Challenges faced by curriculum advisors when offering curriculum support to schools in rural South Africa

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ABSTRACT

Many stakeholders have severe concerns about providing curriculum support to schools. South African districts have minimal authority beyond planning and focusing objectives on district settings, but they are in charge of implementing all areas of educational operations, including curriculum, funds, and resources. Curriculum support has come under scathing criticism from teachers and principals who describe it as difficult and unsustainable. This paper aims to investigate challenges faced by curriculum advisors when offering curriculum support to schools in the Waterberg District in the Limpopo Province of South Africa. From a qualitative standpoint, coupled with the case study research design, this study used a purposive sample to select 15 (n = 15) participants. Data were collected through literature reviews and the application of semi-structured Key Informant Interviews and analysed using Thematic Analysis. Main findings of the study include (i) understaffing of curriculum advisors, (ii) heavy workloads, (iii) incompetence, (iv) a lack of skill and pedagogical training that are requisite for the task, and (v) a time constraint to handle curriculum challenges. This paper intends to consider the intervention strategies and responses of teachers, school principals and the Department of Basic Education to challenges faced by curriculum advisors in offering curriculum support to schools. This paper concludes that adequate operational resources should be made available since they can improve everyone’s access to high-quality teaching and learning resources. It is recommended that adequate funding be made available to address the district's financial issues so that curriculum advisors can easily provide curriculum support.

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Introduction

Many stakeholders have severe concerns about providing curriculum support to schools. South African districts are responsible for implementing all aspects of education operations, including curriculum, finances, and resourcing, but have limited scope beyond planning and focusing goals on district contexts (Khosa, 2013). According to Adetula (2010) curriculum advisors lack the necessary technology tools, such as laptops, data projectors, printers, and scanners, as well as subject-specific tools, to carry out proper curriculum implementation. Due to a shortage of funding, the district cannot provide enough support for curriculum advisors. Rammbuda (2019) contends that there is a lack of finances in the district to buy Learning and Teaching Support Materials. In addition, Beukes (2017) and West and Meier (2020) also note improper use of public funds and under-resourcing, both of which are serious issues. In support of the argument made by Beukes (2017); West and Meier (2020), and Rammbuda (2019) above, McLennan, Muller, Orkin, and Robertson (2017) claimed that curriculum advisors only visited schools once a year to determine how far along teachers and principals were with the curriculum because districts lack the means or funding to visit schools. In the same vein, Malumbete (2021) indicated that visits to schools have been infrequent as a result of a lack of funds. School administrators acknowledged that there was no follow-up visit to ascertain the effect the instruction had on learner performance (Nasser, Kidd, Burns, & Campbell, 2013). Furthermore, Malumbete (2021) also notes that there aren't enough funds available for curriculum advisors to pay for their travel and accommodation expenses, such as travel and subsistence allowances. Nevertheless, curriculum advisors must handle their difficulty to visit to remote areas (Adetula, 2010).

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Again, Moorosi and Bantwini (2016) made the case that many districts in South Africa lack the resources and capacity to offer curriculum management support. Sometimes, the Department of Basic Education’s (DBE) limited resources prevent it from recruiting new curriculum advisors on time (Rasebotsa, 2017). According to Bantwini (2015), there is a pervasive absence of district support for schools in South Africa. Workshops are difficult for curriculum advisors to conduct when there is poor or no infrastructure. A variety of resources are needed for teachers to receive curriculum advice and carry out their tasks effectively and efficiently (DBE, 2019). Curriculum advisors are unable to go to multiple schools to support teachers in the classroom without the assistance of government-funded transportation (Mandukwini, 2016). Curriculum advisors must use their vehicles while they wait for the approval of their applications because there isn’t any other reliable transportation available. However, Seshoka (2016) asserted that the money received for utilising a person’s car is insufficient to cover the cost of maintaining it. When it comes to supporting the curriculum, curriculum advisors are not appropriately funded, which has an effect on teachers, learners, and the economy as a whole. Teachers are unable to demonstrate that they have a thorough understanding of the subject matter. The DBE is responsible for making sure that the resources are delivered to schools on time. Moreover, Jacobs, Vakalisa, and Gawe (2011) note that teachers require assistance to implement the curriculum.

In South Africa, the challenges experienced by curriculum advisors in providing curriculum support to schools are significant and getting worse. In light of the aforementioned, this paper investigates challenges faced by curriculum advisors when offering curriculum support to schools in the Waterberg District in the Limpopo Province of South Africa. Therefore, the paper asks: What are the challenges faced by curriculum advisors in offering curriculum support to schools in the Waterberg District of the Limpopo Province of South Africa? Specifically, the paper interrogates:

i. The DBE’s efforts to address challenges faced by curriculum advisors in offering curriculum support to schools in the Waterberg District in Limpopo Province of South Africa

ii. How the school principals and teachers respond to challenges faced by curriculum advisors in offering curriculum support to schools

iii. How curriculum advisors cope with challenges they face in offering curriculum support to schools

This paper is organised as follows: the introduction part, a second part is a literature review; the third part is theoretical underpinnings that anchor the linkage between theory and practice. The fourth part introduces the study presents design and research methodological approach. After analysis and findings of the study, the author provides discussions and implications. Furthermore, the paper presents its findings, which will be followed by discussions and implications. Finally, this paper concludes with a presentation of the key points, recommendations, and future research directions.

**Literature Review**

A literature review on the role of curriculum advisors, challenges faced by curriculum advisors, and strategies to curb the challenges faced by curriculum advisors is the theoretical underpinnings used for this paper.

**The role of curriculum advisors**

In order to assist the historically poor schools by ensuring that education was used as a tool to transform society, the DBE introduced curriculum advisors. Leithwood and Azah (2017) contend that in challenging, unequal, and dynamic circumstances, empowered curriculum advisors are essential change agents. The districts are crucial to supporting mechanisms for increasing learning, according to Fullan (2015). Again, according to Soobrayan (2012), curriculum advisors must improve the availability and acquisition of Learning and Teaching Support Materials (LTSMs) for use in the classrooms. As they are a tool for teaching and empowering teachers in their local schools, especially in rural and township regions, all of these departmental materials must be easily accessible and used successfully. The functions of curriculum advisors, according to Diko, Haupt, and Molefe (2011), extend beyond just overseeing the implementation of the curriculum to include internal assessment and examination procedures. Ngubane (2014) further claimed that the DBE has leadership, policymaking, and monitoring responsibilities for enhancing learning quality and guaranteeing excellent continuous education, but that it falls short in fulfilling these responsibilities. DBE employees who work as curriculum advisors have the responsibility of overseeing and assisting with the implementation of the curriculum in their respective subject areas (Government Gazette, 2016). Similarly, school inspection is a tool for assessing educational quality and an outside oversight of instruction (Klerks, 2012; Hislop, 2017). Many scholars have suggested that encouraging external school oversight is necessary for nations to monitor and improve their educational institutions (Greatbatch & Tate, 2019; Hislop, 2017; Klerks, 2012).

According to Jaffer (2010) and Matete (2021), an outside assessment can assist the Ministry of Education in determining how well the school is performing and how well the educational system as a whole supports and promotes the institution’s quality standards. Although district policies make a conscious effort to address inequality and uneven capability by establishing standards for responsibilities, authority, and funding, many districts lack the resources and capacity to meet these basic requirements for school support. The unequal distribution of resources and professional capacity to promote learning might reinforce inequality between districts and provinces.
Challenges faced by curriculum advisors

The main issue curriculum advisors have while working with and visiting schools is a lack of resources (Mnatwana, 2014). One of the major difficulties experienced by curriculum advisors when observing and assisting schools is a lack of resources, which has an impact on the overall educational system (Mnatwana, 2014). The South African context’s lack of district funding for schools is revealed by Bantwini (2015). Resources, according to Mohapi (2014), have an effect on both the quality of teaching and learning as well as the efficacy of managing and implementing the curriculum. In the same vein, West and Meier (2020) highlight the detrimental effects of a lack of resources, be they material or infrastructural. Lizer (2013) rejects the notion of curriculum advisors visiting schools to evaluate teacher files and curriculum implementation or leading teacher workshops using outdated or unavailable textbooks. The lack of textbooks and out-of-date classrooms make it challenging for teachers, learners, and curriculum advisors to provide effective teaching. The then-Limpopo Education MEC Kgetjjepe stated, “We cannot expect to see results when learners are taught in outdated classrooms crawling with snakes and other reptiles, with insufficient furniture, and sharing textbooks” (Patterson, 2016, p.2). Jerry Ndou, the acting MEC for Education at the time, was described by Patterson (2016, p. 2) as saying that “the latest budget does not fully address the significant infrastructure issues in Limpopo schools.” Additionally, Tshidaho (2018) makes clear that resource allocation is still one of the largest challenges faced by curriculum advisors while supervising and assisting schools, particularly in the underdeveloped and rural regions of Vhembe. Once more, according to Zwane (2016), DBE has been slow to fill significant positions in many districts and provinces. Arguably, the lack of resources is a primary factor that impedes curriculum management and is widely experienced in South African schools.

Moreover, Le Cornu (2012) also highlights a number of factors that contribute to insufficient advisory in schools, including understaffing of curriculum advisors, heavy workloads, and time constraints. Adongo (2000) noted the inadequacies of school inspections by stating that teachers are hardly ever given advice. Further to this, the amount of classroom observation by curriculum advisors is uneven and disturbingly small. Additionally, according to Ige (2012), and DBE (2019), many curriculum advisors are incompetent because they lack the skill and pedagogical training necessary for the job. The DBE is then faced with having to put curriculum advisors in a situation where they must support and monitor subjects for which they are not qualified or suitable monitors (Mbanjwa, 2014). The majority of the times, curriculum advisors are forced to study “on the job” (Mavuso, 2013). The lack of clarity regarding policies and procedures that might impair the curriculum advisors’ practices for leading curriculum, according to Jaffer (2010) and Janney (2010) is another problem that hinders the curriculum advisors’ ability to support schools. In addition, curriculum advisors need to be specialists to support teachers in terms of effective teaching and learning and teacher professional development. However, another significant factor is the absence of a defined procedure for hiring curriculum advisors.

Again, insufficient oversight presents a difficulty to district administrators. Teachers who receive insufficient supervision are unable to demonstrate that they have a sufficient understanding of the evolution, structure, and function of their respective disciplines (Ololube, 2014). The department has made an effort to keep teachers aware about the requirements of the curriculum change. The ability of the South African educational system to offer suitable professional support to schools, however, has a dismal track record, according to Rambuda (2019). Teachers find it challenging to successfully implement curriculum changes in overcrowded classrooms. The DBE (2009) confirms that additional research is necessary to address the overcrowding issue.

Strategies to curb the challenges faced by curriculum advisors

Mbarek and Zaddem (2013), claim that the use of digital technology in teaching and learning allows learners to pick up new skills and knowledge without worrying about the passing of time. Online learning offers a number of benefits, according to Lwoga (2014), including individualized education, better access to knowledge, effective standards and delivery techniques, on-demand content accessibility, engagement, self-pacing, and confidence-building. As a result, it provides flexible, useful, and varied learning environments to fulfill the unique needs of learners. The implementation of the e-learning technique can encourage in learners and graduates a culture of curiosity and inquiry, which are crucial for lifelong learning. According to UNESCO (2017), digital technology may make it easier to obtain resources for teaching and learning of a high calibre. This is especially true in underprivileged areas, where there may not even be any school libraries (Chigona, 2011). Learners and teachers can access information more easily in connected classrooms. Teachers can gain from connectivity once again by enrolling in online courses for professional growth and using digital technology for better management, governance, and administration of the educational system (UNESCO, 2017). Additionally, district offices should facilitate communication and information sharing between the education authorities and schools, as well as between schools (NDP, 2011).

According to studies conducted in several countries (Greatbatch & Tate, 2019; Hislop, 2017; Klerks, 2012), school inspection is important for education. The main six justifications are discussed in this paper, including enhancing the quality of education offered to citizens, encouraging teachers to take responsibility for students’ learning, serving as a liaison between the Ministry of Education and the school, providing professional support to teachers, and assisting parents in selecting the school that is best suited for their children’s education.

Theoretical Framework

This study was driven by the Theory of Curriculum Implementation proposed by Rogan and Grayson (Rogan & Grayson, 2003). It focuses on how teachers apply new curricula and the factors that affect their implementation. Three main concepts—outside agency
support, the ability to support innovation, and the implementation profile pertaining directly to classroom practice—are the foundation of this theory. In this article, measures conducted by organisations outside of schools, specifically the DBE, which influence practice through assistance, are referred to as support from outside agencies.

Along with the capacity to innovate, which seeks to comprehend the teachers’ capacity to execute the curriculum, the profile of implementation makes an effort to comprehend and articulate the degree to which the curriculum's ambitions are applied in classroom practice. Additionally, Capacity to Support the Innovation focuses on internal school support, including physical resources, school ethos and management, teacher factors, and student factors. This study examined difficulties faced by teachers, staff management teams, supervisors and monitors, and school-based activities. This concept typically refers to elements that could help or hurt a specific implementation process.

The term “assistance from outside agencies” refers to initiatives conducted by businesses independent of the schools, in this case, the DBE and curriculum advisors. In assisting the execution of the curriculum, this alludes to the function of curriculum advisors. The DBE is crucial in preparing curriculum advisors for the implementation and administration of curriculum change. Professional development for teachers, the supply of material resources, and monitoring are all included in this construct. This theory is supported by evidence and is still relevant since successful curriculum reform depends on supervision, support, facilitation, and monitoring by the circuit, district authorities, and institutions. Training workshops are a crucial component of teacher professional development. In the same vein, the researcher justifies the use of this theory because it provides the most straightforward method for identifying and understanding problems, as well as for determining the ability of the school management team to generate the necessary internal support for change, provided that schools differ in their ability to successfully implement new curricula. Teachers have to effect change influenced by the support they receive from both inside and outside of the school setting.

The development of the teachers is the most important factor in the success of any curriculum reform, which is unavoidable. Evidence from South Africa and other countries indicates that professional development is inadequate (Rogan & Grayson, 2003). Even the most well-adjusted person or organisation needs ongoing care when things are changing. According to Rogan and Grayson (2003), teachers are responsible for executing the change in the classroom and must receive various forms of support. Verspoor (1989) emphasised the importance of four factors for successful teacher preparation programmes that support curriculum reform: permanent and locally accessible in-service training; effective systems for teacher support, guidance, supervision, and monitoring; adjustment of the content of teacher training to the teachers’ level of knowledge and experience; and encouragement of teachers’ motivation and commitment. The researcher utilise Analytical Framework as a result of the aforementioned factors.

Furthermore, more recent research (Gokmenoglu & Clark, 2015) shows that the requirements for successful teacher training are hampered by several obstacles as well as by dissatisfaction with the level of ongoing support and professional development for teachers. As opposed to depending on sporadic workshops that employ the lecture approach, one problem is the design of sustainable and ongoing professional development activities, related to classroom lessons, that enhance education and meet instructors' needs. Giving teachers enough time to engage in these activities as a group and encouraging them to put what they are learning about the approach into practice to effectively apply what they have learned in the classroom is another problem. Creating monitoring mechanisms and offering high-quality help both internally and outside to create a cycle of continuous improvement is still another issue. The researcher chose this theory because it emphasises the difficulty of the reform process and the need for teachers to be committed to building essential skills.

**Research design and methods**

Based on the interpretive paradigm, an exploratory case study, which employed a qualitative research design, was adopted for this paper. The researcher positioned himself inside an interpretative paradigm based on Neuman's (2006) views, who contends that an interpretive researcher's objective is to acquire knowledge of social life and discover how people construct meaning in natural contexts. This study used the purposive sample to select 15 participants, distributed as follows: 2 retired officials from the DBE in the Waterberg District in Limpopo Province, 3 retired teachers, 5 former principals of the targeted schools, and 5 retired curriculum advisors. The following reasons were used for the selection of participants in this study:

i. Former principals were selected because they have rich information as they were eyewitnesses to the curriculum support in their schools.

ii. Teachers were selected on the basis that they are responsible for the implementation of the curriculum in their schools and they witnessed what happened in their schools.

iii. Curriculum advisors were selected because they were responsible for offering curriculum support to schools.

iv. The officials from the DBE were selected because the office where they worked had to give support to curriculum advisors.

Data were collected through literature reviews and the application of semi-structured Key Informant Interviews by interviewing individuals with informed and rich views on the challenges preventing curriculum advisors from offering curriculum support to schools in rural South Africa, and analysed using Thematic Analysis by pinpointing, examining and recording themes within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This study took advantage of these platforms as sources for its data. Themes and sub-themes were developed to assist the researcher in recording the collected information without difficulty (see Table 1).
Theme 1: Provision of inadequate resources

Findings indicated that the district provided inadequate resources to schools. Mnatwana (2014) affirms that a lack of resources is the primary obstacle curriculum advisors confront when observing and assisting schools. Participants expressed worry that a shortage of resources compromises the effectiveness of the curriculum. Poor resource allocation led to insufficient assistance for curriculum advisors. It emerged from the study that many districts in South Africa don't have the means or capacity to offer expert curriculum management support. It was discovered that the Waterberg district lacked the staff and facilities necessary to support schools in terms of both human and material resources. West and Meier (2020) reveal that the district lacks both financial and physical resources. The aforementioned claim could be argued to be accurate due to the rarity of resource scarcity in a growing country like South Africa. Due to the emphasis on resources, the district is in charge of implementation. It appears that the curriculum advisors blame a lack of resources for poor implementation and haven't come up with innovative solutions to the problem. Historically disadvantaged schools also lack finances to purchase materials such as learning and teaching aids and other physical resources in the form of furniture that enhance teaching and learning. Malumbete (2021) revealed that visits to schools have been infrequent as a result of a lack of funds.

Theme 2: Improper technological equipment

The study revealed a challenge of suitable technological apparatus. The results indicated a lack of technical apparatus. It emerged from the study that curriculum advisors lack operating resources like computers, data projectors, and basic stationery needs, to name a few, according to findings from papers. In addition, Malumbete (2021) argues that curriculum advisors do not possess the necessary technology tools, such as laptops. The participants claimed that the curriculum advisors’ available resources were insufficient for their operational needs, making it impossible for them to carry out their tasks both successfully and efficiently. It might be argued that curriculum advisors require the right technology tools to ensure effective curriculum implementation. Data projectors, printers, and scanners, as well as subject-specific equipment for the curriculum advisors, are unquestionably essential for implementing the curriculum and should therefore be researched. It seems necessary to develop a supportive environment for teaching and learning where curriculum advisers will be readily available to teachers, and instructors will always find it easier to consult with them if they run into any curricular difficulties.

Theme 3: Financial Constraints

The study found that due to funding limitations, curriculum advisors were unable to carry out their responsibilities efficiently. Malumbete (2021) claims that insufficient financing has resulted in irregular school visits. According to Rammbuda (2019), the district does not have enough money to buy Learning and Teaching Support Materials. There was only one curriculum advisor for English First Additional Language in the entire district, which was found to be a result of a lack of financing. Due to their tiny number, curriculum advisors could be unable to fulfil their duty. To guarantee that the curriculum is successfully implemented, it is

Table 1: Data collection template designed from public opinion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Comment</th>
<th>Designation</th>
<th>Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>Provision of inadequate resources</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>Improper technological equipment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>Financial constraints</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>Inadequate district support for curriculum advisors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>Strategies to curb challenges faced by curriculum advisors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The researcher’s design

From the platforms, comments were entered in appropriate columns in the notebook following the theme category as provided in Table 1. The themes (1–5) were to provide the framework for the analysis and subsequent discussion of the study results. The idea was to capture as much data as possible until saturation was reached. As the reviewed comments were unpredictable in their data sources, no fixed number of data sources for a given theme could be determined in advance. In other words, the data sources were not even organized by respective themes. The researcher observed that the method enabled the paper to collect data from a broad base of data sources. Although the researcher did this for interest’s sake and not to capture it in the study, most of the data sources emanated from both former principals, followed by retired teachers, retired curriculum advisors, and retired officials from DBE in the Waterberg District in Limpopo Province of South Africa. The captured data were analysed using a thematic analysis. Results were captured and documented as the main report.

Findings and discussions

The following themes emerged from the thematic analysis of challenges faced by curriculum advisors when offering curriculum support to schools in rural South Africa: Provision of inadequate resources, improper technological equipment, financial constraints, inadequate district support for curriculum advisors, and strategies to curb challenges faced by curriculum advisors.

Theme 1: Provision of inadequate resources

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imperative to address this issue as soon as possible. Once more, according to Zwane (2016), DBE has been slow to fill critical positions in a number of districts and provinces. It appears that the lack of suitable financial resources hinders the effective and efficient work of curriculum advisors. Furthermore, Malumbete (2021) also claims that there are insufficient funds, such as travel and subsistence allowances, to pay for the travel and accommodation expenses of curriculum advisors. The DBE lacks funds for the smooth running of its schools.

**Theme 4: Inadequate district support for curriculum advisors**

The results revealed that the district does not provide appropriate support for curriculum advisors. Bantwini (2015) reveals the lack of support for schools by districts in the South African context. Again, Rammbupa (2019) indicates that the capacity of the South African education system to provide appropriate professional support to schools has a poor track record. Data gathered also showed that workshops were not given enough help. The district was under-supporting curriculum advisors' efforts to promote curricular change. Monitoring and support in schools are not feasible. The issue of purchasing LTSMs was cited as being due to a lack of money. It is impossible to implement a curriculum successfully if the education system has limited funding capacities. It was found that the majority of funding for education is consumed by salaries, leaving little for textbooks, in-service training, curriculum monitoring, and other necessities for the curriculum's orderly implementation. According to Patterson (2016), the most recent budget does not adequately address the significant infrastructural issues in Limpopo schools. The study shows that state monies were improperly managed. Furthermore, Beukes (2017) and West and Meier (2020) contend that under-resourcing and improper uses of public funds are far too prevalent in South Africa.

**Theme 5: Strategies to curb challenges faced by curriculum advisors**

The results highlighted methods to reduce the difficulties that curriculum advisors confront. It emerged from the study that curriculum advisors should be capacitated in the use of digital technology. UNESCO (2017) also stressed the use of digital technology by teachers for more effective management, governance, and administration of education. In addition, Lwoga (2014) highlights several advantages of online learning, including individualised instruction, improved access to knowledge, efficient methods for standardising and delivering content, on-demand content accessibility, interaction, self-pacing, and confidence-boosting. Using digital tools for teaching and learning enables students to pick up new information and abilities. Furthermore, Mbarek and Zaddem (2013) pointed out that digital technologies for teaching and learning enable learners to pick up new knowledge and abilities without being concerned about the space-time shift. Nevertheless, Malumbete (2021) revealed that curriculum advisors lack the necessary technical tools. The implication is that networked classrooms can help learners and teachers access information. In addition, curriculum advisors need to be specialists to support teachers in terms of effective teaching and learning and teachers professional development. Curriculum advisors should be competent and possess the skill and have adequate pedagogical training which is requisite for the task.

**Conclusions**

This paper aimed to investigate the challenges faced by curriculum advisors when offering curriculum support to schools in rural South Africa. An interpretive paradigm was used to frame this qualitative case study. In this paper, Rogan and Grayson’s Theory of Curriculum Implementation was used to explore the challenges faced by curriculum advisors when providing curricular support to schools in rural South Africa. Adequate operational resources should be made available since they can improve everyone's access to high-quality teaching and learning resources. In addition, curriculum advisors should be specialists to support teachers in terms of effective teaching and learning and teacher professional development. Curriculum advisors should be competent and have the skills and adequate pedagogical training that are requisite for the task. It is suggested that in order for the district to properly support curriculum advisors, appropriate resources should also be made available. Again, adequate funding should be made available to address the district's financial issues so that curriculum advisors can easily provide curriculum support.

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**Author Contributions:** Conceptualisation, M.C; methodology, M.C.; validation, M.C.; formal analysis, M.C.; investigation/literature review, M.C.; writing—original draft preparation, M.C.; writing—review and editing, M.C.

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**Data Availability Statement:** The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not available due to restrictions.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.
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