Rural education and online teaching in wrestling with the covid-19 pandemic

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Abstract
Education is wise, hopeful, and respectful cultivation of learning and change are undertaken in the belief that we all shall have the chance to share in life. Education is necessary for each and everyone in order to improve knowledge, way of living as well as social and economic status in life. It also plays a fundamental role in our career growth as well as in personal growth. However, despite the fact that education is important for human development, rural education receives less attention from the government in its reform agenda. This may be because the education Ministry is usually located in urban areas. This lack of attention from the government has produced several setbacks to the development of rural education, starting from poor infrastructures, lack of qualified teachers to inadequate laboratories and libraries. Based on these problems, it can be said that rural students may not be able to compete with their counterparts in urban schools.

Keywords: rural education, challenges to learning, covid-19 online teaching, poor performance

Introduction

Education is an important method in changing society towards a better platform for sustainable development. (Doost, Sanusi, Fariddudin, & Jegatesan, 2011; Fielding & Head, 2012; Foo, 2013). It's a continuous, slow, and secure process of learning to acquire knowledge, paving innumerable ways to professional success through skills and values in our today's society (Hanifah *et al*., 2014; Hazura, 2009). This simply means that education is paramount because of the belief that, it is the only key to prosper in personal and professional life (Fabunmi, 2010; Ekong, 2000) [22]. Because of this reason, from the time formal education was introduced especially in a developing country, several attempts have been made across different nations to promote basic education in both urban and rural areas. However, significant gap coverage still remains the same (Rahman, Mokhtar & Halimi, 1993) [48]. Empirical evidence from the existing studies disclosed several setbacks to educational development in the rural community even before the arrival of Covid-19 (Haruna, 2011; Denga & Denga, 2007) [30, 17]. These impediments have hindered the development of education in rural areas (Lind & Olof 2015; Rahman, Mokhtar & Halimi 1993; Junaid & Umar, 1991) [40, 48, 36].

Factors affecting Rural Educational learning

A close inspection of empirical studies uncovers a complex finding on key issues affecting the successful operation of education in rural communities. According to Aini and Laily (2010); Busari (2014); and Rahman (1993), overcrowd-classroom is one of the problems affecting quality teaching and learning among rural students in Malaysia. Based on these scholars, an enormous number of children in one classroom does not create a cozy situation for learning. The reason is that an overpopulated classroom increases the risk of lack of concentration, conflict, and other destructive behaviors among students. These attitudes are capable of destabilizing teaching and learning between teachers and students (Birks & Mills, 2011) [9]. Other researchers affirmed that students in overcrowding classrooms are at high risk of transmission of diseases such as hepatitis, salmonella, and tuberculosis (Hanifah *et al*., 2014; Hazura, 2009). Whereas some studies reported lack of professional teachers as another problem that affects the progress of education in rural communities. The problem associated with a shortage of qualified or well-trained teachers in rural schools is that most teachers are not interested in teaching in a rural province where there is little development and modern technology. This problem continues threatening students' performances, causing dissatisfaction among parents in the rural community (Adelabu, 2001; Junaid & Umar, 1991) [2, 36]. In the same way, several studies (Piyaman, Hallinger & Viseshsiri, 2017; Klongklaew, 2012; Kwakman, 2003) [47, 38, 37] reported lack of teacher's engagement in professional training as another factor that influences the development of rural education. According to these authors, when teachers do not have the opportunity to participate in any form of training, they may encounter challenges in delivering quality teaching for students' comprehensive understanding. This drastically affects students learning and eventually, class performance (Adbulwasiu, Alkandu & Nayaya, 2013; Haruna, 2011) [4, 30]. These scholars suggest that equal opportunities and rewards structures should be given to urban and rural teachers. This is to retain qualified and well-trained teachers in both rural and urban schools to avoid educational imbalance between urban and rural students. Conversely, empirical investigations reported a lack of constant electricity supply as another provoking

factor that incapacitates students' performances in a rural community. The reason is that most rural areas do not enjoy 24 hours electricity supply or a regular supply of diesel to run their generators. Because of this, rural students may face difficulties in completing their homework or reading for their examinations at night (Birks & Mills, 2011; Meuret, 2002; Mehan, 1992; Hutmacher, Cochrane & Bottani, 2001) [9, 41, 43, 33]. The ramification of the marginalization between urban and rural education is that a sizable number of students in the rural regions are subjected to lack of motivation, leading to a substantial school drop (de Wal *et al*, 2014) [19]. Another repercussion is that rural schools are at risk of producing an unqualified graduate with just a little or no professional training skills to survive in the competitive labor market. This is in contrast to urban schools with sufficient training skills. This further increases the level of poverty in the rural areas since rural graduates do not have access to gainful employment and another service because of the perception that they do not have marketable skills to complete organizational tasks (Nordin, 2011; Adelabu, 2008; Mehan,1992; Hutmacher, Cochrane & Bottani, 2001) [1, 43, 33]. Moving further, some studies, reported a lack of laboratories with modern technology as another challenging factor that undermines the development of rural education. This creates a situation where rural students cannot discover their potential due to the outdated nature of laboratories (Hallinger & Lu 2014; Fang & Sakellariou 2013; Hallinger & Lee 2011) [31, 21, 32]. This is contrary to urban schools with advanced and well-equipped laboratories. These differences between urban and rural education may be because educational policymakers divert their attention to the development of urban education where rapid economic development began. For this reason, schools were well equipped and manned with little priority given to educational development in several rural areas (Froiland, Peterson & Davison, 2012; Gay, 2000; Deming, 1992) [24, 25, 18].

Online Learning Experience in Rural Global Education
The universal distraction by COVID-19 discovered by World Health Organization (WHO), in 2019 has badly tempered with the economy of every country, the educational sector is not exceptional (Nordin, 2011). The ramifications of coronavirus Pandemic on the educational sector, border closure, social distancing, isolation measures, and travel restrictions are undeniable (QS, 2020). The temporary measures to contain the pandemic have affected roughly 23.4 million students and 1.4 million teachers globally (UNESCO IESALC, 2020) [53]. This simply means that when the Pandemic moved in and turned the world upside down, education especially in the rural communities began to deteriorate at a very high gear (Pam, 2020; UNESCO IESALC, 2020) [45, 53]. The decision made by policymakers to dismantle large gatherings was to reduce the risk of spreading the coronavirus disease. Education from universities to primary schools was compelled to shut down and switch to online learning methods (Dhawan, 2020) [16]. This means that the use of devices such as tablets, mobile phones, computers, and also access to strong internet connection became the only glue that held teachers and students together in online classes. With these devices, students connect with their teachers regardless of their locations (Singh & Thurman, 2019; Algahtani, 2011) [52, 5]. However, results show that online teaching is a problem for underprivileged and marginalized students such as students in the rural communities who have little resources and access to online teaching. Evidence shows that rural students do not have access to high-speed internet or devices to attend online classes. It is not surprising that this lack of internet connectivity, coupled with lack of access to computers and other devices has tremendously led to dropout among rural students. This has brought additional longstanding disparities between urban and rural education (Pam, 2020; Bhuasiri, 2012; Randy, 2011) [45, 8, 12, 49]. This lack of access to devices and the internet has crippled the interaction between rural students which is significant for strengthening their social skills (UNESCO IESALC, 2020; Sanchez-Gordon & Luján-Mora, 2014) [53, 51]. Some studies reported that rural students in developing countries do not have strong self-motivation or computer literacy because they have limited access to devices. This has impacted their ability to access their online teaching (Folorunso *et al*., 2006; Siritongthaworn *et al*., 2006) [23, 50]. In the same way, studies found that rural schools face a triple challenges of poor internet connection with few teachers and technical expertise, leaving rural students with the only option to stitch together and patch up solutions on how to complete their school work. This is in contrast to urban education where students have access to high-speed internet. Therefore, it can be said that lack of qualified staff and poor internet connection has brought further educational inequities between urban and rural education (Lee, 2020). Furthermore, evidence shows that the coming of the coronavirus Pandemic has made it difficult for teachers to meet the needs of their vulnerable students such as students who are English learners and students with disabilities challenge. This is because of the movement restrictions, making it harder for teachers to access their students in a remote geographical location (Iqbal & Ahmad, 2010) [35]. By contrast, empirical investigations found that online learning has a greater benefit for rural and urban students in developed countries like Australia and Korea. The reason is that students in rural and urban areas have equal opportunity to devices and internet connection with flexible time for learning. On the other hand, online learning has its own disadvantage for teachers because they need to prepare lecture notes to be delivered to their students which can be time-consuming (Misko *et al*., 2004) [42]. Another problem with online learning is that it can be a challenging task in assisting the students in accessing the learning materials as online learning requires less supervision (Misko *et al*., 2004) [42]. A study in UK affirmed that students preferred the traditional method of face-to-face teaching despite the fact that they are computer literate. This is because it gives them more chance to mingle with friends (Orton-Johnson, 2009) [44]. A study in Malaysia reported that there are several factors that affect students online. These include computer and a strong internet connection, gender, and financial aid (Panyajamorn *et al*., 2018; Lau and Shaikh, 2012) [46]. Apart from that, students have a

huge communication problem with their lecturers, friends. They cannot also access the laboratory which further affects their learning (Lau and Shaikh, 2012).

Conclusion
According to Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted in 1948, 'everyone has an equal right to education irrespective of religion, skin color, gender, and locations. This means school-age children in both urban and rural areas are entitled to equal opportunity for quality education like their counterparts in urban schools. This is to avoid feelings of timidness and insecurity and afraid among students in rural schools. Despite that, equal opportunity to quality education in the rural schools fell short of the expectation and the gaps in the provision of educational has witnessed a great setback in all aspects, ranging from lack of well-trained teacher down to poor infrastructural facilities for proper learning. These problems become even worse with the arrival of Covid-19 that puts a halt on traditional face to face teaching. Online learning has tiled a new technique to maintain regularity teaching and learning between students and teachers. However, it is disheartening to see that rural students encounters several challenges to attend their online teaching. These problems include lack of strong internet connection and devices, necessary for online teaching. This creates a missed opportunity of learning for rural students as they experience challenges connecting with their teachers.

Way Forward of Improving Rural Education
Despite the challenges face by rural education, there are several ways to improve the problems. One of the methods to improve rural education is for the government to provide basic infrastructural facilities such as conducive classrooms, laboratories for the science practical and game equipment's. With the continuous support from government, online learning will be made affordable and accessible in the rural communities. Another way of strengthening rural education is by promoting free education since poverty is considered as one of the critical and common threats to education, especially among children from a low-income family. Rural education can also be improved by promoting computer literacy among rural students and also establishing more schools.

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