

## **What matters for rural teachers and communities in Turkey? Educational challenges in rural education**

### **Abstract**

This research looks aims to unearth the educational challenges experienced by teachers and communities in rural Turkey. The research employs Nancy Fraser's three dimensional justice approach – distribution, recognition and participation- to frame these challenges and to argue that rural challenges goes beyond economic rationalities and concerns of infrastructure and resources. The study draws its data from 29 in-depth interviews with 20 teachers working in 16 different villages, 9 interviews with community members and two focus group interviews, one with rural dwelling women and the other with rural dwelling men. The findings point out four significant difficulties that impede community and educational development: scarcity of resources, insufficient understanding of social, cultural and economic contexts that constrain educational attempts, lack of collaboration between teacher and communities, and irrelevant education. The study concludes by scrutinising how these interact with one another marginalising or casting out rural lives.

Keywords: rural education, capabilities approach, Turkey, teacher training, community education

### **Introduction**

Across the world, the question of how to provide quality education to the youth in rural areas is an important one to address, as often many countries follow a central education system, which underestimates the realities and needs of rural areas and sparks a heavy debate in the literature. Proponents (Pansiri, 2011; Tabulawa, 2011) argue that centralised education system offers a standardised and homogenised education and enables an equitable distribution of educational resources whereas others (Marginson, 1999; Aikman, 2011) argue that such a system ignores the particularity of local context such as rural areas. So far, initiatives of EFA (Education for All) and Millennium Development Goals to increase schooling in the developing world, including Turkey measured education levels by years of schooling, and concerns regarding the quality specifically in rural areas were often underestimated (Monk, 2007; Molosiwa & Boikhutso, 2016). The studies on rural education across the world show that drop-outs to help farm or perform household work, inability to meet the costs of attendance, distance to schools, curriculum or language incompatible with local conditions, inflexible training schedules, poor school quality, believing that education is not necessary, unqualified teachers, or teaching and training methods ill-suited to rural contexts are the leading challenges in enhancing quality of education (ILO, 2011; White, 2008; Sharplin, 2010).

It is important that we address these concerns to trigger a process of rural development, as rural schools and rural education are regarded as an important tool for communities and their survival (Roberts and Downes, 2016; Schafft & Jackson, 2010; Brown & Schafft, 2011). In discussing how rural schools and education can contribute to communities and their development, the concern should go beyond economic sustainability (Cuervo, 2012; Roberts, 2015). The debate needs to shift away from discussions on economic development view that exclusively sees education in terms of human capital, a term linked with economic goals. Rural education studies (Rao & Ye, 2016; Molosiwa & Boikhutso, 2016) tend to focus on the constraints of schools, lack of resources or quantitative aspects such as population, income, academic achievement. Yet, the nature of what happens within schools and in the community is not well considered. What we need is to focus on capacity-building for cultural, social and political aspects of sustainable development, democracy and to guide the discussion and research in rural areas by underpinning how empowerment and equity can be achieved. Thus we can challenge the view that economic growth is the *only* way for development. Therefore, in this research we give teachers and rural dwellers voice with which to identify educational challenges in rural areas in order to provide guidance on what the rural education in Turkey needs. We look into teachers' practices at rural schools and communities because teachers, as the practitioners of education, have an immense power of distributing social justice beyond teaching. Our aim here is to unearth the challenges in rural education experienced both by teachers and rural communities in order to offer a bottom up approach to enhance the well-being of a community and to transform rural education in Turkey.

### **Rural Education in Turkey**

Turkey suffers from lack of balanced economic, social and educational development between urban and rural regions. Twenty-one per cent of the population in Turkey lives in rural areas (TUIK, 2013). Many rural communities are marginalized in economic, social, cultural and spatial terms (Öğdül, 2010). Most of them are agriculturally based, geographically located far away from urban areas or centres, as well as lacking cultural and infrastructural facilities such as healthcare centres, high schools and electricity and running water. The research focusing on rural development in Turkey (Bakırcı, 2007; Özensel, 2014; Can and Esengün, 2007; Keyder and Yenal, 2013) mainly looks into economical activities, development and improving infrastructure in rural areas. Particularly with the EU accession process of Turkey in 1999, some researchers shifted focus to agricultural policies in rural areas (Yılmaz, 2005; Can and Esengün, 2007). Although EU and UNICEF reports underline the importance of rural development and highlight the problems regarding the education in rural areas, Turkey's recent development goals do not tease out the role of education and the resources are mostly being allocated for infrastructure.

There is also very little research (Kızılaslan, 2012; Çakıroğlu and Çakıroğlu, 2003; Aksoy, 2008) that focuses on rural teachers and schools. These studies argue that the geographical and socioeconomic

disparities between rural and urban areas create a big gap in terms of social and economic development and access to infrastructure and welfare services. They mainly focus on educational problems in rural areas such as insufficient teaching materials, the poor physical conditions, transportation problems, little value attached to education by families and communities, or lack of pre-service or in-service teacher training in relation to rural teaching. Likewise, the limited research on rural teachers (Aksoy, 2008; Kızıllarslan, 2012) argues that teacher training does not equip teachers with the necessary professional and cultural knowledge and skills for rural education, and does not recognise the specific needs of rural communities, students and schools. We argue that this is an outcome of the central education system, which applies the same curriculum and instruction to all children across the country. Such a system does not always fit into the interests or cultural or social differences in the rural areas of Turkey and does not provide knowledge that is recognizable and relevant to all students. As seen, education has been given little value in Turkey in terms of its ability to achieve rural development and the contribution it can make to development. The rural development in Turkey rather focus on aspects such as: geographical location, size of a village, productivity of land, active population, popular production areas, proximity to a river, characteristics of drinking water, productive fruit areas, cooperation and social infrastructure investments (Yilmaz et al., 2010) In this respect, education is mostly seen as an exclusive value for development.

The biggest poverty alleviation programme in Turkey was carried out in 1997 when Turkey has launched a Compulsory Education Program to improve access and retention in rural and Eastern areas, with the financial help of the World Bank. This programme expanded schooling from 5 years to 8 years, and it was supported by social policies such as: free education, free health services for the poor, free meals to students coming from low-income families and free transportation for students in rural areas. This programme was later on supported by the campaigns, social policies and the initiatives launched both by the government and NGOs. The acts focused on building more schools, renovating classrooms, providing education materials, and recruiting additional teachers with almost no concern for teacher development. (McClure, 2014). Likewise, the empowerment of local schools or improving the quality of teachers in order to address local communities and their needs, and the quality and nature of education in rural areas were never sufficiently addressed. We cannot expect rural education to contribute to development and sustainability, if it does not value community needs or care and respect the cultural structures of communities. Therefore, this research builds on the work of rural teachers in Turkey (Kızıllarslan, 2012; Cin, 2017; Çiftçi, 2010) working for public good and social justice in order to extrapolate the challenges that could also offer some suggestions for policy-makers and teacher-training practices which are highly centralised, like the education system itself. The courses and what can be taught at education faculties are determined by Higher Education Council, with some flexibility in the selective courses. The teacher education focuses heavily on pedagogical content knowledge, content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge and the courses such as sociology of education, history of

education and philosophy of education are excluded from the curriculum (YÖK, 1998). These courses are of vital importance to understand human geography and they are core to the issues of equality and quality in education. Lack of such courses rather gives limited vision to the future teachers on society, culture, justice, human geography of the country. Training does not offer much on challenges of being a teacher in different parts of the country, the difficulties waiting for the trainees or sociological issues concerning the diverse nature of Turkish geography such as schooling of girls, low enrollment rates, child brides, poverty etc. Such a central training cannot embrace diverse context of Turkey and leads to unawareness of teachers on a number of issues regarding the cultural codes.

### **Towards a conceptual understanding of challenges: Reframing through social justice lens**

Distributive justice within the concept of social justice has been dominantly employed in rural education and policy research since 1970s. Studies focusing on teachers' accounts of rural schooling to a large extent focused on how rural schools lacked resources; had lower quality of education in relation to urban schools, or faced inequity of staffing and funding as well as spatial and cultural isolation experienced by teachers (Boylan, 2008; Sharplin, 2010), all of which deepen the challenges and social injustice faced by teachers, students and communities. To address these problem, policies that equalise education opportunities by distribution of materials or improving the quality of teaching in rural schools have been introduced (Green, 2008). Likewise, Turkey's basic education initiative between 1997 and 2007 was also directed to building more schools, renovating classrooms, supplying learning materials, distributing monetary funds particularly in rural Turkey with little concern for representation and participation issues (McLuren, 2014).

Most research on rural schooling focused on distributive justice or conceptualised the challenges within the framework maldistribution. In this research, we draw on the work of Nancy Fraser's three dimensional justice to understand the challenges of teachers and community members. Fraser (2013) argues for a three dimensional categorisation of redistribution (economic) and recognition (cultural), a representation principle on the basis of parity of participation (political), which means that all members of society interact with each other as peers. Thus, she aims to cover inequalities related to both socio-economic and socio-cultural perspective, as well as, to a socio-political perspectives through the principle of who is included and excluded from justice claims. Fraser's perspectives aim to address the inequalities and needs recognising the different, marginalized and oppressed groups, and such inequalities are multi-dimensional and intersecting and contribute to distributive injustice. Briefly, redistribution is related to access to resources which in our case related to the lack of teaching and learning materials as well as a quality education. Recognition means identifying the marginalised groups such as women, refugee or racial and sexual minorities which again in our case equates the rural dwellers. Participatory dimension includes rights of individual groups to have their voices heard or be part of decision making in debates or issues that

concern their lives. Each dimension intersect with one another; the inequalities in distribution of resources or opportunities may lead to problems in representation and participation. For instance, in a context where needs of certain ethnic minorities are not recognised or acknowledged by policies and processes may along bring the problems of distribution and participation as they may be likely to denied access to some fundamental rights such as education, voting or welfare system.

Fraser's work have been largely employed in education and to some extent in rural schooling. For instance, Aikman (2011) uses Fraser's analysis of social justice to examine indigenous peoples' rights to education in Africa to raise the importance and need for recognition of different education systems, skills and bodies of knowledge based on the culture and values of people and a possible re-framing of education for indigenous distributive and representative justice. DeJaeghere, Wu & Vu (2013) use Fraser's multi-dimensional approach to look into how ethnicity is discursively formed in education policies in China and Vietnam to understand inequalities. Study of DeJagehere & Wiger (2013) in Bangladesh draws ideas from Fraser to show teachers' discourses of gender equality. Dyer (2010), for example, conceptualises Fraser's parity of participation as a framework to explore the relationship between education and economic, social and political justice for pastoralist children in India. Bozalek and Boughey (2012) use Fraser's framework to explore (mis) representation in apartheid and post-apartheid policies of higher education in South Africa.

In this paper, we aim to explore some of the key rural educational challenges experience by teachers and communities and Fraser's work is useful in understanding, addressing and categorising these issues as well as some future challenges. As outlined so far, much of the work on rural education have focused on the distribution, and challenges that correspond to terrain of recognition and participation have become of a less of concern or received less attention. Therefore, here we are not concerned with offering a framework of social justice based on Fraser but rather use her ideas to frame the issues and challenges in rural education in a way that we move from the distributive dimension or insufficient material resource discussions to include other dimensions such as non-recognition, disrespect or the degree of participation by groups in education.

### **Research Site and Methods**

This research aimed to scrutinise the rural challenges to contribute to rural development drawing from a range of teachers and community members' perspectives. Therefore, we employed qualitative research approach to combine theoretical resources with an analysis on identification of the educational problems that could impede rural development. We used phenomenology design to shape the research to focus on rural education phenomenon and how this phenomenon is experienced and conceptualised by teachers and community members.

The research was conducted in 16 small villages in different parts of Central Turkey. The current definition of rural in Turkey is based on the population size and the administrative units of a community. The “National Rural Development Strategy” defines rural areas as settlements with a population of 20,000 or less (SPO, 2006). The State Planning Organisation (2006) also stresses that the cultural, social, demographic and spatial diversity in rural areas have gained new meanings with changing economic structures, which makes it difficult to provide a concrete definition of what is a rural area. So, in selecting villages, first we identified villages which had a population of less than 20,000 in the region where the main economic activity was agriculture and herding, and which were spatially dislocated from urban or peripheral areas, while also having limited or no access to infrastructural facilities. However, the villages we visited had populations between two thousand and five thousand individuals with a considerable distance from the central town, ranging from 1 to 3 hours away. They all had one primary school and most did not even have a health care centre or a high school. Almost all of these villages consisted of farming communities, where agriculture was the main source of income, followed by herding. Dwellers would mostly do seasonal farm work, and this would also require moving to other villages or regions during the harvest season. Very few of the dwellers in these villages owned a farm, and therefore, they were mostly engaged in the agricultural or herding sector as labourers.

The study draws on a series of 29 semi-structured interviews with 20 teachers (15 women and 5 men) working in primary schools (7-14 years old) in order to understand the lives of teachers in rural areas and the professional skills needed. Criterion sampling was used to select teachers. We recruited teachers who had been working in rural areas for at least two years to ensure that they have sufficient experience in rural life and education. The research also draws on 9 interviews with community members and two focus-group interviews conducted with men only and women only groups in two villages. The rationale beyond the focus group interviews was to create vibrant and dynamic environment for rural dwellers to talk about rural life and education and to elicit what community values were in terms of their everyday life, education and schooling. We provided some quotes from the focus-group interviews yet did not give in the form of a dialogue. The teachers we interviewed were all centrally appointed to rural schools in order to complete their hardship posts, where they would work between three to five years. These hardship posts are usually listed as rural and economically less developed areas. The underlying agenda in hardship posts is to ensure that there are enough teachers, doctors, and police/soldiers for facilities of education, health and security in underdeveloped regions and to close the geographical and socioeconomic disparities between rural and urban areas. Therefore, none of the teachers opted to work in these villages. Upon completing these posts, none expressed the desire to stay in the villages, and they all said that they were going to ask to be assigned to a central school. This was indeed an important problem both for the villages and their communities as there was a high staff turnover in village schools. Semi-structured interviews helped us explore the challenges teachers face and to identify the barriers that stand in the way of development and sustainability of rural communities, rural life. In this sense,

they offered flexibility and allowed us to expand, shift or elaborate on the answers in an interactional manner (Kvale, 1996). Teachers were asked about what sort of problems they experience at school and in rural life; what educational arrangements Turkey needs to address these challenges and what is the role of teachers in addressing these challenge. The interviews took between 45 minutes to one and a half hours. They were all recorded and then transcribed.

We visited each school two to five times with regular intervals. The first visits were explanatory to assess research sites and to meet with teachers. The rest of the visits entailed the collection of data, and each visit added a new layer of information as we combined our interviews with informal conversations with the community, which we were not recorded.

We approached participants' lived experiences from an interpretivist paradigm in order to understand their insights and perspectives about rural education, community and development (Patton, 2002). Since teachers play a significant role in promoting development, both at the community and school level, this helped us understand the multiple dimensions of issues in all their complexity (Creswell, 1998). We used inductive analysis to generate themes and categories (Huberman and Miles, 2002). Then we identified themes and went through an analysis of thinking carefully as to what each theme illuminates in terms of what rural dwellers and teachers experience in relation to rural life and education offered at school and what they envision for better rural education.

### **Scrutinising the rural life and education: What matters?**

#### **Teaching with no resources as an issue of *maldistribution***

Almost all schools in this research lacked resources in terms of learning environment. Most teachers argued that they did not have enough good quality resources to support teaching and the way they dealt with this lack of resources shows no attempt of developing materials/ using authentic (daily life) materials for teaching, mobilising resources or at least asking the nearest directorate of national education for supply of resources. In our research, there were only two teachers who were really striving to do teach well in the face of challenges and prepared learning materials at home for the students. On the other hand, most teachers took the situation for granted and thought that there is nothing they can do when they do not have any materials:

In urban schools, conditions are different than here. They have computers, projectors, photocopy machines, labs and smart boards. Almost all students there have computers and internet at their home. Here none of these are present and accessible. We cannot assign research projects or homework to students. All we have is the book provided by the Ministry of Education. Even if you have a photocopy machine, you cannot use it because you do not have toner and paper. Even if there is a computer at school, students do not have one at home. These conditions reduce my motivation and enthusiasm as a teacher (Selin, teacher).

When you do not have a material, you cannot teach, and even if you teach, it will not be effective and I doubt students will fully grasp what I teach. Rural schools are like this, you are always a half-teacher because there are no materials to assist you or to guide you (Cem, teacher)

This shows that resources are crucial in terms of enabling children to obtain an education. When asked if they were taking any personal initiatives to overcome such challenges, most teachers implied their unwillingness to undertake such an additional burden on the grounds that they were getting paid little and were overwhelmed by the distance they needed to travel to school everyday. On the other hand, the others expressed that they would genuinely want to use their skills to improve their teaching but they associated such problems with a lack of training at their universities and highlighted the gap between teacher-training offered at universities and the reality that they faced in rural areas. In this respect they valued being able to teach well:

I see that we cannot apply the training we got at universities here in rural areas. In universities, there are materials, an established order and models to train us on how to teach. The school life here in rural areas and the teacher-training are completely different from each other. They train us as if we will find all the materials we need at our schools. When we find ourselves in such a deprived context, we become like a fish out of water and do not know what to do (Cemre, teacher).

It could be argued that under-resourced schools in poor and rural communities are still an important problem preventing teachers from teaching. As noted by Cemre, teacher training in Turkey also does not fully consider the conditions of rural life and the reality that teachers may be sent to schools with no or little resources and provides a training mostly based on the available resources. In such a context lack of resources expands well beyond being a challenge experienced by teacher but also affects the quality of learning experiences of students.

Not having learning materials is not a problem that concerns me only as a teacher but also the students and community. It prevents children from meaningful learning and lowers quality of education (...) These schools are discarded by authorities and they see little point in investing as the level of attainment is so low (Kerim, teacher).

The distribution pertains to the economic sphere of society rural schools in Turkey on the grounds of being poor and economically deprived still suffer from scarcity of learning materials that make teaching and learning processes difficult both for students and teachers and little attention or concern is being paid to these areas as they are often seen as places with no hope for educational achievement and



attainment. Rural education in Turkey still needs economic rationalities that needs redressing and reallocation of resources. The maldistribution of resources brings also deprivation and marginalization of lives and identities which deepen the inequalities and challenges. So, the distribution of more resources to be only part of the solution, as both teachers and community members implicated, recognition of social and cultural identities and life is another challenge.

### **Understanding the cultural, social and economic context of rural life as an issue of *recognition***

This includes being able to show care and respect, build communication and value the economic endeavours of rural lives. The poverty, conservative mind-set and farm work oriented cultural context of villages created a barrier for students in terms of their ability to achieve or to aspire to other things, and not many students had aspirations of furthering their education. Therefore, they were rather interested in staying in the village and continuing with farm work. However, for majority of teachers (12 teachers), the rural life was described as ‘a place to be get rid of’ and in this respect, education was often interpreted as ‘a tool for one to get out of a rural life’:

I don't understand what the point of teaching math to these students is. They do not have a vision or plan for the future. All they want is to stay in this village and continue their parents' business. They are not interested in what I teach. They do not have any motivations to learn because they do not want to go to a university or get a job. They do not understand that they need to study and achieve to get out of this life (Ziya, teacher)

Although instrumental value of education is important as it provides the means of getting a job and survival, one can only imagine and aspire to the extent that one has access to opportunities and see that other life options exist for them. So, for rural students, the opportunities of villages shaped their expectations about the future to pursue a life similar to their parents whereas teachers had the understanding that education is important to train students so that they can gain an occupation to make a living. Although preparing kids for future is an important aspect of education, the education can also have an intrinsic value for individuals to achieve the non-material goals they value. Teachers envision this role of education but they also prioritize the economic aspect:

Education is of course important to open one's horizon, to let them know about the life outside this village and to gain them a level of intellectual knowledge but the job opportunities in villages are limited, without education they cannot enhance their well-being or make a good living to lead a decent life (İpek, teacher).

The reason teachers hold such a divergent role regarding the education of rural students may be related to the challenge of having limited rural relations or not understanding what rural life encompasses. Our interviews both with teachers and villagers showed that teachers had instant contact and communication with rural dwellers, and they refrained from establishing robust relationships, which was indeed seen as a significant problem by rural dwellers, as such an attitude created an impression among the community that teachers were looking down on them:

We don't see or talk with teachers much, they come and leave the village on the same day. Maybe they don't find anything to talk with us. Our doors are always open to them (Seda, female rural dweller).

This shows that villagers indeed valued the formation of close relationships with teachers, which could open a space for sharing and understanding a community's life and grasping the historical and cultural barriers that impede development of opportunities. Yet, the close relationships formed especially between female teachers and female peasants can result in the development of both the village and women when the teachers take an active responsibility for creating alternative economic endeavours where female peasants can use their skills (Cin, 2017). On the other hand, five women teachers argued that although they wanted to form good relations, they felt they were facing unwelcoming attitudes from the community, which could potentially signify that deliberative communication skills are essential for ice-breaking:

Our communication with the community is limited with the families who visit school. I find the people hostile. When I first came here, I wanted to be close to them, but they do not invite us to their weddings or events. Likewise, as a teacher, I also feel reluctant to talk with them, as they have a different life from us. They are mostly engaged in agricultural work, so we cannot communicate. I don't think they really care about us (teacher) or the school. On the contrary, all they do is work on farms to make a living (Banu, teacher)

Whoever comes here to work wants to leave as soon as possible and they do not see themselves working in this village for long. The community knows this so they donot make an effort to welcome or get to know the teacher (Sinem, teacher).

For most teachers, the time they spent in the villages as teachers was just for the sake of completing their hardship post. This is because most teachers generally spend their entire life in urban cities with access to many resources and social welfare services. Yet, rural context in Turkey lacks many of these services from basic health facilities to public spaces for socialization. What is more, the rural is

composed of a small community and teachers say that this creates a monitoring and public surveillance on them and violates their privacy, which makes them feel uncomfortable as it clashes with their own way of living. This may be the reason for alienation of teachers towards the rural context. On the other hand, rural dwellers expect teachers to understand how socio-economic and cultural context shape both their own as well as their children's lives:

Teachers are not interested in what we do, they tend to compare the life here with the life conditions in cities. Maybe that's why they underestimate our daily practices or the work we do. Farming is not seen as a job that a child may want to do (Mehmet, the rural dweller).

Villagers felt that teachers needed to understand their life choices and accept the fact that their children may want to continue their lives as farmers. This understanding was indeed very prevalent among teachers, and a majority of them think that one does not need education to be a farmer or herd, as these professions are not career choices. In this respect, many rural dwellers pointed out a need for the teachers to see their economic activities as an integral part of rural life and to hold a multi-perspectival stance. Indeed, not being able to necessarily recognize the rural dwellers' cultural context, lives and concerns bring a further problem that has its roots in marginalising communities; ignoring meanings, value and relevance of education for rural communities.

### **Making education meaningful and relevant as an issue of *recognition***

Research in rural education (Aikman, 2011; Çiftçi and Cin, 2016; Çiftçi, 2010) argue that the cultural context of a student's life shapes to what extent s/he can grasp or benefit from the education offered to them, and in some cases, due to central education, the education offered is not meaningful and does not help the student develop the relevant skills and knowledge for survival in rural life. However, nine teachers pointed out that majority of the community members had no interest in sending their kids to school, as they thought that school did not gain them skills and knowledge needed to ease their lives:

They do not value their children's education, and they do not see any point in sending their children to school. Some explicitly told me that school does not teach their children anything useful. They are mostly engaged in agricultural work. I don't think they really care about school. On the contrary, all they do is work on farms to make a living, and sending their kids to school means a loss of labour force at home and in the farm for most of them. Some does not aspire their children to take good quality education (Nimet, teacher)

As indicated, community members question the relevance and appropriateness of the education offered

to them, as they don't find education meaningful, and they think that it does not address the needs of rural life. The only exception to this situation was in two villages where both farming and herding were not possible. In such contexts, education was supported by families and was given an economic value, as it could secure employment opportunities. Likewise, teachers expressed interest to be involved more in education and schooling activities, as they saw an intrinsic motivation from students and communities.

For many rural and pastoralist children, central education is alienating and ignores their cultural rights and diversity (Aikman, 2011). Similarly in this research, our interviews both with teachers and community members show that the curriculum does not value rural children's cultural and social heritage and does not offer valuable skills and knowledge for their lives as rural settlers engaged with agriculture or herding. Since the curriculum does not address the particularities of rural life, teachers also stated that they experience difficulty in offering contextual or situated learning because they have little knowledge of rural life:

What we teach is here universal and the curriculum does not make a distinction between what should be taught here in rural or in urban areas. There is no point in making such a distinction, either. Then people may think they get a lower quality of education in rural life (Mert, teacher)

Only three teachers acknowledged that rural students and schools may indeed need a different curriculum than others and expressed the need for adding relevant knowledge into mainstream formal school curricula for rural education, such as agricultural teaching or linking the learning with their intimate environment.

Maybe what we have been doing is wrong. These students need a different training and education. They live and experience life differently from us, and we do not share the same realities, so we cannot expect them to learn exactly the same stuff that a student in a city learns. They can have a course congruent with the life conditions here (Deniz, teacher).

As a maths teacher, I can see the importance of giving examples from rural life. When teaching the measurement subject, providing a real-life experience of skyscraper on the subject may not mean much to students here but if I talk about how we can measure a field...it may be more meaningful (Cihan, teacher).

Valuing and understanding indigenous lives, knowledge, skills and practices held by rural communities for survival and livelihoods are significant to overcome the issues of relevancy in education. This requires understanding what children and their community value and what is relevant and meaningful for them to re-frame and re-define what a meaningful education would be. Community members'

accounts pointed out that their knowledge was often judged as primitive by teachers and were given little value. Even if some teachers wanted to link their teaching practices with the wider student environment, they had little idea on how to do so, whereas community members stressed several times that education offered in school should feed their life practices and skills:

If you want me to send my kids to school then teachers should get to know my life style. How I live. What I eat. What I do for work. What they teach at school have little meaning for our daily struggles (...) It is disconnected from our life struggles...It would be nice if they learn about, for instance, drippage and irrigation. (Kadriye, female rural resident)

I understand the criticism of some villagers...they find their kids to learn useful stuff that can be connected to their daily practices...I have little idea about rural life so I do not know how I can do it (Gül, teacher)

Different community members focused on how formal education disrupted their everyday life practices and local knowledge with abstract knowledge and academic ways of learning and scientific methods applied to learning, which sees indigenous knowledge as less valuable. Such a perception raises the importance of integrating indigenous or local knowledge into education and increases teacher awareness for local culture. Integrating relevant aspects of local knowledge teaching and learning and curriculum is important for valuing ways-of-knowing.

### **Collaboration and public dialogue with community members as an issue of *Participation***

Being able to identify inequalities for change, collaborate with others and foster public debate & dialogue is a significant aspect of rural life and schooling (Unterhalter, 2007). This requires being able to identify spaces for social change, working with a community or creating alternative space for bottom-up initiatives to reduce the inequalities in areas. Forming such solidarity lies at the heart of understanding the lives of other people, and necessitates being able to establish rapport across social groups and different cultures and to work and act with others. Yet most teachers were not even living in the villages due to lack of infrastructure and poor conditions and therefore they were commuting everyday to school. This left them little space and time to engage with the community, to communicate with students outside the school and to understand the lives of the community members.

I do not even live in the village. I come early in the morning and leave right after school. The conditions here are not feasible for us to live: lack of water, frequent electricity cuts, limited

internet. The villagers think we represent urban life. It is true that we cannot adapt to their farm life here. So there is a lack of communication between us. Even if we gather, there is nothing much in common we can say with the villagers (Ceyda, teacher)

I wish teachers come and talk to us. We can work together. We can help them with what they need at school, and they can help us. If we come together, this village can flourish culturally and socially (Mustafa, the head of a village, rural resident).

Although improving teachers' life conditions in villages and creating more habitable houses or facilities for teachers in these areas seems to fall into the terrain of local governments, the communities can also play a role in supporting these conditions and welcoming teachers. Moreover, collaborating with the community is rather crucial as a number of studies (DeJaeghere & Lee, 2011; Raynor, 2008) point out the importance of relational support of family, the community and teachers as a critical factor for children's schooling. Likewise, many teachers point out in this research that emotional encouragement from the community can be valuable and important for students' attendance education as students are mostly distracted from school by their community members who give them the idea that they do not need education. To create awareness among a community about the importance of education, public debate and dialogue is necessary among teachers, community, students and local stakeholders. This certainly requires communicative ability for listening and developing empathic relationships. It is important that teachers should initiate a public dialogue within the community as facilitators. Some teachers noted that most problems having to do with the school such as schooling time, extra-curricular facilities, parental involvement in education, supplying resources for schools or the quality of schooling can be solved if there is a robust communication between the community and teachers:

If only we could work together and understand each other, we could find solutions to problems...For instance, we could informally schedule the school time according to the harvest season, so that they can send their kids to schools. We could be more flexible, work together or undertake co-activities regarding gardening, raising vegetables with them. We need to establish a dialogue (Sevda, teacher).

Students are reluctant to further their education. As teachers, we cannot persuade them alone, we need to collaborate with community members to give encourage students. At school, we emphasize the importance of education and schooling but at home they are told vice versa (Meryem, teacher).

As seen, it is important that teachers communicate their professional knowledge in a courteous manner

and create an environment in which community members can communicate their ideas and voice their demands. Such a platform can ensure participation of rural dwellers in decision that are taken at multiple levels that affect their lives.

### **Reframing Challenges: Actions for change**

This research aimed to extrapolate challenges of teachers and communities in rural areas in terms of schooling and we used Fraser's three dimensional justice to frame these challenges beyond economic perspective and to show how these challenges also underpin the recognition and participation issues which intersect and interweave one another. It allows us to consider how distribution of resources are linked with lack of recognition of rural identities and lives and their exclusion from everyday schooling and learning. We have attempted to identify some challenges by providing a glimpse from different rural areas and we are aware the challenges experienced goes well beyond the points that have been made in this paper.

First of all, insufficiency or lack of resources for teaching in rural schools is a difficulty that is concerned with distribution as urban schools would be equipped with more materials. This raises an issue of inequality in reallocation of equipment and resources between urban and rural schools, which widens the gap between urban and rural students and schools in terms of student achievement, teacher satisfaction and educational quality. Secondly, a significant challenge teachers faced and the community members pointed out was in relation to recognition dimension of linking what students learn at school to their community context. This points out the need for an extensive adjustment in curriculum and teaching practice change that is sensitive to culture. It is rather important that the curriculum needs a substantial revision to link different learning environments of the student to improve the relevance and quality of learning. Moreover, this also requires introducing robust pedagogical and content knowledge at teacher training level to enhance the learning process and outcomes of students, while showing that agriculture has much to offer to basic education in rural areas. Particularly infusion of agriculture and appropriate technology into curricula and primary schools can reach out beyond the boundaries of schools and also be beneficial for parents and community members (Atchoerena & Gasperini, 2003). This can also potentially lead to volunteering of parents and parental support of schools. For instance, the Indian example in research of Taylor and Mulhall (1997) shows that the way a maths teacher illustrated straight lines and angles in practice by taking pupils into the rice field created a meaningful learning, and supported other life skills beyond basic skills of numeracy and helped families to use maths in their daily lives. Such an approach can likewise be adapted to encourage community members to participate in school decision and integrate community resources effectively with school. So,

recognising needs and values of community can also lead to their participation; and integrating educational values and priorities of rural dwellers into their courses can help schooling and education form both intrinsic and extrinsic values in them and connect educational experiences with their physical, social and cultural realities. Recognising different bodies of knowledge and worldview can also help students in these communities to connect the life they lived with the world outside the community.

Lastly, building and sustaining strategic relationships with the members of a community and working with inter-professional teams such as head of the village to create bottom-up solution is crucial for establishing public debate and dialogue which is salient to addressing problems particularly rising from the central education system in local contexts and significant in mediating the values of individuals and communities. This process of initiating iterative process of dialogue and work in collaboration with the community is critical to ensuring and fostering participation of rural dwellers in issues that matter to them and their children. It can give them the room to be involved in the decision making process concerning rural education problems and in improving the quality of rural schooling. It has been used in local contexts to form a consensus within communities, family and girls to negotiate on local practices that affect girls' schooling (Unterhalter et al, 2005) and a number of authors (DeJaeghere, 2012; Unterhalter, 2007) discussed how public debate can foster justice and equality in education. That is to say, participation of rural dwellers in decision-making about their lives and having full and effective participation in framing agendas or designing education policies can be a place to start, think about and address the rural educational challenges and foster well-being of communities and students.

The narratives of teachers and rural-dwellers implicate that all the challenges build upon one another; the maldistribution in resources and poverty in the villages leads to marginalisation or ignorance of rural lives and identities with little effort from teachers to understand the cultural, social and economic context of being a rural dweller in 21<sup>st</sup> century. This ignorance likewise is reproduced in the central education system by offering education or schooling that has little relevance to the lives of these people. On the other hand “given recognition and space to flourish pastoralists' knowledge through their relationship with the land and its resources can provide alternatives to ‘mainstream’ development processes” (Aikman, 2011: 20).

and communities have limited opportunities to participate in local level decision making about how to increase the meaningfulness and relevancy of education for the kinds of challenges they face in Ngorongoro District today

## **Conclusion**

This paper has only scratched the surface of a rich seam of rural educational challenges experienced not only by teachers but also communities. The research did not aspire to provide an exhaustive list of difficulties in rural life and education but to tease out some significant issues that expand well beyond



economic resources and concerns community welfare and educational development. The challenges we present may well expand beyond these as we have only been to 16 villages. Still they are crucial in understanding the nature of education and schooling in rural areas. In addition, so far, research on rural education and areas in Turkey mostly aimed at identifying the infrastructural and school-related or student-centred challenges. They had an ontologically individualist way of considering and approaching rural education and often underestimated the fact that schools are not independent of the cultural and political environment surrounding them. In this respect, they ignored the social environment and community and the needs of rural life and dwellers. The findings of this research can guide policy-makers in designing policies and educational governance that are particular to rural development and education.

Addressing the problems of rural education in Turkey requires re-design and re-structuring of curricula supported by appropriate learning materials and developing rural-specific policies. Yet, recognition of rural identities and lives and their participation in decision-making in relation to the school and education they are offered can lead to empowerment, decrease the level of marginalisation. The small changes in this area have the potential to bring transformative changes. This is because education based on participation and recognition are crucial elements and powerful weapons for development and poverty alleviation although national donors and governments tend to ignore the fact that they can be transformative, and they focus on economic means and measures to boost development.

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