


Chapter 5


Rural School Teachers Leveraging Pandemic Teaching Experiences for Technology Integration in Post- Pandemic Classrooms

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how rural teachers in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa harness their experiences during the pandemic to integrate technology into post-pandemic pedagogical practices. Adopt TPACK theoretical framework, purposively selected 18 teachers in the Eastern Cape province's rural schools in South Africa. Data was collected through interviews and two sharing circles through a phenomenological approach and analyzed thematically. Findings reveal that rural teachers, initially intimidated by technology, adapted to its use out of necessity during the pandemic and came to view it as an essential teaching tool. Teachers embraced digital tools to overcome infrastructural challenges and maintain educational continuity, showing resilience and innovation, prompting teachers to

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acquire new competencies and reconsider their approach to integrating technology. These experiences continue to shape educational practices and promote sustained technological integration, indicating a marked shift in rural teachers' perspectives towards the role of technology in teaching.

INTRODUCTION

The global emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly transformed nearly every facet of life, including the realm of education (Dhawan, 2020). This shift posed a formidable challenge to the education sector, disrupting the learning experiences of over 1.7 billion students, as reported by UNESCO's COVID-19 Educational Disruption and Response guidelines for 2020 (UNESCO, 2020). Faced with this unprecedented situation undoubtedly occasioned an unprecedented disruption in the global education system (Takona, 2023), forcing a rapid and in many cases, unprepared shift from traditional in-person instruction to technology-mediated education (Shambare & Simuja, 2022). This significant shift also set and expanded the role of digital methodologies in educational settings, crucially shaping the dynamics of teaching and learning (Child & Song, 2023). This transition necessitated teachers to rapidly acquire and hone digital competencies, with some educators adapting the forced digital immersion to innovate their pedagogical practices.

Prior to the pandemic, educational technologies were already being integrated in education in some developed and developing countries with an emphasis on improving the quality of education (Linnes, Ronzoni, Agrusa & Lema, 2022). However, the school closures stemming from the pandemic swiftly turned this growing interest into an imperative need. The abrupt transition to online education was facilitated by digital platforms, e-learning, and other technologies (Dhawan, 2020), presenting a spectrum of challenges, particularly in developing countries such as South Africa, hindered by resource scarcity and limited access to the Internet (Mare, Woyo & Amadhila, 2022).

Moreover, in the context of rural education in South Africa, teachers were faced with unique challenges due to the lack of infrastructure, digital divide, and professional development opportunities to effectively incorporate technology in their pedagogical practices (Azionya & Nhedzi, 2021). Similarly, rural areas, like those in the Eastern Cape Province in South Africa are often characterized by inadequate access to technological resources (Fanteso & Yessoufou, 2022), making the sudden demand for online teaching during the pandemic a discouraging practice (Shambare & Simuja, 2022). Despite these challenges, some rural educators were able to make remarkable resilience and adaptability. Studies indicate that even with limited resources, many educators managed to integrate technology into their

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