

Policy Brief



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Fundamentals of Teacher Education Development:

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(No. 2) Improving the Conditions of Teachers and Teaching in Rural Schools across African Countries

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Summary

There are significant differences in education between rural and urban areas of Africa. Rural areas face challenges, which impact the quality of education, including geographic isolation, poor school conditions, poor remuneration of teachers, lack of resources, and lack of community involvement. These issues contribute to the poor academic achievement of students. This study recommends strategies for improving rural education so that educational development goals can be reached. Although this book was written in 2011, the challenges faced in rural schools still exist today and deserve attention from educational professionals and policymakers.

What the Research Shows

Educational Situation

Education quality is low; many students repeat grades or dropout before finishing and lack basic literacy and numeracy skills. Rural areas in particular are the most populous and most neglected in terms of amenities and education. Rural areas also face challenges such as curricula that is irrelevant to rural life, the impacts of poor nutrition on students' abilities to learn, difficult travel to school, poor sanitation at school, budget issues, and the opportunity cost for families to send their children to school.

Teaching is one of the most important factors in students' achievement. Therefore, policymakers at all levels should focus on teacher quality, emphasizing teacher recruitment, preparation, licensing and certification standards, and professional development. Teachers often feel ignored in the policymaking process while policymakers increase their demands and expectations of teachers. This undermines the role of the teacher in education reform.

Economic Conditions

The economic condition in Africa is below the average world performance. Many countries lack capabilities in terms of health, education, and access to basic infrastructure, leaving many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa trapped in poverty. Additionally, the population of the region continues to grow, which could have serious impacts on the future of development and education.

Literacy rates: While literacy rates in Africa have increased over the years, it remains ranked lowly compared to other regions of the world. Within Africa, literacy rates also vary greatly.

Enrolment rates: Primary enrolments reached 94% in 2006. While enrollments increase, government financial resources alone cannot manage this expansion along with improving quality. Again, rates among countries in Africa vary widely.

Government expenditure: Funds committed to education have increased over the years. However, it is still underfunded when compared to UNESCO's recommendation. Adequate funds must be provided in order to increase the efficiency of rural schools and improve working conditions for teachers.

Educational performance and conditions of teachers: Poor quality is often a reflection of the education system or teaching inadequacy. Another challenge is increasing the completion rate in primary education and dealing with the low transition rate to secondary schools.

Pupil/teacher ratio across African countries: The number of teachers to students is generally low. This impacts the ability to provide adequate education.

Teachers' classroom management in rural schools: Classroom management remains a relevant and common indicator of student achievement. Teachers must be trained in these skills.

Teacher development and preparation: Preparing, recruiting, and supporting teachers will help to provide quality education in rural and urban areas. Good quality teachers must be aware of personal, cultural, social, and political issues.

Teacher recruitment and deployment: It is difficult to find teachers who are willing to teach in challenging rural conditions. It is suggested that teachers are recruited from the areas where they live, especially rural areas, and encouraged to return to them to teach.

Teacher motivation: Motivation is strongly connected to working conditions, administrative support, available educational resources, and teacher input regarding decision-making and school climate.

Situation of teaching: Characteristics of effective teaching in schools usually revolve around six key indicators: 1) configuration of learning spaces and classroom organization, 2) classroom management and discipline, 3) curriculum structuring and planning, 4) teaching strategies, 5) self-directed strategies, and 6) peer tutoring.

Challenges Facing Rural Education in Africa

Poor teachers' status: Teachers are undervalued and not well paid but high expectations are often placed on them without receiving the support necessary for success.

Poor career advancement: These opportunities are not easily accessible or available in rural areas. There are few opportunities for promotion as well.

Outright neglect of teachers in rural schools: A rural teaching placement is often a means of punishment for poor teachers.

Lack of qualified teachers in rural schools: Certification procedures vary among countries causing inconsistencies in the definitions of "qualified teachers." Most teachers in rural areas are younger, less educated, and get lower pay. Teachers do not want to work in rural areas.

Conclusion

Rural areas need quality education. Improving conditions for teachers ultimately helps students' learning outcomes, including in rural areas. Governments and policymakers must ensure that adequate support, both financial and structural, is being given to rural schools, depending on their individual needs.

Recommendations

Issues that teachers face in rural areas can be mitigated by:

- (1) Improved working conditions and increased financial incentives for teachers
- (2) Non-financial incentives such as training opportunities, improved living conditions, and career development opportunities
- (3) Community participation
- (4) Political commitment to rural education
- (5) Support and supervision services for teachers
- (6) Better teacher recruitment and licensing procedures
- (7) Improved schooling conditions, including smaller class sizes

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