

# Educational Stakeholders' Perceptions of Factors Contributing to Resistance to Pedagogical and Policy Changes in Rural Schools

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## INTRODUCTION & CONTEXTUAL DIVIDE

Resistance to change refers to individuals' or groups' hesitation to embrace new methods or practices, often due to fear, uncertainty, or attachment to established routines (Şahin et al., 2024). In rural school development, this resistance severely impacts teaching quality and learner performance, threatening to widen the existing educational gap between rural and urban schools (Lomba-Portela et al., 2022).

*"Facilitating change in rural schools is critical to address systemic challenges such as outdated pedagogical approaches, poor learner outcomes, and limited access to emerging digital infrastructures (Maifala, 2024)."*

In South Africa, rural classrooms face deep structural hurdles. Insufficient professional development prevents effective adoption of modern practices (Dikgale & Chauke, 2024), while lack of robust internet, basic facilities, and administrative isolation compound feelings of marginalization among staff.

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVE & QUESTIONS

This study addresses a critical gap: existing literature fails to sufficiently interrogate the localized socio-cultural and economic factors that anchor resistance in the North West Province.

- **Primary Objective:** Identify the specific structural, institutional, and socio-cultural factors inducing reluctance to adopt provincial educational mandates.
- **Central Research Question:** What factors contribute to resistance to pedagogical and policy change among educational stakeholders in rural schools in the Bojanala District?

## THEORETICAL INTEGRATION

This inquiry blends **Kurt Lewin's Change Model** (Unfreeze, Change, Refreeze) with **Social Constructivism** to analyze stakeholders' responses as a socially constructed reality rooted in communal values.

### 1. Unfreezing & Cognitive Dissonance

## PRIMARY EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

Thematic analysis following Braun & Clarke's (2006) protocol yielded 4 core thematic blocks that drive institutional paralysis:

### 1. Socio-Economic Hardship & Resource Scarcity

Critical Barrier

### 2. Communication Gaps & Policy Misalignment

High Impact

### 3. Intergenerational & Psychological Friction

Moderate-High

### 4. Cultural Preservation & Nostalgia

Socio-Cultural Context

#### 4.1. Lack of Understanding & Awareness

Top-down implementation without targeted local awareness leads to misinformation and systemic mistrust. Inadequate preparation reflects a failure in Lewin's "unfreezing" phase, leaving stakeholders without clear motivations to discard familiar routines.

#### 4.2. Cultural and Traditional Norms

Schools function as core cultural preservation centers. New methods are frequently rejected when perceived as threats to long-standing communal identities. Additionally, deep reverence for older, established teachers fosters a preference for conventional teaching over innovative digital strategies.

#### 4.3. Socio-Economic Hardship & Staffing Strains

Widespread rural poverty forces families to focus primarily on basic daily survival, depressing broad community support for long-term educational transitions. Financial barriers also constrain staffing options, forcing a heavy reliance on either inexperienced early-career teachers or re-employed retirees, both of whom exhibit distinct forms of pedagogical resistance.

#### 4.4. Attitudinal and Psychological Barriers

Internal friction across generations creates isolated micro-environments, driving early-career teachers out and reinforcing overall stagnation. Feelings of political fatigue turn into a passive reliance on the external Department of Education, crippling local proactivity.

## STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR SUSTAINABLE REFORM

Preparing educators and communities to see the necessity of reform by actively dismantling long-held administrative assumptions and institutional mindsets.

## 2. Collaborative Change Mediation

Utilizing targeted professional training and open communication as tools to turn top-down policies into a negotiated, trusted, shared group path.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Grounded in the **interpretivist paradigm** and utilizing an **intrinsic case study design**, this project prioritized understanding subjective human experiences behind organizational behaviors.

| Stakeholder Group           | Sample size | Targeted Analytical Lens  |
|-----------------------------|-------------|---|
| School Governing Body (SGB) | 5 Parents   | Community traditional values, parental expectations & trust profiles.     |
| Senior Management (SMT)     | 5 Educators | Classroom practice execution barriers, staff friction & age dynamics.     |
| Learners (Grade 12)         | 5 Students  | Direct lived experience of policy transition impacts (e.g., GEC mandate). |

*\*Exclusion criteria applied to any stakeholders with less than 6 months of institutional tenure or facing personal conflicts of interest.*

To move past administrative pushback and secure long-term stakeholder buy-in, rural policy rollouts should integrate three contextually responsive mechanisms:

**1. Culturally Synchronized Communication:** Reframe policy innovations so they actively respect and work alongside community traditions, turning local values into assets rather than structural roadblocks.

**2. Localized Professional Mentorship:** Implement multi-generational collaboration models that blend the technical skills of newer teachers with the community prestige of senior staff.

**3. Targeted Infrastructure Integration:** Bridge the urban-rural divide by ensuring provincial policy demands (such as the GEC mandate) are backed by foundational infrastructural and financial cushions.