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Swimming Against the Tide: Resource Mobilization and its Implications for Rural Schools of South Africa

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ABSTRACT
In a developing country like South Africa, the quality of education has a pivotal role in eliminating poverty and bringing about economic transformation. This constitutes the central goal of the National Development Plan. However, research has consistently demonstrated that providing quality education is linked to the availability or the absence of resources in South Africa. Therefore, in rural communities where resource scarcity is prevalent, the goal of quality inclusive education for all remains elusive and impossible to achieve. Driven by this challenge, in this study, we elicited insights from various stakeholders in a rural community about how they mobilize resources or can enhance resource mobilization in their context. We adopted a qualitative research approach, employing participatory methodologies such as transect walks, SWOT analysis and photovoice to engage the participants on what they described as resources in their rural context and how these resources could be mobilized. The findings presented three sets of capital under which resources that may drive the provision of quality education can be housed. These are human capital, cultural capital, and social-organizational capital. Based on the findings, we argue that the dominant discourse that rural communities lack capital is a "half reality" and that the challenge is the lack of awareness of what is available and how it can be harnessed to enhance the provision of quality education. We therefore recommend focused approaches to resource identification and mobilization.

KEYWORDS
Participatory methods; quality education; rurality; rural schools; resource mobilization.

INTRODUCTION

Research has consistently demonstrated that providing quality education is linked to the available resources (Blank et al., 2012; Masinire, 2020; West & Meier, 2020). Therefore, resource availability is central to achieving quality education (Mestry & Bodalina, 2015; Mkhize & Davids, 2021). However, research also indicates that rural communities in South Africa (SA) and other developing countries face difficulties obtaining the requisite resources to achieve quality education (Nelson Mandela Foundation [NMF], 2005; Mkhize & Bhengu, 2018; Chikoko & Mthembu, 2020). In a developing country like SA, the quality of education provided has a pivotal role to play in eliminating poverty, bringing about economic transformation, and redressing the imbalances and inequalities brought by the apartheid past (Myende & Chikoko, 2014; Ngubane & Nzima, 2023). These are the central goals of the National Development Plan (NDP) (National Planning Commission, 2012). As a sign of its commitment to achieving quality education, SA subscribes to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which mandate signatories to provide quality education for all (United Nations, 2015). In addition to the SDGs, Africa and South Africa's commitment to people-derived development, as articulated in the Agenda 2063 of the African Union, demands that education is well-resourced, considering that the development of human capital requires the expansion of universal access to basic education (African Union, 2015).

Unfortunately, while SA subscribes to these global and African treaties, her rural communities continue to suffer from various socio-economic challenges, such as poor development outcomes, which render these communities more unequal and among the poorest (Moletsane, 2012; Ndofirepi & Masinire, 2021; Maja, 2023). As authors of this paper, we have been directly affected by the existing conditions in rural communities, having grown up and worked in similar contexts. Our belief in human capital development also played a role in adopting participatory and empowering methodologies. As highlighted above, quality education remains a crucial element of life (Spaull, 2013). Regrettably, though, the quality of education in South African rural communities has remained substandard for a long time (Myende & Hlalele, 2018). There is a shared concern that these communities lack the essential resources for the provision of quality education and that this has exacerbated the challenge of providing quality education to these communities (Balfour et al., 2008; Hlalele, 2012; Hlalele, 2014; Mncube & Ngema, 2023).

The National Education Infrastructure Management System (NEIMS) Report in 2019 revealed that rural schools are still facing challenges of using pit latrine toilets with limited water and a lack of libraries and laboratories (Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2019). This resource scarcity threatens the provision of quality education in rural communities and requires coordinated attention if the SGDs, especially Goal #4, are to be achieved in SA. Emphasizing the importance of addressing the concerns above, Moletsane (2012, p. 6) states:

If we are to make a difference in the lives of those who live, work and learn in rural contexts, we urgently need studies with a focus on identifying existing resources and assets in communities and schools, and among individuals and groups, as well as on how we might harness them to effect the desired social change.

Hlalele (2012) makes an important observation, which underlines the critical need to pursue the call that Moletsane (2012) has made, namely that the dominant negative discourse about rural communities and schools has resulted in the positive aspects that make rural communities places of choice to live in and raise families being ignored and overlooked.

Drawing on the call by Moletsane (2012) and the observation by Hlalele (2012), given their importance for quality education and possible effects on rural schools, we explore how resources can be identified and mobilized in this paper. We first look into the nature of resources within the context of rurality, and then at strategies that schools can employ to harness these resources to advance educational goals. Thus, this paper responds to two key research questions. First, we ask, what is the nature of resources within the context of rurality? Secondly, we ask, what strategies can be employed to harness educational resources to advance educational goals within rurality? In our response to these questions, we present the findings of our study, which have both theoretical and practical implications and relevance, especially about how we see the context of rurality. Firstly, we put under scrutiny the work of resource mobilization advocates such as Edwards and Kane (2014), Zald (2017) and Manky (2018), to mention a few. These scholars claim that all communities (including rural communities) have a plethora of resources that, if identified and harnessed, can address community concerns, including the poor quality of education. The paper examines this claim about rurality in SA by exploring what is defined as resources in the context of rurality. The second contribution is to share practical approaches or strategies that can be employed to identify and mobilize resources in rural schools. The findings on strategies for resource mobilization are essential, given that the prospect of government funding provided for education provision may dwindle due to the looming budget deficits SA faces. A study like this creates awareness among school leaders about resources within and beyond their vicinity and how these resources can be identified and harnessed.

Rurality and Rural Schools

While this study focuses on resource mobilization, the concept of rurality is essential to unpack for two main reasons. The first is that the meaning of this concept remains elusive, and multiple meanings are attached to it (Hlalele, 2012; Stoop, 2018) despite the growing research on rural education locally and internationally. The second reason relates to the connection between what is understood to be resources in communities and whether these resources are available in rural communities. Defining rurality in this case may provide deeper insights about whether or not it is even possible to talk about resources in the context of rurality in SA.

We have highlighted above that rurality has elusive and multiple meanings. For example, some scholars (Hlalele, 2012; Mkhize, 2018; Myende, 2015) argue that way this concept is

understood in SA differs from how it is understood in first-world countries like Canada and the United States of America (USA). In other contexts, rurality refers to communities that house smaller population sizes and are far from big cities (Lamb et al., 2014; Redding & Walberg, 2012). Within this conception of smaller population size, White (2020) explains that in Canada 'rural' typically refers to a population outside dense population centers of approximately 1,000 persons. per square kilometer. In Canada's neighbor, the USA, the understanding is that rural areas are outside big cities and primarily constituted of agricultural communities.

It is important to note that definitions of rurality used in other countries, although they may be helpful, may not be relevant to South Africa's colonial and apartheid history, which led to "skewed demography, vulnerable political economy, and inequitable educational provision characterizing rural areas" (Moletsane et al., 2017, p. 76). Dominantly, in SA, rurality is understood within the confines of demographics such as income per capita, population growth rate and size, location or proximity between the area and the city, and the type of governance that exists in the area. Starting with the latter, we referred to Myende and Hlalele (2018), who view a rural area as a place where traditional leaders govern. SA also experiences rural-urban migration, which has led to a "brain-drain" which strips rural areas of their few emancipated community members who leave to pursue a better life in the cities (Nwaka, 2021; Venturini & Goldstein, 2021). Contrary to the self-sufficient, agriculturally rich areas described in other contexts (as outlined earlier), most rural areas in SA are far from self-sufficient. However, most agricultural contribution to the country's gross domestic product is attributed to rural areas; the vast majority of most inhabitants are not farmers. Instead, many are farm workers, often earning below the minimum wage (Hlalele, 2012). The schools used in this paper fall within the Quintile 1 category of schools in terms of the National Norms and Standards for School Funding defined in the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 1996). Quintile 1 schools comprise primarily poor, rural schools, while Quintile 5 includes well-resourced, predominantly urban schools. Schools in Quintile 1 to Quintile 3, because of the poverty associated with rurality in South Africa (Moletsane, 2012), are exempt from paying school fees. Therefore, they have no additional revenue beyond their budget allocation from the government. This makes such schools solely dependent on government funding.

It is apparent that, in our discussion, we have not focused on the negative aspects that are usually associated with rurality, such as underdevelopment, lack of infrastructure, poor telecommunication services and so forth (Mngoma & Ayonrinde, 2023; Plagerson, 2023). While we note these negative aspects of rurality, our positioning is that rural areas have, for a very long time, remained a place of choice to live and raise a family for many of its dwellers (Hlalele, 2012). However, cities continue to benefit from the brain drain in rural areas because of the lack of economic opportunities primarily found in the cities. Still, we argue that rural communities have resources that, if identified and mobilized, can play a pivotal role in improving the quality of education. With this argument, our next section looks into the types of resources that are present in different communities.

Resources in the context of rurality

We believe that, despite the negative conceptions usually associated with rurality in SA, rural areas have resources that can contribute to improving the quality of the education provided. According to Green and Haines (2015), community resources may be defined as gifts, skills and capacities of individual associations and institutions within the community. These may be of the utmost importance to the community, as they can be used to reduce or prevent injustices. This conception extends the scope of what we can view as the resources within communities and schools.

We acknowledge the work of Chikoko and Khanare (2012), who view rural school stakeholders as contributing both non-material and material resources. In their categorization of resources, these scholars use Mourad and Ways' (1998) classification of a primary, secondary, and outside tier. These tiers are essential because they may guide school stakeholders in how and where to mobilize resources – in other words, as resource mobilization strategies in rural contexts. The primary tier consists mainly of resources that school stakeholders may mobilize within the school and over which the school has complete control. Chikoko and Khanare (2012) explain that the secondary tier comprises resources within the school's immediate community. The last or outside tier encompasses resources beyond the school and its immediate community (Chikoko & Khanare, 2012). While the nature of resources in the context of rurality may not differ entirely from the nature of resources in other contexts, it is important to highlight in this paper that traditional leadership remains one unique and often untapped resource in the rural settings of SA (Mbokazi, 2015; Mkhize, 2018). The importance of traditional leadership can be explained as follows. Traditional leadership in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, where this study was conducted, is hierarchical, consisting of the King at the top, followed by the Amakhosi (chiefs) and Izinduna as provided for in the KwaZulu-Natal Traditional Leadership and Governance Act, No. 5 of 2005. Traditional leaders are known for their firm, solid possession of political capital and ability to command respect from their local people and others accessing their territory (Myende & Nhlumayo, 2020; Balasuriya, 2023). Traditional leaders were found to be instrumental in establishing key partnerships and encouraging parental involvement (Mbokazi, 2015; Myende & Nhlumayo, 2020).

Emerging from the above is that, despite their location, schools are likely to be located in areas with different resources. This paper ventures into this gap, and through participatory research, this research not only exposes the resources but also stirs and enhances awareness and agency among the participants. In the next section, we explore the theoretical framework utilized for this research.

Resource Mobilization Theory

We adopted the Resource Mobilization Theory (RMT) as a theoretical framework. This was one of the major sociological theories to emerge in the 1970s (Kendal, 2006). It stresses the ability of a movement's members to acquire resources and to mobilize people towards accomplishing the movement's goals. Early adherents of RMT (White, 2015; McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Tilly, 1978;

Zald & McCarthy, 1987) sought to understand how rational and often the most marginalized social actors are effectively mobilized to pursue desired social change goals. RMT acknowledges the role that can be played by the study of social movements (SMOs) in advocating, expressing and addressing the challenges of resource scarcity. For instance, Kendal (2006) argues that social movements succeed by effectively mobilizing material and non-material resources and developing political opportunities for their members. Material resources include money, organizations, the workforce, technology, means of communication and mass media. In contrast, non-material resources include legitimacy, loyalty, social relationships, networks, personal connections, public attention, authority, moral commitment, and solidarity (Kendal, 2006).

Edwards and Kane (2014) and Hamilton (2023) indicate that early formulations of the resource mobilization perspective fell into two groups: an organizational, social entrepreneurial perspective, which is linked to McCarthy and Zald (2001), and the political perspective, which is linked with Tilly (1978). The entrepreneurial model analyzes social action as determined by the economic factors affecting a social movement. It argues that grievances may not be the only reason for establishing social movements. However, accessibility and monopoly over resources are crucial determinants in forming social movements. The political model strongly emphasises the political struggle instead of economic factors. We posit that both approaches are geared towards bringing about desired social and organizational change, emphasizing their importance in understanding the nature of resources and their potential benefits (Maggott, 2023; Manky, 2018; Zald, 2017).

METHODOLOGY

In this study, we adopted a qualitative participatory approach underpinned by critical emancipatory research (CER). Critical emancipatory research has its foundations in the critical theory paradigm (Banakuka, 2023; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). It concerns itself with research processes aimed at creating awareness among people regarding challenges they face. Simultaneously, CER tries to create a space where the researcher and the participants empower one another to utilize their capital in resolving societal challenges (Mahlomaholo, 2010; Schmid, 2023). CER is part of a broader qualitative inquiry; thus, it also takes place in the natural world of the participants. Qualitative inquiry occurs in the natural settings of participants (Creswell & Clark, 2019), where researchers are instruments through the notion of the 'I was there' phenomenon (Wolcott, 1995). In this study, the natural setting refers to schools within a rural context. We used three schools within one community, namely the uMzimkhulu Local Municipality. These three schools are situated within a rural context where the marginalization of communities in various forms still exists. For example, the communities in this study still experience limited access to water while simultaneously facing several social constraints that limit their agency in addressing their issues.

We chose CER because it emphasizes connectivity between the investigator and the investigated (Ivey, 1986). This enables participants not to be treated like objects in a scientific experiment (Mahlomaholo, 2010) but as equal partners. The CER principles of equality, participation, social justice and human emancipation ensure that the marginalized voices of schools' stakeholders are acknowledged and that the effects of power relations are minimized (Dube & Hlalele, 2018; Mahlomaholo, 2010). Mahlomaholo and Nkoane (2002) advise that the investigator and the participants are interested in social transformation that will enable emancipation, democracy and equity. Therefore, critical theory epistemology, as conceptualized in this study, presumes that the participants and the researcher are connected (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The methodology adopted is sensitive to and embraces the plight of schools within rural contexts. This is rooted in emancipatory epistemology, which prioritizes the interests of those situated at the margins of society, burdened and enslaved (Mahlomaholo & Nkoane, 2002; Dahal, 2023). CER resonates with RMT, which is driven to enact change by creating a community that can address its challenges. Likewise, CER is change and empowerment-driven (Myende, 2014).

The goals of participatory methodology and CER are grounded in the critical paradigm. The methodology involves working collaboratively with stakeholders to find solutions applicable to the prevailing context (McKenzie & Skrla, 2023). Additionally, it advocates hope and advances the active participation of stakeholders in producing research knowledge (Cumbo & Selwyn, 2021). Participatory research strives to empower communities to address their challenges, which resonates with our beliefs and research intentions.

Table 1.

Profile of participants

	Stakeholder	**Number**
1.	School Principal: A (Male), B (Female), C (Male)	3
2.	Teacher: SGB A (Female), B (Female), C (Male)	3
3	Parent: SGB A (Female), B (Male), C (Female)	3
4.	Trade union (2 Males & 1 Female)	3
5.	Non-profit organizations (NPOs) 2 Females & 1 Male	3
6.	Corporate social investment (CSI) manager: A (Female), B (Male), C (Female)	3
7.	Local municipality (1 Male)	1
	Total	**19**

In this study, we worked with 19 school stakeholders (research participants) attached to three schools in the uMzimkhulu Circuit in the uMzimkhulu Municipality. These are described in Table 1.

The participants were purposively selected based on their roles in the schools and the community. This is in keeping with the tenets of purposive selection, which foregrounds the

notion of handpicking participants (Cohen et al., 2018) based on their possession of rich information that will provide insights about the phenomenon - resources mobilization in the case of this study (Patton, 2002).

Methods

To generate rich qualitative data, we used four methods or techniques consistent with participatory research. These were free attitude interviews (FAIs), SWOT analysis, transect walks and photovoice. According to Meulenberg-Buskens (1993), a Free Attitude Interview encourages a data-generation process that is as humane as possible. This ensures that participants are respected and not undermined (Mahlomaholo & Netshandama (2010); Maboya et al. (2022). The second method was a SWOT analysis (the acronym for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) conducted with all participants from all three sites during the mapping phase of the study. We used the SWOT analysis during the community mapping exercise because it assisted in conscientizing the participants in identifying strengths and utilizing them while also exploring opportunities and mitigating the threats. It further exposed the weaknesses to counteract and minimize them (Puyt et al., 2023). The school principals, the School Governing Board (SGB) members, union representatives, and representatives from non-profit organizations (NPOs) worked together to identify internal and external forces that impacted the identification and mobilization of resources.

A transect walk was the third technique we used. Ingold and Lee (2008) propose that taking a walk with participants stimulates a sense of togetherness with the environment, which enables researchers and co-researchers to understand how, for example, places are developed by the routes people take in relation to resource mobilization. The transect walk allowed participants to identify resources and opportunities in different areas within the community (Okoko & Prempeh, 2023). This study identified these during the walk with school principals and other school-based stakeholders (Almario–Desoloc, 2023).

The fourth technique was photovoice, and through it, we sought to achieve three objectives as recommended by Wang and Pies (2004). Firstly, it facilitated the capturing of (through photographs taken by the local stakeholders themselves) and discussion about the nature of resources within the rural context of the locality (Bandauko & Arku, 2023). Secondly, it facilitated practical group discussions about what the photographs captured and what they signified. At the same time, special attention was paid to issues that are challenges and those who addressed such challenges in identifying and mobilising resources in schools (Muller, 2023). Thirdly, the ideas, challenges and solutions shared in the discussion with the stakeholders were linked to strategies for identifying and mobilizing school resources (Gabrielsson et al., 2022). Our analysis had both deductive and inductive dimensions to it. It was deductive because some themes were derived from the questions we posed to the participants, and others emerged from our analysis (the inductive dimension). We used thematic analysis to analyze transcribed data from the Free Attitude Interviews, transect walks and photovoices (Braun & Clarke, 2023). Hesse-Bieber and Leavy (2011) maintain that the central issue in thematic analysis is that the

research participants' subjective meanings and social realities are conveyed in the research report. As a first step to get to the participants' perspectives, we read the interview transcripts repeatedly. As we continued reading, we identified codes of meaning, which we later grouped to develop themes. Similarly, in conversations with the participants about the photos they had taken as part of the photovoice technique adopted in the study, we scrutinized their explanations about the contents of the photographs. This kind of analysis constituted the inductive aspect of our research, while the other themes were generated from the literature about the nature of rural communities. In other words, deductive and inductive analyses were used in an integrated and complementary manner, as indicated in the following results section. We used the theory and literature to discuss the themes that emerged during our data analysis, interpretation and discussion of the findings. Resource Mobilization Theory was implemented as a framework for the analysis.

To ensure rigor, we used a variety of techniques that are appropriate to participatory research and critical emancipatory research methodologies, such as the use of reflective journals and member-checking to ensure that what emerged from our continuous interactions with participants was not influenced in any way by our interpretations and biases. Field notes captured in our reflective journal entries were augmented by confirmability sessions we held with participants during the Free Attitude Interviews. In such sessions, we shared our interpretations of what was emerging from our analysis with them, and they were requested to confirm or refute these. In some instances, they further clarified what they had told us.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The findings are presented and discussed under two broad themes that emerged during the inductive and deductive data analyses. In other words, the themes draw on the theories, literature, predetermined research questions and the issues emerging from the field. These themes are (a) the nature of resources in the context of rurality and (b) the strategies and approaches for resource identification and mobilization. These two broad themes were crafted from the research questions of this study, and under each theme, we used subthemes that emerged from the data.

The nature of resources in the context of rurality

To understand the nature of resources in the context of rurality, we used multiple data-generation strategies, as described in the methodology section. Drawing from the literature reviewed, we analyzed what the participants identified as resources within their vicinity. The study's results clearly showed that, firstly, the participants were acutely aware of their environment, and could identify resources both in the primary and secondary tier. For example, a parent participant had this to say:

Partnerships with NPOs, parents, community and the corporate sector presents opportunities for mobilizing resources for the school (Parent: SGB C).

Secondly, the results revealed that the resources took the form of human and social capital in the community. The next section elaborates on these resources: local public and private institutions, traditional leadership and parents, all of which are significant resources in their context.

Local private and public institutions as resources

Participants at all three sites identified several local private institutions (businesses) as possible supporters of what schools do. These businesses either worked with the schools or were identified by participants as possible partners. The photos that the participants took during the transect walks (shown below) depict some of these local institutions.

Figure 1:

Pictures of businesses identified by participants during transect walks

The three pictures above were taken by participants during the transect walks. Photo 1 and Photo 2, shown in **Figure 1**, illustrate school signboards erected by two companies that the participants identified as great resources for their schools. For the participants, the erected signboards indicated that the concerned companies approached the schools. What we noted with some degree of surprise is that although relationships existed between the schools and companies, the participants in all three schools were not able to sustain the relations so that they could benefit the school effectively. This was even though they unanimously acknowledged these companies as great resources into which schools needed to tap. What was more surprising was that the two principals whose schools had signboards reflecting these companies' logos were not using the companies in any tangible way. The third principal was new to the school and had not established any contact with the private sector at the time of the study. Photo 3 in **Figure 1** shows a hardware store that has been supportive to the school.

The discussions that followed the transect walks and the SWOT analysis suggested similar views to those presented in the photographs. In response to the issue of local private institutions constituting key assets, the interview with Corporate Social Investment (CSI) Manager A, from one local company, said:

Let me state that education is one of our focus areas. I also concur with you that the biggest CSI slice goes to education. We support schools situated within our footprint.

Showing his awareness of the importance of business, Principal A stated: “We need to identify companies that will be able to assist us.” Awareness of businesses as important resources was also reflected by the School Governing Body (SGB) teacher representative who stated that “(t)he school must learn to work with business”. Implicit in these remarks is the awareness of opportunities proffered through the availability of these companies and their potential usefulness for resource mobilization.

Figure 2:

Pictures of churches identified by participants during transect walks

An important issue that surfaced from the data is the value that participants attached to the church as an institution in their communities, as depicted in Pictures 1 and 2 in **Figure 2**. Participants from all three sites had taken pictures of different churches, even though only two are displayed here. The church as a crucial resource was also discussed during the Free Attitude Interviews. During the discussions, Principal A highlighted the existence of a fruitful relationship with the church and stated:

Our school has a good relationship with the nearby church and the church supports the school with donations and volunteers.

The SGB teacher representative from School C added to this conversation by emphasizing the need for close collaboration between schools and the church. He said:

I believe as a school we need to continue to work with our local community, churches and NPOs.

On the role of the church, SGB Parent member A from Site A. brought a slightly different dimension to the discussion by highlighting an existing relationship with the church when he said, “Our fence is old, and the church is assisting with repairing the school fence”.

Besides the business sector and churches, the importance of local government institutions was evident, as reflected in **Figure 3**.

During the Free Attitude Interviews, the participants stressed the importance of the public sector as a resource within rural contexts. In this regard, a parent member of the School Governing Body (SGB) from Site 2 highlighted the potential benefits of working with various departments when she said:

School stakeholders need to identify government departments that can bring resources to the school.

Figure 3.

Pictures of the public sector identified by participants during transect walks

During the same conversation, similar sentiments were expressed by the SGB Parent member from Site A. This is what this parent said:

Different government institutions should be able to assist schools in mobilizing resources.

Adding another layer of understanding of the public sector as a resource, Principal B from Site 2 expressed a slightly different view by highlighting the existing relationship with the provincial Department of Basic Education. She said:

There are a lot of resources that we receive from the Department of Basic Education in the form of stationery , books and money.

While it can be argued that it is the mandate of the Department of Basic Education to provide resources, photographs reveal further engagement by the Department of Rural Development, the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA), the Department of Public Works (DPW) and the Department of Higher Education.

In addition to the photos from the transect walks and the Free Attitude Interviews (FAIs), the participants were asked to compile their schools' and communities' SWOT analyses. It became clear that organizations (private and public) were among the opportunities identified by participants. This finding is consistent with the interviews and photo evidence, as discussed earlier. In **Figure 4** below, we share some findings from the SWOT analyses of the different sites. The evidence above provides a picture that reflects an awareness of the institutions and organizations that rural schools could bring on board to harness resources. However, what surfaced from the FAIs is that the capital held by these institutions was seldom used by schools, despite their awareness of its existence and availability. It was indirectly indicated at one site that a leadership change had adversely affected the sustainability of a relationship that had been established. One participant indicated during the discussion of business relationships that their school no longer had the principal who was there at the time that Clover (**Figure 1**) started working with the school; the current principal seemed unaware of the agreements between the school and the company. Nevertheless, the participants were aware that the schools could benefit from the companies that erected signboards at their main gates.

Figure 4.

Extracts from SWOT Analyses

Identification of businesses next to us presents an opportunity for attracting resources. (SWOT Analysis: Site A)
The school need to identify businesses that can adopt the school. (SWOT Analysis: Site B)
There is an opportunity to form partnerships with NPOs, parents, community and the corporate sector as a way of mobilizing resources for the school. (SWOT Analysis: Site C)

Another asset that South African schools can tap into is the structure of traditional leadership. We turn to this item in the next section.

Traditional leadership as a resource

The term 'traditional leadership' is used in this paper to refer to the indigenous leadership structure that predates colonial and apartheid South Africa. In the democratic era in SA, this term refers to those leaders who operate within traditional leadership structures as defined in the KwaZulu-Natal Traditional Leadership and Governance Act No. 5 of 2005. The participants regarded traditional leaders as important in connecting the school with other parts of the community. From the discussions with participants from all the sites, it appeared that traditional leadership as a structure, and traditional leaders as people who operate in that structure, were critical in linking the school with resources in the private sector, public sector, non-profit organizations and the community. The Corporate Social Investment (CSI) Manager B from Site 2 stated:

First, I think the traditional leadership council can play a critical role in mobilizing resources for schools in their areas. Even today at the office, I was attending to requests from NPOs and schools and asked my area managers if the applying NPOs or schools did go to Inkosi for endorsement and support.

Adding to the importance of traditional leadership, CSI Manager A stated:

I also believe that schools should always have an open relationship with traditional leaders in municipal areas as they connect schools with resources.

Both participants emphasized the critical role played by Amakhosi (chiefs) in supporting the mobilization of resources in their context. Corporate Social Investment (CSI) Manager B indicated that the Traditional Leadership Council played a critical role in endorsing and supporting schools' appeals for support from local business and NPOs. CSI Manager A emphasized the importance of schools having open relationships with the Amakhosi in their municipal areas, as they were key in serving as a connection between schools and resources. In other instances, it surfaced that traditional leaders played an extended role of being gatekeepers for local organizations' access to resources. The utterances by CSI Manager B regarding different resources found in the area that can be utilized by schools, emphasized this crucial role. He indicated that before NPOs could be supported by the municipality, they first

had to show that they had the blessing of the Inkosi (Chief) governing the area in which they were operating. He said (as cited above):

> … Even today at the office, I was attending to requests from NPOs and schools and asked my area managers if the applying NPOs or schools did go to the traditional leader (Inkosi) for endorsement and support.

The excerpts above show the importance of traditional leadership in rural communities – not only for individuals, but also for institutions in and around the community.

Parents as an important resource

It became clear during the study that the participants acknowledged parents as another important source of capital or resources. It is noteworthy that parents acted both as a resource in enhancing the learning and teaching culture in the schools and facilitating the identification and mobilization of resources. Photograph 1 in **Figure 5** was provided by teachers who were part of the study after their school had organized a *'Meet the Teacher Day'*. In this setup, parents are invited into the school together with their children, and they meet all the teachers who teach their children. Photograph 2 was taken during the transect walks at Site 2 and shows an Early Childhood Development center which, according to the teachers, was sponsored and built by parents from scratch.

Figure 5.

Parents at Site A & ECD center at Site B

Beside the two photos above, parents were featured in the SWOT analysis (opportunities section) at all the research sites (Sites A, B and C). Below. in **Figure 6**, are some points that were taken from the SWOT analyses of the research sites.

Figure 6.

Extracts from SWOT analyses

NPOs, parents to support RM efforts	*Swot analysis Site A*
Strong parental involvement	*Swot analysis Site B*
Involved parents	*Swot analysis Site C*

In addition to the transect walks and the SWOT analyses, the interviews also revealed the importance of parents as a resource. For example, Principal C at Site C had this to say:

> When there is a need to discuss with parents and the community, they all attend and are always committed to assist.

Emphasizing the value of parents as one of the school's assets, one parent who is an SGB member (SGB Parent from Site B) stated that several classrooms in the schools were built by parents. The parent stated:

Let me tell you that parents built this school. We have classrooms that were built by parents.

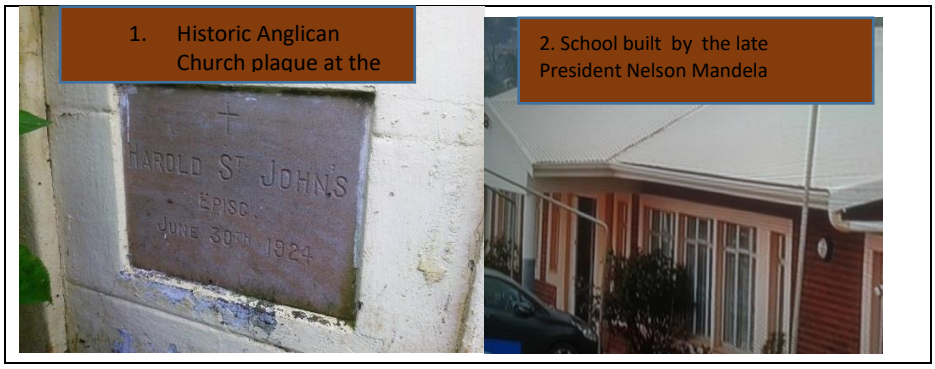
Emerging from the foregoing discussion is the primacy of agency, local human capital and the high value that parents attach to education, contrary to stereotypes that portray rural parents as both uneducated and lacking interest in the education of their children. Clearly, this study's findings challenge such generalized notions and stereotypes. The SWOT analyses at all three sites depicted the parents as being involved in the education of their children, and as supporting resource mobilization efforts.

Rich school history as a resource

During the transect walks, participants from two sites (Site 1 and Site 2) indicated that the schools' history formed one of the greatest resources or forms of capital. One of the two photographs shown in **Figure 7** reveals a school wall with an Anglican Church plaque dated 1924. The participants indicated that the school was initially built by the Anglican Church and they viewed this history as crucial for resource mobilization endeavors. They argued that such a heritage could be used to reconnect with the church to seek support in the form of donations. The second picture in **Figure 7** shows a school building. When participants were asked about the significance of this building, they pointed out that it was donated and opened by the late Dr Nelson Mandela in 1996. In the participants' views, this showed the school's rich history and they believed that this alone could be used as an opportunity for the school in terms of tapping into more resources.

Figure 7.

Anglican Church plaque and school building opened by Nelson Mandela



In relation to the photos above, the participants from Site 2 also pointed to the spade that the late President Nelson Mandela used for sod turning in 1996, which is displayed in a glass cabinet at the entrance of the reception area of the school. The participants indicated that their rich history was used to attract corporate, business and individual support for the school.

While the Anglican Church had initially built the school, the participants from Site 1 indicated that, although they had always viewed this history as important, they had not thought about its potential for attracting resources. They expressed a strong need to create awareness about this issue. The need for this awareness was also aired by SGB Teacher A from Site A when discussing the SWOT analysis. The teacher said:

The Anglican Church missionaries built the school in 1924. This provides a rich missionary history that may market the school and attract missionary tourism to new partnerships.

Furthermore, during the FAI, the principal from Site B showed awareness of the importance of the school's history, stating:

The fact that the school was built through the efforts of the late President Nelson Mandela after being approached by the previous principal gives us a rich culture and history that generate interest from people to want to know more about us.

The voices of the participants above emphasize the importance of school history as a resource in schools in rural contexts. For instance, SGB Teacher A at Site A indicated during the FAI that the school's history (having been founded by Anglican missionaries) may serve as an asset linking the school to its roots and attracting missionary tourism for the school that may lead to the mobilization of resources. Discussions with Principal B from Site B further emphasized the importance of school history in attracting resources when the principal highlighted the fact that Shell South Africa built the school after the late President Nelson Mandela was approached by the previous school principal. The principal further indicated that their rich school history generates interest from different people who want to know about the school, which might enable the school to attract resources.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The discussion is organized into four themes that we have developed from our analysis. The themes relate to the identification and mobilization of resources. The four themes are (a) Traditional leadership and parents as human capital; (b) Cultural capital; (c) History as a strategy for attracting resources; (d) Public, private and faith-based organizations as social-organizational capital. Each of these themes is presented below.

(a) Traditional leadership and parents as human capital for resource mobilization

This study found that ***traditional leadership*** and ***parents*** constituted important ***human capital***. As conceptualized by Emery and Flora (2006, p. 21), human capital "refers to the skills and abilities of people to develop and enhance their resources and to access outside resources and bodies of knowledge in order to increase their understanding, identify promising practices, and to access data for community-building". According to Edwards and Kane (2014), human resources, like material resources, are more solid and easier to verify than the three resource such as experience, skills and knowledge.

According to Mbokazi (2015) and Mawere et al. (2022), traditional leaders have a history of working with the structures that govern schools which can be traced from the Bantu

Education era to post-1994. Amakhosi (chiefs) are important agents when it comes to mobilizing rural communities because they are respected within the community (Huizenga, 2022; Koenane, 2017). Our findings reinforce the view that traditional leaders are important in the provision of education in rural schools in SA.

Two dimensions emerged from the findings. The first is that traditional leadership is viewed as a form of human capital which is already being utilized, while the second suggests that although it remains a source of human capital, it assumes a further potential. In terms of the first dimension, participants such as the CSI Manager B have indicated that before NPOs are supported by the Municipality, they first have to show that they have the blessing of the Inkosi governing the area where these organizations are operating. The findings have also shown that the endorsement of the Amakhosi is important for any potential investment by the business sector in the community and schools.

The second-dimension positions traditional leadership as human capital that has the potential to enhance efforts to mobilize resources. Utterances such as "*I think the traditional leadership council can play a critical role in mobilizing resources for schools in their areas"* by CSI Manager B, and "*I also believe that schools should always have an open relationship with traditional leaders"* by CSI Manager A serve as illustrations of the second dimension. Arguing from within the asset-based approach, Hlalele (2014) opines that rurality is always perceived from what it does not have or cannot achieve. Therefore, when employing RMT in this case, the findings call for the acknowledgement of traditional leadership as a resource that is already available within rural contexts, before looking elsewhere. Similarly, our discussions with participants from all the sites identified traditional leadership as critical in linking schools with resources in the private and public sector, and with non-profit organizations on the one hand and the community on the other. This study has challenged the view that underestimates traditional leadership as human capital and commends the efforts by the South African government to reinstate the powers and dignity taken away from traditional leaders by colonialism and apartheid. We argue here that this process has to be accompanied by deliberate education efforts aimed at conscientizing people to be proud of their indigenous institutions and preserve them as a national asset that can be leveraged for mobilizing resources in their context.

The findings also regard parents as important resources that school stakeholders identify as human capital in their context. There are multiple gains that parents bring to the mobilization of resources within rural contexts. In the section 'Parents as important resources' we elaborate on this point, giving the example of a 'Meet the Teacher Day'. From the SWOT analyses and FAIs, it was clear that the participants identified parents as the main resource in assisting the school to mobilize resources. The transect walks also affirmed the importance of parents as a resource for resource mobilization.

Viewing parents as a resource finds resonance with various scholars such as Chikoko and Khanare (2012), Edwards and Kane (2014), Khong (2016), and Myende and Nhlumayo (2020).

For example, Khong (2016) argues that parents possess a huge potential to create favorable learning conditions by mobilizing financial and physical resources required by the school. On the same issue, Myende and Nhlumayo (2020) contend that parents are an important resource in improving academic performance in schools within rural contexts. Similarly, Witte and Sheridan (2011) argue that rural schools are uniquely placed to nurture parental involvement and benefit from it. Witte and Sheridan (2011) further maintain that owing to their centrality within communities, rural schools constantly interact with parents and families at different levels. Resource Mobilization Theory (Edwards & Kane, 2014; Manky, 2018) identifies parents as a resource located within human resources.

(b) Cultural capital as a factor in resource mobilization

Cultural capital was identified as another critical resource. Cultural capital refers to how people interact with and understand their world in relation to education. It affects what voices are heard and which voices are silenced (Emery & Flora, 2006). Therefore, we suggest that cultural capital may enable school stakeholders to strengthen school-community partnerships in all three community tiers (Mourad & Ways, 1998). Edwards and Kane (2014) suggest that culture may include acknowledged and ignored symbols, beliefs, values, identities, and the behavioral norms of a group of people that anchor their behaviors and how they interact both socially and with the environment. Therefore, culture is a reserve supply of resources ready for use by school stakeholders within rural contexts in much the same way as structural resources are (Saha, 2021). Edwards and Kane (2014) advise that cultural resources are neither equally distributed socially within a given space nor universally accessible to potential movements, actors and organizations. We argue that schools should be aware of the cultural resources within their context and utilize them to advance the mobilization of resources. Music, literature, web pages, or films and videos as cultural products assist in the socialization and encourage the capacity of social movements and organizations to engage in collective action that will leverage the required resources (Edwards & Kane, 2014). It is against this background that schools need to be aware of the cultural resources at their disposal and utilize them to enhance resource mobilization efforts.

(c) History as a strategy for attracting resources

We argue that despite the importance of history in our current and future lives, organizations such as schools have not paid enough attention to preserving and narrating their ***history as a strategy for attracting resources***. All data sources indicate that schools within rural contexts have rich histories but also that they have not viewed those histories as important assets. We considered the examples of a school established by Anglican Church missionaries and another built and opened by the late President Nelson Mandela, using funding from Shell South Africa (**Figure 7**). Evidently, such history can be used as an asset for resource mobilization, but the participants had not consciously realized this potential prior to the study. The free attitude interviews (FAIs) and SWOT analyses we conducted indicated the importance of schools' history as a cultural resource and potential resource mobilization strategy in the rural context, as seen

from the participants' perspectives. For instance, the Anglican Church history of the one school might have tourism potential. Kipping, Wadhwani and Bucheli (2014) also emphasize the importance of history. We therefore argue that schools should tap into their rich history as a cultural resource and strategy to identify and mobilize resources.

(d) Private and public organizations and churches as social-organizational capital

Our analysis and the work of McCarthy (1996) further strengthen our argument that certain resources can be described as ***social-organizational capital***. These resources include infrastructure, coalitions, partnerships and pressure groups. Edwards and Kane (2014) point to the fact that such resources may be manipulated and controlled by those who are in power. In essence, issues of access to these resources can be used as a tool to marginalize and exclude some, as in the case of the rural communities and schools in this study.

Private and public organizations and ***churches*** were identified as residing under the classification ***social-organizational capital*** in this study. We argue that in SA, exclusionary practices embedded in the apartheid past denied some communities access to resources and created marginalized rural communities and schools in the process (Gardiner, 2008; Nelson Mandala Foundation [NMF], 2005). Tilly (1998) stresses this point and states that resources identified as social organizational resources can be withheld by those in power and denied to those perceived as outsiders or different from those in power. We contend here that similar patterns of exclusionary practices have resulted in an unequal society in SA, especially in rural communities and schools. Social-organizational capital refers to the connections between people and organizations that enable positive and negative things to happen (Emery & Flora, 2006, p. 21). The literature (Gardiner, 2008; NMF, 2005) depicts rural communities as marginalized, with resources far away from them. However, on the marginalization issue, Emery and Flora (2006) believe that rural communities are rich in terms of social-organizational capital. Owing to the resources housed in these sectors, the participants identified private and public organizations as crucial school resources. There are multifaceted gains to be reaped for schools from the two sectors. For example, it was clear that the schools received significant support from different government services. SGB Parent member B from Site 2 recognized the need for *"identifying government departments that can contribute resources to the school is important".* Similarly, during the transect walk discussions, it was revealed that the private sector could help with the funding of education, the provision of mentorship and the exposure of learners to practical business experience through educational visits.

The findings discussed above align with the literature discussed in this study. For example, according to Myende (2014), rural schools can tap into public and private sector resources. On the other hand, Mahlomaholo (2012) opines that rural areas, unlike urban areas, are not close to government power as they lie on the margins of social, educational, political and economic resources. The Nelson Mandela Foundation (2005) study describes rural schools as located *emaphandleni*, which means where there is dust, isolation, deprivation and distance from resources. Implied here is the notion of the marginalization of such places, largely due to

spatial issues. Similarly, Bourdieu et al. (1994) and Westaway (2012) emphasize the wide distance between rural schools and private and public resources. Contrary to this literature, the findings of this study show that many companies have identified rural areas as places for business. During the transect walks, as displayed in **Figure 1**, it was evident that there are many companies that were not far from the rural schools. This then shows that rural schools can tap into what these sectors can provide.

Similarly, government departments such as the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform (DRDLR), Department of Higher Education (DHET), Department of Social Development (DSW), Department of Health (DOH), Department of Basic Education (DBE), South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) and Department of Public Works (DPW), were identified as public organization from which schools could seek resources as shown in **Figure 3** in our analysis. Various participants, including SGB Parent B and Principal B, acknowledged the role that various government departments can play in resource mobilization.

In linking the three tiers of assets to RM efforts, Chikoko and Khanare (2012), suggest that public and private organizations house possible resources for schools, although they further posit that these are at the third tier of assets. This means that, although schools cannot directly control them, through coordinated resource mobilization strategies, these resources can be mobilized by the schools. Contrary to the argument that these two sectors are at the third tier, in the rural context of the studied schools we found these public and private organizations very close to the schools, and thus easily accessible to them. RMT (Edwards & Kane, 2014; Manky, 2018) identifies the private sector as being in possession of material resources – physical and financial capital, and the public sector as being in possession of social-organizational resources – public goods like services and civil infrastructure. We argue that these can be harnessed for the identification and mobilization of resources to ensure the sustainability of the schools. Our analysis revealed the value that participants attach to the ***church*** as social-organizational capital. This was depicted in Photographs 1 and 2 of **Figure 2**. All participants from all three sites took pictures of different churches. The church as a crucial resource was confirmed in our discussions with the participants.

Historically, the church has played a critical role in the political changes in SA in the 20th and 21st centuries, focusing on dismantling apartheid, and promoting reconciliation and nation-building (Turek, 2020 ; Carmichael , 2023). Beukes and Beukes (2023) and Resane (2020) argue that even in formal education, the church has played a significant role. Jansen, Pretorius and Van Niekerk (2009) in turn posit that schools do not operate in isolation from other societal formations such as the government, community, business and the church. Arguing along similar lines, Myende and Nhlumayo (2020) has shown that the church has a critical role to play in assisting rural schools to mobilize resources. For example, his study found that the local religious community donated R1,6 million towards building 10 of the 18 classrooms. Other authors (Ditlhake & Maphosa, 2021; Knoetze & Black , 2023; Reddie, 2023) also highlight the role the church plays in community development and education, but lament the limited attention given

to the historical, current and future role of faith-based organizations. Our discussion which identified churches as a crucial resource was in line with the moral resources identified by Resource Mobilization Theory (Edwards & Kane, 2014). By moral resources, Edwards and Kane (2014) mean resources such as solidarity support, legitimacy and sympathetic support.

Limitations

Our research was a qualitative study conducted in three schools within a rural context. Therefore, our findings cannot be extended to other schools. However, we argue that the intention of this study was not to generalize the findings but, rather, to understand a practical case that can be used to unravel the discourse about resource mobilization and its implications for rural schools in South Africa. Additionally, to provide deeper insights about the phenomenon of resource mobilization, we have provided a detailed discussion of all the steps and processes used in conducting the study.

Conclusion

It is evident from the findings that the participants in this study were able to identify resources in the community that could be used to mobilize resources. It was also clear that hitherto, participants had not realized the importance of the resources in their communities. We can argue that the methodology we used in this study enabled them to develop new insights about the strengths and opportunities in their communities. The dominant discourse on resources in the community and their implications for resource mobilization was largely based on potential contributions towards strengthening schools' partnerships with various organizations (Bhengu & Svosve, 2019; Mkhize & Hungwe, 2022). The relationships with the Anglican and traditional leadership were the two main assets that the participants spoke about as being current working relationships that could be strengthened for further resource mobilization. The findings present three sets of capital under which resources that can drive the provision of quality education are housed. These are human, cultural and social-organizational capital. Based on the findings, we conclude that the dominant discourse that has suggested that rural areas lack capital is a "half reality". Nevertheless, we recognize the challenge of the lack of awareness of how what is available can be identified as a resource to enhance the provision of quality education. We therefore recommend focused approaches to resource identification and mobilization that recognize the value and importance of each resource and how it may be used for educational enhancement purposes. Based on this, we challenge those who lead schools to continuously engage in an exercise of scanning their environment to identify what works within the primary and secondary tier of resources, before resources are sought beyond the school vicinity.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declared that no conflicts of interest existed with respect to the research, authorship and publication of this article.

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Data availability statement

The data supporting this study's findings are available from the corresponding author upon request.

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