



Assessing Factors Contributing to Poor Education Quality in Selected Rural Schools: A Case Study of Changanhole Primary School in Nkhata Bay District, Malawi

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the factors contributing to poor education quality at Changanhole Primary School in Nkhata Bay District, Northern Malawi. The research explores how resource availability, shortage of qualified teachers, lack of parental engagement and community involvement, and inadequate infrastructure and facilities ultimately contribute to poor education quality.

A case study approach was used employing quantitative data collection techniques. Primary data were gathered through interviews, and focus group discussions with students, teachers, parents and school administrators. Secondary data were sourced from government reports, academic literature, and school records. This study employed themes to analyze data collected.

The findings of this research contribute to the deeper understanding of underlying challenges that rural schools encounter in providing education quality specifically Changanhole Primary School in Nkhata Bay District and provide evidence-based recommendations for policymakers, educators, and development partners seeking to improve learning outcomes in similar contexts.

Keywords: Education quality: rural schools: teacher shortages: infrastructure: parental engagement: resource availability: community involvement: teacher competency: resource constraints.

INTRODUCTION

Education is a critical driver of socio-economic development (United Nation 2015), yet its quality remains a major challenge in many rural areas of developing countries, including Malawi. Quality education is essential for equipping individuals with knowledge, skills, and competencies that enhance their ability to contribute meaningfully to society and break the cycle of poverty (UNESCO,2021). However, rural schools in Malawi face numerous challenges that hinder the delivery of quality education, ranging from inadequate infrastructure and teacher shortages, resource constraints affecting students' learning experiences.

This study focuses on the education quality at Changanhole Primary School in Nkhata Bay District Northern Malawi where resources are limited, infrastructures are inadequate, qualified teachers are very few and lack parental engagement and community involvement thereby lagging behind in students' performances. By examining these key factors on a specific school like Changanhole Primary School, this research aims to contribute. to the broader discourse on achieving equitable and high-quality education in rural Malawi.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Learning Resources and Teaching Materials

The availability of learning materials, such as textbooks, exercise books, and digital learning resources, is critical for education quality. However, many rural schools in Malawi experience severe shortage of these materials (UNICEF, 2019). The government's textbook distribution program has improved access to some extent, but the supply remains insufficient, with many students sharing textbooks in large groups (World Bank, 2019). The absence of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools in most rural schools also limits students' exposure to digital learning opportunities.

Teacher Shortage and Qualification

The shortage of qualified teachers is a major challenge in rural Malawian schools. Many rural schools have high pupil-to-teacher ratios, often exceeding the recommended 40:1 (Ministry of Education, Malawi, 2020). In some cases, a single teacher manages multiple grades due to a lack of staff, leading to reduced quality of instruction and student engagement (Mulkeen, 2010). Additionally, many rural teachers lack professional development opportunities, further limiting their effectiveness in delivering quality education.

Parental Literacy and Involvement

Parental literacy and involvement also play a crucial role in shaping education quality. Studies show that children from literate families tend to perform better academically due to parental support (Kadzamira & Rose, 2003). However, in many rural Malawian communities, low literacy levels among parents limit their ability to assist children with schoolwork, further exacerbating the learning gap.

Infrastructure Deficiencies

Many rural schools in Malawi lack adequate infrastructure, including classroom, desks, libraries and sanitation facilities. A study by UNESCO (2021) reported that 60% of Malawian primary schools lack proper classrooms, forcing students to learn under trees or in makeshift structures. Poor infrastructure creates an un conducive learning environment, leading to reduced student engagement and attendance (World Bank, 2019). Changanole Primary School faces similar challenges, with overcrowded classrooms and inadequate sanitation, which affects student health and learning outcomes.

EMPERICAL LITERITURE REVIEW

This section delves into specific empirical studies that explore the factors contributing to poor education quality in rural schools.

1. Impact of resource availability

Study: "Impact of Resource Distribution and Availability on Primary Schools Pupil Learning Outcomes in Malawi" by Mercy K. Nyirenda (2021) investigated the impact of resource distribution on learning outcomes. The study found that rural schools experience a shortage of textbooks which contributes to the challenges in the learning process, as several learners had to share a single textbook, reducing concentration and performance. She also noted that students in resource-limited schools struggle to study effectively at home due to a lack of reference materials. The study highlighted that inadequate provision of notebooks further affects education quality. The study suggest that governments and donors should increase funding for rural schools, ensure effective resource allocation, and regularly monitor how resource availability impacts education quality to identify areas for improvement.

2. Effect of teacher qualification and teacher practice

Study: "The Impact of Managing the Supply and Demand for Scarce Skill Teachers on the Quality of Learning and Teaching in Rural Schools in South Africa" by Professor Nyota (2019). The study examines that lack of permanent teachers in critical subjects like mathematics and physical science was a significantly a challenge in rural schools which adversely affects the quality of teaching and learning. Nyota (2019) suggested that by implementing incentives like housing allowances, rural allowances and professional development opportunities can attract and retain qualified teachers in rural areas. Kadzamira & Rose (2003) further emphasized that teacher qualifications and teaching practices significantly impact student learning outcomes. Their study found that experienced teachers are better equipped to handle classroom challenges, especially in resource-limited settings. **They** suggested that recruiting more qualified teachers, providing professional development training, and adopting student-centered teaching approaches can improve learning outcomes.

3. Effects of parental engagement and community involvement

Study: "School, Family and Community Partnership in United States" by Epstein. L.(2011) highlighted the importance of parental involvement and community engagement in education quality. She argued that active parental support enhances student achievement, while community participation can address resource shortages by providing financial and infrastructural assistance. She suggests that local communities should advocate for increased educational funding and resource allocation to improve school conditions. She added that teacher training programs should incorporate with strategies for building effective school-family community partnerships to prepare for collaborative engagement this sustains a meaningful partnership that can enhance student learning outcomes.

4. Impact of inadequate infrastructure and facilities

Study: "Quality and Determinants of Primary Education in Rural India" by Dr. Ruchi Jain (2021) According to Dr. Ruchi Jain (2021) examined factors contributing to poor education quality in rural India. The study found that many rural schools lack basic infrastructure, including adequate classrooms, electricity, clean drinking water and sanitation facilities. These create an unfavorable learning environment, adversely affecting student attendance and performance. The study suggests that it was crucial to invest in the development of school infrastructure which ensures the availability of essential facilities like classrooms, electricity, potable water and sanitation of which can significantly improve the learning environment and student outcomes.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is significant because it provides an in-depth analysis of the specific factors affecting education quality in a rural Malawian school. While several studies have examined education challenges at the national level, few have provided localized insights into schools in Nkhata Bay District. By focusing on Changantole Primary School, this research offers a case study that will inform targeted interventions for rural education improvement.

Additionally, the study contributes to policy discussions on education quality in Malawi by providing empirical data that can be used by policymakers, education stakeholders, and development partners to design effective strategies. Improving education in rural areas is crucial for achieving Malawi's Vision 2063, which prioritizes human capital development as a key driver of national growth (Government of Malawi, 2021)

The quality of education in rural Malawi remains a pressing concern due to infrastructure challenges, teacher shortages, lack of parents and community involvement, and inadequate learning materials. Changantole Primary School reflects the broader struggles faced by rural schools, making it a suitable case study for examining these challenges in depth. By identifying the root causes of poor education quality and proposing evidence-based solutions, this study aimed to contribute to the ongoing efforts to improve primary education in rural Malawi

Research Questions

This study was based on the following research questions:

1. How does the availability of educational resources affect the quality of education at Changantole Primary School?
2. In what ways do teacher qualifications and teaching practices influence student learning outcomes?
3. What is the effect of parental involvement and community engagement on education quality?
4. How does the state of school infrastructure and facilities contribute to education quality?

Theoretical Framework

The study employed two theoretical frameworks

- The research was guided by a Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979), which posits that a child's development is influenced by a complex system of relationships and environments. This theory emphasizes the interconnectivity of different systems, including the microsystem (e.g., home and school), mesosystem (e.g., relationships between home and school), exosystem (e.g., community resources), and macrosystem (e.g., cultural and policy contexts). In the context of education quality in rural schools like Changantole Primary School, factors such as inadequate infrastructure, insufficient teaching resources, and parental involvement challenges can be understood within these interacting systems. This theoretical lens has allowed this study to analyze how these interconnected environments influence the quality of education delivered, providing a holistic understanding of the contributing factors (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Donald, Lazarus, & Lolwana, 2010).
- This research also used a Schultz's Human Capital Theory (1961), which views education as a means to improve individual productivity and economic development. This theory highlights the importance of investing in human capital in improving education quality. With rural schools this theory emphasizes the need to address factors contributing to poor education quality. Therefore, this theory outlines that by investing in teacher training, improving infrastructure, increasing access to technology rural schools can improve education quality and increase human capital investment in return.

Research Design:

This study employed qualitative case study design, using Changantole Primary School as the case study site.

Qualitative Components:

Interviews with students, teachers, parents and school administrators. Observations were also conducted in classrooms and semi-structured interviews were also used for a focus group discussion of teachers, students and parents.

In conclusion, this theoretical design provided a framework for a comprehensive study of resource constraints, teacher related factors, infrastructure factors, parent and community involvement factors contributing to poor education quality in rural schools. By using qualitative methods, the research provided a nuanced understanding of the key factors in a specific context.

Sampling

The study targeted a population of 20 students from upper classes, five teachers, 15 parents, and five school administrators making a total of 45. Purposive sampling was employed to select participants who are directly involved in the education process at Changantole Primary School. The main goal of this purposive technique was to select respondents who were knowledgeable enough and experienced in the area of study such that they can give valid and reliable data

The sample was selected purposively to cater the diversity of all the stakeholders of the school so that the main goal of the study has to be achieved.

Therefore, students from upper classes were selected as they have stayed long at the school in such case, they had enough experiences on the challenges they encounter at the school. Teachers were also involved since these were the direct people who are involved in teaching and learning and parents and community, they were the very people who supports the school so it was vital to be included.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

1. How does the lack of resources affect your learning?

Few of the student respondents said it is difficult to understand the lessons due to lack of resources and some said it is hard to complete assignments due to lack of resources while other student respondents said motivation of attending school is very low due to lack of resources and other student respondents said always, they performance very poorly during due to lack of resources. The school administrators explained that lack of resources greatly affect student performance as it leads to high dropout rate, high repetition rate as well as absenteeism.

From the above responses it clearly shows that limited resources affect most of learners in their performances.

2. What do you think would be the impact of these trainings to the students' outcomes?

At changantole primary school there are 7 qualified primary school teachers. These have only certificate in primary education and they is none who have any other higher qualification apart from the certificate. School administrators said that these teachers access to continuous professional development though very rarely possibly once a year. Administrators said these training can assist teacher to gain more knowledge and skills that makes them to teach better thereby improving student's outcomes.

The above information indicates that teacher qualification and practices influence learners' outcomes.

3. Effect of parental involvement and community engagement on the quality provided

Teachers said most parents do not attend the meetings even parents rarely communicate with teachers about their children academic progress. Teachers openly said that parent commonly just encourage school attendance of their children's education in support. Teachers also expressed that local community participate in school activities occasionally. School administrators said the school organizes community engagement programs occasionally.

From these responses it clearly outlines that parents do not take part in their children's academic performances and community do engage rarely into school activities as a result the school is prone to experience poor education quality.

4. How does the state of school buildings and facilities affect the daily teaching and learning process?

The state of the school buildings contributes to absenteeism, dropout and poor performance. Teachers describe the overall condition of school buildings at Changantole Primary School as poor. Teachers said that the average number of students per classroom was more than 70 students per class and the school has only 5 classrooms with an enrollment of 530. Toilets are very few even the desks. The school has no library and no water source among others. School administrators said inadequate infrastructures and facilities affect teaching and learning process.

Basing from the above responses school infrastructure and facilities play a greater role on education quality. inadequate of these infrastructures affects the quality of education.

MAJOR FINDINGS

The sample is based on the school stakeholders which include 20 students from upper classes, 5 teachers, 15 parents and 5 school administrators

Resource availability: lack of resource availability has a great impact on education quality at Changantole Primary School. Many students share a textbook against eight students which limits effective learning which bring down the quality of education. Teachers also uses the same resources and teaching aids like textbooks and charts which demotivates students learning hence increasing absenteeism thereby affecting education quality. This clearly shows that Lack of the resources affects students learning and teachers' lesson delivery. Shortage of qualified teachers: lack of qualified teachers influences negatively to education quality as it does not match to the school enrollment leading to high pupil-teacher ratio. And these teachers have only certificate in primary education and there is none who have any other higher qualification apart from the certificate and these teachers rarely access continuous professional development. This hinders teachers to provide clear examples and explanation to students as such it is difficult for students to understand new concepts. Even students receive little individual work and support from the teachers which affects their learning outcomes. Parental engagement and community involvement: most parents within Changantole Primary School hardly help their children with homework. They do not talk to teachers about their children's performances. The study shows that parents occasionally attend school meetings as to the responses from the students and the school administrators also admitted that parents rarely or never attend school meetings or other academic-related events. In response the Parents admitted that they are ignorant on what they are supposed to do in their children's education because they are not educated. Parents also said besides the school initiatives to engage the parents on the issues of school but parents are resistance to show up themselves in these school meetings. Further, the school has poor infrastructure conditions which affects students performance.

SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To improve resource availability in rural schools, it is essential for the government, NGOs and other stakeholder to provide adequate resources including textbooks, and other materials and also to allocate more funds to schools like Changantole Primary School. Providing teacher training and deployment of qualified teachers in rural schools will improve skills and knowledge thereby making a recommendable pupil-teacher ratio. Promotion of community involvement and parent engagement through awareness which encompasses a sense of belonging by government and other stakeholders in rural schools will improve education outcomes. To improve infrastructure and facilities of rural schools like classrooms, toilets, teachers houses and other facilities like safe drinking water, government and other stakeholder must invest more infrastructure in rural school by raising funds allocation.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study, shows lack of resource availability has a great impact on education quality at Changantole Primary School as many students share a textbook which limits effective learning which bring down the quality of education. Teachers also uses the same resources and teaching aids like textbooks and charts which demotivates students in learning hence increasing absenteeism thereby affecting education quality. To improve resources availability at the school parents and community have to be part and parcel of the school on the way forward to mobilize resource availability at the school while the government is making its effort that every school have enough resources

The study underscores the importance of the qualified teachers and practices on education quality. The school Changantole has few qualified teachers in relation to the school enrollment leading to high pupil-teacher ratio. It was observed that failed to provide clear examples and explanation to students due to overcrowding in classes as such it was difficult for students to understand new concepts. Even students receive little individual work and support from the teachers which affects their learning outcomes. Furthermore, the study highlighted the role of infrastructure and facility such that the school had poor infrastructure conditions which contribute to students' absenteeism.

The study shows the following limitations: parents rarely communicate with teachers about their children academic progress. The parents occasionally attend school meetings or other academic-related events. Due to ignorance parents are resistant to comply their roles on education quality. School organizes community engagement programs occasionally so that leaders can lead their subjects to do development works.

Despite the limitations, the study offers valuable insight for education quality improvement at Changantole Primary School. By prioritizing resource availability, recruiting of more qualified and deploying to remote areas with incentives to retain them and investing in infrastructures and conducting awareness meetings with parents and community can assist to improve education quality.

Future research should explore more factors may contribute to poor education quality in other rural areas in Malawi like poverty and health issues. By building upon the foundations laid by this study, future research can contribute to the better equipped Malawian human capital thereby improving the development and economy of the country.

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