



Factors Affecting Challenges of Teachers' Retention in Rural Schools

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Abstract

This article brings to light the difficulties rural schools in developing countries like Pakistan have in recruiting and retaining qualified teaching staff. Challenges with student retention continue to be a problem in rural schools, despite the fact that educational authorities have devised policies and measures to address the problem. This article presents an alternate, multifaceted contextual strategy to minimizing the obstacles of retaining teachers. It does so by drawing on previous research on staffing and retention, as well as empirical data obtained from interviews with rural school instructors.

Keywords: teachers' retention, rural schools, challenges, qualitative study

1. Introduction

Education enables individuals to become more self-aware of their skills and potential, which in turn contributes greatly to a nation's overall capacity for increased production (Abotsi, Yaganumah, and Obeng, 2018). In particular for schools located in rural areas, having instructors who are highly qualified, experienced, knowledgeable, and well-prepared is essential to the achievement of the educational strategy's goals (Goldhaber et al., 2020). Despite the fact that Pakistan has seen considerable increases in the number of students enrolled in rural schools, the country continues to struggle with a number of formidable obstacles in its attempts to meet the demand for an adequate teaching force (Pakistan Ministry of Education, 2017). Teachers who are qualified to teach do not accept assignments in rural schools for a variety of reasons, including disparities between rural and urban schools' standards (Akram, 2020), Scarcity of Teachers' Professional Development (Akram and Yang, 2021), a dearth of financial incentives, unfavorable working conditions, and a scarcity of opportunities for professional growth (Hamid, Bisschoff, and Botha, 2015). These problems are frequently made worse because there is insufficient basic infrastructure in the form of electricity, water, roads, and other forms of transportation as well as information and communications technology (ICT) (Du Plessis and Mestry 2019). As a direct consequence of this, rural schools have a higher proportion of instructors with inadequate or no qualifications, and in certain instances, remote schools do not receive any teachers at all (Hamid, Bisschoff, and Botha, 2015). This is supported by the findings of Du Plessis and Mestry (2019), who contend that African governments frequently place a higher priority on urban schools in comparison to their rural counterparts, which has resulted in rural schools being chronically neglected. Based on the following aims, this essay makes the case that Pakistan's retention policies and methods are suffering as a result of the persistent disregard given to educators working in rural schools.

1. To identify the major barriers to teacher retention in rural areas of schools.
2. To come up with potential suggestions to help rural schools in Pakistan keep their teachers.

2. Literature Review

The sections that follow examine the key issues that arose from the literature review regarding the sustaining issues teachers face in underprivileged countries, including Pakistan.

2.1. Rural areas and Schools

Despite the fact that numerous studies have been conducted to investigate regarding rural areas and schools, researchers have been unable to settle on a single conception that is broadly recognized. According to Hlalele (2019), A huge area that is inhabited by a relatively small population of people who are economically reliant on agriculture and natural resources is what we mean when we talk about a "rural area." Additionally, rural areas are characterized by a lack of social amenities, limited access to information and communication technology, and poor infrastructure of roads. Furthermore, Romo (2017) observes that the rural schools' low population density and sparse settlements have an impact on the efficient management of the schools as well as the availability of services and resources such as transportation. The author Wubayehu (2020) draws the conclusion that definitions of the word "rural areas" may not be accurate for all locations around the globe and may change over the course of time even within the same country. This is due to the term's multidimensional characteristics. On the other hand, such definitions reflect the realities of developing countries, including Pakistan's, in a particularly pronounced way.

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In light of what has been discussed up until this point, it is important to first define the phrase "country schools." Both Du Plessis (2014) and Romo (2017) agree that schools in rural areas are underfunded and underprivileged, that they are located far from urban towns, that they lack fundamental infrastructure such as water, roads, electricity, transportation, and information and communication technology (ICT), and that they lack opportunities for lifelong learning. As a result of all of these difficulties, both educators and students suffer. Because there are fewer options available in nearly all aspects of life, including those listed above, rural schools provide their employees with a greater number of obstacles, and it is more difficult for these schools to keep their teaching staff. Asada, Mitric, and Chriqui (2020) note that some of the features that identify rural schools include separation from specialized services, lack of qualified educators, falling student populations, and restricted access to higher education and professional training programs. In light of this context, it is absolutely necessary to take into consideration retention as a separate part of the conceptual framework.

2.2. Teachers Retention

In the majority of studies, "teacher retention" refers to an educator remaining in the same school. However, in some studies, "teacher retention" refers to an educator remaining in the same school system, state, or province, works in a publicly financed school, or continues to teach in general in some research (See et al. 2020). Despite the variety of possible definitions, maintaining people is an important factor in an organization's long-term health and performance. This is true even if employees leave for other jobs. If an employer is unable to keep good staff, it will result in decreased production and service quality, as well as a loss of institutional knowledge, expertise, and experience (Bibi et al., 2017). According to Gberville (2008), The term "employee retention" refers to an organization's strategies for keeping its valuable, long-term employees and cutting down the ratio of turnover.

Moreover, Khalid and Nawab (2018) assert that employee retention refers to the process of actively incentivizing workers to remain with the company for a prolonged period of time or until a predetermined goal or project has been completed. According to Imam et al. (2017), in order to keep employees around for the long haul, businesses should carefully craft initiatives with this objective in mind. This suggests that businesses should include "strategy" among the factors used to define "staff retention." As a result of this, Khalid and Nawab (2018) come to the conclusion that businesses should implement retention tactics and procedures that have a dual purpose. First, businesses should work toward lowering the rate of employee turnover, and second, they should make concerted efforts to cut the expenses and costs involved with recruiting, training, and orienting new workers.

2.3. Retention Challenges in Rural Schools in Pakistan

The socioeconomic situation in Pakistan's rural areas is difficult, and there is a significant wealth gap between rural and urban areas. Some of the obstacles that rural schools face include limited resources, poor infrastructure, and teachers with insufficient qualifications; as a result, the odds of remote students gaining access to excellent education are diminished (Zaman et al., 2019). Free primary education and the education and training sector strategy are just two examples of the interventions and reforms that have been made, but despite these, the education and training gap persists, and rural students' academic performance is still below average (ASER, 2020). In spite of the disparities that exist between rural and urban areas, a standardized evaluation system is used to grade schools in accordance with the same criteria for performance. This is done regardless of the distinct difficulties and socioeconomic circumstances that are present in rural and urban areas (Pakistan Ministry of Education 2017).

As a consequence of this, school administrators have been forced to hire instructors who are inadequately prepared, incompetent, and unprepared in order to fill teaching positions, which has a detrimental effect on the academic performance of the students (Akram et al., 2020). In a different setting, Hamid, Bisschoff, and Botha (2015) signifies that a sizeable portion of primary school teachers do not hold the appropriate education and experience. As a consequence, this has led to a high failure rate, with 66% of primary learners not finishing primary school. According to the findings of a number of studies, prospective instructors avoid working in rural schools, which results in a significant number of vacancies in rural schools (Bertoni et al. 2019; Downes and Roberts 2018; Monaco 2016). Even if the positions are filled, it is typically with instructors who do not have the necessary qualifications or who are employed on a temporary basis. This is because the more qualified and experienced teachers go to the urban areas where their favorite schools are located (Bertoni et al. 2019).

In addition, the delivery of educational services to remote locations that are difficult to access has proven to be challenging and has been accompanied by a great deal of difficulty in terms of staffing and the retention of teachers. There are a number of factors that may be contributing to these challenges. According to Masinire (2015), newly trained teachers have a strong dislike to working in rural schools. This aversion manifests itself in their work. According to the Latchem (2018) findings, because of the inherent challenges and constraints of rural schools and village life, many instructors who were assigned to these schools left their posts. Sometimes they refused to teach in rural schools and instead chose to teach in urban schools (Latchem, 2018). This results in unequal distribution of teachers, which cause harm to schools in outlying areas and leaves teaching jobs unfilled.

3. Research Methodology

In the course of this research, a qualitative research methodology was utilized, and then semi-structured interviews were conducted. The perspectives of teachers are essential to understanding their practices and the issues they face; as a result, the utilization of semi-structured interviews enables researchers to obtain detailed data. In order to reduce the time of the researcher, the participants in the study were chosen using a method of sampling that was both practical and convenient. After then, 25 educators, consisting of 21 females and 4 males, were chosen from various primary schools around the province of Punjab.

Face-to-face conversations with the author were used to conduct the interviews, and consent from the people being interviewed was solicited prior to recording their voices for the transcripts. The duration of each interview ranged about from twenty to thirty minutes, and it was conducted in the participants' preferred language. The author took each of the recorded interviews and summarized them before sending them on to another researcher so that they could be verified. After that, the analysis of the data was carried out by adhering to the methodology proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2018), which entailed carrying out the theme analysis in a series of distinct steps.

4. Results and Discussion

The following is a list of the most significant obstacles that teachers face when attempting to instill moral ideals in their students.

4.1. Lack of Teachers

A significant proportion of the participants mentioned the severe lack of available teaching positions in schools. Because the schools are located in rural and distant areas, it might be difficult for school administrators to find qualified teachers who live in close proximity to the schools. As a consequence of this, qualified instructors are hired from far away urban regions; but, due to the lengthy distance and the lack of lodging, teachers are unable to maintain their jobs for an extended period of time. The classes are left unoccupied for months at a time, and very few teachers are able to manage the entire class by combining the pupils into a single space. Not only is it difficult for pupils, but it is also difficult for teachers to instruct a big number of kids at once. The statements of the one participant are as follows:

SU: "Our School has been operating without a Science instructor for a number of months." It can be challenging for me to operate both units on my own. Because there are so many of them, it is impossible for me to pay special attention to each of the kids."

This finding is in line with the finding of Akram et al. (2020), who suggested inadequate English teachers as the main barrier in the way of coping with certain learning challenges of pupils in rural primary schools. This finding is in line with the finding of Akram et al. (2020). Therefore, the relevant authorities should establish policies to deal with this difficulty by providing certain amenities and allowances. This is intended to attract instructors to join rural schools in the first place and to stay there after they have done so.

4.2. Poor Working Conditions

The respondents to the interview cited insufficient working conditions as one of the primary obstacles associated with teaching in rural locations. The comments they gave, on the other hand, varied greatly based on the institution that they represented. The most common explanations were that working in rural areas is demoralizing since there are less educational resources available, and that instructors were overworked as a result of more teaching responsibilities. The statements of the one participant are as follows:

WE: "Other than textbooks, we are not given access to any other kind of educational material."

This finding is consistent with the finding of Marinette (2017), who argued that teachers' perceptions of their workplace environment have a significant impact on their likelihood of leaving a rural school for one with better working circumstances, and this can have a detrimental impact on the school's ability to attract and retain qualified professionals.

In addition, very few educators brought up the issue of the tremendous load of labor associated with big class sizes, which not only causes them to become exhausted but also causes them to remain unmotivated. This finding is consistent with the finding of Obungu, Njuguna, and Itegi (2021), who indicated that there was a significant teacher turnover rate in rural schools because of the poor working circumstances, including greater class sizes and heavier workloads. These factors include larger class sizes and increased workloads. Therefore, the management of schools ought to make working conditions as pleasant as possible in order to encourage instructors to maintain their employment there and maintain a level of productivity that is satisfactory.

4.3. Low Salary

It has been found that a teacher's compensation is another important element that contributes to their decision to leave the teaching profession. As a result of the poor income that they receive from the teaching profession, teachers are unable to meet the necessities for basic survival that they have; as a result, they continue to hunt for occupations that pay more. DR, one of the instructors, was quoted as saying:

DR: "Here, instructors do not earn enough salaries or other allowances, so they immediately move employment when a better chance arises."

This finding is consistent with the finding of Khawary and Ali, S. (2015), who revealed that poor income was one of the primary causes that play a significant role in the high teacher turnover rate in schools. This finding shows that there is consistency between the two sets of findings. Therefore, the management of schools or the relevant authorities should boost the monthly pay of teachers so that teachers may satisfy all of their fundamental demands and continue to feel content in their jobs.

4.4. Lack of Learners Motivation

The level of academic success attained by students is directly correlated to the level of interest and motivation they demonstrate in their studies. On the other side, participants in the study noted a lack of interest and motivation among students. Because of this, students are unable to take an interest in the learning activities that take place in classrooms, which ultimately leads to unfavorable outcomes. As a direct result of this, educators begin to experience feelings of burnout as a result of the pressure they feel to not achieve the required educational objectives. HY's instructor mentioned the following:

HY: "Students show careless behavior due to which teachers find themselves hard to teach."

4.5. Lack of Parental Interest

The most important people in the lives of learners are their parents. The financial and emotional support that parents provide is a major factor in the academic success of their children. Their assistance can improve students' academic performance and learning outcomes, which will be beneficial to both their fields of study and their future professions (Khanam, Akram, & Kamran, 2022; Nugent et al., 2015). On the other hand, the participants in the study revealed a lack of interest and involvement on the part of their parents in their children's academic activities, which has a significant impact on the academic performance of their children. The following was brought up by a teacher:

PO: "Students frequently fail to complete their homework, and their parents disregard their education. Nonetheless, when the teachers summon them to inform them of their progress, they do not appear."

Teachers frequently experience burnout because their lack of motivation is caused by the reckless behavior of students' parents. This finding demonstrates consistency with the finding of Rasanen et al. (2020), and as a result, teachers face challenges in terms of sustaining constructive interaction with the parents of students in terms of meeting the academic and emotional needs of students, which ultimately leads to a rise in the intention of teachers to leave their jobs. Therefore, it is essential for schools to hold meetings to raise awareness among parents in order to inspire and motivate them to participate actively in their children's education. It will be of assistance in building the interest of both the kids and the parents in achieving the targeted learning goals.

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