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Transforming Pedagogical Frontiers- Harnessing the Potential of School Libraries as Catalysts for Teacher Professional Development: Reflections from Six Rural Schools

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Abstract: Generally, school libraries serve the purpose of promoting a culture of reading among users and creating environments that foster literacy. They achieve this by offering reading materials that are relevant and appealing to individuals of all ages. School libraries play a crucial role in facilitating quality teaching and learning, thereby positively impacting student achievement. Recognising the influential role of educators in shaping students' learning experiences and the specific challenges faced by those in rural settings, this qualitative case study research investigates the potential of school libraries as centres for teacher professional support, aiming to improve instructional practices. The study reflects on the experiences of three primary and three secondary schools purposefully selected from a South African rural education district. Through the use of Google Forms and semi-structured interviews, the data revealed that school libraries serve as dynamic hubs that foster professional growth among teachers, enhance lesson preparation, promote learner engagement, create learner-centred environments, and address resource disparities. The research concludes that incorporating school libraries as vibrant professional hubs in rural educational settings is essential for advancing teacher pedagogy, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive and effective learning environment. Therefore, the study advocates for the prioritisation of school library availability to enhance overall teacher pedagogy in rural educational landscapes.

Keywords: Transformation, school libraries, teacher professional development, rural schools, teacher pedagogy.

1. Introduction

Generally, the purpose of school libraries is to promote a reading culture and create literate environments by providing relevant and appealing reading material for individuals of all ages (Itsekor & Nwokeoma, 2017). According to Dukper, Agyekum, and Konlan (2018), the rapid advancement of information technology (IT) is significantly transforming various aspects of development. In the information age, the current generation must proactively confront the numerous challenges in the educational system. This implies that children should be allowed to acquire knowledge to effectively control nature and contribute to educational reform in society with enthusiasm and innovation (Dukper et al., 2018). The importance of literacy as a fundamental basis for academic success is widely recognised. Todd et al. (2012) have expressed concern about the lack of a dynamic school library system that serves as an affordable and essential resource to equip learners with the skills to critically analyse and construct knowledge from information available in various formats. School libraries contribute to quality teaching and learning, thus positively impacting learner achievement.

The literature confirms that effective education depends on the presence of exemplary educators, whose professional development (PD) is crucial (Mokhele, 2014 and 2017; Desimone & Garet, 2015; Garet et al., 2016). We require teachers who prioritise learning in order to create an environment

where it can flourish. All segments of society, including educators, are committed to ensuring that students reach their full educational potential, which is a concise term encompassing learning and academic achievement. Nevertheless, we must consider how teachers can meet our expectations. This assertion, as emphasised by Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), underscores the significance of ongoing teacher development in driving educational reforms. Teachers form the foundation of every education system, and schools must enhance their skills and capabilities, as Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) highlighted.

However, while it is true that there are benefits to teaching in rural areas, educators face difficulties in rural schools. South African rural schools are not immune to these challenges (Volmer, 2023). Teaching in rural schools is characterised by a lack of basic teaching and learning resources, as well as other resources such as computers, internet access, and funding (National Education Infrastructure Management System [NEIMS], 2020; Shikalepo, 2020). Rural schools face numerous limitations in resources to support teaching and learning, including a shortage of textbooks, laboratory facilities and equipment, ICT resources, and inadequate infrastructure (Netshivhumbe & Mudau, 2021). Research shows that this lack of resources creates obstacles for students in rural schools, resulting in discouragement, failure, and higher dropout rates (Abotsi et al., 2018). Consequently, the poor infrastructure, including roads and facilities, coupled with the remoteness of rural schools and towns, discourages teachers from accepting positions in these remote areas (Linake & Makeleni, 2023). However, it is crucial to avoid adopting a negative and deficit perspective towards rural schools. Instead, we should shift our mindset and focus on maintaining high-quality education through various teacher induction and professional development programs (Linake & Makeleni, 2023; Mkhize & Davids, 2023).

The school library plays a crucial role in education by meeting the basic requirements of supporting the educational process and preparing a knowledgeable generation focused on scientific thinking, thus contributing to societal progress and combating stagnation (Alkhawaldeh & Khasawneh, 2021). The school library provides specialised services tailored to the school community, including teachers, to fulfil educational and pedagogical objectives across diverse areas (Almulla & Khasawneh, 2024). Recognising the pivotal role of educators in shaping the learning experiences of students, the interrelationship between school libraries and teacher professional development is a topic deserving attention, especially in rural areas where access to training and resources may be limited. The indispensable role of school libraries in empowering teachers and revitalising rural education cannot be overstated. As emphasised by Mondal (2021), the library serves not only as a conventional information hub but also as a space where educators can acquire information to enhance their efficacy in the classroom and supplement the content taught in class to elevate learners' academic achievement. Azubogu (2020) established that libraries serve as valuable resources for teaching and learning laboratories, fostering an environment where learners develop the skill of exploration. Libraries play a crucial role in providing high-quality education because they are vital resources that facilitate information access, support research, encourage literacy, provide a supportive learning environment, and promote lifelong learning for both teachers and students (Ullah & Usman, 2023).

Therefore, this study explores the multifaceted impact of school libraries on teacher development, highlighting their critical role in fostering a dynamic and empowering learning environment in the context of rural education. The study delves into the reflections and narratives arising from the experiences of twelve teachers from six rural schools where school libraries have been established, examining the potential of these educational hubs to shape and enhance teaching practices. The investigation aims to uncover specific strategies, challenges, and successes encountered, shed light on the transformative potential of school libraries, and contribute valuable insights to the wider discourse on effective teacher development strategies in resource-constrained environments.

1.1 Problem statement

Working in rural schools for an extended period of time provided me with numerous opportunities to observe and experience the challenges that these schools face regarding resources, such as school libraries, and access to systems that support teaching and learning, such as customised professional development programs that cater to the needs of teachers in such contexts. As stated by Shikalepo (2020), teachers in remote settings encounter unique difficulties, including limited access to resources and opportunities for professional development. Consequently, it becomes more challenging to implement effective teaching strategies, resulting in a decline in student achievement (Abotsi et al., 2018). Therefore, it is crucial to maximise the potential of each acquired resource in rural contexts. However, it has been observed that schools with access to school libraries tend to regard them solely as tools for improving literacy. Consequently, the potential of school libraries to serve as catalysts for teacher professional development in rural settings often goes unrecognised despite their acknowledged role in promoting literacy and supporting teaching and learning (Mondal, 2021). Without a comprehensive understanding of the library support systems, the potential for educational excellence remains untapped. Thus, the aim of this study is to explore a deeper comprehension of how school libraries can function as centres for professional development and teacher support in remote learning environments. That is, the study explores the potential of school libraries in enhancing teacher professional development to strengthen their pedagogies. This is achieved through reflections from twelve teachers (n=12) who were selected from six (n=6) rural schools located in a rural South African education district in the Eastern Cape.

1.2 Research question

To achieve the objective of the study, the study sought to answer the following question:

- What is the potential of school libraries in enhancing teacher professional development to strengthen pedagogies in schools within a rural South African Education District in the Eastern Cape?

2. Conceptual Framework

The study employed Todd and Kuhlthau's (2005) Model of the School Library as a Dynamic Agent of Learning as a conceptual framework to guide the interpretation and synthesis of findings, as depicted in Figure 1 below.
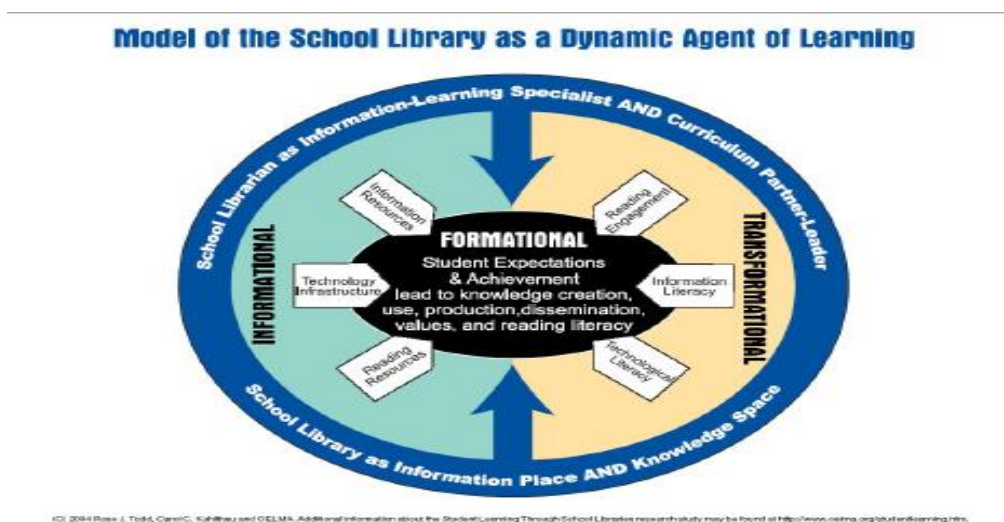

Figure 1: *Four Aspects of Student Ability Todd and Kuhlthau's Model*

Todd and Kuhlthau (2005) argue that the components of school libraries – formation, transformation, and information – are interconnected and work together to facilitate learning. This integration defines the school library as an active learning agency. When viewed and framed as a place for learning rather than just a place for information exchange, a library moves beyond its passive role. Proficient school libraries serve as instructional partners, prompting learners to engage in meaningful search processes through investigation, conceptualisation, and organisation of their searches while providing a supportive environment.

The shared pedagogical dimension offered by libraries has several key benefits, such as fostering higher-order thinking, deepening knowledge and understanding, facilitating meaningful conversations, recognising knowledge as complex, and promoting reading literacy, including language, grammar, and technical vocabulary (Todd & Kuhlthau, 2005). However, interventions like annual library tours, teaching internet dos and don'ts, or computer usage guidelines are ineffective unless they demonstrate how they contribute to students' goals, particularly their learning objectives. As the scholars state in their concluding remarks, "When effective school libraries are in place, students do learn, and 13,000 students cannot be wrong" (Todd & Kuhlthau, 2005, p.87).

The model put forth by Todd and Kuhlthau (2005) highlights the transformational role of the library, which involves instructional interventions and collaboration with educators to enhance learning (Todd, 2012). In the case of the schools included in this study, librarians, or teacher librarians, play a collaborative role in guiding teachers towards educational resources and innovative teaching strategies. This ongoing interaction helps teachers stay up-to-date with educational trends, integrate interdisciplinary approaches, and develop effective and engaging lesson plans (Todd & Kuhlthau, 2005). By utilising the library's diverse resources and expertise, teachers can enhance their subject knowledge, improve their teaching skills, and ultimately contribute to a richer and more dynamic educational experience for their students.

This study aimed to gather the perspectives of twelve educators from six rural schools regarding the value of school library access for their pedagogical approaches and the improvement of the learning environment. This research is part of a larger project based on the School Library as a Dynamic Agent of Learning Model developed by Todd and Kuhlthau (Todd & Kuhlthau, 2005, p. 6). The model was relevant to this study's focus on the importance of school library access in enhancing teacher pedagogy.

3. Methodology

The paper constitutes a component of a larger study conducted in a South African setting within one of the rural Education Districts in the Eastern Cape province. The twelve teachers who participated in this study were selected from six schools that are part of a collaborative research project on the establishment of school libraries. This project involves a group of university lecturers, university library staff, education district officials, and schools. The paper is a contribution to this broader project, drawing on the expertise of various scholars from different fields. The study employed a method that engaged the teachers in reflecting on their experiences of the significant role that established libraries play in their professional development, particularly in enhancing their teaching practices within the rural context.

The study was grounded in the interpretivism paradigm. According to Rehman and Alharthi (2016), interpretivists posit that truth and reality are not discovered but rather created, and that multiple socially constructed realities exist. The aim of interpretivism is to advance knowledge by understanding people's distinct perspectives and the significance attached to those perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Given that participants in this research study shared their constructively generated reflections on the phenomenon under investigation, it was appropriate to employ the

interpretivism paradigm, as it is based on the notion that beliefs and knowledge comprehension are socially constructed.

The study followed a qualitative research approach, specifically a social action approach that focuses on individuals' interpretation and understanding of their experiences, aiming to capture each person's unique social realities (Mohajan, 2018). A multiple case study design was adopted for the study, as the sample consisted of participants from multiple schools (Yin, 2018). The twelve participants from the six schools served as the cases for the study, enabling the analysis and comparison of comprehensive and effective reviews (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Yin, 2018). In a multi-case study, two or more cases that share similar characteristics but differ in other ways are selected and analysed with the intention of examining the same phenomenon across multiple replications or instances (Yin, 2018). The participants shared real-life experiences, providing a deep conceptualisation of their understanding of the potential of school libraries as catalysts for teacher professional development within their natural setting (Leedy & Ormrod, 2014; Eyisi, 2016).

3.1 Participants and settings

The selection of 12 teachers from six schools, each of which had established libraries, was carried out in a rural district of the Eastern Cape Province in South Africa. This purposive sampling was done to fulfil the objectives of the larger project as well as the specific objective of this study (Obilor, 2023). The sampled schools consisted of three primary schools and three secondary schools. Within each school, two teachers were chosen, representing grades 1–3 and grades 4–6 at the primary level and grades 8–12 at the secondary level. The selected teachers covered various subjects, such as Mathematics, Natural Sciences, Life Skills (incorporating science and environmental studies), and Physical Sciences, depending on the grade levels they taught. Furthermore, one of the sampled secondary schools specialised in technical education, offering subjects such as Engineering, Graphics and Design, and Technical Sciences.

3.2 Participants descriptions

Table 1 below provides the biographical profiles of the participants included in the study. To preserve their confidentiality, pseudonyms Teacher 1 to Teacher 12, abbreviated as T1 to T12, were assigned to the participants. The participants consisted of teachers from various subjects and grade levels, spanning from grade 2 to grade 12. A total of six schools, comprising three primary and three secondary schools, were selected as the sample for this study. The participants exhibited a range of teaching experience, with the minimum being two years and the maximum being 31 years. Moreover, the years of experience in teaching the subjects examined in this study varied between 2 and 21 years.

Table 1: *Biographical data of participants*

Name of Participant	Grade Taught	Subjects taught	Years of experience in teaching	Years of experience in teaching the subject
T1	3	Maths and Life Skills	31	7
T2	6	Maths and Natural Sciences	14	14
T3	3	Maths and Life Skills	2	2
T4	6	Maths and Natural Sciences	4	4
T5	2	Maths and Life Skills	17	17
T6	4 and 5	Maths and Natural Sciences	21	21
T7	10–12	EGD and Technical Science	15	15
T8	8 and 9	Maths and Natural Sciences	15	15
T9	10 and 12	Physical Sciences	7	7

T10	11 and 12	Maths	22	22
T11	10–12	Mathematics and Physical Sciences	9	9
T12	10–12	Mathematics and Physical Sciences	12	12

3.3 Data collection tools

The tool used to collect data was semi-structured interviews and a Google Form with the same format of questions. Initially, the plan was to use Google Forms because it was anticipated that interviewing twelve (12) teachers could be challenging. However, since the selected participants were teachers employed in rural schools, some individuals experienced difficulties in completing the Google forms online due to network issues. As a result, some participants chose to respond verbally to the questionnaire through semi-structured interviews, and their answers were recorded and documented in printed forms. Participation in the study was voluntary, and the participants shared their experiences by responding to both open-ended and close-ended questions (Young, 2015). All participants were informed that their involvement in the research was voluntary, and the gathered information would be kept confidential and used solely for academic purposes (Creswell, 2020).

3.4 Data analysis and ethical considerations

The data collected in this study was thematically analysed in order to identify patterns that capture the narratives present in the data sets. The themes were identified through careful reading and re-examination of the transcribed data (Dawadi, 2021). The findings section outlined a main theme, "Professional Growth in Pedagogical Practices," along with five sub-themes which emerged from the teachers' reflections.

Like quantitative research, qualitative investigations also require obtaining authorisation from various stakeholders, including the organisation, site, participants, and university institutional review boards, as Creswell (2020) stated. Prior to data collection, ethical approval was obtained from the University of the Free State Ethics Committee. Permission to conduct the research was also secured from the Eastern Cape Department of Education, as well as from the District Office and the schools where the study took place. Participants signed informed consent forms, and a Memorandum of Understanding was established with the district office and the schools for the duration of the project (Creswell, 2020).

4. Presentation of Results

In order to respond to the research question, the participants identified a variety of opportunities regarding how school libraries not only enhance knowledge but also serve as dynamic hubs that enrich teacher pedagogical practices. Subthemes such as enhanced lesson preparation, improved learner participation, support with knowledge integration, enhanced learner-centred environments, and assistance with resource disparities emerged to articulate the reflections of the participants, as described in the following sections.

4.1 Enhanced lesson preparation

The participants shared how the materials available in their school library, including posters, charts, and colourful pictures, positively impact their lesson-planning process. Despite the fact that the resources are not yet as abundant as they would like, the school libraries still empower the participants. A teacher expressed the following thoughts:

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T3 established the following: *If you look around the walls of the library, there are charts and posters. When I sit there and plan as a maths teacher to prepare a lesson, I see that I can use this part for the introduction. This is the material I will use in grade 8 and use as an introduction in grade 10. It helps us sequence our teaching. For example, analytical geometry, etc. The description is not enough; learners need to identify, with the beautiful colourful charts that are not black and white from the textbook, the library helps. Some of us are not artistic you know.*

T6 corresponded when sharing that:

It helps, there are things that when I prepare for learners to understand, I check at the library for material that can assist in deeper understanding. Although it is not enough, what we have we use, to help shape the lesson, when learners do not understand, we have visual pictures, the periodic table for example, the process of photosynthesis, and take learners to the library. It is very helpful. In chemistry, for example, in Grade 12, we teach things one cannot see, for example, a molecule, and we do not have microscopes; the library has colourful pictures that assist with visuals on such concepts.

T11 shared as follows:

Yes, our school library impacts positively on my teaching because it is a place where I empower myself as a teacher as I have access to different textbooks. It has facilitated my way of understanding of some concepts and topics.

Despite acknowledging the limitations of these resources, the presented data acknowledges that the availability of diverse materials in the library has an empowering and beneficial impact on various aspects of teaching. The findings further underscore the significance of these resources in facilitating a deeper comprehension of subjects that are challenging to visualise. Consequently, access to libraries for teachers not only enhances their effectiveness in teaching but also contributes to their continual professional development. Although the resources in the school library may not be plentiful, the materials that are available play a pivotal role in enriching the educational process.

4.2 Learner participation

The findings indicated that the school libraries supported learner participation. As the participants alleged, learner's various skills are enhanced, and teamwork is developed. An extract from T3 indicated as follows:

Yes, our learners develop thinking skills, listening skills, reading, and writing skills. They become fast thinkers and their brains are collected. They use different resources, use practical objects when they visit the library to do some work, which makes them the best readers and writers.

T8 alleged that:

Ohh, the access to a library in our school assists the learners a lot and us as teachers. It assists with bonding students so that they can ask for help from others. For example, I group learners sometimes when learning, so at times, I group them and vary them according to their intelligence and send them to the library to search for information. What I have discovered is that access to the library assists in creating a bond between them. They are different as they are, and they can ask and assist each other.

The findings revealed that school libraries play a crucial role in fostering learner participation and enhancing various skills among students. By grouping students and sending them to the library to conduct research, the library environment encourages teamwork and collaboration among students of different levels of intelligence. This collaborative setting, as reported by the participants, not only

enhances their academic skills but also strengthens their interpersonal relationships as students learn to seek help and assist one another. Thus, the school library emerges as a central space that supports both academic and social development, ultimately contributing to a more holistic educational experience.

4.3 Knowledge Integration

The results indicate that school libraries serve as connectors for the integration of subjects. The participants claimed that by utilising the various resources available in the library, they are able to establish connections between the content learned in one subject and that of another. The excerpts confirm this as follows:

> *Libraries assist in …. what do we call this thing, I just forgot the word we normally use..., subject integration. In Maths, we have a chapter that teaches about time zones, and that time zone, for you to be able to teach Mathematically to them, you must go a little bit into Geography on the movement of the earth, how it rotates, lines of longitude and the differentiation of hours. Having a library helps integrate the knowledge of these two subjects and gives a more meaningful understanding to the learners.* (T12)

> *Our library is still limited. But with the few resources we have in the library, with assistance from a robotics program we also have, it assists with the integration of knowledge from different subjects. There is a software that we have that is also installed in our personal computers called the stretch that assists the learners in creating conversational stories, and in doing so, learners also get to understand minutes because a person is given certain minutes to talk, etc.* (T6)

The findings highlight school libraries as key players in integrating knowledge across different subjects and enhancing the educational experience. This cross-subject approach allegedly provides learners with a more comprehensive and meaningful understanding of the material being taught. The data emphasises the importance of school libraries in fostering a holistic learning environment where learners can draw connections between different subjects, deepening their overall comprehension and making learning more engaging and relevant.

4.4 Learner-centered Environments

The findings also highlight that school libraries strengthen teaching and learning by creating an environment that allows learners to be at the centre, fostering curiosity and inquisitiveness.

T1 had this to share:

> *Yes, I can see that the thinking of learners has improved. In teaching, we talk a lot, but when problem-solving is needed, you must explain. When you are talking about these things theoretically, the library most of the time shows them concrete material and they start thinking deeply which makes them inquisitive, especially planets and earth round, but they need to see them, the library provides that which makes it easy to understand.*

T1 expounded as follows:

> *Definitely, so. Kids are in nature curious, they always ask questions, how, when, what, how did it come to this, and why are we saying the buildings outside are standing still because of the air pressure that is less outside than inside? The libraries create enthusiasm for them to learn more about any content you have delivered as a teacher. It stimulates their thinking skills. The library wins them to know more independently as an individual and think beyond while they are in primary, and in that way, it creates a springboard for them when they progress to higher classes. Take the ear section, for example, who knows if any of the kids will want to be ear doctors in the*

future, extra resources such as the library assist in taking learners further in critical thinking and thinking beyond.

The insights from the data analysis indicate the significance of school libraries in enhancing the effectiveness of teaching and learning. They do this by creating learner-centred environments that stimulate curiosity and inquisitiveness. The school library environment is established to improve learners' thinking skills, which is a requirement for effective teaching and learning, and to prepare them for future academic challenges by building a solid foundation for critical thinking. This means creating dynamic learning spaces that place learners at the centre, promoting independent inquiry, and fostering long-term academic growth.

4.5 Assist with resource disparities

The participants' reflections indicate that school libraries serve as a valuable resource in their context, where challenges exist in accessing resources such as textbooks and other teaching and learning aids. The provided extracts offer more detailed information.

Even if you give them work to do, for example, shapes, they know intobana (that) what the teacher is talking about can be found in the library because there are concrete materials in the library such as charts. It's easy for them to see that this is the shape of a pentagon because there are posters and other different resources in the library. (T4)

With the shortage of books that learners must share, the posters in the library help the learners see and relate the theory as they see in the posters for example, that blood in the nervous system circulates this way, etc. (T8)

The library has textbooks, there are books they can read for enjoyment, dictionaries for further understanding, and there are resources available in the library that are not available in the classroom, learners can use the library in their leisure time, maybe in the afternoon, it is flexible enough to be used according to the learner's individual needs. (T7)

It is a very powerful tool, especially in our village where there is no access to the internet, with our learners not exposed much to technology, limited textbooks, and sometimes we are limited in the classroom, it is very difficult to teach, it helps in providing with more information for us teachers. In the library, they have different options for other textbooks (T11)

The reflections of the participants indicate the role of school libraries in alleviating resource disparities in classroom environments where there is a scarcity of textbooks and other teaching materials. The presence of school libraries plays a significant role in enhancing the overall learning experience, as they provide essential resources that help address educational inequalities and support both instructional and self-directed learning.

5. Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study have demonstrated the multifaceted role of school libraries in facilitating the professional development of teachers to enhance their pedagogical practices. The data analysis has corroborated the notion that teachers derive benefits from library access, as it enables them to enrich their lesson preparation with a wide range of materials that may not be readily available in textbooks and other conventional teaching resources. This aligns with the assertion made by Mondal (2021), who describes libraries as spaces where educators can acquire knowledge to improve their effectiveness in the classroom. Moreover, consistent with these findings, school libraries serve as a valuable resource that complements the curriculum, aiming to enhance students' academic achievements (Azubogu, 2020; Mondal, 2021).

Furthermore, the findings have revealed that access to libraries contributes to enhanced learner participation in teaching and learning activities. This occurs because libraries stimulate learner engagement, foster the development of critical thinking, reading, writing, and teamwork skills, and serve as essential research repositories. Libraries also provide a safe and conducive learning environment, promoting literacy and facilitating lifelong learning for both teachers and students (Ullah & Usman, 2023). In the context of teaching and learning, the primary objective is to engage learners in activities that facilitate the construction of knowledge and ultimately lead to the achievement of predetermined educational goals. Learner engagement is considered a crucial element of effective teaching and learning. Consequently, libraries serve as invaluable resources for supporting both teaching and learning, creating an environment where learners can explore independently or with appropriate guidance (Azubogu, 2020; Todd et al., 2012).

Based on participants' reflections, the study findings have revealed that school libraries assist teachers in integrating knowledge across various subjects. In a rapidly changing world that affects multiple aspects of the educational landscape, learners are required to acquire knowledge in innovative ways in order to have an impact on educational reform in society. Therefore, the integration of content taught in different subjects is crucial, as it enhances learners' comprehension of concepts (Dukper et al., 2018). Todd and Kuhlthau (2005) emphasise how libraries can actively engage with students to support and scaffold their learning. In essence, as affirmed by Itsekor and Nwokeoma (2017), school libraries foster a culture of intellectual curiosity and provide engaging and relevant reading materials suitable for individuals of all age groups.

Additionally, the data demonstrates how access to libraries improves teacher instruction by emphasising the development of curiosity and inquisitiveness in class and fostering an atmosphere where students are at the centre. Todd et al. (2012) have long expressed the significance of a dynamic school library system, highlighting its cost-effective and essential role in preparing learners to be reflective individuals capable of discovering, assessing, and constructing knowledge from diverse information formats. It also facilitates high-quality teaching and learning, thus positively influencing learner achievement. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) stress the importance of teachers as the cornerstone of every educational system. Improved instruction assists in the professional development of teachers in learner-centered teaching (Mokhele, 2014 and 2017; Desimone & Garet, 2015; Garet et al., 2016).

Lastly, the findings reveal that school libraries help mitigate resource challenges experienced by teachers in rural schools. As the data attests, posters and other resource materials assist teachers in enhancing their classroom activities. Teaching in rural schools is often characterised by a lack of basic teaching and learning tools (National Education Infrastructure Management System [NEIMS], 2020; Shikalepo, 2020). This lack of resources hinders rather than aids learners, resulting in high failure and dropout rates (Abotsi et al., 2018). However, as the data revealed, libraries can be used to supplement and alleviate this shortage.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

The study examined the potential of school libraries in bolstering teacher professional development to enhance their teaching methodologies through reflections from rural schools in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. The findings of this study brought attention to the multifaceted role that school libraries play as dynamic centres for fostering teacher professional growth in various ways, as well as their significant impact in addressing resource disparities within educational settings. The results demonstrated how access to libraries enriches pedagogical practices by providing teachers with diverse materials to enhance lesson preparation and as invaluable resources that can complement classroom instruction. The findings of the study emphasise the intricate relationship between school libraries and teacher professional development, particularly in rural areas where access to training and resources may be limited. Therefore, the study concludes that recognising

school libraries as more than just repositories of books but also as catalysts for educational development is crucial.

As a result, the study advocates for a strategic and concerted effort to prioritise the availability of school libraries in rural educational landscapes. Recommendations for future research studies could include longitudinal studies to track the long-term effects of school library use on teacher professional development, as well as exploring the policy implications of investing in school libraries for overall educational outcomes. Such studies would provide valuable insights into the sustained impact of library interventions, especially in rural settings.

7. Declarations

Conflict of interest: The author declares no potential conflicts of interest.

Data availability: The data presented in this study is available on request from the corresponding author.

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