

معيقات التعلم بالجمال القروي في المغرب تشير إلى ضعف التحصيل الدراسي ثانوية الإمام الغزالي بتفرانت أنموذجا

Education Hindrances in Remote Areas in Morocco Foretken Underachievement: Case of Imam Ghazali High School in Tafrant

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ملخص:

فشلت المدرسة المغربية، وخاصة المتواجدة منها في المجال القروي، في دمج التلاميذ في بيئتهم اقتصاديا واجتماعيا وثقافيا (الرؤية الاستراتيجية، ٢٠١٤) ويعود هذا الفشل بالأساس إلى تدني مستوى التحصيل العلمي في صفوف التلاميذ، ومن هذا المنطلق يهدف هذا البحث الى دراسة تدني التحصيل العلمي بالجمال القروي - تفرانت أنموذجا. وخلصت الدراسة إلى أن المدرسة المغربية في المناطق النائية تسم بثلاث قضايا أساسية وهي تدني التحصيل العلمي والانتقطاع عن التمدن وصعوبة المجال القروي. أثرت هذه الأوضاع بشكل قوي على التحصيل العلمي خلال السنوات التي مضت بحيث حصل الكثير من تلاميذ هذه المنطقة على درجات متدنية مما جعلهم يرسبون ثم ينقطعون عن التمدن في وقت لاحق. ولاحظ محتصو التربية والمدراء أن ذوي التحصيل المنخفض من المرجح أن يواجهوا حواجز صعبة لا تبشر برحلة تعليمية واعدة وناجحة خلال فترة ست سنوات؛ الإعدادي والثانوي التأهيلي. ومن أجل معالجة هذه المسألة، تم اعتماد دراسة حالة كمنهجية للدراسة؛ وكانت هذه الظاهرة تحفز على ملاحظة ومقابلة ١٠٢ تلميذ على مدى ثمانية عشر شهرا خلال سنتين دراسيتين للوصول إلى أجوبة عن معيقات التمدن وتأثيرها السلبي على التحصيل الدراسي لدى التلاميذ. وتوصلت الدراسة إلى أن المتعلمين يواجهون بعض معيقات التمدن المتمثلة في عدم تناسب الكتب المدرسية وصعوبة الظروف السياسية والاقتصادية وهشاشة البنية التحتية وبعد المدارس واهتراء وسائل النقل.

الكلمات المفتاحية: معيقات التمدن، المجال القروي، الفقر، ضعف التحصيل الدراسي، بعد المدارس،

المقرر المدرسي

Abstract:

Moroccan schools, in particular remote ones, failed to integrate students in their environment economically, socially, and culturally (CSEFRS, 2014). Schools in remote areas are characterised by three critical issues: low achievement, dropouts besides to devilish and challenging regions. It is recognised through two past years that students in Tafrant schools get under the average grades most of whom drop out later. Educators as well as administrators were certain that low achievers would likely to face serious barriers that do not set out on a promising and successful educational journey during a period of six years, middle and high school. To tackle this issue, a case study as a methodology of the research was adopted. This phenomenon was stimulating to observe and interview 102 students over a period of eighteen months through two academic years so that queries about educational hindrances and their effects on students' low achievement find out the answer. The study finds out that learners face difficult barriers such as irrelevant curriculum, challenging socioeconomic circumstances, terrible infrastructure, distant schools, and uncomfortable means of transport, which are surely key concepts that contribute to students' academic underachievement in Tafrant.

Keywords: education hindrances, remote areas, poverty, underachievement, distant schools, curriculum

Introduction:

Running a successful authentic development across Morocco requires decision makers to turn their attention towards reforming the educational system, a milestone of advances and change. They have increasingly emphasised on the value of citizens in their latest speeches as to the king's speech to commemorate the Monarch Day in 2016, citizens are deemed the milestone human capital of the country (Justice, 2016) after many educational organisations, such as CSEFRS (2014), have reported on their official websites that Morocco is out of the way with regards to education. Thus far, human being is regarded to be the basic of development in all fundamental fields by authorities. Due to this fact, the starting point could be bringing constructive changes over educational system which passes through difficult status.

Moroccan schools, in particular remote ones, failed to integrate students in their environment economically, socially, and culturally (CSEFRS, 2014). They lack the means and the tools regardless of administrative and educational staff. It is generally accepted amongst educators and educational bodies that schools are not well equipped to meet the latest theories and approaches that insist on using the technological tools such as lap-tops, data-shows, PowerPoint presentations, and white or smart boards, (CSEFRS (2014) report points out to additional weaknesses that the educational system in Morocco passes through), the thing that makes teachers comply with the rule "*chalk and talk*". Along with this fact, priority is given to the urban areas at the expense of rural ones in terms of curriculum design, infrastructure, and comfortable means of transport. In short, it is the matter of running a failing educational system across the country that produces failure over the developmental domains, particularly in remote areas.

Schools in remote areas such as Tafrant (a remote areas in the region of Fes-Meknes in Morocco) are characterised by three critical issues: low achievement, dropouts besides to thorny and challenging rural areas. It is recognised through two past years that students in Tafrant's schools underachieve, most of whom drop out later. Educators as well as administrators

were certain that low achievers would likely to face serious barriers that do not set out on a promising and successful educational journey during a period of six years: middle and high schools (personal communication. Elwarti Mohamed, the director of Imam Ghazali high school in Tafrant, 2017). This fact was a stimulation to observe and interview students of two schools over two academic years so that reliable and authentic data would be gathered to answer questions about factors behind students' underachievement and the effects of underachievement on remote areas' students.

Review of relevant literature:

Academic achievement

Academic achievement besides to social and emotional factors are the most important outcome of formal educational experience (Moore, 2019). Students' academic performance is classified in terms of high or low achievement. High achievement refers to students with high academic performance than expected (Cheng et al, 2019) in terms of reference. However, Low performance or achievement refers to the "low-than-expected standard of students achievement" (Cheng et al, 2019, p. 4); when the degree of academic performance is in the middle or even lower. Hence, it evidently confirms that there is a gap between expected achievement and real level. Therefore, it is advisable to assess students' academic achievement as a first step to lay hands on the problem in order to improve "teaching and learning, diagnostic learning weakness and remedial teaching" (Cheng et al, 2019, p. 5)

Factors affecting achievement

Remote areas, according to the literature, confront three main issues that impeded smooth learning of subject matters. These issues are relevant to curriculum design, challenging socioeconomic circumstances, and organizational factors which contribute to inequality education and lead to low students' academic achievement (Aref & Aref, 2012; Karmel 1973; Doyle, 2014; Chen, Wang, Liu, 2019).

An agreement between some authors shows that several countries (such as Morocco) launch curriculums and design textbooks nationwide without taking into consideration the differences in educational needs that exists between rural and urban areas. Aref and Aref (2012) and Karmel (1973) point out that one of the local barriers for education is a less relevant rural educational program that motivates neither students nor teachers to reach high attainment. In the same vein, Doyle (2014) states that “rural areas face additional challenges to providing quality education” (p, 23) which is “essential for achieving positive outcomes” (ibid). In other words, teachers as well as students face obstacles to implement the syllabus content presented to the large audience living in the urban areas. Taking into consideration the conditions and needs of urban and rural regions while designing syllabus is one critical step to the successful educational system.

Curriculum, for Halsey (2017) sets the expectations for students’ learning objectives, regardless of the territories they live in or the socioeconomic background they come from. Each territory is “free to deliver the curriculum dimensions in ways that are best suited to the students in local schools; this is true for regional, rural and remote areas” (ibid, p 19). However, this is not true for Moroccan regional areas as there are one way and a set of criteria to design and produce textbooks nationwide that exclude remote areas’ needs and circumstances.

Students in these areas, for Cheng et al (2019), “have weak learning motivations [...] a lack of cultural stimuli, and poverty in daily life” (p, 3). Weak learning motivation arise owing to socio-economic circumstances that give on to low achievement and then to abandoning schooling. These factors combined hinder students’ ability to learn at ease in schools. To elucidate, UKEssay (2018) claims that socioeconomic circumstances are affecting learning in these areas due to low income; thus, families cannot afford buying enough educational resources for their children. It also links remote areas students’ low performance to their parents’ education as the “majority of parents in rural areas are less educated than parents in urban areas” (UKEssay, 2018).

Distant schools and lack of means of transport contribute to increasing the estimated figure of failures and dropouts in remote areas. Some barriers as stated by Aref and Aref (2012) can be organisational such as long distance, poor roads, and inadequate shipping vehicles. These feeble infrastructures lead to impotent and not encouraging school attainments. Doyle (2014) suggests some solutions to the issue of transportation. He adduces that public means of transport can solve the dilemma of remote schools when he points out that the “provision of public transport links to education facilities is a related consideration which has the potential to relieve this barrier” (p, 23). Means of transport, however, are not the only side that needs improvement to encourage students for schooling if poor roads are not fixed.

Research methodology

Questions and hypothesis

This piece of paper intends to answer two questions about factors behind students’ underachievement and the effects of underachievement on students in remote areas. It inquires the following questions:

- Why do students underachieve in remote areas generally, and in Tafrant particularly?
- What are the effects of underachievement on remote areas’ students?

On this basis, the following hypothesis is formulated:

- Geographic and socioeconomic factors affect students’ achievement that generally lead to withdrawing from school.

Data collection and sampling

This article adopts a case study as a methodology of conducting this study. It means conducting an empirical investigation of a contemporary phenomenon within its natural context using multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2003) such as interviews, observations, documents and/or reports but it is not statistical or survey as it is indicated by Merriam. Merriam (2001) points out that sometimes people utilise the term case study as a “catchall category for research that is not a survey, an observational study, or an experiment and is not statistical in nature” (Hancock and Dawson, 2006. p,

15). The case study also allows the researcher to explore the phenomenon in detailed and in-depth.

Observation, group discussion, and interview are used to collect data through a period of eighteen months in order to spot the exact hindrances of education in Moroccan's remote areas, particularly Tafrant. 102 students were interviewed either individually or in groups for at least 30 minutes. The targeted population are middle and high school students living in remote areas in the region of Taounate. They make a journey that lasts one or two hours to commute from home to school each day and vice versa; coming to school in the morning and departing to home in the evening.

Group discussion, on the one hand, is selected because it "capitalizes on the sharing and creation of new ideas that sometimes would not occur if the participants were interviewed individually" (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006, p, 39). Unlike interview which relies on people's bias perception, "observations of the setting by a case study researcher may provide more objective information related to the research topic" (ibid). Therefore, mixing both means of data collection is of great importance to gather authentic and reliable data and have paramount outcomes and implications for this study.

On this regard, this study is meant to be approached qualitatively through employing data gathered from interviews, group discussions and observation; it is a qualitative descriptive (QD) research. The primary aim of a QD study is "to provide an accurate description of an event and the importance a subject applies to the event. It is less time-consuming than other qualitative methods." (Holly et al, 2014). Two groups of students were interviewed through two academic years (eighteen months) to confirm the validity, reliability and trustworthiness of the data.

Analysis and interpretation:

The majority of the students attending these remote schools in Tafrant get lower grades in the exams teachers submitted (personal communication, Elwarti Mohamed, the head of Imam Ghazali high school, 2017) a thing that reflects their feeble level not only in English but also in other subject matters.

Consequently, a few students (about five in each class) are able to sustain the high level of work while the rest are combatting low achievements, which mostly increase the dropping out of school phenomenon in rural areas.

Underachievement is straightforwardly linked to the hardness of remote areas that lack the minimum educational facilities and inadequate curriculum design that comes up with, according to Boumedién (a high school teacher, 2018), failure in the milieu of schools affected by the irrelevant content to the level and rural areas. Moreover, the rate of 47.5 % illiterate parents in remote regions (ANLCA, 2017); mainly half of the residents evidently impact on their children's performance, which is marked by weakness and laziness.

Teachers as well as administrators observe the fact that many students arrive too late to the classes in the morning that makes the start impaired. When asking students about this matter in group discussions, the answer is always chocking and unimaginable since the school journey lasts the whole day. To put it differently, a respondent points out that "we live faraway, our school journey starts at dawn and ends at dusk". Students get out of their houses in the early morning and come back in the evening tardy and tired. Another participant clarifies that "I spend too much time in my way to the school, about one hour in the morning, where I feel overtired and cannot concentrate on the explanation of teachers during the first session". This can be the first demotivating factor facing students even before the classes start.

In addition to distant school, others complain about the terrible local public means of transport. To clarify this idea, one of my students points out while sharing the hard circumstances in which he studies. He states that:

"The school is very far from my home. A thing which means that every day I have to wake up early and walk miles on foot to wait for means of transport, which are in bad conditions. When in school, I have to stay there the whole day and eat food I brought with me in the morning. When I get home, I only think of washing my feet, having dinner and sleeping because of tiredness".

Hours are elapsed each day because of distant schools and the absence of inappropriate school buses although learners use local means of transport commuting them each day twice; in the early morning and late afternoon. The absence of school buses makes things worse in the milieu of Tafrant; therefore, students use vans that are always crowded and do not comprise the minimum standards of comfort. A respondent says that “I walk for twenty minutes before taking a bus (van) that is not worth calling it a bus, transporting students” because it “lacks chairs and calm” another one adds.

Besides to the terrible conditions, this type of means of transport is noisy because vans are always crammed with students of mixed levels from middle and high schools. Another respondent adds that “every one of them (vans) has got between fifty and one hundred students to transport at once”. These justifications and others explain the inappropriate learning conditions and difficulty students pass through in this remote area with the absence of school buses that requires decision makers to turn their attention to.

This issue pushed the administrative staff to think of the alternatives and solutions that may diminish the negative effects in the course of study however they could not solve that. As a consequence, the staff is advised to allow late comers to get into classes after fifteen minutes without any sanctions. Mustapha, the educational supervisor (2017) informs teachers not to deprive late comers from their classes when he points out that “just do not send students out when late fifteen minutes in the morning”. In addition, the administrative staff brings forward the afternoon sessions by one hour so that students would not arrive late at night to their homes. These instantaneous decisions do not solve the tardiness phenomenon as they are not authentic solutions.

Commuting twice a day besides to terrible infrastructure have many passive effects on students’ educational outcomes. In these inapt conditions, students are unable to do their homework or revise for their study due to tiredness and tardiness. In the schools, educational facilities such as restaurants, open access libraries, and places where students can blow up their

talents, hid from rain or hot temperature does not exist. A respondent states that “we don’t find anywhere to hide from the rain” and the “spaces where a student can blow up his talents are completely absent”. In addition, he continues pointing out that “when it is raining, I suffer a lot since my house is not located near road where I find transport; however, I ought to walk for a couple of minutes to arrive to bus station”. Summing up, toughness of education starts in the morning with remote areas students who should walk quit a long distance before taking that overcrowded means of transport that produces lateness, weak concentration and tiredness. Education achievement, then, is affected by these factors; the outcomes are too low and do not reach the expected level.

Due to the fact of living too far, students have no way coming back home for lunch until late evening. Therefore, they spend the whole day in classes or out school walls. A respondent points out that “it is not fair not to have a well-equipped dormitory in rural areas like ours”; only few girls have the chance to stay in a dormitory, but many others have not. A respondent reports his suffering when he declares that “I suffer a lot in Tafrant because I have nowhere to go to read for my lessons or spend my free time”. Another one fosters the idea that villages that lack infrastructure such as dormitory, restaurants, cafeterias, restrooms and libraries lead to unsatisfied outcomes, he argues that “if I want to do my assignment before I leave school, I do not find where, even the school library lacks chairs, tables and resources”. In short, learners experience difficulty studying in these schools as they arrive at before eight in the morning and depart it at five in the afternoon. Comfortable places where to relax, eat and do assignments are not available and spending out class time in school surroundings becomes the habit which has catastrophic effects on their achievements.

School facilities such as libraries, restaurants, restrooms, gardens and cafeterias are momentous places where distant pupils can relax, eat, do their assignments or read for their homework until the arrival of study time. Nobody can imagine a distant school without the minimum facilities that help

achieve the objectives set by the government, especially when talking about a fifteen-year strategic vision (2015-2030).

Findings:

The hypothesis “geographic and socioeconomic factors affect students’ achievement that generally lead to withdrawing from school” is confirmed to prove that geographic, socioeconomic besides to psychological circumstances collectively influence learners’ achievement, particularly in Tafrant.

This piece of research finds out three hindrances affecting achievement in remote areas. These hindrances are: First, psychological factor; students arrive tired and become demotivated about learning after commuting long distance on inappropriate means of transport add up to terrible infrastructure. Second, socioeconomic factor; poor families cannot afford to provide their children with school materials and fees needed in the course of the academic year. As such, nothing is at hand to assist their learning, particularly a large number of parents are also illiterate which means they cannot help with learning. Finally, organisational factor; it includes inappropriate and long curriculum that instructors find difficulty completing all of its content in addition to distant schools that lack the minimum educational facilities. It also encompasses lack and uncomfortable means of transport add up to unpaved roads.

Poverty is the main socioeconomic element contributing to sharply minimising students’ attainments in remote areas. Since Tafrant is a wide mountainous region, residents rely on seasonal agricultural products including vegetables, fruits, and grains which are poorly sustaining families. Wisdom (2013) clarifies that “Crop produce from subsistence farming cannot sustain the family the whole year” (p. 2105). According to Maslow’s theory, “a hungry child cannot pay attention in class since his or her images will be dominated by food” (wisdom, 2013. p, 2105). Similarly, students’ endurances while moving from their homes to school and vice versa prevail their attention in class. This brings to light hindrances students experience as they pursue their middle and high school study. On these bases, poor families cannot afford financing their children’s schooling.

Consequently, the aforementioned factors affecting achievement give rise to dropping out of school, a threatening phenomenon to education in the milieu of remote regions. A large number of students estimated at 13.1 % (viz; 221.958 students) nationwide, most of them are ranging from these regions put an end to their schooling at an early age (2m.ma, 2018), a matter that urges decision makers and educators to take actions so as to save education in these areas. It is an issue that calls for serious decisions and a clear-cut plan to surpass this dilemma and give birth to successful education for remote regions.

Implications and recommendations:

Government is required to design a special curriculum that suits the needs of remote areas' students and tackles their concerns to better integrate them in their environment. In addition, educators and administrators are called to raise students' educational aspiration which plays a significant role in their on-going participation in school and further study, especially those who commute every day to attend classes. Moreover, providing good means of transport and good infrastructures are necessary for increasing students' educational achievement and getting satisfied outcomes. In terms of tools, bringing reliable changes over infrastructure is one step to promote education in remote areas taking into consideration providing enough and not dreadful means of transport. In addition, fixing poor roads would likely to steer clear of arriving brain-dead to schools.

Conclusion

Educational facilities and good infrastructure are considerably contributing to effective academic achievement. Yet, having them at hand does not necessarily ensure high achievement; therefore, “researchers and policy makers are ever increasingly turning to social and emotional factors, as well as the relationships among them, as indicators of student well-being and psychological development” (Moore, 2019). What is more, families’ socioeconomic circumstances broaden the gap between learners and academic achievement with respect to the lack of educational resources and regions’ geographical status. These factors combined inevitably impact students’ academic achievement in Moroccan remote areas that give on to increasing dropping out of school phenomenon.

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