

South-South Teaching Collaborations: An Activity Theory Perspective on Educators' Capacity Development

<https://doi.org/10.36615/epzsdn76>

Monique Keevy

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2580-7367>

Department of Accountancy,
College of Business and Economic Science,
University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South
Africa

mstrauss@uj.ac.za

ABSTRACT

This study uses the lens of Activity Theory to explore the dynamics of a capacity development relationship among educators in the Global South. The research employed a qualitative approach, including questionnaires and interviews with educators from two recipient higher education institutions (HEIs). The findings highlight the importance of a staggered, structured approach to capacity development, where incremental responsibility transfer enables recipient educators to acquire essential skills in teaching, assessment, and curriculum design. Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of mutual respect, collaboration, and continuous professional dialogue within South-South teaching collaborations, contrasting this approach with traditional North-South models. The contribution of this study lies in its novel application of Activity Theory to capacity development, providing valuable insights into how shared responsibilities, tools, and feedback loops facilitate sustainable growth. This research also offers guidance on implementing a staggered capacity development approach, emphasising the benefits of long-term, contextually relevant collaborations in strengthening educational practices and institutional quality.

Submitted: February 18, 2025

Accepted: April 7, 2026

Introduction

This study aims to understand the dynamics of a capacity development relationship among educators in the Global South, using the lens of Activity Theory. It explores how a teaching collaboration influences recipient educators' teaching practices, knowledge exchange, and professional relationships within their academic environments. The World Bank advocates for the capacity development of emerging countries, given their inherent socio-economic and political challenges (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2007). This has resulted in various calls to build the capacity of HEIs in developing countries (Botman, Van Zyl, Fokie & Pauw, 2009; Färnman, Diwan, Zwarenstein & Atkins, 2016; Kariwo, 2017).

Calls for capacity development have led to various collaborations between countries in the Global North and the Global South. However, despite growing interest in such collaborations, a significant gap remains in empirical research examining teaching collaborations between regions (Brum & Knobel, 2018; Tuba, 2023). Most of the studies on collaborations between North-South institutions (Gaillard, 1994; Jørgensen, 2012; Färnman *et al.*, 2016; Frantz, Leach, Pharaoh, Bassett, Roman, Smith *et al.*, 2016; Owusu-Nimo & Boshoff, 2017), or South-South institutions (West & Shackleton, 1999; Obamba & Mwema, 2009; Boshoff, 2010; Färnman *et al.*, 2016), focus on research. However, it is through the educator, via a teaching collaboration, that capacity development has the propensity to impact the human capital of students through the delivery of the academic programme (Botman *et al.*, 2009; Okafor, 2012; Heryadi, Darmastuti & Rachman, 2024) and, ultimately, society at large through the establishment of strong universities capable of competing in a globalised society (Kariwo, 2017; Robson, 2017). Therefore, this study extends the literature in this area by addressing capacity development collaborations with a focus on teaching capacity. Another dimension of the current study is that it does not propose a North-South collaboration. Capacity development is integral to development studies, where it is assumed to operate between the North and the South (Standing & Taylor, 2016). Northern partners are, therefore, often observed as the 'givers', and the Southern recipients as the 'receivers' (Rosseel, De Corte, Blommaert & Verniers, 2009). However, there is a strong belief that the current paradigm must change from the prevailing and unequal frameworks of North-South interaction (Pearson, 2011; Jørgensen, 2012; Standing & Taylor, 2016). A South-South collaboration is considered a more symmetrical and balanced relationship (Gaillard, 1994; West & Shackleton, 1999; Obamba & Mwema, 2009). Consequently, scholars have called for capacity development involving South-South collaborations to develop Southern paradigms and theories (Jørgensen, 2012; Adriansen & Madsen, 2019; Ofir, 2021).

While North-South collaborations have been shown to contribute to capacity development, South-South collaborations are equally important, as significant capacities exist within developing countries themselves (Binka, 2005; Pearson, 2011; Were, Jere, Lanyo, Mburu, Kiriinya, Waudu *et al.*, 2019; Heryadi *et al.*, 2024). Developing countries can therefore benefit from shared expertise and collaborative exchange (Chaturvedi, 2016). This study advances the literature by exploring a capacity development teaching collaboration in which both the partner and recipient HEIs are located in the Global South, thereby contributing to the understanding of South-South collaboration.

The study offers unique insights into how recipient educators perceive the dynamics of a capacity development teaching collaboration in the Global South. In this South-South teaching collaboration, one HEI plays a key role in enhancing educators' capacity at other HEIs to improve the delivery of their academic programmes. By focusing on the recipients' perspective, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of capacity development in higher education through the lens of Activity Theory.

Literature review

Capacity development emerged as a concept in the late 1980s and early 1990s after decades of development interventions between developed and developing nations (Lusthaus, Adrien & Perstinger, 1999; Vincent-Lancrin, 2007; Clarke & Oswald, 2010). Before this, the conceptual predecessors to capacity development were 'institution building', 'institution strengthening', 'development management', 'technical assistance', and 'human resources management' (Lusthaus *et al.*, 1999; Lopes & Theisohn, 2003). Capacity development emerged as an aggregate of these aforementioned concepts (Lusthaus *et al.*, 1999), reflecting a shift toward more sustainable, long-term, comprehensive, and independent development interventions (Lopes & Theisohn, 2003; Vincent-Lancrin, 2007; Clarke & Oswald, 2010).

The change in capacity development from the previous developmental models can best be illustrated through the well-known proverb:

Give someone a fish and he eats for a day; teach someone to fish, and he can feed himself for a lifetime (Vincent-Lancrin, 2007:53).

Capacity development is formally defined as

the process through which individuals, organizations, and societies obtain, strengthen, and maintain the capabilities to set and achieve their own development objectives over time (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2009:5).

Building on the historical shift towards more sustainable and comprehensive development models, the terms "capacity building" and "capacity development" have often been used interchangeably in the literature (Mormina, 2019). This overlap in terminology reflects the evolving understanding of how to enhance organisational and individual capabilities for long-term success. In earlier works, scholars such as Vincent-Lancrin (2004) described the relationship between these terms as synonymous, acknowledging that while they may sometimes carry slightly different meanings, they are broadly treated as conveying the same idea. For instance, capacity building is frequently associated with certain contexts in Africa, such as trade and private sector development, whereas capacity development is more commonly used within aid development agencies. However, Vincent-Lancrin's later work (2007) introduced a more nuanced distinction between the two concepts, noting that capacity development is a more accurate term as it recognises that existing capacities are already in place, even though they may need strengthening. Scholars support this distinction, highlighting that capacity development focuses on enhancing and strengthening existing capabilities rather than building from scratch (Lopes & Theisohn, 2003; UNDP, 2009).

Capacity development in HEIs

Capacity development in the Global South is essential for addressing persistent challenges in HEIs, such as resource shortages, curriculum gaps, and limited access to contemporary teaching methods, which constrain staff development and the overall quality of education (Fägerlind & Saha, 2010; Keevy, Verhoef & Tharapos, 2023). Such initiatives strengthen teaching practices and knowledge exchange, while enhancing leadership and management capacities that support long-term institutional improvement (Adriansen & Madsen, 2019). In particular, building educators' pedagogical skills is crucial for addressing curriculum deficiencies and fostering transformative academic programmes that respond to evolving professional and educational demands (Keevy, Tharapos, O'Connell, Verhoef, de Lange & Beatson, 2025).

While capacity development is increasingly recognised as central to strengthening higher education systems in the Global South, the broader policy context in which it operates reveals persistent

tensions. Despite global frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (including SDG 4) calling for equitable international partnerships in education, power asymmetries remain evident, particularly in collaborations where development projects are predominantly initiated and led by institutions in the Global North (Standing & Taylor, 2016; Tuba, 2023). This pattern reflects how broader economic and political forces interact with educational goals: the market-oriented positioning of higher education can unintentionally reproduce hierarchical structures reminiscent of colonial power dynamics, thereby limiting the agency and decision-making autonomy of Southern institutions (Tuba, 2023). These critiques underscore the importance of strengthening South–South collaborations, where institutions with comparable socio-economic contexts can engage on a more equitable footing, thereby fostering contextually relevant and mutually beneficial capacity development (Heryadi *et al.*, 2024).

North–South and South–South collaborations have been increasingly distinguished in the literature due to their differing dynamics and implications for capacity development. In many established North–South collaborations, Northern institutions have historically been positioned as the ‘providers’ of expertise and resources, while Southern institutions have assumed the role of ‘recipients,’ creating asymmetrical, sometimes dependency-based relationships (Gaillard, 1994; West & Shackleton, 1999). Although some collaborations have evolved towards more balanced models characterised by greater mutual respect, accountability, and shared governance (Kassie, 2024), structural hierarchies and uneven power relations continue to limit Southern influence in determining project priorities and outcomes (Tuba, 2023). In many cases, capacity development interventions are shaped largely by Northern expertise and thematic interests – as illustrated by Finnish-led programmes – requiring Global South partners to realign their priorities to fit externally defined agendas. Such dynamics raise important questions regarding sustainability, long-term relevance, and the transformative potential of these initiatives, underscoring the need for capacity development approaches that strengthen Southern ownership, leadership, and strategic direction in higher education transformation (Tuba, 2023).

In contrast, South–South collaborations have gained increasing attention for their potential to foster mutual learning and address development challenges shared by countries in the Global South (Pearson, 2011; Kassie, 2024). Unlike North–South collaborations, which often involve the transfer of knowledge from more developed contexts, South–South partnerships emphasise collaboration between countries with similar socio-economic conditions, making them more contextually relevant and sustainable (Binka, 2005; Pearson, 2011; Heryadi *et al.*, 2024). For example, an Indonesian–South

African collaboration illustrates how shared socio-economic realities can support culturally and pedagogically meaningful exchanges that strengthen teaching practices and institutional capacity (Heryadi *et al.*, 2024). Moreover, Keevy *et al.* (2025) demonstrate how targeted, context-specific interventions can enhance educators' pedagogical capabilities, particularly in under-resourced or rural settings.

Within many contexts, this relative parity enables more contextually informed and relevant knowledge exchange, reducing the hierarchical power relations that frequently accompany traditional North–South capacity initiatives (Samoff & Carrol, 2004; Heryadi *et al.*, 2024). Evidence from other development sectors reinforces this potential. For example, research on sustainable mariculture in Cambodia illustrates how South–South triangular co-operation can facilitate capacity development through context-sensitive technological transfer, collaborative problem-solving, and shared learning processes (Rimmer, Larson, Thay, Laining, Allison, Anderson *et al.*, 2025). These examples demonstrate that South–South collaborations enable HEIs in the Global South to draw on one another's expertise, resources, and experiences, fostering shared ownership, reducing reliance on external aid, and promoting solutions that are locally grounded and more likely to endure (Chaturvedi, 2016; Lee & Kuzhabekova, 2019; Rimmer *et al.*, 2025). Drawing on these principles, HEIs in the Global South may be better positioned to meet both local and global educational demands, thereby advancing the realisation of SDG 4 (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 2017).

While institutional collaborations are essential, the realisation of SDG 4 ultimately depends on the individuals who enact change within classrooms and academic programmes. Building on the recognition of South–South collaboration as a contextually grounded approach to capacity strengthening, it is important to emphasise the central role of educators in driving institutional development. In teaching collaborations, educators serve as key agents of change, and their professional growth directly enhances institutions' ability to deliver high-quality education. The strength of HEIs is therefore shaped not only by financial, physical, or technological resources but also by the pedagogical competence and confidence of their academic staff (Lusthaus *et al.*, 1999; Keevy *et al.*, 2023). Evidence suggests that structured collaborative initiatives can significantly contribute to educator development by enhancing teaching practice, fostering reflective engagement, and promoting the adoption of new methodologies (Keevy *et al.*, 2025). In this regard, teaching partnerships between HEIs have become pivotal for cultivating ongoing professional learning, with

Färnman *et al.* (2016) highlighting that such collaborations provide meaningful opportunities for shared learning and pedagogical exchange.

To guide these processes, several frameworks for capacity development have been proposed, including the World Bank's emphasis on institutional capacity strengthening (OECD, 2007), the UNDP's comprehensive model (UNDP, 2009), and the OECD's criteria for development assistance (OECD, 2021). While these models emphasise the importance of enhancing human, organisational, and systemic capacities, their applicability within South–South collaborations requires careful adaptation. In South–South collaborations, the challenge is not only to build capacity but also to ensure that the processes, frameworks, and outcomes are shaped by the lived realities of those in the Global South, enabling locally relevant, reciprocal, and sustainable impact. Building on these insights, this study examines how a capacity development collaboration, framed through Activity Theory, can provide a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics within teaching collaborations in the Global South.

Theoretical framework

Activity Theory, developed by Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934), emphasises the mediation of the triad – subject, object, and tools (Vygotsky, 1934). Building on the triad concept, Vygotsky identified methods for explaining human activity (Vygotsky, 1978). Leont'ev (1904–1979) expanded on this work, introducing key concepts such as activity, the object of activity, and the division of labour (Leont'ev, 1987). He emphasised that activities cannot exist without their objects, while the division of labour arose from individuals specialising in creating and using tools (Leont'ev, 1987). In the 1980s and 1990s, Engeström further developed the activity system by integrating aspects of both Vygotsky's and Leont'ev's frameworks. Engeström introduced additional elements, including community, rules, and outcomes. According to Engeström's perspective, Activity Theory encompasses subjects, objects, tools, community, rules, division of labour, and outcomes (Engeström, 2003).

Previous studies in professional education employing Activity Theory have explored various contexts. For example, Mwalongo (2015) investigated student teachers' perceptions of effective strategies for fostering critical thinking through asynchronous discussion forums in Tanzania's pre-service teacher education programme. Similarly, Krasny and Roth (2010) used Activity Theory to connect individual learning with the resilience of social-ecological systems. Furthermore, Garraway and Winberg (2020) employed Activity Theory to help vocational and professional educators connect academic curricula to work practices, thereby fostering expansive learning and transformative agency that enables

adaptation to changing industry needs. Activity Theory, therefore, explores human activity as a complex, real-world social process, providing a valuable framework for examining the dynamics of teaching collaborations (Engeström, 2015). In this study, the elements of Activity Theory were reflected in the following ways:

Subjects: Recipient educators were the focal participants in the South-South teaching collaboration, engaging in their own professional development while delivering academic programmes to their student bodies. Unlike traditional capacity development models, where external experts lead instruction (Vincent-Lancrin, 2007), this collaboration positioned recipient educators as learners and implementers. They progressively built expertise in their respective subject areas through a staggered approach, taking on increasing responsibility for curriculum design and assessment over successive years.

Object: The objective was to enhance recipient educators' knowledge, skills, and practices in delivering high-quality academic programmes. The South-South teaching collaboration ensured a structured transition of academic ownership by following a staggered approach to capacity development. Recipient educators gradually transitioned from relying on partner educators' materials to having full control over their courses, aligning curricula with professional competency frameworks while fostering long-term teaching independence.

Tools: A staggered approach served as the key mediating artefact in the capacity development process, structuring the transfer of knowledge and teaching practices over successive years. The staggered approach allowed for gradual skills acquisition as follows:

- Year 1: Full course content, assessments, and delivery guidance provided by partner educators. Close mentorship ensured that recipient educators received hands-on support in implementing the curriculum and delivering instruction.
- Year 2: Recipient educators updated content but continued using partner assessments. Mentorship transitioned to a more advisory role, focusing on refining teaching approaches and adapting content to institutional needs.
- Year 3: Recipient educators developed their own assessments with partner moderation. Mentorship emphasised independent curriculum design, pedagogical strategies, and self-reflection.

- Year 4: Full academic independence, with external moderation replacing partner oversight. While partner educators no longer provided direct guidance, mentorship continued informally to support sustained professional development.
- Year 5 onwards: Continued mentorship, emphasising informal, ongoing support to sustain and enhance professional development beyond formal structures.

Community: The collaboration extended beyond individual participants to encompass a broader community of educators from both institutions. Partner educators played a guiding role, offering structured support and feedback, while recipient educators actively implemented and refined the academic content. This continuous exchange fostered a learning network where best practices, curriculum updates, and pedagogical strategies were shared and exchanged.

Rules: The South-South teaching collaboration was guided by the principles of collaboration, accountability, mutual understanding, and a shared vision, where recipient educators were expected to take ownership of their development. The staggered approach allowed for a gradual shift in responsibility.

Division of labour: The division of labour evolved, reflecting the developmental nature of the staggered approach. Partner educators provided substantial guidance and materials in the initial years, ensuring recipient educators had a structured foundation. As the collaboration progressed, recipient educators assumed increasing responsibility for content and assessment development, culminating in complete academic ownership by the fourth year. Joint activities such as curriculum alignment, assessment moderation, and peer feedback mechanisms ensured a balanced distribution of responsibilities.

Focusing on the interconnected elements of the activity system, this study captures the dynamics of capacity development within a South-South teaching collaboration.

Research design

This study adopts a constructivist qualitative research paradigm to understand how educators in the Global South engage in capacity development through teaching collaborations. The constructivist approach underscores the socially constructed nature of reality, recognising that knowledge is shaped by interactions and experiences within specific contexts (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This paradigm is

particularly suited to exploring the perspectives of recipient educators, as it facilitates an in-depth examination of their lived experiences within the academic environment.

Institutions used in this study

A qualitative case study design was adopted to explore the views of recipient educators at two HEIs located in developing countries within the Southern African Development Community (SADC). Purposive sampling was used to select the two HEIs based on shared characteristics:

- Both institutions are public HEIs situated in SADC member states (Namibia and South Africa).
- Recipient educators at both institutions teach undergraduate academic programmes.
- Recipient educators at both institutions are engaged in a professional academic programme within the accounting discipline.
- Both institutions were supported by the same Southern partner institution.
- Recipient educators at both sites participated in a staggered capacity development process facilitated by the partner institution.

Data collection, population, and response rate

Once ethical approval had been obtained, data collection was conducted in two phases. The first phase involved administering a qualitative questionnaire to gather broad insights from recipient educators regarding their experiences of the South-South teaching collaboration. In the second phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted to further explore the themes emerging from the questionnaire responses and to gain deeper insights into educators' experiences with capacity development during the South-South teaching collaboration.

Faculty details were obtained from the respective department heads. Based on the staff lists, 27 recipient educators were identified – 14 from institution A (Namibia) and 13 from institution B (South Africa). The questionnaire was emailed to all identified recipient educators, yielding 25 completed responses: 12 from Institution A and all from Institution B, resulting in an overall response rate of 93%. Table 1 provides the demographic profiles of the respondents.

Table 1. Respondents' profiles - Questionnaire

	Institution A		Institution B		TOTAL	
	<i>n</i> = 12	%	<i>n</i> = 13	%	<i>n</i> = 25	%
Gender						
- Male	7	58%	10	77%	17	68%
- Female	5	42%	3	23%	8	32%
Position at institution						
- Assistant lecturer	1	8%	-	0%	1	4%
- Lecturer	9	75%	2	15%	11	44%
- Senior lecturer	2	17%	10	77%	12	48%
- Associate professor	-	0%	1	8%	1	4%
- Professor	-	0%	-	0%	-	0%
Highest qualification						
- Bachelor's degree	-	0%	-	0%	-	0%
- Postgraduate diploma	3	25%	10	77%	13	52%
- Master's degree	8	67%	2	15%	10	40%
- Doctoral degree	1	8%	1	8%	2	8%

Note: Percentages do not always equal 100% due to decimal rounding.

Overall, 68% of respondents were male, while 32% were female. The respondents included one assistant lecturer, two lecturers, 12 senior lecturers, and one associate professor. Most respondents held a post-graduate diploma (52%), while ten had a master's degree, and a further two held doctoral qualifications.

Demographic data from the questionnaires (Table 1) were used to identify participants for the interviews. Using this technique, the researcher purposively selected a mix of educators. An equal split of participants from institutions A and B was considered satisfactory when selecting the participants. Secondly, participants were selected based on their profiles, ensuring a diverse range of characteristics (including gender, institutional position, and academic qualifications) to obtain a variety of perspectives. An array of characteristics was also evident in the questionnaire phase of the data collection process (Table 1), thereby providing a solid foundation for interviews and allowing for a broader range of applications for the research (Merriam, 2009). Interviewees were invited to participate via email. A series of 10 semi-structured interviews were conducted with recipient educators. Data saturation seemed to occur after the ninth interview. However, a further interview was conducted to ensure an equal split of participants from each institution and to further confirm data saturation (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006). Data saturation is often evident when very little new information is produced, given the time and effort expended to attain it (Merriam, 2009). Table 2 presents the demographic profiles of interviewee participants.

Table 2. Interviewees' profiles

Institution	Gender	Position at Institution	Highest qualification
Institution B	Male	Associate Professor	Doctoral degree
Institution A	Female	Lecturer	Master's degree
Institution B	Male	Senior Lecturer	Master's degree
Institution A	Female	Lecturer	Postgraduate diploma
Institution B	Male	Senior Lecturer	Postgraduate diploma
Institution A	Male	Assistant Lecturer	Postgraduate diploma
Institution B	Female	Senior Lecturer	Postgraduate diploma
Institution A	Male	Lecturer	Master's degree
Institution B	Male	Senior Lecturer	Postgraduate diploma
Institution A	Male	Lecturer	Master's degree

Microsoft Teams was used to conduct the interviews. Each interview was recorded (with the permission of interviewees) using the Microsoft Teams recording tool, and transcribed verbatim by a professional transcriber. The interviewees were encouraged to respond openly to the questions, with prompts and further questions for clarification. The responses elicited rich descriptions of recipient educators' experiences with capacity development in a South-South teaching collaboration.

The collected data (questionnaires and interviews) were thematically analysed using ATLAS.ti (version 9), a qualitative software tool commonly used for in-depth analysis of text-based data (Merriam, 2009). The analysis followed an iterative process involving coding, categorisation, and pattern identification, ensuring that findings were firmly rooted in participants' experiences. Additionally, this approach facilitated the integration of theoretical insights drawn from Activity Theory.

Member checking was employed to enhance the validity of the findings (Yin, 2003). As part of this process, one participant from each HEI was invited to verify the accuracy of the reported information. This involved presenting the findings to the participants and seeking their confirmation on whether the report accurately and comprehensively reflected the experiences of recipient educators engaged in capacity development within the South-South teaching collaboration. To maintain participant anonymity, quotations referenced in the study are paired with unique identifiers.¹ In accordance with ethical protocols, participants provided consent at both the questionnaire and interview phases, with the option to withdraw from the study at any time.

¹ Participants from Phase 1 (questionnaires) will be referred to as 'respondents', and participants from Phase 2 (interviews) will be referred to as 'interviewees' for the direct quotes.

Empirical findings

The data analysis identified five broad themes, which are presented below with supporting direct quotations from the recipient educators.

Theme 1 – Professional development

Recipient educators reported benefits from the capacity development collaboration, with many describing the experience as transformative for their professional growth. For example, one recipient educator reflected that the collaboration “enhanced the value of the academic” (Interviewee 2). Moreover, recipient educators highlighted professional development, referring to enhanced individual skills and improvements in academic practices (Respondents 1, 3, 5, 10, 14, 16, 21, 24), indicating a broader impact on their professional standing. This resulted from the structured division of roles that encouraged personal growth, with each educator contributing to the collective knowledge and practices of the academic community. The reciprocal nature of the relationship (Theme 5) reinforced the object of the collaboration: enhancing educators' academic capabilities to deliver high-quality academic programmes.

Recipient educators also acknowledged increased personal growth regarding skills and confidence (Respondents 2, 14; Interviewee 5). One recipient educator, for instance, noted that the relationship helped them learn “the best academic practices” (Respondent 10). Others spoke about the development of “professional skills” (Respondent 10) and the ability to “grow” (Interviewees 4, 5, 7). This growth was not confined solely to technical knowledge but extended to a more holistic approach to teaching and learning, reflecting how the tools, in the form of teaching materials, assessments, and collaborative methods (staggered approach), were utilised to advance academic practice.

A common area emerged regarding the integration of technical and professional skills. Recipient educators noted specific improvements in their Information Technology (IT) skills (Respondent 3), as well as “pre-requisite skills” such as teaching, assessment, and tutoring (Respondent 6). The capacity development also broadened recipient educators' understanding of curriculum development (Respondent 10), new teaching techniques (Respondents 6, 7, 10, 12, 13, 21, 23; Interviewees 2, 4, 5, 9, 10), and formulating assessments. A respondent elaborated on this by stating:

I could develop my own teaching materials, assessments, and examinations for the academic programme. (Respondent 6)

In particular, recipient educators noted the significant benefits associated with assessment practices. Many recipient educators described a deeper understanding of assessment design, with some noting improvements in the quality of assessments they set (Respondents 2, 5, 6, 7, 9, 12, 13, 15, 19, 23; Interviewee 1, 2, 5, 7, 9, 10), by reflecting on how the collaboration “taught me about the latest trends in setting assessments” (Respondent 8).

This ability to create tailored teaching resources, including assessments and examinations, reflects the increased autonomy that educators gained through the collaboration, further enhancing the object of the collaboration: improving academic delivery. Another recipient educator emphasised the importance of curriculum development, noting that the collaboration “developed teaching capacity, curriculum development capacity, material development capacity” (Respondent 10), pointing to the wide-ranging effects on their academic practices.

The community aspect is evident in the cross-institutional engagement fostered through joint activities such as setting and moderating assessments (Respondents 1, 2, 10). For example, a recipient educator emphasised that partner educators were “very supportive” in moderating assessments (Interviewee 5). Furthermore, another respondent shared:

By the end of the mentorship programme, I was able to set a quality paper and be open to criticism through moderation and review comments without taking it personally. (Respondent 10)

This ability to receive and apply constructive feedback without personal bias demonstrates the positive impact of the collaboration on recipient educators’ professional maturity and their approach to assessment practices, highlighting the importance of the community developed through the shared exchange of ideas and feedback.

The professional development experienced by recipient educators in this South-South teaching collaboration was transformative, creating tangible shifts in their teaching approaches and academic capabilities. Moreover, the benefits were not confined to individual recipient educators but extended to their colleagues, fostering a ripple effect that enhanced the teaching capacity across disciplines, as elaborated in Theme 2.

Theme 2 – Consequential influence

The South-South teaching collaboration had a profound influence that extended beyond the individual development of recipient educators. The transformation of recipient educators’ skills and practices

extended through the academic programme and influenced broader institutional outcomes, highlighting the interconnectedness of personal and institutional change. This aligns with the notion that capacity development is not just about individual growth but about creating broader systemic changes (Lopes & Theisohn, 2003; Clarke & Oswald, 2010), as evidenced by recipient educators such as Respondent 13, who noted the capacity development process as pivotal in gaining a deeper insight into the disciplines and passing on knowledge to others, thus “creating capacity within their discipline (depth in defence)”.

The division of labour within the teaching collaboration was evident in how individual recipient educators' increased capacity became part of the broader system. Recipient educators reported on taking on new roles within their departments due to the skills they acquired. One respondent, for example, attested that they were “able to mentor” their “colleagues in the department” (Respondent 6). Other recipient educators remarked that the teaching collaboration also enabled them to transfer this knowledge when moderating assessments for other educators within their department (Respondents 1, 2, 6). This speaks to the object of the collaboration: enhancing academic practice and how individual growth in teaching capacity led to broader knowledge exchange and best practices. By assuming mentoring roles, educators helped their peers and contributed to the overall development of the academic community.

The personal growth experienced by recipient educators also had a community-wide effect. The shift in their teaching abilities and confidence directly influenced the quality of the academic programmes they delivered, helping them to maintain high standards.

I have benefitted immensely as the level of teaching at the [partner institution] is very high, and we kept similar standards of both teaching and assessment after the mentorship project. (Respondent 10)

Several recipient educators noted that the capacity development allowed them to improve the academic offerings within their institution (Respondents 10, 12; Interviewee 4), as illustrated below:

The relationship between [the recipient institution] and [the partner institution] has most definitely resulted in a positive change. Through this partnership, [the recipient institution] was able to offer a high-quality CA [Chartered Accountancy] programme, which was not the case in the past. (Respondent 12)

This improvement in academic quality indicates how tools such as new teaching strategies, curriculum development knowledge, and assessment practices, through the staggered approach, were employed

to elevate the educational offerings, which “deepened” recipient educators’ “capacity to be able to actually deliver the knowledge through to the students” (Interviewee 4), with the “main [aim] being the attainment of student success” (Respondent 10). The influence was not restricted to the specific academic programme being developed; it was also felt across other programmes within the department. One educator noted that they brought the “best practices to the other programmes offered by the department” (Respondent 25), extending the collaborative impact throughout the institution.

Furthermore, the personal transformation of recipient educators, as a result of the capacity development, prompted a sense of responsibility and desire to “give back” to their institution, as one participant expressed:

I feel like there’s a lot that I’ve learned, there’s a lot that I feel [the partner institution] has invested in me and I haven’t given back. (Interviewee 7)

This sentiment highlights the community aspect, where the knowledge and skills gained through teaching collaboration ripple out to others in the academic environment, fostering a culture of shared growth and reciprocal development.

The South–South teaching collaboration’s objective – enhancing the academic programme’s quality through capacity development – was realised not only on an individual level but also through organisational and departmental performance (Respondents 10, 23). Recipient educators noted that the improvements in their teaching had a consequential impact on the university.

The relationship has been sufficient in providing resources to develop staff in order to achieve the departmental goals and that of the University. (Respondent 3)

As capacity development expanded across the institution, it catalysed transformative change. The tools used to develop educators’ skills – from teaching materials to new pedagogical approaches – ultimately led to a broader social change within the institution. This shift was not merely about individual recipient educators gaining new knowledge but also about how that knowledge circulated within the academic community, creating a positive feedback loop that benefited the entire institution (Interviewee 9). Two respondents encapsulated this transformation by stating:

Capacity development is a transformative initiative. (Respondent 10)

Capacity development is a process of change. (Respondent 1)

Moreover, the change was seen as “invaluable” by recipient educators (Respondent 12), with one respondent affirming that the collaboration “brought significant change” (Respondent 21). This change was felt in the delivery of quality academic programmes and in creating an environment where educators could continuously develop and contribute to the institution’s success (Respondents 6, 10; Interviewee 4).

As the capacity development of recipient educators led to improved academic practices, it became evident that such growth had broader implications. Recipient educators recognised the potential for this development to positively influence the objectives of their work, including curriculum delivery and student success. Furthermore, the capacity developed by one recipient educator is often translated into a ripple effect within the department and institution, ultimately driving broader organisational change.

Theme 3 - Increasing existing capacities

Capacity development is a process of change that involves continuous growth and improvement over time (Respondents 1, 4, 23; Interviewees 1, 10). This aligns with the idea that capacity development is not a singular event but rather a journey of progressive enhancement, as highlighted below:

Capacity development encompasses a continuous process. (Respondent 4)

Capacity development is not an event; it is a process. (Interviewee 10)

This conceptualisation of capacity development, particularly concerning lifelong learning, is crucial for continued recipient educator development. Recipient educators described the need for a “willingness to learn” (Interviewee 10) and an attitude and appreciation for lifelong learning (Interviewees 2, 6, 8). Furthermore, Interviewee 10 remarked:

If we do not bring the aspect of lifelong learning, then we would be assuming that capacity development is an event, but in reality, capacity development is a process.

This perspective highlights that teaching and learning are dynamic and require constant adaptation to maintain and expand capacities within the educational system. Furthermore, a critical aspect of this process involves constant learning as recipient educators refine their practices through reflection on what has worked and what has not, as one participant described:

Learning continuously, it also helps in that aspect where you know what worked and what didn’t work, and then how do we improve. It helps with improving the system continuously. (Interviewee 9)

This insight reflects how capacity development is an iterative process that leverages feedback loops to improve recipient educators' teaching practices over time. These insights also relate to the division of labour within the academic community, where recipient educators not only enhance their own capacity but also contribute to the collective knowledge and development of their peers. This creates a shared responsibility among educators, fostering collaboration and mutual support. As Respondent 16 observed, "there is always room for growth and improvement," and such growth helps educators remain "ready and adaptive" (Respondent 3) to changing educational needs. This cyclical learning, adapting, and growing process underscores the importance of tools such as professional development opportunities, peer mentoring, and cross-institutional collaborations. The South-South teaching collaboration specifically emphasised the need for educators to stay agile, highlighting that the collaboration itself was an essential tool in facilitating this ongoing process.

Recipient educators affirmed that capacity development is about enhancing and sustaining existing capacities rather than developing new skills from scratch. This was evidenced by their use of terms like "improving," "enhancing," "maintaining," "advancing," and "expanding" (Respondents 5, 13, 19, 21, 24; Interviewees 4, 6), which suggest a process of building upon existing strengths and deepening expertise. For example, one recipient educator remarked:

Capacity development involves turning an ordinary academic into an expert in a particular module/subject. (Respondent 6)

This idea of enhancing existing skills is aligned with the division of labour in academia, where educators progressively move into more specialised roles as their knowledge and skills deepen. As educators advance, they are positioned to contribute more meaningfully to their departments and institutions, sharing their expertise with colleagues and impacting the broader academic community, as one respondent shared:

Capacity development is the process of strengthening the capabilities of staff to achieve their objectives and that of the company. (Respondent 23)

Capacity development is recognised as a process of continuous improvement that focuses on deepening and expanding existing capacities rather than starting from scratch. This dynamic process requires constant reflection, feedback, and adaptation, emphasising lifelong learning. Through this lens, the South-South teaching collaboration serves as both a tool and a catalyst for recipient educators to build upon their existing skills and ultimately contribute to their institutions' broader academic and organisational success. Individual educators and the academic community felt the

transformative effects of capacity development, as the division of labour and community collaboration fostered a culture of shared growth and sustained excellence.

Theme 4 – Relationship between professionals

Recipient educators emphasised that the South-South teaching collaboration is a professional relationship (Respondents 2, 6, 10, 12, 13, 16; Interviewees 1, 2, 4, 6, 9, 10). As recipient educators noted, the professionalism of the partner educators was a key aspect of the relationship: they were seen as “mature” and “highly capable” (Interviewee 2), with “vast experience” and expertise in their field (Interviewee 10; also described by Respondent 10; Interviewees 4, 9).

Recipient educators described their experience of having multiple mentors within a specific subject area, stating, “I had mentors who assisted whenever we needed assistance” (Respondent 2). There was a team of “like two or three people” (Interviewee 10). This approach reflects a well-defined allocation of responsibilities, where different partner educators contributed specialised expertise in various areas, which allowed recipient educators to benefit from “learning through diversity” (Interviewee 9). This division of responsibilities ensured that capacity development was not confined to a single individual but distributed among a team, fostering a collaborative learning environment.

Effective communication was highlighted as essential to the success of professional relationships (Respondents 2, 3, 10, 12, 13; Interviewee 1). One recipient educator described it as “one of the greatest sources of a successful project” (Respondent 3), emphasising that continuous and prompt communication was central to ensuring that the capacity development process remained on track. Feedback concerning assessments and course content was critical in “maintaining a healthy working relationship” (Respondent 12). Furthermore, another respondent remarked on the importance of communication in setting capacity development objectives, as illustrated below.

The notion of effective communication and ongoing feedback is critical in order to gauge whether the set objectives of the mutual agreement have been achieved. Without such, where would we be able to measure whether the objectives are achieved? (Respondent 13)

Additionally, this communication focused on motivation and support, reinforcing the rules of engagement that govern professional relationships. These rules stressed the importance of reciprocal professionalism, active participation, and mutual respect (Respondents 6, 10). One recipient educator stated that “effective and timely communication was key in the capacity building process” (Respondent 12), underscoring the importance of ongoing dialogue to sustain the collaboration.

The collaborative nature of the relationship also involved joint assessments and cross-lecturing opportunities, which helped ensure that teaching and assessment standards were maintained across institutions. This was viewed as a way to benchmark performance, encourage professional growth, and align curricula. One recipient educator explained:

Setting joint assessments can be useful in terms of benchmarking and maintaining high standards. (Respondent 7)

This cross-institutional exchange also enhanced the sense of shared purpose within the professional community, with educators working together to ensure the quality of content and assessment practices. Finally, the professional relationship was governed by clear expectations, where both institutions and educators committed to the long-term development of capacity. One recipient educator emphasised that there was “100% commitment” from the partner institution (Interviewee 10). Building on this, another respondent emphasised the deep interconnection between such commitment and ongoing support and collaboration.

It is not possible without the commitment and support from [the partner institution]. This commitment involves a great deal of time, not only in guiding and mentoring the respective lecturers but also in providing feedback and maintaining a healthy working relationship. (Respondent 12)

However, the sustainability of the collaboration was also addressed by establishing clear goals and an exit strategy, ensuring that once specific objectives were achieved, the teaching collaboration could end naturally without over-reliance on any single party (Respondent 9).

Ultimately, the relationship between professionals in this South-South teaching collaboration was built on mutual respect (Respondent 6) and trust (Respondent 10), both of which are essential to fostering a collaborative, effective, and sustainable capacity development process. This relationship extends beyond simple knowledge transfer; it fosters a community of practice where parties collaborate to achieve shared educational objectives.

Theme 5 – Mutual undertaking

Recipient educators emphasised that capacity development must be a two-way process where responsibility is shared (Respondents 5, 7, 8, 10; Interviewees 1, 2, 4, 9, 10) and “beneficial to both institutions” (Respondent 18, also described by Respondents 8, 9, 21). One recipient educator described this relationship as a “cohesive capacity development approach” (Respondent 16). The division of labour in this context highlights the clear delineation of roles:

Because I'm just being mentored, you must draw the line. This is a professional environment. Now you have duties or responsibilities to do, I've got responsibilities to do. So, you foster that sort of sense of maturity. (Interviewee 2)

This reflects the underlying principles of South-South teaching collaborations, emphasising professionalism and avoiding overdependency. As Respondent 8 explained:

It is important that the relationship is a give-and-take agreement. Educators from the 'helped' institution should not expect the 'helping' institution to give everything on a plate to them without taking the necessary responsibility.

One key tool in the capacity development process is the staggered approach, which provides a foundation of shared content during the first year. However, educators are expected to update and maintain these materials over time to ensure alignment with curriculum changes.

The information that is there makes you comfortable that for the next five years, you might find that the lecturers are working with the same slides. (Interviewee 8)

Active involvement, a critical rule, was also emphasised to keep recipient educators "on their toes" (Interviewee 2, also echoed by Interviewee 4). Recipient educators highlighted the importance of being engaged from the outset of the collaboration:

Some academics might be entitled to say we're just being mentored, so the first year I must relax, get everything from the mentor. No, it shouldn't be that way. They are the ones who should learn and therefore involve them right from the word go. (Interviewee 2)

Participants suggested that recipient educators should take responsibility for their development and "stand on their own feet" (Interviewee 1). For those recipient educators "who took responsibility for their own teaching and learning practices, the capacity development resulted in a significant learning experience" (Respondent 8).

Furthermore, it is essential to empower educators at both institutions so that the collaboration is mutually beneficial, without creating a hierarchical relationship or overdependence on the part of some educators (Respondent 7). The community dimension was evident in joint activities, such as setting and moderating assessments (Respondents 2, 6, 7; Interviewees 1, 2, 9, 10). For instance:

The paper was for the [partner institution] and the [recipient institution]. I would send in one question and [the partner institution] would do the other question. That worked well, because then I could see that my work is really up to standard. (Interviewee 1)

Setting joint assessments can be useful in terms of benchmarking and maintaining high standards. (Respondent 7)

Such collaborative practices serve as tools for benchmarking and maintaining academic quality, ensuring high standards are consistently met across institutions. Mutual learning is further reinforced through joint reflection on teaching and assessment approaches (Interviewees 2, 4, 5, 6), as well as opportunities for cross-lectures:

Through online learning, [to] have cross-lectures (certain topics taken by [recipient] educators and vice versa) to both students ([the partners] and [the recipients]). (Respondent 24)

It's basically just to learn from one another in terms of how we, the two institutions, can enhance the teaching ability and in terms of sharing ideas and knowledge. (Interviewee 6)

This collaborative engagement fosters a sense of shared purpose within the community and aligns with the object of capacity development. Additionally, sustainability is addressed through the establishment of clear goals and an exit strategy:

Although capacity development should be a long-term commitment, there should be an 'exit' strategy as well. Clearly defined goals and requirements need to be communicated by each party, in order to retain the mutually beneficial agreement. Ultimately, once certain criteria are met, the agreement comes to a natural end (if successful). (Respondent 9)

Recipient educators also identified mutual respect (Respondent 6) and trust (Respondent 10) as essential rules for the success of the teaching collaboration. This reinforces the idea that the South-South teaching collaboration is not merely about developing the subjects (recipient educators) but also about cultivating a collaborative and respectful community that benefits all parties involved.

Discussion

The findings illustrate the transformative influence of a South–South teaching collaboration on the professional development of recipient educators. Consistent with arguments that South–South capacity development is most effective when it is contextually relevant and mutually driven (Binka, 2005; Heryadi *et al.*, 2024), the structured, staggered approach facilitated both technical and professional growth. The gradual transfer of responsibility enabled recipient educators to acquire essential skills in teaching, assessment design, and curriculum development while learning within their own institutional realities. Beyond individual development, the teaching collaboration fostered a

sense of academic community. Joint activities – such as assessment moderation and curriculum alignment – created ongoing spaces for professional dialogue and reciprocal learning, aligning with South–South scholarship that views collaboration as a shared process rather than a top-down intervention (Lopes & Theisohn, 2003; Heryadi *et al.*, 2024). Recipient educators also benefited from direct mentorship and reported increased confidence in responding to constructive criticism, refining their teaching practices through interaction rather than dependence.

As recipient educators developed their skills and teaching practices, the transformation extended across academic programmes and led to broader changes. This underscores the idea that capacity development is about enhancing individual capabilities and fostering organisational improvements (UNDP, 2009). The insights gained through the teaching collaboration enabled recipient educators to share their knowledge, creating a ripple effect that enhanced academic quality within and across other HEI departments.

The findings also highlighted that the South–South teaching collaboration aligns with a dynamic and ongoing model of professional growth. Rather than viewing capacity development as a one-time event (Lopes & Theisohn, 2003), the study underscores the importance of continuous learning in which educators progressively refine and expand their capabilities. Consistent with this, Keevy *et al.* (2025) emphasise that sustained and iterative development opportunities are essential for strengthening pedagogical confidence and practice, particularly in under-resourced contexts.

The study emphasised the importance of a staggered capacity development approach, where growth occurs progressively through a series of smaller, manageable stages rather than through a single, large-scale intervention. The staggered approach was crucial for ensuring that recipient educators not only developed new competencies but also sustained them over time. Recipient educators engaged in ongoing feedback loops, refining their teaching practices at each stage of development. The sustained mentorship, which continued beyond the four-year cycle, further supported a culture of continuous improvement.

The focus on enhancing existing capacities, rather than starting from scratch (Lusthaus *et al.*, 1999; Vincent-Lancrin, 2007), emerged as a crucial element of effective capacity development. The staggered approach allowed recipient educators to build on their strengths, gradually transitioning into more specialised roles. As their knowledge deepened, they were better positioned to contribute meaningfully to their institutions, through the application of their expertise and by fostering collaboration with their peers. Moreover, the South-South teaching collaboration was based on a

professional relationship that emphasised mutual respect (Samoff & Carrol, 2004; Rosseel *et al.*, 2009; Kassie, 2024), trust, and a clear division of responsibilities. Educators within this framework described their experience as one of collaborative mentorship, in which expertise was shared among multiple mentors to support a well-rounded learning environment. The division of labour encouraged a collective learning space where knowledge was exchanged, and educators benefited from exposure to diverse approaches and perspectives. This model of shared mentorship ensured that no single individual bore full responsibility, fostering a more inclusive and collective growth experience.

Effective communication was identified as a critical component in maintaining the success of this professional relationship. This is consistent with Rimmer *et al.* (2025), who emphasise that structured and ongoing communication is central to successful South–South capacity development. In this collaboration, regular and prompt exchanges of information, feedback, and support sustained the momentum of development. Clear communication not only ensured that goals were achieved but also reinforced the collaborative nature of the partnership. The capacity development commitment, supported by structured professional exchanges such as joint assessments and cross-lecturing, enabled partner and recipient educators to align teaching and assessment standards, promoting a high-performance culture and shared educational objectives.

Lastly, the South-South teaching collaboration was characterised as a mutual undertaking, where partners and recipients share responsibility for capacity development, ensuring the process benefits all parties involved. Educators from the recipient institution were encouraged to engage fully in the process from the outset, fostering a sense of professional maturity and responsibility. The division of labour within this context was clear, with roles and duties distinctly outlined to prevent imbalances, ensuring that both institutions were actively involved in the development process; this contrasts with the hierarchical tendencies often seen in North–South models (Standing & Taylor, 2016; Tuba, 2023).

Conclusion

This study explored the dynamics of capacity development among educators in the Global South through the lens of Activity Theory. It examined how a structured teaching collaboration influenced the teaching practices of recipient educators, promoted knowledge exchange, and enhanced professional relationships within their academic communities.

The findings of this study underscore the significant influence of a structured South-South teaching collaboration on the professional growth and institutional capacity development of recipient educators. By adopting a staggered approach, the collaboration enabled the gradual acquisition of skills, fostering confidence, pedagogical expertise, and curriculum development capabilities. Beyond individual transformation, the initiative cultivated a culture of shared learning, mentorship, and sustained professional dialogue, reinforcing the collaborative nature of capacity development.

Moreover, this study highlights that effective capacity development is an ongoing, dynamic process rather than a singular intervention. The emphasis on incremental learning, mutual respect, and structured engagement ensures that recipient educators enhance their expertise and contribute to broader institutional improvements. By fostering a high-performance culture rooted in collaboration and continuous learning, the South-South teaching collaboration serves as a model for sustainable professional development in higher education.

From a policy-making perspective, governments and educational authorities should prioritise and fund South-South teaching collaborations, creating policies that encourage mutual knowledge exchange and capacity development between institutions in the Global South. HEIs can further institutionalise staggered, structured approaches to professional development, ensuring that educators receive continuous mentorship and opportunities for skills enhancement over time. Educators should actively engage in collaborative professional development, embracing peer learning, feedback, and sharing best practices to foster a culture of ongoing improvement within their institutions.

This study acknowledges certain limitations. Although data collection involved a qualitative questionnaire and interviews, the small sample size may limit the broader applicability of the findings. Additionally, the study focused on only two recipient HEIs, which may not fully capture the diversity of capacity development experiences across different institutional and regional contexts. Future research could address these limitations by including a larger sample of HEIs and incorporating additional qualitative methods (focus groups) to enrich the findings further.

This study makes a valuable contribution by applying Activity Theory as a novel lens to examine capacity development within a South-South teaching collaboration. By analysing how educators engage with tools, navigate the division of labour, and interact within a broader academic community, this study offers fresh insights into the transformative potential of structured teaching collaborations. Additionally, it highlights the unique benefits of South-South teaching collaborations, which

emphasise mutual growth, contextual relevance, and equitable knowledge exchange – offering a meaningful alternative to traditional North-South capacity development models. The study offers guidance on a staggered approach to educator development, illustrating how gradual, structured learning promotes sustainable growth and long-term institutional impact. These insights contribute to theory and practice, reinforcing the importance of collaborative, contextually grounded strategies in higher education capacity development initiatives.

References

- Adriansen, H.K. & Madsen, L.M. 2019. Capacity-building projects in African higher education. *Learning and Teaching*. 12(2): 1-23. [DOI:10.3167/latiss.2019.120202](https://doi.org/10.3167/latiss.2019.120202)
- Binka, F. 2005. North-South research collaborations: A move towards a true partnership? *Tropical Medicine and International Health*. 10(3): 207-209. [DOI:10.1111/j.1365-3156.2004.01373.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-3156.2004.01373.x)
- Boshoff, N. 2010. South-South research collaboration of countries in the Southern African Development Community (SADC). *Scientometrics*. 84, 481-503. [DOI:10.1007/s11192-009-0120-0](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11192-009-0120-0)
- Botman, H.R., van Zyl, A., Fakie, A. & Pauw, C. 2009. A pedagogy of hope: Stellenbosch University's vision for higher education and sustainable development. Paper delivered at 12th General Conference of the Association of African Universities, Sustainable Development in Africa: The Role of Higher Education, 4–9 May, Abuja, Nigeria.
- Brum, J.A. & Knobel, M. 2018. The international dimension of the Brazilian higher education system through the prism of South-South cooperation. *International Journal of African Higher Education*. 4(2): 92-103. [DOI:10.6017/ijahe.v4i2.10299](https://doi.org/10.6017/ijahe.v4i2.10299)
- Chaturvedi, S. 2016. The development compact: A theoretical construct for South–South cooperation. *Higher Education and International Development: Comparative Perspectives*. Elsevier. DOI:10.1177/0020881717705927
- Clarke, P. & Oswald, K. 2010. Introduction: Why reflect collectively on capacities for change? *Institute of Development Studies (IDS) Bulletin*. 41(3): 1-11 DOI:10.1111/j.1759-5436.2010.00132.x
- Creswell, J.W. & Creswell, J.D. 2018. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (5th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Engeström, Y. 2003. Activity Theory and individual and social transformation. In Engeström, Y., Miettinen, R. & Punamaki, R.L. (eds.). *Perspectives on Activity Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 19-38.
- Engeström, Y. 2015. Making use of Activity Theory in educational research. In Gedera, D.S. & Williams, P.J. (eds.). *Activity Theory in Education: Research and Practice*. Champagne, ILL.: Springer. vii-ix.
- Fägerlind, I. & Saha, L.J. 2010. *Methods*. 18(1): 59-82. DOI:10.1177/1525822X05279903

- Färnman, R., Diwan, V., Zwarenstein, M. & Atkins, S. 2016. Successes and challenges of North-South partnerships - key lessons from the African/Asian regional capacity development projects. *Global Health Action*. 9(1): 1-10. [DOI:10.3402/GHA.V9.30522](https://doi.org/10.3402/GHA.V9.30522)
- Frantz, J. M., Leach, L., Pharaoh, H., Bassett, S., Roman, N., Smith, M. & Travill, A. 2016. Research capacity development in a South African higher education institution through a North-South collaboration. *South African Journal of Higher Education*. 28(4): 1216-1229. DOI:10.20853/28-4-396
- Gaillard, J.F. 1994. North-South research partnership: Is collaboration possible between unequal partners? *Knowledge and Policy: The International Journal of Knowledge Transfer and Utilization*. 7(2): 31-63. DOI:10.1007/BF02692761
- [Garraway](#), J. & Winberg, C. 2020. Incorporating principles of expansive learning and activity theory in curriculum design to bridge work and education contexts for vocational teachers. [Journal of Vocational, Adult and Continuing Education and Training](#). 3(1): 1-21. DOI:10.14426/jovacet.v3i1.121
- Guest, G., Bunce, A. & Johnson, L. 2006. How many interviews are enough?: An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field Research and Information System for Developing Countries*, Discussion Paper No 203. DOI:10.1177/0020881717705927
- Heryadi, R.D., Darmastuti, S. & Rachman, A.A. 2024. Advancing South-South cooperation in education: Indonesian experience with South Africa. *F1000 Research*. 11, 982. DOI:10.12688/f1000research.123311.3
- Jørgensen, T.E. 2012. *CODOC—Cooperation on doctoral education between Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe*. European University Association.
- Kariwo, M. 2017. Educational policy and the Africanisation of knowledge in the African university. In Cross, M. & Ndofirepi, A. (eds.). *Knowledge and Change in African Universities*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers. 63-82.
- Kassie, K. 2024. Patterns of relationships in North-South higher education partnerships: A pathway to mutuality. *Journal of International and Comparative Education*. 13(2): 75-91. [DOI:10.14425/jice.2024.13.2.1230](https://doi.org/10.14425/jice.2024.13.2.1230)
- Keevy, M., Tharapos, M., O’Connell, B.T., Verhoef, G., de Lange, P. & Beatson, N.J. 2025. Using an extended professional project to develop professional skills among rural South African accounting students. *Accounting Education*. 34(1): 25-49, DOI: 10.1080/09639284.2023.2283441
- Keevy, M., Verhoef, G. & Tharapos, M. 2023. Developing country educators’ experiences of higher education teaching during COVID-19. *Journal of Economic and Financial Sciences*. 16(1): 1-11. DOI:epdf/10.4102/jef.v16i1.829
- Krasny, M.E. & Roth, W.M. 2010. Environmental education for social–ecological system resilience: A perspective from activity theory. *Environmental Education Research*. 16(5-6): 545-558. DOI:10.1080/13504622.2010.505431

- Lee, J.T. & Kuzhabekova, A. 2019. Building local research capacity in higher education: A conceptual model. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*. 41(3): 342-357. DOI:10.1080/1360080X.2019.1596867
- Leont'ev, A.N. 1978. *Activity, Consciousness and Personality*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.
- Lopes, C. & Theisohn, T. 2003. *Ownership, leadership and transformation: Can we do better for capacity development?* Earthscan Publications Ltd.
- Lusthaus, C., Adrien, M. & Perstinger, M. 1999. Capacity development: Definitions, issues and implications for planning, monitoring and evaluation. *Universalia Occasional Paper*. 35, 1-21.
- Merriam, S.B. 2009. *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation (2nd ed.)*. Hoboken, New Jersey, USA: John Wiley and Sons.
- Mormina, M. 2019. Science, technology and innovation as social goods for development: Rethinking research capacity building from Sen's capabilities approach. *Science and Engineering Ethics*. 25(3): 671-692. DOI:10.1007/s11948-018-0037-1
- Mwalongo, A.I. 2015. Using activity theory to understand student teacher perceptions of effective ways for promoting critical thinking through asynchronous discussion forums. In Gedera, D.S. & Williams, P.J. (eds.). *Activity Theory in Education: Research and Practice*. Champagne, Ill.: Springer. 19-34.
- Obamba, M.O. & Mwema, J.K. 2009. Symmetry and asymmetry: New contours, paradigms, and politics in African academic partnerships. *Higher Education Policy*. 22(3): 349-371. DOI:10.1057/hep.2009.12
- Ofir, Z. 2021. Evaluation in transition: The promise and challenge of South-South cooperation. *Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation*. 36(2): 120-140. DOI:10.3138/CJPE.71630
- Okafor, R.G. 2012. Accounting education in Nigerian universities: Challenges and prospects. *Journal of Economics and Sustainable Development*. 3(14): 205-212.
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). 2007. Executive summary. In Vincent-Lancrin, S. (ed.). *Cross-border Tertiary Education: A Way Towards Capacity Development*. The World Bank and OECD Publishing. 11-20.
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). 2021. *Applying Evaluation Criteria Thoughtfully*. Available: https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/2021/03/applying-evaluation-criteria-thoughtfully_45a54ea7.html. Accessed 12 February 2025.
- Owusu-Nimo, F. & Boshoff, N. 2017. Research collaboration in Ghana: Patterns, motives and roles. *Scientometrics*. 110, 1099-1121. DOI:10.1007/s11192-016-2221-x
- Pearson, J. 2011. Training and beyond: Seeking better practices for capacity development. *OECD Development Co-Operation Working Papers*, No 1, OECD Publishing.
- Rimmer, M.A., Larson, S., Thay, S., Laining, A., Allison, J., Anderson, C., Giri, I.N.A., Mustafa, A., Muzaki, A. & Mulyaningrum, S.R.H. 2025. Applying a South-South triangular cooperation approach to capacity building: Bridging technological gaps and supporting sustainable mariculture in

- Cambodia. *Marine Policy*. 182, p.106888. DOI:[10.1016/j.marpol.2025.106888](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2025.106888)
- Robson, S. 2017. Developing and supporting excellent HE teaching: Opportunities and challenges. In French, A. & O’Leary, M. (eds.). *Teaching Excellence in Higher Education: Challenges, Changes and the Teaching Excellence Framework*. Leeds, U.K.: Emerald Publishing Limited. 109-137.
- Rosseel, P., De Corte, E., Blommaert, J. & Verniers, E. 2009. *Approaches to North-South, South-South and North-South-South collaboration: A policy document*. Available: https://lirias.kuleuven.be/bitstream/123456789/229636/1/POLICY_PAPER_VLIR_UWC_NSS.pdf. Accessed 10 March 2024.
- Samoff, J. & Carrol, B. 2004. The promise of partnership and continuities of dependence: External support to higher education in Africa. *African Studies Review*. 47(1): 67-199. DOI:10.1017/S0002020600027001
- Standing, H. & Taylor, P. 2016. Engaged excellence. *Institute of Development Studies (IDS) Bulletin*. 47(6): 169-178. DOI:10.19088/1968-2016.194
- Tuba, O. 2023. *A Postcolonial Exploration of Finnish Engagement in North-South Higher Education Capacity Development Partnerships*. Master’s thesis in Education, Faculty of Education and Psychology, University of Jyväskylä.
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). 2009. *Capacity development: A UNDP primer*. Available: https://www.undp.org/content/dam/aplaws/publication/en/publications/capacity-development/capacity-development-a-undp-primer/CDG_PrimerReport_final_web.pdf. Accessed: 20 June 2020.
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). 2017. *Education for sustainable development goals: Learning objectives*. Available: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000247444>. Accessed: 12 February 2025.
- Vincent-Lancrin, S. 2004. Building capacity through cross-border tertiary education. Paper prepared for the UNESCO/OECD Australian Forum on Trade in Educational Services, Sydney: Australia, 11-12 October. Available: <https://www.oecd.org/education/skills-beyond-school/33784331.pdf>. Accessed 18 October 2019.
- Vincent-Lancrin, S. 2007. Developing capacity through cross-border tertiary education. In Vincent-Lancrin, S. (ed.). *Cross-border Tertiary Education: A Way Towards Capacity Development*. The World Bank and OECD Publishing. 47-108.
- Vygotsky, L.S. 1934. *Thought and Language*. Boston, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Vygotsky, LS. 1978. *Mind and Society*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Were, V., Jere, E., Lanyo, K., Mburu, G., Kiriinya, R., Waudu, A., Chiteba, B., Waters, K., Mehta, P., Oluoch, T. & Rodgers, M. 2019. Success of a South-South collaboration on Human Resources Information Systems (HRIS) in health: A case of Kenya and Zambia HRIS collaboration. *Human Resources for Health*. 17(6): 1-8. DOI:10.1186/s12960-019-0342-z
- West, M. & Shackleton, L. 1999. USHEPia: Building a research capacity network in Africa. *ADEA working group on higher education*. Cape Town: University of Cape Town.

Yin, R.K. 2003. *Applications of Case Study Research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc.



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>