Challenges in Rural Teaching: Insights from Teachers' Experiences in Kurdistan Province and Global Research

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Abstract

Rural education is a critical component of community development; however, it is often hindered by numerous considerable challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, limited resources, a shortage of qualified personnel, and insufficient training policies. This study examines the obstacles faced by rural schools, with a particular focus on Iran, while drawing comparisons with international experiences. Due to the scarcity of data on rural schools in Iran, a multi-method qualitative research approach was adopted. First, a systematic review of existing literature on global rural education challenges was conducted to derive relevant insights from international research. Second, in light of the limited published data on the specific difficulties encountered by rural schools in Iran, an empirical qualitative research design was implemented. Findings from the literature review informed the development of semi-structured interview questions administered to teachers in rural schools in Kurdistan Province. A total of 14 experienced teachers—seven men and seven women—participated in the study. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, and theoretical saturation was applied to ascertain the final sample size. Through a rigorous process of thematic analysis and coding, key challenges and proposed solutions articulated by teachers were identified. The findings of this study underscore the significant challenges faced by rural schools, including inadequate resources and insufficient infrastructure. Nonetheless, the results highlight certain advantages including smaller class sizes and stronger teacher-student relationships. The study further reveals that while global research emphasizes the necessity of comprehensive, systemic interventions to address these challenges, localized and adaptable strategies can also yield positive outcomes in improving rural education in Iran. By integrating insights from international research with context-specific knowledge, rural schools can be revitalized, ultimately enhancing student learning outcomes.

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Introduction

Rural schools face distinct challenges that are not confined to Iran but are prevalent in many countries worldwide. These challenges include inadequate resources, deteriorating school infrastructure, and concerns regarding the quality of teaching personnel. By examining the experiences of other countries in addressing the difficulties associated with rural education, valuable insights can be gained to inform the development of context-specific solutions. Such solutions should be tailored to align with the cultural, geographical, and emotional states of rural schools in Iran, ensuring their relevance and effectiveness in improving educational outcomes.

To effectively address these challenges, it is crucial to bring them to the attention of policymakers and educational authorities, ensuring they are prioritized in decision-making processes. By consistently bringing these challenges to the attention of officials, it becomes possible to advocate for targeted and effective solutions.

Despite the annual assignment of numerous young and novice teachers to rural areas—where an understanding of experiences associated with teaching in rural settings is essential—there remains a paucity of resources that systematically examine and disseminate these valuable insights. Consequently, the collection, analysis, and categorization of teaching experiences in rural settings—aimed at identifying and introducing obstacles, advantages, and potential solutions—can significantly contribute to enhancing the mental preparedness of novice educators.

In many countries, particularly in Iran, rural schools face numerous challenges that significantly hinder the quality of education and students' learning outcomes. These challenges include a shortage of educational resources, deteriorating school infrastructure, inadequate teaching materials, and limited access to professional development opportunities for teachers. Moreover, the quality of human resources, particularly teachers, is influenced by a range of factors that directly impact the effectiveness of teaching and the overall learning process.

Analysis of educational outcomes reveals that rural students generally perform worse than their urban counterparts (Glover, 2014). In addition to teacher shortages, rural schools face unique challenges such as geographic isolation, inadequate workplace for teachers, lack of resources, and weak community engagement (Du Plessis, 2017). Social capital theory highlights the role of social relationships in enhancing educational outcomes. In rural communities, high social capital can foster greater parental involvement, improve resource access, and encourage collaboration between teachers and the community. In the absence of sufficient resources and infrastructure, these social networks become essential in enhancing educational quality (Byun et al, 2012). Du Plessis and Mestry (2019) also identified additional issues in rural schools, including the unattractiveness of rural teaching positions, underperforming teaching staff, curriculum challenges, and poor infrastructure and facilities.

The distinctive cultural and social conditions prevalent in rural communities, including the economic hardships faced by families, frequently lead to a diminished emphasis on education, resulting in a decline in the quality of educational opportunities. Entering the teaching profession in rural areas presents unique challenges for newly appointed individuals who are unfamiliar with the rural context—challenges that are often absent in urban schools. Each year, many novice educators are assigned to the most remote villages, where they are likely to encounter significant difficulties. It is clear that young teachers, particularly those with no prior experience living in rural environments and lacking familiarity with rural culture and societal norms, are especially susceptible to facing such challenges (Glover, 2014).

These challenges necessitate focused attention and the implementation of strategic interventions to improve educational conditions in rural regions. The evolving expectations placed upon teachers, coupled with the rapid transformations within the educational system, serve to further intensify the difficulties faced by these communities. Consequently, it is imperative to identify and thoroughly analyze these issues while proposing viable solutions. Such efforts are not only crucial for enhancing the quality of education in rural schools but also for promoting sustainable development and strengthening human capital in these areas (Xue et al, 2021). This paper aims to explore the challenges encountered by rural schools in the Kurdistan Province of Iran by examining the experiences of teachers and drawing comparisons with similar contexts in other countries. The overarching objective is to contribute to the enhancement of educational practices and learning outcomes in these regions.

Research Questions

1. What do the experiences of rural teachers in Kurdistan Province reveal about the challenges they face?

2. What insights can be drawn from the experiences of rural teachers in Kurdistan Province regarding potential solutions?

3. What strategies have researchers suggested to mitigate the challenges encountered by teachers in rural areas?

Methodology

This research adopts a multi-comparative qualitative approach, comprising two primary phases: an extensive literature review followed by semi-structured interviews. The primary objective is to identify, compare, and contrast themes and codes derived from existing literature with those obtained through participant interviews, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

The multi-comparative qualitative method is an analytical approach designed to examine qualitative data with the purpose of identifying, comparing, and contrasting various themes and codes collected from diverse sources. This method generally involves the following steps:

1. Data Collection: Researchers gather qualitative data from various sources, including interviews, observations, and literary texts.

2. Data Analysis: The collected data is systematically analyzed to identify relevant themes and codes. These themes are then compared across different contexts to develop a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the research topic.

3. Comparison of Results: By comparing the analyzed data, researchers can identify similarities and differences among diverse experiences or observations, allowing for the extraction of new patterns and insights.

This method is particularly valuable in social and human studies, as it enables researchers to develop a deeper understanding of diverse cultural and social contexts (Creswell, 2013).

Phase 1: Literature Review

To synthesize existing research related to teaching in rural schools and establish preliminary codes and themes, we conducted a thorough review of relevant articles through the following three steps (Search Strategy, Systematic Data Extraction and Systematic Coding Procedure):

1. Conduct a systematic search using academic databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, ERIC, Sage and Scopus.

2. Employ keywords, synonyms, and subject headings relevant to rural education. At this stage, a total of 45 articles were identified.

3. Establishing inclusion criteria (e.g., date range, peer-reviewed articles, specific populations) and exclusion criteria (e.g., non-English articles, unrelated topics). Ultimately, 19 relevant articles were selected pertaining to research topic.

4. Investigating key themes (66 codes).

5. Drawing two tables for sorting and grouping Challenges (44 codes) and solutions (22 codes) codes individually.

6. Developing initial coding categories based on themes that emerge from the literature.

7. Applying an inductive coding approach to identify patterns and categories within the reviewed literature.

Phase 2: Interviews

To obtain comprehensive firsthand accounts from experienced rural school teachers and to supplement and contrast the findings of the literature review, interviews were conducted with fourteen individuals, comprising seven women and seven men. Purposeful sampling was employed, with the selection criterion being teaching experience in rural schools. The process continued until theoretical saturation was achieved after the twelfth interview; however, the interviews were extended to the fourteenth participant to achieve theoretical saturation, ensuring the robustness and completeness of the findings. Subsequently, the interview data were systematically coded, and content analysis was performed to identify challenges and suggestions related to educational issues in rural schools within the Kurdistan Province

of Iran. The interviews were conducted in the following manner:

Target Population Definition: Defining the population relevant to teaching in rural schools.

Purposive Sampling: Applying purposive sampling to select participants who met specific criteria related to the research questions, such as teaching experience and professional background.

Diverse Sampling Strategy: Ensuring diversity in sampling to capture a broad range of perspectives.

Development of Interview Guide: Creating a semi-structured interview guide informed by insights from the literature review, incorporating open-ended questions to encourage detailed responses.

Pilot Interviews: Conducting three-stage pilot interviews to test and refine the interview questions, ensuring clarity and relevance.

Interview Execution: Carried out interviews either in person or through remote platforms (e.g., telephone, WhatsApp, and Telegram), with each session lasting approximately 45 - 70 minutes.

Data Recording and Transcription: Recording and transcribing all interviews to ensure accuracy in data analysis.

Participant Verification: Implementing participant checking to ensure the reliability and validity of the transcribed data.

Coding and Analysis: Applying a three-stage coding methodology to systematically analyze the interview data.

Phase 3: Coding Comparison

To systematically compare the findings from the two phases, the following steps were undertaken:

1. Constructing a matrix to juxtapose codes derived from the literature with those obtained from the interview data.

2. Identifying alignments, discrepancies, and nuances within the themes, with due consideration to context and participant perspectives.

3. Examining the extent to which the literature findings converge or diverge from the lived experiences reported by participants.

4. Integrating insights from both phases to formulate conclusions regarding teaching practices in rural schools.

5. Discussing implications, limitations, and potential directions for future research.

Findings

Phase 1: Literature Review

To systematically examine the background and challenges associated with rural schools, as well as potential solutions, all relevant information has been organized into two comprehensive tables, presented below.

Challenges

The challenges confronting rural education are complex and highly interconnected, adversely affecting both the quality of education and the overall development of communities. One of the most critical issues is the shortage of educational staff, resulting in a scarcity of qualified teachers in rural areas. This shortage is exacerbated by hiring constraints and a lack of adequate training opportunities, rendering it difficult for schools to attract and retain skilled educators. Furthermore, many teachers experience time limitations that hinder their ability to participate in professional growth or pursue professional progression. The scarcity of opportunities for skill enhancement further compounds this issue, leaving educators inadequately prepared to address the diverse needs of their students.

Many rural communities are characterized by geographical isolation, presenting significant challenges in accessing villages and navigating difficult routes. These conditions make commuting to school a daunting task for both students and teachers. In many cases, children are required to walk long distances to school or endure lengthy drives to reach their workplaces, contributing to high absenteeism and increased dropout rates. Moreover, the inadequate infrastructure and facilities prevalent in these areas exacerbate the challenges faced by rural schools. A lack of heating facilities during the winter months creates an unwelcoming and uncomfortable learning

Table 1: Global Challenges in Rural Schools

Dimensions	Challenges	Authors	Freq.
Staffing Issues	Shortage of Educational Staff	Du Plessis, 2017 (S. A.3) - Masinire, 2014 (S. A.) - Preston et al, 2014 (USA, Can. and Aus.) - Preston & Barnes, 2017 (USA, Can. and Aus.) -Rahim et al, 2020 (Pak.) - Starr & white, 2008 (Aus.)	6
	Lack Professional development	Du Plessis, 2017 (S. A.) - Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019 (S. A.) - Faisal et al, 2024 (G. R. S.) - Fardoun et al, 2014 (S. Ar.) - Hudson & Hudson, 2008 (Aus.) - Masinire, 2014 (S. A.) - Matshe, 2014 (S. A.) - Preston et al, 2014 (USA. Can. And Aus) - Preston & Barnes, 2017 (USA. Can. And Aus) - Rahim et al, 2020 (Pak.)	10
	Career Advancement	Beutel et al, 2011 (Aus.) - Hudson & Hudson, 2008 (Aus.) - Masinire, 2014 (S. A.)	3
	Skill Development Limitations	Du Plessis, 2017 (S. A.) - Masinire, 2014 (S. A.) - Matshe, 2014 (S. A.) - Preston et al, 2014 (USA. Can. And Aus.) - Preston & Barnes, 2017 (USA. Can. And Aus) - Rahim et al, 2020 (Pak.)	6
	Hiring Limitations	Preston et al, 2014 (USA, Can. and Aus.) - Preston & Barnes, 2017 (USA, Can. and Aus.) - Rahim et al, 2020 (Pak.) - Starr & white, 2008 (Aus.)	4
	Insufficient Training Opportunities	Du Plessis, 2017 (S, A,) - Hudson & Hudson, 2008 (Aus.) - Masinire, 2014 (S, A,) - Matshe, 2014 (S, A,) - Preston et al, 2014 (USA, Can. and Aus.) Preston & Barnes, 2017 (USA, Can. and Aus.) - Rahim et al, 2020 (Pak.) - Starr & white, 2008 (Aus.)	8
	Time Constraints	Matshe, 2014 (S, A,)	1
	Cultural Barriers	lamb et al 2014 (Aus.) - Masinire, 2014 (S, A,) - Preston et al, 2014 (USA, Can. and Aus.) - Preston & Barnes, 2017 (USA, Can. and Aus.) - Rahim et al, 2020 (Pak.) - Starr & white, 2008 (Aus.) - Wallin& Newton, 2014 (Can.)	7
Geographical and Infrastructure Challenges	Difficult Access to Villages	Sumintono, 2009 (In.) - Du Plessis, 2017 (S, A,) - Starr & white, 2008 (Aus.) - Wallin& Newton, 2014 (Can.)	4
	Geographical Isolation	Beutel et al, 2011 (Aus.) - Biriescua & Babaitaa, 2014 (Rom.) - Clarke et al, 2009 (Aus.) - Du Plessis, 2017 (S, A,) - Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019 (S, A,) - Faisal et al, 2024 (G. R. S.) - Fardoun et al, 2014 (S. A.) - Hudson & Hudson, 2008 (Aus.) - lamb et al 2014 (Aus.) - Marwan et al, 2011 (Mal.) - Masinire, 2014 (S, A,) - Starr & white, 2008 (Aus.)	12
	Challenging Routes	Sumintono, 2009 (In) - Wallin& Newton, 2014 (Can.)	2

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[3] . Countries abbreviation include: S. A.: **South Africa, USA: United States of America, Can.: Canada, Aus.: Australia, Pak.: Pakistan, G. R. S.: Global Review Study,** S. Ar.: Saudi Arabia, In: Indonesia, Rom.: Romania, Mal.: Malaysia, Thai: Thailand, Ch.: China

	Teachers Driving for Hours to Reach Their Workplace	Biriescua & Babaitaa, 2014 (Rom.)	1
	Teachers Driving for Hours to Reach Their Workplace	Wallin& Newton, 2014 (Can.)	1
	Weak Infrastructure and Facilities	Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019 (S, A,) - Biriescua & Babaitaa, 2014 (Rom.) - Clarke et al, 2009 (Aus.) - Du Plessis, 2017 (S, A,) - Hudson & Hudson, 2008 (Aus.) - lamb et al 2014 (Aus.) - Marwan et al, 2011 (Mal) - Masinire, 2014 (S, A,) - Preston et al, 2014 (USA, Can. and Aus.) - Starr & white, 2008 (Aus.) - Wallin& Newton, 2014 (Can.)	11
	Lack of Heating Funds in Winter	Biriescua & Babaitaa, 2014 (Rom.)	1
	Collapsed School Buildings	Biriescua & Babaitaa, 2014 (Rom.)	1
	Low Attractiveness of Rural Schools	Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019 (S, A,) - lamb et al 2014 (Aus.)	2
	Inadequate Working Conditions	Du Plessis, 2017 (S, A,)	1
Working Conditions	Intensification of Work	Starr & white, 2008 (Aus.) - Du Plessis, 2017 (S, A,) - Starr & white, 2008 (Aus.)	3
	Simultaneous Management & Teaching	Wallin & Newton, 2014 (Can.)	1
	Multi-Subject Teaching by General Teachers	Fardoun et al, 2014 (S. Ar.)	1
	Variety of Roles in School	Starr & white, 2008 (Aus.) - Fardoun et al, 2014 (S. Ar.) - Starr & white, 2008 (Aus.) - Wallin& Newton, 2014 (Can.)	4
	Unnecessary Administrative Requirements	Starr & white, 2008 (Aus.) - Starr & white, 2008 (Aus.)	2
Resource Limitations	Lack of Physical Resources	Preston et al, 2014 (USA, Can. and Aus.)	1
	Lack of Resources	Du Plessis, 2017 (S, A,) - Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019 (S, A,) - lamb et al 2014 (Aus.) - Wallin& Newton, 2014 (Can.)	4
	Insufficient Funding	Rahim et al, 2020 (Pak.) - Biriescua & Babaitaa, 2014 (Rom.) - Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019 (S, A,) - Marwan et al, 2011 (Mal.) - Rahim et al, 2020 (Pak.) - Starr & white, 2008 (Aus.) - Wallin& Newton, 2014 (Can.)	7
	Financial Constraints	Biriescua & Babaitaa, 2014 (Rom.) - Hudson & Hudson, 2008 (Aus.) - lamb et al 2014 (Aus.) -	3
	No Internet Connection at School	Arreerard, 2022 (Thai.)	1
	Digital Divide Between Urban & Rural Schools	Faisal et al, 2024 (**G. R. S.**)	1

	Internet Connectivity Issues	Luo et al, 2022 (Ch.) - Arreerard, 2022 (Thai.) - Rahim et al, 2020 (Pak.)	3
Community & Parental Involvement	poor community collaboration	Du Plessis, 2017 (S, A,**)** - Hudson & Hudson, 2008 (Aus.) - lamb et al 2014 (Aus.) - Marwan et al, 2011 (Mal.) - Wallin& Newton, 2014 (Can.)	5
	Parents' Weak Educational Backgrounds	Matshe, 2014 (S, A,**)**	1
	Lack of Parental Participation in School Management	Matshe, 2014 (S, A,**)** - Du Plessis, 2017 (S, A,**)**	2
	Lack of Parental Involvement	Preston et al, 2014 (USA, Can. and Aus.) - Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019 (S, A,**) -** Hudson & Hudson, 2008 (Aus.) - lamb et al 2014 (Aus.) - Marwan et al, 2011 (Mal.)	5
Curriculum and Educational Challenges	Curriculum Challenges	Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019 (S, A,) - Fardoun et al, 2014 (S. Ar.)	2
	Complexities of Managing Rural Schools Without Empathy	Wallin & Newton, 2014 (Can.)	1
	Complexities of Running Small Schools	Wallin& Newton, 2014 (Can.)	1
Systemic and Administrative Problems	Systemic and Administrative Problems	Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019 (S, A,) - Biriescua & Babaitaa, 2014 (Rom.) - Clarke et al, 2009 (Aus.) - Du Plessis, 2017 (S, A,) - Hudson & Hudson, 2008 (Aus.) - lamb et al 2014 (Aus.) - Marwan et al, 2011 (Mal.) - Starr & white, 2008 (Aus.)	8
	Isolation of Rural School Principals Due to Marginalization	Wallin & Newton, 2014 (Can.)	1
	Lack of Administrative Support	Preston et al, 2014 (USA, Can. and Aus.) - Du Plessis, 2017 (S, A,)	2
	Inadequate Support for Students Throughout Their Education	Matshe, 2014 (S, A,) - Fardoun et al, 2014 (S. Ar.)	2
	Lack of Qualified Teachers	Luo et al, 2022 (Ch.) - Biriescua & Babaitaa, 2014 (Rom.) - Clarke et al, 2009 (Aus.) - Du Plessis, 2017 (S, A,) - Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019 (S, A,) - Wallin& Newton, 2014 (Can.)	6
	Frequent Turnover of Principals and Teachers	Clarke et al, 2009 (Aus.)	1
	Short Tenure of Principals in Rural Schools Threatening Sustainable Leadership	Clarke et al, 2009 (Aus.) - Du Plessis, 2017 (S, A,) - Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019 (S, A,)	3

environment. Additionally, the structural disrepair of many schools, some of which have even collapsed, significantly reduces the appeal of rural schools to both teachers and students.

Working conditions in rural schools are frequently inadequate, with educators experiencing heightened workloads as they manage multiple responsibilities simultaneously. A typical teacher may be required to

instruct several specialized subjects concurrently, often resulting in professional burnout and reduced job satisfaction. The expectation to assume a variety of roles, alongside burdensome administrative obligations, detracts from their primary pedagogical focus. Moreover, the acute shortage of physical resources and financial support severely restricts the educational opportunities accessible to students. The digital divide between urban and rural schools further exacerbates disparities, as many rural institutions lack essential internet connectivity—an essential component of contemporary education.

Community involvement represents another critical factor influencing the efficacy of rural education. Limited community collaboration and insufficient parental participation in school management undermine the establishment of a supportive educational environment. Parents with limited educational backgrounds may struggle to engage meaningfully in their children's academic journey. Additionally, rural schools often face curriculum challenges and the complexities associated with managing small institutions. These difficulties are frequently compounded by a lack of empathy and understanding from principals, who may feel isolated and marginalized within the educational system. The absence of consistent administrative support and the frequent turnover of newly appointed principals and

teachers pose significant threats to the stability and sustained progress of rural education, impeding the development of sustainable leadership and long-term improvements. Ultimately, addressing these challenges necessitates a comprehensive approach that prioritizes investment in human resources, infrastructure development, and active community engagement.

Educational challenges in rural areas give rise to numerous fundamental issues, each of which directly impacts the quality of education. One of the most prominent obstacles is remote location (12), which is considered the most critical among these issues. This issue significantly hinders access to educational resources and facilities, as remote locations are inherently difficult to reach. Furthermore, the deficiency in professional development opportunities (10) for teachers is another significant challenge, resulting in diminished pedagogical skills and adversely affecting the overall quality of instruction.
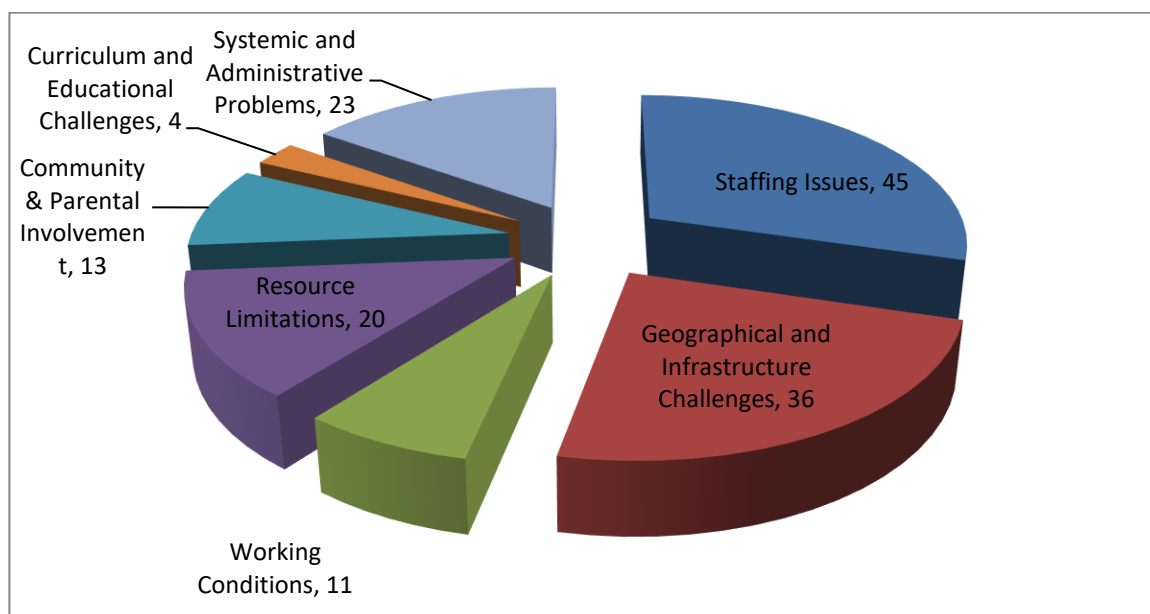

Figure 1. Frequency of challenges faced by rural schools mentioned in the articles.

The analysis of challenges faced by rural schools identifies several critical areas of concern. Staffing

Issues are the most significant, with 45 mentions, highlighting difficulties in recruiting and retaining

qualified teachers. This is closely followed by Geographical and Infrastructure Challenges (36 mentions), pointing to the isolation of these schools and inadequate facilities that hinder educational delivery. Resource Limitations (20 mentions) indicate a lack of necessary materials and funding to support effective teaching. Additionally, Community and Parental Involvement (13 mentions) shows that local engagement is crucial yet often insufficient. Systemic and Administrative Problems (23 mentions) highlight bureaucratic obstacles that impede school functioning. While Working Conditions are mentioned less frequently (11 mentions), they still affect teacher satisfaction. Lastly, Curriculum and Educational Challenges (4 mentions) signify the need for relevant and adaptable educational content. Together, these challenges present a comprehensive view of the hurdles rural schools must overcome to improve educational outcomes.

Table 2: Global Solutions to Challenges in Rural Schools

Dimensions	Solutions/Suggestions	Authors	Frequency
Revitalization of Rural Schools	Revitalization of rural schools	Sumintono, 2009 (In) - Marwan et al, 2011 (Mal.)	2
	Strategies for attracting and retaining highly qualified educators	Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019 (S, A,**)** - Beutel et al, 2011 (Aus.) - Clarke et al, 2009 (Aus.) - Faisal et al, 2024 **(G. R. S.) -** Hudson & Hudson, 2008 (in Aus.) – lamb et al 2014 (Aus.)	6
	Addressing the shortage of competent teaching professionals	Du Plessis, 2017 (S, A,**)** - Faisal et al, 2024 **(**G. R. S.)	2
	Provision and Optimization of Educational Resources	Du Plessis, 2017 (S, A,**)** - Faisal et al, 2024 **(**G. R. S.)	2
	Securing and Allocating Adequate Educational Funding	Du Plessis, 2017 (S, A,) - Faisal et al, 2024 (G. R. S.) - Faisal et al, 2024 (G. R. S.)	3
Pre-Service Teacher Training Programs	Pre-Service Teacher Training Program	Masinire, 2014 (Aus.)	1
	Being in an unfamiliar rural environment can lead to the development of extensive professional learning in a short period	Beutel et al, 2011 (Aus.)	1
	Rural teaching experience for student teachers	Masinire, 2014 (Aus.)	1
	Interaction with local communities, living with host families, observing teaching practices, and educating student teachers in rural schools	Hudson & Hudson, 2008 (Aus.) - Fardoun et al, 2014 (S. Ar.)	2
	Being exposed to rural conditions to attract qualified teachers to rural schools	Masinire, 2014 (Aus.)	1

Professional Development Initiatives for Educators	Both principals and teachers require more professional and educational skills	Du Plessis, 2017 (S, A,) - Beutel et al, 2011 (Aus.) - Faisal et al, 2024 (G. R. S.) - Starr & white, 2008 (Aus.) - Wallin& Newton, 2014 (Can.)	5
	Rural teachers should have access to remote learning, seminars, and workshops.	Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019 (S, A,)	1
	There is a need for professional development incentive packages for rural teachers	Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019 (S, A,) - Du Plessis, 2017 (S, A,) - Faisal et al, 2024 (G. R. S.) - Fardoun et al, 2014 (S. Ar.) - Wallin& Newton, 2014 (Can.)	5
Community Involvement and Engagement	Community Involvement	Beutel et al, 2011 (Aus.) - Starr & white, 2008 (Aus.)	2
	The importance of rich collaboration with community members	Preston & Barnes, 2017 (USA, Can. and Aus.) - Fardoun et al, 2014 (S. Ar.)	2
	Active members of the community should be elected to school governing boards, where they can oversee teaching and school facilities	Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019 (S, A,)	1
	Managers must be able to communicate with rural communities.	Preston et al 2014 (USA, Can. and Aus.)	1
	Conducting further research on rural schools to raise community awareness about their challenges	Marwan et al, 2011 (Mal.) - Du Plessis, 2017 (S, A,)	2
	Community support for rural schools, in terms of providing school buildings and other infrastructure	Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019 (S, A,) - Marwan et al, 2011 (Mal.) - Masinire, 2014 (Aus.) - Matshe, 2014 (S, A,) - Preston et al, 2014 (USA, Can. and Aus.) - Preston & Barnes, 2017 (USA, Can. and Aus.) - Rahim et al, 2020 (Pak.)	7
Policy Support	Policy support	Du Plessis, 2017 (S, A,) - Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019 (S, A,) - Fardoun et al, 2014 (S. Ar.) - Marwan et al, 2011 (Mal.) - Masinire, 2014 (Aus.) - Matshe, 2014 (S, A,) - Preston & Barnes, 2017 (USA, Can. and Aus.) - Rahim et al, 2020 (Pak.) - Starr & white, 2008 (Aus.) - Wallin& Newton, 2014 (Can.)	10
	Policy makers and senior education leaders need to be aware of fundamental challenges	Preston et al, 2014 (USA, Can. and Aus.)	1
	Policymakers and officials should not treat rural schools the same as urban schools.	Preston et al, 2014 (USA, Can. and Aus.)	1
Designing an Information System	Designing an information system for specialized teaching and interaction between students and teachers within it	Fardoun et al, 2014 (S. Ar.)	1

Solutions

Having examined the various challenges faced by rural schools, it is essential to direct our focus toward potential solutions. Understanding these challenges provides a foundation for addressing them effectively, and exploring the proposed strategies will help identify actionable steps to enhance the educational landscape in rural areas. The following section outlines several key initiatives designed to confront these issues directly.

Revitalizing rural schools is crucial for mitigating the educational disparities that persist between urban and rural areas. Addressing this issue necessitates a comprehensive and multifaceted approach, beginning with the recruitment of high-quality teachers to serve in rural educational settings. Various challenges, including remote location and limited facilities, often hinder the successful recruitment of qualified teachers. To overcome these obstacles, it is essential to implement effective strategies, such as offering competitive salaries, comprehensive benefits packages, and relocation assistance, while also emphasizing the professional development opportunities inherent in rural teaching environments. Increasing the supply of qualified teachers is also of paramount importance. This can be achieved through establishing partnerships with teacher training programs that explicitly prepare candidates for teaching in rural contexts.

Providing adequate funding constitutes a fundamental aspect of revitalizing rural schools. Sufficient financial support is essential to ensure that these institutions can acquire critical educational resources, ranging from textbooks to advanced technology, thereby facilitating the delivery of high-quality education. In addition to financial investment, implementing pre-service training programs specifically tailored to rural educational settings is of paramount importance. These programs should be designed to equip prospective teachers with the skills and knowledge necessary for effective teaching within rural contexts. Emphasizing immersion in unfamiliar rural environments can further enhance the preparedness of student teachers, enabling them to gain hands-on experience and develop strategies to address the unique challenges they may encounter.

Promoting community involvement is critical to establishing a supportive educational ecosystem. Facilitating opportunities for student teachers to interact with local communities is particularly beneficial, as living with host families and observing local teaching practices fosters a deeper understanding of community culture and values. This immersive approach enhances teachers' ability to tailor instructional methods to better meet students' needs. Furthermore, community participation in educational processes strengthens local support for schools. Community members, including elected representatives, should be actively engaged in school governance to ensure that local perspectives and requirements are adequately regarded in decision-making processes.

Principals and teachers in rural settings require ongoing professional development to remain informed about educational best practices. Facilitating access to remote learning opportunities, seminars, and workshops can provide invaluable resources and skills that are otherwise difficult to acquire in geographically isolated areas. To encourage professional development, it is essential to offer incentive packages specifically designed for rural educators which can foster long-term commitment while enhancing pedagogical competencies and skills.

Establishing clear communication between school principals and rural communities is essential to identifying and addressing local educational challenges. Conducting further research on rural education helps raise community awareness and promotes collaborative problem-solving. Finally, legislative and policy support from lawmakers and educational leaders is indispensable. Policymakers must recognize the fundamental challenges unique to rural schools and avoid the indiscriminate application of urban-focused educational policies. Designing a specialized information system to facilitate interactive teaching and foster collaboration between students and educators can further strengthen rural education. Promoting collaborative learning environments is crucial to revitalizing and sustaining rural schools in the long term.

In analyzing challenges and opportunities for revitalizing rural schools, policy support emerges as the most frequently mentioned factor, appearing ten times within the data. This highlights the crucial role of policymakers and educational leaders in addressing the distinctive challenges faced by rural education systems. Effective policy support requires a nuanced understanding of rural-specific needs, with funding,

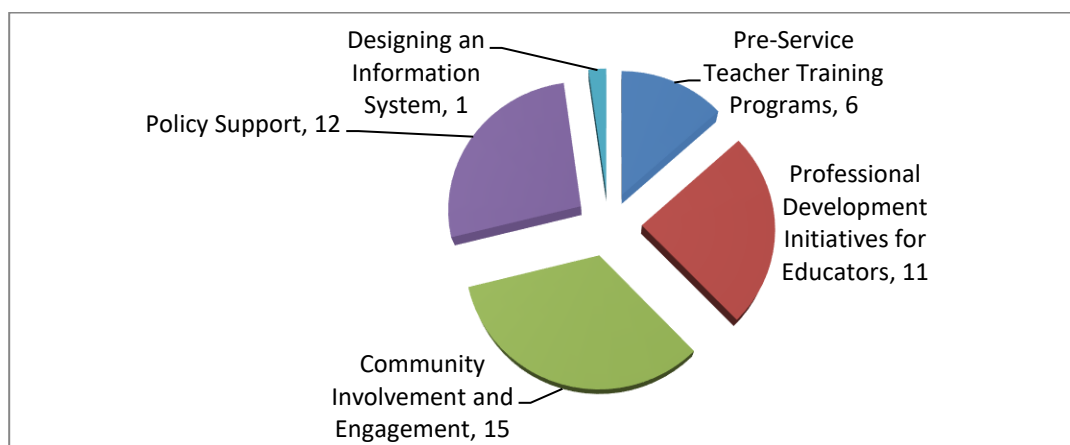resource allocation, and educational strategies tailored to local contexts.

Figure 2. Frequency of the Global Solutions to Rural Schools Challenges that mentioned in articles.

The frequency of codes in the analyzed articles highlights crucial areas in educational discussions. Pre-Service Teacher Training Programs (6 mentions) emphasize the importance of preparing future educators, while Professional Development Initiatives for Educators (11 mentions) underline the necessity of continuous learning for teachers. Community Involvement and Engagement (15 mentions) is the most frequently cited category, reflecting the value of collaboration with local communities in enhancing educational outcomes. Policy Support (12 mentions) signifies the need for strong frameworks to facilitate effective practices. In contrast, designing an Information System (1 mention) suggests a lower priority on technology integration relative to other key areas. Overall, these findings indicate a comprehensive focus on improving education through teacher preparation, community collaboration, and supportive policies.

Following the completion of the first phase of the research, which involved analyzing past studies related to the challenges and solutions for rural schools, study proceeds to the second phase. This phase focuses on conducting in-depth interviews with teachers from rural areas in the Kurdistan province of Iran. The primary objective is to explore the perspectives, experiences, and obstacles encountered by these teachers within diverse educational, social, and cultural contexts. Through the analysis of this qualitative data, the study aims to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the current educational landscape in rural schools and identify practical solutions to address the obstacles.

Phase 2: Interview Findings

To collect updated and relevant data on teaching in rural schools in Iran, we conducted interviews with experienced teachers from the Kurdistan province. The qualitative data obtained were analyzed through a three-stage coding process.

Question 1: Are There Problems in Rural Schools That Are Specific to Rural Areas and Not Present in Urban Schools?

The purpose of this question was to understand the distinct challenges encountered in rural schools as compared to urban schools. By doing so, we aimed to raise awareness among future educators and officials about the unique difficulties faced by rural schools. The responses provided by the interviewees revealed several challenges that were not previously well-documented. The primary challenges identified were classified into four main categories:

1. Lack of Facilities

2. Problems Related to Teachers

3. Problems Related to Parents

4. Problems Related to Students

The most frequently mentioned issue was the insufficient facilities, including inadequate

Table 3: Specific Challenges of Rural Schools in Iran (Kurdistan)

Selected Code	Axial Codes	Free Codes
Lack of Facilities	Lack of Facilities	- Inadequate facilities (I3) [4] - Insufficient spatial resources, including the absence of laboratories and a well-equipped library. For instance, the photocopying machine is nonfunctional, transportation is challenging, and there are difficulties when technicians visit the village (I4). - Inappropriate educational environment (I4). - Financial constraints (I4). - Insufficient educational materials (I5). - Deficiencies in educational and welfare facilities (I8). - Limited access to technologically advanced classrooms (I10). - Deteriorating and outdated school buildings (I10). - Limited access to technologically advanced classrooms (I11). - Geographical remoteness from the provincial center, resulting in severely limited facilities (I11). - Limited internet accessibility (I13). - Suboptimal educational environment (I13).
	Multi-grade Classes	The most important difference is multi-grade classes (I8). Textbooks have not been developed for multi-grade classes (I10). Classes do not reach the minimum number of students and thus become multi-grade (I4)
Issues Related to Students	Absenteeism and Dropout	Absenteeism of students (I1). [Their parent] would not allow their children to come to school at all (I2).
	Mixed-gender Nature of rural schools	Students are placed in mixed-gender classes, which frequently results in conflicts between boys and girls (I 4). The coeducational nature of the classes has led to reluctance among families to send their daughters to school (I 6).
	Non-localization of Textbook Content	Certain concepts in the textbook have not been localized (I 3). The content of the lessons is not aligned with the living conditions of the children (I 8).
	Weak Academic Performance of Students	There is a weakness in the academic foundation of the students (I 6).

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[4] "I" with numbers in parentheses stand for the interviewee participant's number.

	Multilingualism	We face challenges associated with being trilingual students (I 11)
	Low Motivation of Students	The children demonstrate reduced interest (I 14). Students in the village exhibit a lack of motivation (I 7).
Problems Related to Parents	Lack of Cooperation from Parents	Parental supervision of children's activities is highly limited (I 7). Unlike in urban areas, parents in the village demonstrate minimal attentiveness to their children's activities (I 14). Overall, parental participation in the village remains notably low (I 7).
	Illiteracy of Parents	A significant number of parents are illiterate (I 8). In the village, parents are predominantly either semi-literate or entirely illiterate (I 9).
Problems Related to Teachers	Cost of Commuting to Village	The cost of commuting to the village is significantly high (I 4).
	Multiple Roles of Teachers	The teacher serving in the village assumes multiple roles, including those of janitor, physical education teacher, principal, and vice principal—in essence, fulfilling all necessary duties within the village (I 6).
	Cultural Difference Between the Teacher and the Rural Residents	Cultural conflicts may occasionally arise between teachers residing in the village and the local community (I 10).

educational resources, dilapidated school buildings, financial difficulties, limited internet access, a lack of smart classrooms, and insufficient educational spaces such as laboratories and libraries. One of the most prominent issues in sparsely populated rural areas is the prevalence of multi-grade classrooms. Due to the low number of students, these schools are often required to combine multiple grade levels into one class, compromising the quality of education. Given that rural teachers are particularly focused on the issue of the insufficient facilities, much more attention needs to be paid to this problem. This issue was emphasized by several teachers, including Interviewee Number 14, who stated:

"One of the significant challenges faced by rural schools is the lack of adequate facilities. For instance, in remote villages, proper schools are often absent. In many villages within Divandarreh, schools are situated in shipping containers, which serve as makeshift classrooms. These facilities are typically located at considerable distances from residential areas and lack access to natural gas lines, necessitating the use of oil for heating. As a result, the living and learning conditions in these areas are considerably more challenging compared to urban environments.

Furthermore, a major obstacle to educational development is the low level of student motivation to attend school, accompanied by limited parental involvement in monitoring and supporting their children's academic progress."

Several challenges identified were directly related to students, driven by various underlying factors. The most common issues reported included absenteeism, dropout rates, co-educational classes, lack of localization in textbook content, poor academic performance, multilingualism, and low motivation. Students in rural schools often exhibit higher rates of absenteeism and demonstrate a lack of sufficient motivation to engage in studying. In some rural areas, students often speak multiple languages, creating barriers to effective teaching and learning. Interviewee Participant Number 6 described the challenges as follows:

"Upon visiting rural villages, you can observe numerous challenges. One significant issue is the poor academic performance of students, a problem that appears to be less prevalent in urban areas. Another challenge constitutes the co-educational nature of

classrooms, which, in the past, led to hesitation among some families regarding the enrollment

of their daughters in school. Although this concern has diminished over time, it remains a notable aspect of rural education. In summary, rural villages face distinct challenges and problems that differ from those encountered in urban settings."

Another category of issues pertains to the parents which in rural areas can be divided into two main categories: parental illiteracy and lack of cooperation. Many rural parents are uneducated and thus unable to effectively support their children's education progress. Additionally, parents often fail to supervise educational matters or participate in school-related activities. As noted by Interviewee Number 14:

"Parents often do not prioritize their children's education."

Teachers also face numerous challenges when working in rural schools. One significant issue is the high cost of commuting, as schools generally do not provide accommodations. Additionally, cultural differences between teachers and the local community can hinder their ability to adapt and build rapport.

Question 2: Are the Academic Levels of Rural Students Higher or Lower Than Those of Urban Students?

Table 4: Comparison of Academic Levels between Rural and Urban Students

Selected Code	Axial Codes	Free codes
Educational Inequality in Rural and Urban Contexts	Parental Conditions and Involvement	The educational outcomes of students cannot be definitively determined, as they largely depend on the family circumstances of each student (I 2). Urban children tend to perform better academically, as their parents are more involved in their education (I 4). Due to the availability of resources and parental support, urban students learn in a more enriched and conceptual manner. They have access to educational videos and various other learning materials (I 5). In urban areas, a noticeable difference is evident, as parents actively and enthusiastically participate in school activities—a level of involvement not commonly observed in rural settings (I 7). A significant educational disparity exists, primarily attributed to differences in living conditions, cultural context, and family poverty—both economic and cultural. Many students with potential go unnoticed because there is no one at home or within the family to support their development, often due to parental illiteracy or indifference (I 8). his disparity appears to be related to the parents' level of education, as well as the environment in which the child is raised—particularly whether relatives and acquaintances are educated. Based on these factors, it seems that urban students generally achieve better educational outcomes (I 13).
	Multi-grade Classes	Undoubtedly, cities maintain a higher educational standard. A student who has been educated in multi-grade classrooms differs significantly from one who has attended single-grade classes (I 14). While an examination of students' report cards may not reveal substantial differences compared to urban schools, those who have experienced both settings can clearly discern a distinction. This disparity arises primarily from the inability to deliver quality education due to time constraints and the challenges posed by multi-grade classrooms (I 10).
	Access in the Village	In villages situated closer to cities, students do not exhibit substantial differences in educational outcomes. However, in more remote villages with limited resources, students experience considerably poorer conditions (I 9). Particularly in rural and remote areas, there is a pronounced disparity between urban and rural students (I 14).

	Teacher	However, I have encountered rural students who demonstrated greater academic strength than their urban counterparts. In multi-grade classes, if a student struggles in a particular grade, that grade is repeated, allowing for reinforcement of learning. Moreover, when a multi-grade class is led by a competent teacher, the smaller class size resembles private tutoring, which can contribute to greater student success (I 6). Nonetheless, teacher demotivation remains a challenge, as many teachers are required to commute considerable distances daily, whether due to necessity or other circumstances (I 7). The quality of rural education is closely linked to the competency of the teacher. In some cases, a teacher who has served in a village for several years may have had a negative impact on an entire generation. Conversely, in the village where I worked last year, effective and dedicated teachers had made significant progress with the students, resulting in markedly improved urban students this year (I 9).
	Additional Education in Cities	Students in rural areas tend to excel in practical subjects such as work and technology. However, they generally display limited interest in subjects like mathematics, with only a few exceptions. In contrast, urban students, who benefit from educational packages and private tutoring, typically demonstrate stronger mathematical skills (I 12). Given that urban children have access to extracurricular and remedial classes, while rural children lack such opportunities, it is important to recognize that rural students also possess talents that require nurturing and development (I 11).

The research background suggests that the academic performance levels of rural students are generally lower than those of urban students. This question aimed to investigate whether this pattern holds true in rural schools within Kurdistan province. All interviewed teachers affirmed that the academic performance of urban students tends to surpass that of rural students, although some exceptions were noted, particularly among talented students whose potential remained untapped. Generally speaking, without considering specific cases, the academic performance of students in rural areas tends to be lower compared to that of their urban counterparts.

Five fundamental issues were identified, by interviewee number 5, as contributing to the lower academic performance levels of rural students: parental conditions and involvement, multi-grade classes, geographic accessibility, quality of teachers, availability of supplementary educational opportunities. According to Interviewee Number 8, a significant factor influencing rural students' academic performance is the limited engagement and cooperation of parents:

"There exists a substantial disparity in educational outcomes, primarily due to living conditions, cultural factors, and various forms of poverty—both economic and cultural. In some instances, I have encountered exceptionally talented and intelligent students whose potential remained unfulfilled due to the lack of support at home. Parental illiteracy or indifference often results in the neglect of students' abilities, as there is no one within the family capable of nurturing or guiding their academic development. We once had a student with remarkable football talent who, if given proper support and opportunities, could have had a promising future in the sport. Unfortunately, due to the lack of guidance and encouragement, his potential remained unrealized. In contrast, urban schools exhibit a markedly different situation, characterized by significant attention to various classes and a high level of parental involvement. It would be incorrect to assert that the cognitive abilities of rural children are inferior to those of urban children. Numerous instances exist where students from rural areas, despite financial hardships and parental illiteracy, have demonstrated capabilities comparable to their urban counterparts."

In urban schools, parents are typically more involved in their children's academic lives, often supplementing education with tutoring or private teachers. In contrast, rural areas lack the necessary support systems, leading to disparities in educational outcomes. Teachers also cited multi-grade classroom setups and inadequate teaching resources as contributing factors to the reduced academic performance of rural students. According to the interviewees, the lack of resources in remote villages adversely affects both the quality of teaching and the academic performance of students.

Table 5: Practical Solutions by Teachers for Challenges in Rural Schools

Selected Code	Axial Codes	Free Codes
Compensating for Lack of Facilities.	Preparation of Educational Materials by Teachers	To address the lack of resources, I took the initiative to prepare some educational materials independently (I 5). Additionally, I borrowed costly equipment from urban schools and sought support from benefactors to acquire the necessary materials (I 5). At times, I personally created educational supplies, while on other occasions, I purchased items for the classroom using my own funds (I 8). During my single years, I dedicated a significant portion of my salary to purchasing educational materials for the village children, particularly for students whom I recognized as talented. This included buying books and handouts to support their learning (I 12). To further alleviate resource constraints, my family and I established a charitable fund, which I utilized to address the shortage of educational materials (I 14).
	Using Films and Alternative Methods	To enhance the learning experience, I utilized educational and virtual films and brought relevant tools for conducting experiments (I 6). In bilingual schools, I took the initiative to study the material independently and occasionally sought assistance from others. At times, I brought a laptop to the classroom to show educational films, allowing students to visualize and better comprehend the concepts (I 8).
	Making Unused School Facilities Available	The first step I took was to inspect the school's storage room and make available the tools and resources that had remained unused from previous years (I 9).
Promoting Collaboration with Parents and Villagers	Establishing Communication with Parents and Village Residents	I organized meetings for parents (I 3). I motivated both parents and students through meaningful conversations (I3). For children whose parents exhibited limited involvement, we organized meetings to encourage greater parental engagement (I 4). We established effective communication with the village residents, promoting a sense of community and collaboration (I 4). To address the issue of corporal punishment, I held numerous meetings—often fifteen or sixteen, and sometimes even more—to discuss child-rearing methods and emphasize that corporal punishment is outdated, both in parenting and education. I consistently advocated for non-punitive approaches to child discipline (I 14). From the outset, I actively involved parents in the educational process (I 7). We also sought support from the village council and the parents themselves to address various challenges (I 9). Furthermore, we organized training sessions for families, inviting teachers from the education administration and other areas to conduct workshops and share knowledge (I 11).
Enhancing Teacher Awareness and Professional	Consulting with Knowledgeable Individuals	I actively sought guidance from experienced individuals (I 1). I sought help from counselors (I 1). I also consulted counselors and reached out to university professors for support (I 1).

	and Studying	I encountered numerous challenges in managing multi-grade classes, prompting me to seek assistance and engage in further study (I 8).
	Gaining Teaching Experience in the Village	The primary challenge we encountered was time management. In the initial stages, many teachers approached the classroom with perfectionist attitudes, believing that delivering lesson content must be executed with complete effectiveness (I 10).
Establishing Effective Communication with Students	Establishing Better Communication with Students	In terms of emotional support, it is essential to demonstrate greater affection toward village children, as they often experience a lack of nurturing. Additionally, spending quality time with them is crucial (I 12).
Health-Related Challenges in Education	Explaining Health Issues	Regarding health and hygiene, we frequently advised them on the importance of keeping their nails trimmed and maintaining neat hair (I 13).

The greater the distance from urban centers, the more challenging it becomes to access educational facilities, resulting in lower academic outcomes. One contributing factor to the poorer performance of rural students is the lower quality of teaching and diminished motivation among teachers. Teachers in rural schools often undertake lengthy commutes to reach the village, which might reduce their motivation and commitment to teaching. Consequently, the attitudes and performance of rural teachers also play a role in the lower academic achievements of rural students.

Question 3: What Actions Have Teachers Taken to Solve the Problems of Rural Schools?

In addressing the challenges encountered by rural areas, the most prominent issue identified was the lack of facilities. To explore potential solutions, we consulted the teachers themselves, who proposed several strategies to mitigate this problem. These included purchasing supplies at their own expense, borrowing resources from urban schools, attracting benefactors to support educational initiatives, substituting films for hands-on experiments, and utilizing unused school materials effectively. For example, Interviewee 5 described how teachers tackle the issue of limited resources:

"To address the limited facilities, I independently prepared a series of instructional materials. For more costly items, I borrowed resources from urban schools and sought support from donors to acquire the necessary equipment."

According to the interviewees, the likelihood of securing funds through educational departments is minimal. Consequently, teachers primarily address the lack of facilities by engaging parents, attracting benefactors, and personally acquiring educational materials and supplies. Additionally, showing films as supplementary teaching aids following lessons was proposed as a strategy to mitigate resource limitations.

One of the challenges faced by teachers in rural areas is a lack of awareness regarding effective strategies to address rural school problems. To overcome this challenge, teachers emphasize the importance of engaging in professional development through study and consultation with experienced and knowledgeable individuals. Interviewee 1 shared their approach to overcoming challenges in rural schools:

"I sought guidance from experienced individuals to address challenges effectively. For instance, during my first year, I frequently consulted my principal, who possessed significantly more experience, and ensured that I kept them informed of any arising issues. Additionally, I sought assistance from counselors, including a city-based counselor who was a personal acquaintance. On occasion, I even reached out to university professors, presenting specific problems

and requesting their professional advice on how to manage them."

To address the challenges encountered by teachers in conducting multi-grade classes, acquiring knowledge through study and gaining practical experience have proven effective strategies. Despite the scarcity of resources and the inherent challenges in rural schools, employing engaging teaching methods and demonstrating genuine care for students can partially mitigate academic shortcomings. Additionally, addressing health-related issues through informational sessions directed by teachers or rural health network officials, as well as fostering collaboration between health networks and schools, can significantly enhance student well-being and academic performance.

Question 4: What Advantages Do Rural Schools Have Compared to Urban Schools?

The objective of the present research is to provide an accurate portrayal of teaching in rural settings. Accordingly, it is essential not only to address the challenges and problems but also to highlight the benefits that motivate some teachers to enthusiastically choose rural teaching positions. One of the most notable advantages of rural schools is the low student-to-teacher ratio, which facilitates more effective teaching and thorough assignment review. Students in rural schools typically exhibit greater politeness and calmness. Interviewee number 6 mentioned the advantages of rural schools as follows:

Table 6: Advantages of Rural Schools

Selected Code	Axial Codes	Free Codes
Low Student Population in Rural Schools	Low Number of Students	The number of students in rural schools is generally lower compared to urban schools. (I 1) The number of students in villages is lower. (I 3) With fewer students, teachers find it easier to deliver instruction and manage the classroom effectively. (I 4) One significant advantage of the tranquility and silence in rural schools is that teachers can assume a role similar to private tutors, offering more individualized attention. (I 6) The smaller class sizes in village schools allow for greater focus on the students and more personalized teaching. (I 8) For instance, in a rural school with an independent principal, the maximum number of students is typically around twenty. (I 7) The number of students in rural areas is lower, so the teacher can teach more easily. (I 12) Overall, the lower number of students in rural schools contributes to a calmer and more manageable teaching environment, in contrast to the high student numbers commonly found in urban schools. (I 13)
Simplicity and Mutual Respect within Rural Communities	Low Expectations of Rural Parents	The rural environment is more peaceful, and families tend to be less demanding. In contrast, urban parents often have higher expectations and frequently visit the classroom to monitor progress. (I 1) They do not intervene in the educational process. (I 1) One of the advantages of working in rural schools is the opportunity to gain experience in interacting with students and managing relationships with parents. There is a notable difference between parents in urban and rural settings; parents in urban schools tend to be extremely sensitive and demanding. (I 9) Urban schools often have high expectations that teachers must meet, but these expectations are sometimes accompanied by unreasonable demands. (I 14) Village residents are generally straightforward and honest. (I 8)

		People in the village tend to display a level of respect that is often more pronounced than in urban schools. (I 13)
	Politeness of Students	Students in the village tend to exhibit greater politeness compared to their urban counterparts. (I 3)
		Certainly, village children are generally simpler. (I 5)
		Village children tend to be more respectful and attentive to the teacher's instructions, which can be attributed to the smaller village environment. (I 11)
		The teacher's status is still respected in rural settings, unlike in the city, where students may be more assertive and demanding. (I 13)
Opportunities for Nature-Based Teaching in Rural Settings	Possibility of Teaching in Rural Nature	Many issues that students encounter can be addressed in the village through practical and direct teaching methods in a natural setting. (I 7)
Enhanced Practical Skills among Rural Students	Higher Skills of Rural Students	Village children inherently possess craftsmanship skills, as they are exposed to practical life experiences from a young age. (I 8)

"One of the significant advantages of the tranquility and quietness of rural schools is that teachers can function similarly to private tutors, allowing for increased interaction between students and the teacher. When the teacher is competent and skilled, this this leads to substantial academic progress among the students."

From the teachers' perspective, parents of rural students are generally more reserved and refrain from disrupting the instructional process. In contrast, urban schools often face excessive and occasionally unreasonable parental expectations, which can disrupt teaching. Additionally, rural settings offer the unique advantage of easily conducting outdoor classes, particularly in science, allowing students to develop practical skills that often surpass those of their urban counterparts.

Question 5: What Actions Can the Educational System Take to Solve Problems of Rural Schools?

Rural schools face a range of challenges that demand immediate attention, and it is essential for the education system to devise targeted solutions to address these issues.

Teachers' responses regarding how the education system could support rural schools were categorized into four main areas: improving the physical infrastructure, allocating necessary facilities and funding, attracting skilled and motivated teachers, and adapting the curriculum to better fit the rural context. One significant issue is the dilapidated condition of many rural school buildings. Numerous schools still operate in substandard environments, with some even held in makeshift containers. The initial step must be to ensure the safety of these physical structures, with a priority placed on the elimination of container schools. Furthermore, deteriorating buildings should be identified and, where possible, renovated or repaired. Many rural schools also suffer from a lack of adequate resources and laboratory equipment, which impedes effective teaching. Interviewees highlighted that the scarcity of resources is one of the key factors contributing to the low motivation of rural students. As Interviewee 2 noted:

"I respectfully request that the education department place particular emphasis on supporting rural schools. The students aspire to have access to a laboratory where they can conduct experiments. This need is especially critical in the fourth, fifth, and sixth grades, where numerous experiments are needed. These poor children expect to be able to do their own experiments in their laboratory.

Table 7: Solutions for Educational System to Address Challenges in Rural Schools

Selected Code	Axial Codes	Free Codes
Improvement of physical infrastructure of rural schools	Physical Infrastructure of Schools	Rural schools are often in poor condition, with some even operating in containers. It would be beneficial to establish a more suitable educational environment. (I 1) There is a need to improve the physical condition of schools to create spaces where students can feel comfortable and enjoy learning. (I 9) Some rural schools are dilapidated, and efforts should be made to enhance safety within the school environment. (I 11) While it is possible to repair the physical structures, economic constraints pose significant challenges. (Interviewee 10) Many discussions center around constructing quality schools in rural areas and adequately equipping these institutions to meet educational needs. (I 14)
Providing facilities and budget to rural schools	More Facilities and Budget	Rural areas often face challenges related to laboratories and heating systems, with heating system issues being particularly prevalent. (I 1) Children in these areas aspire to have access to a laboratory where they can conduct experiments. (I 2) Educational facilities in rural areas are extremely limited, and the availability of teaching aids is insufficient. (I 2) There is a pressing need to allocate more budget to rural schools and to provide them with adequate resources. (I 3) Addressing these challenges requires funding, yet the education department does not provide per capita funding, instead suggesting that schools collect it from parents. (I 4) One of the primary recommendations is to ensure that rural schools are adequately resourced. (I 5) Educational kits should be provided to schools for health-related matters, and efforts should be made to seek support from benefactors. Many benefactors are willing to contribute to school building and other needs if they are made aware of the situation. (I 8) Next is the issue of resource disparity should be addressed, as it is unfair for final exams to be standardized across regions with vastly different levels of resources. For instance, it is unreasonable to expect students in Sistan and Baluchestan Province to perform at the same level as those in Tehran when their access to resources differs significantly. (I 12)
Attracting capable and motivated teachers	Quality teachers	If a teacher voluntarily chooses to work in a village, their productivity tends to be higher; however, if assigned involuntarily, they may lack motivation. (I 7) To address this, it is important to create opportunities and platforms for capable teachers to choose rural assignments willingly. Currently, some teachers go to rural schools primarily due to a lack of supervision and administrative presence. (I 6) To attract qualified teachers to rural areas, incentive packages should be offered. (I 9) Providing capable staff with economic incentives and benefits can help alleviate some of the challenges associated with rural education. (I 10) The primary goal is to recruit competent teachers who are motivated to teach in rural areas. (I 12) One effective approach is to select rural teachers from local candidates. (I 13) Assigning young and adequately trained staff to these schools can further enhance the quality of education. (I 14)

Customizing content to fit the rural environment	Content customization	Educational content should be tailored to align with the living conditions of the students. (I 3)
		When designing curriculum materials, it is essential to ensure that they are appropriate for the students' circumstances and the environment in which they grow up. (I 7)
		Efforts should be made to localize educational lessons to make them more relevant and effective. (I 12)

Regrettably, our educational resources are profoundly limited, and the availability of teaching aids remains inadequate. Unlike urban schools, we face considerable challenges. Therefore, I strongly request the education department to allocate a dedicated budget to ensure that these children are not deprived of essential educational experiences."

Another critical issue is the curriculum, which is often not tailored to the rural context. The content taught in rural schools should be adjusted to align with the cultural, social, and physical conditions unique to these areas. One of the main factors contributing to the low academic performance of rural students, as previously discussed, is the presence of low-quality teachers in these schools. Attracting competent teachers to rural schools could be achieved by offering financial incentives or professional development opportunities, which would help retain skilled teachers and enhance their motivation to remain in rural areas.

Phase 3: Coding Comparison

Comparison of Rural School Problems in Iran and Other Countries

A comparison of the challenges faced by rural schools in Iran and those in other countries reveals both shared and unique difficulties. Some problems, such as resource shortages and limited parental involvement, are common across both settings. However, each country also faces specific challenges that require reform strategies tailored to the particular cultural and social context.

Common Problems

Across both Iran and other countries, a lack of financial and educational resources, geographical isolation, and inadequate infrastructure impede the delivery of quality education in rural areas. Additionally, issues related to teacher recruitment, such as the lack of appeal of rural teaching positions, contribute to a shortage of qualified teachers. Moreover, limited parental involvement and the absence of local community organizations in the

educational process exacerbate intergenerational illiteracy and fail to address the specific needs of rural schools.

1. Insufficient Teacher Supply

- **Global Setting**: Many countries face difficulties in attracting and retaining qualified teachers in rural settings, primarily due to lower remuneration, limited professional advancement opportunities, and a prevailing sense of isolation.

- **Iran Setting**: Iran encounters comparable challenges, where teachers in rural areas are confronted with cultural differences and the high costs associated with commuting to remote regions, deterring them from accepting or maintaining positions in these schools.

2. Insufficient Infrastructure

- **Global Setting**: Rural schools around the world often struggle with insufficient infrastructure, including a deficiency of classrooms, hygiene facilities, and necessary instructional materials.

- **Iran Setting**: This issue is particularly acute in Iran, where limited government funding and geographical barriers exacerbate the scarcity of essential facilities, thereby hindering the effective functioning of schools.

3. Multi-Grade Classes

- **Global Setting**: Many countries with low student enrollment numbers often implement multi-grade classrooms, where one teacher is responsible for teaching students of different ages and levels within a single classroom.

- **Iran Setting**: In Iran, this is a significant issue. Teachers in rural schools often manage diverse age groups and varying grades within the same class, which presents considerable

challenges in offering personalized and efficient instruction.

4. Parental Engagement

- **Global Setting**: Low levels of parental engagement are common in rural schools, often due to parents' limited educational backgrounds and heavy work commitments, which reduce their capacity to engage with their children's learning.

- **Iran Setting**: This challenge is similarly present in Iran, where many rural parents struggle with low literacy rates, which in turn hampers their ability to effectively support their children's educational development.

5. Geographical Challenges in Rural Education

- **Global Setting**: In many rural areas worldwide, geographic isolation presents substantial barriers to accessing schools. Students might be required to travel considerable distances on foot or via unreliable transportation.

- **Iran Setting**: Iran diverse geography, which includes mountainous regions, deserts, and forests, adds complexity to this issue. Students in these remote areas often face dangerous or difficult travel conditions in order to attend school.

6. Technology Integration Gaps

- **Global Setting**: The integration of technology into education remains uneven globally, especially in rural areas. Limited access to digital resources and inadequate teacher training hinders the effective use of technology to enhance learning experiences.

- **Iran Setting**: Similarly, Iran experiences gaps in technology integration, particularly in rural regions, where there is limited access to the internet and digital educational tools.

Specific Challenges Encountered in Iran (Kurdistan Province)

While many challenges are shared across rural schools globally, Iran, particularly regions like Kurdistan, faces specific issues that require nuanced approaches:

1. Mixed-Gender Nature of Rural Schools

In rural areas of Iran, such as Kurdistan, the mixed-gender nature of schools presents significant challenges. Cultural and religious concerns often lead many parents to be reluctant to send their daughters to school. This issue stands in contrast to many countries where co-educational systems are widely accepted and actively supported by parents. As Interviewee 2 stated:

"In one of the villages, I encountered a family whose two children were my students in a third-grade class. The father consistently prohibited his children from attending school, creating considerable challenges throughout that school year. Rural areas generally face greater difficulties compared to urban settings, and, as previously noted, early dropout rates are common, particularly among girls. Parents often have their own beliefs and community-driven perspectives that discourage higher levels of education. In many cases, girls are permitted to study only until the ninth grade, beyond which parental support is withdrawn. Despite our persistent efforts, including counseling sessions and direct appeals to the parents, they remain resolute in their decision."

2. Multilingualism in Iran

Multilingualism presents a significant challenge in Iran, as various ethnic groups communicate in different languages. In numerous regions, particularly those characterized by diverse cultural backgrounds, children often grow up speaking a language distinct from the one utilized in educational settings. This linguistic disparity poses significant challenges within the educational system, as students may encounter difficulties in effectively acquiring knowledge and skills when instruction is delivered in a language other than their mother tongue.

Despite its importance, multilingualism has not been adequately addressed in the educational system, primarily due to the centralized nature of Iran curriculum, which prioritizes Persian as the sole language of instruction. Consequently, students from minority language backgrounds often face barriers that impact their academic performance and overall comprehension.

3. Non-Localization of Textbook Content

In Iran, the non-localization of textbook content is a widespread issue, as certain concepts within educational materials fail to adequately reflect the local realities and living conditions of students. This lack of contextual relevance can impede students'

ability to connect with the material, thereby diminishing their engagement and comprehension.

For example, lesson content often fails to account for the socio-economic diversity and cultural backgrounds of students from various regions. Textbooks frequently overlook the unique challenges and experiences faced by rural and underprivileged communities, resulting in a disconnect between the prescribed curriculum and students' real-life situations.

Challenges Mentioned in Global Articles but Not in Interviews

1. Curriculum Challenges

The management of rural schools often overlooks local needs, resulting in challenges in implementing effective educational programs. Furthermore, the difficulties inherent in operating small schools can impede the delivery of a comprehensive curriculum tailored to students' needs, ultimately affecting the quality of education provided.

2. Systemic and Administrative Problems

Rural school principals often experience a sense of isolation and marginalization due to insufficient administrative support, which undermines their capacity to provide consistent guidance and assistance to students throughout their educational journey. Additionally, frequent turnover among principals and teachers disrupts school development and progress, while the short tenure of school leaders compromises the sustainability of effective leadership.

Due to the centralized nature of the educational system in Iran, teachers did not raise concerns regarding the curriculum itself, instead emphasizing the lack of localization in textbooks. As the interviews were conducted exclusively with teachers, managerial challenges specific to rural schools were not directly addressed or discussed.

Comparative Analysis of Solutions

Both global solutions and Iranian teaching approaches emphasize the significance of context-specific strategies for improving rural education. Global practices predominantly advocate for systematic changes and resource allocation, whereas Iranian methods demonstrate an adaptable approach that prioritizes local engagement, adaptability, and community support. Integrating insights from both

perspectives can foster the development of more effective strategies to revitalize rural schools and improve learning outcomes for students. Here's a more detailed comparative analysis of global and Iranian approaches across five dimensions:

1. Attracting Teachers: The global approach adopts a structured and system-oriented model, emphasizing formal incentives and professional training programs to recruit teachers. In contrast, the Iranian approach is more flexible and relationship-based, focusing on adaptability and personal initiative to attract and retain teachers.

2. Professional Development: The global approach prioritizes formal, structured programs and the use of digital resources to enhance teacher skills. In contrast, the Iranian approach places greater emphasis on experiential learning and community-based solutions to foster professional growth.

3. Community Engagement: The global approach emphasizes formal governance structures and clearly defined roles to foster community involvement. In contrast, the Iranian approach prioritizes practical, direct communication and the development of informal relationships to build community support.

4. Resource Allocation: The global approach emphasizes systematic distribution and standardized support to ensure resource availability. In contrast, the Iranian approach focuses on maximizing existing resources through creativity and adaptive strategies.

5. Policy Framework: The global approach prioritizes formal policy development and structured implementation processes. In contrast, the Iranian approach relies more on grassroots solutions and local adaptation to address challenges effectively.

Discussion and Conclusion

The obstacles encountered by Iranian rural schools, particularly in regions such as Kurdistan, demonstrate a complex interaction of cultural, economic, and geographical factors that impede educational advancement. While many of these challenges—such as teacher scarcity, inadequate facilities, and limited parental engagement—are common in rural schools

globally, the unique socio-cultural setting of Iran necessitates context-specific solutions. For example, the coeducational structure of rural schools presents substantial cultural impediments to the education of girls, as numerous families exhibit reluctance to enroll their daughters in educational institutions due to deeply ingrained societal beliefs regarding gender roles and the prioritization of educational pursuits. This perpetuates gender disparities and hinders broader community growth and development.

Table 8: Comparative Analysis of Solutions

Solutions	Global Approach	Iranian Approach
Attracting Teachers	Emphasizes systemic reforms (e.g., incentives, pre-service training) for attracting quality teachers to rural areas.	Focuses more on local adaptations and the initiative of existing teachers to create supportive educational environments.
Professional Development	Prioritizes structured professional development programs and access to online resources for ongoing learning.	Reflects a more individualized method where teachers innovate and gain experience through trial and adaptation within their communities.
Community Engagement	Advocates for formal roles for community members in school governance and decision-making.	Places emphasis on practical communication with parents and community members to directly support educational initiatives.
Resource Allocation	Focus on systemic funding and resource provision to ensure all rural schools receive adequate support.	Highlight the creative use of existing resources and local expertise to tackle shortages.
Policy Framework	Strong emphasis on creating policies specifically supporting rural education.	Lacks a robust policy framework but emphasizes grassroots solutions and local adaptation.

Moreover, the issue of multilingualism in Iran introduces an additional layer of complexity to the educational landscape. A significant number of students originate from diverse linguistic backgrounds and encounter challenges when instructed in a language other than their mother tongue. The centralized emphasis on Persian in educational materials exacerbates this barrier, leading to disengagement and impeding effective learning. Furthermore, the lack of localized textbooks hinders students' ability to relate to the content, further disconnecting them from their educational experience.

Addressing these challenges requires implementing contextually relevant and culturally sensitive solutions. Adopting global best practices while incorporating local adaptations can enhance rural education in Iran. Key strategies include integrating technology, promoting community engagement, and addressing the unique needs of students and their families. By prioritizing these approaches, policymakers can foster a more equitable and effective educational environment, empowering students in underserved rural regions to reach their full potential.

Suggestions and Recommendations:

To address the obstacles encountered in rural schools in Kurdistan, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Decentralization of Educational Policies**: Advocate for a more decentralized educational system that empowers provinces to tailor curricula and materials to the specific requirements of their communities. This approach would facilitate the localization of textbooks and enhance content relevance, particularly for students in rural areas.

2. **Increased Funding for Rural Education**: Allocate additional financial resources to rural settings to enhance infrastructure, instructional materials, and technology access. Priority should be given to teacher training and hiring additional

personnel to support effective learning environments.

3. **Teacher Incentives and Professional Development**: Implement targeted incentive programs to attract and retain qualified teachers in rural areas by offering competitive remuneration, housing support, and opportunities for professional advancement. Furthermore, continuous training initiatives should be established to equip teachers with the necessary skills to adapt to evolving educational demands and address the specific challenges inherent in rural settings.

4. **Community Engagement Initiatives**: Promote collaboration among schools, parents, and local communities by implementing structured community engagement programs. Encouraging parental engagement in the educational process fosters a supportive learning environment and empowers families to advocate for their children's academic success.

5. **Research and Data Collection**: Undertake continuous research and data collection to gain a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by rural schools in Kurdistan. This evidence-based approach will inform policy decisions and ensure that interventions are data-driven and tailored to the specific needs of the communities served.

6. **Integration of Technology in Education**: Advocate for the utilization of technology and the internet as fundamental mediums to enhance educational experiences in rural schools. Investment in digital infrastructure and internet access will enable remote learning, access to online resources, and virtual professional development for teachers. By leveraging technology, students in rural areas can connect with diverse educational materials, participate in online courses, and collaborate with peers and educators globally. This approach can bridge the educational divide between urban and rural schools while equipping students with the essential skills for success in a digital economy.

Research Limitations:

Firstly, the study conducted a comparative analysis between the themes extracted from our interviews and the qualitative text codes derived from existing scholarly articles. This methodological approach may introduce certain limitations to our findings. Furthermore, the scope of our analysis was confined to articles written in English, which may have resulted in the inadvertent exclusion of valuable resources available in other languages and diverse geographical contexts globally.

Our sample comprised fourteen experienced teachers from the Kurdistan province of Iran. Although these teachers offered valuable insights, it is important to acknowledge that this sample is not exhaustive and may not be representative of the entire country. The fourteen teachers possessed substantial experience in rural settings, allowing for meaningful comparisons between the two environments. However, to enhance the reliability of our conclusions, it would be beneficial to address potential biases by incorporating a more diverse group of teachers and gathering insights from additional stakeholders.

To develop a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges encountered in rural schools, it is essential to explore the perspectives of parents, students, and school principals. Including these stakeholders would offer a more nuanced understanding of the issues and contribute to identifying effective, context-specific solutions.

To advance this line of research, future studies may consider conducting interviews with teachers and stakeholders from diverse regions across the country, thereby ensuring a more comprehensive representation in terms of gender, teaching experience, and regional context. Such an approach would enhance the depth and breadth of the findings, facilitating a more nuanced understanding of the varied experiences and potential solutions associated with challenges in rural education.

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