

The Perceptions of Teacher Candidates About Rural Schools: Practicum and Student Teaching Programs

Öğretmen Adaylarının Kırsal Kesimdeki Okullara İlişkin Algıları: Uygulama ve Okul Deneyimi Programları

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ABSTRACT

There are considerable differences between urban living standards and rural living standards. Such standards may affect teacher distribution. The inequitable distribution of teacher labour force has been one of the major problems in education system of the United States. This situation has adverse impacts on student achievement. Especially schools in rural areas have difficulty to recruit quality teacher because of poor living standards. Teachers serving in rural schools are generally less qualified in pedagogical training, experience, test scores, and subject-matter content. In this qualitative study, the researchers aimed to examine the perceptions of teacher candidates in practicum and student teaching programs about rural schools. The study included 30 students from practicum program and 30 students from student teaching program. The programs were conducted by the Cooperative Educational Service Agency 8 (CESA 8) in the state of Wisconsin, USA to attract more quality teachers to rural schools. Content analysis method was employed to analyse the qualitative data. The results of the study showed that the perceptions of students in both practicum and student teaching programs seem to be alike regarding the advantages and challenges of rural schools.

Keywords: Rural schools, Practicum, Student teaching, Teacher distribution, Perceptions

ÖZ

Kentsel yaşam standartları ile kırsal yaşam standartları arasında önemli farklılıklar vardır. Farklı yaşam standartları öğretmen dağılımını etkilemektedir. Öğretmen işgücünün eşitsiz dağılımı Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'nin (ABD) eğitim sistemindeki en büyük sorunlardan biri olmuştur. Bu durumun öğrenci başarısı üzerinde olumsuz etkileri vardır. Özellikle kırsal kesimdeki kötü yaşam standartları nedeniyle buradaki okullarda kaliteli öğretmenlere sahip olmak oldukça zordur. Kırsal okullarda görev yapan öğretmenler genellikle derslerin içeriği konusunda daha az pedagojik eğitim ve deneyime sahiptirler. Bu nitel çalışmada araştırmacılar, öğretmen adaylarının kırsal okullarla ilgili öğretmen adaylarının uygulama ve okul deneyimine ilişkin algılarını incelemeyi amaçlamışlardır. Çalışmada, uygulama ve kurum

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deneyimi için 30'ar öğretmen adayı yer almıştır. Bu programlar, kırsal okullara daha kaliteli öğretmenler çekmek için ABD'nin Wisconsin eyaletindeki Kooperatif Eğitim Hizmetleri Birimi (CESA 8) tarafından yürütülmüştür. Çalışmada toplanan veriler içerik analizi yöntemi kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir. Çalışma sonuçlarına göre hem uygulama hem de okul deneyimi programında bulunan katılımcıların kırsal kesimde bulunan okullarla ilgili problemleri ve olumlu yönleri benzer şekilde algıladıkları görülmüştür.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Kırsaldaki okullar, uygulama, okul deneyimi, öğretmen dağılımı, algılar.

INTRODUCTION

With the industrialization, the process of transition from agricultural society to industrial society has been experienced by many people. The growing populations have rather become more intense in urban areas than rural areas. This intensity has led to clustering of services from health to education in cities. As the consequence of such clustering, some services including the educational services were not distributed fairly to the other areas of the country, particularly to the rural areas (Baker-Doyle, 2010). While the physical and educational infrastructure of educational institutions in cities are constantly evolving, rural schools are lagging behind these developments (Palavan & Donuk, 2016).

The living standards between rural and urban setting are quite different. Teachers living in rural areas have many issues associated with teaching setting and materials. According to Ertürk (1984), teachers' perceptions about rural regions may differ as such areas experience many difficulties including cultural differences, economic issues, and harsh geographical terrains. Uygun (2010) stressed that rural regions mainly experience difficulties based on lack of social activities, transportation, and teaching items. On the other hand, Palavan and Donuk (2016) conducted a study and found that harsh environmental conditions and lack of instructional materials affect the quality of education and students' progress. It is evident that these issues create obstacles for teachers to teach at rural regions.

Teacher Distribution

The distribution of teachers is quite crucial as it has critical impacts on the educational experiences of students. The distribution of the teachers is also linked to equity in education (Luschei & Chudgar, 2016, Luschei, Chudgar, & Rew, 2013). The factors effecting the distribution of teacher labour force include incentives, geographical terrain, transportation, other living conditions, and educational systems (King & Orazem, 1999). Teacher distribution has been one of the critical problems for many countries including USA. In USA, there is a shortage of qualified teachers in low-income schools. Teachers serving in such schools are generally less qualified in pedagogical training, experience, test scores, and subject-matter content (Steiner-Khamsi & Lefoka, 2011). Darling-Hammond (2010) reported that qualified teachers predominantly serve in affluent schools, which include mainly white students. The report added that about 33% of low income schools include students of colour with educators, who are not certified or generally teach outside of their field.

One of the factors having influence on the distribution of teacher labour force is the working conditions of teachers (Loeb, Author, & Luczak, 2005). Working conditions in schools include number of students, classroom size, effectiveness of leadership, the availability of teaching resources, and the safety of school. These conditions have effects on teachers' decisions whether to change the school, the district, or the teaching profession. Because teachers in U.S. have a great deal of choice over where they want to serve or move to, it would not be surprising if they choose to work in urban school settings with better living and working conditions (Feng & Sass, 2018; Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 1999). Being aware of this fact, after a short teaching time in rural districts, many teachers may prefer moving back to urban districts to teach in schools with more resources and better conditions (Mafora, 2103).

Another problem associated with the distribution of teacher labour force is the unfair distribution of quality teachers (Goldhaber & Brewer, 2000). Teacher quality is a crucial factor it has positive effects on student achievement (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2007; Monk, 1994). Unfortunately, the gap in reaching quality teachers in rural and low-income schools in the U.S. is among the largest in the world (Akiba, LeTendre, & Scribner, 2007). The quality of teachers has an immense effect on the quality of education and academic success of the students (Feng & Sass, 2017). For that reason, school districts compete with one another to employ teachers with high qualifications. In that sense, compared to urban school districts, the rural school districts have difficulty to attract teachers with high qualifications. Many factors such as the physical infrastructure of education and training environments, the flexibility and functionality of the curriculum, the quality and accessibility of educational tools and technological facilities may affect teachers' interests about school districts (Özpinar & Sarpkaya, 2010).

Efforts on Making Rural Schools More Attractive

The educational leaders and school districts made some substantial efforts to make rural schools preferred so that quality teachers may start working at such places. Main efforts for such important purpose include increasing salary, offering loan forgiveness programs, and providing incentive pays (Southworth, 2004; Weston, 2000). Crucial attempts such as salary increases are made by some school districts to attract more teachers for working in rural regions of the country (Clotfelter, Glennie, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2008). Researchers agree that preventing issues in association with teaching in

rural settings and high-need areas may be possible through increasing the salaries (Falch, 2011, Hendricks, 2014, Griffin & McGuire, 2015).

The second to approach to increase teachers' desires for teaching in rural schools includes offering loan forgiveness programs. As salary differential receive a substantial resistance from teachers and teacher unions, a different set of compensation schema was designed to attract and retain teachers serving in high-need areas (Munsch & Boylan, 2008). As a common strategy in about 20 states, the loan forgiveness program was used to increase teacher attainment and retain in shortage areas. For instance, the state of Florida offer a loan forgiveness programs called Florida's Critical Teacher Shortage Program (FCTSP). The program targets teachers working in high-need areas including rural schools. Feng and Sass (2017) explained that the FCTSP may a teacher's loan debt may be paid up to \$10,000. They added that the program reduced the attrition rates for teachers serving in middle school by 10.4% and those in high school by 8.9%.

Lastly, policy makers in U.S. have put some efforts such as incentive pay to address inequitable teacher distribution (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003). Incentive pays may have a positive impact on the supply of quality teachers (Hanushek & Pace, 1995; Pogodzinski, 2000). However, Loeb et al. (2005) contended that teachers serving in low-income schools such as those in rural areas usually receive low incentive pay. This issue may cause teachers to quit their jobs (Hanushek et al. 1999; Theobald & Gritz, 1996).

Despite the laws and regulations, more and more qualified teachers in U.S. prefer working at schools with economically advantaged and higher achieving students (Luschei & Carnoy, 2010). This situation clearly shows that rural schools are out of the reach of the quality teachers. In this case, it is important to inform teacher candidates about both the challenges and benefits of teaching at rural schools. They need to know that rural communities are mainly small, have a caring atmosphere with committed (Lester, 2001) and supportive (Wildy & Clarke, 2005) school personnel. When the teacher candidates are well-informed about the conditions including the challenges of the rural schools and environments, they may clear away their prejudices about such settings and be able to make healthier decisions.

Challenges Existing in Rural Schools

Teacher turnover has been a major problem for rural school districts. The annual estimates for teacher turnover is about %9. Monk (2007) explained that even though some teachers prefer working in rural areas for their entire teaching careers, the others are not inclined to do so. Several challenges related to rural schools include teacher shortages in core courses, lack of quality teachers, and inexperienced novice teachers (Pegg, 2007).

In both urban and rural schools, mathematics, science, and technology are the areas where the shortages are deeply felt (Monk, 2007). However, the shortage in core courses

has been a vital one for rural districts as they are not able to attract and retain teachers in those areas compared to urban districts. Ingersoll and Perda (2009) stressed that filling positions in shortage areas may be four times more difficult to fill in compared to areas such as Social studies or English. Some rural districts hire uncertified or unqualified teachers for core courses as it is extremely hard for some of the districts to hire quality teachers in those areas. This situation creates problems such questioning the accountability of rural schools by student families and policy makers (Dunning, 1993). The numbers of unqualified teachers teaching core courses are on the rise even in urban schools. Considering teacher shortage in such core courses being prevalent even in urban schools denotes the unimaginable heaviness of this issue in rural schools (Ingersoll & Perda, 2009).

Rural schools have experienced quite big challenges to attract quality teachers as a second challenging situation after teacher shortages in core courses. Due to reasons such as low pay, difficult environment, lack of technology and teaching materials, and small settings teachers do not prefer to work at rural regions (Imazeki, 2005). Generally, quality teachers are aware of the fact that they are on demand and that they look in for better teaching options. They prefer schools, which are economically advantageous and have high achieving students (Feng & Sass, 2018; Hanushek et al., 1999). In addition, they avoid serving at schools far from urban settings, with low achieving populations and having students with attitudinal problems (Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002). The lack of quality teachers in rural schools results in minimal preparation time resulting in low academic achievement of the students (Boe, Cook, & Sunderland, 2008).

The last major challenge for rural schools includes having high numbers of inexperienced novice teachers. Due to high attrition rates in rural areas, the schools in such districts are mainly staffed with novice teachers (Murphy & Angelski, 1997). According to NCES (2009) reports, teachers in rural districts are more likely to be younger and inexperienced compared to those in cities. It would be really difficult to make educational innovations with inexperienced novice teachers due to closed mindsets and traditional ways of thinking of the community members (Clarke & Stevens, 2009; Nolan, 1998). These deleterious impacts are more visible when rural schools have difficulty in filling teaching vacancies (NCES 2009). The novice teachers may be consisted of those, who are underprepared and uncomfortable with teaching any subjects yet. This situation creates a dire result as student achievement continue suffering in rural districts. Therefore, school leaders in rural districts need to come up with effective ways to select the novice teachers for the teaching positions.

The recruitment of novice teachers may be problematic if these teachers are not well-informed about the possible challenges and benefits of teaching at rural schools. Having said that, according to Murphy and Angelski (1997), the factors affecting the attrition and retention of rural school teachers include but are not limited to life in rural community, relationship with school administration, and preparation time.

Some of the other issues novice teachers might experience in rural settings include simple life style and having little privacy (Barley, 2009). Lowery and Pace (2001) stated that novice teachers select serving locations based on criteria that may be beneficial for their own good. In that sense, the some of them consider geographic proximity and prefer working in areas that they are familiar with or where they grow up. Lankford et al (2002) emphasized that novice teachers may only prefer high performing schools, which are available mainly in urban school districts.

As teachers continue insisting to work in or closer to their residential locations, there may be a problem in terms of the distribution of qualified teachers, meaning that they may lean towards serving at higher performing schools and not to consider serving at in-need schools such as rural schools located in other parts of the town or city. To prevent this problem, the state of Wisconsin have employed a program called the Rural School Teacher Talent Commission Grant (RSTTC). The program is designed to have students doing their student teaching and practicum in rural schools.

The Rural School Teacher Talent Commission Grant

In this research, the perceptions of the teacher candidates, who were supported by the Rural School Teacher Talent Commission Grant (RSTTC) in Wisconsin were examined. The RSTTC began in Spring 2018 with the intention to attract undergraduate education students to rural districts throughout the state of Wisconsin. The grant was created due to a low supply and high demand for teachers in rural Wisconsin. Prior to this grant, the network for colleges and universities was much smaller to place students in districts. Typically, student teachers were placed in local school districts that were close to the college/university campus. Therefore, students rarely had a rural experience and never experienced the benefits of working in a rural district. This grant allows partners to form with rural districts, which is an added opportunity for the student, college/university, and rural school district. The RSTTC manages the barrier of access and expenses. Incentives include grant dollars distributed to student teachers and practicum students who serve in a rural district. The stipends help cover the costs associated with a rural district placement such as mileage/gas. This grant was provided as CESA 8 partnered with a local legislator, State Representative, and Chief of Staff in Wisconsin. The selection of students who receive grant dollars is wide open. Any Wisconsin college/university undergraduate education student working in a rural district receives a stipend for Spring and Fall 2018, and Spring 2019.

Certain laws including No Child Left Behind Act (2001) require the existence of qualified teachers in each classroom. This requirement is not only for the schools in urban settings but also for those in rural settings. It is clear that stakeholders take certain initiatives to find and recruit more teachers for rural regions. However, literature based on such issue seems lacking as more research needs to be conducted on the matter. There is a need for research on school administrators and novice teachers at rural regions (Barley 2009; Munsch & Boylan,

2008). The current research aims to add more in literature by focusing on students in both practicum and student teaching programs. The study includes the following research questions:

1. How do aspiring teachers perceive the challenges and advantages of teaching at rural settings?
2. How do professional experiences in rural context shape teachers' interests?

METHODS

Research Design

The main purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions of teacher candidates in practicum and student teaching about rural school teaching. In the study, the rural schools are considered as the central phenomenon. Therefore, a phenomenological approach was employed to focus on the commonality of a lived experience within teacher candidates in both practicum and student teaching programs.

Basically, a phenomenological research is conducted to investigate the lived experiences associated with a certain phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). Such experiences may be related to a person or a group. A phenomenological approach tends to reduce an individual's experience into the universal feature (Van Manen, 1990). It is crucial for the researchers to diminish the ideas of prejudices while conducting a phenomenological research (Husserl, 1931). The perception of a phenomenon obtained through lived experiences should be considered as something new (Moustakas, 1994). For instance, in this study, the main goal includes understanding how teacher candidates understand rural schools as a concept and how they are able to make sense of such schools. In line with this, the current study was designed as a phenomenological qualitative study.

Setting

The participants of this qualitative study included 30 teacher candidates in practicum and 30 teacher candidates in student teaching supported by the Cooperative Educational Service Agency 8 (CESA 8) in the state of Wisconsin, USA. All students were also the participants of the RSTTC. Among the participants in practicum, 86.6% were females and 93.3% were White. As for the participants in student teaching, all of them were White and 93.3% were females.

Data Collection

There are 12 CESAs in Wisconsin. The data collection took place in CESA 8. It is a service agency and includes 27 school districts in Northeastern Wisconsin. CESA 8 provides services, resources, and programs for all these school districts. The data was collected from the participants through interview forms provided by CESA 8. Field experts such as CESA coordinators and university faculty provided feedbacks for the internal validity of the interview form before it was used for data collection.

Data Analysis

Content analysis method was used to analyze the qualitative

data. This method was employed to be able to interpret specific concepts and themes related to research content (Yildirim & Simsek, 2013). As soon as the data were collected from the participants, they were organized as in codes and then themes. After the draft theme was created, accordingly the codes were re-arranged. Lastly, the final main themes were put as in dimensions along with their frequencies in the tables.

Credibility

In the study, before using data collection form, for the validity of such purpose, two subject matter experts in the field were consulted for their opinions and then, the form was prepared as in its final format. For the reliability of the current research, the researchers separately examined the texts to express their views. Then, they decoded and grouped the texts under the main themes commonly developed by the researchers. Independent analysis of the texts are considered as an effective approach for the conclusiveness of qualitative study (Creswell, 2012).

The themes created in the current study were based on an approach developed by Johnston (1995). The approach basically includes creating themes based on the grouped views of the researchers in the study. In the qualitative studies the consensus between the experts in the field must be taken under consideration. With that in mind, Miles and Huberman (2015) contend that for the reliability of the study, this consensus between the experts must be at least 70% or above. For the current study, the mentioned consensus was found as 85%, which indicates that the reliability was established. In addition, direct quotations also enhance the validity and reliability of the study (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). Therefore, the findings of this study was supported by direct quotations.

FINDINGS

This part of the study includes answers obtained from the participants in practicum and student teaching. The answers provided from teacher candidates were coded and explained in the fashion of themes and frequencies in order to outline the experiences obtained from practicum and student teaching based on their importance.

Findings from Practicum

The findings from the practicum experience of teacher candidates were based on the answers about advantages and challenges of teaching in a rural community and how the practicum experience changed the way they see rural education. Abbreviations were used for the quotations provided by teacher candidates in practicum (e.g., P-12 was used for student number 12 in practicum). In Table 1, the frequency values for the advantages of living and teaching in rural community are given. These advantages were examined within five dimensions: Teacher (f = 20), students (f = 11), staff/faculty (f = 8), community (f = 14), and school/classroom (f = 13).

According to Table 1, the advantages of living and teaching in rural community were examined based on the explanations of

teacher candidates in practicum. Practicum students suggests that working in rural communities may be beneficial for the teachers. Agreeing with this, one of the participants states the advantages of teaching in rural schools:

I think the advantage of teaching in a rural community is that there is a smaller student body, which can help with creating deeper and more meaningful connections with students due to the more one on one time (P-8).

The participant underlines the effect of small classrooms on the teachers' connections with students and states that students in such classrooms may establish deeper understanding of the concepts and make connections with real-life events. Another student in practicum supports this idea:

A positive for rural teaching is being able to get to know your students on a personal basis. The classes may be a little smaller and students can come to the teacher for anything and the teacher gets to know his/her students well (P-13).

The practicum student asserts that in smaller classrooms, students feel free to approach to their teachers for help on anything. This situation allows teachers to know their students on individual level. Similarly, another student explains the advantage of rural teaching:

An advantage is to be able to work with all the students. You really know the students well and get to see where they are in life. Everyone works together and is team, and it's great to

Table 1: Answers Given on the Question: What Do You Foresee as Being the Advantages of Living and Teaching in Rural Community?

Main Themes	Unit of Meaning
1. Teacher	1.1. Knowing students on personal level (f=12)
	1.2. Being close to the community (f=4)
	1.3. More one-on-one time (f=3)
	1.4. Challenge students to think new ways (f=1)
2. Students	2.1. Focused more on learning (f=4)
	2.2. Share their living experiences (f=2)
	2.3. Less populated (f=2)
	2.4. Knowing each other well (f=2)
	2.5. Large variety (f=1)
3. Staff/faculty	3.1. Close to each other (f=5)
	3.2. Positive climate (f=3)
4. Community	4.1. Smaller (f=5)
	4.2. Tight knit (f=5)
	4.3. Quiet (f=2)
	4.4. Slower paced (f=2)
5. School/classroom	5.1. Smaller class size (f=8)
	5.2. Welcoming (f=2)
	5.3. Having your voice heard (f=2)
	5.4. Sufficient technology (f=1)

see other people have your back. It's will be great to see the student's growth throughout the year and all they work for (P-23).

The answers of teacher candidates were examined based on the challenges that they experienced during their practicum. The frequency values of such answers are provided in Table 2. Based on the content analysis, the challenges were examined in five dimensions: Teacher (f = 6), students (f = 6), staff/faculty (f = 3), community (f = 11), and school/classroom (f = 16).

Table 2: Answers Given on the Question: What Do You Foresee as Being the Challenges of Living and Teaching in a Rural Community?

Main Themes	Unit of Meaning
1. Teacher	1.1. Low salary (f=2)
	1.2. Having to know a lot of students (f=2)
	1.3. Hard to relate students (f=2)
2. Students	2.1. Lack of diversity (f=2)
	2.2. Having family issues (f=2)
	2.3. Different views from teachers (f=1)
	2.4. Doing much work on farms (f=1)
3. Staff/faculty	3.1. Traditional viewpoints (f=2)
	3.2. Not having enough support (f=1)
4. Community	4.1. Close knit (f=4)
	4.3. Closed mindsets (f=3)
	4.5. Inadequate places for socialization (f=2)
	4.6. Challenging geography (f=1)
5. School/classroom	5.1. Less advanced technology (f=4)
	5.2. Being away from amenities (f=4)
	5.3. Little diversity (f=3)
	5.4. Lack of innovations (f=2)
	5.5. Lack of resources (f=2)
	5.6. Racism (f=1)

Table 2 indicates how the teacher candidates in practicum expressed the challenges that they experienced during their practicum. Students in practicum states that teaching in rural community may be challenging for some teachers. Supporting this approach, a participant asserts that the apparent challenge would in association with students living in and working at farms:

Some of the challenges of living and teaching in a rural community is that many of the students live on farms. During harvesting time and planting time, the parents are very busy working on the farms. This means that there is a lack of attention on the kids, which they are not used to. We have seen this affect with a couple of our students. Another is that the students are tired as they wake up early and work on the farm before school starts (P-19).

As the answer of the participant indicates, she has the opinion that students living on the farms may be tired and sleepy while

being in the school for learning. Similarly, another practicum student suggests that along with challenging living conditions of the students in rural community, schools may experience difficulty in reaching adequate funding:

Some of the challenges would be the underfunding. Rural schools don't have a lot of funding, and it is difficult to have a strong school and building with not a lot of money. Another challenge would be the geography of where the school would be located. The salary is also a challenge because it might not be enough for some teachers to live off of (P-23).

Next, the participants also agree that the disadvantages of rural community would include knowing everyone and therefore, they would have difficulty to have enough privacy. A participant explains this issue:

I don't like small town living. Too much gossip and everyone knows everything about each other. There is very little privacy. Location wise, a rural community does not have many amenities and are not close enough to actual busy civilization. If something bad were to happen, it would take a while for emergency responders to get there (P-24).

The practicum experiences of teacher candidates were examined based on how their practicum experience changed the way they see rural education. In Table 3, the frequency values for such answers are given. The content analysis results showed that there were five dimensions of how teacher candidates' practicum experience changed the way they see rural education: Teacher (f = 14), students (f = 3), staff/faculty (f = 8), community (f = 3), and school/classroom (f = 14).

Based on the answers given on Table 3, how the practicum experience of teacher candidates changed the way they see rural education was examined. A student in practicum says that rural schools have a positive climate and this idea changes her views about rural schools:

This school has been one of the most positive and tight-knit schools I have ever visited. I now see rural schools as a positive community that works extra hard to make sure school is a positive experience these students can look forward to every day (P-2).

The participant emphasize that schools in rural regions have positive atmosphere and work harder for their students. Having similar thoughts about rural schools, a participant claims that these schools care for students:

I have never really known a lot about it, but everyone is so close and the energy is helpful and caring (P-5).

The participant's answer suggests that the caring approach of the school in rural community changes her perceptions about such school. Another participant explains how having practicum experience in a rural school changes her views:

This experience has erased by previous stereotypes about rural education. Before this experience, I was expecting to be placed in a run-down school in the middle of nowhere with impoverished students. However, Wrightstown is far from that

Table 3: Answers Given on the Question: In What Ways Has Your Practicum Experience *Changed the Way You See Rural Education?*

Main Themes	Unit of Meaning
1. Teacher	1.1. No change in my views (f=5) 1.2. Increased willingness towards rural schools (f=3) 1.3. Destroyed stereotypes (f=3) 1.4. More open to teaching (f=1) 1.5. Realizing the diversity among students (f=1) 1.6. Need in using same materials over and over (f=1)
2. Students	2.1. Bright students (f=2) 2.2. All students having similar needs (f=1)
3. Staff/faculty	3.1. Caring (f=4) 3.2. Close relationships (f=2) 3.3. Different ways of disciplining students (f=1) 3.4. Hardworking (f=1)
4. Community	4.1. Positive (f=2) 4.2. Having unique needs (f=1)
5. School/classroom	5.1. Not so different than urban schools (f=5) 5.2. Availability and use of technology (f=3) 5.3. Opportunities (f=2) 5.4. Underfunded (f=2) 5.5. Different setting (f=2)

image. On the contrary, it is a beautiful school full of bright students and caring faculty. I am so grateful for this opportunity and hope I can work in a district like this one someday (P-18).

Findings from Student Teaching

The findings from the student teaching experience of teacher candidates were based on the answers about advantages and challenges of teaching in a rural community and how the student teaching experience changed the way they see rural education. Abbreviations were used for the quotations provided by teacher candidates in student teaching (e.g., ST-15 was used for student number 15 in student teaching). The frequency values for the advantages of living and teaching in rural community are given in Table 4. The advantages were examined within five dimensions: Teacher (f = 20), students (f = 2), staff/faculty (f = 6), community (f = 25), and school/classroom (f = 5).

Tables from Student Teaching

According to Table 4, the advantages of living and teaching in rural community were examined based on the answers of the students in student teaching. A student in student teaching program asserts how community support was involved in rural teaching:

Table 4: Answers Given on the Question: What Do You Foresee as being the *Advantages* of Living and Teaching in Rural Community?

Main Themes	Unit of Meaning
1. Teacher	1.1. Getting to know students, families, and staff (f=7) 1.2. Building stronger relationships (f=7) 1.3. Being involved (f=5) 1.4. Having a different perspective (f=1)
2. Students	2.1. A lot of respect (f=1) 2.2. Better behaviours (f=1)
3. Staff/faculty	3.1. Strong relationships (f=3) 3.2. Looking out for one another (f=3)
4. Community	4.1. Close-knit ties (f=11) 4.2. Supportive (f=11) 4.3. Laid back (f=1) 4.4. Lower crime rates (f=1) 4.5. Less poverty (f=1)
5. School/classroom	5.1. Providing opportunities (f=2) 5.2. Small class (f=2) 5.3. Connections with local businesses (f=1)

From my experience, the advantages of working in a rural community come from the experience the students bring into the classroom along with the community support you receive from the area. The community feels more like a family and everyone seems to know everyone (ST-6).

As the answer of the student in student teaching program indicates, the community support of the rural settings make a person feel like home. Similarly, another student stresses the importance of close-knit environment:

The involvement you have at the school can be used in the community. Being in the area and understanding what your students do before and after school could better educate teachers of why they behave a certain way in the classroom. Having that close-knit feeling, in and out of school, can help ease the stress away of driving for 50+ miles a day and you can be involved in more activities without having to check the weather or the time. You also have to think on your feet more with adapting lessons and seeing things from a different perspective (ST-13).

The participant underlines the advantage of teaching in a rural school as the supportive environment of the community ease off the stress of the teachers. The participant also adds that working in rural school may help you think and adapt from different perspectives. A different participant mentions that rural schools have more opportunities:

More opportunity for coaching and being involved. There are also typically more opportunities to expand programs and advance one on one relationships and content understanding with students (ST-21).

The answers of teacher candidates were examined based on the challenges that they experienced during their student teaching. The frequency values of their answers are provided in Table 5. Based on the content analysis, the challenges were examined in four dimensions: Teacher (f = 9), students (f = 4), community (f = 10), and school/classroom (f = 26).

Table 5: Answers Given on the Question: What Do You Foresee as Being the *Challenges* of Living and Teaching in a Rural Community?

Main Themes	Unit of Meaning
1. Teacher	1.1. Needing additional time (f=3)
	1.2. Running into similar faces most times (f=2)
	1.3. Difficult to gain trust (f=1)
	1.4. Having to teach multiple classes (f=1)
	1.5. Not meeting the needs of all students (f=1)
	1.6. The commute (f=1)
2. Students	2.1. Reluctant to learn new ideas (f=2)
	2.2. Coming from different backgrounds (f=1)
	2.3. Lack of support from parents (f=1)
3. Community	3.1. Gossiping (f=3)
	3.2. Low income families (f=2)
	3.3. Lack of opportunities (f=2)
	3.4. More drama (f=2)
	3.5. Stereotyping (f=1)
4. School/ classroom	4.1. Limited technology and other resources (f=14)
	4.2. Less funding (f=7)
	4.3. Resisting to the change (f=4)
	4.4. Shortage of specialists (f=1)

Table 5 indicates how the student teachers emphasized their feelings on the on the challenges that they experienced in rural communities. One challenge may be related to the lack of experienced teachers in core courses. A participant in student teaching program expresses her thoughts that rural schools experience teacher shortage:

Teachers typically need to teach multiple different classes (biology, physics, and chemistry) at the high school level due to teacher shortages. This is difficult because it requires lots of additional prep time for teachers (ST-2).

The participant explains that because of teacher shortages in certain courses, a teacher may have to teach more than one course at different levels. This situation creates obstacles as they need to spend a lot of time for the preparation of their classes. Along with this issue in rural schools, another participant points out that these schools do not have enough technology:

I think when talking about a rural school, funding for the school will quite often be a challenge. This hurts as far as technology is concerned (ST-29).

The participant implies that rural schools receive less funding compared to urban schools, and this situation mainly affects the technological materials of the rural schools. With parallel thoughts, a student in student teaching program expresses the shortages in teaching supplies:

The challenges of living and teaching in a rural community is that the community will talk and everything will be easily known which can be good and bad. Also, I think resources will be more difficult to find and teachers will have to supply supplies and deeply think about projects before they are given (ST-30).

In table 6, the student teaching experiences of teacher candidates were examined based on how such experience changed the way they see rural education. The table includes the frequency values for the answers provided through content analysis. According to the analysis, teacher candidates' student teaching experience changed the way they see rural education within five dimensions: Teacher (f = 17), students (f = 5), staff/faculty (f = 1), community (f = 3), and school/classroom (f = 5).

Based on the answers provided on Table 6, the student teaching experiences were examined based on how such experience changed the way student teachers see rural education. One of the participants mentions that less tense environment of the rural school affects her perceptions:

I prefer the atmosphere of a small rural town and school. I grew up in the country all my life and prefer to stay in a rural area and hope to find a job in a small, rural school district. I have noticed that the students of smaller schools are a little less tense than those who come from bigger cities (ST-4).

The participant suggests that growing up at a place similar to rural community makes me prefer working in such places as they are small and less stressful. Another participant explains that even though rural areas have some challenges for teachers, I still prefer working there:

Rural schools present some challenges, such as distance and, in some cases, lack of funding (which will trickle down into lack of resources). However, I still prefer rural schools because of the sense of community that surrounds them (ST-6).

Based on the answer of the participant, the schools in rural regions experience lack of funding. However, this situation does not have an inverse impact on her perceptions. One of the other participants stresses that being familiar with the rural communities may affect someone to choose working there:

I grew up in a rural community and enjoy the community atmosphere it brings within a school. Students move through the grades with the same students and really get to know each other and help each other (ST-12).

As the answer of the participant, it would be easier to work at places that we are familiar with. With the similar thoughts,

Table 6: Answers Given on the Question: In What Ways Has Your Student Teaching Experience Changed *the Way You See Rural Education*?

Main Themes	Unit of Meaning
1. Teacher	1.1. Having a better outlook (f=8) 1.2. No change in views (f=7) 1.3. Seeing differences between rural and non-rural schools (f=1) 1.4. Self-improving opportunities (f=1)
2. Students	2.1. Ambitious and hardworking students (f=2) 2.2. Better relationships with teachers (f=2) 2.3. Different student backgrounds (f=1)
3. Staff/faculty	3.1. Inspiring staff (f=1)
4. Community	4.1. Being positive (f=2) 4.2. Tightness (f=1)
5. School/classroom	5.1. Being strong (f=1) 5.2. Lack of technology (f=1) 5.3. Not so different than urban schools (f=1) 5.4. No stereotyping (f=1) 5.5. Availability and use of technology (f=1)

another participant agrees with the convenience of working at community where she grew up:

Growing up in a rural school district, I am used to the teaching styles and academic tools/resources that are used. Also, I appreciate the smaller class sizes where you can connect with your students on a more personal level and create more positive relationships (ST-22).

DISCUSSION and CONCLUSION

This qualitative study explored the perceptions of university students in Wisconsin about the advantages and challenges of teaching in a rural community and how such experiences changed their views about rural teaching. These students were in practicum and student teaching programs. Firstly, the findings are presented based on the perceptions of the students in practicum about the advantages and challenges of rural schooling, and how the practicum experience shifts their views about those schools. Secondly, the perceptions of the students in student teaching program are explained based on the advantages and challenges of rural schooling, and how the student teaching experience changes their views about such schools.

Based on the perceptions of the students in practicum, there are several advantages related with rural teaching. The students explained that the rural schools have advantages such

as being in a small and quiet community, having helpful staff, knowing students on personal level, and focused learners. These advantages of teaching at rural schools can be inferred from Lester (2001) that the staff at these schools are highly committed for their students and the school. Confirming this, Wildy and Clarke (2005) stated that rural school generally experience similar situations in terms of being small and having supportive staff. This important as also found in this study, the smaller student body in these schools may help teachers to spend more time with the students and in return, students may establish deeper understanding of the topics and relate them to the real world.

The participants of the practicum said that teaching in rural schools may be challenging for some teachers as well. They imply that one of the main challenge for teachers would be having lower salary compared to those teaching in urban schools. This overlaps with the study of Clotfelter et al. (2008). Accordingly, Hendricks (2014) states that salary differences among teachers may create problems for teacher distribution in high-need areas. The participants of the study also indicated the challenges that the school staff in rural community tend to employ traditional teaching methods and that those schools do not have enough technological materials. Besides being underfunded, there is also lack of student diversity as most of the students in such schools are mainly white. These may be the reasons why teachers prefer urban schools over rural schools. Similarly, Imazeki (2005) contends that due low pay, lack of technology and teaching materials teachers prefer urban schools. Because higher salary and enough resources may attract these teachers (Falch, 2011). Therefore, leaders in education need to come up with viable solutions as lack of teaching resources have an impact on student achievement (Chiu & Khoo, 2005).

In the study, how the practicum experience of the students changed their perceptions about rural schools was examined. The findings showed that the practicum experience did make change on their perceptions about rural teaching. Some of the factors changing their perceptions include positive climate of the community and caring and hardworking school staff. Some of the students also stressed that rural schools were no different from urban schools and in that sense, they did not have any more stereotypes for such schools. The existence of quality and hardworking staff is crucial because they can make substantial changes in students' life. Lack of such school staff may cause big problems in rural schools. In line with this, Pegg (2007) agreed that schools in smaller communities may be vulnerable in terms of providing effective teaching when they do not have quality teachers. Because the members of the community start questioning the success of the school when most of the students fail to learn. In parallel with this, Dunning (1993) explain that there are growing demands from the community members and policy makers regarding accountability of rural schools.

In this study, the perceptions of the students in student teaching program are also explained according to the advantages and challenges of rural schools, and how such

experience changes their views about those schools. First, the students emphasized that it would advantageous to teach in rural schools. They said that the advantages of teaching at these schools include building stronger relationships with the students and their families, and having close-knit relationships with the community members, which are very supportive. Based on these assumptions, Weston (2000) also indicates the staff in rural schools are helpful and supportive as they bring about change and improvement for the community. These findings overlap with the findings of Southworth (2004) that the existence of supportive teachers in rural schools affect the quality of teaching, and provide students with powerful opportunities.

The students in student teaching program suggested that teaching at rural community may be challenging for some teachers. The findings showed that the challenges of teaching a rural school were needing more time to prepare, gossiping among the members of the community, limited technology, closed mindsets, and lack of resources. It is important to indicate that teachers prefer working at economically advantageous schools (Feng & Sass, 2018; Hanushek et al., 1999). Therefore, school leaders need to make sure that rural schools have a fair share of quality teachers and teaching resources. The students expressed that less funding would create hurdles for getting enough technology and other resources for rural schools. It may be inferred from Boe et al. (2008) that teachers do not prefer working in rural schools that have such problems and far away from the urban settings. In addition, in long run, it does not seem that the funding problems at rural schools would easily be addressed (Griffin & McGuire, 2015).

Based on the findings, how the student teaching experience of the students changed their perceptions about rural schooling was examined. Students explained that this experience allowed them to clearly see the difference between urban schools and rural schools. They implied that such experience did not negatively affect their perceptions about rural education. Some of the factors that positively affected their views included the positive behaviours of the school staff and community. The students also added that smaller class sizes help teachers to establish stronger relationships with their students. The positive behaviours of the school staff is important especially when it comes to initiate new educational praxis different than the traditional ones. Because sometimes, due to the closed mindsets of people in small communities, it may be difficult to make any changes. Having similar ideas, Nolan (1998) asserts that it may harder for new teachers to make changes in the minds of the students and community members because they might be uncondusive to sustainable reforms regarding educational teachings. That is why educational leaders should find effective solutions in finding quality teachers, who can understand the community well, and accordingly make reforms in education (Clarke & Stevens, 2009).

As the result of overall findings, this study suggested that the perceptions of students in both practicum and student teaching program seem to be alike regarding the advantages

and challenges of rural schooling, and how such experiences change their perceptions towards those schools. According to the students in both programs, the major challenges in rural schools were low salary, lack of resources and quality teachers, closed mindsets, and traditional teaching approaches. All of these factors may negatively affect the educational outcomes of the schools in rural community. Resolving these issues must be a top priority for school leaders and policy makers.

Based on the literature, many challenges exist for students and staff in rural schools. The students attending rural schools seem to obtain lower educational outcomes compared to their peers in urban schools (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2000). The students in rural schools are less likely to finish secondary school (Lamb, Walstab, Teese, Vickers, & Rumberger, 2004) and attend university (James, 2001). Lack of quality teachers and resources in such schools result in poorer performance on achievement tests (Chiu & Khoo, 2005; OECD, 2005; Williams, 2005).

In any case, to address the problems in rural educational settings, advocate of rural education and reformers of national education should engage in communication to utilize a fair distribution of teacher labour force and teaching resources for rural schools (Akiba et al., 2007; Darling-Hammond & Ball, 1997). They should also help rural teachers and students achieve learning objectives set by states. The recruitment of teachers should allow quality teachers to teach in rural settings as well. That way, students would be able to develop higher order skills in real-life situations by tackling challenges existing in the rural community. Students with such critical skills would not only select the life they want but also make substantial contributions to the community and make informed decisions.

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