

Teachers in Rural Primary Schools: A Study of Their Perceptions on Teacher Preparation, School Environment and Parental Involvement

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ABSTRAK

This paper discusses the findings of a study which was carried out on 287 primary teachers and 24 principals in a rural Malaysian district. The aim was to construct a profile of the teachers, their perception of school facilities, students, parents, principals and the adequacy of teacher training. Interviews were conducted and questionnaires administered. The data show that generally teachers are satisfied with the basic facilities in their schools; they find their work challenging and they are committed to serve rural communities. However, they are constrained by lack of parental involvement, low motivation among pupils, inadequate residential facilities and teaching aids. They perceive their teacher preparation as generally adequate, but indicate that more need to be done in terms of a longer preservice exposure in rural areas, teaching methods and subjects tailored to rural needs, skills in producing teaching aids and carrying out suitable co-curricular activities. However, they agree that guidance and support given in schools are more important than college preparation. The paper concludes with a discussion on the implications for teacher education (preservice and inservice) and school support for teachers.

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INTRODUCTION

Democratization of education is a well established concept and throughout the twentieth century many democratic states have expanded their educational institutions to provide access for all. In the effort to achieve the ideal of democratizing education, many structures have been devised (Eide, 1982).

Despite much concerted effort, however, it has been realized that equality of access does not always lead to equality of outcome. This phenomenon is most evident in Malaysia where there exists an obvious inequality of outcome between rural and urban schools.

In 1988, enrolment figures for Peninsular Malaysia show that more Malaysian children are

enrolled in schools which are categorized as rural. Of the total number of primary schools, 83% are rural, with the share of enrolment of pupils at 63% and that of teachers at 69%. At the secondary level, 58% of the schools are rural, the share of the pupils enrolled being 49% while that of teachers was 51%. The participation of rural children in the formal educational process is impressive.

It is often the case that rural schools do not get their fair share of education funding (Sher, 1988; Swiger, 1989). However, Malaysia, unlike most developing countries, has expanded educational provision in the rural areas through programmes incorporated in successive Five Year Plans. These include improvement of physical facilities and the establishment of residential schools especially for poor children from the rural areas who would otherwise have been denied access to quality education. Lately rural hostels were set up for children of the chronically poor (parents whose income is less than RM175 per month). These hostels provide the diet greatly needed by poor rural children and generally provide a more conducive environment for learning (Azizah and Sharifah, 1991).

Other programmes which help rural children greatly are the Textbook Loan Scheme, which ensures that disadvantaged pupils have access to the textbooks prescribed for their class, and the Supplementary Food Programme, which has contributed towards improved percentage of attendance in schools (Sahari, 1988). In addition to the programmes mentioned above, the government also assists rural students financially by giving deserving students small grants in the form of scholarship to cover expenses other than costs of accommodation and textbooks. Obviously, much has been done by the Government of Malaysia to improve the quality of rural education, yet some difficulties remain. In particular, equality of access does not necessarily lead to equality of outcome. This is clearly illustrated by the academic achievement of rural students.

The Dropout Study of the early seventies had indicated that the dropout rate at the lower secondary level was much higher among rural pupils (72%) than urban pupils (53%). This tendency for rural pupils to achieve less than their urban counterparts seems to persist despite the several programmes of assistance designed to solve the problems of rural education. Data

comparing the performance of rural pupils in public examinations in 1983 and 1988 showed improved performance in 1988. However, there exists a difference in the quality of their achievement. For example, in 1988 only 2.8% of rural pupils obtained the maximum five A's in the UPSR (Primary School Achievement Test) compared to 7.3% obtained by urban pupils. At the School Certificate level in the same year, only 9.35% of the pupils in rural schools obtained grade I compared to 27.92% of urban pupils (Azizah and Sharifah, 1991).

The consistently lower achievement of rural students compared to their urban counterparts is a matter for great concern. It has been pointed out that home background factors seem to be relatively more important to pupil achievement in the United States while school and teacher-related factors are more important in the context of developing countries (Dove, 1986). In rural schools, teachers represent almost the only source of knowledge as prescribed in the curriculum. The performance and achievement of rural students, therefore, are very much in their hands. Thus in this paper we take the position that Malaysian rural teachers play an important role in students' success. We seek to clarify that vital role, particularly in regard to the 'extras' they need, based on our findings pertaining to the personal and professional profile of the teachers studied, their working conditions, their perception of their role as rural teachers, and the adequacy of their teacher training.

TEACHER PREPARATION

It is generally assumed that teacher performance is related to the teachers' initial academic qualification and the professional training they receive. In this section, therefore, we examine the curriculum for teacher education.

The preparation of teachers for the primary and lower secondary levels of schooling in Malaysia is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, specifically, the Teacher Education Division (TED). Currently the minimum academic entry qualification for the basic preservice teacher education programme is the Malaysian Certificate of Education (attainable after eleven years of formal education) with a credit in the National Language and at least four other credits in subjects related to the course applied for. In addition, a pass in Mathematics is also a requirement. Beside the academic

qualification, candidates are also given a scholastic aptitude test (UKELP), followed by an interview for those who are short-listed. These measures have been taken of late to ensure quality intake into the teaching profession.

It was in 1982 that a philosophy of teacher education was first enunciated. The ideal Malaysian teacher is stated as one who

- is noble in character;
- has deep moral and religious convictions;
- is human, yet progressive and scientific in outlook [sic];
- upholds the aspirations of the nation;
- cherishes the national cultural heritage;
- has a positive attitude towards learning, the school and society; and endowed with these attributes,
- promotes the all-round development of the child;
- is loyal to his profession; and
- ensures the preservation of a united, democratic, progressive and disciplined society.

(Ministry of Education, TED, 1982)

In line with the above ideal, the curriculum for pre-service teacher education aims to equip teachers with several 'professional' qualities, namely: dedication, sensitivity, awareness of national needs, positive attitude towards learning and innovativeness (Ministry of Education, TED, 1991).

The introduction of the New Primary School Curriculum (KBSR) in 1983 and the Integrated Secondary School Curriculum (KBSM) in 1989 has necessitated some changes in the teacher education curriculum to better prepare trainees for the new curricula. Beginning in 1991, the duration of the training programme for preservice teacher education is two and a half years (5 semesters). The course structure and components in this programme are shown in Table 1; Table 2 gives a more detailed version of the programme.

Upon graduation, the Ministry of Education assigns the trained teachers to schools in their own home towns where possible. These teachers may request for a transfer to other schools after five years of service, except in the state of

Kelantan where the period of compulsory service is three years for teachers serving in remote rural areas before application for transfer within the state is entertained.

THE RESEARCH

Research was carried out in primary schools in a rural education district comprising three administrative districts in Kelantan - Tanah Merah, Jeli and Machang. Primary schools in these districts are typical of Malaysian rural schools in that some could be considered remote while others are situated close to small towns. Of the 45 national primary schools in this education district, approximately 55% (25 schools) were studied, involving 287 primary teachers (approximately 30% of the population) and 24 principals. The distance between these sample schools and the district office situated in a small town ranges from 14 kilometers (the nearest) to 91 kilometers (the furthest).

The area is mainly agricultural; most of the people are Malays and Muslims, earning their living as rubber tappers and rice farmers, with little education and low income. There are, however, a very small number of government employees who are educated. Some people work as labourers in the private sector. These schools are accessible by cars, land rovers, and motor bikes and are difficult to reach only during rainy seasons. There is, however, no public transport system. The schools are moderate in academic achievement, but some perform so poorly that they are placed under 'intensive care', i.e. under special supervision by the Department of Education.

Questionnaires were administered to the teachers and principals in the schools studied. Of the 300 questionnaires sent, there were 287 (95%) responses. For additional data district education officers, state education officers, some lecturers in a teacher training institution in Kelantan, and officers from the Teacher Training Division, Ministry of Education, were interviewed.

The data were then analysed descriptively. Content validity was ensured by building up questions based on earlier interviews with teachers and principals in two rural primary schools in the education district under study. The reliability of the items used in the questionnaire is 0.72.

TABLE 1
Course structure and content for Pre-Service (Five Semester)
Teacher Education Programme (beginning June 1991)

Component	Course	
	Primary Teacher Education	Secondary Teacher Education
A. Core Subjects	860 hrs	860 hrs
B. Specialization	230 hrs	547 hrs
C. School Subjects	693 hrs	252 hrs
D. Self Enrichment	97 hrs	173 hrs
E. Practicum (for both courses 9 weeks in Semester I and 10 weeks in Semester II)	19 weeks	19 weeks
F. Co-curriculum (2 sessions x 1 1/2 hrs x 4 semesters)	210 hrs	210 hrs
TOTAL	2090 hrs	2042 hrs
G. Tutorials (Academic/Guidance)	430 hrs	418 hrs
H. Resilience Programme (Semester I)	1 week	1 week
GRAND TOTAL	2520 hrs	2520 hrs

Actual time will differ according to area of specialization when course adjustment is taken into account.

** Service Orientation Programme : 1 week in the Fifth Semester

Source: Ministry of Education, Teacher Education Division (1991)

TABLE 2
Component and time allocation for five semester Teacher Education
Programme - Primary Education (beginning June 1991)

COMPONENT		HOURS
CORE SUBJECTS FOR ALL COURSES	1. Foundation of Education: Psychology	34
	Pedagogy	219
	Education in Malaysia	53
	2. Guidance and Counselling	14
	3. Bahasa Malaysia (Proficiency)	154
	4. English Language (Proficiency)	154
	5. Resource Management	77
	6. Islamic Religious Knowledge (Muslims only)	7
7. Islamic Civilization	39	
8. History of Nations Development	39	
TOTAL FOR CORE SUBJECTS		860
PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHER EDUCATION	9. Specialization/Majoring Subject	260
	10. Mathematics	147
	11. Moral Education	77
	12. Man and Environment	168
	13. Physical Education	147
	14. Art Education	77
	15. Music	77
	16. Home Economics (self enrichment)	39
	17. Computer Education	58
TOTAL FOR SCHOOL AND ENRICHMENT SUBJECTS		1020
PROGRAMME	18. Tutorials (Academic/Guidance)	430
	19. Co-curriculum	210
	20. Resilience Programme (in Semester I)	1 week
	21. Service Orientation Programme (in Semester V)	1 week
GRAND TOTAL		2520

** Further adjustment is made according to area of specialization.

Source: Ministry of Education, Teacher Education Division (1991)

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Teacher Profile

Whereas in most developing countries rural teachers are predominantly female, our data show that our respondents are mostly male (70%). This can be explained by the fact that more males have been sent to rural schools because, according to district education officers, they can cope better with the transport and accommodation problems in rural areas.

The majority of the teachers are Malays (93%). Most of them are from the area itself or come from the neighbouring states of Kedah and Perak. Eighty three percent are below 35 years old and 74% are married. Only 17% of these teachers come from towns, the rest are from suburban (56%) and remote rural areas (27%). At the time of the study, they lived in school quarters (31%), rented houses (33%) and or in their own homes (34%). As accommodation in school quarters is limited, a greater number had to find accommodation elsewhere, resulting in some of them living a far distance away from school. The school records show that 55% of these teachers live outside the district. This has implications on their involvement in school and community activities. Principals complain of teachers arriving late at school and being reluctant to carry out co-curricular activities.

Of the respondents, 60% obtained a second grade at the School Certificate Examination, 23% had third grades and only 13% were first graders. About 22% obtained the full certificate in the Higher School Certificate Examination while 47% had never sat for the examination. In terms of professional training, 91% were trained to teach in primary schools while 4.5% had secondary teaching as their option.

The majority of the respondents (87%) have less than 5 years teaching experience, 9% between 6-10 years, and 4 teachers have taught more than 10 years. Their teaching experience ranges from 2 months to 38 years. Approximately 30% of the teachers have taught in town schools. As regards rural teaching experience, a majority of the respondents (64%) have less than six years experience but there are some who have taught in rural schools throughout most of their teaching careers. The length of time teachers spend in rural schools affects their performance. Principals note that performances deteriorate after teachers have spent 3-4 years in the school.

Obviously much needs to be done to sustain performance and maintain quality teachers in the rural schools.

In terms of inservice courses, 54% of the respondents reported having attended at least one course. The range of attendance is 1-7 times with some having attended 1-4 times (51%). It is disturbing to note that almost half of the respondents have never attended inservice courses. Of those who attended, only 36% of the respondents report that the latest inservice course they attended was held in the previous year. Among those who have never attended any inservice course, the majority are young (20-30 yrs old - 87%), though some (12%) are between 31-40 yrs old. Indeed much needs to be done, considering the number of changes that have been introduced in the primary school curriculum in the recent past.

From the open-ended questions, reasons given by the teachers for the lack of opportunity to attend these courses are:

- a. priority given to teachers in town schools;
- b. difficulty in obtaining information and application forms;
- c. failure to receive replies to their applications;
- d. candidates selected based on principals' recommendations;
- e. perception that the chances to be accepted were slim and limited to one teacher per subject.

With regard to opportunity for promotion, almost half of the respondents (49%) feel dissatisfied with their prospects for promotion. Clearly, teaching in rural schools is seen as an unattractive venture in terms of promotion and professional development. Consequently some form of reward structure needs to be introduced to encourage and retain teachers in rural areas.

Conditions at Work

Teacher perception of their working conditions contribute much to their satisfaction at work. Our data show that generally the respondents are satisfied with their school building, classroom size, resource centre, library, restrooms, playing fields, canteen and facilities for co-curricular activities. However, the open-ended questions reveal various opinions that reflect a certain amount of dissatisfaction, both from teachers and principals. For example, teachers complain of:

insufficient classrooms; absence of resource centres, or if present, they are inadequately equipped; libraries with outdated materials; lack of playing fields, and if available, they are in poor condition; underutilization of materials available, and old buildings which need to be replaced. If the schools are new, they are inadequate in terms of basic facilities. It is conceivable that the term 'satisfactory' in the questionnaire is taken to mean 'just okay' by the respondents.

The majority of respondents regard their principals as satisfactory in terms of administration, instructional leadership and relationship with teachers, pupils and parents. On problems they face related to teaching, 88% of the respondents say that they seek the advice of their headmasters. The same is also true in the case of student disciplinary problems: 87% state that they refer the matter to their headmasters.

Generally, the respondents are not satisfied with their students' academic ability (53%), student attitude towards study (50%), and student participation in the classroom (45%). Quite a number are not satisfied with student attendance (34%) and health conditions (34%). Teachers attribute the low achievement to

- a. lack of parental involvement and co-operation;
- b. attitude of parents and pupils;
- c. unstimulating environment; and
- d. the socioeconomic background which affects parental guidance and children's attendance in school.

This lack of parental involvement has increased the burden of rural teachers. They feel that, unlike their urban counterparts, they have to bear the sole responsibility of their pupils' performance. However, this does not mean that they are unhappy with their relationship with parents as only less than half of the respondents express dissatisfaction in the matter.

Workload and Responsibilities

There are eight subjects in the primary school curriculum. The majority of the respondents (33%) teach 3 subjects, only 12% specialize in teaching just one subject. The number of subjects taught by the teachers ranges from 1-7.

Our data show that the rural teachers are entrusted with various administrative duties. The

average number of responsibilities a teacher holds is 2 and the majority (76%) are responsible for 1-3 administrative duties in school, such as being key personnel for various subjects, discipline teacher, teacher in charge of Textbook Loan Scheme, and secretary of the Parent Teacher Association. In addition, on the average they are involved in at least three co-curricular activities, encompassing sports, uniform bodies, and clubs and societies. The rural teachers also participate in community organizations. About 40% of them are involved in various community activities, including participation in youth organizations, religious organizations, member of committees set up to tackle flood problems and various other problems faced by the village. The responsibilities entrusted to them in these organizations include being chairmen, secretaries, auditors and committee members. These posts demand leadership qualities and skills, knowledge in religious affairs, communication skills, interpersonal relationship and the like. Thus respondents perceive that they have to play the role of community leaders, whereas in towns, community leaders come from other professions as well.

Co-curricular activities in schools also have unique characteristics in that some games and societies are unique to rural areas. Traditional games such as top spinning, 'congkak' and the Malay art of self defence (silat) are offered in some schools. These activities need special skills on the part of the teachers, and imply an extra need in teacher preparation for rural schools.

To sum up, it can be said that the primary rural teachers studied have responsibilities such as teaching, administrative work, co-curricular activities and community services. They work with children whom they perceive to be of low ability, with an unstimulating home environment and parents who leave the education of their children solely to the school. School facilities, although perceived as 'satisfactory' by the majority, are still lacking. They also perceive that they have a more difficult role to play compared to their urban counterparts. What then is their commitment to work under these conditions?

Commitment to Work

Generally, respondents are committed to their work. Only 38% indicated that they would leave the profession if given the chance. Among the reasons given for this was that it would give them

a chance to improve themselves academically and professionally (in urban areas), and that they could not cope with the pressure from their principals, the education officers and from parents. The respondents who indicated that they would remain in the teaching profession (62%) stated that the teaching profession was the most suitable profession for them, that teaching was their chosen profession, and that it is challenging. When responding to the question on whether they would choose to teach in a town school if given the choice, 74% replied affirmatively. The reasons given include: that the change would add to their teaching experience, and would allow them to evaluate their teaching ability (i.e. to practice what they have learnt) in the light of the more conducive teaching-learning environment which they perceive to exist in town schools. Those who responded negatively (26%) gave reasons such as their wish to upgrade the standard of performance of the rural schools, and that they have adjusted well to the school and community and were happy where they were.

It can be concluded that the majority of the respondents are committed to teaching. However, the chance to teach in town is also welcome, as indicated by the large number wanting to transfer to town schools if given the choice. Our data also show that the respondents choose teaching because of interest (85%). Only a few choose teaching because of 'no other choice' (17%), 'good pay' (30%), 'work half a day' (21%), and 'lots of holidays' (20%). This interest in teaching and commitment towards their profession is indeed laudable; steps should be taken to improve their teaching conditions in school.

Perception of their Ability

On the whole the respondents feel satisfied with their teaching ability. Areas in which more than 20% of the respondents are not satisfied are: preparing teaching aids (23%), carrying out group activities (22%), remedial teaching (29%), and community activities (26%). These areas of dissatisfaction reflect their concern for teaching children of 'low ability' and the importance of preparing teaching aids in the light of the inadequate facilities in rural schools. Also of concern is their ability to carry out community activities. Our data also show that teachers living far from schools (in town) feel that they do not have the energy for community involvement. Respondents also state that they wish they were

prepared with more skills to perform these activities well.

Despite the general satisfaction with their ability to carry out their duties as teachers, 56% of the respondents express some inadequacy. Many teachers feel the need to obtain help as well as to attend inservice courses to overcome these inadequacies. Teachers cite various strategies they take to overcome their teaching inadequacies. 'Always' discussing with other teachers is cited by most respondents (61%), 'sometimes' and 'always' seeking advice from their headmasters (82%), reading educational magazines and attending seminars (77%), going to Teachers' Resource Centres (59%), and seeking advice and guidance from district education officers (44%). It is clear that these rural teachers do need help in carrying out their work and that inservice training as well as 'in school' guidance is needed.

Perception towards Teacher Training

The data show that generally teachers are positive about their teacher preparation at college. In terms of personal development they agree with the statement that their teacher training has made them more creative (81%), more productive (83%), more self confident (86%), more mature (89%), better at adapting to different environments (89%), and prepare them for a more balanced personality (67%). Nevertheless, as the data show, a number of teachers also disagree with the above statements, especially in regard to 'balanced' personality. It is interesting to note that despite the positive reaction to their training, more than half of the respondents (56%) agree with the statement that college lecturers regard and treat student teachers as school children. They comment that lecturers should treat them as adults or would-be teachers, and that they should conduct more discussion and less lectures. Respondents indicate that the general atmosphere at college is determined mainly by the principals and lecturers of the college. Some observe that college is too examination-oriented, and 35% admit that their main aim in college was to pass examinations with honours. They opine that college should provide student teachers with the groundwork to mature later as dedicated teachers, well-equipped with methodologies and determination to meet pupils in the classroom.

General questions pertaining to the role of preservice teacher education in preparing teachers for rural schools have the following responses: 33% agree with the statement that teacher training did not prepare them to teach in rural areas, 42% agree with the statement that teacher training prepared them better to teach in town. We see that although the majority of respondents disagree with the above statements, quite a large number feel that teacher training did not prepare them for rural teaching and that the training was more geared towards teaching in urban schools.

In terms of teaching methods, 41% disagree that their methodology course (options) and the core 'Education' component helped them to teach effectively in rural areas, while more than half agree. With regard to practical teaching, 36% of the respondents disagree with the statement that their training provided them the exposure to teaching in rural schools. According to our data, only 18% of the respondents had their practical teaching in rural schools, 32% had it in schools in towns and 41% had it in suburban schools. In the rural states such as Kelantan and Kedah, suburban schools, do have many characteristics of rural schools, hence the large number of respondents agree with the statement, the majority being those whose practical teaching experience was in suburban schools.

On the whole, respondents feel that apart from preservice teacher education, the role of the school and inservice courses are important in helping them cope with teaching in rural schools. Sixty one percent of the respondents agree with the statement that guidance in school is more important than the teacher training course to enable teachers to teach in rural areas, while 39% disagree. On the question of whether a special inservice course is needed to enable teachers to teach in rural areas, 54% of respondents agree. However, 61% felt that the inservice courses they had attended did not help them much in teaching in rural areas. Thus although generally respondents feel that teacher training can not prepare teachers for all eventualities (70%); on-the-job help together with inservice is needed. These findings also have implications on preservice teacher education.

Respondents gave several suggestions for improvement specifically for teachers who will be

teaching in rural areas. Methodology courses, according to respondents, should be practical rather than theoretical; group teaching based on student abilities and skills in individualized instruction should be emphasized; various methods of remedial teaching should be taught; teaching methods that are consistent with the ability, interest and environment of rural children should be emphasized. Lecturers need to have some experience in rural teaching to be more effective lecturers. In terms of other courses, subjects which lead to a greater understanding of rural culture and children would be useful in helping teachers prepare themselves for rural teaching. Respondents also stress the need for college to provide trainees with the skills of devising and making audio-visual aids which are simple, durable and inexpensive.

Teaching practice was emphasized by respondents as an important aspect of teacher education. There is consensus among respondents that part of teaching practice should be carried out in rural schools so that trainees can experience the actual conditions in these schools. Respondents cite the principal and other teachers in rural schools as the main resource personnel. Most respondents feel that the quality of supervision (in terms of its frequency and quality) should be improved.

Respondents were generally satisfied with co-curricular activities in college, but some improvement were suggested to meet the needs of rural teaching. These include: traditional games and activities relevant to rural society; activities that can be carried out despite inadequacies such as the lack of playing fields and equipment; exposure and experience in co-curricular activities which enhance their leadership qualities and raise their problem-solving capabilities; practical rituals of the Islamic religion because of the various involvement of rural teachers in religious activities; visits to rural schools and 'adoption' of rural schools.

It was suggested that programmes aimed at improving teacher confidence, adaptability, and resilience (character building) should have the following features: emphasis on the spiritual aspects for Muslim participants to reduce emotional and psychological stress; inculcation of love and loyalty for the religion, country and countrymen; inspire hard work and care for

pupil achievement; build participants' confidence and resilience so that they will be able to cope with all kinds of situations, emphasize motivating factors for prospective rural teachers and inculcate positive attitude towards rural teaching especially for those without any rural experience or exposure.

With reference to the Resilience Programme recently introduced by the Teacher Education Division, our data show that only 43% agree that it helped prepare trainees to handle rural teaching while 29% disagree. Twenty-one percent of the respondents never attended the course, presumably because it had not been introduced then.

IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this research point to some 'extras' needed by rural primary teachers. To recapitulate, the subjects studied generally have the following characteristics: they are young married males with moderate academic qualification; they are trained teachers but have not had much opportunity to attend inservice courses; the schools in which they teach lack facilities, with students not sufficiently motivated to learn and poor parental involvement, but these are not conditions foreign to the teachers as they have had some rural experience themselves; they feel some inadequacy in group teaching and remedial work and do seek advice from their principals and fellow teachers when faced with problems; they carry out a number of co-curricular activities and perceive their role as teachers to include being guardians for their students; being involved in community activities is part of their role too. With regard to their professional qualification, they perceive their initial teacher training as adequate but recognize that there are areas for improvement, particularly the need for inservice courses and on-the-job training.

What then can the authorities do to improve rural education via the teachers? The government has already adopted a 'benevolent' attitude with regard to posting teachers to rural areas, and facilities in rural schools continue to be improved. But other measures need to be taken.

Rural teaching needs to be seen as having its own advantages. It needs to be presented as intrinsically worthwhile: it provides a challenge for 'good' teachers to try out their own teaching

methods, be innovative and resourceful; teachers do not have to face as many disciplinary problems as in urban areas; the rewards for successful teaching come in sincere parental gratitude.

The authorities need to remove the barriers to promotion among rural teachers and in their place create incentives: recognition of dedicated rural teaching in the form of salary increment or other rewards and priority for selection to attend inservice courses, to name a few.

The need for on-the-job advice and guidance has to be given serious consideration. This means that the headmasters themselves have to be exemplary in terms of leadership, providing professional guidance and encouragement. There is also a need for collegial support, which implies that a place for teachers to meet should be provided, for social as well as professional purposes. The geographical isolation of rural teachers need to be minimised, and this can be done by providing them with up-to-date reading materials and occasional invitations to meet together in town.

In terms of teacher preparation, there is need to recognize that rural teaching has its own peculiarities. Thus it has to be highlighted across the curriculum and every subject lecturer must ensure relevance of his/her teaching materials to rural schools, in addition to discussing methods of effectively teaching it. In this respect, theories of teaching should be balanced by practical implications. Teacher trainees need to understand relevant theories and to develop for themselves teaching strategies suitable for their particular classrooms. While the respondents did mention inadequacy in group and remedial teaching, the solution does not lie in emphasizing 'how-to-do-it' courses. Rather, the objective of teacher training should be geared more towards producing creative, innovative, resourceful and reflective teachers.

In line with the above, resilience as a teacher quality, which the Ministry seeks to inculcate through a course (Bina Semangat) emphasizing physical endurance, indeed has a place in the curriculum but the course should be revised to emphasize spiritual endurance. This is one of the suggestions put forward by the respondents.

Finally, an exposure to rural teaching is necessary for all teacher trainees. This means that colleges must ensure that the students' practicum cover a period of teaching in rural schools.

TABLE 3
 Perception distribution of responses based on condition of schools and
 perception of students, teachers, headmasters and parents

Items	Responses				
	VS	S	NS	VU	NA
<i>Physical Facilities</i>					
Building	39 (14)	199 (69)	36 (13)	10 (4)	–
Number of pupils in a classroom	30 (11)	159 (56)	71 (25)	15 (5)	–
Total number of classroom	23 (8)	175 (61)	73 (25)	11 (4)	–
Teaching aids	11 (4)	179 (62)	85 (30)	8 (3)	–
Resource Centre	22 (8)	200 (70)	46 (16)	6 (2)	3 (1)
Library	23 (8)	214 (75)	28 (10)	4 (1)	2 (1)
Teachers' common room	21 (7)	201 (70)	47 (16)	12 (4)	3 (1)
Canteen	13 (5)	201 (70)	51 (18)	17 (6)	1 (.3)
Rest room	13 (5)	147 (51)	87 (30)	34 (12)	–
Playing field	13 (5)	171 (60)	72 (25)	19 (7)	6 (2)
Subsidiary Food Programme	9 (3)	215 (75)	37 (13)	3 (1)	5 (2)
Textbook Loan Scheme	29 (10)	212 (74)	36 (13)	6 (2)	–
Facilities for co-curricular activities	10 (4)	160 (56)	93 (32)	13 (5)	–
<i>Academic Needs</i>					
School syllabus	29 (10)	209 (73)	40 (14)	4 (1)	–
Textbooks	24 (8)	206 (72)	49 (17)	4 (1)	–
Evaluation system/examination	18 (6)	212 (74)	48 (17)	2 (1)	–
<i>Perception Toward Students</i>					
Students' academic achievement	1 (.3)	132 (46)	133 (46)	19 (7)	–
Students' participation in the classroom	6 (2)	149 (52)	123 (43)	6 (2)	1 (.3)
Students' attendance	7 (2)	183 (64)	84 (30)	10 (4)	–
Students' attitude toward studies/ education	2 (1)	137 (48)	123 (43)	19 (7)	1 (.3)
Students' discipline	13 (5)	195 (68)	71 (25)	7 (2)	–
Students' involvement in co-curricular activities	27 (9)	196 (68)	59 (21)	2 (.7)	–
Health	5 (2)	180 (63)	93 (32)	4 (1)	–
<i>Perception Toward Parents</i>					
Contributions in terms of money/ kind from parents	3 (1)	107 (37)	145 (51)	25 (9)	5 (2)
Guidance from parents	2 (1)	40 (14)	179 (62)	59 (21)	4 (1)
Parental attitude toward their children's education	2 (1)	67 (23)	164 (57)	51 (18)	2 (1)
Attendance in PTA activities	6 (2)	127 (44)	126 (44)	22 (8)	3 (1)
Parent-teacher relationship	12 (4)	161 (56)	101 (35)	10 (4)	–

Items	Responses					
	VS	S	NS	VU	NA	
<i>Perception Toward Headmaster</i>						
Quality of headmaster's leadership	64 (22)	183 (64)	28 (10)	2 (1)	-	-
Ability to administer	56 (20)	188 (66)	31 (11)	2 (1)	-	-
Ability to guide	52 (18)	191 (67)	26 (9)	3 (1)	2 (1)	2 (1)
Ability to put forward ideas to improve school performance	54 (19)	195 (68)	23 (8)	1 (.3)	1 (.3)	1 (.3)
Ability to handle discipline problems	46 (16)	195 (68)	34 (12)	2 (1)	-	-
Supervision by headmaster	39 (14)	208 (72)	20 (7)	2 (1)	-	-
Headmaster's treatment of teachers	92 (32)	154 (54)	24 (8)	4 (1)	-	-
Headmaster's treatment of pupils	71 (25)	192 (70)	12 (4)	-	-	-
Headmaster's treatment of parents	71 (25)	196 (68)	9 (3)	-	-	-
Headmaster's relationship with the district education officers	93 (32)	168 (59)	8 (3)	2 (1)	-	-
<i>Perception Toward Teachers' Ability</i>						
To teach effectively	20 (7)	240 (84)	14 (5)	-	-	-
To motivate student interest	23 (8)	224 (78)	24 (8)	2 (1)	-	-
To prepare teaching aids	12 (4)	198 (69)	60 (21)	6 (2)	-	-
To carry out group activities	11 (4)	199 (69)	62 (22)	2 (1)	2 (1)	2 (1)
To carry out remedial teaching	11 (4)	168 (59)	76 (27)	8 (3)	8 (3)	8 (3)
To carry out enrichment activities	15 (5)	200 (70)	55 (19)	1 (.3)	2 (1)	2 (1)
To handle discipline problems	28 (10)	222 (77)	23 (8)	-	2 (1)	2 (1)
To handle students according to ability	23 (8)	213 (74)	37 (13)	1 (.3)	2 (1)	2 (1)
To carry out administrative duties	18 (6)	210 (73)	29 (7)	2 (1)	2 (1)	2 (1)
To carry out co-curricular activities	27 (9)	222 (77)	21 (7)	2 (1)	2 (1)	2 (1)
To carry out community activities	9 (3)	169 (59)	69 (24)	7 (2)	15 (5)	15 (5)
To adjust yourself to the rural society	34 (12)	215 (75)	25 (9)	1 (.3)	1 (.3)	1 (.3)
To understand the local dialect	91 (32)	159 (55)	18 (6)	2 (1)	2 (1)	2 (1)
To put forward ideas to improve the school's performance	28 (10)	214 (75)	31 (11)	-	2 (1)	2 (1)
<i>Teacher's Relationship with Headmasters, Parents and Teachers</i>						
Teacher's relationship with the headmaster	92 (32)	174 (61)	12 (4)	-	-	-
Teacher's relationship with other teachers	114 (40)	163 (57)	4 (1)	1 (.3)	-	-
Teacher's relationship with parents	50 (17)	192 (70)	33 (12)	4 (1)	1 (.3)	1 (.3)
<i>Opportunities for Growth and Supervision from Education Officers</i>						
Opportunity to attend inservice courses	8 (3)	134 (47)	97 (34)	22 (8)	14 (4.9)	14 (4.9)
Opportunity for promotion	4 (1)	95 (33)	106 (40)	36 (13)	24 (8)	24 (8)
Opportunity to implement your own ideas	15 (5)	184 (64)	63 (22)	7 (2)	5 (1)	5 (1)
Supervision by education officers	8 (3)	171 (60)	70 (24)	12 (4)	8 (3)	8 (3)
Supervision by school inspectorate	4 (1)	182 (63)	65 (23)	8 (3)	7 (2)	7 (2)
Coordination of supervision between school, district education officers and inspectorate	3 (1)	167 (58)	79 (28)	12 (4)	7 (2)	7 (2)

Items	Responses		
	<i>Never</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Always</i>
<i>Strategy to Overcome Teaching Problems</i>			
Try to solve the problem on my own	4 (1)	86 (30)	196 (68)
Get help from the headmaster	31 (11)	208 (73)	44 (15)
Discuss with the other teachers in the school	5 (2)	104 (36)	176 (61)
Discuss with the district education officers	173 (60)	102 (36)	5 (2)
Discuss with other teachers at the Teachers' Resource Centre	128 (45)	128 (45)	24 (8)
<i>Strategy to Overcome Student Discipline Problems</i>			
Try to solve it on my own	15 (5)	125 (44)	134 (47)
Refer it to the teacher in charge of discipline	9 (3)	150 (52)	119 (42)
Refer it to the headmaster	29 (10)	201 (70)	50 (17)
Inform the parents	63 (22)	185 (65)	30 (11)
<i>Strategy to Overcome Teaching Inadequacies</i>			
Obtaining help from the headmaster	36 (13)	170 (59)	66 (23)
Obtaining guidance from the district education officers	139 (48)	118 (41)	13 (5)
Discussing with the other teachers	16 (6)	86 (30)	175 (61)
Reading educational magazines/journals	20 (7)	142 (50)	113 (39)
Applying to attend courses/workshops/seminars	50 (17)	145 (51)	79 (28)
Going to the Teachers' Resource Centre	103 (40)	137 (48)	33 (12)

Items	Responses				
	<i>VS</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>NS</i>	<i>VU</i>	<i>NA</i>
<i>Perception Towards Teacher Training</i>					
The teacher training college prepared me to teach any where.	59 (21)	152 (53)	56 (20)	5 (2)	5 (12)
The teacher training prepared me better to teach in the town.	28 (10)	88 (31)	130 (45)	18 (6)	12 (4)
The teacher training did not prepare me to teach in the rural areas.	19 (7)	17 (27)	149 (60)	17 (6)	14 (5)
The courses on basic education helped me to teach effectively in the rural areas	16 (6)	136 (47)	110 (38)	7 (2)	6 (2)
The methodology courses (options) prepared me to teach effectively in the rural areas.	13 (5)	133 (46)	114 (40)	7 (2)	8 (3)
The practical teaching provided me the exposure to teaching in the rural areas.	19 (7)	145 (51)	92 (32)	11 (4)	9 (3)
The co-curricular activities prepared me with the ability to lead in the rural areas.	32 (11)	145 (51)	85 (30)	6 (2)	8 (3)
Kursus Bina Semangat did not help to prepare trainees to handle the duties in the rural areas.	16 (6)	67 (23)	112 (39)	12 (4)	59 (21)

Teachers in Rural Primary Schools

Items	Responses				
	VS	S	NS	VU	NA
Kursus Bina Insan is useful in building leadership qualities.	39 (14)	130 (45)	31 (11)	7 (2)	57 (20)
Some college lecturers regard and treat student teachers as school children.	38 (13)	124 (43)	91 (32)	9 (3)	12 (4)
The duration of the teacher training that I had gone through was adequate.	38 (13)	184 (64)	45 (16)	6 (2)	2 (1)
The duration of the teaching practice that I had gone through was adequate.	27 (9)	186 (65)	57 (20)	4 (1)	1 (.3)
The teaching practice destroyed my interest to be a teacher.	12 (4)	47 (16)	161 (56)	46 (16)	9 (3)
When I was in the teacher training college, my main purpose was to pass the examination with honours.	26 (9)	102 (36)	122 (43)	19 (6)	5 (1)
The supervision during the teaching practice did not provide me with the guidance I needed.	14 (5)	71 (25)	161 (56)	24 (9)	4 (1)
The guidance in school was more important than the teacher training course to be able to teach in the rural areas.	62 (22)	114 (34)	84 (30)	13 (5)	2 (.7)
The teacher training cannot prepare the teacher for all eventualities.	68 (24)	135 (47)	58 (20)	12 (4)	4 (1)
On the whole, the inservice courses that I have attended did not help me to teach in the rural areas.	32 (11)	144 (50)	63 (22)	2 (1)	30 (11)
To be able to teach in the rural areas require a special inservice course.	50 (17)	107 (37)	92 (32)	11 (4)	12 (5)

Items	Responses			
	SA	A	D	SD
<i>Conditions of Teacher Training College</i>				
To be more creative	58 (20)	176 (61)	35 (12)	3 (1)
To be more productive	47 (16)	193 (67)	30 (11)	2 (1)
To be more self-confident	60 (21)	186 (65)	25 (9)	2 (1)
To be more mature	64 (22)	191 (67)	17 (6)	2 (1)
To be better at adapting myself	69 (24)	186 (65)	18 (6)	1 (.3)
To widen my knowledge through reading	55 (19)	191 (67)	26 (9)	2 (1)
On the whole the atmosphere in the college did not help me build a balanced personality.	12 (4)	68 (24)	157 (55)	34 (12)

Legend:

SA - Strongly Agree
A - Agree
SD - Strongly Disagree
D - Disagree
NA - Not Available

VS - Very Satisfactory
S - Satisfactory
NS - Not Satisfactory
VU - Very Unsatisfactory

Notes : 1. Figures in parentheses are percentages.
2. Percentages are rounded off to the nearest whole number.

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