

Echoes from the Hills: Narratives of Teachers in Teaching Research Subjects in Rural Schools

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the challenges and strategies of teachers assigned to teach research subjects in rural schools, focusing on the DepED Don Carlos II District, Division of Bukidnon. Using a phenomenological approach, the research explores the qualifications and experiences that led to teachers' assignments, the obstacles encountered, and the creative interventions they employed. Findings reveal that teachers are often chosen based on academic credentials, research training, and prior experience. However, they face significant barriers, including limited internet access, scarce research materials, and low student motivation. Students often struggle with writing, critical thinking, and language proficiency. Despite these difficulties, teachers have adopted innovative strategies, such as utilizing printed resources, contextualizing research topics to local issues, working closely with students, and involving the community to assist students in completing research projects. The study highlights the importance of targeted professional development and collaborative partnerships with universities and local government units to support rural teachers. Recommendations emphasize the need for sustainable teacher training and resource allocation to enhance research instruction in under-resourced settings. These efforts can help ensure that students in rural areas develop essential research skills despite prevailing challenges.

Keywords: Rural schools, Research teaching, Teaching strategies, Professional development, Educational challenges

INTRODUCTION

In the K to 12 Basic Education Curriculum in the Philippines, teaching research subjects in Senior High School has become a crucial component for developing students' critical thinking, problem-solving, and academic writing skills. Teachers are expected not only to possess content knowledge but also to be facilitators of inquiry, guiding learners through the complexities of the research process. This task becomes particularly challenging in rural settings, where resource limitations, student preparedness, and contextual barriers pose additional demands on teachers.

Despite the growing emphasis on research education, limited studies have explored the lived experiences and narratives of teachers who are assigned to teach research subjects, particularly in rural schools. There is a significant gap in understanding the challenges they face, their qualifications, and the strategies they employ to deliver the subject effectively in under-resourced contexts. This lack of qualitative insight leaves policymakers and curriculum planners unaware of the real conditions on the ground.

This study investigates the qualifications and experiences that led to the teachers' assignment in teaching research, the challenges encountered in rural school settings, and the strategies and interventions they applied to overcome such challenges. Moreover, the study aims to uncover recommendations that could inform future implementation and support systems. These elements are interrelated, as teacher qualifications influence their ability to cope with challenges, and the strategies they adopt affect outcomes in student engagement and performance.

According to Ababon (2020), research education in the Philippines remains uneven, particularly in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas, where teacher capacity and resource access significantly impact student research outcomes. Similarly, in an international context, Penuel and Gallagher (2017) emphasized the importance of teacher agency and contextual knowledge in implementing educational research practices, particularly in underserved environments.

Additionally, Gándara and Ee (2018) highlighted the importance of culturally and contextually responsive teaching practices in promoting equity in education, stressing that the rural teaching context requires tailored strategies that meet the unique needs of marginalized learners.

The study aims to explore the personal and professional qualifications and experiences of teachers assigned to teach research subjects in rural schools; identify the challenges they have encountered; describe the strategies they have implemented to address such challenges; analyze how these strategies were executed and what outcomes were achieved; and generate recommendations for future teachers handling research subjects in similar rural contexts.

This qualitative research was conducted at DepED Don Carlos II District, Division of Bukidnon, during School Year 2024–2025.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a phenomenological research design to explore and understand the lived experiences of Senior High School teachers assigned to teach research subjects in a rural context. Phenomenology is appropriate for this study as it seeks to describe the essence of participants' experiences, allowing the researcher to gain deep insights into the personal and professional challenges, strategies, and perspectives of teachers. Through this approach, the study aims to surface common themes that reflect the reality of teaching research in under-resourced, rural educational settings.

Research Locale

The study was conducted at DepED Don Carlos II District, Division of Bukidnon, specifically among Senior High School teachers who were handling research subjects during the School Year 2024–2025. This district, located in a rural area, provides a rich context for the study as it reflects the unique challenges and educational realities faced by educators in geographically and economically disadvantaged regions. The study aimed to capture varied perspectives of teachers in these schools to better understand their narratives and the complexities of teaching research in such a setting.

Participants of the Study

The study involved Senior High School teachers from DepED Don Carlos II District, Division of Bukidnon, who were assigned to teach research subjects during the School Year 2024–2025. The participants' ages ranged from 25 to 52 years, with an average teaching experience of ten years. Their specializations included English, Science, Mathematics, Filipino, Social Studies, and Technical-Vocational and Livelihood. All participants had completed at least one professional development training related to research or curriculum development, and several were pursuing or had completed advanced degrees (Master's or ongoing graduate studies). This variety in age, experience, and specialization provided a comprehensive perspective on the challenges and strategies unique to teaching research subjects in a rural school context.

Data Gathering Procedure

Data were gathered through in-depth interviews, which served as the primary instrument for data collection. An interview guide aligned with the research questions was used to elicit detailed, narrative responses from the participants. Interviews were conducted either face-to-face or online, depending on the availability and preference of the participants. Each interview was audio-recorded—with the consent of the participants—and

later transcribed for analysis. Participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity throughout the process.

Statistical Techniques

The data collected were analyzed using thematic analysis, which is suitable for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns or themes within qualitative data. The analysis followed the six-phase process proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. This method allowed the researcher to capture both commonalities and unique experiences among participants, offering a comprehensive understanding of their narratives in teaching research subjects in a rural context.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the main findings from the experiences of Senior High School teachers assigned to teach research subjects in rural schools. The results highlight key themes related to teachers' backgrounds, the challenges they encounter, and the strategies they use to address these challenges.

On Comprehensive Background in Education and Research

This theme highlights how teachers' academic qualifications and professional experiences contributed to their selection as research teachers in rural schools.

"I have a Master's degree in Education. I also attended various trainings in action research, which made the principal assign me to handle the research subject."

"I have 10 years of teaching experience and was the school paper adviser. My writing background was the reason I was assigned to teach research."

"I completed an in-service training on action research under DepEd. I was also assigned to mentor junior faculty in the past."

"I was chosen because of my background in science and experience in coaching students for investigatory projects."

"I am pursuing graduate studies and was among the few teachers in our school with formal research background."

"I attended several DepEd training workshops on Practical Research and was designated as the subject leader."

"I have an experience as a thesis adviser in college before joining the K-12 program."

"I am known in our division for helping other teachers write their action research, so my principal assigned me this subject."

The responses underscore that rural schools often rely on teachers with strong academic credentials, specialized training, and prior experience to address gaps in expertise. This reliance is particularly pronounced in rural settings where teacher shortages and professional isolation are common challenges. Teachers with advanced degrees, research experience, or leadership roles are often seen as better equipped to handle specialized subjects like research.

However, this reliance on individual qualifications also highlights systemic issues. Rural schools may lack structured professional development (PD) opportunities or resources to prepare more teachers for such roles. This can lead to overburdening qualified teachers, potentially contributing to burnout or dissatisfaction. Moreover, rural schools must contend with geographic isolation and limited access to PD resources, which can

hinder the professional growth of their teaching staff.

The implications are significant: rural schools must invest in targeted PD programs that are accessible and sustainable. This includes leveraging local expertise and addressing gaps through remote learning opportunities or partnerships with educational institutions. Such efforts can help distribute responsibilities more evenly among teachers and ensure that all educators are adequately prepared for specialized teaching roles.

Research supports these findings by emphasizing the importance of teacher qualifications and targeted training for effective teaching in rural areas. For instance, studies indicate that professional isolation is a significant barrier for rural educators, making it essential to rely on teachers with prior expertise (Smith & Johnson, 2020). Additionally, tailored PD programs designed for rural contexts have been shown to enhance teacher preparedness and improve student outcomes (Lee et al., 2019).

Moreover, teacher identity plays a critical role in retention and job satisfaction. Teachers who feel unsupported or unprepared for specialized roles may struggle with role adjustment, highlighting the need for integrated pre-service training that aligns with local needs (Brown & Taylor, 2021). These findings underscore the importance of systemic investments to strengthen teacher capacity while addressing resource constraints in rural schools.

On Challenges in Teaching Research Subjects in Rural Settings

This theme explores the various obstacles teachers face in delivering research instruction in rural schools, including issues with resources, student skills, and motivation.

"The biggest challenge is the lack of internet connectivity. Most students do not have access to online journals and resources."

"Limited access to computers and the internet was a big hurdle."

"There is a lack of funding for materials and fieldwork."

"Students struggle with writing and critical thinking. Most have not been exposed to research before senior high school."

"There's a low level of student engagement. Many see research as too difficult or unnecessary."

"Students lack motivation and find the topic overwhelming."

"Language barrier—some students are not comfortable writing in English or Filipino."

Teaching research subjects in rural schools presents significant challenges due to resource constraints and student-related issues. The lack of internet connectivity, computers, and funding for fieldwork severely limits teachers' ability to provide students with access to essential research tools and materials. Additionally, students' struggles with writing, critical thinking, motivation, and language barriers further complicate the learning process. These challenges result in low engagement levels, making it difficult for teachers to foster interest in research subjects.

The implications of these challenges are profound. Teachers may face burnout as they attempt to overcome these obstacles, while students' risk being underprepared for higher education or careers requiring research skills. Addressing these issues requires systemic interventions such as improving infrastructure, providing offline resources, offering teacher training tailored to rural contexts, and engaging communities to support education.

Recent studies reinforce the challenges faced by rural schools in delivering quality education. According to CRY (2024), rural schools often lack adequate infrastructure such as electricity, computer laboratories, and internet access, which are crucial for modern education. EdWeek (2023) highlights that rural students face

limited access to broadband internet and technology, which restricts their ability to engage in research activities effectively. Furthermore, Edutopia (2023) emphasizes that rural students often struggle with foundational academic skills due to limited exposure at earlier stages of schooling. Addressing these challenges requires innovative solutions such as integrating technology into classrooms and adapting curricula to meet the specific needs of rural students.

On Adapting Teaching Methods to Fit Local Contexts and Resources

Teachers in rural schools have implemented creative strategies to address challenges in teaching research subjects. These include:

Establishing mini libraries with printed resources and teaching students how to use books and case studies (Response 1).

Using real-life community examples to make research relatable (Response 3).

Resorting to handwritten outputs and printed references instead of online sources (Response 4).

Aligning research topics with other subjects for integrated learning (Response 5).

Employing storytelling and local success stories to inspire students (Response 6).

Encouraging brainstorming in the local dialect before translating work into academic language (Response 9).

This theme underscores the adaptability of teachers in rural schools who tailor their methods to fit the unique needs of their communities. By leveraging local resources, culture, and community connections, these educators ensure that learning is accessible, meaningful, and relevant. This approach not only addresses the lack of technological resources but also fosters inclusivity and engagement among students.

The implications are significant for educational policy and teacher training programs. Rural educators must be equipped with skills to integrate local contexts into their teaching effectively. Professional development initiatives should focus on fostering creativity, resourcefulness, and community engagement among teachers. Additionally, this highlights the need for systemic support in providing adequate resources to rural schools while recognizing the value of localized teaching strategies.

Barrera et al. (2018) emphasize cultural adaptation in curriculum design to make learning more relevant for diverse communities. Similarly, Beswick (2023) highlights how community connections improve educational outcomes by fostering localized learning environments. Avery (2019) discusses how integrating local knowledge into curricula enhances student engagement and strengthens school-community ties. These studies collectively support the idea that adapting teaching methods to local contexts is essential for overcoming challenges in rural education.

On Making Research Work Despite Challenges Through Practical Strategies and Community Support

Teachers in rural schools could handle challenges in teaching research by using practical approaches and involving the school and local community.

For example, one teacher (Response 1) guided students in choosing topics based on available materials, which helped them gain confidence and independence. Another teacher (Response 4) scheduled research activities during class hours so students could use the school's only computer. Teachers also collaborated with colleagues (Response 5) to avoid repeated lessons and build research skills across different subjects. Others encouraged students to use simple methods like surveys and interviews that did not need transportation or expensive tools (Response 8). Some teachers (Response 3) shared that student became more engaged when research topics focused on real-life community issues like farming and health. As a result, students even interviewed local farmers and barangay officials (Response 6). Regular feedback, peer editing, and weekly

consultations (Response 2) helped students improve their outputs. Teachers also promoted responsible writing through plagiarism awareness weeks (Response 7). Over time, students became more confident in sharing their ideas and presenting their research work (Response 9). In some cases, parents helped by assisting with interviews or printing needs (Response 10). This theme shows how rural teachers can succeed in teaching research by making the most of what is available and by working together with others. Instead of focusing on what they lacked, teachers focused on what could be done. They also connected the lessons to real-life issues, which made students more interested and involved. These efforts not only helped students do better in their research work but also taught them to become more independent and responsible learners. The support from parents, fellow teachers, and the community also played a big role in making research more meaningful and manageable for students.

Recent studies also support these findings. According to Tindowen (2019), practical teaching methods and peer collaboration in rural schools can significantly improve student research skills and motivation. Similarly, Reyes and Dizon (2021) found that connecting research to local community issues makes the subject more relevant and engaging for students. In a more recent study, Cruz and Santos (2023) emphasized the role of parental and community involvement in helping rural students complete academic tasks, especially when resources are limited. These studies confirm that creative teaching and strong community ties can make a real difference in how students learn research, especially in rural settings where challenges are more common

On Teaching Research through Practical Strategies and Meaningful Support

Teachers shared that in rural school settings, teaching research requires both creativity and compassion. They emphasized the importance of adapting to available resources rather than waiting for ideal conditions. One teacher advised maximizing what's already present and building partnerships with nearby schools or local government units. Others shared that being flexible and adjusting expectations to suit students' capacity is key. Participants also highlighted the need to scaffold research skills gradually since many students are unfamiliar with the process. They encouraged starting with relatable topics and real-life problems that students can connect with, making the learning more meaningful. Some emphasized the importance of teaching research ethics early on, especially academic integrity. Teachers also encouraged collaboration with other educators, integrating research across subjects, and involving parents to strengthen student support. They recommended multilingual scaffolding to help students better understand concepts, especially in diverse linguistic communities.

This theme reflects the realities and challenges of teaching research in rural schools, where limitations in infrastructure, materials, and training can hinder learning. By adapting their methods and focusing on empowering students, teachers are creating a more inclusive and sustainable way to teach research. The implications of this approach are significant—it shows that with the right mindset and support strategies, research can be taught meaningfully even in underserved areas. This strategy not only builds research competence but also confidence in students who might otherwise feel excluded from academic discourse. It also reflects the importance of community-based education, where collaboration and contextual relevance are prioritized.

Recent literature supports this view. For example, Chik et al. (2019) highlighted that flexible and localized teaching methods improve learning outcomes, especially in low-resource contexts. Similarly, Hallinger and Bryant (2019) discussed how school leadership in rural areas often requires adaptive strategies due to limited support and capacity. Meanwhile, Cabigao and Oducado (2021) pointed out the role of research in empowering learners when it is made culturally and contextually relevant. More recently, a study by Mendoza and Reyes (2023) emphasized that engaging parents and local stakeholders leads to better research engagement among students in provincial schools. These findings reinforce the idea that teaching research is not just about methodology, it is about mindset, adaptability, and connection to the learners' lived realities.

CONCLUSIONS

Teachers in rural schools are often chosen based on strong academic qualifications, professional experience, and prior research involvement, highlighting the reliance on personal credentials due to limited formal

teacher training opportunities. This underscores the need for more structured and accessible training for a wider range of educators. They also face major challenges such as poor internet access, scarcity of research materials, low student motivation, and weak foundational skills, all worsened by socio-economic and infrastructural shortcomings that hinder both teaching effectiveness and student outcomes.

Despite these challenges, teachers use creative, context-sensitive strategies like employing printed materials, linking lessons to local community issues, and using local languages to scaffold learning, which help overcome resource limitations and engage students better. These practical and community-involved teaching methods lead to enhanced student engagement, increased confidence in research skills, and more responsible learning behaviors, demonstrating that effective research teaching is achievable with appropriate contextual support.

Teachers recommend a flexible, resource-aware approach emphasizing collaboration, incremental skill development, community participation, and culturally relevant curricula to make research education accessible and meaningful for rural students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study indicate that rural schools may benefit from developing collaborative partnerships with nearby universities, Local Government Units, and other educational stakeholders in the community. Such partnerships might allow for sharing resources, exchanging expertise, and jointly developing research curricula, like existing regional education networks or consortia that provide opportunities for professional development and peer learning. Additionally, adopting flexible and tiered professional development frameworks may help teachers gradually build their research teaching skills. These frameworks might include flexible training courses, blended learning modules, peer coaching, ongoing mentorship, and action research projects designed to address the specific challenges of rural education.

Assigning experienced research teachers as academic coaches might also be considered, as this could provide mentorship, facilitate lesson study groups, and support curriculum adaptation, potentially encouraging trust and sustained professional growth among educators. Furthermore, encouraging teachers to design research projects that integrate local community issues may increase student engagement and relevance while making use of local knowledge and resources. These approaches might enhance the practical support available to teachers in rural schools and improve the overall quality of research education in under-resourced settings.

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