**Rural Education in Saudi Arabia: School leaders’ and Teachers’ Experiences and Perceptions**

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**Abstract**

Rural education is considered as one of the key aspects of Saudi life with around 10% (out of 31 thousand) of schools that are located in rural areas (MoE, 2019). The current educational policy in Saudi Arabia is to treat all urban and rural schools as the same. However, evidence suggests that rural education is very different and has unique challenges such as a lack of continuing professional development to enable school leaders and teachers to work in this context (Drummond & Halsey, 2013; Gallo & Beckman, 2016; Hammer, Hughes, McClure, Reeves, & Salgado, 2005; Prew, 2009). Additionally, Saudi rural school staff who do not live in a rural community are obliged to travel long distances every day which may isolate them from interacting with members of that community. Despite growing research in urban education in Saudi Arabia (Abu-Nasser, 2011; Al-Fozan, 1997; Alameen, Male, & Palaiologou, 2015; Alyami & Floyd, 2019), there is an almost total lack of published research looking at rural education. Therefore, the aim of this study is to explore school leaders’ and teachers’ experiences and perceptions of working in rural education in Saudi Arabia. The framework of this study is based on three key concepts: leadership practice, continuing professional development and culture.

This study designs as a multiple case study that will draw on documentary data and semi-structured one-to-one interviews and focus groups. Therefore, the evidence informing this thesis collected from purposive sampling, as detailed above. The six rural schools are chosen based on the classification of the Saudi Ministry of Civil Service and the Ministry of Education. These schools are divided into 3 girls and 3 boys schools so that one school leader and one school deputy will be selected for a one-to-one interview and five teachers as focus groups from each school. These data will be thematically analysed by the processes of coding, categorising into emerging themes and developing conceptual categories.

Keywords- Leadership, CPD, School culture

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