

DOI Link: <https://doi.org/10.59671/tpyZX>

Vol.408, Issue.6, Part.1, June 2025, PP. 100-122

Received April 2025 Accepted May 2025 Published June 2025

A Literature Review on Learning and Development Strategies for Workforce Empowerment in Mpumalanga's Local Government

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ABSTRACT

This theoretical literature review explores essential strategies for enhancing workforce capacity within the local government context of Mpumalanga, South Africa. Utilizing a qualitative methodology, the review synthesizes existing literature sourced from prominent academic search engines, including Google Scholar, JSTOR, and EBSCOhost. Relevant data and insights were gathered from authoritative sources such as Statistics South Africa, local municipalities, the Office of the Auditor-General, the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA), CENSUS, and various survey reports. The literature search was conducted using key terms including "workforce empowerment," "learning and development," "local government," "Mpumalanga," and "capacity building, and cultivating competence." Inclusion criteria were established to focus on literature published in the last decade, emphasizing peer-reviewed articles and policy documents relevant to workforce strategies in local governance. Exclusion criteria filtered out resources that did not specifically address the South African context or lacked empirical support. This review reveals critical findings, indicating that effective learning and development strategies, such as tailored training programs, mentorship initiatives, and performance management systems, significantly enhance workforce competence and empowerment. The analysis highlights the importance of integrating stakeholder involvement and continuous feedback mechanisms in developing these strategies. Based on the findings, the authors recommend a holistic approach to workforce development, advocating for collaborative partnerships between government agencies, educational institutions, and local communities to ensure sustainable empowerment and capacity building in the local government sector of Mpumalanga.

Keywords: Strategy, workforce empowerment, learning and development, local government, public service, Mpumalanga, capacity building.

1 INTRODUCTION

In today's rapidly evolving global landscape, learning and development have emerged as critical components for empowering the workforce across various sectors, including public and private domains. Investment in employee development enhances individual capabilities and drives organisational performance, ultimately benefiting the communities they serve. The employee investment paradigm is recognised worldwide, as organisations increasingly adopt continuous learning initiatives to adapt to market demands, technological advancements, and shifting consumer expectations (Zakaria et al., 2017; Lim, 2023). Focusing on the African context, the trajectory of learning and development within local governments has garnered growing attention. Many African nations grapple with high unemployment rates, especially among youth, which necessitates the urgent implementation of training and development programmes to enhance employability and job performance (Wessels, 2018). The importance of cultivating employee competence in the public sector is intensified by the challenges local governments face including resource constraints, governance issues, and the quest for improved service delivery in the face of increasing citizen expectations (Annan-Prah & Andoh, 2023). Within South Africa, the imperative for robust learning and development strategies is underscored by the ongoing discourse surrounding public service efficacy, particularly within the local government sphere. The South African Finance Minister has voiced concern over the deteriorating quality of municipal services across both metropolitan and rural municipalities, citing an urgent need for reform (National Treasury, 2025). This call to action aligns with the country President's emphasis on the urgency to review local government structures and fiscal frameworks, highlighting the need for enhanced skills and competence among municipal employees to meet new financial requirements and community expectations. Addressing the unique context of Mpumalanga Province, this study reveals a critical research problem: local municipalities are facing significant barriers in implementing effective employee learning and development strategies.

These challenges hinder employee engagement and impede overall organisational performance, thus compromising service delivery to communities. The objectives of this study are therefore fourfold, i). To analyse the existing literature on employee learning and development in local government settings, particularly in Mpumalanga Province. ii). To assess the impact of learning initiatives on employee performance and organizational outcomes within

local government. iii). To identify key challenges hindering the effective implementation of learning and development programmes in local municipalities. iv). To explore best practices from other provinces or sectors that might be applicable for improving employee development in Mpumalanga's local government. v). To provide Learning and Development Strategies for Workforce Empowerment in Mpumalanga's Local Government. Ultimately, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how learning and development initiatives can be optimised within municipalities and to offer evidence-based recommendations specific to the unique challenges and opportunities of Mpumalanga's local government landscape. Through these efforts, we hope to contribute to a more empowered and effective public service that can better respond to the needs of its constituents.

2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Mpumalanga, a strategic province in South Africa, encompasses three district municipalities responsible for 17 local municipalities, including but not limited to Bushbuckridge, Nkomazi, Thaba Chweu, and the City of Mbombela (Cogta.mpg.gov.za, 2025; Municipal Demarcation Board, 2016; Statistics South Africa, 2024). Predominantly rural, these municipalities face high poverty and unemployment rates, with the provincial unemployment rate recorded at 34.7% in the fourth quarter of 2024 — reflecting a concerning increase among the youth population (ages 15-34) at 46.4% (Statistics South Africa, 2024). The increasing reliance on social grants among indigent households underscores the urgent need for innovative learning and development strategies to empower the workforce. The performance of Mpumalanga's municipalities is consistently scrutinized by residents, leading to widespread dissatisfaction with service delivery. The recent decline in support for the African National Congress (ANC) in the 2024 elections demonstrates a significant public outcry regarding effective governance at the local level (Isabirye et al., 2024). Considering these challenges, Cogta Mpumalanga (2016) has reported critical shortcomings in performance management systems across local municipalities, where: i). A lack of standardization creates confusion regarding performance expectations. ii). Most municipalities lack the capacity to establish and sustain effective performance management structures. iii). Significant non-compliance issues remain unaddressed. Such an environment hinders the responsiveness of municipalities to community needs, as indicated by the Auditor General's findings in the 2023/24 report, revealing widespread performance deficiencies across various local governments. Despite some

municipalities showing improvements in basic service delivery—such as access to clean water and electricity—the pervasive challenges in refuse removal and sanitation highlight the dire need for enhanced local government capacity (Statistics South Africa, 2025). Premier Mandla Ndlovu's recent State of the Province address echoes the need for continued efforts towards improved service delivery amidst alarming youth unemployment rates, which have risen significantly in previous years. Against this backdrop, this literature review seeks to illuminate the necessary learning and development strategies that can empower the workforce within Mpumalanga's municipalities, ultimately improving service delivery and governance. By addressing these challenges, we can explore pathways for establishing a standardized and sustainable performance management framework that meets the constitutional mandates while enhancing community trust and participation in local governance.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used qualitative methods because the researchers aimed to gather insight into the experiences of municipal employees with learning and development in their work environment (Corner et al., 2019) and identify best practices from other provinces of South Africa that can be adapted to better the performance of training and development strategies in the province of Mpumalanga. The literature search strategy in this study involved reading and interpreting scholarly works from government websites, peer-reviewed academic journals, and databases in the training and development, and research domain to determine the suitable training and development strategies that can be adapted and applied to municipalities in the province of Mpumalanga. Related themes, strategies, approaches, and practices relevant to this study were identified, analyzed, and categorized according to meaning. The literature synthesized in this study was harvested from existing literature sources from prominent academic search engines, including Google Scholar, JSTOR, EBSCOhost, and government websites. The researchers used broad keywords like training and development, learning and development, municipal performance, Mpumalanga socio-economic, performance management system, learning and development strategy, qualitative research methodology training, Qualitative research learning, qualitative research development, and qualitative data analysis. Using qualitative research methods, this research paper is an outcome of a comprehensive analysis of learning and development strategies implemented with municipal employees in other provinces as reported by various academic authors about training and development in municipalities.

3.1 Selection criteria

This study only selected articles, reports, data, and information relevant to education, training, and development in public service and municipalities, municipal performance, municipal mandate, municipal service delivery, skills in municipalities, finances in municipalities, municipalities and communities, municipalities, and coalition politics. The selection focused on the relevance of keywords and content. The literature had to be less than ten years old to obsolete dated information. Reliance on the most recent studies and sources was considered important by the researchers of this study. The sources included empirical studies and theoretical papers. Emphasis was on peer-reviewed articles, reports, and policy documents relevant to workforce, and performance strategies in local governance. Out of 73 articles downloaded, 49 were regarded useful for this paper because they covered information on training and development, learning and development, municipal performance, municipal finance, Mpumalanga socio-economic and political environment, performance management system, learning and development strategy, qualitative research methodology training, Qualitative research learning, qualitative research development, qualitative data analysis. The preferred articles covered training and development, learning and development, municipal performance, and learning and development strategy in Mpumalanga province, South Africa, and the African continent. Most of the articles and reports that were not used covered contexts outside the African continent, some although relevant, were mainly private sector focused, and others dated above the ten-year threshold. Analysis techniques This qualitative study employed thematic analysis to identify, analyse, and write down themes that emerged from the qualitative data that was extracted from peer-reviewed research papers, relevant municipal policies and reports, Auditor General's report, Statistics South Africa report, Census, state of the nation address, Budget speech, and state of the province address. Emerging enabled the researchers to establish deeper meanings, experiences, and behaviour of the municipal employees and their organisations. The researchers started by reading the sources broadly to generate knowledge and understanding of the information contained in the documents. Familiarising with the data was followed highlighting important ideas from the documents that enabled the development of broader themes and refined from the original data to create meaning. The established meaning was interpreted and conclusions about the best training and development practices that can be adapted to the Mpumalanga municipal context were reached.

3.2 Limitations of the methodology and search criterion

The decision to disregard private sector data deprived this study an opportunity to learn from high-performing private sector organisations. Although focused on profit, the private sector has the advantage of being performance-based and preoccupied with wealth creation. Municipalities are bound to self-sustain, meaning that they must generate revenue for their continued existence. Due to the need to sustain, some private sector training and development practices might, if properly adapted, add to the performance of municipalities in Mpumalanga, especially when considering the commitment to customer satisfaction and standards. It would be acceptable if future studies of similar focus can explore practices in the private sector that can be adapted to public service to increase the adequacy of local municipalities in Mpumalanga province, and the broader South African public service.

3.3 Rigour and trustworthiness

Over the years, research methodology scholars have proposed different ways of ensuring rigour and trustworthiness in qualitative investigations. Some have proposed checklists that must be followed to certify studies as rigorous and transparent. Other researchers have argued that checklists are limiting to the potential of qualitative methods that are useful for their flexibility and open-endedness. Another view is in favour of a guideline to be followed by peer reviewers and researchers to determine rigour and trustworthiness (Ahmed, 2024; & Leung, 2015). Ensuring trustworthiness is crucial in establishing the credibility and reliability of qualitative results. It includes the elements of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Stahl & King, 2020). This study relied on peer-reviewed articles, and empirical studies whose credibility was confirmed through the scholarly peer review mechanisms, government reports like the Auditor General's report, statistics South Africa reports, and census reports regulated by the South African Constitution. The results of the current study relied on credible sources that can be confirmed for authenticity and standards and can be verified. In this study, sources used to extract data were rigorously examined, allocating comparable scrutiny time on all of them, and equal opportunity to contribute to the discourse by comparing and contrasting their contents against the aims and objectives of this study.

The elimination requirements were clearly stated and applied to all sources that were consulted. All sources were also subjected to a relevance test considering the key concepts, words that characterized the entire study (Stahl & King, 2020). The outcomes of this study are transferable because the best practices of the Mbhashe local municipality in the Eastern Cape is adaptable, and can be used in municipalities in Mpumalanga, and other provinces of South Africa.

This paper explored the key strategies that are implemented in different municipalities in the Republic of South Africa with the purpose of benchmarking best practices that can be adapted for use in municipalities in Mpumalanga province. Using qualitative methods were used to assess and analyze the relevant literature available. Practices in public service and municipalities were studied, and the findings revealed that in most municipalities, strategies that are used to provide for the training of employees, do not align well with the skills needs of their workplaces. As a result, the investment committed to training and development of municipal employees does not contribute in improving the performance of municipalities in Mpumalanga. The study found that the training and development strategy of the Mbhashe local municipality in the Eastern Cape contains most of the elements of an effective employee empowerment initiative. Key to the strength of the Mbhashe local municipality strategy is its aligning nature to the skills needs of the municipal priorities, the provision for continuous assessment of the strategy for alignment to the changing needs of the municipality, alignment to the performance management system of the municipality among others. The researchers concluded that the Mbhashe training and development strategy might benefit municipalities in Mpumalanga if adequately adapted to respond to the prevailing environment and contexts of individual municipalities.

4 LITERATURE REVIEW

In the following sections, literature that foregrounds the current study is presented.

4.1 Employee Learning and Development in Local Government Settings

The significance of employee learning and development (L&D) in local government settings is underscored by the constitutional mandate of the Republic of South Africa, which requires municipalities to provide essential social services to their communities (Act 108, section 152

of 1996). The ability of local government employees to effectively deliver these services is highly contingent on their training, skill sets, and overall professional development (Ariusni & Andrianus, 2024; Akpalu & Markom, 2022; Wessels, 2022). Local municipalities, operating in various capacities, represent a government tier that is intimately connected to community needs and expectations. Hence, L&D serves as a crucial enabler for optimizing service delivery processes. Investing in employee development not only facilitates individual growth but also compels organizations to improve operational efficiency and overall performance (Ariusni & Andrianus, 2024). Evidence suggests that local governments that prioritize employee development enjoy sustainable succession planning and enhanced organizational effectiveness (Ariusni & Andrianus, 2024; Akpalu & Markom, 2022). Furthermore, a well-structured L&D framework fosters human resources initiatives that not only support employee growth but also drive collective performance; thereby fortifying the alignment of local governments with their service mandates (Wessels, 2022; & Mkhabela, 2015).

4.2 Impact of Learning Initiatives on Employee Performance and Organizational Outcomes

The relationship between learning initiatives and employee performance in local government is well-documented in various studies. Higher levels of employee performance are directly linked to the quality of training and the acquisition of applicable skills and competencies (Nchuchuwe & Etim, 2020; Yimam, 2022). For instance, it has been argued that the efficacy of government performance is ascertained through the productivity and efficiency of its workforce (Ghebreorgis & Negusse, 2022). In this respect, a myriad of research underscores the critical role of training and development in bolstering employee performance (Nor, 2023; Sabekti & Setawan, 2023). Strong support for employee training and development within local governments correlates with enhanced service delivery capabilities. Research indicates that without adequate knowledge and competency-building initiatives, government institutions struggle to fulfill their constitutional imperatives (Nor, 2023). For example, in the context of Somalia's post-civil war recovery, comprehensive training programs were employed as a strategy to enhance government administration and capacity, demonstrating the transformative effects of L&D investments on public sector outcomes (Akpalu & Markom, 2022; Nor, 2023). In South African municipalities, a systematic approach to L&D involves various interventions such as training workshops, mentoring, coaching, and simulations (Isabirye et al., 2024). The

design and structure of training programs must align with the unique needs of employees and be backed by organizational commitment to ensure success (Cummings et al., 2021; Isabirye & Moloi, 2023). Training methodologies that cultivate essential skills in areas such as leadership, communication, and negotiation are particularly vital in a landscape marked by coalition politics, where the ability to navigate complexities is increasingly important (Bright Network, 2019). Moreover, as underscored by recent studies, ongoing L&D initiatives significantly impact organizational outcomes by enhancing employee competencies that translate into improved service delivery (Ariusni & Andrianus, 2024; Akpalu & Markom, 2022). It is imperative for local governments to adopt a holistic view of learning and development, seeing it not only as a contributor to individual employee success but also as a strategic lever for achieving organizational goals and delivering public value effectively. What the foregoing observations imply is that employee learning and development emerge as critical dimensions influencing the performance and outcomes of local government operations. A nuanced understanding of the interplay between training initiatives, employee performance, and organizational success is essential for public sector entities seeking to meet their service delivery mandates and ensure the effective stewardship of community resources. The investment in human capital through targeted learning frameworks will undoubtedly continue to be a cornerstone for enhancing local governance and public service effectiveness.

4.3 Challenges affecting learning initiatives in local municipalities

The pursuit of effective training and development within local municipalities is fraught with numerous challenges that hinder learning initiatives. A critical examination of the existing literature reveals that even when training programmes are initiated with the support of municipal frameworks, glaring inadequacies are visible. Participants frequently report that these training efforts fail to address the core skills required by employees and their respective organizations. As highlighted by Isabirye et al. (2024), Hill (2023), Yimam (2022), and Hassan (2020) the disconnect between training content and the actual skill needs of employees poses a considerable barrier to the effectiveness of these initiatives. This misalignment underscores the importance of tailoring training programs to the unique demands of municipal work environments to ensure that financial investments yield meaningful outcomes (Hayes & Smith, 2021). A pervasive issue identified in the literature is the lack of relevant training materials, particularly in the area of financial management. Isabirye et al. (2024) and Mkhabela (2015)

point out that many training programs fail to provide adequate resources that are aligned with the specific requirements of municipalities. Consequently, the absence of contextualized training can lead to a significant waste of financial resources, as the lack of appropriate content undermines the potential for skill development. Moreover, the constricted timeframe allocated for training programs further exacerbates these challenges. As Hill (2023) and Yimam (2022) indicate, short-duration training sessions limit employees' ability to engage with and absorb the material thoroughly. This issue is compounded by the tendency of programmes to be implemented as one-off initiatives without any follow-up or evaluation mechanisms. The absence of post-training assessment mechanisms leaves a substantial gap in understanding the effectiveness of the programs, ultimately leading to questions about the value of these interventions to municipal employees and their organizations (Hayes & Smith, 2021; Isabirye et al., 2024). The literature also points to a prevailing emphasis on academic qualifications within municipal training and development strategies, which often lack strategic alignment with the practical skills required for municipal work. Employees frequently pursue degrees in public administration, which, while somewhat relevant, do not adequately address critical competencies in areas such as municipal finance management. This emphasis without a clear mechanism for determining which qualifications can effectively contribute to the skill set needed in municipalities leads to a mismatch in employee preparedness (Isabirye et al., 2024; Mdhlalose, 2020). Ultimately, as municipalities continue to invest in training and development, there is an imperative need for accountability regarding the financial resources allocated. The existing interventions have not significantly improved employee performance, suggesting that a re-evaluation of training models is crucial for fostering an effective learning environment within local governments. Scholars emphasize a transition towards more adaptable, needs-based training programs that enhance local governments' operational efficacy (Osborne et al., 2021; Yelubayeva et al., 2023). It can therefore be asserted that the challenges affecting learning initiatives in local municipalities are complex and multifaceted. There is a pressing need for alignment between training programs and the skill requirements of municipalities, as well as the development of robust evaluation frameworks to assess the impact of such initiatives comprehensively. Addressing these challenges is essential for enhancing the capabilities of municipal employees and ensuring the effective use of training resources.

4.4 Socio-economic and Political Factors Influencing Training and Development Programs in Mpumalanga Province

The socio-economic landscape of Mpumalanga province in South Africa presents unique challenges and opportunities for training and development programs. The province's rural characteristics, with a significant majority of its population engaged in subsistence farming and reliant on government grants for livelihoods, create an environment where funding for training and development is often deprioritized. According to Statistics South Africa (2024), a substantial number of municipalities lack a robust revenue base, largely depending on national treasury allocations directed primarily towards basic service delivery. This situation hampers economic growth and impacts the municipalities' ability to prioritize employee training initiatives. The economic context of South Africa further complicates matters. With the nation's economy growing at a mere 0.6%, the minister of finance faces significant constraints in budget allocations, exacerbated by the reality that 75% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is consumed by servicing debts (News24, 11 March 2025). This fiscal environment limits available funds for critical programmes, including those aimed at enhancing skills and capabilities within local government. Notably, the national skills fund—an essential resource for financing training in municipalities—faces threats of withdrawal as political parties argue for redirecting funds to more immediate needs (Isabirye et al., 2024). Such political discourse raises concerns over the sustainability of training initiatives, as reliance on external funding can create a precarious environment for ongoing development efforts. Moreover, the political climate has seen the emergence of coalition municipal councils, which, as highlighted by Gumede (2024) and Mofokeng et al. (2024), often leads to instability in governance. Frequent leadership changes and the underlying power struggles within coalitions can disrupt critical decision-making processes related to training and development. The alignment of local governance with specific political agendas may overshadow the long-term needs of employee development. In environments characterized by instability, the commitment to training and development diminishes, as immediate political considerations tend to take precedence over strategic human resource development. Further exacerbating the challenges is the impact of local governance disruptions on service delivery. As noted by Zweni (2022), the prioritization of basic services often overshadows the need for systematic employee development programs, resulting in a cyclical pattern of neglect that undermines overall governance efficacy. The frustration of constituents with local services can create additional pressure on coalition

leaders, who may be more inclined to focus on populist measures rather than nurturing a skilled workforce. The socio-economic and political factors outlined above emphasize the multi-layered challenges facing training and development programs in Mpumalanga municipalities. The interdependencies between socio-economic status, political stability, and effective governance underscore the need for a holistic approach in designing training initiatives that align with the province's unique context. Future research could explore innovative funding models and partnerships that leverage local resources and address the pressing issues within rural municipalities, thereby fostering a culture of continuous learning and development despite prevailing constraints. Thus, the literature illustrates that while socio-economic factors such as reliance on governmental funding and limited economic growth pose significant barriers to training and development, the political landscape can exacerbate these challenges by prioritizing short-term political gains over sustainable human resource development. Addressing the complexities of governance, funding, and community expectations will be vital for enhancing training and development programs in the region.

4.5 Best Training and development Practices from other provinces

The landscape of training and development practices in South Africa's municipalities is nuanced and varies significantly across provinces. Effective training and development regimes are crucial for aligning employees' skills with the strategic objectives of local governments, ultimately enhancing service delivery to communities. Best practices from other provinces provide valuable insights that can be implemented in municipalities, particularly in Mpumalanga, to improve training outcomes. One notable example is the Training and Development Strategy implemented by the Mbhashe local municipality in the Eastern Cape. This strategy is especially comprehensive, as it aligns training initiatives with the municipality's mandate, ensuring the development of skills directly linked to enhancing basic service delivery (Mbhashe Local Municipality, 2021-2025). By conducting regular skills assessments, the municipality can identify priority areas for training that correspond not only to the organizational needs but also to the evolving demands of the community. Similar practices, when adopted by municipalities in Mpumalanga, could mitigate the often-disjointed nature of training that fails to meet local requirements and expectations (Isabirye et al., 2024). Incorporating performance management systems into the training architecture is another best practice worth noting. This approach allows municipalities to track the effectiveness of training

initiatives and to assess whether newly acquired skills contribute positively to both employee performance and organizational goals. The integration of performance management with training creates a feedback loop, encouraging continuous improvement and ensuring that resources are allocated to the most impactful initiatives (Nor, 2025). Communities benefit from this alignment, as it directly links training outputs to service delivery imperatives. Contrastingly, findings from the Nyandeni local municipality reveal the pitfalls of poorly aligned training programs. Research by Mabungela and Mapuranga (2022) indicates that lack of evaluation of training initiatives has resulted in inadequate service delivery. This underscores the necessity of implementing robust assessment mechanisms that evaluate the training's impact on service outcomes, ensuring that employee development translates into tangible improvements within municipal operations. Such lessons could serve as cautionary tales for municipalities in Mpumalanga, where training programs might suffer from similar misalignment. Furthermore, the framework outlined in the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (2012) emphasizes a learning-oriented approach, yet it falls short in addressing the practical challenges of alignment between skills acquisition and the needs of local government. The need for training programmes to transcend theoretical frameworks and align closely with community-specific service delivery priorities has never been more evident (Zweni, 2022). This calls for municipalities to adopt more pragmatic and responsive training strategies that directly respond to community feedback and service delivery assessments. To maximize the effectiveness of training and development initiatives, municipalities should also consider leveraging relationships with relevant Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), such as the Local Government Sector Education and Training Authority (LGSETA). By enhancing collaboration with SETAs, municipalities can access additional funding and resources, enabling the development of tailored training programs that reflect the skills shortages identified in their strategic assessments. In conclusion, municipalities in Mpumalanga stand to benefit significantly from adopting best training and development practices observed in other provinces, like the strategic focus seen in the Mbhashe local municipality. Key pillars include regular skills assessments, performance management integration, robust evaluation mechanisms, and enhanced collaboration with SETAs. By prioritizing these areas, municipalities can foster a culture of continuous learning, ensuring that training efforts not only address employees' immediate needs but also resonate with the broader service delivery priorities of their communities.

5 RECCOMENDATIONS

The explored literature review highlights the need for evidence-based strategies to enhance learning and development (L&D) within Mpumalanga's local government. The following recommendations are formulated to guide policymakers and practitioners in cultivating competence and empowering the workforce effectively.

5.1 Implement Comprehensive Onboarding Programmes

To foster a culture of learning from the outset, local governments should implement structured onboarding programs that go beyond mere orientation, focusing on mutual learning opportunities (Jeske & Olson, 2022). These programmes can establish foundational competencies and align new hires with the organization's values and goals. This approach not only enhances retention rates but also accelerates the acclimatization of employees, which is critical in a public sector context where service delivery impacts community trust. It is vital that local governments develop a standardized onboarding framework that includes training modules on public service ethics, community engagement, and collaborative decision-making, ensuring all new staff participate regardless of their prior experience.

5.2 Foster Lifelong Learning Opportunities

Given the fast-paced changes in technology and public needs, adopting a lifelong learning framework is essential. Programmes should incorporate continuous professional development, tailored training sessions, and mentorship schemes. Such initiatives promote adaptability and equip employees with the necessary skills to meet evolving challenges (Poquet & De Laat, 2021). Investing in partnerships with educational institutions to offer accredited training programmes and create a robust system for tracking employee progress and skill acquisition will be one way of ensuring that local government workers are exposed to learning opportunities. Additionally, implementing flexible learning schedules that allow employees to engage in learning without disrupting service delivery will enable municipal workers to engage with their training while at the same serving their communities.

5.3 Integrate Evidence-Based Governance Practices

Local governments should prioritize the integration of evidence-based strategies in their L&D initiatives. Utilizing frameworks such as the policy ecology framework proposed by Wortham et al. (2023) can help local governments assess their existing programmes and identify areas for improvement. This involves collecting data on current L&D outcomes, analyzing gaps, and deploying practices that have been proven effective in similar contexts. As a way of implementing policy of integrated evidence-based governance practices, it will be essential for the municipalities to establish a dedicated task force to oversee the evaluation and redesign of L&D programmes based on empirical data. This task force should include representatives from various departments to ensure that a diverse range of perspectives is accounted for in policy planning and execution.

5.4 Encourage Collaborative Learning Environments

Creating a collaborative atmosphere promotes shared knowledge and skills. Local governments in Mpumalanga can leverage team-based learning approaches that encourage peer mentoring and knowledge-sharing platforms. Encouraging employees to work together on projects and participate in discussion forums can enhance collective problem-solving abilities and foster innovation (Osher et al., 2021). The practical suggestion regarding encouraging collaborative learning environments would be setting up regular inter-departmental workshops and forums where employees can share best practices and lessons learned from their experiences. This approach not only builds camaraderie but also ensures that valuable insights are disseminated across the organization.

5.5 Advance Strategic Human Resource Management Practices

Aligning human resource management practices with organizational goals is crucial for maximizing public sector performance (Knies et al., 2024). Implementing strategic HR frameworks that prioritize merit-based promotions, performance appraisals, and recognition programmes can empower employees and drive motivation. As a policy recommendation, Local government leaders should review and revise current HR policies to promote transparency and fairness. Furthermore, regular workshops can be conducted to train HR personnel in strategic management principles, ensuring a cohesive approach towards L&D initiatives. These strategies, grounded in evidence and best practices from literature, provide a

roadmap for enhancing learning and development in Mpumalanga's local government. By implementing these recommendations, local government authorities can cultivate an empowered workforce capable of meeting the needs of the community effectively. The holistic adoption of these evidence-based strategies will not only benefit individual employees but will also contribute substantially to improved public service outcomes and overall community satisfaction (Rosalia, 2022).

6 CONCLUSION

This theoretical literature review sought to analyse the existing literature on learning and development in the local government settings of the provinces of South Africa, assessing the impact of learning and development initiatives on employees and organizational performance. Through assessment, identify the key challenges hindering the effective implementation of learning and development programmes in municipalities in Mpumalanga, to explore best practices from other provinces that can be ideal for increasing the performance of municipal employees in Mpumalanga province. The qualitative research methodology was more suitable for this study because it facilitated the exploration of essential strategies for enhancing workforce capacity within the local government context of Mpumalanga, and other provinces of South Africa. This literature review on learning and development (L&D) strategies for workforce empowerment in Mpumalanga's local government has elucidated the vital role that effective L&D initiatives play in enhancing public sector performance. Key findings reveal that comprehensive onboarding programs, lifelong learning opportunities, evidence-based governance, collaborative learning environments, and strategic human resource management practices are essential components that can elevate the competencies of local government employees. The implications of these findings for local government management are profound. Enhanced onboarding processes not only foster employee alignment with organizational mission but also contribute to higher retention rates. Moreover, a commitment to lifelong learning equips public servants with the adaptive capabilities necessary for navigating the complexities of modern governance. Integrating evidence-based practices ensures that L&D initiatives remain relevant and impactful, while collaborative environments encourage knowledge sharing and collective problem-solving. Finally, aligning HR practices with strategic organisational goals promotes a motivated and empowered workforce, ready to serve the community effectively. While this review provides a foundational understanding of

effective L&D strategies, it also highlights the necessity for further research in this critical area. Future studies should explore the specific contextual factors unique to Mpumalanga's local government that influence the implementation of these strategies. Investigating the long-term impacts of enhanced L&D on community engagement and citizen satisfaction would provide valuable insights for policymakers. By building on this foundational literature, researchers can contribute significantly to optimising workforce empowerment strategies in the public sector, ultimately leading to improved governance outcomes for the communities served.

6.1 Summary of key findings and their implications for local government management

This study found that municipalities in Mpumalanga support training and development for employees. The lack of alignment between the skills that employees are trained in, and the skills that their work environment needs remain a major concern. Most employees use the available development opportunities to advance their academic qualifications with fewer benefits to their work skills demand. If the status quo is allowed to continue, lack of capacity to respond to the service delivery needs of communities is likely to persist, and the investment in training and development will continue to be a fruitless expenditure. This study concludes that the training and development strategy of the Mbhashe local municipality remains a positive reference for municipalities that are committed to aligning their skills needs to those of their employees, especially in Mpumalanga province.

6.2 Call for further research to build on this foundational literature review

Future research is required to explore the possibility of developing uniform principles that must guide the development of strategies to facilitate training and development in all municipalities in South Africa. The common principles would help all municipalities with alignment, and continuous assessment of the skills needs of employees and their municipalities to guarantee relevant and appropriate investment in interventions that add to increased performance in municipalities. The District Development Model which was introduced by President Cyril Ramaphosa in 2019 to address the lack of synergy in municipal planning processes can be explored as the possible avenue for developing aligned strategies for training and development in all municipalities in South Africa.

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