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LIVED EXPERIENCES OF OFF-HOME-BASE SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS IN NUEVA ECIJA

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ABSTRACT
This study explored the lived experiences of off-home-base secondary school teachers in Nueva Ecija, focusing on the challenges they encountered, the coping strategies they employed, and the impact of their deployment on their personal and professional lives. A qualitative phenomenological research design was used, and data were gathered through in-depth interviews with purposively selected teachers. The responses were analyzed thematically. The findings revealed four major themes: professional challenges, personal and relational impacts, logistical constraints, and coping mechanisms and support systems. Despite experiencing isolation, financial strain, and difficulties in adjustment, the participants demonstrated resilience through professional collaboration, personal adaptability, and dedication to their vocation. The study recommended the institutionalization of support systems such as mentorship programs, professional development opportunities, and administrative assistance to improve teacher retention, job satisfaction, and instructional quality. These findings underscored the importance of implementing responsive policies that support teachers deployed in remote or underserved areas to enhance overall student learning outcomes.

KEYWORDS: *Off-Home-Base Deployment, Teacher Experiences, Adaptation Challenges, Support Mechanisms, Student Outcomes.*

INTRODUCTION
Teacher deployment plays a critical role in promoting educational equity in rural and underserved areas of the Philippines. DepEd Orders No. 77, s. 2010 and No. 22, s. 2013 provide frameworks for equitable teacher distribution, yet challenges remain due to geographic disparities and teacher preferences. The Magna Carta for Public School Teachers (RA 4670) emphasizes the welfare of educators, but many still face harsh conditions in remote assignments, such as long travel, isolation, and limited resources.

Research by Quejada and Orale (2018) and Villa-Conejos (2019) highlights that new teachers often accept far-flung posts for economic reasons, despite personal sacrifices. Still, many report resilience, personal growth, and stronger connections with marginalized communities. Localized deployment further enhances pre-service teachers' confidence by placing them in familiar settings.

Teachers in remote schools often work in multi-grade settings with minimal support (Barcena, 2018; SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2013). International studies echo these challenges, citing poor infrastructure, limited incentives, and restricted career advancement as barriers to retention (Lusingu, 2018; World Bank, 2016).

Professional and emotional strain is common among off-home-base teachers. Documentaries like *Kilapsaw* and studies by Beltramo (2017) and Flinders (2018) show that teachers often feel isolated and overwhelmed. Effective support systems—such as mentoring, training, and administrative backing—are essential for maintaining teacher morale and performance (Elliot, 2021; Junifer Education, 2022).

Work-life balance is another concern, with many teachers experiencing stress and disrupted personal lives (Dulay, 2022; Awan, 2022). While coping strategies help, institutional support remains crucial for retention.

Despite extensive literature, few studies focus on the lived experiences of off-home-base secondary teachers in the Philippines. This study addresses that gap, aiming to understand how these educators adapt, cope, and find meaning in their professional journeys.

RESEARCH PROBLEM
This study explored the lived experiences of off-home-base secondary school teachers in Nueva Ecija, focusing on their daily routines, challenges, coping strategies, and perceptions. It aimed to provide insights into how these teachers manage their roles and to identify areas needing support to improve their professional and personal well-being. Considering this, the statement of the problem guided the investigation;

1. How may the lived experiences of off-home-base teachers in the Division of Nueva Ecija be described in terms of the following;
   1.1 professional challenge;
   1.2 personal life and relationships;
   1.3 logistical challenges; and

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1.4 coping strategies and support systems?
2. What intervention plan may be proposed based on the findings of the study?

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

This study used a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore the emotional, social, and professional experiences of off-home-base secondary school teachers in Nueva Ecija. Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 20 purposively selected senior high school teachers with at least three years of experience and current off-home-base assignments. Conducted in selected areas of the Schools Division of Nueva Ecija (excluding independent cities), the interviews were transcribed and thematically analyzed to identify key patterns. Trustworthiness was ensured using Lincoln and Guba's criteria, supported by transcript verification, audit trails, and advisor debriefings. Ethical standards, including informed consent and confidentiality, were strictly observed. The researcher personally conducted all phases of the study while upholding reflexivity and ethical integrity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Relocated teachers face a range of professional and personal challenges that affect their performance and well-being. These include logistical issues, emotional stress, and the need to adapt quickly to new environments while maintaining teaching quality.

Professional Challenges. Teaching in a new location requires adjusting to long commutes, unfamiliar work cultures, and increased workloads. Daily travel often leads to fatigue, impacting lesson preparation and delivery. Building relationships with new colleagues and adapting to different school policies and curriculum requirements can be overwhelming. Balancing teaching responsibilities with personal life adds further stress.

Personal Life and Relationships. Relocation disrupts personal routines and relationships. Teachers often feel isolated from family and friends and must rely on technology to stay connected. Emotional stress from separation is common, though some view the move as an opportunity for growth. Coping requires strong time management, self-care, and emotional resilience.

Logistical Challenges. Transportation problems, lack of teaching resources, and poor infrastructure hinder teachers' ability to deliver effective instruction. Limited access to technology and materials forces teachers to be resourceful, increasing their workload. Unexpected schedule changes and balancing school and home duties further complicate their responsibilities.

Coping Strategies and Support Systems. Teachers adopt various strategies such as carpooling, advanced planning, and prioritizing tasks to manage stress and time. Support from colleagues, administrators, and communities plays a vital role in easing transitions. Still, many teachers express the need for better financial support and improved access to teaching tools and technology.

Overall, the experiences of off-home-base teachers highlight the need for stronger support systems and targeted interventions to sustain their effectiveness and well-being in challenging teaching environments.

Table 1

Table of Emergent Themes

Emergent Theme	Responses highlight the significant themes (summary)
Theme 1: Professional Challenge **Questions;** *What specific challenges do you face in maintaining your professional standards in a new location?* *Can you describe the challenges you have encountered since being deployed to a different location?* *In what ways do logistical challenges affect your ability to plan and deliver lessons?*	• **Travel and Distance**: Daily commuting, waking up early, long-distance travel. • **Adjusting to a New Environment**: Building relationships, adapting to new cultures and work practices, feeling isolated. • **Balancing Personal and Professional Life**: Managing work-life balance, maintaining professional standards. • **Uncertainty or Lack of Ideas**: Some participaants have no idea yet. • **Adapting to Curriculum or Educational Changes**: Fast-paced curriculum, obtaining teaching materials, adjusting to school regulations.
Theme 2: Personal Life and Relationships **Questions;** *How do you stay connected with your family and community while living away from home?* *How has relocating affected your personal life and relationships?*	• **Staying Connected**: Using mobile phones, social media, commuting back home daily. • **Impact of Relocating**: Lesser time with family, positive aspects such as personal growth, emotional stress. • **Managing Balance**: Time management, self-care, and overcoming challenges.

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How do you manage the balance between your professional responsibilities and personal life?	
Theme 3: Logistical Challenges **Questions ;** *What are the main logistical challenges you face as an off-home-base teacher?* *How does your daily commute impact your teaching schedule and overall effectiveness?* *How do you handle the availability and transportation of teaching materials and resources?* *How do you ensure that logistical issues do not negatively impact your students' learning experience?*	• **Transportation**: Daily commuting, traffic issues, long-distance travel. • **Resource Access**: Limited access to teaching materials and technology. • **Logistical Issues**: Technology failures, preparation and planning, balancing work done at school and home.
Theme 4: Coping Strategies and Support Systems **Questions;** *What steps do you take to manage the additional time and cost associated with commuting?* *Can you describe any personal strategies you use to manage time and resources efficiently?* *What types of support have you received from the school administration, colleagues, or the community?* *Are there any resources or support systems you wish you had access to that would help you in your current position?* *What strategies or coping mechanisms have you found helpful in adapting to your new environment?*	• **Managing Commuting Costs and Time**: Shared rides, waking up early, adaptation. • **Personal Strategies**: Planning ahead, prioritization, resourcefulness. • **Support from School and Community**: Support from colleagues, practical and emotional support, professional development, desired resources such as financial and technological support.

Proposed Intervention Plan

Table 2

Proposed Intervention Plan

Strategic Intervention Area	Program Description / Implementation Strategy	Anticipated Impact / Outcome	Responsible Entity	Time Frame
Financial Support	*Provide incentives such as hardship allowance and housing subsidy; adjust compensation based on deployment.*	*Enhanced financial security and increased teacher retention.*	*Department of Education-Central and Regional Offices*	*Within 6 to 12 months*
Access to Technology and Internet	*Distribute laptops or tablets; ensure reliable internet access in remote schools through partnerships with internet service providers and mobile hotspot subsidies.*	*Improved digital teaching capability and learner engagement.*	*Department of Education Information and Communications Technology Unit, Local Government Units, School Heads*	*Ongoing*
Instructional Resources	*Supply updated teaching materials and create centralized digital lesson banks for quick and easy access.*	*Improved lesson quality and teaching effectiveness.*	*Education Program Supervisor (EPS), School Heads, Division Offices*	*Quarterly*
Professional Development	*Offer continuous training (online and in-person) on adaptive teaching strategies, technology*	*Sustained growth and innovation in teaching practice.*	*Department of Education Division Human Resource Development Units, Education Program*	*Bi-annually*

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	integration, and mental health awareness.		*Supervisor (EPS), School Heads, Division Offices*	
Administrative and Peer Support	*Implement mentoring programs, peer-buddy systems, and collaborative team-building initiatives for new and reassigned teachers.*	*Greater collegiality, reduced professional isolation, and smoother workplace integration.*	*School Administrators, Department of Education Coordinators, Master Teachers*	*Every semester or quarter*
Community Engagement	*Organize community forums and school-based initiatives that involve parents, Local Government Units, and other stakeholders to build support for off-home-base teachers.*	*Stronger school-community partnerships and enhanced support systems.*	*Barangay Councils, Parent-Teacher Associations, School Heads*	*Quarterly*
Work-Life Balance	*Help teachers develop flexible yet structured schedules; provide orientation on time management and strategies for balancing personal and professional responsibilities.*	*Improved organization and ability to manage responsibilities without burnout.*	*School Heads, Human Resources Personnel, Department of Education*	*Within 3 months*
Combating Loneliness	*Encourage teachers to join community activities or local interest groups; establish informal social circles within school environments.*	*Improved emotional well-being and stronger sense of belonging.*	*School Heads, Guidance Counselors, Community Leaders*	*Ongoing*
Stress Management	*Promote self-care practices (such as mindfulness, exercise, and hobbies); create mental health spaces and provide access to wellness resources.*	*Reduced stress levels and increased productivity.*	*Guidance Counselors, School Wellness Teams, MAPEH Teachers, Head Teachers, ESP Teachers*	*Quarterly*
Workplace Integration	*Facilitate regular team check-ins, orientation programs, and gradual familiarization with workplace culture through observation and peer collaboration.*	*Stronger collegial relationships and faster adjustment to new teaching environments.*	*School Administrators, Senior Faculty Members*	*Every semester*
Overcoming Logistical Challenges	*Develop and maintain a digital library of teaching materials; promote use of collaborative tools (such as Google Workspace and Microsoft Teams); assist with data or internet needs.*	*Improved lesson planning, reduced logistical burden, and enhanced collaboration.*	*Department of Education Information and Communications Technology Unit, School Heads, Local Government Units*	*Ongoing*
Efficient Travel and Scheduling	*Advise teachers to plan travel during low-traffic periods; allow time during weekends or evenings for lesson preparation to minimize weekday strain.*	*Reduced fatigue, increased preparedness, and better use of personal time.*	*School Heads, Teachers*	*Continuous*
Resilience and Growth Mindset	*Conduct workshops on resilience, positive thinking, and adaptive leadership to strengthen personal and professional coping mechanisms.*	*Increased motivation, adaptability, and emotional resilience in challenging settings.*	*Guidance Counselors, External Trainers*	*Annually*
Coping Strategies	*Deliver structured sessions on stress management and emotional regulation; distribute self-care toolkits and encourage routine integration.*	*Enhanced emotional well-being, reduced anxiety, and improved coping behavior.*	*Guidance Counselors, Mental Health Advocates, School Heads*	*Quarterly*

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The proposed intervention plan addresses the key challenges faced by off-home-base secondary school teachers in Nueva Ecija, including financial strain, professional isolation, logistical barriers, and emotional stress. It offers support through transportation and housing assistance, access to technology and teaching resources, and targeted professional development. The plan also promotes peer collaboration, community engagement, and emotional well-being through work-life balance and resilience-building strategies. By improving support systems and working conditions, the intervention enhances teacher morale, effectiveness, and retention. Ultimately, it aims to improve the lived experiences of teachers and student outcomes in geographically isolated and underserved school communities.

SUMMARY

This study examined the lived experiences of off-home-base secondary school teachers in Nueva Ecija and found that they face significant professional and personal challenges. These include early schedules, demanding curricula, long commutes, limited resources, homesickness, and family strain. Despite these difficulties, teachers demonstrated resilience through time management, resourcefulness, and support from peers and communities. Digital communication helped maintain emotional well-being. The findings underscore the need for targeted policies on transportation, housing, materials access, and structured support systems. Such interventions are essential to enhance teacher retention, instructional quality, and overall effectiveness in geographically underserved school settings.

CONCLUSIONS

Off-home-base teachers faced logistical and technological challenges such as poor internet, lack of digital tools, and high transport costs, which affected lesson preparation and delivery. Schools addressed these through tech access, improved connectivity, and financial aid. Teachers managed work-life balance by setting boundaries and organizing schedules. Peer collaboration, support from school leaders, and access to professional development helped them adapt and grow. Emotional strain and isolation were common, but connections with family and colleagues fostered resilience. Overall, strong collaboration and support systems enabled teachers to stay effective and thrive despite the challenges of being stationed away from home

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study found that while off-home-base teachers face personal and professional challenges, these also offer growth opportunities. Key recommendations include tailored professional development in adaptive teaching, time management, and financial literacy. Schools should improve digital access and provide training to support innovation. Strengthening collaboration through peer support and mentoring programs can ease adjustment and build leadership. Teacher well-being must be prioritized through wellness initiatives and emotional support. Policy support should address transportation, housing, and deployment guidelines. Lastly, recognizing off-home-base teaching as a path to career growth can boost morale, retention, and overall teaching effectiveness in underserved areas.

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