Beyond The Classroom: Challenges and Resilience of Teachers in Remote Schools

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explores the challenges and resilience of teachers' assigned to remote schools in Bukidnon, Philippines. It highlights the unique difficulties faced by educators in geographically isolated areas, including limited resources, cultural diversity, and professional isolation. Through in-depth interviews with ten remote school teachers, the research identifies their motivations, coping strategies, and the significance of cultural adaptation in their roles. The findings reveal that teachers are driven by a deep commitment to education and personal fulfillment, often overcoming significant obstacles to ensure quality learning for their students. The study emphasizes the need for systemic support, professional development, and collaborative partnerships to enhance the well-being and effectiveness of remote school teachers. Recommendations are provided for policymakers and administrators to address these challenges and sustain teacher resilience.

Keywords: remote education, teacher resilience, rural schools, cultural adaptation & educational challenges

INTRODUCTION

This qualitative research study aims to explore the unique challenges and resilience employed by teachers assigned to remote schools in the province of Bukidnon, Philippines. These dedicated educators face distinct challenges due to their placement in geographically isolated and underserved locations. By delving into their challenges, this study seeks to address the existing gap in understanding the specific difficulties faced by the teachers in Bukidnon who are assigned in remote areas and shed light on the perseverance they utilize.

A major problem in the Philippine education system is the lack of teachers, especially in rural and underprivileged areas. To solve this problem, most teachers are sent to these areas, which are frequently far from their homes and familiar support networks. These teachers face a variety of difficulties, including isolation, a lack of resources, cultural diversity, and geographic barriers. It is important to understand their challenges and resilience.

In addition, the experiences of remote location teachers are uniquely contextualized by the province of Bukidnon, with its diversified indigenous population, agricultural settlements, and rough terrain. The unique features of this area make the challenges faced by these Bukidnon educators as well as the determination with which they handle their work.

The challenges and resilience shown by remote locations teachers in rural areas to overcome obstacles have received little consideration in previous studies. In particular, there aren't many thorough studies that focus on the situation of remote school teachers in Bukidnon. By emphasizing the challenges and resilience of these teachers in this particular context, this study seeks to close this gap in the literature.

Also, this research will also investigate how different factors relate to the challenges and resilience of dealing with difficulties among remote areas school teachers in Bukidnon. These factors include the motivation behind

teacher's decisions to pursue teaching, the struggles they work in and strategies, and their ability to adapt to the local culture.

Additionally, cultural adaptation is an important factor to consider. How well remote school teachers integrate into the local community and adjust to the cultural norms and practices can greatly affect their experiences and ways of dealing with difficulties.

According to Glover et al., 2010 Some insight into Professional Development have similarities and differences between rural, urban, and suburban schools comes from a report sponsored by the National Staff Development Council and funded by the Gates Foundation (Wei, Darling-Hammond, & Adamson, 2010). When differences were found, they were most likely between rural and urban. For example, urban teachers participated in significantly more hours of Professional Development than rural teachers, were more likely to participate in reading Professional Development than rural, and perceived content focused Professional Development as more of a priority than rural teachers. Other insight into rural vs. non-rural differences comes from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) teacher Professional Development study (Choy, Chen, & Burgarin, 2006).

In addition, as cited from the study of Noble 2009 and Shikalepo 2020, working conditions were characterized as poor when the work environment and the circumstances under which teachers perform their work were not favorable for teachers to teach effectively. It emphasizes the prevention of poor working conditions, because when employees have negative perceptions about their work environment, they get dissatisfied resulting in less productivity. Due to the impact of poor working conditions on employees' productivity, and in light of the demand for constant improvement in a technologically driven work environment, poor working conditions is a subject of international debate among scholars (Ali, Abdiaziz & Abdigani, 2013; Mulkeen & Chen, 2008). When teachers were not content with their working conditions, their ambitions and willingness to deliver quality teaching were incapacitated Rural school locations and socio-economic conditions serve as major barriers in attracting, retaining and supporting talented teachers (Elfers & Plecki, 2006).

Lastly, understanding the challenges and resilience of remote school teachers in rural schools has significant implications for educational practice and policy in the Philippines. By acknowledging and addressing the encounters faced by these educators, policymakers and educational stakeholders can develop targeted interventions to support their professional development, well-being, and retention. Additionally, fostering collaborative partnerships between schools, communities, and government agencies can facilitate the provision of resources, training, and support networks for outstation teachers (Santos, A., & Reyes, B.2020)

The main objective of this research is to explore the challenges of remote school teachers in Bukidnon, with a specific focus on understanding the trials they face in their work and personal lives. Additionally, the study aims to identify the problems faced by teachers assigned to remote schools. It also seeks to investigate strategies and coping mechanisms employed by teachers to address dilemma in remote schools.
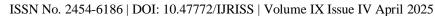
The ultimate goal is to provide valuable insights and recommendations to educational policymakers and school administrators in Bukidnon, with the aim of improving the well-being and support systems for remote school teachers.

The research will be conducted during the academic year 2024-2025 in Bukidnon, which will be determined during the planning phase of the study.

Objective of the study

The objective of this study is to explore the experience and coping strategies of outstation teachers in Bukidnon. Specifically, this study will attempt to:

1. Explore the motivations behind teachers' decisions to pursue a teaching career and accept assignments in Bukidnon.

2. Identify and analyze the challenges faced by teachers assigned to remote schools.

3. Examine the coping strategies and resilience mechanisms they employ.

4. Provide recommendations for educational stakeholders to enhance support systems for remote educators.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

The research design for this study was qualitative, specifically utilizing a case study approach to investigate the challenges and resilience of remote school teachers in Bukidnon. The study was conducted at the Province of Bukidnon, Northern Mindanao region which was chosen due to its significant number of remote school teachers. The study's participants included ten remote school teachers who were purposefully chosen based on particular criteria, such as having worked at remote school area within Bukidnon for at least one year.

The data-gathering procedure followed ethical considerations, with the school principal being provided an ethical statement and the remote school teachers receiving comprehensive information about the study before their voluntary participation. Privacy was kept throughout the study, and respondents provided informed consent. In-depth interviews were the main information collecting strategy, done one-on-one to investigate the remote school teachers' resilience and personal challenges. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing for freedom while also promoting the study of participants' shared observations and challenges.

The main resource for data collection was an interview guide was made up of open-ended questions indicated for gathering thorough responses from participants. The questions aimed to uncover the remote school teachers' resilience, challenges faced, coping strategies employed, and support systems utilized. The interview guide was piloted and refined to ensure its clarity and effectiveness. Thematic analysis was applied to the collected data, involving a meticulous examination, coding, and categorization of the interview transcriptions and group recordings. This analysis aimed to identify themes, patterns, and classifications that would provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and resilience remote school teachers in Bukidnon.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the different results and the emerging themes based on the responses of the participants.

What made you decide to become a teacher?

Theme: Teachers as Catalysts for Growth and Transformation

This theme emphasizes the idea that teachers are inspired by their passion for education and commitment to empowering and inspiring students. By promoting personal growth, teaching values, and offering students opportunities to reach their greatest potential while giving back to their communities, they act as role models. This highlights how educators and mentors influence people's lives outside of the classroom.

This theme is supported by the following responses:

Respondent 1: "I decided to become a teacher because I've always had a passion for helping others learn and grow. I remember the teachers who made a difference in my own life—those who encouraged me, challenged me, and made learning fun. I wanted to do the same for others".

Respondent 2. "I was inspired by my high school teacher, whose dedication and passion for teaching motivated me to pursue a career in education".

Respondent 3. "Teaching for me is the best thing that I can do to share and inspire students that age is just a number. Learning is for all".

Respondent 7: "Becoming a teacher has always been my childhood dream. I vividly envisioned myself guiding and sharing knowledge with young minds. For me, teaching is not only a way to give back to the community but also a way to express my gratitude for the blessings in my life").

Respondent 8: "It's my passion to teach and make positive impact to students' lives".

Respondent 9: "To educate learners and try to make a difference among young people".

The responses reflect that teachers are motivated by their intrinsic desire to inspire growth, foster learning, and create meaningful transformations in their students' lives. Many respondents cite personal passion, role models, and the opportunity to give back as key drivers behind their decision to enter the teaching profession. This theme emphasizes the pivotal role of educators in shaping not only individual learners but also communities and society at large.

In accordance to the theme, teachers are not just information providers but also change agents who impact students' intellectual, social, and emotional growth. Recognizing this fundamental role requires systemic support, including ongoing professional development, sufficient funding, and policies that enable teachers to succeed in the face of challenges. Supporting teachers can increase their capacity to build students' resilience, especially in remote schools.

UNESCO emphasizes that "the transformation of education begins with teachers," highlighting their central role in driving educational progress and societal change. Teachers must be supported through improved working conditions, professional development opportunities, and active participation in policy-making processes.

According to Kumar (2025), teachers are catalysts for social change, influencing critical areas such as innovative teaching methods, social justice education, technology integration, and environmental awareness. These roles equip students with skills necessary for thriving in real-world contexts.

Continuous professional development is crucial for empowering educators to adapt to evolving challenges and foster inclusive education. UNESCO's initiatives demonstrate how training enables teachers to address diverse student needs effectively.

What are your reasons why you accepted being assigned in remote school?

Theme: Commitment to Education beyond Circumstances

This theme highlights that teachers are driven by a deep commitment to education, whether it is driven by passion for teaching, personal fulfillment, or practical needs. They are willing to adapt and overcome challenges in remote settings to ensure that students receive quality education. This commitment underscores the resilience and dedication of educators in making a positive impact on students' lives, regardless of the location or circumstances.

This theme is supported by the following responses:

Respondent 1: "I accepted the assignment in a remote school because I believe in the importance of education, no matter the setting. It was a chance to make a positive impact and adapt to new challenges, while helping students who may not have access to traditional resources".

Respondent 2: "I accepted being assigned to a remote school because it allows me to continue working and providing for my family while also preparing for my future. Despite the challenges, it offers stability and opportunities for growth".

Respondent 3: "For me it's a job, and this job would give me happiness not just for my learners but also for my family and daughter. They are my reasons that inspired me the most".

Respondent 4: "Well, if we love the profession, if the passion is there, school assignment doesn't matter".

Respondent 6: "It felt like the right thing to do. These kids deserve a good education just as much as anyone else, and I knew there was a real need for teachers out here. Plus, I love the challenge of being somewhere a bit off the beaten path".

Respondent 7: "I accepted the assignment to a remote school with an open heart because... teaching in a remote school has made me feel complete as an educator, allowing me to interact with individuals from diverse cultures, traditions, and beliefs".

The responses demonstrate that, in spite of obstacles in their personal or professional lives, educators are steadfastly dedicated to making sure that education reaches even the most isolated places. Intrinsic motives like a love of teaching, a desire to positively impact students' lives, and the fulfillment of one's own ideals or spiritual convictions are what propel this dedication. Although they are important, practical factors like stability and family support are frequently subordinated to their commitment to education.

This theme highlights the resilience of teachers who accept assignments in remote schools. Their ability to adapt and thrive in challenging environments reflects their dedication to overcoming barriers such as geographic isolation, lack of resources, and professional isolation. It also reveals that teachers view these roles as opportunities for personal fulfillment and professional growth.

The theme suggests that supporting teachers in remote schools is crucial for sustaining their commitment and resilience. Schools and policymakers should prioritize: providing adequate resources and infrastructure, developing support networks for teachers and offering professional development opportunities tailored to remote settings. Since, these measures can help ensure quality education in remote areas while enhancing teachers' well-being.

Teachers in remote areas often face social and professional isolation. Research suggests that creating collaborative practices and offering distance education programs can mitigate these challenges (Frontiers in Education, 2021). According to PMC (2025), teachers' lived experiences in remote areas reveal their sacrifices and adaptability. Providing resources and support networks can enhance their resilience and improve working conditions.

Success in remote schools depends on qualities like relationship-building rather than qualifications alone. Strong connections with local communities are critical (Academia.edu)6.And it is visible during the COVID 19 pandemic according to Education Week (2022) highlight teachers' commitment despite unprecedented challenges. Their adaptability during remote learning demonstrates their dedication to students' success (Education Week, 2022).

What are your challenges being assigned in a remote school?

Theme: Overcoming Various Challenges in distant learning

This theme highlights the diverse challenges teachers face in remote schools, encompassing both practical obstacles like transportation, resource limitations, and infrastructure issues, as well as personal and social hurdles such as isolation, cultural adaptation, and emotional strain. Teachers must navigate these barriers while maintaining their commitment to providing quality education in underserved areas.

This theme is supported by the following responses:

Respondent 1: "Being assigned to a remote school in the mountains presents challenges like limited access to resources and technology. Internet connectivity can be unreliable, making it tough for students to fully engage in online lessons. Travel to and from the school can also be difficult, especially in harsh weather conditions. Additionally, there can be a sense of isolation, both for students and teachers".

Respondent 2: "My challenges being assigned to a remote school include expensive transportation, time-consuming travel, the risk of accidents, and the physical toll of tiring journeys. Aside from the aforementioned, the new environment, people you work with, and the new sets of tasks... are also quite challenging".

Respondent 3: "Distance and climate are my challenges and also financial".

Respondent 4: "Transportation, limited resources, poor internet connection".

Respondent 5: "I am not with my family; I need to contextualize every lesson so that they relate".

Respondent 6: "Sometimes it's tough getting supplies, and the roads can be rough, especially during the rainy season. And the kids come from all sorts of backgrounds, so it's important to be adaptable in my teaching".

Respondent 7: "The challenges... are multifaceted. First, there's the issue of accessibility... Second, there's the adjustment to the local community... Another challenge is the language barrier... Additionally, some learners face challenges with proper hygiene".

Respondent 9: "Very far location of the school, rough and muddy roads and no water supply sometimes, no signal".

Respondent 10: "I have two challenges. First, I live far from my family. Second, commuting home every weekend is exhausting".

Based on the responses, teachers in remote schools deal with a number of logistical and environmental challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, unpredictable internet connectivity, and challenging travel circumstances. Personal and social difficulties like being away from family and adjusting to new cultural or linguistic contexts enhance these problems. Teachers must also attend to the specific needs of each student, such as addressing hygiene issues gently or contextualizing teachings for a variety of backgrounds.

This theme shows that while remote teaching offers opportunities to make a difference in underserved areas, it demands resilience and adaptability from educators. The challenges highlight a pressing need for systemic support to ensure teachers' well-being and effectiveness.

The findings suggest that addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach such as improving infrastructure including roads, water supply, and internet connectivity in remote areas, providing teachers with adequate resources and professional development tailored to remote teaching, offering emotional and logistical support for teachers separated from their families and encouraging community involvement to ease cultural adaptation.

According to Van Nuland et al., (2020) remote teaching often suffers from inadequate infrastructure. Teachers face challenges like unreliable internet access and limited teaching materials. And teachers in remote areas report feelings of isolation due to distance from family and colleagues. Building support networks can help mitigate this issue (National University, 2025). It is supported with Maguire (2025), that teachers must adapt their methods to address diverse student needs in remote settings. This includes adapting content to local lessons and employing low-bandwidth or offline teaching methods.

How did you address the challenges?

Theme: Adaptation and Resourcefulness and Community and Cultural Integration

This theme highlights the importance of communities working together, utilizing their resources, and supporting each other to overcome challenges and adapt to changes. It involves fostering strong relationships, leveraging local knowledge, and engaging in collaborative efforts to create a resilient and effective environment for addressing various challenges.

This theme is supported by the following responses:

Respondent 6: "I tried to get creative with what we have, and the community has been amazing in helping out. We've done things like nature walks for science lessons, and I've learned a lot from the kids and their families about local knowledge. It's all about working together and making the most of what we have!"

Respondent 7: "To address the challenges I foster cultural integration. I participated in activities that promote cultural exchange and community involvement. Collaborate with leaders to bridge cultural gaps and create a

supportive environment. I also collaborate with my colleague to enhance language development and social integration."

Respondent 5: "Research more on their tradition that will help connects my lessons."

The theme of Community Engagement and Support underscores the importance of collaboration between educators, students, families, and communities to address challenges effectively. By leveraging local knowledge, fostering cultural integration, and involving community leaders, educators can create inclusive environments that enhance learning experiences. This approach not only addresses immediate challenges but also builds stronger relationships between schools and communities, fostering trust and shared responsibility.

The implications of the Community Engagement and Support theme are significant. Community involvement significantly enhances learning experiences by incorporating real-world perspectives into lessons, making learning more relevant and engaging. Additionally, collaboration with communities optimizes resources, unlocking access to mentorships, cultural insights, and practical support that might not be available otherwise. This approach also fosters social integration by promoting cultural exchange, which bridges gaps between diverse groups and fosters mutual understanding and respect. Furthermore, active community participation empowers students by helping them develop critical skills such as problem-solving, collaboration, and civic responsibility. These skills are invaluable for their personal growth and future success.

Community engagement in education has consistently been shown to improve student outcomes. According to Social Pinpoint (2025), active community involvement enhances student success, strengthens bonds between schools and society, and creates a culture of shared responsibility. Similarly, XQ Super School (2024) highlights how collaboration improves attendance rates, academic aspirations, grades, and school reputation while empowering students with real-world skills.

Daily Human (2024) emphasizes the transformative power of community engagement in turning schools into vibrant learning hubs that benefit both students and communities. This symbiotic relationship fosters holistic education encompassing academic learning, personal growth, and civic responsibility.

And lastly, IDRA (2023) states that meaningful community participation enhances resources for education while addressing societal challenges collaboratively. Such partnerships ensure quality education becomes a collective effort rather than solely the responsibility of schools.

CONCLUSION

It is crucial to remember that the teachers employed by distant schools in Bukidnon, Philippines, are the exclusive subject of this study. Because the sample size is restricted to this area, the results are indicative of the experiences and driving forces of educators in these particular regions. The results may not be entirely generalizable to other places with various circumstances, even though this regional focus offers insightful information about the difficulties and commitment of educators in remote areas.

Teachers in remote schools in Bukidnon, Philippines, are motivated by a passion for education, a desire to help students grow, and a commitment to making a difference, even when facing challenges like isolation and limited resources. They accept assignments in these areas to provide quality education, support their families, and find personal fulfillment. To support these teachers, it's crucial to provide them with adequate resources, strong support networks, and professional development opportunities tailored to the unique challenges of remote education.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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