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BEYOND

**THE RURAL DEFICIT: A CRITICAL DOCUMENTARY REVIEW
OF TEACHER RETENTION AND EDUCATIONAL JUSTICE**



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THE RURAL DEFICIT: A CRITICAL DOCUMENTARY REVIEW OF TEACHER RETENTION AND EDUCATIONAL JUSTICE

MÁS ALLÁ DEL DÉFICIT RURAL: UNA REVISIÓN DOCUMENTAL CRÍTICA SOBRE LA RETENCIÓN DE DOCENTES Y LA JUSTICIA EDUCATIVA

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ABSTRACT

The concept of rural education has often been approached through deficit-based discourses focused on scarcity, marginalization, and institutional weakness. Although these conditions are objectively relevant, such perspectives may oversimplify the complexity of rural schooling and obscure the structural, territorial, and political factors that determine educational opportunities. This article presents a critical literature review of research on teacher retention and educational equity in rural education, with a special emphasis on the Colombian context. The review draws on international, Latin American, and Colombian literature published between 2015 and 2025. Methodologically, the study is based on a qualitative literature review. The selected studies were analyzed through a thematic and categorical reading, which allowed for the identification of four main analytical dimensions: material conditions as structural determinants of educational processes; teacher training and contextualized teaching; inclusion and equity in relation to the gaps between rural and urban areas; and teacher retention linked to psychosocial well-being and community agency. The analysis shows that teacher retention in rural schools is influenced by regional inequality, poor infrastructure, limited access to professional development, weak institutional

support, and the persistence of policy frameworks focused on urban areas. The article argues that teacher retention should not be viewed as an isolated administrative issue, but rather as a central dimension of educational justice. To strengthen rural education, it is necessary to move beyond deficit-oriented discourse and promote policies and pedagogical approaches based on territorial recognition, sustained public investment, and meaningful support for teachers and communities.

Keywords:

Rural education, teacher retention, educational justice, rural-urban gaps.

RESUMEN

El concepto de educación rural se ha abordado a menudo a través de discursos basados en el déficit, centrados en la escasez, la marginalidad y la debilidad institucional. Aunque estas condiciones son objetivamente relevantes, tales perspectivas pueden simplificar en exceso la complejidad de la escolarización rural y ocultar los factores estructurales, territoriales y políticos que determinan las oportunidades educativas. Este artículo presenta una revisión documental crítica de la investigación sobre la retención

docente y la justicia educativa en la educación rural, con especial énfasis en el contexto colombiano. La revisión se basa en la literatura internacional, latinoamericana y colombiana publicada entre 2015 y 2025. Metodológicamente, el estudio se basa en una revisión documental cualitativa. Los estudios seleccionados se analizaron mediante una lectura temática y categórica, lo que permitió identificar cuatro dimensiones analíticas principales: las condiciones materiales como determinantes estructurales de los procesos educativos, la formación docente y la enseñanza contextualizada, la inclusión y la equidad en relación con las brechas entre lo rural y lo urbano, y la retención docente vinculada al bienestar psicosocial y la agencia comunitaria. El análisis muestra que la retención docente en las escuelas rurales está condicionada por la desigualdad territorial, la precariedad de la infraestructura, el acceso limitado al desarrollo profesional, el débil apoyo institucional y la persistencia de marcos de políticas centrados en las zonas urbanas. El artículo sostiene que la retención del profesorado no debe entenderse como una cuestión administrativa aislada, sino como una dimensión central de la justicia educativa. Para fortalecer la educación rural es necesario ir más allá de los discursos deficitarios y promover políticas y enfoques pedagógicos basados en el reconocimiento territorial, la inversión pública sostenida y un apoyo significativo para el profesorado y las comunidades.

Palabras clave:

Educación rural, retención del profesorado, justicia educativa, brechas entre zonas rurales y urbanas.

INTRODUCTION

Rural education has historically occupied a marginal position within dominant educational policy frameworks. It has often been represented through the language of absence: lack of infrastructure, connectivity, resources, and qualified teachers. Although these material limitations are real and have profound consequences, describing rural schooling only through its deficiencies produces a partial and politically limited understanding of the issue. Such a perspective tends to naturalize inequality rather than interrogate the structural conditions that produce it. Moving beyond the rural deficit therefore requires a critical examination of the territorial, institutional, and historical forces that shape educational life in rural contexts.

In Colombia, rural education continues to be deeply marked by territorial inequality. Geographic isolation, precarious school infrastructure, limited internet access, multigrade teaching conditions, and restricted institutional support affect both students' educational trajectories and teachers' professional experiences. These challenges are not merely technical or administrative. They reflect broader patterns of uneven state investment and the long-standing predominance of urban-centered policy models that often fail to respond to the realities of rural communities. As a result, rural schools are frequently expected to meet

national standards without being provided with the structural conditions necessary to do so.

Within this context, teacher retention emerges as a key dimension of educational justice. Frequent turnover in rural schools disrupts pedagogical continuity, weakens long-term school processes, and affects students' opportunities to build stable and meaningful learning experiences. At the same time, teachers in rural settings are often required to assume roles that extend well beyond instruction. They navigate contexts shaped by poverty, social exclusion, cultural diversity, limited access to services, and, in some cases, experiences of violence or displacement. Under these conditions, remaining in rural schools is not simply a matter of individual commitment, but one that is strongly mediated by institutional support, professional recognition, and the broader social value assigned to rural education.

This article presents a critical documentary review of literature on teacher retention and educational justice in rural education with particular emphasis on Colombian context. It draws on international, Latin American, and Colombian studies published between 2015 and 2025. However, these levels are not treated as analytically equivalent. International and regional literature provides a comparative and interpretive framework for identifying broader structural patterns, while the discussion is primarily grounded. This allows the article to situate rural education within wider debates without dissolving its specific territorial, political, and historical conditions.

Rather than approaching rural schools as deficient versions of urban institutions, this review argues for the need to understand them as educational spaces shaped by distinct territorial logics, community relations, and knowledge practices. From this standpoint, the problem is not only how to improve educational indicators in rural settings, but also how to challenge the assumptions through which those settings have been historically governed and evaluated. This shift is particularly important in discussions of teacher retention, which should not be reduced to an administrative concern but examined as part of broader struggles over educational equity, recognition, and justice.

The article is organized around four major analytical dimensions that emerge from the literature: material conditions as structural determinants of educational processes; teacher training and the need for contextualized teaching; inclusion and equity in relation to rural-urban gaps; and retention as linked to psychosocial well-being and community agency. Through these dimensions, the article argues that strengthening rural education demands more than compensatory measures. It requires sustained public investment, context-sensitive pedagogical approaches, meaningful support for teachers, and a reorientation of educational policy toward territorial recognition and educational justice.

Understanding teacher retention in rural contexts requires going beyond explanations limited to administrative or individual factors. This phenomenon is deeply rooted in historical conditions of territorial inequality, in the conceptualizations of rurality within educational policies, and in the pedagogical challenges faced by teachers in areas characterized by structural limitations and specific sociocultural dynamics. In this regard, the present theoretical framework is organized around three interrelated conceptual axes: rural education beyond deficit discourses, teacher retention as an expression of educational justice, and the relationship between territorial inequality, teacher training, and contextualized teaching. These approaches enable an analysis of rural education that eschews the simplistic characterization of it as an isolated problem, instead recognizing it as a complex field traversed by structural, political and pedagogical tensions. These tensions have a direct impact on educational quality and the sustainability of school processes.

The concept of “rural” is subject to variation according to the criteria established by each nation in administrative terms. In particular, the term “rural” is typically used to denote areas that are not urban (Florez, 2016). During long decades, rural education has been interpreted from narratives that are centered in the scarcity, marginality and institutional insufficiency. From this perspective, rural schools have been described from the resources they do not have, such as inadequate infrastructure, connectivity, pedagogical resources, or specialized staff. Although these limitations are evident and have significative effects on teaching and learning process, diverse studios have demonstrated that reducing rural education to a deficit-based can oversimplify the complexity of these regions and ignore historical, social and political conditions that are shaped the education inequality (Plazas, 2023; Yupanqui, 2025).

From this perspective rural education must not be viewed as an incomplete version of urban education, but rather as a region with its own social, cultural and educative dynamics. Consequently, analyzing rural educations demands shifting the focus from lack of resources to an understanding of the territorial and structures that shape access to, retention in, and the quality of education in these contexts (Almache et al., 2025).

The concept of teacher retention pertains to the ongoing commitment of educators to their professional roles within the same institution or system, extending beyond the initial years of their career. It is frequently utilized as a pivotal indicator of educational system health, institutional climate, and leadership efficacy (Raspatiningrum et al., 2025). Teacher retention in rural context has traditionally been addressed through administrative approaches focused on educational coverage, the allocation of teaching positions or the provision of staff in territories that are difficult

to access. However, recent research suggests that high teacher turnover should be understood as a structural manifestation of education inequality with direct effects on pedagogical continuity, institutional stability, and students' educational trajectory (Herrera & Buitrago, 2015; Ramos & Aguirre, 2016).

In rural settings the decisions on remain or leave the institution does not deepen merely on individual vocation, but on multiple factors, rated to working conditions, geographical isolation, access to professional development opportunities, institutional support and teachers' emotional well-being. In this regard, teacher retention serves as a key indicator of educational equity, as it reflects the degree of institutional and governmental commitment to historically marginalized communities (Castro Escobar & González Chavarría, 2023; Moreno-Acero et al., 2024).

Regional inequity remains among the most significant factors shaping rural education experience in Colombia. Limitations regarding to school infrastructure, connectivity, access to educational resources, and availability of basic service affect both, students leaning process and teachers' professional practice (Colombia. Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2024; Fonseca et al., 2024).

In the case of Colombia, rural education cannot be analyzed merely in terms of gaps in infrastructure or access to resources, it must also consider the historical consequences or armed conflict, forced displacement, and the multiple forms of territorial violence that have shaped school life for decades across vast regions of the country (Cambio Colombia, 2024). These conditions have created environments characterized by high social vulnerability, limited institutional presence, and profound inequities in access to education opportunities. Various authors have noted that rural education trajectories have been closely linked to process of historical exclusion, territorial insecurity, and community fragmentations, those factors continue affecting students' retention, and teachers' stability (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2020).

In this scenario, teachers training is of fundamental importance, since many initial and continuing educational program has been designed based on urban models that do not always reflect the sociocultural realities of rural areas. Consequently, many teachers are require developing pedagogical adaptations strategies in context characterized by multigrade classroom, cultural diversity, material limitations and complex socioemotional needs (Díaz & Murray, 2025; Ramos & Aguirre, 2016).

Considering this situation, the literature agrees on the need to strength contextualized training process that enables teacher to design situated, culturally relevant pedagogical practices aimed at building more equitable education pathways (Almache et al., 2025; Yupanqui, 2025).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was conducted under a qualitative approach through a critical documentary review that aimed to analyze the relationship between teacher retentions, rural education, and educational justice in national and international context. According to Hernandez et al. (2014) qualitative research seeks to understand social phenomena from meanings, interpretations, and contextual realities that shape different human experiences that allow researchers to examine educational issues in depth rather than numerical generalization. In this sense, critical documentary review not only facilitates the identification of research trends and recurring findings but also enables a reflective and analytical interpretation of the structural, pedagogical, and territorial conditions that shape educational experiences in rural settings.

To identify studies, researchers employed combination of keywords in Spanish and English including, including rural education, teacher retention, educational justice, rural schools, and English language teaching. The inclusion criteria considered empirical studies or peer-reviewed academic reviews published between 2015 and 2025; studies focused on rural education, teacher

education, English languages teaching, teacher retention or rural education inequities; and studies directly relevant to the objective of the present study. After applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria a final corpus of twelve studies from Colombia, Ecuador and Indonesia was selected for the analysis.

Researchers employed a process of thematic coding and categorical analysis. For the first phase, researchers started with an exploratory reading of each selected study to identify recurring concepts, methodological approaches and key findings. During the second phase, an analytical coding process was performed which allowed the organizations of finding into four main categories: (1) material conditions as structural determinants of educational processes; (2) teacher preparation and contextualized teaching; (3) inclusion and equity in relation to rural-urban educational gaps; and (4) teacher retention, psychosocial well-being, and community agency. This analytical process enables the study to move beyond a merely descriptive synthesis of previous studies and to construct a critical interpretation of the structure, pedagogical, and territorial factors that shape educational justice and teacher retention in rural areas (Table 1).

Table 1. Selected studies.

No.	Study	Country /Year	Participants	Main Contribution
1	External Factors Affect English Learning	Indonesia, 2020	Secondary school students and English teachers	Identified the influence of family support, school environment, teaching strategies, learning facilities, peer influence, and socioeconomic conditions on English learning outcomes.
2	External Factors Affecting Students' English Learning	Indonesia, 2023	Junior high school students and English teachers	Confirmed the impact of family background, peer interaction, learning environment, and teacher support on students' English achievement in rural settings.
3	Teachers' Challenges in Teaching English to Young Learners in Rural Area	Indonesia, 2022	One English teacher and elementary students	Identified challenges related to curriculum implementation, lack of qualified teachers, limited resources, and socioeconomic conditions.
4	Teachers' Challenges in Teaching English in Rural Areas ¹	Indonesia, 2022	Four English teachers and rural students	Reported limitations in materials, professional development, student motivation, parental support, and institutional resources.
5	Teaching English to Young Learners in Rural Area: Teachers' Challenges	Indonesia, 2021	Six elementary English teachers	Highlighted curricular limitations, pandemic effects, and socioeconomic challenges affecting rural English education.
6	External Factors Affect English Learning in Rural Elementary Schools ²	Indonesia, 2023	One English teacher and one rural elementary school	Identified infrastructure limitations, school remoteness, insufficient learning resources, and language barriers.
7	Strengths and Weaknesses of Virtual Education in Rural Areas of Guayas Province	Ecuador, 2022	Students and teachers	Identified digital divide, connectivity limitations, lack of devices, and low digital competence in rural education.
8	The Difference Between Rural and Urban Education in the Professionalization of Students in Ecuador	Ecuador, 2025	Rural and urban students	Showed inequalities in educational opportunities, infrastructure, and professional development between rural and urban students.

No.	Study	Country /Year	Participants	Main Contribution
9	Rural Education in Boyacá: Strengths and Weaknesses from the Perspective of Teachers	Colombia, 2015	Rural teachers	Identified teacher commitment as a strength, but also infrastructure deficits, isolation, and limited institutional support.
10	English Language Teaching in Rural Areas: A New Challenge for English Teachers in Colombia	Colombia, 2016	English teachers	Highlighted contextual challenges in ELT, including multigrade classrooms, limited resources, and lack of contextualized teacher training.
11	Impact of a Productive Pedagogical Project on Rural School Dropout	Colombia, 2024	Students, teachers, school administrators	Showed how context-based pedagogical projects can reduce school dropout and strengthen student engagement.
12	Peasant Families' Perceptions of Challenges, Needs, and Expectations in Education	Colombia, 2024	Eight peasant families	Highlighted the role of family support, community participation, and educational aspirations in rural schooling.
13	Teacher Retention in Rural Indonesian Schools	Indonesia/2025	18 elementary and secondary school teachers	Teacher retention in rural schools is shaped by structural inequalities, limited institutional support, and professional challenges; however, teachers remain committed due to their moral responsibility, resilience, and strong ties to their communities.
14	Supportive Teacher Working Conditions as a Tool to Retain Non-Local Teachers in Rural Schools	U.S.A/2025	22,148 rural public-school teachers from 702 rural and town schools across 108 school districts in Virginia (United States), including both homegrown and non-local teacher	Supportive working conditions significantly increased rural teachers' job satisfaction and intentions to remain in their schools. Although homegrown teachers reported stronger community connectedness, supportive school environments reduced the differences in retention intentions between local and non-local teachers

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The thematic analysis of the selected studies revealed four interrelated dimensions that explain the complexity of rural teacher retention and educational quality in rural contexts. Firstly, an examination of extant literature reveals that material conditions are identified as structural determinants that shape teaching and learning opportunities. Secondly, it underscores the necessity for contextualized teacher training, which is defined as educational programming that equips educators to address the specific realities of rural schools. Thirdly, the findings highlight the persistent rural urban disparities affecting educational trajectories and access to equitable learning opportunities, thereby positioning educational justice as a central concern. A comprehensive review of extant studies reveals a robust correlation between teacher retention and psychosocial well-being, the presence of a supportive leadership structure, and the active engagement of families and local communities. These factors, when present, contribute to the sustainability of educational processes in rural settings. Collectively, these four dimensions demonstrate that the decision to remain in a rural teaching position is not entirely individual in nature. Rather, it is the result of an interplay among structural, pedagogical, social, and community factors.

Material conditions as structural determinants of the educational process

The evidence analyzed consistently shows that material conditions are a structural factor that determines access to education and its quality in rural settings. Thus, factors such as geographic dispersion, difficulties in physically accessing schools, inadequate infrastructure, and limited availability of teaching resources directly affect the viability of educational processes (Ramos & Aguirre, 2016; Yusuf et al., 2023). Areas such as English language instruction require specific inputs materials, exposure to the language, and audiovisual resources the absence of which significantly restricts the development of communicative competence.

Furthermore, the results indicate that the rural digital divide is exacerbated in technology-mediated environments. Connectivity, access to devices, and the development of digital skills are emerging as essential conditions for ensuring educational continuity. However, limited internet coverage, insufficient equipment, and low levels of digital literacy among teachers and students lead to educational exclusion and exacerbate inequalities compared to urban contexts (Castro Escobar & González Chavarría, 2023). From this perspective, technology is no longer a

complementary resource but has become a structural factor that redistributes educational opportunities.

In addition to this, studies suggest that these limitations are closely linked to shortcomings in public policy and to the long-standing, significant underinvestment in rural education. The lack of coordination between educational policies, territorial development, and access to technology hinders the implementation of relevant and inclusive educational models (Plazas, 2023; Yupanqui, 2025). Consequently, a systemic approach is required that recognizes infrastructure, connectivity, and educational resources as essential conditions for ensuring equity and quality in education, especially in vulnerable areas (Almache et al., 2025).

Beyond highlighting material shortages, the studies reviewed help us understand that infrastructure, connectivity, and access to resources are not merely technical prerequisites for teaching, but concrete expressions of how the state distributes or restricts educational opportunities across different regions. From this perspective, material precariousness in rural contexts should not be interpreted as an isolated limitation of certain schools, but rather as a historical manifestation of territorial inequality that shapes both students' school experiences and teachers' professional retention. Consequently, material gaps affect not only educational quality but also the possibility of building educational justice in historically marginalized regions.

Teacher training and the need for contextualized teaching

The literature shows that pedagogical practice in rural contexts develops within tensions between teachers' professional capacities and the structural constraints of the environment. Rural teachers are required not only to master disciplinary and pedagogical knowledge but also to develop skills to adapt to geographic isolation, cultural diversity, and limited resources (Herrera & Buitrago, 2015). Teacher training must move beyond one-size-fits-all models and prepare teachers to recognize the social, cultural, and regional diversity of their students.

Despite these challenges, studies recognize strengths such as close teacher–student relationships, professional commitment, and efforts toward pedagogical contextualization. However, these strengths coexist with significant limitations, including the lack of continuous professional development, limited institutional support, and the absence of sustained teacher training policies (Castro Escobar & González Chavarría, 2023). In this regard, comparative evidence indicates that educational systems investing systematically in teacher professional development achieve better educational outcomes.

Moreover, it is emphasized that teaching practices in rural contexts must respond to students' psychosocial conditions. Factors such as poverty, violence, family instability, and territorial isolation directly impact learning processes,

requiring the design of context-sensitive and responsive pedagogical strategies (Díaz & Murray, 2025). In the field of inclusion, the lack of specialized training and adapted curricula limits attention to diverse learning needs, positioning teacher training as a key element for ensuring inclusive and equitable educational practices (Almache et al., 2025).

The findings also suggest a structural tension between traditional teacher training models and the pedagogical realities of rural settings. While many initial teacher training programs continue to be based on urban and standardized models, rural teachers face multigrade classrooms, sociocultural diversity, material constraints, and complex socio-emotional needs on a daily basis. This disconnect highlights that the challenge lies not merely in offering more training, but in critically rethinking what kind of training is relevant for historically excluded communities.

Inclusion and equity: rural–urban gaps, educational trajectories, and educational justice

The analyzed studies reveal that rural–urban gaps remain a persistent structural issue. These inequalities are reflected in access to resources, educational quality, retention opportunities, and the possibility of continuing educational trajectories. Factors such as socioeconomic inequality, inadequate infrastructure, and limited connectivity create a scenario that reproduces and deepens educational disparities (Castro Escobar & González Chavarría, 2023).

Additionally, it is evident that public policies have not effectively closed these gaps, particularly when educational models fail to incorporate intercultural approaches or respond to the specific needs of rural territories (Plazas, 2023). In terms of educational trajectories, the evidence highlights critical situations characterized by high dropout rates, low retention, and limited access to higher education, thereby restricting opportunities for social mobility.

Although progress has been made through community-based strategies, their impact remains limited when not accompanied by sustained investment, institutional strengthening, and comprehensive policy implementation (Yupanqui, 2025). Therefore, the studies emphasize the need to advance toward models of educational justice that integrate equitable funding, high-quality teacher training, and universal access to technological resources as fundamental pillars for reducing disparities (Almache et al., 2025).

From a critical perspective, the gaps between rural and urban areas cannot be understood solely as differences in coverage, infrastructure, or access to technology. Rather, they represent historical patterns of unequal distribution of recognition, public investment, and opportunities for social mobility. In this sense, discussing inclusion in rural contexts involves questioning not only who has access to the education system, but also under what conditions they remain in it, learn, and chart sustainable educational

trajectories. Therefore, educational justice requires moving beyond compensatory policies and advancing toward more equitable models of territorial development.

Retention, psychosocial well-being, and family/community agency in the rural educational experience

Community connectedness was identified as a significant factor influencing teacher retention in rural schools. Teachers who had been raised in rural communities and were currently teaching in or near their hometowns (hometown teachers) reported higher levels of job satisfaction and stronger intentions to remain in their schools than teachers who were not local. These findings suggest that familiarity with the local context and stronger ties to the community foster a greater sense of belonging, which positively influences teachers' commitment and long-term retention in rural educational settings. (Miller et al., 2025). In a similar way, Raspatingrum et al. (2025) observes that teachers feel an ethical sense of responsibility toward the community and decide to stay despite adversities and structural challenges. This finding suggests that community influences may shape teachers' decisions regarding their continued employment.

Findings also show that poverty, dysfunctional family environments, violence, geographical isolation, and school demotivation have a direct impact on learning, which requires comprehensive pedagogical strategies that do not reduce performance to strict instructional variables (Díaz & Murray, 2025). Along the same lines, dropout rates are associated with structural conditions such as child labor, low curricular relevance, and poor school engagement, suggesting that productive pedagogical projects and other contextualized strategies can operate as mechanisms to reframe the meaning of school and strengthen educational trajectories (Castaño & Cardenas, 2018).

Findings also reveal that the lack of acknowledgement from school administrators had a detrimental impact on teachers' professional well-being. The participants reported that their pedagogical innovations, classroom initiatives, and problem-solving efforts frequently went unnoticed, reducing their sense of professional value and potentially influencing their decisions regarding their continued employment in rural schools. (Raspatingrum et al., 2025). Schools in rural areas are among the least attractive workplaces for teachers in Colombia, particularly those located in geographically isolated regions. As noted by Holguín & Aguirre (2016), "most English teachers in Colombia are reluctant to work in rural schools due to several challenges that they may encounter" (p. 210). This reluctance reflects not only the difficult working conditions experienced by rural teachers but also the broader structural inequalities that continue to affect teacher recruitment, retention, and educational quality in these territories.

On the other hand, it is documented that rural families view education as a key resource for expanding future

opportunities and improving quality of life, and they emphasize the importance of moral and financial support for schooling. Despite this, tensions are also expressed in relation to difficulties of access and institutional limitations that restrict the fulfillment of educational expectations, demonstrating that rurality combines the high symbolic value of schooling with material conditions that hinder its full realization (Moreno et al., 2024). Complementarily, it is recognized that community ties and relational closeness (teacher-student-community) can constitute strengths for sustaining educational processes, even when they coexist with weaknesses derived from infrastructure and limited educational offerings (Herrera & Buitrago, 2015).

Finally, it is evident that access to public services, employment, education, and infrastructure affects overall well-being and, therefore, school experience. This analysis allows us to understand that rural education is immersed in territorial conditions that condition both attendance and educational continuity, and that any pedagogical intervention is strengthened when it dialogues with social and territorial development policies (Fonseca et al., 2024). Thus, it is noteworthy that policies involving community participation can enhance student engagement and school governance, but their effectiveness depends on resolving structural constraints infrastructure, teacher retention, and connectivity to consolidate sustainable impacts on permanence and results (Yupanqui, 2025). In summary, the evidence places retention and well-being as necessarily interdependent categories of rural education, requiring comprehensive approaches that articulate school, family, community, and the state.

The findings reveal that teachers' retention in rural settings is not solely an individual decision, but rather a complex response to the material, emotional, community, and institutional conditions that shape their professional experience. In this sense, remaining in a rural school involves not only performing a pedagogical role, but also building community ties, responding to situations of social vulnerability, and sustaining educational processes in areas frequently marked by historical exclusion. Therefore, teacher well-being and professional retention must be understood as inseparable dimensions within any agenda aimed at educational justice.

A significant finding of this literature review is the identification of common patterns across geographically, culturally, and socially diverse contexts, including Colombia, Ecuador, and Indonesia. Despite the evident disparities in educational, linguistic, and sociocultural traditions between the Asian context of Indonesia and the Latin American context, the studies analyzed reveal surprisingly similar structural challenges. In all three contexts, rural education continues to face constraints related to insufficient infrastructure, restricted access to pedagogical and technological resources, connectivity issues, a lack of context-specific teacher training, and a marked

disconnect between centralized educational policies and the actual needs of rural areas. These findings suggest that rural educational inequalities transcend national borders and stem largely from global patterns of unequal distribution of resources, institutional recognition, and opportunities for teacher professional development.

Particularly, Studies conducted in Indonesia demonstrate that rural teachers encounter challenges related to multigrade classrooms, material constraints, limited institutional support, and pedagogical adaptation processes that are analogous to those reported in Colombia and Ecuador. This international convergence indicates that teacher retention in rural contexts is influenced by more than just individual or national factors. Rather, it is shaped by broader structures of territorial inequality that influence educational quality and the sustainability of school systems in historically marginalized communities.

The findings of this literature review suggest a shift in the traditional understanding of teacher retention in rural areas. The evidence examined indicates that this phenomenon should not be regarded exclusively as a human resources management concern, but rather as an indicator of educational justice and territorial justice. Historically, the issue of teacher retention has been addressed from a predominantly administrative perspective. The primary objectives of this approach have included filling vacancies, reducing teacher turnover, and hiring new teachers. However, the extant literature suggests that the decision to remain in rural schools is influenced by a multitude of factors, including government's ability to guarantee the right to a quality education, the working conditions offered to teachers, professional recognition, institutional support, and equity in the distribution of opportunities across regions. In this sense, teacher retention transcends the administrative dimension and becomes a concrete expression of educational justice.

Similarly, this review challenges traditional perspectives that have interpreted rurality through a deficit lens, particularly in terms of the scarcity of infrastructure, educational resources, and technologies. While these limitations are real, the findings suggest that the problem lies not solely in rural schools having fewer resources, but in the fact that they have historically been conceived and managed according to educational models designed for urban contexts. This perspective has obscured the territorial, cultural, and social particularities of rural communities, leading to the reproduction of one-size-fits-all policies that are ill-suited to their specific needs. Along these same lines, Jiménez & Cely Betancourt (2024) argue that teacher training in Colombia has deeply centralized historical roots, dating back to the colonial period, when education was guided by religious institutions and uniform teaching models with little recognition of regional particularities. As a result, teacher training has traditionally been guided by a uniform national agenda rather than by the needs of

diverse contexts such as rural, indigenous, and peasant communities. This historical perspective helps us understand that the current challenges facing rural education are not merely temporary problems, but rather the result of long-standing historical processes that continue to shape teacher training and educational policies.

In the same way, educational planning is often designed to align with national educational policy framework and international trends in education. It suggests that the Ministries of Education often prioritize policy agendas over the specific educational needs of rural communities. Herrera & Rivera (2020) assert that the government's education policy is not aligned with the needs of the rural sector and does not accurately reflect the realities of these communities. The policy is designed for the elite, preparing them to be excessive consumers. Moreover, the policy disregards the location of rural areas in our country and fails to recognize that secondary education, the primary driver of admission to higher education is a key factor in the development of the country itself.

Similarly, the findings indicate that teacher retention is contingent upon a multifaceted ecosystem comprising structural, pedagogical, institutional, and community factors. The decision to remain at a rural school is not explained by any single element alone; rather, it is the interaction among them that shapes the conditions for professional stability. In this context, a salient finding is that the community is no longer regarded exclusively as the setting for the educational process; rather, it is recognized as a pivotal factor in teacher retention. The extant research indicates that social bonds, social acknowledgment, a sense of local belonging, and a strong connection to one's community are associated with heightened professional dedication among educators, thereby motivating them to continue their employment in rural educational institutions. In this manner, the community not only acquires an education but also makes active contributions to the sustenance of educational processes by fortifying the sense of belonging and mutual commitment between the school and the local community.

A critical observation is that the disparities evident in the realm of rural education are rooted in systemic patterns that transcend national boundaries. Despite the cultural, social, and political differences between countries such as Colombia and Indonesia, the studies reviewed reveal strikingly similar issues, including a marked centralization of education systems, an unequal distribution of public resources, greater opportunities for training and professional development for urban teachers, and limited investment in rural areas. These parallels indicate that rural inequality is a systemic phenomenon of global scale, marked by the obscurity of rural regions and the endurance of development models that concentrate resources in urban centers. From this perspective, issues such as inadequate infrastructure, challenges in connectivity, insufficient

teacher training, and high teacher turnover are not merely school-related problems, but rather manifestations of historical processes of territorial inequality. Regarding school assessment, Ortega & Solano (2023) state that there is a predominant tendency in educational quality assessments to rely on standardized measures, which show higher scores in urban areas than in rural areas. Measuring educational quality using general criteria can lead to a bias favoring urban areas, particularly due to the one-sided way quality standards are defined.

Consequently, the findings support the conclusion that rural schools have taken on responsibilities that far exceed their educational role. Teachers not only facilitate teaching and learning processes but also address issues related to poverty, transportation, health, connectivity, violence, armed conflict, school meals, and social exclusion. In this regard, rural schools end up compensating for multiple structural failures of the state, a situation that considerably expands teachers' responsibilities and affects their willingness to remain in the area. Therefore, strengthening rural education requires much more than purely educational reforms; it demands comprehensive territorial development policies that integrate public investment, infrastructure, teacher well-being, community participation, and recognition of the unique characteristics of each context. In other words, the transformation of rural education will depend on the ability to transform territorial development policies, rather than on implementing isolated educational reforms.

Finally, this review identified a significant gap in specialized literature. Most research continues to focus on describing the challenges and needs of rural contexts, while few studies aim to understand which policies, leadership models, professional development strategies, or mechanisms for coordination between schools and communities effectively promote teacher retention. This indicates that the research agenda remains focused on diagnosing inequalities rather than generating evidence on sustainable solutions. Consequently, future research should move toward evaluating successful interventions, policies, and models that can strengthen teacher retention and consolidate more equitable, resilient, and socially just rural education systems.

CONCLUSIONS

This critical documentary review demonstrates that teacher retention in rural schools cannot be understood as an isolated administrative or human resource issue. Rather, it constitutes a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by the interaction of structural, pedagogical, institutional, and territorial factors that directly influence educational quality and the realization of educational justice. The findings reveal that material conditions, contextualized teacher preparation, institutional support, and community engagement are not independent variables but interconnected dimensions that determine both teachers' professional

permanence and students' educational opportunities in rural settings.

The review also challenges deficit-oriented perspectives that have traditionally characterized rural education through narratives of scarcity and marginalization. Instead, the evidence suggests that many of the challenges affecting rural schools are rooted in historical processes of territorial inequality, centralized educational policies, and unequal distribution of public resources. Consequently, improving rural education requires moving beyond compensatory educational measures toward policies that recognize the specific realities of rural territories and guarantee equitable access to quality educational conditions.

Furthermore, the findings highlight that rural teachers play roles that extend far beyond classroom instruction. In addition to their pedagogical responsibilities, they frequently respond to social, cultural, and economic challenges that arise from limited institutional presence in rural communities. Under these conditions, teacher retention becomes closely linked to professional recognition, psychosocial well-being, supportive leadership, and meaningful relationships with local communities. In this sense, retaining teachers is not only essential for ensuring pedagogical continuity but also for strengthening the social fabric of rural schools and promoting sustainable educational development.

Finally, this review identifies an important gap in current literature. While most studies continue to document the structural challenges facing rural education, relatively little attention has been paid to identifying and evaluating successful strategies that effectively promote teacher retention, strengthen school leadership, or foster sustainable rural educational development. Future research should therefore move beyond diagnosing educational inequalities and focus on generating evidence about context-sensitive policies, community-based initiatives, and professional support models that contribute to educational justice in rural territories.

Ultimately, moving beyond the rural deficit requires recognizing rural schools not as spaces defined by what they lack, but as territories with distinct social, cultural, and educational realities that deserve equitable investment, contextualized policies, and sustained institutional commitment. Within this perspective, teacher retention should be understood not only as an educational objective but also as a fundamental indicator of educational justice and territorial equity.

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Conflicts of Interest:

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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Ethical statement:

The study addresses topics related to vulnerable students/populations; however, it was conducted exclusively through a documentary review, analysis of secondary sources, and publicly available databases. It did not involve the direct participation of human subjects or the collection, use, or processing of personally identifiable information.