

Challenges In The Training Of Rural Teachers In Mexico

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Abstract

We present a study that aims to identify the main challenges in the training of basic education teachers for rural areas of Mexico. It is a documentary research, based on the selection and review of 34 investigations, evaluations and institutional proposals that addressed this issue and that were updated in the last ten years. With the support of the Zotero bibliographic reference manager and the construction of a database, the various documents collected were analyzed. As main results we identify that a reductionist concept of rural education has been deprived, assuming that this is restricted to educational services located in towns with less than 2500 inhabitants, and those who work in them are classified as rural teachers; the deficient image of schools, and of rural teaching, is the one that is mostly installed in the teaching staff. In turn, it suffers from a system of initial and continuous training of teachers where rural education is present. Given this scenario, it is urgent to make visible and clarify the concept of rural education in the country and implement specific models of teacher training.

Keywords: rural schools; teacher training; basic education.

1. Introduction

Teacher training for rural territories was gradually made invisible from Mexico's educational policies (Civera, 2004; Civera et al., 2011; Cano and Espino, 2019; Cano and Juárez, 2020). Although at the time of writing this article Mexico

has 15 rural normal schools, an indigenous normal school and a regional normal education center (which are considered rural), they are institutions that for decades have struggled to remain current and provide training . alternative teaching to the centralized proposal; It is in its genesis to conceive itself as popular institutions linked to the needs of the peasantry and rural contexts, in addition to promoting a teaching profile as a leader of the community where it works (Civera, 2004; Civera et al., 2011; González, 2021).

In our country, the homogenization of the study plans that correspond to the initial training of teachers was progressively imposed (González, 2021), giving little room for state or regional professionalization needs, as is the case of training for rural multigrade teaching. . We know that basic education has also lacked care models or proposals that respond with relevance and sufficiency to the heterogeneity of the country's rural population (Cano and Juárez, 2020). Regarding the study plans, it has been documented that those aimed at the rural population have few differences from those of urban schools (Popoca et al., 2020). The Ministry of Public Education (SEP) has opted for national basic education graduation profiles, and in recent decades (as is the case of the 2011 study plans) the establishment of standards by subjects that sought to homogenize the performances of students in various training fields.

It should be noted that educational policies aimed at the rural population underwent significant changes in the last hundred years. If we do a brief historical review, we will find that during the post-revolutionary era, a decisive boost to rural education in Mexico is identified. With the founding of the town houses, in 1923, a vision of the school was adopted as a space of and for the community that surrounded it. José Vasconcelos and then Rafael Ramírez thought about, and

promoted, a pedagogical proposal focused on the needs and characteristics of the peasantry; The subjects of education were not only girls, boys and adolescents from the localities, all members of the community where the schools were located were thought of. This national proposal sought to improve the living conditions of local residents through the promotion of productive activities, the adoption of health measures and the promotion of the arts (De la Peña, 1998).

Unfortunately, since 1936, the distinction between educational programs aimed at the countryside and the city has ceased to be differentiated. Rockwell and Garay (2014) point out that derived from a constitutional mandate of 1934, the departments of urban and rural schools were merged in a single direction, with this the SEP sought to standardize formal education at the national level through a centralist policy that concentrated (in the federation) decision-making, regulations and financial expenditure dedicated to educational services. Socialist education, which spanned from 1934 to 1940, promoted the concentration of teachers in fully organized schools. Added to this type of initiative was the adoption as the main precept of building a single national identity and therefore avoiding differentiating rural from urban education. Furthermore, the fact that in rural schools there was only one teacher in charge of a group of different ages - with elementary preparation (Osuna, 1983) - led to the belief that a "second-class" education was offered, since the superiority of the graduated and complete school, that is, one teacher per grade; This conception advanced progressively throughout the 20th century, it was a shift that "occurred with time lags and extensive pedagogical and legal discussions. It was a profound change: a kind of 'school grammar' was generated (Rockwell and Garay, p. 5, 2014).

Osuna (1983) points out that rural teachers of the 20s and 30s had a strong identification with the context, since the majority were members of the localities themselves who voluntarily assumed this task. He also warns that this was transformed over time, as the “mystique and teaching vocation” was diluted (Osuna, 1983, p.14), to the extent that today it is difficult to converge the individual interests of teachers and the educational project promoted by the state; A utilitarian vision of the profession was strengthened. It should be noted that in Mexico, entry into the teaching profession linked to schools located in the most remote places has been promoted; merits must be made for job access to urban areas (Cano et al., 2018), and this is an aspiration of many teachers regardless of whether they come from a rural normal school, or are originally from rural communities. Multigrade organization schools are the ones that have been most affected by these teacher hiring policies, and for this reason programs or incentives for teacher integration have had to be promoted (National Institute for the Evaluation of Education [INEE], 2018).

It should also be noted that our country faced a significant urbanization process; That is to say, the urban model of life was imposed on the rural one. We can corroborate this in the sustained growth of the percentage of urban population throughout the 20th century, as a consequence mainly of a process of industrialization of the country and an increase in access to goods and services in the urban environment. According to data from the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) in 1930 the degree of ruralization of the country (GR) was 74.4% and rose to 65.4% in 1950, 39.9% in 1980 and in 2000 it rose to 31.0% (INEGI, 2005). In the last National Population and Housing Census, which

corresponds to 2020, it is reported that 21% of the country's population is rural and 79% urban (INEGI, 2020).

Although the percentage of the country's rural population is low compared to the urban population, in absolute numbers it has remained on the rise, as a consequence of the agrarian distribution (which rooted the inhabitants to the territory), as well as the high birth rates and increase of life expectancy. As of the date of writing this document, the rural population amounts to 26 million 983 thousand 528 people. It should be noted that from 2010 to 2020, only one percent of the rural population decreased, which speaks of a certain slowdown in the growth curve of the urban population (INEGI, 2020), or that the number of rural population is beginning to stabilize. .

This is a small approach to the country's rural population and the educational services offered to them. If we review what has happened in recent decades regarding public actions and policies in this matter, the case of the National Council for Educational Development (CONAFE) stands out because from its origin it had an educational model designed for rural students, in addition responds to the multigrade organization of its schools (Cano and Juárez, 2020). Efforts have also been made in indigenous education to adapt national proposals aimed at the mestizo population at the initial, preschool and primary levels, but not for secondary and high school. (Cano and Bustamante, 2017). A separate issue is to analyze how the training of teachers or educational figures who provide educational care to students has been promoted.

From this perspective, we proposed to carry out a documentary investigation that allows us to identify the main challenges in teacher training for rural territories in Mexico, in relation to basic school.

2. Method and materials

The study involved a documentary-type investigation (Claus ó , 1993,) that would allow the selection of both research and documents issued by official bodies and Higher Education Institutions, which address the training of rural teachers; A search period was defined ten years ago (2012 to 2022). The search included articles, postgraduate theses, official documents (evaluations and proposals), books and book chapters, all in digital format published in various repositories and digital search engines such as: Redalyc, Scielo and Google Academic. In turn, specialized educational repositories were reviewed, such as that of the Thematic Research Network in Rural Education (RIER), as well as that of the INEE (today the Commission for the Continuous Improvement of Education [MEJOREDUE]); It should be noted that this last instance carried out various evaluations of public actions regarding indigenous, multigrade education and that aimed at migrant agricultural laborers, from which it derived national guidelines, which are relevant materials for the purpose of this study.

The search yielded 34 documents that met the established selection criteria (table 1). This data allows us to identify that, although there is not a vast production on the subject, it is possible to locate both research and instances that have discussed or made proposals on the topic of teacher training for rural territories in the last decade.

The Zotero bibliographic reference manager was used to collect the various texts, as well as to work with the generation of labels and comments that facilitated the analysis of the content. It was also helpful to work with a database in the Excel program that helped identify the characteristics and contribution of each of the

documents. This made it easier to propose three categories of analysis that are presented in the following section.

Table 1. Results of the search for production linked to teacher training for rural contexts

| Articles (7) | Books (4) | Book chapters (7) | Thesis (1) | Official documents (15) |
|---|---|--|--------------|--|
| Bautista (2018), Cano and Bustamante (2017), Cano (2020), Castro (2018), Rockwell and Garay (2014), Rodríguez Hernández, Bautista and Servín (2021), Soloaga, Plassot and Reyes (2020). | Arteaga, Popoca and Juárez (2020), González (2021), Medrano, Ángeles and Morales (2017), Torres (2020). | Arteaga and Juárez (2020), Cano and Espino (2019), Cano, Ibarra and Ortega (2018), Cano and Juárez, (2020), Mancilla, (2020), Messina, Oliva, Gómez and García | Soto (2020). | CONAFE (2016), DGESuM (2021), INEE (2016), INEE (2017a), INEE (2017b), INEE (2018), INEE (2019), INEGI (2015), MEJOREDU (2022b), MEJOREDU (2022c), SEP (2022), UEP (2015), Iberoamerican University (2021), National |

| | | | |
|--|-----------|--|---------------|
| | (2020), | | Pedagogical |
| | Rubio and | | University |
| | Castro | | (2020), |
| | (2020). | | Pedagogical |
| | | | University of |
| | | | Chihuahua |
| | | | (2022). |
| | | | Total: 34 |

Source: self made.

3. Results

Although the research and documents address various problems on the topic of interest of this study, there is agreement in discussing the lack of clarity in the delimitation of rural education, which suffers from a teacher training system for rural territories and permanent training that responds to the needs of teachers; We return to these three elements as analytical categories.

3.1 Delimitation of rural education

In our country, no specific rural education statistics are reported by official institutions (Arteaga and Juárez, 2019); This data alone is an indicator of the veiled nature of the topic and, therefore, of the teachers who carry out their work in the various rural territories. There is information regarding the number of rural localities per federal entity and therefore it is common to refer to rural education depending on the type of locality where educational services are located (catalogizing schools as unigrade and multigrade). . In this way, it is maintained that rural education is that which is deployed through schools that operate in small

rural towns –less than 2,500 inhabitants– (Cano and Juárez, 2020). These schools are quite heterogeneous and can belong to three types of services: general, dependent on the SEP and aimed at the mixed-race population; the community, run by CONAFE, present in the smallest and most dispersed towns in the country where enrollment does not reach a minimum of 30 students; Finally, the indigenous, which is offered in initial, preschool and primary education in indigenous localities (National Commission for the Continuous Improvement of Education [MEJOREDUE], 2022a).

This delimitation of rural education does not consider populations that, even exceeding 2,500 inhabitants, have a predominance of economic activities linked to the countryside, little infrastructure of services, distance from urban centers and few communication routes, all of them qualitative characteristics attributed to Mexican rurality (INEGI, 2015). At the same time, as they explain Messina et al. (2020), it is necessary to broaden the view of rural education since it is not limited to girls, boys and adolescents of school age, it also includes the service offered by the National Institute of Adult Education (INEA) through its respective representatives in the states of the country, and that serves the young or adult population.

On the other hand, rural education is defined from a pedagogical and didactic position. It should be noted that in Mexico we stop considering and studying in depth the category of rurality in the educational field. It is common for rural education to be conceived as synonymous with multigrade education (as opposed to unigrade) and, therefore, to think of teaching focused on simultaneous attention to more than one school grade within the same group (Arteaga and Juárez, 2019). It is worth clarifying that multigrade is not exclusive to rural schools, as

these exist on the outskirts of cities, and also in central areas of cities by private initiatives that adopt this form of organization as a pedagogical option.(Bautista, 2018). In the case of telesecundarias, which originated to serve rural localities, today they have a presence in urban areas, and therefore they are not a modality exclusive to one context or another.

We identify various research works, and even proposals, that address fields or modalities of rural education(INEE, 2016, 2017a, 2017b, 2018, 2019). Although these works are necessary and relevant, it is also necessary to understand that these services converge in rural territories and therefore share various problems. It is important to recognize meeting points that strengthen rural pedagogies that are the subject of teacher training.

3.2 The “system” of initial teacher training

Since the introduction of this article we have stated that Mexico lacks a rural teacher training policy (Cano and Espino, 2019; Mancilla, 2020). Nor has it been possible to consolidate a teacher training system that articulates the various instances and institutions involved in this process (INEE, 2018). Teachers are trained mainly through the Normal Schools (EN), although the National Pedagogical University (UPN), and its state units, also offer academic programs aimed at teacher training; To a lesser extent, other Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) contribute to the training of teachers, without the study plans contemplating it as the only field of work for graduates.

In the case of the ENs, they have focused on the training of basic education teachers. These institutions do not have management or curricular autonomy, which is why their study plans are promoted centrally (currently the entity on which they depend is the General Directorate of Higher Education for Teachers

[DGESuM]). It is recent that a curricular co-design process has begun, where the participation of the various entities of the Republic is sought in the definition of half of the curricular spaces of the 2022 study plans.(General Directorate of Higher Education for Teaching [DGESuM], 2021)

Table 2 recapitulates the various study plans that have been implemented in the ENs; It is necessary to specify that since 1984 the studies taught in these institutions have a bachelor's degree. They are programs that are oriented to teaching work at an educational level (preschool, primary, secondary) or to train specialist teachers (special education, physical and inclusion); They operate equally in urban or rural normals.

Table 2. Normal School Study Plans

| Bachelor's degrees in: | National curricula |
|---|--|
| Initial education | 2022 |
| Preschool education | 1984, 1999, 2012, 2018, 2022 |
| Bilingual Intercultural Preschool Education | 2012, 2022 |
| Primary education | 1984, 1997, 2012, 2018, 2022 |
| Bilingual Intercultural Primary Education | 2004, 2012, 2022 |
| Secondary Education | 1936, 1945, 1959, 1976, 1983, 1999, 2018, 2022 |
| Physical education | 1976, 1982, 1988, 2002, 2018, 2022 |

| | |
|-----------------------|------------------------------|
| Special education | 1974, 1980, 1985, 2004, 2022 |
| Educational Inclusion | 2018, 2022 |

Source: Taken and adapted from Medrano, Ángeles and Morales, 2017.

We consider that the degrees in Bilingual Intercultural Preschool and Primary Education are related to work in rural contexts ¹, also at the secondary level which corresponds to the telesecundaria modality ², since it was created expressly for the small towns of the country.

At the same time, it is documented that some ENs have designed training paths, or optional courses, mainly focused on multigrade teaching for preschool and primary school (Castro, 2018; INEE, 2018, 2019; Torres, 2020). The case of the 2022 study plans stands out, which in the case of preschool, primary and telesecondary schools incorporate curricular spaces focused on multigrade teaching. The little that has been documented regarding the implementation of these courses shows the richness of the student body approaching both the theory of the multigrade classroom and rural multigrade schools.. Observing how teachers solve management and teaching tasks, as well as the characteristics of these schools in the territory, is highly educational for students (Rubio and Castro, 2020).

The UPN has curricular autonomy and therefore defines its offer of academic programs. These are varied training options that focus on both the educational levels that make up basic education and other fields (educational psychology, innovation, intervention, among others). It also offers two programs related to teaching work in indigenous contexts. Something to highlight is that in 2022 this university designs the Bachelor's Degree in Multigrade Education in alliance with the RIER. The feasibility study of the program included a survey that was applied

to 3,000 thousand multigrade teachers in service in Mexico, Guanajuato, San Luis Potosí, Veracruz, Chihuahua and Baja California Sur, the results indicated that 70% had not taken any course related to multigrade education (National Pedagogical University, 2020). In the month of August 2022, Unit 241 of the UPN, based in Tierra Nueva San Luis Potosí, offers this degree for the first time in the country. This program contains lines of training in the history of multigrade education, as well as in disciplinary didactics for multigrade groups.

3.3 Lack of permanent or continuing training

Rural education has been almost invisible from the permanent or continuing training processes that are offered officially or institutionally (Cano and Espino, 2020; Cano and Bustamante, 2017; Soto, 2020). In recent decades, at the national level, there has been a commitment to offering courses that promote generic training for both teachers and supervisory and accompaniment figures. This offer is linked to the formal curriculum, transversal or current topics, without distinguishing whether the recipients work in urban or predominantly rural areas (Cano and Espino, 2020).

Some entities have made efforts to provide courses or workshops focused mainly on multigrade teaching for rural territories. Also in deploying actions to support the practice of multigrade teachers; Along these lines, the case of Guanajuato, Veracruz and Yucatán stands out, which are entities with a high percentage of multigrade schools (INEE, 2018). At the same time, it is recognized that some federal entities have developed multigrade curricular organizations, with the purpose of facilitating teaching work through the concatenation of topics or content common to various school grades. This work has been carried out by the following states: Veracruz, Guanajuato, Hidalgo, Zacatecas and Tlaxcala (INEE, 2018).

Also the RIER through the Universidad Iberoamericana (Mexico City headquarters) has offered a course in multigrade didactics (Universidad Iberoamericana, 2021) and various support materials for multigrade teaching organized in an open access repository³. Recently (September 2022) the RIER, in collaboration with the Ibero-American University and the Undersecretary of Basic Education of the SE, have launched the diploma course Strategies to develop the 2022 Basic Education Curriculum in Multigrade Telesecundarias(SEP, 2022), which seeks to ensure that those who take it have an approach to both the characteristics of multigrade teaching and what the 2022 Curricular Framework indicates for the secondary educational level.

MEJOREDU recently promotes training programs for in-service basic education teachers that are carried out through Training Interventions (IE)⁴. In relation to multigrade teaching, the IE Horizons for multigrade teaching practice: inclusive education (MEJOREDU, 2022b; MEJOREDU, 2022c) stands out, which is supported by a workshop as a training device and a workbook for teachers. The study of these materials seeks to motivate the reflection of preschool, primary and tele-secondary teachers of multigrade education regarding the pedagogical potential of their groups, the practices linked to attention to diversity and thus influence the learning experiences of the students.

A special case is that of CONAFE, because as we have pointed out, it has an educational model designed for the multigrade classroom. It also contemplates an initial and continuous training scheme for the various figures involved in the operation of its schools: community educational leader (LEC), tutor trainers (CT) and educational assistants (AE). It should be noted that this organization faces important challenges because the LEC are young people from secondary school,

high school or truncated careers and must be trained in a short time for multigrade teaching work (CONAFE, 2016). They have a high fluctuation of these educational figures in schools because they provide a social service and cannot remain in this function for more than one or two years (Cano and Espino, 2020).

Regarding the postgraduate offer, only a Master's Degree in Rural Education was found that operates at the Pedagogical University of Chihuahua, in mixed modality; This has as its main objective:

Train rural education professionals through solid conceptual, pedagogical-didactic and intervention preparation, in addition to an attitude of commitment and service, which allows them to intervene from an intercultural perspective in favor of community and educational development, in the contexts where you carry out your teaching practice (Pedagogical University of Chihuahua, 2022, sp).

There is also the case of the Specialty in Multigrade Teaching of the Benemérita Escuela Normal Veracruzana “Enrique C. Rébsamen”. This program is school-based and is aimed at those interested in teacher training for multigrade groups, as well as in the management of this type of schools (Graduate Studies Unit, 2022, sp).

The limited educational offer and updating actions that we have just presented explain the results presented by works such as that of Rodríguez et al. (2021). Well, they point out that, in the case of multigrade teachers, they lack training, updating and training experiences that support them in their daily work. That is why they require support in topics associated with didactic planning and the evaluation of learning, as well as in the work of subjects such as Spanish and mathematics (Cano et al., 2018; Cano, 2020).

4. Discussion

Based on what is stated in the results, it is identified that the challenges in rural teacher training are diverse. We begin with a broad challenge, but one that necessarily impacts teachers, since in Mexico rural education is not clearly delimited and therefore does not appear in official educational statistics. The category of rurality emerges to classify the population of small towns, but it is not present as an important concept for decision-making in the National Educational System. It is also questionable that rural educational services are considered based on the demographic criteria with which the localities where schools operate are classified. Unlike what happens in other Latin American countries, such as Brazil, Colombia, Cuba and Costa Rica, in our country a serious analysis of the various criteria that allow a locality to be classified as urban or rural has not been achieved; they continue to be presented as dichotomous aspects (Cano and Juárez, 2020) ⁵.

We agree withArteaga et al. (2020) when they point out that talking about rural education requires putting the concept of territory at the center in which, although the sociodemographic criterion is present –which dates back to 1930 (Soloaga et al. 2021)–, others such as the economic criterion should be added. , the political and even the cultural. There is then talk of embracing the concept of new ruralities, which states that rurality is multidimensional, in turn

(...) accepts as a starting point the complexity of rural realities and the links between urban and rural areas. The OECD (2006) defines this paradigm as a change in the orientation of public policies and of the different actors (public, private, civil society), from the sectoral to the territorial, promoting a certain decentralization, and valuing the specificities of the local and the environment (amenities, products and services). (p.16)

Although an updated concept of rural education is demanded, it is an even greater challenge to build a theoretical body that bases it epistemologically, philosophically and pedagogically. We observe a trend towards research development in the field of multigrade schools, as well as innovative experiences such as the case of educational models promoted by CONAFE, or what happens with attention to the indigenous population (intercultural-bilingual approach). Although these have features of a pedagogy that links the school with the rural communities in which they are located, the greatest emphasis is on the type of need for which they were created and therefore on the curricular dimension: multigraduation-multisubject , and bilingualism (Spanish-indigenous language).

The training of rural teachers has a close relationship with basic education, when this level began to serve the rural population through a standardized curriculum, it affected the processes of initial and continuous training of teachers since it directed it towards generic training with little attention to the local or regional (Arteaga et al., 2020); The decision to contextualize the contents in rural areas was left to the teacher. That is why there are few study programs from teacher training institutions that include elements of rural teaching. This situation impacts the fact that it is already in practice that teachers face the pedagogical, didactic and management aspects demanded by students and their communities (Cano et al., 2018).

Regarding the continuous training of teachers, we see important actors such as the RIER, which has promoted everything from courses to undergraduate and postgraduate programs, especially in terms of multigrade teaching. It should be noted that in this study, not enough works were found that broadly address rural teaching and its professionalization needs. There is work on multigrade teaching,

which, as we noted, is linked to rural territories (Cano et al., 2018; Rodríguez et al., 2021). In these cases it has been documented that the vast majority of teachers express not being professionally prepared to meet the characteristics of their groups and there is also no close, relevant and sufficient training offer; For this reason, they demand to strengthen the didactic dimension of their work: teaching planning and learning evaluation.

It is important to recognize that teachers who work in rural schools have specific professionalization needs. Being a rural teacher implies a deep knowledge of the territory, the localities and their internal dynamics (Soto, 2021); Its identification and roots in the localities is also a key element for the continuity of a school improvement and development project. At the same time, we have pointed out that in the case of basic education it is common for teachers to face a multigrade situation in their classrooms and therefore require knowledge in multigrade didactics.

5. Conclusions

The problem of teacher training for rural territories is broad and complex. One of the aspects that needs to be addressed is the conceptualization of rural education, as well as the definition of its presence in the territory. We recognize that although instances such as the RIER have allowed us to join academic and institutional efforts to advance in the study of rural education in our country (as well as in deploying updating and teacher training actions), it is necessary to recover the contributions of rural education Mexican and Latin American, in addition to enriching or expanding them based on current educational needs.

Visualizing the country's rural population is of utmost importance, because as Rockwell and Garay (2014) state, it would allow us to consider that serving small

towns educationally involves the implementation of alternative models to those designed for a standard and predominantly urban student, This includes thinking about the ideal training of both teachers and figures who supervise and support schools.

Mexico has difficulties in articulating its teacher training system. Rural normal schools decreased significantly and implement centrally designed study plans, just like urban normal schools. There are other types of higher education institutions where teachers who work in rural schools are trained under curricula distant from rural education components. We also observe that there is an effort to implement training courses in multigrade didactics (in the case of normal schools), as well as a degree in this line from the UPN, they are valuable but limited efforts.

The lack of proximity of teachers in training to rural contexts causes serious challenges in the professional practice that they subsequently develop in rural schools. We consider that teachers need to understand the new dynamics of rural territories, beyond thinking that it is the opposite of urban, as well as the characteristics and needs of the groups they serve. Furthermore, it is important to transform the deficient representation of rural schools and teaching, which was established since the beginning of the last century alongside the growing urbanization of the country, which today we see reaching a point of stabilization.

At the same time, we warn that rural teachers have not benefited from relevant and sufficient updating and training actions. The invisibility of rural education is reflected in the lack of this type of actions or public policies. When tracking professionalization needs of rural teachers, it is identified that those who work in multigrade schools are the ones who have been studied the most, in contrast, few training options are observed for this sector.

Finally, we want to point out that we are facing a new curricular proposal for basic education, which seeks to be implemented in the 2023-2024 school year. This is called “New Mexican School” and puts the community at the center. Although it is a proposal for the entire country, we observe that it could be especially relevant for rural territories and it is desirable that it impact the initial and continuous training of teachers. It is one of the many actions required to support rural education in the country.

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