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Is Poverty the Ultimate Obstacle to Theological Education?

Are there solutions to the challenge of making theological education accessible for poverty-stricken pastoral leaders?

We believe there are. However, before we present some solutions, let's first understand the issues surrounding poverty and theological education.

Cultural/Educational Poverty



Pastors who grow up in poverty often lack access to general education. They may receive an education up to the 8th grade, though some may not even be able to read. This situation makes it impossible for them to attend formal training institutions, as they must meet the standard high school graduation requirement. Nevertheless, they continue to serve as pastors, even if some cannot read and must depend on congregation members to read the scriptures for them.

These pastoral leaders rarely communicate in languages other than their native tongue, and few are proficient in English. Unfortunately, a substantial portion of theological training is conducted exclusively in English. Consequently, the goal of studying the Scriptures becomes even more challenging for under-resourced pastors.

In many countries, an individual's class, caste, or tribe shapes their access to education.

Unfortunately, numerous traditional Bible schools and seminaries struggle to tackle this cultural poverty among pastoral leaders.

Additionally, these institutions do not accommodate bi-vocational pastoral leaders seeking theological training.

Economic Poverty

In many nations, pastors are bi-vocational and serve impoverished churches. In Kenya, a church that iTEE Global is helping manages to gather about \$300 a month to cover its needs, such as electricity and rent. The pastor, one of our students, works another job to support his family. When it came time to pay tuition, the church could not assist their pastor with the small amount needed. They lacked the funds to do what they truly wanted to do. Consequently, the pastor sought additional sources of income to cover tuition.



In Guatemala, an iTEE team hosted a teacher training workshop. The cost for this workshop was about \$10. All the students lived in poverty along the edge of Guatemala City's garbage dump. Some supported themselves by searching for items such as metal, plastic, wires or anything that could be recycled. One student couldn't afford to pay tuition. However, another student graciously covered her tuition so she could study.

This type of divine grace is happening worldwide. This is possible because iTEE University's tuition

remains affordable, even for the poorest of the poor. Millions of pastoral leaders do not know about iTEE Global and thus have no access to Bible training.

One of our students is a pastor who lives in Kibera, Kenya, the largest slum in Africa where people in extreme poverty live. He completed his training with iTEE Global because iTEE Global missionaries were willing to teach him online and face-to-face at their own expense!

Spiritual Poverty

We also recognize that spiritual poverty exists among pastors and churches. Two forms of spiritual poverty are closely linked to theological education.

First, there is the issue of the individual pastor's poverty. Ironically, even when they can afford training, some pastors believe that theological education should be made free of charge and funded by others. A pastor in India amassed significant wealth from a previous job. When asked to pay tuition for his training, he declined, asserting that pastoral training should be offered free to students and that iTEE Global should secure the funds to cover this. He reflects the sentiments of many other pastors we've spoken with who refuse to pay the \$25 tuition per term.

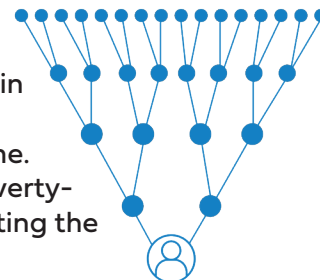


Other spiritually impoverished pastors believe they do not need training and think that only the Holy Spirit should teach them. The Holy Spirit teaches and guides us. Yet, Jesus also made it clear in Matthew 28:19-20 that we are to teach all He commanded and taught. Those I've met who claim to be taught solely by the Holy Spirit often reflect aberrant teachings, misapplications of Scripture, or a lack of godly living.

There is also a spiritual poverty among churches that believe they should not compensate their pastors. They think that pastors should work just like everyone else. Consequently, their pastors work full-time outside the church and have limited opportunities for further training.

A Response to Poverty and Theological Education

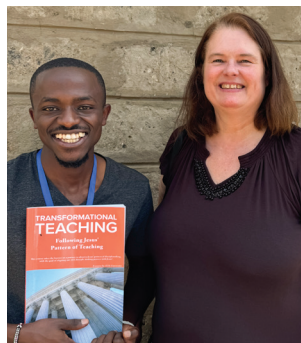
iTEE Global is dedicated to training pastoral leaders worldwide. We aim to sustain training for decades and multiple generations to come. Our strategy is to tackle poverty-related issues by implementing the following four principles.



Number One: iTEE Global works hard to significantly reduce the cost of theological education, effectively addressing much of the affordability issue. We do not own or rent offices or a campus. Sixty-five percent of our staff are volunteers and serve without compensation. Those who are salaried raise their support. Residential schools in many countries charge tuition of thousands of dollars per student. In contrast, iTEE Global delivers quality education for about \$400 per student to fund a complete four-year, 36-credit-hour bachelor's level program.

Number Two: iTEE Global believes all students should invest in their education. Even the most financially challenged students should contribute something. There is perceived value in investing in one's own education. This principle leads to long-term sustainability.

Number Three: To break cultural barriers, studies are most effectively taught in students' native languages. This is why iTEE Global is training bilingual master trainers to instruct in their native tongues. To facilitate this, iTEE Global raises funds to translate and print courses in major languages.



Transformational Teaching Course in Juja, Kenya

Courses remain available in each language by translating and covering the printing costs because students participate in education costs. As underprivileged students receive training in their native languages, many will become trainers for future leaders.

Number Four: iTEE Global cannot address cultural poverty in any general sense. However, we address cultural poverty through the biblical training students receive in their courses. In previous issues of Global Insight, we have featured stories of pastors and churches that have taught and applied

what they have learned and see transformed churches and communities.

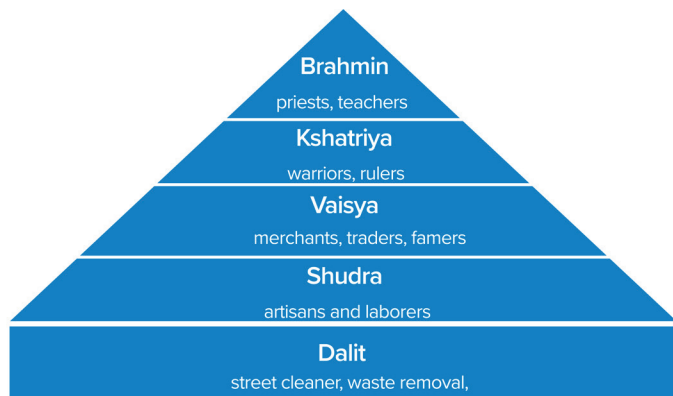
By making theological education affordable, available at different educational levels, and available in the student's heart languages, and by offering it in online, hybrid, and face-to-face modes, more pastoral leaders have access to Bible and ministry training.

In Luke 14:13, Jesus said, *"But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed!"* iTEE Global is doing just that. We feel honored and blessed to be in a place where we can bless the poor!

Overcoming Poverty in Theological Education in India

Poverty in theological education in India is a significant concern that requires attention to several critical nuances within the nation. While financial hardship is one important factor, the issue runs much deeper within the very fabric of society. The crucial question is: *"Why does poverty exist in Christian theological education in India?"*

The Caste System



The primary answer to this question is the caste system. Although it has been officially abolished, caste-based discrimination still affects access to education for lower caste individuals. Those from lower castes, especially Dalits, encounter ongoing barriers to quality education.

In many parts of the country, educational institutions are intentionally not established in lower caste communities. Lower caste individuals are denied access to schools attended by upper-caste students. Politicians and officials deny this, thereby refusing to address the issue. The lack of education leads to poverty and illiteracy.

The upper caste has resisted changes that might empower lower caste individuals due to their fear of losing dominance. Consequently, theological education remains restricted.

The Educational and Financial Barriers for Pastors

The limitation of educational resources affects the Christian community and its leaders in more ways than one. Most pastors in India come from simple backgrounds and can obtain only basic education, maybe up to the 8th grade or so. Though they are called by our Lord Jesus Christ to minister and serve, they face challenges in obtaining formal theological training.



Mumbai, India

Colleges and seminaries established to equip Christian leaders require a high school or college education for admission. Pastors with limited education are excluded from this stream, leaving them untrained to lead their congregations effectively. They are passionate about their calling and faithful in serving, yet they lack the resources and knowledge to disciple effectively.

Financial challenges compound an array of difficulties. A pastor may possess the necessary educational background, yet the high costs of theological education are often unaffordable for individuals from modest means. As a result, pastors called to minister in congregations across India must forgo their theological training, limiting their ability to effectively reach out and serve their communities without a solid Biblical foundation or adequate discipleship.

iTEE Global's Vision

iTEE Global is stepping up to bridge this gap. By creating Biblically grounded courses that are simple and accessible through our online portal. We ensure that even those with little or no formal education can receive theological training. iTEE Global's courses are affordable for economically disadvantaged individuals. iTEE's courses are easy to understand and teach, allowing pastors to immediately apply and share what they learn. By employing the Head, Heart, and Hands technique, iTEE Global ensures that Biblical knowledge empowers pastors and assists them in effectively discipling others, creating a ripple effect of exponential growth in the Church.

Overcoming Poverty in Bangladesh — a testimony of a current student.



A traditional village in Bangladesh

When he was growing up in southern Bangladesh, John’s parents wanted him to receive an education, even though the nearest school was several hours away on foot. There were no paved roads. Until college, John walked four hours a day—more when

storms approached. Money was tight. His parents would catch fish by hand in the pond to make a living. John is very grateful they trusted Jesus, which is uncommon in Bangladesh. However, because they were illiterate, their faith lacked depth.

Fortunately, John was mentored by those involved with Young Life during his high school days. The Bengali chapter of Young Life also provided him with a scholarship to attend college. While he is very grateful for Young Life, the Lord gave John a vision to become a church planter. John feels that the harvest is plentiful in Bangladesh, but very few pastors are available to lead congregations. Consequently, John aspires to become a pastor, but he, his wife, and his two-year-old daughter—lack the financial resources to afford seminary.

The Lord has intervened, allowing him to receive pastoral training. John discovered iTEE Global. After completing his first course in his diploma program, John shares, *“I have learned so many things through this course.”* He is very grateful to have affordable pastoral education close to home. Through iTEE Global, he can study the Bible in depth and pursue further pastoral training using his phone.

Prayer Points

Pray for the recruitment and training of twenty bilingual trainers in 2025 to teach in one of ten languages: Burmese, Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Hindi, Urdu, Swahili, Maa, French, or Spanish.

Pray for funding courses in the ten languages mentioned above.

We would love to pray for you, send your personal requests to: pray@iteeg.org

Ministry Opportunities

We seek volunteers to assist with administrative tasks in the United States. Five to ten hours weekly will significantly impact this ministry.

We seek volunteers with specialty training in online technologies, marketing, graphic arts, etc.

We ask God to add five new full-time missionary staff to our team in 2025.

Interested? Contact Tom Wood:
HRinfo@iteeg.org

Global iNSIGHT in your e-mail:

https://iteeg.org/gi_subscription.html



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