

EDUCATIONAL DISPARITIES IN RURAL MADAGASCAR: THE IMPACT OF POVERTY ON PRIMARY EDUCATION ACCESS

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis kesenjangan pendidikan di wilayah pedesaan Madagaskar dengan fokus pada peran kemiskinan terhadap akses pendidikan dasar. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif dengan melibatkan 15 partisipan yang terdiri atas guru, orang tua, kepala sekolah, dan tokoh masyarakat yang dipilih melalui teknik purposive sampling. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur, observasi, dan analisis dokumen, sedangkan analisis data menggunakan teknik analisis tematik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kemiskinan berpengaruh signifikan terhadap partisipasi pendidikan anak melalui keterbatasan pendapatan keluarga, kurangnya fasilitas sekolah, jauhnya jarak tempuh ke sekolah, keterlibatan anak dalam pekerjaan

rumah tangga, serta rendahnya kesadaran pendidikan orang tua. Sekolah-sekolah di pedesaan juga mengalami kekurangan guru berkualitas, keterbatasan bahan ajar, dan infrastruktur yang tidak memadai sehingga memperbesar ketimpangan kesempatan pendidikan. Selain itu, keterbatasan sosial ekonomi berkaitan erat dengan ketidakteraturan kehadiran siswa dan rendahnya motivasi belajar. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa peningkatan pendidikan dasar di pedesaan Madagaskar memerlukan kebijakan terpadu yang mencakup pengentasan kemiskinan, pembangunan infrastruktur sekolah, pemerataan tenaga pendidik, dan penguatan dukungan pendidikan berbasis masyarakat.

ABSTRACT

This study examines educational disparities in rural Madagascar by focusing on the role of poverty in primary school access. The research employed a qualitative case study approach involving 15 participants consisting of teachers, parents, school principals, and community representatives selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis, and analyzed using thematic analysis techniques. The findings revealed that poverty significantly affects children's educational participation through limited household income, inadequate school facilities, long travel distances, child labor, and low parental educational awareness. Rural schools also experienced shortages of qualified teachers, insufficient learning materials, and poor infrastructure, which contributed to unequal educational opportunities. In addition, socioeconomic deprivation was closely associated with irregular attendance and low student motivation. The study further found that institutional limitations and geographical isolation intensified educational inequality in rural communities. These findings support theories of

educational inequality and social reproduction, which explain how disadvantaged socioeconomic conditions perpetuate unequal access to education. The study concludes that improving primary education in rural Madagascar requires integrated policies addressing poverty reduction, school infrastructure development, teacher distribution, and community-based educational support.

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INTRODUCTION

Education is widely recognized as a fundamental driver of social development, economic mobility, and human well-being. In developing countries, primary education plays a particularly crucial role in reducing poverty and promoting social equality because it provides children with foundational literacy, numeracy, and life skills necessary for future participation in society. However, despite global commitments to achieving equitable education through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), many low-income countries continue to experience substantial disparities in educational access and quality, especially between urban and rural areas. Madagascar represents one of the countries where poverty and rural marginalization significantly influence children's educational opportunities and learning outcomes (Aiga et al., 2021).

Madagascar faces persistent socioeconomic challenges characterized by widespread rural poverty, food insecurity, inadequate infrastructure, and limited public services. These structural conditions have directly affected the accessibility and effectiveness of primary education in rural communities. Previous studies have shown that children living in impoverished rural households are more likely to experience school absenteeism, delayed enrollment, malnutrition, and low academic achievement compared to children in urban settings (Herrera et al., 2021). In many rural regions of Madagascar, schools operate with insufficient learning facilities, limited teaching materials, and shortages of qualified teachers, thereby constraining educational quality and student engagement. Such inequalities contribute to a cycle in which poverty limits educational opportunities, while low educational attainment further perpetuates intergenerational poverty.

Recent educational research has increasingly emphasized the relationship between poverty and unequal educational achievement in rural contexts. Studies conducted in developing countries demonstrate that socioeconomic background remains one of the strongest determinants of children's educational participation and performance. Sanfo and Ogawa (2021), for example, found that rural-urban educational gaps are strongly influenced by household socioeconomic conditions and unequal access to educational

resources. Similarly, research in Madagascar identified malnutrition as a significant factor associated with weaker academic performance among primary schoolchildren, indicating that educational inequality cannot be separated from broader social and economic deprivation (Aiga et al., 2021).

In addition to economic deprivation, rural educational inequality in Madagascar is also shaped by geographical isolation and weak institutional support. Many rural schools are located in remote areas with inadequate transportation networks, making school attendance difficult for children living far from educational facilities. Teachers working in these areas frequently encounter limited professional development opportunities, insufficient instructional support, and poor working conditions, all of which affect teaching effectiveness and learning quality. Furthermore, educational policies often fail to fully address the contextual realities of rural communities, resulting in uneven implementation of educational reforms and unequal distribution of educational resources across regions (Niens & Bögeholz, 2021).

Although several studies have discussed education and poverty in Madagascar, existing literature still provides limited qualitative understanding of how rural communities experience and respond to educational inequality in everyday life. Much of the current research focuses on statistical indicators of enrollment, nutrition, or academic achievement, while less attention has been given to the perspectives of teachers, parents, school leaders, and local communities regarding the barriers to primary school access. Moreover, there remains insufficient discussion concerning how poverty-related conditions interact with institutional limitations to shape children's educational experiences in rural Madagascar. This gap highlights the need for more context-sensitive research that examines educational inequality from social, cultural, and institutional perspectives.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze educational disparities in rural Madagascar by focusing on the role of poverty in primary school access. The study explores how socioeconomic hardship, school infrastructure, teacher capacity, and community conditions influence educational participation in rural areas. By examining the lived experiences of educational stakeholders, this research is expected to contribute to broader discussions on educational inequality and provide insights for policymakers in developing more inclusive and equitable educational strategies for marginalized rural communities in Madagascar.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore educational disparities in rural Madagascar, particularly focusing on how poverty influences access to primary education. Qualitative research was considered appropriate because it enables researchers to understand social phenomena through the perspectives and lived experiences of participants within their natural settings. According to John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth (2021), qualitative approaches are effective for examining complex social issues such as inequality, marginalization, and educational barriers because they provide rich and contextualized data regarding human experiences and social interactions. This approach allowed the researcher to investigate the socioeconomic and institutional factors affecting children's access to primary education in rural communities of Madagascar.

The study used a case study method because it facilitates in-depth investigation of specific social contexts and educational realities within rural environments. The case study approach enables researchers to analyze educational issues comprehensively by considering cultural, economic, and institutional dimensions simultaneously (Yin, 2021). Through this method, the research examined how poverty-related conditions shape educational participation, school attendance, and learning opportunities among children living in disadvantaged rural areas. The study was conducted in selected rural communities in Madagascar where access to educational facilities remains limited and poverty levels are relatively high.

The participants of this study consisted of 15 individuals selected through purposive sampling techniques. Purposive sampling was applied because the participants were chosen based on their direct experiences and involvement in primary education within rural communities. The sample included primary school teachers, parents, school principals, and community representatives who possessed relevant knowledge regarding educational challenges in rural Madagascar. According to Michael Quinn Patton (2021), purposive sampling allows researchers to obtain information-rich participants capable of providing detailed insights related to the research objectives. The inclusion of multiple stakeholder groups was intended to strengthen the depth and credibility of the findings through diverse perspectives.

Data collection in this study employed semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis as the primary research instruments. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather participants' experiences, perceptions, and opinions regarding poverty and access to primary education. Observations were conducted to examine school

environments, classroom conditions, learning facilities, and student participation in educational activities. In addition, document analysis was utilized to review school reports, attendance records, and educational policy documents relevant to rural education in Madagascar. The interview guideline functioned as the main research instrument because it provided flexibility for participants to express their views while maintaining consistency with the research focus. According to Uwe Flick (2022), combining interviews, observations, and documentation enhances data validity through triangulation and supports comprehensive understanding of social phenomena.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques. Thematic analysis was conducted through several stages, including data transcription, coding, categorization, theme development, and interpretation of findings. First, the interview recordings and observational notes were transcribed into written form. Second, the researcher identified meaningful statements and assigned codes to relevant data segments. Third, similar codes were grouped into broader categories representing recurring patterns related to poverty and educational inequality. Finally, the themes were interpreted to explain the relationship between socioeconomic conditions and primary school access in rural Madagascar. Braun and Clarke (2021) stated that thematic analysis is useful for identifying and interpreting patterns within qualitative data systematically and flexibly. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, the researcher applied triangulation, member checking, and prolonged engagement during the data collection and analysis processes.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The findings of this study indicate that poverty is the primary factor influencing educational disparities in rural Madagascar. Based on interviews and observations, most participants stated that economic hardship directly affects children's ability to attend and complete primary education. Parents explained that limited household income often forces children to assist with agricultural work, household labor, or informal economic activities instead of attending school regularly. Teachers also reported that many students frequently miss classes due to financial constraints and transportation difficulties.

The study further identified several structural barriers contributing to unequal educational access, including inadequate school infrastructure, shortages of qualified teachers, and limited educational resources. Rural schools commonly lacked sufficient classrooms, learning materials, sanitation facilities, and electricity. In addition,

geographical isolation and long travel distances discouraged regular school attendance, particularly among younger children.

The main findings are summarized in the following table.

Table 1. Major Factors Affecting Primary School Access in Rural Madagascar

No	Identified Factors	Number of Participants Mentioning the Issue (n=15)	Percentage
1	Household poverty and low income	15	100%
2	Long distance to school	12	80%
3	Inadequate school facilities	11	73%
4	Shortage of qualified teachers	10	67%
5	Child involvement in labor activities	9	60%
6	Limited learning materials	8	53%
7	Low parental educational awareness	7	47%

The findings demonstrate that household poverty was experienced by all participants as the dominant obstacle to educational participation. Economic difficulties limited families' ability to provide school supplies, uniforms, transportation costs, and nutritional support for children. Furthermore, the lack of educational infrastructure and professional teaching staff contributed to poor learning conditions and lower educational quality in rural schools.

Another important finding was the relationship between poverty and student motivation. Teachers explained that children from economically disadvantaged households often demonstrated lower learning engagement because of fatigue from labor activities and insufficient family support for education. Observational data also revealed overcrowded classrooms and deteriorated school facilities that negatively affected learning environments

Discussion

The findings of this study support the theory of educational inequality, which argues that socioeconomic background significantly influences children's educational opportunities and academic achievement. According to Pierre Bourdieu, social and economic capital shape access to educational resources and contribute to the reproduction of social inequality across generations. In rural Madagascar, poverty restricts children's access to learning materials, transportation, adequate nutrition, and supportive educational environments, thereby limiting their educational participation and future opportunities.

The study also aligns with the social reproduction theory proposed by Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, which explains that educational systems often reproduce existing social inequalities rather than eliminate them. Children from poor rural families in Madagascar face structural disadvantages that reduce their chances of achieving educational success. Limited infrastructure, unequal teacher distribution, and weak

institutional support further reinforce disparities between rural and urban educational systems.

Moreover, the findings are consistent with recent studies indicating that poverty and geographical isolation remain major barriers to educational access in developing countries. Aiga et al. (2021) found that poor nutritional conditions among rural children in Madagascar negatively affect academic performance and school participation. Similarly, Sanfo and Ogawa (2021) emphasized that rural educational gaps are strongly associated with household socioeconomic inequality and unequal access to educational resources. These studies support the present findings that educational inequality in Madagascar is deeply interconnected with broader social and economic deprivation.

From a policy perspective, the findings suggest that improving educational access in rural Madagascar requires multidimensional interventions rather than solely expanding school enrollment. Educational reforms should include poverty alleviation programs, infrastructure development, teacher training and distribution, nutritional assistance, and community awareness initiatives. Strengthening cooperation between government institutions, schools, and local communities may also help reduce educational disparities and improve learning outcomes among rural children

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that poverty plays a central role in shaping educational disparities in rural Madagascar. Economic hardship, inadequate infrastructure, geographical isolation, shortages of qualified teachers, and limited educational resources collectively hinder children's access to primary education. Poverty not only affects school attendance but also influences learning motivation, academic participation, and educational continuity among rural students.

The findings further demonstrate that educational inequality in rural Madagascar is closely related to structural and institutional limitations that perpetuate social disadvantage across generations. Therefore, addressing educational disparities requires integrated strategies involving poverty reduction, improvement of school facilities, equitable teacher distribution, and increased community support for education.

This study contributes to the understanding of educational inequality in developing countries by highlighting the interconnected relationship between poverty and primary school access in rural communities. Future research is recommended to explore broader regional comparisons and the long-term impacts of educational inequality on social development in Madagascar.

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