

Systematic Review

Leveraging Social, Cultural and Economic Resources to Transform Rural School Habitus, a Bourdieuan Systematic Review

Maxwell Tsoka ^{1,*}  and Eric Machisi ² ¹ Department of Professional & Curriculum Studies, University of Venda, Thohoyandou 0950, South Africa² Mathematics Department, Fujairah Boys School 2, Fujairah P.O. Box 611, United Arab Emirates

* Correspondence: maxwelltsoka@yahoo.com

Abstract

Rural schools often operate within complex educational fields shaped by material, structural, and institutional constraints that influence teaching and learning opportunities. Although previous research has extensively documented resource limitations in rural education, deficit-oriented perspectives may overlook locally embedded resources that support school improvement. Drawing on Bourdieu's concepts of capital, habitus, and field, this systematic review synthesizes evidence from 44 studies published between 2000 and 2025 to examine how rural schools mobilize social, cultural, and economic forms of capital to transform educational practice. Using PRISMA 2020-guided procedures, the included studies were analyzed through thematic synthesis informed by a Bourdieuan theoretical lens. Findings indicate that rural schools possess diverse yet often underrecognized forms of capital embedded in community relationships, local knowledge, teacher expertise, alumni networks, and context-specific practices. However, the educational value of these resources depends on institutional conditions that enable their recognition, mobilization, and conversion within rural schooling fields. Based on these findings, the review proposes the Transformative Rural School Habitus Model (TRSHM), which conceptualizes how interactions among different forms of capital, conversion mechanisms, and institutional practices contribute to habitus transformation. The model provides a theoretically grounded framework for understanding rural school improvement as a relational process involving both resource mobilization and changes in the conditions through which resources become valued and utilized.

Keywords: Bourdieuan theory; cultural capital; rural education; school habitus; school improvement; social capital; teaching and learning



Academic Editor: Lawrie Drysdale

Received: 12 May 2026

Revised: 5 July 2026

Accepted: 20 July 2026

Published: 22 July 2026

Copyright: © 2026 by the authors.

Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland.

This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the [Creative Commons Attribution \(CC BY\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) license.

1. Introduction

Rural schools occupy diverse educational, geographical, socioeconomic, and cultural contexts, making rurality a complex and contested concept in educational research. Traditional definitions have often conceptualized rural schools through spatial characteristics such as geographical remoteness, low population density, distance from urban centers, and limited access to infrastructure and services (Roberts & Green, 2013). However, contemporary rural education scholarship increasingly challenges purely geographical interpretations and conceptualizes rurality as a relational and socially constructed phenomenon shaped by interactions among place, history, socioeconomic conditions, institutional arrangements,

cultural practices, and community relationships (Corbett, 2016; Cuervo, 2016; Green & Corbett, 2013). From this perspective, rural schools cannot be understood as a homogeneous category because rural educational experiences differ across national and regional contexts depending on how local conditions interact with broader political, economic, and educational fields (Bæck, 2016). Therefore, examining rural schooling requires attention not only to location but also to the social relations, resources, and institutional structures that shape educational opportunities.

Despite this diversity, many rural schools operate within educational fields characterized by structural constraints that influence teaching and learning opportunities. Research across different contexts has documented challenges related to inadequate infrastructure, limited instructional resources, teacher shortages, geographical isolation, and constrained institutional support (Adedeji & Olaniyan, 2011; Mtsi & Maphosa, 2016; Nkambule & Mukeredzi, 2017). These conditions influence the resources available to schools and contribute to persistent inequalities in educational opportunities.

However, focusing exclusively on material shortages risks reproducing deficit narratives that define rural schools primarily by what they lack. Such perspectives may overlook locally embedded resources, including community relationships, cultural knowledge, teacher expertise, local practices, and networks that can support educational improvement. Therefore, understanding rural schooling requires moving beyond deficit explanations toward examining how available resources can be recognized, mobilized, and converted into educational advantage. This shift from deficit-based to asset-oriented perspectives is consistent with broader developments in rural education scholarship. Historical analyses have shown that rural education research has frequently portrayed rural schools as educational problems defined by scarcity, isolation, and disadvantage, while giving comparatively less attention to the strengths, resources, and capacities embedded within rural communities (Biddle & Azano, 2016). Recognizing these locally situated assets provides an important foundation for understanding how rural schools can mobilize different forms of capital to support teaching and learning.

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of capital, habitus, and field provides a useful relational framework for examining these processes. From a Bourdieuan perspective, educational practices and outcomes are shaped not only by the possession of resources but also by how different forms of capital are valued, legitimized, and converted within particular social fields (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Schools may possess various forms of social, cultural, and economic capital, yet these resources influence educational outcomes only when they are recognized as valuable within the educational field.

Previous research has extensively documented the structural inequalities affecting rural schools, including limited access to educational resources and unequal institutional opportunities (Molaudzi & Adeyemo, 2022; Phaswana, 2018; Stephen & Nkosi, 2025). However, less attention has been given to synthesizing how rural schools identify, mobilize, and transform locally available forms of capital into improved teaching and learning practices. This gap is particularly important because resources embedded within rural communities may remain invisible or undervalued when viewed through conventional measures of educational advantage.

Accordingly, this systematic review synthesizes empirical research examining how locally embedded forms of social, cultural, and economic capital are mobilized within rural schooling contexts and how these processes influence institutional practices and educational outcomes. Guided by Bourdieu's concepts of capital, habitus, and field, the review addresses the following research question:

How can locally embedded forms of social, cultural, and economic capital be mobilized and converted to transform institutional habitus and improve teaching and learning in rural schools?

Conceptual Framework

This study is guided by Pierre Bourdieu's theory of capital, habitus, and field, which provides a relational framework for understanding how educational processes are influenced by the distribution, recognition, and conversion of resources within structured social contexts (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). From a Bourdieuan perspective, educational outcomes cannot be explained solely by material resources; rather, they must be understood in terms of how different forms of capital function within institutional environments, and how these resources are legitimized, mobilized, and transformed into educational advantages.

Bourdieu conceptualizes capital as accumulated resources that provide individuals or groups with advantages within particular social fields (Bourdieu, 1986). Economic capital refers to material and financial resources that can be directly converted into monetary value, including funding, infrastructure, and physical resources that influence educational opportunities. Cultural capital refers to valued knowledge, competencies, dispositions, practices, and symbolic resources that exist in embodied, objectified, and institutionalized forms. Within schooling contexts, cultural capital shapes whose knowledge, practices, and ways of participating are recognized as legitimate.

The concept of social capital has been interpreted differently across sociological and educational research traditions, requiring clarification of its theoretical use in this review. As noted by Portes (1998), social capital remains a contested concept because different theoretical traditions emphasize different mechanisms through which social relationships generate benefits. Coleman (1988) conceptualizes social capital as a resource embedded within social structures that facilitates individual and collective action, while Putnam (1995) emphasizes trust, norms, cooperation, and civic participation within communities (Claridge, 2004; Portes, 1998). In contrast, Bourdieu conceptualizes social capital relationally as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources" linked to durable networks of mutual recognition (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 248). Therefore, this review adopts a specifically Bourdieuan interpretation of social capital. From this perspective, social relationships do not automatically constitute social capital; rather, networks become capital when they provide access to resources, opportunities, influence, or symbolic recognition within a particular field. Consequently, community relationships, parental involvement, alumni networks, and external partnerships are examined not simply as expressions of cooperation or community participation but as resources whose educational value depends on their recognition, mobilization, and convertibility within rural educational fields.

Habitus refers to structured systems of dispositions that shape perception, practice, and expectations (Bourdieu, 1990). Within schooling, institutional habitus comprises the shared norms, orientations, and practices that organize teaching and learning. These dispositions are historically formed through accumulated experience yet remain responsive to changing structural and material conditions. As patterns of resource access and institutional practice shift, habitus may gradually be reconfigured, altering how educational actors perceive possibilities and organize practice (Bourdieu, 1990; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

Capital and habitus acquire meaning within what Bourdieu describes as a field: a structured social space characterized by particular rules, power relations, forms of recognition, and struggles over legitimacy (Bourdieu, 1990; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Fields determine not only the distribution of resources but also which forms of capital are valued, legitimized, and convertible into advantage (Grenfell, 2014; Thomson, 2016). Therefore, pos-

sessing social, cultural, or economic resources does not automatically result in educational advantage; these resources must be recognized as valuable within the educational field.

In rural schooling contexts, the educational field includes policy environments, curriculum structures, governance systems, accountability mechanisms, and broader socioeconomic relations that shape how schools operate. Locally embedded resources, such as community knowledge, social networks, agricultural practices, and teacher expertise, may exist within rural communities but remain undervalued when they do not correspond to dominant forms of recognized capital. This explains why resources available in rural communities do not automatically translate into improved educational outcomes. Transformation of rural school habitus, therefore, requires changes not only in the availability of capital but also in the field conditions through which different forms of capital are legitimized, mobilized, and converted into improved teaching and learning practices (Reay, 2004, 2018).

Educational change depends not only on resource availability but also on the processes of capital mobilization, recognition, and conversion within institutional settings (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). When locally embedded forms of capital are legitimized and strategically used, they can reshape institutional habitus and foster new patterns of teaching and learning. Conversely, if recognition structures are restrictive, available resources may be underutilized or symbolically marginalized. This relational understanding of capital, habitus, and field provides the theoretical basis for examining how rural schools mobilize and convert locally embedded forms of capital in resource-constrained environments. It also informs the development of the Transformative Rural School Habitus Model (TRSHM), presented in the findings section of this paper, which conceptualizes how capital mobilization, institutional mediation, and recognition processes interact to reshape educational practice and outcomes.

2. Materials and Methods

This study employed a systematic literature review design, guided by the PRISMA 2020 principles, to synthesize empirical research on improving teaching and learning in rural schools through a Bourdieuan lens. Although this systematic review was not formally preregistered with PROSPERO or other review registries, a review protocol was established prior to data extraction and synthesis to enhance transparency and methodological consistency. The protocol specified the review question, databases, search strategy, inclusion and exclusion criteria, screening procedures, quality appraisal approach, and synthesis methods. These procedures were followed consistently throughout the review process to strengthen reliability and replicability.

2.1. Search Strategy

A comprehensive literature search was conducted across four databases: EBSCOhost, ERIC, PsycINFO, and Google Scholar. These databases were selected to provide broad interdisciplinary coverage of scholarship related to rural education, educational sociology, psychology, and school improvement. ERIC and EBSCOhost were included because of their extensive indexing of educational research. PsycINFO was selected to capture studies addressing psychological, social, and relational dimensions of schooling, while Google Scholar was used as a supplementary source to identify relevant peer-reviewed studies across disciplinary boundaries.

The search strategy combined terms related to rural schooling, educational improvement, and Bourdieuan theoretical constructs. The following Boolean search string was used, with minor adaptations according to database requirements: ("rural school*" OR "rural education" OR "improving rural education") AND ("teaching and learning" OR

“school improvement” OR “educational improvement”) AND (“Bourdieu” OR “capital” OR “social capital” OR “cultural capital” OR “economic capital” OR “habitus” OR “field”).

Searches were limited to peer-reviewed journal articles published in English between 2000 and 2025. This period was selected to capture contemporary developments in rural education research and the increasing application of Bourdieuan theoretical perspectives in educational studies. The search results from all databases were exported, combined, and screened systematically following PRISMA 2020 procedures.

2.2. Selection and Screening

The study selection process followed PRISMA 2020 guidelines. After the database search was completed, duplicate records were removed, and the remaining studies underwent a staged screening process. The first stage involved screening article titles and abstracts to assess their relevance to rural schooling, teaching, and learning, as well as to the review’s theoretical focus. Articles that appeared relevant proceeded to full-text eligibility assessment.

Studies were included if they (a) focused on rural primary or secondary schools, (b) examined teaching and learning processes, school improvement, or educational practices, and (c) provided empirical evidence or theoretically informed analysis of social, cultural, or economic resources relevant to schooling contexts. Both qualitative and quantitative studies were considered eligible because the purpose of the review was not to compare methodological outcomes but to synthesize how different forms of capital were mobilized within rural educational fields.

During full-text eligibility assessment, articles were excluded if they did not address rural primary or secondary schooling, did not engage with capital, habitus, resource mobilization, or institutional processes, were not peer-reviewed, or were outside the scope of the review. Studies were also excluded when they lacked sufficient analytical depth. In this review, sufficient analytical depth was defined as studies that went beyond identifying rural educational challenges and provided analysis of relationships, practices, resources, institutional conditions, or mechanisms that influence teaching and learning.

Two researchers independently conducted the title/abstract screening and full-text eligibility assessment. Differences in inclusion decisions were discussed and resolved through consensus before finalizing the studies included in the synthesis. The study selection process is summarized in the PRISMA flow diagram (Figure 1).

The database search yielded 1248 records across the four databases. After removing 268 duplicate records, 980 articles proceeded to the title and abstract screening stage. During this stage, 842 articles were excluded because they did not meet the review focus or inclusion criteria. The remaining 138 articles underwent full-text eligibility assessment, resulting in the exclusion of 94 articles that did not satisfy the eligibility requirements. Following this process, 44 studies met all inclusion criteria and were retained for quality appraisal and final thematic synthesis.

2.3. Quality Appraisal

Following completion of the full-text eligibility assessment, the studies retained for synthesis underwent structured quality appraisal using adapted criteria from the Critical Appraisal Skills Program (CASP) framework (CASP, 2018). The CASP framework evaluates research quality across three broad domains: methodological rigor (including clarity of research aims, appropriateness of study design, sampling, data collection, and analysis), credibility and transparency of findings (including interpretation of evidence, researcher reflexivity, and support for conclusions), and relevance and transferability (including contextual clarity and applicability of findings beyond the immediate study setting).

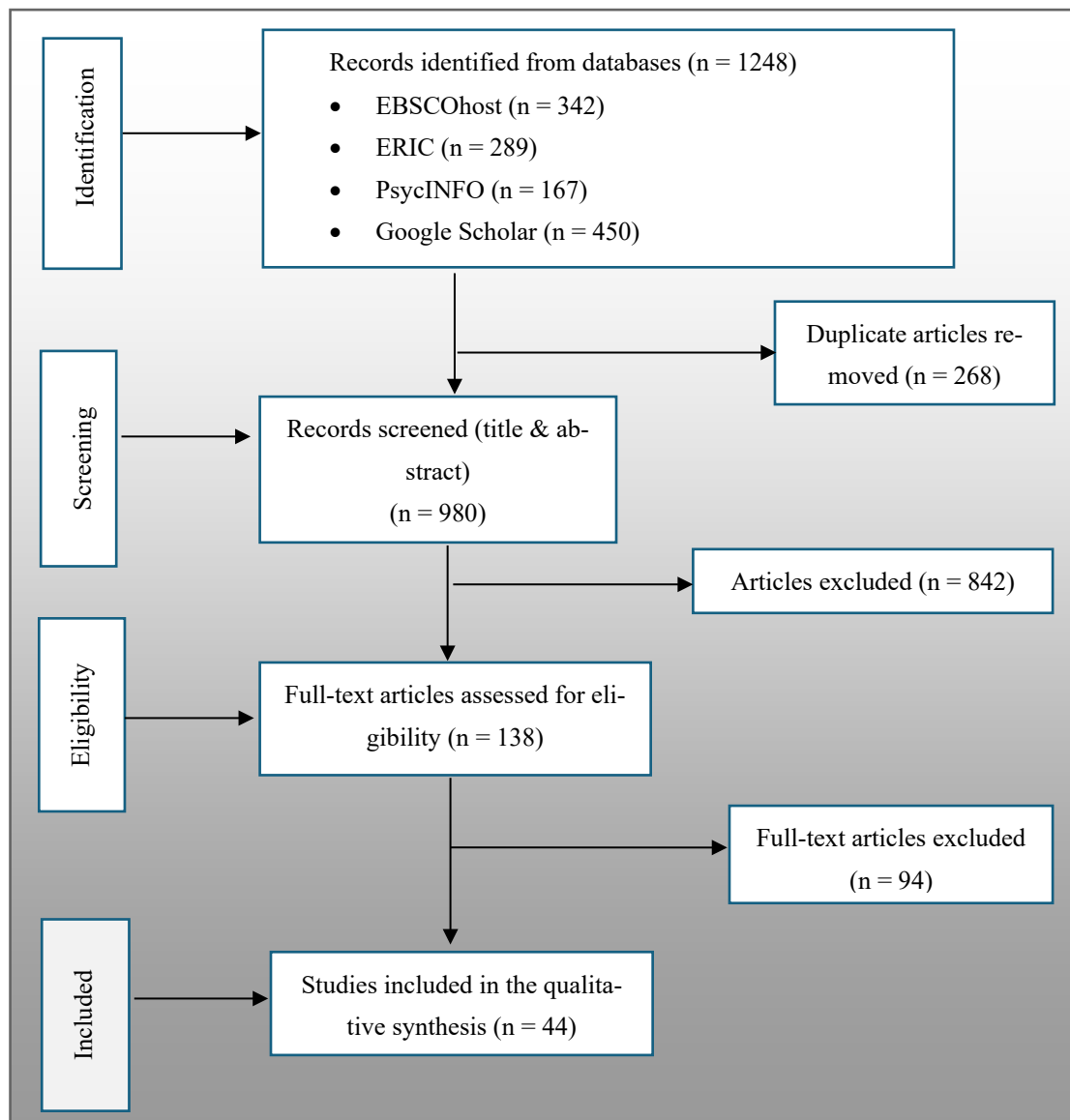


Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram of Study Selection.

Consistent with recommendations that appraisal tools may be adapted to align with the aims and contexts of systematic reviews (Long et al., 2020), the CASP criteria were refined to reflect this review’s focus on rural schooling. Attention was given to methodological quality, clarity of rural context, consideration of socioeconomic and institutional conditions, and relevance to understanding capital mobilization within educational settings. This appraisal process strengthened the credibility of the synthesis by ensuring that conclusions were informed by studies with sufficient methodological transparency and contextual relevance.

2.4. Data Extraction and Synthesis

A structured data extraction process was conducted to ensure systematic and consistent analysis across the included studies. A data extraction framework was developed to capture key characteristics of each study, including authorship, publication year, geographical context, study design, participant characteristics, educational level, and the forms of capital or resource mobilization examined. Information was also extracted regarding how studies conceptualized and applied Bourdieu’s constructs of capital, habitus, and field within rural schooling contexts.

Data extraction was conducted independently by the researchers, and the extracted information was compared to ensure consistency and accuracy. Differences in interpretation were discussed and resolved through consensus before proceeding to thematic analysis.

The extracted data were analyzed using thematic synthesis. The process followed established approaches to qualitative evidence synthesis, involving initial coding, development of descriptive categories, and generation of analytical themes. Bourdieu's concepts of economic, social, and cultural capital served as sensitizing theoretical constructs during initial coding, while allowing additional patterns related to capital mobilization, recognition, conversion, and institutional transformation to emerge inductively from the data.

During the first coding stage, researchers independently reviewed and coded the extracted data to identify recurring ideas related to resources, relationships, institutional practices, constraints, and transformation processes. Codes were then compared and refined through discussion to establish shared interpretations. Rather than calculating statistical intercoder reliability, which is more commonly associated with positivist content analysis, coding credibility was enhanced through researcher triangulation, consensus discussions, and the maintenance of an audit trail of coding decisions.

In the second stage, related codes were grouped into broader descriptive categories representing forms of capital and the conditions influencing their mobilization within rural schools. Finally, these categories were synthesized into higher-order analytical themes explaining how different forms of capital interact with field conditions to influence institutional habitus and educational practices. This interpretive synthesis informed the development of the Transformative Rural School Habitus Model (TRSHM), which represents the relationships among capital mobilization, conversion mechanisms, field conditions, habitus transformation, and educational outcomes.

3. Results

3.1. Characteristics of Included Studies

The first stage of analysis involved mapping the descriptive characteristics of the 44 studies included in the systematic review. This mapping provided an overview of the geographical distribution, methodological approaches, participant groups, educational contexts, and forms of capital examined across the reviewed literature (Table A1). The purpose of this descriptive analysis was to enhance transparency regarding the evidence base that informed the synthesis and to clarify the scope and diversity of studies from which the thematic findings were derived.

The reviewed studies represented diverse geographical contexts, reflecting the varied ways in which rural schooling is shaped by socioeconomic, cultural, historical, and policy conditions. Most studies were conducted in African contexts, particularly South Africa and other sub-Saharan countries, although studies from other regions, including Asia, Europe, and North America, were also represented (Table A1). This geographical diversity supports a relational understanding of rurality by recognizing that rural schooling experiences differ across educational fields rather than representing a single universal condition.

The included studies employed qualitative, quantitative, mixed-methods, and review-based designs, with qualitative approaches being most common (Table A1). This pattern reflects the review's focus on understanding processes through which resources, relationships, cultural practices, and institutional conditions influence rural teaching and learning. Participants across the reviewed studies included teachers, learners, school leaders, parents, community members, and other educational stakeholders. The studies examined economic, social, and cultural forms of capital, with many highlighting interactions among these forms rather than treating them as isolated resources.

Taken together, the descriptive mapping of the 44 included studies shows that the reviewed corpus was geographically, methodologically, and conceptually diverse. This diversity was important because it allowed the synthesis to examine rural schooling not as a single, uniform condition but as a set of context-specific educational fields in which resources are distributed, recognized, and mobilized differently. Building on this descriptive overview, the next section presents the thematic synthesis of how economic, social, and cultural forms of capital were represented across the reviewed studies and how these forms of capital shaped possibilities for transforming rural school habitus.

3.2. Thematic Findings

The thematic synthesis of the 44 included studies identified three interconnected themes explaining how rural schools experience, mobilize, and transform resources within their educational fields: (1) economic capital and material resource mobilization, (2) social capital through relational networks and partnerships, and (3) cultural capital embedded in knowledge, practices, and pedagogical resources. Although these themes correspond to Bourdieu's forms of capital, the synthesis revealed that school improvement depends less on the existence of individual resources and more on the conditions that enable their recognition and conversion into institutional advantage.

3.2.1. Economic Capital and Material Resource Mobilization

Across the included studies, economic capital was primarily discussed in relation to material resources, infrastructure, funding constraints, and locally generated income opportunities. Although these issues were represented across diverse rural contexts, comparatively fewer studies examined school-based income-generating initiatives, which therefore emerged as illustrative rather than dominant findings within the review. Studies from African rural contexts consistently reported that limited economic capital manifested through inadequate infrastructure, shortages of teaching and learning materials, limited digital resources, and difficulties attracting and retaining qualified teachers (Adedeji & Olaniyan, 2011; Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019; John, 2019; Molaudzi & Adeyemo, 2022; Phaswana, 2018; Shikalepo, 2020). These findings indicate that material constraints are not isolated problems but structural features of the educational field that influence what schools can realistically achieve.

However, the reviewed literature also challenged purely deficit-oriented interpretations of rural schooling. Several studies highlighted that rural schools and communities possess resources that can be mobilized when appropriate institutional mechanisms are in place. For example, locally available resources, community contributions, agricultural initiatives, and entrepreneurial activities represent potential strategies for schools to supplement limited formal funding (Uleanya, 2023). From a Bourdieuan perspective, these findings suggest that transformation depends not only on the availability of economic resources but also on schools' capacity to recognize and convert available resources into institutional advantage.

Although only a small number of the reviewed studies explicitly examined agricultural initiatives as income-generating strategies, these studies illustrate how locally available productive resources can be converted into economic capital within rural school contexts. Practical activities such as crop cultivation, poultry and livestock rearing, fish farming, and beekeeping provide opportunities for schools to connect learning with productive community practices. When strategically organized, such initiatives can generate resources that support school operations while simultaneously strengthening learners' practical skills. This reflects a process of capital conversion in which locally embedded knowledge and practices are transformed into economic resources that enhance institutional capacity.

The reviewed studies, therefore, show that, alongside formal resource provision, locally generated initiatives represent an important dimension of how some rural schools respond to material constraints.

3.2.2. Social Capital Through Relational Networks and Partnerships

Across the reviewed studies, social capital emerged as one of the most consistently represented forms of capital shaping rural schooling. The evidence highlighted school–community relationships, parental involvement, alumni engagement, and external partnerships as important mechanisms through which rural schools accessed resources, expertise, and institutional support beyond their immediate institutional boundaries. However, the synthesis also demonstrated that relationships alone did not automatically improve teaching and learning outcomes. Consistent with Bourdieu’s relational conception of social capital, these networks became educationally valuable only when they provided access to resources that were recognized, mobilized, and converted into institutional advantage.

Several studies highlighted alumni networks as important sources of social capital in rural schooling contexts. Alumni associations provided schools with access to financial resources, professional expertise, mentorship opportunities, infrastructure support, and broader institutional connections (Geswindt, 2013; Obi, 2019; Obaka et al., 2024; Kyorimpa et al., 2024; Wairimu & Lawrence, 2014). These findings demonstrate that former learners represent more than supportive community members; they constitute networks through which schools can access forms of capital that may otherwise be unavailable within resource-constrained environments.

The reviewed studies also identified parental and community involvement as important forms of social capital. Studies examining school–community relationships showed that families and local stakeholders contributed to rural schooling through participation in governance structures, provision of local knowledge, support for learning activities, and mobilization of community resources (Manilal & Jairam, 2023; Munje & Mncube, 2018; Ndwandwe, 2023; Segoe & Bisschoff, 2019). However, these relationships yielded educational benefits only when schools developed mechanisms to recognize, organize, and integrate community contributions into institutional practices.

From a Bourdieuan perspective, these findings indicate that social networks contributed to rural schooling by providing access to resources, expertise, and opportunities that supported teaching and learning. The synthesis, therefore, highlights the importance of examining not only the existence of relationships but also how these relationships were mobilized within school contexts.

3.2.3. Cultural Capital Embedded in Knowledge, Practices, and Pedagogical Resources

The thematic synthesis revealed that cultural capital was the most broadly represented form of capital across the reviewed studies and played a central role in shaping teaching and learning opportunities within rural schools. The evidence consistently highlighted learners’ local knowledge, teacher expertise, culturally responsive pedagogies, place-based learning, and community knowledge as valuable educational resources brought into educational settings by teachers, learners, and communities. However, consistent with Bourdieu’s relational understanding of capital, these resources did not automatically translate into educational advantage; rather, their educational value depended on their recognition, legitimization, and integration within the school field.

Several studies demonstrated that rural communities possess rich forms of knowledge that can support meaningful learning when incorporated into classroom practices. Research on funds of knowledge and place-based education showed that learners’ household experiences, cultural practices, community histories, and everyday problem-solving activities

could serve as valuable resources for curriculum development and instruction (Moll et al., 1992; González et al., 2005; Avery, 2013; Azano & Stewart, 2015; Avery & Hains, 2017). These findings challenge deficit interpretations of rural learners by demonstrating that communities possess forms of cultural capital that may remain invisible when schooling privileges only dominant forms of knowledge.

Teacher expertise also emerged as a significant form of cultural capital across the reviewed studies. In resource-constrained rural contexts, teachers frequently relied on professional knowledge, creativity, and adaptive pedagogical practices to respond to local challenges. Studies examining teacher practices have highlighted improvisation, contextual adaptation, and the ability to connect formal curriculum requirements with learners' lived experiences as important resources that support teaching and learning (Berk & Trieber, 2009; Mæland & Espeland, 2017; Säfstöm & Rytzler, 2023). Within a Bourdieuan interpretation, teacher knowledge represents institutionalized cultural capital that becomes transformative when it enables schools to respond effectively to contextual realities.

The synthesis further indicated that cultural capital increasingly intersects with digital and technological resources. Access to digital tools and educational technologies is more than the possession of physical resources; it requires the skills, knowledge, and pedagogical capacity to integrate technology meaningfully into teaching and learning (Wang et al., 2019). Thus, digital transformation in rural schools involves both economic capital (the availability of technology) and cultural capital (the capacity to use technology effectively).

Overall, the reviewed studies suggest that cultural capital contributed to rural school improvement when locally embedded knowledge, teacher expertise, and pedagogical resources were incorporated into teaching and learning practices. These findings highlight the multiple ways in which knowledge-based resources were represented and utilized across rural educational contexts.

The synthesis of economic, social, and cultural capital across the reviewed studies revealed important relationships among material resources, social networks, local knowledge, and institutional practices within rural schooling contexts. Building on these interconnected findings, the following section presents the Transformative Rural School Habitus Model (TRSHM), which was developed as an integrative representation of the patterns identified across the reviewed studies.

3.3. Development of the Transformative Rural School Habitus Model (TRSHM)

The Transformative Rural School Habitus Model (TRSHM) (Figure 2) was developed through an interpretive synthesis of recurring patterns identified across the 44 included studies. The model integrates the three major themes generated from the review by illustrating relationships among economic, social, and cultural capital, the mechanisms through which these forms of capital are mobilized and converted, and their influence on school practices. Specifically, the economic capital component emerged from studies examining material resources and income-generating initiatives; the social capital component was informed by evidence on school–community partnerships, alumni engagement, and parental involvement; while the cultural capital component was derived from studies highlighting local knowledge, teacher expertise, culturally responsive pedagogies, and place-based learning. Rather than presenting these forms of capital as independent resources, the TRSHM conceptualizes them as interdependent and mutually reinforcing within rural schooling contexts. Economic capital encompasses the financial and material resources that support school functioning; social capital comprises networks and relationships involving parents, communities, alumni, and external partners; and cultural capital includes the knowledge, skills, local practices, and pedagogical resources available within rural educa-

tional settings. Together, these forms of capital interact through institutional processes that shape opportunities for transforming school practices.

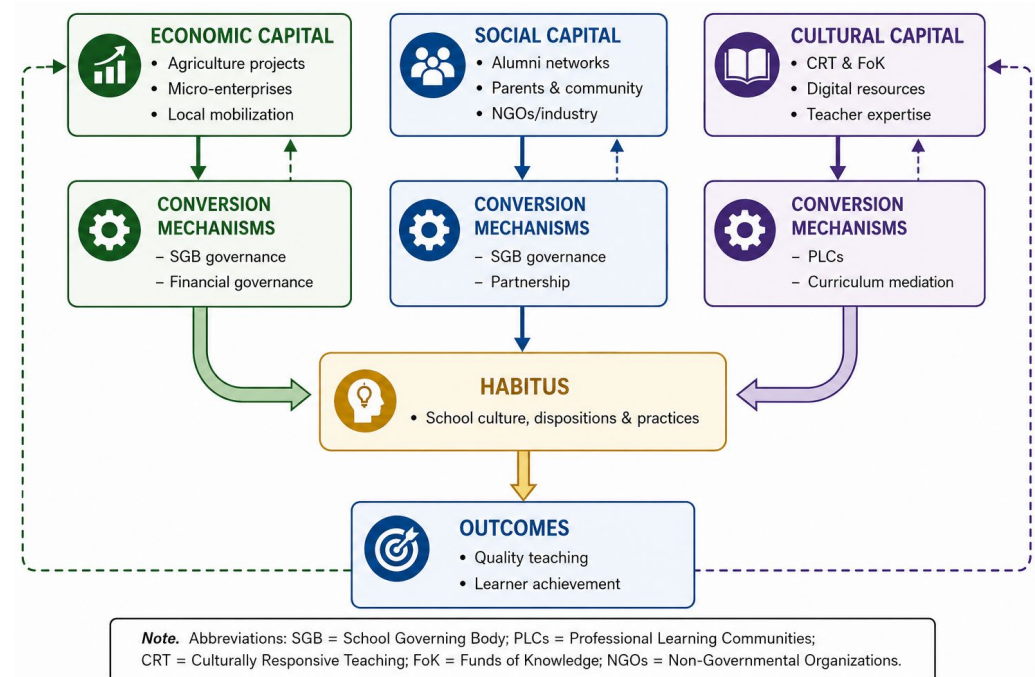


Figure 2. Proposed Transformative Rural School Habitus Model (Authors' own illustration).

Within the TRSHM, habitus transformation refers to changes in the collective practices, expectations, and ways of operating that shape teaching and learning within rural schools. The model summarizes the synthesis findings by illustrating how capital mobilization, institutional processes, and changing school practices are connected. Figure 2 presents these relationships by showing how different forms of capital interact through conversion processes within rural educational fields.

As illustrated in Figure 2, the TRSHM summarizes relationships identified across the reviewed studies by connecting forms of capital, conversion mechanisms, school habitus, and educational outcomes. The model provides a visual representation of the synthesis findings and serves as the basis for examining the enabling conditions and constraints that affect capital mobilization in rural school contexts.

3.3.1. Enabling Conditions for Capital Conversion

The synthesis identified several enabling conditions that influenced the mobilization of economic, social, and cultural forms of capital within rural school contexts. These conditions represented institutional processes through which available resources, relationships, and knowledge were organized and incorporated into school practices.

First, governance and organizational structures emerged as important mechanisms influencing resource utilization. Across the reviewed studies, effective leadership, transparent decision-making processes, and coordinated management practices supported the transformation of available resources into school improvement initiatives. For example, locally generated economic resources, including income-generating activities, were more effectively integrated into school development when supported by planning, accountability processes, and alignment with educational priorities (Uleanya, 2023; Shikalepo, 2020).

Second, the synthesis highlighted the importance of recognizing and integrating locally situated knowledge within teaching and learning practices. Studies on rural education and funds of knowledge have demonstrated that community experiences, cultural practices,

and learners' everyday knowledge can contribute to meaningful learning when connected to formal educational processes (Moll et al., 1992; González et al., 2005; Avery & Hains, 2017). This recognition process represented an important pathway through which cultural resources were incorporated into school practices.

Third, structured relationships with communities, alumni, and external stakeholders were identified as mechanisms supporting the mobilization of social capital. The reviewed studies showed that partnerships contributed to rural schooling through infrastructure development, mentorship opportunities, resource mobilization, and access to external expertise when participation was coordinated through established school–community relationships (Obaka et al., 2024; Kyorimpa et al., 2024; Manilal & Jairam, 2023).

Finally, teacher professional capacity emerged as a key factor shaping how different forms of capital were utilized in classroom contexts. Studies have indicated that teachers' pedagogical knowledge, adaptability, and ability to connect curriculum requirements with learners' contexts influence how available resources are translated into teaching and learning practices (Berk & Trieber, 2009; Mæland & Espeland, 2017; Säfström & Rytzler, 2023). Collectively, these enabling conditions informed the TRSHM by illustrating the institutional processes associated with capital mobilization across rural schooling contexts.

3.3.2. Constraints Affecting Capital Mobilization

Although the reviewed studies identified multiple forms of capital in rural schooling contexts, the synthesis also revealed several constraints that affected how these resources were mobilized and utilized. These constraints demonstrate that the availability of economic, social, or cultural capital alone does not guarantee improvements in teaching and learning outcomes.

First, structural and institutional constraints influenced the extent to which schools could effectively utilize available resources. Studies indicated that inadequate infrastructure, limited financial support, policy constraints, and unequal resource distribution continued to affect rural schools' capacity to convert available resources into sustainable improvements (Adedeji & Olaniyan, 2011; Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019; Shikalepo, 2020).

Second, the mobilization of social capital was affected by differences in the strength and sustainability of school–community relationships. While partnerships involving parents, alumni, and community stakeholders provided important support mechanisms, the reviewed studies showed that these relationships varied across contexts and required organizational structures that enabled continued collaboration (Munje & Mncube, 2018; Manilal & Jairam, 2023; Obaka et al., 2024).

Third, cultural resources were not always recognized or integrated into formal schooling practices. Studies focusing on local knowledge and community-based learning indicated that valuable forms of knowledge may remain disconnected from classroom practices when curricula and institutional expectations prioritize dominant forms of knowledge over locally situated experiences (Moll et al., 1992; González et al., 2005; Avery & Hains, 2017).

Overall, the synthesis indicates that capital mobilization within rural schools is shaped by contextual and institutional conditions that influence how resources, relationships, and knowledge are utilized. These constraints are represented in the TRSHM as factors that affect the movement from capital availability to changes in school practices and habitus.

4. Discussion

The findings of this systematic review demonstrate that improving teaching and learning in rural schools cannot be understood solely through the presence or absence of resources. Rather, the synthesis of the 44 reviewed studies indicates that educational transformation depends on how different forms of capital are recognized, mobilized, and

converted within specific educational fields. The Transformative Rural School Habitus Model (TRSHM), developed from this synthesis, extends this understanding by illustrating that rural school improvement involves dynamic interactions among economic resources, social networks, cultural assets, institutional structures, and field conditions. This section discusses the theoretical and practical implications of these findings, focusing on how a Bourdieuan interpretation of capital, habitus, and field can contribute to a more relational understanding of rural school transformation.

4.1. Moving Beyond Deficit Perspectives: Rural Schools as Sites of Capital Mobilization

A central contribution emerging from this review is the need to reconsider deficit-oriented interpretations of rural schooling. Rural education research has increasingly argued that rurality should not be understood only through geographical isolation or disadvantage but as a relational condition shaped by social, cultural, economic, and institutional contexts (Howley & Howley, 2014). Although rural schools continue to experience challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, limited financial resources, teacher shortages, and restricted access to learning materials (Adedeji & Olaniyan, 2011; Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019; Shikalepo, 2020), the findings of this review suggest that focusing exclusively on scarcity provides an incomplete understanding of rural educational contexts.

Through a Bourdieuan lens, rural schools can be understood as educational fields in which different forms of capital exist but are not always equally recognized or valued (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). The reviewed studies demonstrated that rural communities possess various resources, including social networks, community knowledge, local practices, teacher expertise, and contextual experiences that may contribute to educational improvement (Avery, 2013; Azano & Stewart, 2015; Moll et al., 1992). However, the transformative potential of these resources depends on whether they are legitimized within schooling structures and converted into forms of capital that support teaching and learning.

This interpretation extends previous discussions of rural school improvement by shifting attention from resource availability alone to processes of resource recognition and conversion. For example, community relationships and alumni networks become valuable not simply because relationships exist, but because they create access to additional resources, expertise, mentorship, and institutional support (Geswindt, 2013; Obi, 2019; Wairimu & Lawrence, 2014). Similarly, local knowledge and cultural practices become educationally meaningful when incorporated into curriculum and pedagogy rather than remaining disconnected from formal schooling (González et al., 2005; Avery & Hains, 2017).

Therefore, addressing rural educational inequalities requires both strengthening access to external resources and transforming the conditions under which existing resources are recognized and mobilized. This perspective avoids romanticizing rural communities as naturally resourceful while also challenging assumptions that improvement depends solely on external intervention. Instead, rural transformation emerges from interactions between available forms of capital, institutional practices, and broader field conditions that shape what forms of knowledge, resources, and relationships become valued.

4.2. Capital Conversion and Field Conditions

The findings of this review highlight that the relationship between capital and rural school improvement is not linear. The presence of economic, social, or cultural resources does not automatically produce educational transformation. Instead, consistent with Bourdieu's relational theory, the value of capital depends on the field in which it operates and the extent to which particular resources are recognized as legitimate and capable of

producing advantage (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). This explains why similar forms of capital may generate different outcomes across rural schooling contexts.

Across the reviewed studies, successful capital mobilization depended on institutional conditions that enabled resources to be converted into meaningful educational practices. For example, financial resources and infrastructure investments contributed to improvement when accompanied by effective leadership, governance structures, and sustainable resource management practices (Molaudzi & Adeyemo, 2022; Shikalepo, 2020). Similarly, social relationships with parents, communities, and alumni became valuable when schools developed mechanisms for transforming these relationships into concrete forms of support, including funding, expertise, mentorship, and learning opportunities (Obi, 2019; Kyorimpa et al., 2024; Manilal & Jairam, 2023).

The synthesis also showed that cultural resources require institutional recognition before they can influence teaching and learning. Local knowledge, community practices, and learners' everyday experiences may remain undervalued if dominant educational structures fail to recognize them as legitimate forms of knowledge. However, when incorporated into curriculum and pedagogical practices, these resources can expand learning opportunities and strengthen connections between schools and communities (Moll et al., 1992; González et al., 2005; Avery & Hains, 2017).

These findings suggest that rural school transformation involves a process of capital conversion rather than simple resource accumulation. Economic, social, and cultural resources must be mediated through school leadership, institutional practices, policy environments, and community relationships before they can contribute to changes in school habitus. Therefore, inequalities in rural education persist not only because some schools lack resources but also because educational fields differ in their capacity to recognize, legitimize, and transform available resources into sustainable educational advantage.

4.3. Contribution of the Transformative Rural School Habitus Model to Rural Education Research

The Transformative Rural School Habitus Model (TRSHM) developed in this review contributes to rural education research by providing an integrative framework for understanding how different forms of capital interact within specific educational fields to influence school transformation. While Bourdieu's concepts of capital, habitus, and field have been widely applied to explain the reproduction of educational inequalities, the findings of this review demonstrate their usefulness for examining processes through which rural schools may recognize, mobilize, and convert available resources into educational opportunities (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

The TRSHM extends existing approaches to rural school improvement by shifting attention from individual forms of capital to the relationships among capital mobilization, conversion processes, and habitus transformation. The synthesis of the reviewed studies suggests that economic resources, social networks, and cultural assets do not operate independently but interact dynamically within rural educational fields. For example, community partnerships may create access to economic resources, local knowledge may strengthen culturally responsive pedagogies, and teacher expertise may enable schools to transform limited resources into meaningful learning experiences (Avery, 2013; Manilal & Jairam, 2023; Uleanya, 2023).

A key contribution of the TRSHM is its emphasis on transformation rather than only reproduction. Although Bourdieuan analyses of education often highlight how unequal distributions of capital reproduce social advantage and disadvantage, the model illustrates how rural schools may also become sites where existing forms of capital are reorganized and converted into new institutional practices. This does not imply that schools can overcome structural inequalities independently; rather, transformation occurs when field conditions,

institutional arrangements, and external support structures enable alternative forms of capital to gain recognition and value.

Practically, the TRSHM provides a framework for policymakers, school leaders, and educational stakeholders to identify enabling conditions that support rural school improvement. Instead of focusing exclusively on the provision of external resources, the model emphasizes strengthening institutional capacity, building sustainable partnerships, recognizing local knowledge systems, and creating structures that enable capital conversion. In this way, the TRSHM offers both a theoretical contribution to Bourdieuan educational research and a practical framework for understanding context-responsive rural school development.

While the findings and the proposed TRSHM provide insights into how different forms of capital may contribute to rural school transformation, the interpretation of these findings must consider the methodological and contextual boundaries of the review. The diversity of rural contexts, variations in theoretical perspectives across included studies, and the interpretive nature of the synthesis create important considerations for understanding the scope and transferability of the conclusions. These limitations are discussed in the following section.

5. Limitations of the Review

As with all systematic reviews, the findings should be interpreted in relation to the scope and boundaries of the reviewed literature. First, although the included studies represented diverse geographical contexts, definitions and experiences of rurality varied across national and regional educational fields. Rural schooling contexts differ in terms of geography, socioeconomic conditions, policy environments, cultural practices, and institutional arrangements. Therefore, the findings should not be interpreted as representing a single universal rural experience but as identifying relational patterns in how resources are recognized, mobilized, and converted across different rural educational contexts.

Second, the synthesis was guided by Bourdieu's concepts of capital, habitus, and field, which shaped the interpretation of findings across the reviewed studies. Not all studies explicitly adopted a Bourdieuan theoretical framework or used concepts such as social and cultural capital in the same way. Consequently, the review interpreted evidence through a Bourdieuan lens by examining how resources, relationships, and practices functioned as forms of capital within educational fields. This interpretive approach enabled theoretical integration but also reflects the analytical perspective adopted by the authors.

Third, although the Transformative Rural School Habitus Model (TRSHM) provides a framework for understanding capital mobilization and habitus transformation, it should not be viewed as a universal model applicable identically across all rural schools. The effectiveness of capital conversion depends on field-specific conditions, including governance structures, policy environments, community relationships, and institutional capacity. Future empirical studies are therefore needed to examine how the model operates across different rural contexts.

Finally, the review was limited to peer-reviewed English-language publications indexed in selected databases. Relevant studies published in other languages, books, policy documents, dissertations, or other forms of grey literature may therefore have been excluded.

6. Conclusions

This systematic review synthesized evidence from 44 studies to examine how economic, social, and cultural forms of capital shape teaching and learning in rural schools. Using Bourdieu's concepts of capital, habitus, and field as an analytical lens, the review demonstrates that rural school improvement cannot be understood solely in terms of the presence or absence of resources. Rather, educational transformation depends on how these resources are recognized, legitimized, mobilized, and converted within educational fields.

The findings challenge deficit-oriented representations of rural schooling by showing that, despite persistent structural constraints, rural schools and communities possess diverse forms of capital embedded in social relationships, local knowledge, teacher expertise, and institutional practices. However, the synthesis also demonstrates that these resources do not automatically translate into educational advantage. Their value depends on enabling institutional conditions, including governance, recognition practices, and collaborative partnerships, that support the conversion of capital into sustainable improvements in teaching and learning.

The Transformative Rural School Habitus Model (TRSHM), developed through the interpretive synthesis of the reviewed studies, provides a theoretically grounded framework for explaining how interactions among economic, social, and cultural capital may reshape institutional dispositions, practices, and opportunities for change. By emphasizing the conditional and relational nature of capital conversion within specific educational fields, the model extends rural education scholarship beyond deficit-based explanations of scarcity toward a more nuanced understanding of school improvement.

Future research should empirically examine the application of the TRSHM across diverse rural contexts to investigate how different policy environments, governance structures, community relationships, and institutional arrangements influence processes of capital mobilization, recognition, and habitus transformation. Such work would further clarify the conditions under which locally embedded resources can be converted into meaningful educational improvement while addressing the broader structural inequalities that continue to shape opportunities for rural schools.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, M.T.; methodology, M.T. and E.M.; validation, M.T. and E.M.; formal analysis, M.T.; data curation, M.T. and E.M.; writing—original draft preparation, M.T.; writing—review and editing, M.T. and E.M. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Acknowledgments: During the preparation of this manuscript/study, the author(s) used CHATGTP 5.4 for the purposes of improving the clarity of ideas. The authors have reviewed and edited the output and take full responsibility for the content of this publication.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Appendix A

Table A1. Characteristics of Studies Included in the Systematic Review (n = 44).

No.	Author(s), Year	Country/ Context	Research Design	Participants	Study Focus	Relevant Bourdieuian Construct
1	Adedeji and Olaniyan (2011)	African countries	Review	Not applicable	Teacher working conditions and rural school resourcing	Economic capital
2	Nkambule and Mukeredzi (2017)	South Africa	Qualitative	Pre-service teachers undertaking rural teaching practice (secondary education)	Teaching experiences in rural contexts	Cultural/social capital
3	Mtsi and Maphosa (2016)	South Africa	Qualitative Case Study	Junior secondary Natural Sciences teachers	Resource constraints affecting teaching and learning	Economic capital
4	Mokoena and Hlalele (2021)	South Africa	Participatory Action Research	Rural school stakeholders (primary and secondary education)	School enrichment and rural improvement	Social/cultural capital
5	Mukeredzi (2021)	South Africa	Qualitative	Rural secondary school teachers	Teacher professional experiences in rural schools	Cultural capital
6	Molaudzi and Adeyemo (2022)	South Africa	Quantitative	Rural secondary school learners	Resource provisioning and learner performance	Economic capital
7	Phaswana (2018)	South Africa	Quantitative	Rural secondary schools and learners	Educational inequality and access	Economic/cultural capital
8	Stephen and Nkosi (2025)	South Africa	Quantitative	Grade 12 Physical Science educators in rural secondary schools	Educational resources in Physical Science	Economic/social capital
9	John (2019)	South Africa	Qualitative Exploratory Study	Pre-service teachers undertaking rural teaching practice (secondary education)	Physical sciences teaching in Eastern Cape rural schools	Economic/cultural capital
10	Du Plessis and Mestry (2019)	South Africa	Qualitative	Rural schoolteachers and principals	Teacher supply and rural school challenges	Economic/cultural capital
11	Shikalepo (2020)	Namibia	Review	Not applicable	Teaching resources and rural education challenges	Economic/cultural capital

Table A1. Cont.

No.	Author(s), Year	Country/ Context	Research Design	Participants	Study Focus	Relevant Bourdieuian Construct
12	Uleanya (2023)	Rural higher education	Review	Not applicable	Post-digital rural higher education	Cultural Capital
13	Geswindt (2013)	South Africa	Qualitative Case Study	Previously disadvantaged schools	Alumni associations and school support	Social capital
14	Obi (2019)	Nigeria	Quantitative	Secondary school principals and alumni	Alumni's role in school management and resources	Social capital
15	Obaka et al. (2024)	Nigeria	Quantitative	Head teachers and School-Based Management Committee (SBMC) chairpersons in UBE schools	Alumni contribution to school development	Social capital
16	Kyorimpa et al. (2024)	Uganda	Quantitative	Government-aided secondary schools	Alumni engagement and student academic performance	Social capital
17	Wairimu and Lawrence (2014)	Kenya	Quantitative	Public secondary school principals and alumni	Alumni involvement in governance and management	Social capital
18	Manilal and Jairam (2023)	South Africa	Qualitative Multiple Case Study	Parents and teachers from privileged and underprivileged primary schools	Parental involvement	Social capital
19	Munje and Mncube (2018)	South Africa	Qualitative	Parents of rural school learners	Parental participation in schooling	Social capital
20	Segoe and Bisschoff (2019)	South Africa	Quantitative	School community members	Community participation and school support	Social capital
21	Ndwandwe (2023)	South Africa	Qualitative	Principals, teachers and parents from two rural secondary schools	Parental involvement	Social capital
22	Antony-Newman (2024)	Canada	Policy analysis	Not applicable	Parental engagement	Social capital
23	Wang et al. (2019)	China	Quantitative	Rural schoolteachers	Digital educational resources and rural teaching quality	Cultural capital
24	Makombe and Nyambi (2021)	South Africa	Qualitative	Rural secondary school teachers	Indigenous knowledge integration	Cultural Capital

Table A1. Cont.

No.	Author(s), Year	Country/ Context	Research Design	Participants	Study Focus	Relevant Bourdieuian Construct
25	Brown (2017)	K–12 education (predomi- nantly United States)	Qualitative Meta-synthesis	Not applicable	Culturally responsive and inquiry-based science education	Cultural capital
26	Tanase (2022)	United States	Qualitative	Secondary mathematics and science teachers	Culturally responsive pedagogy	Cultural capital
27	Wallace et al. (2022)	United States	Qualitative Case Study	Science teachers participating in a professional learning group	Equitable and culturally responsive science teaching	Cultural capital
28	Sherfinski et al. (2021)	United States	Qualitative Case Study	Pre-service teachers in elementary teacher education	Funds of knowledge and community resources	Cultural capital
29	Silseth (2018)	Norway	Qualitative Case Study	Teachers and Grade 9 learners in a lower secondary school	Everyday knowledge in classroom dialogue	Cultural capital
30	Silseth and Erstad (2018)	Norway	Qualitative Case Study	Teachers and Grade 9 learners in a lower secondary school	Contextualizing instruction	Cultural capital
31	Lee (2006)	United States	Qualitative Case Study	High school teacher and secondary school learners	Cultural classroom discourse	Cultural capital
32	Rivet and Krajcik (2008)	United States	Mixed Methods	Middle school science learners	Contextualized science instruction	Cultural capital
33	Berk and Trieber (2009)	United States	Conceptual/ theoretical	Not applicable	Teacher pedagogical practice	Embodied Cultural Capital
34	Mæland and Espeland (2017)	Norway	Qualitative Case Study	Practicing teachers observed by in-service master’s student teachers	Teaching improvisation	Cultural capital
35	Säfström and Rytzler (2023)	Sweden/ Ireland	Conceptual/ theoretical	Not applicable	Teaching as improvisation	Cultural capital
36	Byun et al. (2012)	United States	Quantitative	Rural high school students	Educational aspirations	Social capital
37	Semken and Freeman (2008)	United States	Mixed methods	Undergraduate geoscience students	Place-based science teaching	Cultural capital
38	Biddle and Azano (2016)	United States	Literature Review	Not applicable	Rural education research	Cultural capital
39	Auerbach (2007)	United States	Qualitative Case Study	Working-class African American and Latino parents of high school students	Parent involvement	Social capital

Table A1. Cont.

No.	Author(s), Year	Country/ Context	Research Design	Participants	Study Focus	Relevant Bourdieuian Construct
40	Yosso (2005)	United States	Critical synthesis	Not applicable	Community cultural wealth	Cultural capital
41	Azano and Stewart (2015)	United States	Qualitative Case Study	Pre-service teachers in a teacher education program	Preparation for rural teaching	Cultural capital
42	Avery (2013)	United States	Literature Review	Not applicable	Local knowledge in science education	Cultural capital
43	Avery and Hains (2017)	United States	Conceptual	Not applicable	Oral traditions in science education	Cultural capital
44	Howley and Howley (2014)	International	Conceptual	Not applicable	Rural educational improvement	Cultural capital

References

- Adedeji, S. O., & Olaniyan, O. (2011). *Improving the conditions of teachers and teaching in rural schools across African countries*. UNESCO-IICBA Addis Ababa.
- Antony-Newman, M. (2024). Teachers and school leaders' readiness for parental engagement: Critical policy analysis of Canadian standards. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 75(3), 321–333. [CrossRef]
- Auerbach, S. (2007). From moral supporters to struggling advocates: Reconceptualizing parent roles in education through the experience of working-class families of color. *Urban Education*, 42(3), 250–283. [CrossRef]
- Avery, L. M. (2013). Rural science education: Valuing local knowledge. *Theory Into Practice*, 52(1), 28–35. [CrossRef]
- Avery, L. M., & Hains, B. J. (2017). Oral traditions: A contextual framework for complex science concepts—Laying the foundation for a paradigm of promise in rural science education. *Cultural Studies of Science Education*, 12, 129–166. [CrossRef]
- Azano, A. P., & Stewart, T. T. (2015). Exploring place and practicing justice: Preparing pre-service teachers for success in rural schools. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 30(9), 1–12.
- Bæck, U. D. K. (2016). Rural location and academic success—Remarks on research, contextualization and methodology. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 60(4), 435–448. [CrossRef]
- Berk, R. A., & Trieber, R. H. (2009). Whose classroom is it, anyway? Improvisation as a teaching tool. *Journal on Excellence in College Teaching*, 20(3), 29–60. Available online: <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ883731> (accessed on 5 July 2026).
- Biddle, C., & Azano, A. P. (2016). Constructing and reconstructing the “rural school problem”: A century of rural education research. *Review of Research in Education*, 40(1), 298–325. [CrossRef]
- Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education* (pp. 241–258). Greenwood Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1990). *The logic of practice*. Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J. C. (1990). *Reproduction in education, society and culture* (Vol. 4). Sage.
- Bourdieu, P., & Wacquant, L. J. (1992). *An invitation to reflexive sociology*. University of Chicago Press.
- Brown, J. C. (2017). A metasynthesis of the complementarity of culturally responsive and inquiry-based science education in K-12 settings: Implications for advancing equitable science teaching and learning. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*, 54(9), 1143–1173. [CrossRef]
- Byun, S. Y., Meece, J. L., Irvin, M. J., & Hutchins, B. C. (2012). The role of social capital in educational aspirations of rural youth. *Rural Sociology*, 77(3), 355. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
- Claridge, T. (2004). *Social capital and natural resource management: An important role for social capital?* [Unpublished master's thesis, University of Queensland].
- Coleman, J. S. (1988). Social capital in the creation of human capital. *American Journal of Sociology*, 94, s95–s120. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
- Corbett, M. (2016). Reading Lefebvre from the periphery: Thinking globally about the rural. In A. Schulte, & B. Walker-Gibbs (Eds.), *Self-studies in rural teacher education. Self-study of teaching and teacher education practices* (Vol. 14, pp. 141–156). Springer International Publishing. [CrossRef]

- Critical Appraisal Skills Programme. (2018). *CASP checklists*. CASP. Available online: <https://casp-uk.net/casp-tools-checklists/> (accessed on 5 July 2026).
- Cuervo, H. (2016). *Understanding social justice in rural education*. Palgrave Macmillan US.
- Du Plessis, P., & Mestry, R. (2019). Teachers for rural schools—a challenge for South Africa. *South African Journal of Education*, 39, s1–s9. [CrossRef]
- Geswindt, P. G. (2013). *The role alumni can play in the development of disadvantaged schools*. Development Studies, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University.
- González, N., Moll, L. C., & Amanti, C. (Eds.). (2005). *Funds of knowledge: Theorizing practices in households, communities, and classrooms*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Green, B., & Corbett, M. (2013). *Rethinking rural literacies: Transnational perspectives*. Springer.
- Grenfell, M. (Ed.). (2014). *Pierre Bourdieu: Key concepts*. Routledge.
- Howley, C. B., & Howley, A. (2014). Making sense of rural education research: Art, transgression, and other acts of terroir. In S. White, & M. Corbett (Eds.), *Doing educational research in rural settings: Methodological issues, international perspectives and practical solutions* (pp. 7–25). Routledge.
- John, M. (2019). Physical sciences teaching and learning in Eastern cape rural schools: Reflections of pre-service teachers. *South African Journal of Education*, 39(1), 1660. Available online: <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1233459> (accessed on 5 July 2026). [CrossRef]
- Kyorimpa, A., Aheisibwe, I., & Asiimire, D. (2024). Alumni engagement and ordinary-level students' academic performance in government-aided secondary schools in Sheema Municipality. *East African Journal of Education Studies*, 7(3), 354–359. Available online: <https://elibrary.ru/item.asp?id=74317196> (accessed on 5 July 2026). [CrossRef]
- Lee, C. D. (2006). 'Every good-bye ain't gone': Analyzing the cultural underpinnings of classroom talk. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 19(3), 305–327. [CrossRef]
- Long, H. A., French, D. P., & Brooks, J. M. (2020). Optimising the value of the critical appraisal skills programme (CASP) tool for quality appraisal in qualitative evidence synthesis. *Research Methods in Medicine & Health Sciences*, 1(1), 31–42. [CrossRef]
- Makombe, R., & Nyambi, O. (2021). Images and imaginings of schooling: Missions, visions, emblems and mottos of schools in Qwaqwa. *Africa Education Review*, 18(5–6), 55–70. [CrossRef]
- Manilal, R., & Jairam, V. (2023). Experiences of parental involvement in privileged and underprivileged schools. *South African Journal of Education*, 43(3), 1–10. [CrossRef]
- Mæland, K., & Espeland, M. (2017). Teachers' conceptions of improvisation in teaching: Inherent human quality or a professional teaching skill? *Education Inquiry*, 8(3), 192–208. [CrossRef]
- Mokoena, M., & Hlalele, D. (2021). Thriving school enrichment programs for rural South African schools. In S. White, & J. Downey (Eds.), *Rural education across the world: Models of innovative practice and impact* (pp. 129–146). Springer. [CrossRef]
- Molaudzi, A. M., & Adeyemo, K. S. (2022). Resource provisioning and implications on learner performance in schools in Limpopo Province, South Africa. *Africa Education Review*, 19(1), 120–142. Available online: <https://hdl.handle.net/10520/ejc-educare-v19-n1-a7> (accessed on 5 July 2026). [CrossRef]
- Moll, L. C., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & Gonzalez, N. (1992). Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. *Theory Into Practice*, 31(2), 132–141. [CrossRef]
- Mtsi, N., & Maphosa, C. (2016). Challenges encountered in the teaching and learning of the natural sciences in rural schools in South Africa. *Journal of Social Sciences*, 47(1), 58–67. Available online: [http://krepublishers.com/02-Journals/JSS/JSS-47-0-000-16-Web/JSS-47-1-000-16-Abst-PDF/JSS-47-1-058-16-1949-Maphosa-C/JSS-47-1-058-16-1949-Maphosa-C-Tx\[8\].pdf](http://krepublishers.com/02-Journals/JSS/JSS-47-0-000-16-Web/JSS-47-1-000-16-Abst-PDF/JSS-47-1-058-16-1949-Maphosa-C/JSS-47-1-058-16-1949-Maphosa-C-Tx[8].pdf) (accessed on 5 July 2026). [CrossRef]
- Mukeredzi, T. G. (2021). Teacher preparation for rurality: A cohort model of teaching practice in a rural South African school. In S. White, & J. Downey (Eds.), *Rural education across the world: Models of innovative practice and impact* (pp. 65–87). Springer. [CrossRef]
- Munje, P. N., & Mncube, V. (2018). The lack of parent involvement as hindrance in selected public primary schools in South Africa: The voices of educators. *Perspectives in Education*, 36(1), 80–93. [CrossRef]
- Ndwandwe, N. D. (2023). Parental involvement and academic achievement: Voices of role-players in secondary schools in Mpumalanga, South Africa. *Research in Social Sciences and Technology*, 8(4), 237–256. [CrossRef]
- Nkambule, T., & Mukeredzi, T. G. (2017). Pre-service teachers' professional learning experiences during rural teaching practice in Acornhoek, Mpumalanga Province. *South African Journal of Education*, 37(3), 1–9. [CrossRef]
- Obaka, P. H., Adelegan, S. J., & Shaibu, L. (2024). Alumni association's participation in plant maintenance for effective implementation of universal basic education (UBE) programme in Kogi state. *Facilities*, 42(7/8), 573–594. [CrossRef]
- Obi, Z. C. (2019). Assessment of Alumni participation in the management of secondary education in Anambra state of Nigeria. *Global Journal of Education, Humanities and Management Sciences*, 1(1), 157–164. Available online: <https://www.gojehms.com/index.php/GOJEHMS/article/view/15> (accessed on 5 July 2026).
- Phaswana, E. N. (2018). *Sport funding of schools in low socio-economic communities in Gauteng*. University of Pretoria. Available online: <http://hdl.handle.net/2263/68470> (accessed on 5 July 2026).

- Portes, A. (1998). Social capital: Its origins and applications in modern sociology. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 24, 1–24. [CrossRef]
- Putnam, R. D. (1995). Bowling alone: America's declining social capital. *Journal of Democracy*, 6(1), 65–78. [CrossRef]
- Reay, D. (2004). 'It's all becoming a habitus': Beyond the habitual use of habitus in educational research. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 25(4), 431–444. [CrossRef]
- Reay, D. (2018). Miseducation: Inequality, education and the working classes. *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 27(4), 453–456. [CrossRef]
- Rivet, A. E., & Krajcik, J. S. (2008). Contextualizing instruction: Leveraging students' prior knowledge and experiences to foster understanding of middle school science. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*, 45(1), 79–100. [CrossRef]
- Roberts, P., & Green, B. (2013). Researching rural places: On social justice and rural education. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 19(10), 765–774. [CrossRef]
- Säfström, C. A., & Rytzler, J. (2023). Teaching as improvisation. *Teoría de la Educación: Revista Interuniversitaria*, 35(2), 139–155. [CrossRef]
- Segoe, B. A., & Bisschoff, T. (2019). Parental involvement as part of curriculum reform in South African schools: Does it contribute to quality education? *Africa Education Review*, 16(6), 165–182. [CrossRef]
- Semken, S., & Freeman, C. B. (2008). Sense of place in the practice and assessment of place-based science teaching. *Science Education*, 92(6), 1042–1057. [CrossRef]
- Sherfinski, M., Hayes, S., Zhang, J., & Jalalifard, M. (2021). Grappling with funds of knowledge in rural Appalachia and beyond: Shifting contexts of pre-service teachers. *Action in Teacher Education*, 43(2), 106–127. [CrossRef]
- Shikalepo, E. E. (2020). Challenges facing teaching at rural schools: A review of related literature. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, 4(5), 211–218. Available online: <https://rsisinternational.org/virtual-library/papers/challenges-facing-teaching-at-rural-schools-a-review-of-related-literature/> (accessed on 5 July 2026).
- Silseth, K. (2018). Students' everyday knowledge and experiences as resources in educational dialogues. *Instructional Science*, 46(2), 291–313. [CrossRef]
- Silseth, K., & Erstad, O. (2018). Connecting to the outside: Cultural resources teachers use when contextualizing instruction. *Learning, Culture and Social Interaction*, 17, 56–68. [CrossRef]
- Stephen, M. M., & Nkosi, P. (2025). The influence of physical science educational resources on learners competence in schools within disadvantaged South African communities. In L. G. Chova, C. G. Martínez, & J. Lees (Eds.), *EDULEARN25 proceedings: 17th international conference on education and new learning technologies* (pp. 670–675). IATED Academy. [CrossRef]
- Tanase, M. F. (2022). Culturally responsive teaching in urban secondary schools. *Education and Urban Society*, 54(4), 363–388. [CrossRef]
- Thomson, P. (2016). *Educational leadership and Pierre Bourdieu*. Routledge.
- Uleanya, C. (2023). Transforming rural higher education for the Postdigital era. *International Dialogues on Education Journal*, 10(1), 1–26. [CrossRef]
- Wairimu, M. E., & Lawrence, N. (2014). *The role of school alumni in improving performance in public secondary schools: A case study of Mathira Constituency in Nyeri County, Kenya*. Paper Publications.
- Wallace, J., Howes, E. V., Funk, A., Krepski, S., Pincus, M., Sylvester, S., Tsoi, K., Tully, C., Sharif, R., & Swift, S. (2022). Stories that teachers tell: Exploring culturally responsive science teaching. *Education Sciences*, 12(6), 401. [CrossRef]
- Wang, J., Tigelaar, D. E., & Admiraal, W. (2019). Connecting rural schools to quality education: Rural teachers' use of digital educational resources. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 101, 68–76. [CrossRef]
- Yosso, T. J. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 8(1), 69–91. [CrossRef]

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.