



Innovative Approaches to Ensuring Quality Education in Poorly-resourced and Over-crowded Classrooms of the Public schools of Gasabo District-Kigali City

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Abstract: *Achieving quality education is the Rwanda's aim and it is seen as the driver to turn Rwanda into the middle income earner by 2035. This quality education has to be achieved through proper planning and designing of school facilities and learning resources. Despite efforts of the government to succeed in achieving this amid insufficient funds, there are challenges. These challenges are related to the EFA (Education For All) program, whose successful attainment in 2015 led to high enrollment rates causing classroom overcrowding. This has also led to demand for the learning resources and facilities as the available ones have become inadequate, and affect the quality of education. In this paper, we assessed how quality education can be ensured in the selected Rwandan primary schools in such a situation. The research questions employed were: How can quality education be ensured in overcrowded primary school classrooms? How can quality education be achieved in poorly resourced primary school classrooms? The study was qualitative and data was collected using interviews that involved 22 participants from selected schools in Gasabo district, Rwanda. Data was analysed thematically. Findings indicated that quality education can be ensured through the concerted efforts of education stakeholders and the application of various innovative approaches. The implications of the findings is that innovations in curriculum design, pedagogy, school administration and supervision would lead to quality enhancement in primary schools in Rwanda. We recommend that efforts be put in family planning and providing adequate learning resources.*

Keywords: *Quality education, overcrowded classrooms, poorly-resourced classrooms*

1. Introduction

Achieving quality education is the main aim of Rwanda's Ministry of Education and it is seen as the driver that is assumed to turn Rwanda into the knowledge based and middle income earner country by 2020 and a high income earner by 2050 (Mwai, 2020). This education aim is reflected in Rwanda's vision 2020 that emphasizes skills development, free access to education, quality education, and gender promotion. It is through quality education that all those issues will be achieved in the country (Williams, 2016). Achieving this vision 2020 programme and the education aim has to be accomplished through the provision of quality education by properly planning and

designing school facilities and learning resources. Despite tremendous efforts of the government to succeed in achieving this amid insufficient funds, there are challenges. These challenges are related to the EFA program whose successful attainment in 2015 has led to high enrollment rates causing classroom overcrowding. This has also led to demand for the instructional materials/ learning resources as the available ones have become insufficient thereby affecting the quality of education (Fortune Africa, n.d.; MINEDUC, 2018). Yet, the World Economic Forum (2000) stipulates some of the EFA goals as access to education by 2015 as well as improving quality education so as to achieve the learning outcomes so as to meet the millennium development goals by 2015.

The World Bank (2011) provides the definition of quality education as referring to an interplay of factors within an education system which are assumed to lead to the better learning outcomes of students. They include measurable dimensions of how students learn. It constitutes the use of adequate resources such as instructional/learning resources, teachers, infrastructure, supportive school climate, pedagogical support, effective supervision and administration. Such quality education to be achieved has to be determined by the socio-economic status of the learners and their parents, as well as community and parents' support. For the MINEDUC, quality education signifies "all children leaving school with skills, knowledge, attitudes, and values needed for Rwanda's economic and social development, and for their own further education and social development" (World Bank, 2011, p.90). MINEDUC further pinpoints out many quality guidelines, including Content and materials that reflect the relevant curricula, including textbooks, readers' and other didactic material, which can even be made from locally available resources; trained, motivated and well supported teachers using learner centered interactive teaching approaches in well managed classrooms, as well as Skillful assessment to facilitate learning and reduce inequities (World Bank, 2011; Williams, 2016).

Basing on the above, literature (Cremers, Kyriakides & Sammons, 2010) postulate that numerous education reform initiatives for quality improvement don't succeed due to the gap between education theory and practice. Implying that what is theorized is not effectively practiced. For example, having EFA leads to overcrowding in classrooms and thus negatively effects the quality of teaching. According to various studies, classroom overcrowding and poor school facilities have effect on quality education. It is also linked to teacher commitment and motivation especially in the developing countries (Adelabu, 2005; Bennell & Akeampong, 2007).

The World Bank highlights Rwanda as having the highest classroom over-crowding in the world (Gatsinzi, Ndiku, & Jesse, 2014). A study in the Eastern and Southern Africa found that teacher commitment, learning resources, classroom structures, etc were not well provided especially in the rural schools (UNICEF, 2012). Chicagos and West (2010) found that learners without textbooks significantly performed lower in test scores than those with text books.

According to the World Bank (2014), transforming effectively the schools' available resources is what measures the quality of an education system (World Bank, 2004). Basing on that background, it is evident that quality education is compromised in an education system whose reforms demand free access thereby leading to over-overutilization of the available learning facilities and resources. This study aimed at finding out how teachers and local educational leaders perceive quality attainment in the poorly-resourced and overcrowded classrooms amid

reforms that demand for free education access and quality education.

The research questions that guided the study were:

1. How can quality education be achieved in poorly resourced primary school classrooms?
2. How can quality education be ensured in overcrowded primary school classrooms?

2. Literature Review

This section highlights studies and literature that are in support of this study on quality education in a classroom environment that is overcrowded and poorly resourced is affected and how it can be attained through various innovative approaches and concerted efforts of the all education stakeholders. For example, classroom overcrowding affected quality education and teacher motivation (Gatsinzi, Ndiku, & Jesse, 2014). Tiongson (n.d.) posited that quality education in many countries waned due to augmentation of learners' enrollments, which emanated from the education policy of free access to education. The World Bank reveal Rwanda as having the highest over-crowding in the world (Gatsinzi, Ndiku, & Jesse, 2014). Similarly, Adelabu (2005) established over-crowding as affecting the education quality in least developed countries. Williams (2016) established that free access to education succeeded at the expense of quality education in Rwanda's primary schools.

UNESCO (2012) revealed that in Eastern and Southern Africa, teacher commitment, learning resources, classroom structures, etc., are not well provided yet crucial in providing quality education, especially in the rural schools. Furthermore, professional support services, parents, local community, and school leadership need to interact if quality is to be ensured and are linked to students' performance. Sergiovani (2009) highlighted effective schools as the ones that create environments that facilitate teachers to execute their tasks as well as receive recognition. Bennell and Akeampong (2007) have found teacher motivation crisis as emanating from poor school facilities, and teacher commitment.

Mupa and Chinooneka (2015) revealed that in many primary schools of Zimbabwe, teachers do not employ a variety of pedagogies as their instructional materials are only limited to textbook and syllabus. These authors further revealed that teachers' morale is low while learners study in uncondusive environments, provision of learning resources not supported by parents, while schools lacked adequate learning resources like textbooks and resource books. RCSP (2014) highlights challenges to Rwanda's education system as government's insufficient education financing to cater for basic education needs. It also commends the need for creating safe learning

environments where children can learn while seated comfortably, and teaching supervisions and methodologies be improved specifically teaching in an overcrowded class without adequate learning resources.

A study by Najumba (2013) established that students in schools that have adequate learning resources and facilities performed better in primary school standardized exams. On the other hand, Chicagos and West (2010) found that learners without textbooks significantly performed low in test scores than those with text books.

Tikly and Barret (2013) called this access expansion and quality improvement as contradictory in Rwanda's EFA program. This is complemented in a study by the USAID (2014) revealing a significant number of learners in primary school grades 1-3 as unable to read, or understand words they were assessed on. Besides, they were unable to do additions and subtractions in mathematics assessments of their level. The DFID education review in Rwanda also established primary education quality as low due to learners' lack of numeracy and literacy skills and this was attributed to government's lack of emphasis on quality. The DFID described this situation as undermining its education assistance development impact (ICAI, 2012).

Studies in 72 schools from 4 European countries also reveal 20% of learners from socially disadvantaged places in Europe as lacking mathematics skills. These studies further revealed that dynamic approaches to school improvement had a positive impact on learners' performance in mathematics skills. It was recommended that adequate learning resources be provided to teachers and learners, quality of teaching, classroom management, and partnership policy as key areas that need interventions if learning outcomes were to be improved (Kyriakides, Antoniou, Cremers, Devine, & Papastylianou, 2017).

According to Monyooe (2014), schools have to be well-resourced and well managed. The inspection and supervision have to be done by the stakeholders and focus on addressing teaching and classroom management strategies, class size and enrollments, leadership as well as governance school issues. Stringer (2013) pinpoints that educators have to discover means to foster inquisitiveness, cultivate creativity as well as engage the attention of the students through the use of innovative approaches. Thus, reshaping what takes place in schools for quality purposes requires collaborative efforts of all education stakeholders.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

We used qualitative approaches to collect, analyze, present, and interpret data. Thus, the study was designed as phenomenological research as it dealt with how

respondents perceived how quality education can be achieved based on their lived experience of instructing in poorly resourced and over-crowded classrooms. The study involved public schools with primary level in Gasabo district. We used purposive sampling to select 10 schools with upper level (primary 5 & 6) which had an over-crowding of over 60 students in each class and lacked teaching and learning resources. The participants were the teachers in the above mentioned schools, 1 SEO (Sector Education Officer) and the DEO (District Education Officer) who had the experience of teaching in such classrooms as well as supervising the schools. Convenience sampling was used to reach to 20 teachers/participants who were available at school yet free from classrooms during the time of the study. Thus data was collected from 22 participants.

The unstructured interview and observation were used as tools for data collections. Before collecting data, permission for data collection was sought from the district authorities, SEOs and the school leaders. We then proceeded to schools, introduced to teachers who were available in the staff room, told them about the purpose of the study and requested them to participate voluntarily in the exercise. It was shown by the informed consent form signed by every participant to ensure the voluntarily participation to the study.

3.2. Data analysis

We analysed the collected data using the qualitative methods of thematic analysis. In this case, we coded words, then categorized similar words/grouping codes, and then developed themes out of them according to each research question (Saldana, 2016). Constant comparative data analysis was also conducted to identify data incongruities. The following were the results/themes which were classified according to each study question.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents the various themes/ approaches the respondents provided that can help achieving quality education in poorly-resourced and overcrowded classrooms. These innovative approaches are presented basing on each research question and supporting literature as highlighted below.

4.1. Ensuring quality education in poorly resourced classrooms

This research question endeavored to solicit information on what can be done to achieve quality education in a classroom that has no learning resources like text books, computers, internet, charts, maps, and other learning materials. An unstructured interview was used to solicit information. The following were the emerging themes:- innovative/improvised teaching, using different pedagogies(grouping students, teach one group after

another, demonstration, interactive learning), using internet, using phones with internet, effective use of the available resources, buying resources (government), parents role in providing learning resources to their children, motivating and teaching students to conduct personal research.

4.1.1. Innovative/improvised teaching

On the theme of innovative/improvised teaching, one teacher/respondent is was quoted as saying: *“we the teachers must improvise when teaching so that we don’t wait to teach until we get all learning resources. For example, when a lesson on different types of erosion and I don’t have learners’ books for each student, I should take students outside the classroom and observe around the school compound the lilies and gullies other than wasting time looking for textbooks to observe it in as pictures.”* This innovative idea doesn’t only help students to master the content but also equips them with practical and analytical skills of observing and differentiating the various erosional types.

4.1.2. Using internet

On the theme of using internet, some respondents underpinned that although learning resources are scarce and the government is striving to provide them, some schools have been equipped with internet connection and we the teachers can use that opportunity to search and download the learning resources we need. *“The problem is that some of the teachers don’t know how to capitalize on the internet availability yet it is the avenue where you can access all the resources needed for teaching and learning for the success of the students. The schools need to be equipped with internet connection and also teachers be taught how to access materials on the internet so that quality education is achieved.”* To supplement on this issue, data obtained from the DEO and SEO questionnaires indicated that some teachers don’t perform well with the pretext of not having sufficient learning resources. Yet, the REB (Rwanda Education Board) has posted all the learning resources specifically for subjects that are not available in schools for teachers to download them freely and bind them for use in classrooms with the facilitation of the school administration. *Teachers can also use their phones that access the internet to access the resources they want”* highlighted the SEO.

4.1.3. Using the available resources effectively

On this theme, the REB, through the partnership with the stakeholders, purchases books from local and international books publishers and they supply them to all public schools in varying quantities depending on the available funds. This is aimed at equipping the schools with one book per student. However, according to the DEO, *“in some schools the few available books are not effectively used and given to students during the learning process but kept in the library shelves or rooms implying that some*

teachers don’t use them effectively. They only go to class carrying only their teacher’s copy. We have advised the teachers to use all the available resources but some don’t. The school leadership should help to ensure that teachers use all the resources available.” During the May and October 2019 Quality Education Enhancement Campaign organized by the MINEDUC, some of us participated in it and observed that some teachers didn’t use the available resources and this justifies the DEO’s assertion.

4.1.4. Parents’ role in providing learning resources

On this theme, majority respondents indicated that parents should be responsible for providing the necessary resources so that their children succeed in school. For example, one respondent highlighted that *“there are parents who have the perception that their role is to bring the child to school and the rest the government will take care. Some of them don’t even buy exercise/notebooks for their children not because they are poor but because of the perception. They should understand their role by providing all the resources to supplement what the government is providing.”*

4.1.5. Using various pedagogies

Under this theme, majority respondents stressed that teachers can use various methods including demonstration, group work, teaching one group after another, etc. *“For example, one respondent pointed out that some of our colleagues are still using teacher centered approach even when there are enough resources for use and per student.”* The same was echoed by the DEO and the SEO. During the May and October 2019 Quality Education Enhancement Campaign organized by the MINEDUC, we observed that some teachers were teaching without giving students the learning resources which were available in abundance and were sticking to the teacher centred approach in an overcrowded classroom.

4.1.6. Government’s provision of learning resources

Majority respondents posited that the government of Rwanda has to provide all the learning resources if the quality of education is to be attained. For instance, one respondent emphasized that since the government is buying learning resources and specifically one book per child, it should do it and provide resources on time. Data from the DEO and the SEO indicated that the government is striving to provide resources in various phases depending on the available funds to purchase them. Our observation indicates that the government had distributed some learning resources in majority schools despite the resources not matching the student numbers and more were still to be delivered. However, some of these learning resources/ books, readers were found still untouched in

their boxes. This implies that the government is trying its best to provide the resources but the pace at which it is done is very slow.

4.1.7. Motivating students and teachers to conduct research

According to majority respondents' assertions, quality education can be achieved through motivating students to conduct personal research through reading various related resources or visiting libraries and internet sites. Teachers can also enrich themselves by researching other sources that are not available at their schools. *Conducting personal researches would make both teachers and students to equip themselves with abundant knowledge related to the learning content as well as be equipped with research and synthesis skills.* One respondent stipulated. Hence quality education achievement.

These innovative approaches are a support and response to the discussed literature above. For example, Stringer (2013) pinpoints that educators have to discover means to foster inquisitiveness, cultivate creativity as well as engage the attention of the students through the use of innovative approaches. This also is contended by Monyooe (2014) who emphasizes that schools have to be well-resourced and well managed, the inspection and supervision be done by the stakeholders and focus on addressing teaching and classroom management strategies, class size and enrollments, leadership as well as governance school issues. Besides, Najumba (2013) established that students in schools that have adequate learning resources and facilities perform better in primary school standardized exams. On the other hand, Chicagos and West (2010) found that learners without textbooks significantly perform low in test scores than those with text books. Mupa and Chinooneka (2015) revealed that in many primary schools of Zimbabwe, teachers do not employ a variety of pedagogies as their instructional materials are only limited to textbook and syllabus. Cremers et al. (2010) postulated that numerous education reform initiatives for quality improvement don't succeed due to the gap between education theory and practice.

4.2. Ensuring quality education in over-crowded classrooms

The second research question investigated how quality education can be achieved in an over-crowded classroom. An unstructured interview was used to collect responses from the respondents (20 teachers, the DEO, and the SEO). Like in the first research question, data was coded, categorized and developed into the following themes:- Provision of seats(by government, parents, stakeholders), family planning, satellite schools, support staff during teaching activities, effective classroom management skills, active methods of teaching(different pedagogies of, learner motivation, helping the slow learners, giving learners many activities, group work learning,

learning/teaching from outside the classroom, plays and songs to attract learner attention, teaching groups in shifts during class time), raising teacher commitment, improvising seats, building new classrooms, removal of double-shift program, CPD (Continuous Professional Development), teacher motivation.

4.2.1. Recruitment of support teachers

Recruitment of support staff or teachers emerged from the respondents' views that in an overcrowded classroom, it is difficult for one teacher to facilitate learning, check learners' responses/activities to the assignments given, control/manage the classroom as well as provide the feedback to each student in a period of 40 minutes. Our observation during data collection indicates that teachers were faced with the challenge of teaching a larger class whose students were not at pa with content understanding and mastery.

4.2.2. Provision of seats

Regard to this theme, majority respondents expressed that all stake holders in education have to provide sufficient seats in classrooms so that all students sit comfortably. These seats should again be designed in a manner that they are easy to be turned around and should be in varying shapes. *Their design should allow flexible movement of students and teachers due to compaction in class. The current ones don't allow flexibility.* Asserted one respondent. The parents can even improvise and provide their children with some potable seats.

4.2.3. Family planning

Most respondents expressed their views on this theme by indicating that the government has to raise the awareness to the public of the dangers of producing many children so that they develop family planning. One respondent posited that *parents should be taught how to plan for the family through producing few children so that when they grow up, their future is guaranteed.* Lack of family planning measures is attributed to the high student population and over-crowding of classes. During our data gathering in one school, we observed that in the class of primary one, there were 140 students in one class. This justifies the rate of birth of Rwandans which is affecting the classroom student ratio.

4.2.4. Establishment of satellite schools

On this theme, most respondents pointed out that since the available schools are over-populated with students, the government should establish satellite schools especially in densely populated villages so as to curb the over-crowding in one school. This would lead to reduction in student number in classrooms of the main school hence quality education achievement. *The satellite schools can be achieved through using temporary materials like tents or permanent structures.* Said one respondent.

4.2.5. Active methods of learning

Some respondents expressed their views and asserted that teachers should employ various methods that engage students in learning. Such methods include learner participatory methods, role plays, students' work presentations, etc. we observed during data collection that some teachers were still using teacher centered approaches instead of learner centred. They could spend a lot of time writing on a chalkboard instead of engaging students to participate. This, coupled with the overcrowded classroom, couldn't lead to quality education.

4.2.6. Teacher's commitment and motivation

Most of the respondents acknowledged that despite the overcrowding and lack of enough teaching and learning resources challenges, teachers have to be committed to their job. One respondent expressed that *it demotivates to teach in a classroom where you cannot even reach the students' seats to monitor their activities*. Another respondent stressed that *"we teachers are responsible to ensure quality education achievement in that we have to be committed, motivated since teaching is our passion and the career we chose. We have to plan our lessons and striver for each student success."* From our informal conversations with the teachers, they seemed to be just teaching for the sake of earning a living without commitment to the job.

4.2.7. Construction of new classrooms

As the government emphasizes EFA, the available classrooms don't match with the growing student number in majority public schools. *One respondent reiterated that in my class of Primary six, I have 99 students. Giving them exercises to practice and marking them becomes unpractical in the allocated period of teaching (40 minutes) Yet this is a candidate class who will sit for their primary leaving exams at the end of the year. This number is very big so that government has to construct new classrooms so that new streams/classrooms are created to reduce this number if the quality is to be achieved.* Our observation indicated that majority classes were overcrowded in the schools the study was conducted in.

4.2.8. Harmonizing teaching schedule hours

On this theme, respondents stipulated that the time allocated for teaching a lesson is very short and time ends when the content is not well mastered by the students. One respondent highlighted that in a week his course is allocated 120 minutes. But these minutes are divided into three different teaching hours. That is to say, *"I teach on Monday 40 minutes, then Wednesday 40 minutes, and Friday 40 minutes. It would be better to teach at least 80 minutes at ago on one day, then the remaining 40 minutes for another day. These would be helpful and could lead the teacher to facilitate the learners to master the competencies learned without hurry of time and also to*

identify which students have weaknesses." From our analysis, we observed that it is the REB that plans the schedule as stipulated in the CBC framework.

4.2.9. Providing incentives for private sector investment in education

This theme emerged from the respondents views that highlighted the need from government to partner with the private sector so as to entice investment in education. For instance, one respondent hinted out that the government can provide incentives like leasing land to private individuals/ groups for the purpose of establishing schools and provide education at a lower cost. This would help curb the student population in public schools thereby leading to quality education.

These innovative approaches in an overcrowded classroom do also support the analysed literature about achieving quality education. For instance, Kyriakides, et al. (2017) revealed that dynamic approaches to school improvement had a positive impact on learners' performance in mathematics skills. These authors recommended that adequate learning resources be provided to teachers and learners, quality of teaching, classroom management, and partnership policy as key areas that need interventions if learning outcomes were to be improved and achieved. The World Bank highlighted Rwanda as having the highest classroom over-crowding in the world (Gatsinzi, Ndiku, & Jesse, 2014). Tikly and Barret (2013) called free education access expansion and quality improvement as contradictory in Rwanda's EFA program. Also, the USAID (2014) revealed a significant number of learners in primary school grades 1-3 as unable to read, or understand words they were assessed on. The Teacher commitment, learning resources, classroom structures, etc were not well provided especially in the rural schools according to a study in Eastern and Southern Africa (UNICEF, 2012). Akeampong (2007) found teacher motivation crisis as emanating from poor school facilities, and teacher commitment. Cremers et al. (2010) postulated that numerous education reform initiatives for quality improvement don't succeed due to the gap between education theory and practice.

The above findings therefore, indicate that quality education in a classroom environment that is overcrowded and poorly resourced is affected and can be possible through various innovative approaches and concerted efforts of the all education stakeholders. The findings also do agree with the above literature thereby shading light on quality achievement. We base on those findings to develop a model for quality education achievement as highlighted below.

6. Model explanation

Our model highlighted below illustrates how the various innovative approaches of ensuring quality education in

poorly-resourced and over-crowded classrooms can lead to quality education assurance in primary schools of Rwanda whose resources and facilities are overwhelmed by the reform for free education access. The approaches in poorly-resourced classrooms link with the approaches in the over-crowded classrooms to result into quality education. An education system that provides quality education is characterized by competent and motivated teachers, learning resources, sufficient time for performing tasks, recruitment and continuous development of the teachers, collaboration between the government, parents, donor agencies, and local community, infrastructure/classrooms development (UNESCO, 2012). For Stringer (2013), educators have to

devise means to foster inquisitiveness, cultivate creativity as well as engage the attention of the students through the use of innovative approaches. Cremers and Kyriakides (2012) proposed that the learning of students has to be contemplated as the key purpose of the school and collaborative efforts need to be addressed if learning achievements have to be attained. Also, the World Education Forum (2000) set goals for EFA including ensuring quality improvement. Our model thus provides useful knowledge to dealing with quality issues in an emerging education system that is characterized by lack of learning resources and adequate classroom facilities, among other challenges, amid global education reforms.

6.1. Model for quality education achievement in primary schools

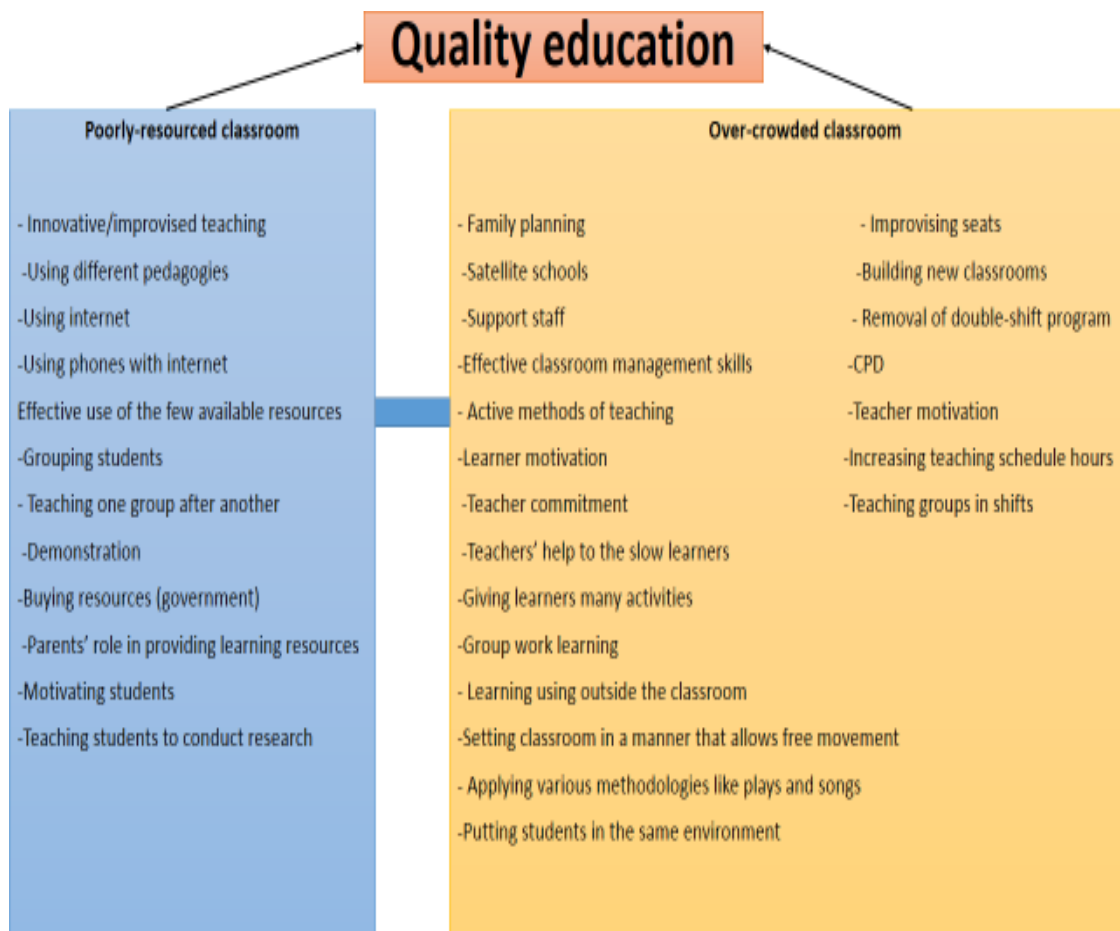


Figure 1: Model for ensuring quality education in poorly-resourced and overcrowded primary schools classrooms designed from primary data

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

7.1 Conclusion

This qualitative study was conducted in ten selected schools of Gasabo public primary schools and covered 22 respondents. Basing on the findings, we do conclude that

quality education in poorly- resourced classrooms is possible and can be ensured through various innovative approaches- effectively using available resources, application of various pedagogies to engage learners, classroom management and supervision, etc. and a collaborative effort from the government, donor agencies, parents, teachers, community and students. Furthermore,

Quality education in over-crowded classrooms can be ensured through various teacher innovative approaches, family planning, parents' role, construction of new buildings, increasing teaching schedules, provision of adequate instructional resources, establishment of satellite schools, government-private sector partnership, etc.

Simply put, quality education in a classroom environment that is overcrowded and poorly resourced is possible through various innovative approaches and concerted efforts of all education stakeholders.

7.1 Recommendations

Learning resources be provided by the stakeholders support/effort (Govt & parents, teachers, donor agencies). Teachers need to be committed and use innovative/improvised approaches in learning so as to achieve enhancing quality education in poorly resourced classrooms. Building of new classrooms should be done in partnership with all stake holders (Govt, parents, and donor agencies). Family planning should be highly emphasized. Parents' role in providing educational resources should be highly emphasized. Teaching schedules/hours be increased. CPD should be highly implemented. Teachers' commitment should be developed. Use of the available resources from the environment be used by teachers. The government can also motivate private investment in education by alluring private individuals to construct schools on the free land donated by the government and they charge tuition that is affordable by parents. This will attract parents to send their children to these private schools thereby reducing the classroom size. A study that covers a bigger sample size and applies mixed methodological approaches needs to be conducted to provide more insights on this issue.

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