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Exploring Educators' and Learners' Perceptions of Factors Influencing Quality Teaching and Learning in Public Schools in the O. R. Tambo District, Eastern Cape South Africa

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Abstract

This research article critically explored the perceptions of educators and learners regarding factors influencing quality teaching and learning in public schools of the O.R. Tambo District, Eastern Cape, South Africa. Employing a qualitative analysis of secondary sources and content analysis of interview transcripts, the study systematically examined the main challenges confronting educators, learners' experiences of educational engagement, the impact of school infrastructure, and the role of parental and community involvement. The findings revealed that barriers in curriculum implementation, inadequate professional development, and pervasive socio-economic adversity significantly impaired classroom effectiveness. Learners identified limited motivation, adverse peer relationships, and restricted access to learning resources and technology as impediments to their academic achievement. Moreover, insufficient physical infrastructure and resource scarcity, compounded by weak administrative support, further constrained both teaching and participation. The research also underscored the vital influence of parental engagement and community partnerships, while highlighting persistent barriers to effective home-school collaboration. By triangulating these findings with current literature, the study provided nuanced insights into the multifaceted nature of educational quality in rural South Africa and underscored the urgent need for integrated, context-sensitive interventions. The article concludes by advocating for systemic improvements in curriculum support, resource provision, teacher development, and community engagement to foster equitable educational outcomes.

Keywords

educator perceptions, learner engagement, rural education, curriculum implementation, parental involvement, school infrastructure

INTRODUCTION

South Africa's rural education system, particularly in the Eastern Cape's O.R. Tambo District, struggles to provide quality education. National reforms prioritise educational equity, yet resource, teacher, and stakeholder gaps limit meaningful learning outcomes. A qualitative case study was used to examine educators' and students' views on the many issues affecting educational quality in this underfunded area. The study examined how structural, institutional, and community-driven elements affect classroom experiences and student outcomes by engaging instructors and students.

Teacher preparedness and ongoing professional development are crucial in rural schools, where marginalised teachers often lack pedagogical support and in-service training (Deacon, 2021). In the O.R. Tambo District, overcrowded classrooms, insufficient learning materials, and limited digital access were consistently reported as barriers to effective teaching and learner engagement (Ngumbela, 2021). These situations force teachers to adapt and use resourcefulness and creativity to fulfil student requirements.

Alongside teacher-related issues, student perspectives demonstrate how socio-economic deprivation, language obstacles, and limited parental involvement affect motivation and school participation. Research shows that rural Eastern Cape students often struggle with poverty, hunger, and household duties, which affects attendance and curriculum engagement (Jama et al., 2024). The mismatch between the language of instruction and students' native languages marginalises disadvantaged students and hinders skill development.

The study also highlighted parental and community engagement's impact on education. Learner motivation and academic achievement improve when families are involved in their children's education (Ebrahim et al., 2023). However, low literacy, unemployment, and poor school-household communication can limit parental agency, especially in rural areas. By comprehensively analysing teacher ability, learner experience, and family-school partnerships, this research sought contextually relevant information to inform targeted educational reform strategies in O.R. Tambo and similar rural contexts.

Background

The Eastern Cape's O.R. Tambo District has struggled with rural education transformation. Poverty, infrastructure concerns, and social inequality hinder the district's education. These interactions were studied utilising a qualitative case study and instructor and student perspectives. This district's school system has been marginalised, underfunded, and lacking in teacher professional development. Such structural realities have hampered national equity, inclusiveness, and educational excellence goals.

Underfunded educational quality lectures focus on teacher training, efficacy, and support. Most O.R. Tambo instructors reported irregular, inadequately contextualised, or unavailable professional development. Teachers' selection, preparation, and continued learning improve classroom practices and student outcomes, especially in remote areas where mentorship networks help new and experienced teachers (Ambrosetti & Dekkers, 2021). Local educators agreed that while pre-service training offered basic knowledge, in-service support, mentoring, and collaborative learning communities were needed to maintain teaching efficacy in challenging school contexts. Coaching and professional development improve rookie teacher mentorship and inclusive classroom practices (Cornelius et al., 2020). Such opportunities were unevenly distributed, often in cities, increasing rural-urban teacher quality and confidence inequalities.

Digital innovations have transformed teaching worldwide, but O.R. Tambo lacks infrastructure, connectivity, and resources. Teachers described their technology integration efforts as disjointed and lacked system-wide training or financing. Carusi and Franco (2021) stressed that deep technological integration requires school culture, teacher capacity-building, and resources. Local narratives showed that instructors and students said occasional internet use during COVID-19 worsened educational inequity. Device- and data-enabled students benefited more than remote pupils, highlighting the need for district-wide digital divide initiatives.

Parent and community involvement were essential to O.R. Tambo's educational ecology. Learning motivation, parental agency, and academic success are highly linked in the literature (Ebrahim et al., 2023). In this district, teachers highlighted parental illiteracy, work demands, and socioeconomic pressures as home-school partnership barriers. In-depth focus group talks demonstrated that parents wanted to help their children's education but lacked funds and confidence. Albrecht (2021) favoured family-school coalitions over parental participation. Although rare, O.R. Tambo found that such interactions boosted student engagement and resilience. Thus, boosting parental involvement was a critical, although underdeveloped, strategy to improve district education. Poor Eastern Cape schooling was aggravated by poverty. Local research found that chronic absenteeism and irregular school attendance were caused by home economic distress, food insecurity, and bad transit (Ngumbela, 2021). Teachers said that many students were hungry, weary, or preoccupied by family obligations, which inhibited classroom involvement. Qualitative data showed that socio-economic issues impacted academic achievement, aspirations, and dropout rates, especially among older pupils. Teachers found poverty affected learner self-efficacy and instructor morale, perpetuating underperformance cycles. Partners engaged to district education prioritised student material conditions.

South African policy and practice discussions are growing about inclusive education and learner diversity. Many pupils with disabilities and learning issues live in the O.R. Tambo District, which struggles to provide inclusive education. Despite national goals of universal access and participation, local schools frequently lacked specialised support, teacher training, and facilities. This study's educators agreed with recent studies that inclusion required attitudinal changes and systematic investment in professional development and school resources (Crispel & Kasperski, 2021). Special needs kids felt excluded and relied on teacher advocacy rather than a whole-school approach. This illustrated how policy rhetoric must be turned into actionable inclusion programs that match rural schooling's constraints and opportunities.

Collaboration amongst educational stakeholders can improve schools. The research showed that school officials, teachers, parents, and community members collaborated to identify obstacles, share resources, and try new approaches. Collaborative, boundary-crossing laboratories help teachers be inclusive and context-responsive, according to Paju et al. (2021). Hierarchical school cultures, limited time, and vague position descriptions made O.R. Tambo collaboration uneven. Teachers in professional networks or local partnerships were more comfortable managing student diversity and generating positive school climates. District educational reform prioritises stakeholder collaboration. Student voices further complicated teaching-learning quality analysis. Students in focus groups frankly recounted classroom, teacher-student, and peer relationships. Many valued compassionate, attentive teachers who understood their needs and ambitions. Authentic educator-student relationships increased learner motivation and perseverance (Guzzardo et al., 2021). Inflexible instruction, rote learning, and lack of recognition caused disengagement. These views underlined the need of relational pedagogy and differentiated instruction professional development, especially in resource-constrained settings with diverse and disadvantaged pupils.

The district also prioritised new teacher mentoring and induction. These data reveal that early-career instructors were enthusiastic but quickly confronted heavy workloads, minimal assistance, and complex classroom dynamics. Expert mentoring and induction programmes boost teacher retention, professional development, and classroom creativity (Hudson & Hudson, 2020). Access to such programs was sporadic, leaving new O.R. Tambo instructors feeling alone and uncertain. Older teachers with longer mentorship were more inclined to collaborate, reflect, and enhance school culture. To increase rural teaching workforces, induction and mentorship were needed.

Qualitative methods like semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions caught these complex interactions. Interpretivism analysed life events and created context-based meaning (Islam & Aldaihani, 2022). Through meticulous educator and student narrative analysis, the research revealed O.R. Tambo's public schools' exceptional teaching and learning. The findings proposed multi-layered interventions for teacher training, parental participation, socio-economic reality, and inclusive education. This indicated rural South African education needs policy commitment and stakeholder-driven, contextual action.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Educators' Perceptions of Challenges Affecting Quality Teaching and Learning

The study literature has shown that rural educators like O.R. Tambo face major difficulties that hinder their capacity to teach well. Clarke (2020) showed that teachers lacked mentorship and professional assistance, especially in resource-constrained settings. Participants in the O.R. Tambo District often cited a lack of in-service training and professional development as a barrier to instructional effectiveness. Cornelius, Rosenberg, and Sandmel (2020) found that beginner teachers struggled without mentorship and professional coaching, which often led to isolation and burnout.

Hudson and Hudson (2020) found that many rural instructors lacked collaborative professional networks, making it difficult for them to share best practices or innovate pedagogically. Individual instructors established robust professional identities despite these systemic inadequacies, but the overall effect was professional stagnation, according to Goktepe and Kunt (2021). Teachers in the O.R. Tambo District said bureaucratic limitations and resource shortages hurt their morale and motivation. These findings show that while individual instructors adjust imaginatively, institutional impediments prevent general teaching quality gains.

Teaching efficacy has been a prominent concept in understanding educators lived experience in demanding circumstances. Klassen and Durksen (2022) found that teacher self-efficacy greatly influenced classroom management and instructional innovation. Due to a lack of support, resources, and administrative burdens, many instructors in the O.R. Tambo District failed to maintain high efficacy beliefs. Lester, Cho, and Lochmiller (2020) said organised qualitative reflection and peer cooperation could boost teacher resilience, but the district rarely offered them. The findings showed that sustainable professional support and teacher agency are essential for successful teaching, especially in under-resourced settings.

Learners' Experiences: Factors Supporting or Hindering Engagement and Achievement

South African rural school students' participation and achievement views have been nuanced in academic literature. Adigun and Ndwandwe (2022) noted that the COVID-19 epidemic, which disproportionately afflicted rural and underprivileged populations, tested pupils' academic resilience. O.R. Tambo District students indicated substantial technological difficulties when switching to online or mixed instruction. Dube (2020) also showed how the digital gap hampered students' remote instruction, worsening disparities and involvement.

Sociocultural influences, together with technology constraints, shape learner experiences. Bornman (2021) found that inclusive educational practices including customised instruction and active participation for special needs students increased engagement. Students in the O.R. Tambo District said overcrowded classes and poor instructional distinction hindered their sense of belonging and active involvement. Skae, Bruce, Brown, and Wilmot (2020) found that inclusive, well-supported environments fostered high-quality teacher–learner engagement, but rural schools were the exception.

Student involvement and performance were further hampered by poverty and materialism. Ngumbela (2021) showed that poverty, food insecurity, and lack of educational supplies hindered attendance and attentiveness. In this study, O.R. Tambo District students often felt discouraged from these facts, which hampered their motivation and aspirations. When compared to Crispel and Kasperski (2021), which stressed the necessity of specialised teacher training in inclusive settings, both learner- and teacher-focused interventions are needed to address engagement issues comprehensively.

Impact of School Infrastructure and Resource Availability on Teaching Effectiveness and Learner Participation

Physical infrastructure and educational resources affect South African teacher performance and student participation. Poor classroom facilities and cleanliness inhibited teaching and learning, according to Mpu and Adu (2020). Teachers and students in the O.R. Tambo District cited old infrastructure and a lack of instructional resources as curriculum implementation barriers. Rural school infrastructure deficits enhanced inequalities and educational exclusion, according to Jama, Buka, Naidoo, and Moloi (2024).

Allocation of resources and technology innovation affect educational success. Digital technology could help teaching and learning, but Carusi and Franco (2021) discovered that underfunded rural districts could only dream about it.

Teachers and students at O.R. Tambo complained about insufficient internet, computer labs, and stationery, hindering modernisation and blended learning. Otermans et al. (2024) found that school technology assessments varied by local infrastructure, with rural areas always trailing urban centres.

Specialised instructional resources and support staff affect teaching quality and student engagement. Bruwer (2021) recommended bilingual and bicultural treatments for students of different languages, but O.R. Tambo's budget disallowed them. Lack of teaching assistants and remedial programs limited educators' differentiation. These findings corroborated Martinez-Alvarez, Lopez-Velasquez, and Kajamaar (2021), who said inclusive education goals required continual infrastructure and resource investment. Without addressing infrastructural and resource disparities, educational quality would remain limited, study reveals.

Parental and Community Involvement in Shaping Educational Outcomes in Rural Public Schools

Parent and community engagement is becoming vital to successful education in rural and marginalised communities. Albrecht (2021) reported a shift from traditional parent participation to empowerment-based collaboration. In the O.R. Tambo District, teachers and students found that financial concerns, lack of formal education, and cultural perspectives on the school's purpose hindered parental participation. Some study participants indicated focused parent engagement activities like seminars and open days improved learner outcomes and shared responsibility.

Parent agency in early childhood development boosted students' motivation and academic achievement, according to Ebrahim, Bipath, and Theron (2023). O.R. Tambo rarely realised such benefits due to practical obstacles and insufficient family resources. Despite these constraints, Mbhiza and Nkambule (2022) found that teachers and parents wanted more collaboration but needed formal opportunities and institutional support. Parental engagement can change but also conflict with school and community expectations, according to Haisraeli and Fogiel-Bijaoui (2023).

Political and social conditions in the Eastern Cape have affected school–community cooperation. In many rural South African communities, historical mistrust between schools and parents impeded meaningful partnerships, according to Sibanda and Netshitangani (2021). O.R. Tambo District participants said policy reforms and outreach had improved trust, communication, and decision-making. Considering Davids (2020), who found that parental literacy involvement boosted student achievement, school–community ties remain both a barrier and an opportunity to improve education.

METHODOLOGY

Research Paradigm

For understanding instructors' and students' complex, socio-cultural experiences in the O.R. Tambo District, interpretivist research was optimal. Interpretivism maintains that knowledge is socially created and reality is best understood through subjective meanings and interactions. This paradigm allows the researcher to capture participants' complex teaching and learning dynamics and focus on their individual and collective educational quality interpretations. Interpretivist paradigms operate best in education where several realities coexist and context changes meaning, according to Ashu (2021). Through this paradigm, the study acknowledged participants' voices and agency in shaping educational situations. Interpretivism allowed emergent concerns to be explored without theoretical constraints.

Research Design

A qualitative case study was used to investigate quality teaching and learning in selected O.R. Tambo District public schools. Case study research examines complicated social processes in a limited setting using multiple data sources and analytic methods. This approach met the study's goal of diverse real-life experiences. Bell et al. (2022) indicate qualitative case studies show educational practice-influencing processes, links, and contextual variables. Focussing on rural district schools allowed for a thorough evaluation of local educational difficulties and promise. The architecture allowed contextually grounded recommendations based on instructors' and learners' experiences in similar under-resourced environments.

Research Approach

Qualitative research fit the interpretivist framework and exploratory nature. This strategy prioritised depth over breadth and how participants interpreted their teaching and learning. Qualitative study examined people' opinions and impressions without preconceptions. Ncube (2023) suggests qualitative methods for African education because standardised technologies lose cultural and contextual complexity. The study approach yielded rich descriptive insights and theme analysis. The researcher could adjust to changing data patterns and participant narratives via adaptive inquiry.

Sample and Sampling Technique

Participants who could provide detailed accounts of the district's teaching and learning environment were selected using purposive sampling. The sample included 12 educators and 16 students from four public schools chosen for their geographic reach, performance, and accessibility. Teachers ranged in experience, while students were intermediate and senior. A purposeful technique ensured variation in encounters while meeting research goals. Agricola et al. (2022) recommend selective sampling in qualitative research for deep, targeted insights rather than generalisable data. Ethics influenced the sample procedure, including informed permission, voluntary involvement, and secrecy. These protections build data collecting trust and transparency.

Data Collection

Focus groups and semi-structured interviews collected primary data. Individual educator interviews permitted frank discussion of educational challenges, professional development, and institutional support. Four- to six-person learner focus groups discussed classroom, peer, and resource experiences. With participant consent, all interviews and discussions were recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis. According to Hashim and Yusoff (2021), semi-structured formats yield nuanced narrative and surprising results. Reading school reports and district education plans and taking field notes helped collect data. Many sources triangulated conclusions and strengthened study credibility.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis identified and interpreted data patterns. This strategy required familiarity with transcripts, coding noteworthy statements, categorising, and synthesising research objectives-aligned themes. Thematic analysis offers rigorous but flexible interpretation of qualitative data, making it suited for educational research with complex and multi-layered meanings, according to Bell et al. (2022). Iterative comparison and reflexive memo-writing refined early codes. This technique helped the researcher identify latent themes and align with the theoretical framework. Data was organised and managed using NVivo software, improving analytical transparency and auditability.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The present study used an integrated theoretical framework to examine educators' and students' views of quality teaching and learning in O.R. Tambo District. This concept was based on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and Inclusive Education, with a focus on rural and underfunded South African schools. The approach allowed a sophisticated understanding of how individual, interpersonal, institutional, and systemic elements affected educational results, drawing from previous scholarship.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory held that human development happens within layered, interacting environmental systems that affect learners and educators differently (Jama et al., 2024). The microsystem included peers, teachers, and students' immediate classroom interactions. Mesosystem connections to family and community emphasised parental involvement, home-school linkages, and peer influences (Ebrahim et al., 2023). The exosystem included the school administration staff, district offices, and community stakeholders, which indirectly affected school operations. The macrosystem represented social norms, cultural values, and national educational policy, while the chronosystem tracked changes like COVID-19 disruptions to schooling (Dube, 2020).

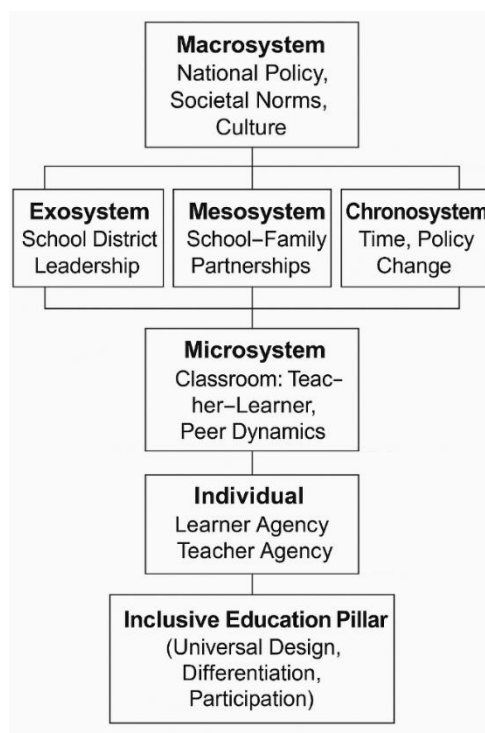
The framework acknowledged that various systems interact. For instance, poor ecosystem infrastructure could limit microsystem resources and pedagogy (Hudson & Hudson, 2020). Community poverty and local economic realities affected student motivation and family engagement, which affected classroom interactions and teacher agency (Ngumbela, 2021). The report found that multi-level interactions defined the O.R. Tambo educational setting and that change required coordinated responses across all ecological layers.

Additionally, Inclusive Education theory emphasises the right of all students—regardless of ability, socio-economic status, or background—to meaningful participation in quality education (Walton & Engelbrecht, 2022). Recent literature suggests that inclusion is a legislative need, a practical problem, and an ethical issue for under-resourced school instructors (Crispel & Kasperski, 2021). The theoretical framework expanded Bronfenbrenner's paradigm by emphasising universal design, teacher development, and systemic collaboration for inclusion, as recommended by Galkiene and Monkeviciene (2021). Classroom differentiation tactics, school policies, and cultural expectations showed how inclusive ideals and ecological systems interact.

The paper framed teacher and learner agency as dynamic, context-responsive phenomena to operationalise the theoretical viewpoint. Teachers were seen as active agents who could interpret, negotiate, and implement educational change within their systems' restrictions and affordances (Ambrosetti & Dekkers, 2021). According to research on professional learning communities, mentoring, and rural school leadership, relational trust and collective efficacy boost outcomes (Paju et al., 2021). The voices of learners were interpreted through ecological embeddedness and inclusive rights. The approach examined how immediate relationships and systemic forces affect learner participation, resilience, and motivation.

The study also emphasised the importance of digital and technological settings in the macrosystem. Systemic inequalities facilitated rural school e-learning uptake during the COVID-19 epidemic (Dube, 2020). Based on Carusi and Franco (2021), the framework saw technology as a venue for negotiating access, capacity, and cultural relevance. The ecological framework was used to interpret teacher readiness to use digital platforms, community support for e-learning, and government infrastructure investment to show how technology both hindered and enhanced education.

Theoretical Framework Diagram



The paper applied this theoretical framework to O.R. Tambo and determined that ecological system and inclusive education pillar interventions were needed to improve schooling. When school leadership (exosystem) and culturally responsive national policy (macrosystem) encouraged parental involvement (mesosystem), it worked better. Inclusion-based teacher professional development needs supportive school climates and district-level resources. Educational and learning experiences showed that system-wide transformation involved social, cultural, and attitudinal shifts at all ecological model levels, not only resource allocation.

The framework acknowledged implementation issues. Teachers reported high class numbers, insufficient expert support, and unclear policy guidelines as challenges to inclusive practises (Mpu & Adu, 2020). Marginalised students said peer networks and community factors hindered involvement. These findings supported Nilsen (2020)'s need for implementation science in educational transformation, emphasising clarity, contextual adaptation, and ongoing innovation support in complicated situations.

Finally, this study applied the theoretical model for analysis and emancipation. The framework encouraged stakeholders to participate in education by revealing the often-hidden structural forces that influenced schooling. The framework synthesised ecological and inclusive views to help assess study findings and construct targeted, contextually relevant interventions that will have the greatest impact in similar rural and under-resourced contexts.

FINDINGS

Educators' Perceptions of Main Challenges Affecting Quality Teaching and Learning

Curriculum Implementation Barriers

Public school curriculum varied for O.R. Tambo District educators, according to secondary sources. Curriculum improvement instructions were vague, and government aims differed from classroom realities, according to several teachers. Frequent curriculum framework updates without orientation or resource alignment impacted lesson planning. Teachers also reported limited access to updated teaching materials, with some schools using outdated textbooks or sharing resources across classrooms. Lack of material support and policy ambiguity caused mixed course coverage in teaching. Teachers worried about stress and demotivation from pressure to meet unachievable academic goals without structural supports. Systemic gaps and local capacity constraints hindered curriculum implementation, preventing effective education.

The study's curriculum implementation challenges findings supported past research on systemic and resource-related barriers in rural South African schooling. In South African schools, especially the O.R. Tambo District, imprecise reform objectives and lack of material assistance hinder curriculum implementation, according to Mpu and Adu (2020). Skae et al. (2020) found that inaccurate resource allocation and curricular change professional orientation harmed lesson planning and classroom management. Collaborative teacher networks can assist schools address policy uncertainty through collective interpretation and peer support, according to Dube (2020). This study left educators alone in curriculum adjustment due to lack of collaboration. Overall, the findings corroborated larger literature patterns but also demonstrated the O.R. Tambo District's acute vulnerabilities, particularly poor material and human resource investment amplification of curriculum obstacles.

Professional Development and Support Deficits

Content analysis revealed that most district educators lacked mentoring and professional development. Teachers described a lack of formal in-service training, reflective practice, and peer collaboration as hurdles to professional progress. These concerns were exacerbated by remote school teachers' professional isolation. Mentoring and communities of practice that may have shared knowledge and taught new methods were absent. Thus, educators said their skills and pedagogical methods remained stagnant, with little room for adapting to new educational concerns or learner needs. Many instructors' stories showed how professional neglect, lack of recognition, and insufficient institutional support lower morale. Intermittent professional growth relied on individual effort rather than systematic assistance.

These research findings supported literature arguing that effective teaching and learning require ongoing professional development. Ambrosetti and Dekkers (2021) link mentoring, continual learning, and teacher efficacy, emphasising that professional progress involves both structured support and informal peer networks. Hudson and Hudson (2020) found 'grow your own' teacher development initiatives useful in resource-constrained South Africa. According to Goktepe and Kunt (2021), areas lacking the administrative will and resources to expand these models rarely succeed. In the O.R. Tambo District, professional development shortages lowered teacher agency and stagnated instructional practice, confirming the literature. In particular, professional separation worsened material deprivation and teacher involvement and morale.

Socio-Economic and Community Influences on Teaching

Secondary data also showed that educators saw socio-economic difficulties and limited parental engagement as important instructional obstacles. Poverty, unemployment, and food insecurity at home made many pupils hungry, tired, or agitated at school. Teachers said these conditions generated high absenteeism, dropout rates, and poor student excitement, making classroom involvement difficult. Teachers ascribed a lack of parental involvement in school administration and learning support to community marginalisation, adult illiteracy, and demanding job schedules. Community instability like crime or marital violence influenced school discipline and academic attention, educators said. Due to socio-economic and neighbourhood factors, academic priorities conflicted with classroom social and material needs.

Recent South African studies on poverty, family background, and educational quality supported these findings. Ngumbela (2021) noted that socio-economic issues in Eastern Cape schools generate chronic absenteeism, poor nutrition, and inconsistent academic performance. The results corroborated Sibanda and Netshitangani (2021) that low parental participation harms student behaviour and school performance. Ebrahim et al. (2023) expressed optimism that community partnerships have enhanced home-school links and student results. Without such activities, the O.R. Tambo District's socio-educational environment remained inadequate, suggesting that future interventions must directly target community poverty, enhance parental agency, and promote holistic learner support to make a difference.

Learners' Experiences and Views on Factors Supporting or Hindering Educational Engagement and Achievement

Motivation and Aspirational Barriers

Secondary source analysis showed many O.R. Tambo District children had low academic motivation. Without constant support from lecturers and parents, many students stated they lost motivation to study. Lack of community role models and career options increased uncertainty and low aspiration. According to research, few pupils could set objectives or succeed academically after elementary school. An apparent disconnect between academic relevance and job prospects made schooling seem ethereal and unimportant. The study found that students typically voiced despair, low desire, and a belief that academic achievement had little practical value in their local area in classroom discussions.

The motivational and aspirational hurdles findings supported South African rural learner literature. Adigun and Ndwandwe (2022) discovered that socioeconomic hardship and lack of family and community support prevented pupils from reaching high goals. Guzzardo et al. (2021) say mentoring and academic or professional pathways motivate and form career orientation in poor kids. Gil-Galván and Martín-Espinosa (2023) emphasise parental support's impact on student ambition, emphasising motivating traits. Mampane (2023) reported that excellent teacher-student interactions largely compensated for familial shortcomings in rare circumstances in O.R. Tambo District. To foster a sense of possibility, increase visible academic role models, and connect educational achievement to significant future prospects, comprehensive school culture and family interventions are needed.

Classroom Climate and Peer Relationships

Interviews demonstrated that classroom emotional and social climate substantially influenced student involvement. Student discussions included classroom discipline, teacher-student interaction, and peer relationships. Many kids were bullied or excluded, hurting their involvement and belonging. Teacher favouritism and strong discipline decreased student participation, while good, respectful teacher-student relationships fostered safe learning settings. Supportive peers inspired, but antagonistic ones worried and distracted. Schools that fostered respect, discipline, and peer support had more children participate and achieve.

The data highlights classroom climate and peer relationships on student progress. Like Skae et al. (2020), this study indicated that teacher-learner rapport and inclusive classroom practices affect academic interest and participation. Crispel and Kasperski (2021) found that peer acceptance and classroom management reduced behavioural disruptions and

boosted student self-confidence. Conversely, Bozhkova et al. (2020) explored how long-term bullying and social isolation affects academic performance and mental health. Simmons (2021) underlined the preventive value of well-being therapies and pleasant school environments, but O.R. Tambo District indicated that such mechanisms were not consistently implemented, resulting in inconsistent learner experiences. These studies demonstrated that strong classroom management and intentional peer interactions boost student engagement and achievement.

Access to Learning Resources and Technology

The content analysis found that O.R. Tambo District pupils failed to attend school owing to a lack of textbooks, digital learning devices, and reliable internet. Some classes lacked resources, and many students shared obsolete textbooks. Due to ICT infrastructure issues, most students had limited computer access and digital skills training. Internet access was infrequent or expensive, limiting research, self-directed learning, and online education. Students were irritated by resource constraints and unable to complete assignments, explore other resources, or meet curriculum requirements. The digital divide hurt academic achievement and alienated students from technological developments in better-resourced institutions.

The findings on learning resource and technology access matched South African school digital disparity and resource constraints study. According to Dube (2020), rural Eastern Cape pupils were barred from e-learning due to COVID-19. Digital technology could change education, but unequal access could maintain educational differences, according to Carusi and Franco (2021). Otermans et al. (2024) also recommended device provision and technology integration into pedagogy to close engagement gaps. Secondary data showed that O.R. Tambo District resource allocation and infrastructure investments lagged behind national expectations, perpetuating inequality. These findings stressed the need for coordinated, equity-driven resource allocation and technology capacity-building to increase educational engagement.

Impact of School Infrastructure and Resource Availability on Teaching Effectiveness and Learner Participation

Quality and Sufficiency of Physical Infrastructure

The content analysis showed that teachers and students regularly cited overcrowded classrooms, decaying structures, and inadequate sanitation as major obstacles to learning. Over 60 students per instructor made individual attention and classroom management impossible in many classrooms. In bad weather, leaking roofs, broken windows, and inadequate furnishings made it hard for teachers to establish a safe and comfortable learning environment. Girl students were especially at risk of absenteeism during menstruation due to poor restroom hygiene and privacy. Respondents related school conditions to low morale, absenteeism, and instructional quality. Lack of basic infrastructure like electricity or water forced teachers to cut lessons or adjust them, reducing curriculum coverage and learning outcomes.

This analysis matches recent South African rural education literature. Overcrowding and infrastructural degeneration in Eastern Cape schools hurt student attendance and performance, according to Ngumbela (2021). Jama et al. (2024) also cited low sanitation and classroom space as rural inclusive education hurdles. Walton and Engelbrecht (2022) claimed that infrastructural neglect reflects systemic disparities, making quality education unachievable without focused action. Recent policy revisions have promised improvements, but O.R. Tambo District data reveals delayed and unequal change. This study supports the idea that infrastructural restoration is essential for lasting educational change in marginalised areas.

Teaching and Learning Materials Provision

Secondary sources report chronic textbook, stationery, and scientific equipment shortages in most district schools. Teachers and students said that textbooks were few, forcing them to share or forgo crucial reading. Without laboratory equipment and basic stationery, teachers have trouble teaching practical science. Photographing facilities were scarce or expensive, limiting teachers' ability to provide extra worksheets or assessments. Poor teaching and learning materials hindered homework completion, exam preparation, and lesson participation. These material constraints confined the curriculum to activities possible with the resources.

The educational literature agrees that South African public schools lack resources. Crispel and Kasperski (2021) noted that learning resource constraints aggravate achievement gaps and hamper inclusive pedagogy. Bruwer (2021) proved from nearby situations that diverse learners need bilingual and bicultural literacy aids. The COVID-19 pandemic widened digital and material disparities, especially in rural O.R. Tambo, according to Dube (2020) and Carusi and Franco (2021). The study supports the literature and calls for coordinated efforts to make fundamental teaching and learning tools more accessible.

Administrative and Institutional Support

Text analysis revealed respondents' concerns regarding administrative support and institutional inefficiency. Teachers complained about textbook and feeding scheme grant delays. Teacher complaints included that paperwork, audit compliance, and district approvals took time away from class preparation and teaching. Delays in procurement or district office misunderstanding left schools without essential supplies for months. Staff and kids said frequent principal or district authority changes disrupted continuity and school operations. Teachers were discouraged by a lack of professional support and recognition, while students complained about inconsistent policy enforcement, such as bursary allocation or feeding programs.

Recent study confirms this. Clarke (2020) noted that administrative inefficiencies and poor institutional support impair school-based teaching and that teachers perform best without bureaucracy. Hudson and Hudson (2020) found that supportive, proactive school leadership improves teacher morale, professional growth, and student achievement, especially in resource-constrained situations. Decision-making frameworks and leadership stability affect educational reform outcomes, according to Mehta et al. (2022). Despite good policy design, Nilsen (2020) says weak institutions hinder policy implementation. This study suggests that robust, timely, and well-coordinated administrative help is needed to enhance teaching efficacy and learner participation in tough contexts like the O.R. Tambo District.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Enhancing Parental Involvement in School Activities

Secondary sources showed a substantial parental engagement gap in O.R. Tambo District public schools. Parents participated in parent meetings, school governance, and learner monitoring in some schools but not others. Schoolchildren with active parental involvement had better behaviour, attendance, and academic success. Absenteeism and discipline are higher in schools without parental involvement. An important need exists to boost parental interest and overcome parental illiteracy, socioeconomic constraints, and home-school communication.

Research supports parent empowerment and capacity building. Ndwandwe (2023) found that parent-teacher seminars, adult education programs, and inclusive school events increased parental agency and student outcomes. To go from passive to active parenting, Albrecht (2021) advised empowering families, especially in rural areas. Haisraeli and Fogiel-Bijaoui (2023) suggested culturally sensitive communication and community liaisons to create trust and dialogue. Given these findings, the present study recommends parent support programs, local community workers for home visits, and digital platforms for regular updates to improve home-school collaboration and student performance.

Strengthening Community Partnerships and Support Structures

Schools with NGOs, local leaders, and faith-based organisations outperformed others. Community-driven projects filled government underfunding gaps with uniforms, food security, mentorship, and psychosocial assistance. These tools were not available to all schools, highlighting the need for systematic collaborative framework expansion.

Recent research demonstrates multi-sectoral alliances evolve. Mbhiza and Nkambule (2022) discovered that community stakeholders' fundraising, skills development workshops, and direct support of vulnerable learners increased academic resilience and involvement. Ebrahim, Bipath, and Theron (2023) discovered that strong school-community ties increased holistic development and adversity adaptation, especially in poor areas. Jama et al. (2024) recommend government, public society, and schools collaborate to remove systemic learning barriers. School and district leaders should prioritise multi-sectoral steering committees. Schools should map local organisations, develop relationships, and promote volunteerism. This strategy expands support networks and protects at-risk pupils.

Overcoming Barriers to Home-School Collaboration

Results demonstrated that parental illiteracy, tight work schedules, strained teacher-parent relationships, and poor communication infrastructure hamper home-school collaboration. These obstacles misaligned educational priorities, unmet learner needs, and eroded educator-family trust. Schools struggled to accommodate diverse households, especially when parents felt unqualified or unwelcome.

Rural education literature emphasises context-sensitive methods. Davids (2020) said that adult literacy and informal community education can enhance parents' confidence and competence in helping their children's learning. Adigun and Ndwandwe (2022) recommended SMS updates, bilingual information, and flexible meeting times to prevent pandemic disengagement. Haisraeli and Fogiel-Bijaoui (2023) suggested school-based family liaisons to resolve conflicts and establish trust.

The convergence of data suggests schools offer adult education seminars, local language information campaigns, and remote or asynchronous meetings. These strategies would make home-school collaboration more inclusive even with significant family mobility or literacy barriers.

CONCLUSION

Instructors and students' perceptions of effective teaching and learning in O.R. Tambo District public schools revealed complex systemic, social, and institutional elements. Curriculum implementation, professional development, socio-economic disadvantages, and infrastructure limitations affected classroom realities, according to content analysis. Teachers often observed how mismatched curricula, outdated teaching resources, and insufficient support hampered instructional creativity and student progress. Students also reported lack of desire, bad peer dynamics, and limited technology as academic obstacles. These findings supported and supplemented current literature. Mbhiza and Nkambule (2022) and Jama et al. (2024) stressed teacher professional development and resource allocation to improve rural education, whereas Ebrahim, Bipath, and Theron (2023) stressed parental and community collaborations. Ndwandwe (2023) discovered that regular contact and family agency are essential to learner progress, identifying home-school collaboration barriers and the need for context-sensitive interaction. Rural schools will struggle with inequality and underperformance without holistic, multi-level interventions, these sources said.

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