needs of each school and its learners.

If we want to make things better, we need to listen to teachers and shape our systems around what's really happening in their classrooms, not around what we think should be happening. Stronger connections with parents and communities aren't just helpful; they are necessary if we want schools to stand a real chance at success.

The future of Early Childhood Education in rural areas depends on us doing better. Teachers need real training that helps them in their classrooms, not more paperwork that wastes their time. Teachers also need real support from the communities around them. Every child, no matter where they come from, deserves a real chance at a good education. But that won't happen if we keep trying to treat all schools the same. We need to build schools that match the real lives, real needs and real hopes of rural communities.

References

- Adebunmi Y., Aina, A. Y., & Keshni, B (2022). Availability and use of infrastructural resources in promoting quality early childhood care and education in registered early childhood development centres. *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, 12(1). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v12i1.980>
- Aina, A. Y., & Bipath, K. (2022). Availability and use of infrastructural resources in promoting quality early childhood care and education in registered early childhood development centres. *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, 12(1). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v12i1.980>

- Andrade, M. S., & Alden-Rivers, B. (2019). Developing a framework for sustainable growth of flexible learning opportunities. *Higher Education Pedagogies*, 4(1), 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23752696.2018.1564879>
- Atmore, E. (2012). Challenges facing the early childhood development sector in South Africa. *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, 2(1), 120-139. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v2i1.25>
- Aubrey, C. (2017). Sources of inequality in South African early child development services. *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, 7(1), 1-9.
- Aubrey, C. (2017). Sources of inequality in South African early child development services. *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, 7(1), 1-9.
- Barrett, N., Cowen, J., Toma, E., & Troske, S. (2015). Working with what they have: Professional development as a reform strategy in rural schools. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 30(10), 1-18.
- Biersteker, L. (2012). Early childhood development services: Increasing access to benefit the most vulnerable children. *South African Child Gauge*, 52–57.
- Blease, B., & Condry, J. (2014). What challenges do foundation phase teachers experience when teaching writing in rural multigrade classes? *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, 4(2), 36-56.
- Bonilla Medina, S. X., & Cruz Arcila, F. (2013). Sociocultural factors involved in the teaching of English as a foreign language in rural areas of Colombia: An analysis of the impact on teachers' professional development. *Research in Teacher Education*, 3(2), 28-33.
- Bryant, J. (2010). Dismantling rural stereotypes. *Educational Leadership*, 68, 54–58.
- Chuene, D.M., & Teane, F.M. (2024). Resource inadequacy as a barrier to effective curriculum implementation by life sciences teachers in South Africa. *South African Journal of Education*, 44(2), Article #2387. <https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v44n2a2387>
- Clark, K., Cahill, R., & Ansell, D. (2022). Early childhood development and the role of neighbourhood hubs for supporting children's development and wellbeing in disadvantaged communities: A review of the literature (Life Course Centre Working Paper Series, No. 2022-11). Institute for Social Science Research, The University of Queensland.
- Davids, M., Samuels, M. L., September, R., Moeng, T. L., Richter, L., Mabogoane, T. W., Goldman, I., & Buthelezi, T. (2015). The pilot evaluation for the National Evaluation System in South Africa – A diagnostic review of early childhood development. *African Evaluation Journal*, 3(1), 7-12. <https://doi.org/10.4102/aej.v3i1.141>
- de Klerk, E. D., & Palmer, J. M. (2021). Resetting education priorities during COVID-19: Towards equitable learning opportunities through inclusion and equity. *Perspectives in Education*, 39(1), 12-28. <https://doi.org/10.18820/2519593X/pie.v39.i1.2>
- Deakin University (2009). *Introducing flexible learning*. Consultado el 08 de Mayo del 2013. <http://www.deakin.edu.au>
- Deakin University (2009). *Perspectives on the Future of Flexible Education*. Internal Report, December.
- Desforges, C., & Abouchaar, A. (2003). *The Impact of Parental Involvement, Parental Support and Family Education on Pupil Achievements and Adjustment: A Literature Review*. Nottingham: DfES Publications.
- Diale, B. M., & Sewagegn, A. A. (2021). Early childhood care and education in Ethiopia: A quest for quality. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 19(4), 516–529. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1476718X211002559>

- Du Plessis, P., & Mestry, R. (2019). Teachers for rural schools – A challenge for South Africa. *South African Journal of Education*, 39(Supplement 1), Article #1774, 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v39ns1a1774>
- Epstein, J. (2009). Building bridges of home, school, and community: The importance of design. *The Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, 6, 161–168.
- Gasva, D., Mutanana, N., & Goronga, P. (2019). Challenges Faced by Teachers in the Implementation of the New Curriculum in Selected Rural Primary Schools in Zimbabwe: A Quest for Quality in Education. *East African Scholars Journal of Education, Humanities and Literature*, 2(6), 327-334. DOI: 10.36349/easjehl.2019.v02i06.006. Published by East African Scholars Publisher, Kenya.
- Glover, T. A., Nugent, G. C., Chumney, F. L., Ihlo, T., Shapiro, E. S., Guard, K., Koziol, N., & Bovaird, J. (2016). Investigating rural teachers' professional development, instructional knowledge, and classroom practice. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 31(3), 1-16.
- Graham, M., McLean, J., Read, A., Suchet-Pearson, S., & Viner, V. (2017). Flipping and still learning: Experiences of a flipped classroom approach for a third-year undergraduate human geography course. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 41(3), 403-417. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03098265.2017.1331423>
- Hannaway, D., Govender, P., Marais, P., & Meier, C. (2019). Growing early childhood education teachers in rural areas. *Africa Education Review*, 16(3), 36-53. <https://doi.org/10.1080/18146627.2018.1445974>
- Hannaway, D., Govender, P., Marais, P., & Meier, C. (2019). Growing early childhood education teachers in rural areas. *Africa Education Review*, 16(3), 36-52.
- Hartell, C. G., & Steyn, M. G. (Year). Challenges influencing the professional context of the Foundation Phase teachers in rural and township schools in South Africa. University of Pretoria.
- Hu, B. Y., Roberts, S. K., leong, S. S. L., & Guo, H. (2016). Challenges to early childhood education in rural China: Lessons from the Hebei province. *Early Child Development and Care*, 186(5), 815-831. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2015.1062984>
- Jordan, T., Gibson, F., Stinnett, B., & Howard, D. (2019). Stakeholder engagement in event planning: A case study of one rural community's process. *Event Management*, 23(1), 61-74. <https://doi.org/10.3727/152599518X15378845225339>
- Klemenčič, E., Mirazchiyski, P. V., & Sandoval-Hernández, A. (2014). Parental Involvement in School Activities and Student Reading Achievement - Theoretical Perspectives and PIRLS 2011 Findings. *Solsko Polje*, 25(3/4), 117-130.
- Leshoele, M. (2016). Implications of public funding for early learning in South Africa: A case of Ekurhuleni metropolitan municipality in Gauteng. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Johannesburg, South Africa: University of the Witwatersrand.
- Mabasa-Manganyi, R. B. (2022). Factors influencing foundation phase rural teachers' understanding and practices in selecting inclusive teaching strategies. *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, 13(1), a991. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v13i1.991>
- Madondo, F. (2021). Perceptions on curriculum implementation: A case for rural Zimbabwean early childhood development teachers as agents of change. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 35(3), 399-416. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02568543.2020.1731024>
- Malaikosa, C. A., & Sahayu, W. (2019). Teachers' challenges on implementing EFL curriculum in Indonesian rural area. *Journal of Foreign Language Education and Technology*, 4(1), 61-71. Retrieved from <http://jflet.com/jflet/>

- Mampane, S. T. (2021). Discourse on ECD Practitioners' Perceptions of Leadership Practices in a Multicultural Environment: The South African Context. *New Challenges to Education: Lessons from Around the World*. BCES Conference Books, Vol(19). Sofia: Bulgarian Comparative Education Society.
- Matjokana, T.N.M. (2023). Early childhood care and education policy intentions and the realities in rural areas. *Perspectives in Education*, 41(2), 258-274. <https://doi.org/10.38140/pie.v41i2.6741>
- Mesa, N., Nores, M., & Vega, H. (2021). Reaching thousands of children in low income communities with high-quality ECED services: A journey of perseverance and creativity. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 9, Article 637031. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2021.637031>
- Mncube, D. W., Ajani, O. A., Ngema, T., & Mkhasibe, R. G. (2023). Exploring the problems of limited school resources in rural schools and curriculum management. *UMT Education Review*, 6(2), 1–31. <https://doi.org/10.32350/UER.62.01>
- Mollenkopf, D. L. (2009). Creating highly qualified teachers: Maximizing university resources to provide professional development in rural areas. *The Rural Educator*, 30(3), 1-10.
- Mugendawala, H., & Muijs, D. (2020). Educational process factors for effective education in resource-constrained countries: a multilevel analysis. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 31(3), 445-467. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09243453.2019.1702562>
- Murray, J., & Norma Rudolph, N. (2019). Voices heard and lessons learnt: Exploring multiple knowledges and local participation in a community-based integrated early childhood development project in rural South Africa. *JoP*, 10(1), 13–32. <https://doi.org/10.2478/jped-2019-0001>
- Nakaya, A. (2018). Overcoming ethnic conflict through multicultural education: The case of West Kalimantan, Indonesia. *International Journal of Multicultural Education*, 20(1), 118-137.
- Naudeau, S., Kataoka, N., Valerio, A., Neuman, M. J., & Elder, L. K. (2012). Investing in young children: An early childhood development guide for policy dialogue and project preparation. Pretoria, South Africa: World Bank Publications. <https://doi.org/10.1037/e596922012-001>
- Ngwenya, V. C. (2020). Curriculum implementation challenges encountered by primary school teachers in Bulawayo Metropolitan Province, Zimbabwe. *Africa Education Review*, 17(2), 158-176. <https://doi.org/10.1080/18146627.2018.1549953>
- Nicoll, K. (1998). 'Flexible learning' - unsettling practices. *Studies in Continuing Education*, 19(2), 100-111.
- Nicoll, K. (1998). "Fixing" the "Facts": flexible learning as policy invention. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 17(3), 291-304.
- Palmer, S. R. (2011). The Lived Experience of Flexible Education – Theory, Policy and Practice. *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice*, 8(3). <https://doi.org/10.53761/1.8.3.2>
- Penn, H. (2005). *Unequal childhoods: Young children's lives in poor countries*. Abingdon, Oxon.: Routledge.
- Sappey, J. (2005, 9-11 February). The commodification of higher education: Flexible delivery and its implications for the academic labour process. Paper presented at the Reworking Work - AIRAANZ 19th Conference, Sydney.
- Schwartz, K., Cappella, E., Aber, J. L., Scott, M. A., Wolf, S., & Behrman, J. R. (2019). Early Childhood Teachers' Lives in Context: Implications for Professional Development in Under-Resourced Areas. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 63(3-4), 270–285. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.12325>

- Şahin, A., Soylu, D., & Jafari, M. B. (2024). Professional Development Needs of Teachers in Rural Schools. *Iranian Journal of Educational Sociology*, 7(1), 219-225. <https://doi.org/10.61838/kman.ijes.7.1.22>
- Sincovich, A., Harman-Smith, Y., & Brinkman, S. (2019). The reach of playgroups and their benefit for children across Australia: A comparison of 2012, 2015, and 2018 AEDC data. *Telethon Kids Institute, South Australia*.
- Skyhar, C. L. (2020). Thinking Outside the Box: Providing Effective Professional Development for Rural Teachers. *Theory & Practice in Rural Education*, 10(1), 42-72. <https://doi.org/10.3776/tpre.2020.v10n1p42-72>
- Speight Vaughn, M., & De Beer, J. (2020). Contextualising Science and Mathematics Teacher Professional Development in Rural Areas. *Perspectives in Education*, 38(2), 213-226. <https://doi.org/10.18820/2519593X/pie.v38.i2.14>
- Palmer, D. K., Martínez, R. A., Mateus, S. G., & Henderson, K. (2014). Reframing the debate on language separation: Toward a vision for translanguaging pedagogies in the dual language classroom. *The Modern Language Journal*, 98(3), 757-772. <https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12121>
- Tecău, A. S., Dimitriu, C., Marinescu, N., Tescasiu, B., & Epuran, G. (2020). A qualitative research on the food security of school children in the rural area. *Sustainability*, 12(21), 9024. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12219024>
- Tucker, R., & Morris, G. (2011). Anytime, anywhere, anyplace: Articulating the meaning of flexible delivery in built environment education. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 42(6), 904–915. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8535.2010.01138.x>
- Ugwu, J. O. (2023). Perceived constraints of teachers towards effective implementation of civic education curriculum in rural and urban secondary schools in Nsukka education zone of Enugu state. *Irish Journal of Educational Practice*, 6(2), 16-31. Advance Scholars Publication. <https://aspjournals.org/Journals/index.php/ijep>
- Urban, M., Vandenbroeck, M., Van Laere, K., Lazzari, A., & Peeters, J. (2012). Towards Competent Systems in Early Childhood Education and Care: Implications for Policy and Practice. *European Journal of Education*, 47(4), 508-526. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12010>
- Visser, M., Grossmark, J., Krüger, S., Smith, C., van Zyl, M., Willemse, Z., & Wright, C. (2021). The challenges experienced by practitioners from under-resourced early childhood development centres in South Africa: A single site study. *South African Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 51(3), 14-24. <https://doi.org/10.17159/2310-3833/2021/vol51n3a3>
- Wilson, B., Sherry, L., Dobrovolny, J., Batty, M., & Ryder, M. (2002). Adoption factors and processes. In H. H. Adelsberger, B. Collis, & J. M. Pawlowski (Eds.), *Handbook on information technologies for education and training* (pp. 293-307). New York: Springer.
- Yi Yang, & Nirmala Rao (2021). Teacher professional development among preschool teachers in rural China. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education*, 42(3), 219-244. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10901027.2020.1726844>
- Yoshikawa, H., & Kabay, S. (2015). The evidence base on early childhood care and education in global contexts: Background paper prepared for the Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2015, Education for All 2000-2015: Achievements and challenges. UNESCO.