



# CHERISHING THE EMPATHY AND DEDICATION OF TEACHERS IN BALUT ISLAND, DAVAO OCCIDENTAL

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## ABSTRACT

*The purpose of the study titled "Cherishing the Empathy and Dedication of Teachers in Balut Island, Davao Occidental" is to explore and highlight the significant role that empathetic and dedicated educators play in transforming the educational landscape of remote communities. This qualitative study explores the lives and experiences of teachers working in remote areas, aiming to capture the essence of their dedication and the transformative impact of education in marginalized communities. A total of eight (8) participants are considered in this study who will join the in-depth interview and focused group discussion respectively. The findings from this theme underscore the significant challenges educators face in remote teaching environments, particularly in achieving work-life balance and overcoming limitations in access to resources and amenities. The implications of these challenges suggest a need for more flexible work structures and support systems that allow teachers to manage personal and professional responsibilities effectively. Researchers should focus on policy-oriented studies that can inform and shape future educational policies, ensuring that remote island communities receive the necessary support, infrastructure, and resources to provide quality education.*

**KEYWORDS-** *Cherishing the Empathy, Dedication of Teachers, Balut Island, Davao Occidental*

## INTRODUCTION

In the sprawling landscapes where roads wind through rugged terrain and communities are scattered amidst the wilderness, lies the heart of education – the remote areas where dedicated teachers embark on a journey to educate the last miles. These educators, often overlooked by mainstream narratives, play a crucial role in bringing the light of knowledge to the farthest corners of the world.

Nestled among mountains, deserts, forests, or islands, remote areas present unique challenges to education, characterized by geographical isolation, limited resources, and sparse populations. Yet, it is in these remote corners that teachers demonstrate unparalleled commitment to their profession, overcoming obstacles and barriers to ensure that every child receives access to quality education. The stories of these educators, who choose to teach where others may never venture, are as diverse and captivating as the landscapes they inhabit.

Although there is some research available on the educational difficulties and efforts in remote regions, there is a lack of studies that especially concentrate on the experiences, viewpoints, and narratives of instructors working in these circumstances. Gaining insight into the distinct obstacles, incentives, and tactics utilized by educators in remote regions is crucial for guiding focused assistance and advancement initiatives.

In Northern Ethiopia, Kirk (2018) study's shined a light on the unwavering dedication of teachers working in refugee camp. These educators face a multitude of challenges, including limited resources, harsh living conditions, and the potential trauma experienced by both themselves and their students. Despite these obstacles, they remain committed to providing a quality education for their students. The study delves into the motivations and strategies these teachers employ to create a safe and nurturing learning environment, fostering hope and opportunity for the children entrusted to their care. Kirk highlights the resilience and resourcefulness of these educators, who often go above and beyond to meet the emotional and academic needs of their students. By examining their experiences, the study underscores the vital role that education plays in healing and rebuilding lives in the midst of crisis.

Moreover, in Australia, Pennington (2019) takes us on a journey through the experiences of teachers in remote Outback Queensland schools. It weaves together personal stories that showcase their unwavering dedication to educating students, despite the significant challenges they encounter. The article delves into these obstacles, providing insights into the difficulties these educators face and the resourceful strategies they employ to overcome them. This exploration paints a well-rounded picture of these remarkable teachers, highlighting their passion and the innovative approaches they use to ensure their students receive a quality education. The article also emphasizes the profound impact these educators have on their communities, often serving as pillars of support beyond the classroom. By sharing their stories, Pennington sheds light on the resilience and creativity required to thrive in such unique teaching environments.

Hoffman (2020) explores the essential role of empathy in moral development and its significance in fostering caring relationships, particularly within educational settings. He defines empathy as the ability to recognize, understand, and respond to the feelings and perspectives of others, arguing that this emotional connection is foundational for moral reasoning and ethical behavior.



Hoffman discusses various stages of moral development, drawing on theories such as those proposed by Lawrence Kohlberg, to illustrate how empathy influences moral judgments and actions. He highlights that children who cultivate strong empathetic abilities are more likely to engage in pro-social behaviors and make ethical decisions. The study emphasizes the importance of empathy in creating caring relationships in educational environments; when educators model empathetic behaviors, they foster an atmosphere where students feel valued and understood, enhancing student engagement and learning outcomes.

Meanwhile, In the Philippines, Guerrero (2019) delves into the world of educators working in remote area. It sheds light on their experiences, both rewarding and challenging, as they strive to deliver quality education to their students. The study goes beyond simply acknowledging their dedication; it explores the specific needs and aspirations of these teachers. By examining the challenges they face, such as limited resources, difficult living conditions, or potential communication barriers, the article aims to identify areas where professional development can offer the most support. This focus on professional development highlights a commitment to empowering these dedicated educators with the tools and knowledge they need to thrive in their unique environment and ensure their students receive the best possible education.

Another study explores the dedication of teachers who persist in challenging circumstances, emphasizing their unwavering commitment to student learning and professional growth. The research is grounded in a longitudinal study that examines the factors contributing to teacher effectiveness over time. Day highlights that successful teachers are characterized not only by their pedagogical skills but also by their resilience and adaptability in the face of obstacles. These educators demonstrate a deep commitment to fostering positive learning environments and actively seek out professional development opportunities to enhance their teaching practices. The study reveals that effective teachers often reflect on their experiences, allowing them to adapt their strategies to meet the diverse needs of their students. Furthermore, Day underscores the importance of supportive school cultures that encourage collaboration and continuous improvement, enabling teachers to thrive even in challenging contexts, (Day 2020).

Locally in Sarangani, Zamora (2019) explores the lived experiences of teachers in far-flung communities, discussing the challenges and successes of educators in these remote areas. Teachers reported traveling long distances to schools and having limited resources, which often complicates their ability to deliver quality education. However, they also described finding fulfillment in their work and forming strong bonds with their students, highlighting the meaningful connections that motivate them to continue despite the difficulties. The article details how teachers collaborate with the community to improve learning conditions, showcasing initiatives that foster local involvement in education. Parents and other stakeholders provide financial and emotional support to the schools, reinforcing a sense of shared responsibility for student success. Furthermore, Zamora emphasizes the innovative approaches these teachers employ to adapt their teaching methods to the unique cultural and social contexts of their communities, ensuring that education is relevant and accessible. Through storytelling and community engagement, the teachers not only enhance academic outcomes but also promote a culture of resilience and hope, demonstrating the profound impact of their dedication on both students and the wider community.

As the world grapples with the challenges of achieving inclusive and equitable education for all, the stories of teachers in remote areas offer invaluable insights and inspiration. They remind us of the power of passion, perseverance, and human connection in transforming lives and communities. In the context of Balut Island, Davao Occidental, the dedication of teachers becomes particularly poignant, as they navigate the complexities of educating students in a setting marked by geographical isolation and limited resources. These educators embody the essence of empathy, going beyond mere instruction to understand the unique challenges faced by their students and their families. Their commitment is evident in their willingness to forge strong relationships with the community, fostering collaboration that enhances educational opportunities. By cherishing the empathy and dedication of teachers in Balut Island, we acknowledge not only their efforts to create inclusive learning environments but also their role as agents of change, instilling hope and resilience in their students. Their stories serve as a powerful reminder that with empathy and dedication, even the most daunting challenges can be overcome, paving the way for a brighter future for all.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Seelig et. Al. (2021) explored the factors contributing to teacher retention in rural areas, aiming to challenge existing narratives and promote a deeper understanding of the complexities involved. It highlights the importance of shifting the discourse from solely focusing on the challenges of rural teaching to recognizing the unique opportunities and rewards that rural educators experience. This study emphasizes the importance of reframing the narrative around rural teaching to highlight the positive aspects and unique opportunities that rural educators experience. By shifting the focus from deficits to assets, the authors argue that policymakers, school leaders, and stakeholders can better support rural teachers and promote retention in these communities. This approach not only acknowledges the challenges faced by educators in rural settings but also celebrates their resilience and dedication, encouraging a more balanced perspective that can lead to targeted interventions and support systems that enhance teacher satisfaction and commitment. By embracing a narrative that values the contributions of rural educators, the study calls for a collaborative effort to create an environment where teachers feel valued and empowered to thrive in their roles.

While the findings of the study of Brillantes & Nebria (2021) revealed that a variety of themes that encapsulate the lived experiences of these teachers, shedding light on the difficulties, sacrifices, and profound fulfillment associated with teaching in such environments. The study highlights the arduous journey teachers undertake to reach their schools, often requiring motorcycle rides and long walks over challenging terrain. Despite limited resources, teachers demonstrate dedication by sacrificing a portion of their pay to purchase classroom materials and supporting students financially for food and school supplies. This commitment goes beyond mere professional obligation; it reflects a deep sense of responsibility and care for their students' well-being and education. The study illustrates how these educators find fulfillment in their work, often viewing their challenges as opportunities to make a meaningful difference in their students' lives.

Also, Teachers who are allocated in remote schools are typically inexperienced in teaching, but they are young, enthusiastic, committed, and passionate. They perceive their current position as transitory and anticipate being subsequently reassigned to a significantly superior institution. Due to the inadequate status of schools in terms of teaching and learning resources, instructors are compelled to contribute a portion of their compensation into supporting classroom activities in order to enhance the quality of education they provide. The teacher-participants find their lives as remote teachers enjoyable, although they want to eventually receive assignments that are closer to their homes. They envision numerous positive outcomes for their kids and the community at large (Orale, 2018).

Bolaton, (2020) ventured into the heart of the Philippines, specifically the remote hinterlands of Mindanao. Its focus lies on the remarkable public school teachers who work tirelessly to educate children in these isolated areas. The research sheds light on the unwavering commitment these educators possess, a commitment that burns bright despite the significant challenges they face. Limited resources, harsh living conditions, and potentially long commutes are just some of the obstacles they must overcome. However, the research doesn't stop at simply acknowledging these hardships. By leveraging creativity and resourcefulness, they develop innovative teaching methods that adapt to the unique context of their surroundings, ensuring that their students receive meaningful educational experiences. Additionally, the study highlights the importance of building strong relationships with the local community, as teachers often collaborate with parents and community members to enhance educational support and resources.

Research Questions

This study seeks to unveil the untold stories of these unsung heroes, shedding light on their unwavering dedication, resilience, and profound impact on the lives of their students.

- 1. What are the lived experiences of teachers in Balut Island, Davao Occidental?
- 2. How do teachers cope with the challenges encountered on teaching in Balut Island, Davao Occidental?
- 3. What educational insights gained by the teachers assigned in Balut Island, Davao Occidental?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This qualitative study explores the lives and experiences of teachers working in remote areas, aiming to capture the essence of their dedication and the transformative impact of education in marginalized communities. Using in-depth interviews, personal narratives, and reflective accounts, the study provides a platform for educators to share their unique journeys. Through these narratives, teachers recount the challenges they face, the triumphs they celebrate, and the enduring influence they have on their students' lives and their communities.

The study adopts a phenomenological approach, which is highly relevant for understanding the essence of teachers' experiences in remote areas. Phenomenology seeks to uncover the core of human experiences by examining subjective perspectives and the meanings that individuals attribute to these experiences. In this context, phenomenology allows the researchers to deeply explore the personal and emotional dimensions of teachers' dedication. It sheds light on the underlying motivations, emotions, and perceptions that shape their commitment to education, despite the challenging environments they navigate.

Research Participants

Using purposive sampling, researchers select teachers who have experience working in remote areas, ensuring diversity in terms of geography, demographics, and teaching experience. This ensures that a range of perspectives and experiences are represented in the study.

In this study, purposive sampling is employed to select participants. This sampling method is strategically chosen to ensure that the selected teachers have substantial experience working in remote areas, thereby providing rich and relevant data for the study. The criteria for selection include:

Geographic Diversity: Teachers from various remote regions across the country are chosen to capture a wide range of environmental and cultural contexts. This geographic diversity ensures that the study does not overlook regional variations in challenges and experiences.

Demographic Diversity: Teachers of different ages, genders, and ethnic backgrounds are included to provide a comprehensive view of the diverse experiences and perspectives in remote teaching.

Teaching Experience: The sample includes teachers with varying lengths of service in remote areas, from those who are relatively new to those with extensive experience. This range helps to understand how dedication evolves over time and with increased exposure to the unique conditions of remote teaching.

By using these criteria, the study ensures that a wide array of perspectives is represented, providing a holistic understanding of the dedication of teachers in remote areas.

A total of eight (8) participants are considered in this study who will join the in-depth interview and focused group discussion respectively. Four (4) of them will join the in-depth interview (IDI) while the remaining participants will be subjected to the focus group discussion (FGD). All data gathered during IDI and FGD will be recorded and transmuted to summarize the responses of the participants in an orderly manner.

In-Depth Interviews (IDI): Four (4) participants will partake in in-depth interviews. These interviews aim to delve deeply into each teacher's personal experiences, challenges, and motivations. The one-on-one setting allows for detailed and candid discussions, providing nuanced insights into their dedication.

Focus Group Discussion (FGD): The remaining four (4) participants will engage in a focus group discussion. The FGD aims to foster a dynamic exchange of ideas and experiences among teachers. This method allows participants to interact with each other, potentially uncovering shared experiences and collective insights that might not emerge in individual interviews.

Research Instrument

The interview guide serves as the principal data collection tool for this qualitative inquiry aimed at exploring the empathy and dedication of teachers in Balut Island, Davao Occidental. As a structured yet flexible framework, the guide facilitates semi-structured in-depth interviews, allowing the researcher to gather detailed, personal narratives while also enabling the participants to speak freely and meaningfully about their experiences.

The guide was designed based on the study's objectives, ensuring that each question aligns with the core themes of teaching motivation, emotional connection, professional commitment, challenges in remote education, and personal reflection. These themes were translated into open-ended prompts, which allow the respondents to elaborate on their feelings, describe specific incidents, and express perspectives that may not emerge through closed or structured questioning.

Data Analysis

The collected interview data will be analyzed using phenomenological analysis techniques, which involve a systematic exploration of the lived experiences described by participants. Researchers engage in a process of bracketing, setting aside preconceptions and biases, to focus solely on the participants' accounts. Through a process of thematic coding and interpretation, researchers identify common patterns, themes, and essences that emerge from the data, capturing the shared lived experiences of stakeholders.

Creswell (2013) outlines six crucial stages in qualitative data analysis that are necessary for assessing and interpreting published research findings in the realm of education. This approach typically involves a systematic process of analyzing qualitative data, often following steps such as coding, categorizing, and thematic analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter explores the broader implications of the research findings and their potential impact on the field of education, particularly in remote and underserved areas. The insights gained from the experiences of teachers and students in such settings reveal the importance of adaptive teaching strategies, community involvement, and support systems. The challenges faced by these educators and their creative solutions offer valuable lessons for policymakers, school administrators, and educators in similar environments.

Implications

This section highlights how these implications can inform future policy decisions, teaching practices, and research initiatives aimed at improving education in remote, rural, and island settings, ensuring that all students, regardless of their geographic location, have access to high-quality learning experiences.

Main Theme 1: Unpacking the Multifaceted Effects of Remote Teaching on Educators' Lives

The findings from this theme underscore the significant challenges educators face in remote teaching environments, particularly in achieving work-life balance and overcoming limitations in access to resources and amenities. The implications of these challenges suggest a need for more flexible work structures and support systems that allow teachers to manage personal and professional responsibilities effectively. It is clear that the lack of resources, coupled with emotional and mental well-being concerns, can deeply impact teachers' resilience and long-term success in remote settings.

Education authorities should prioritize providing adequate professional development programs focused on mental health, work-life balance, and emotional support to strengthen teachers' capacity to adapt and remain committed to their roles. Furthermore, the development of robust infrastructure and access to resources, both digital and physical, is critical in minimizing obstacles faced by teachers in remote settings, ensuring they can deliver quality education despite these limitations.

Main Theme 2: Buoyancy and Adaptation in a Remote Teaching Environment

The second main theme reflects the dynamic nature of teaching in remote settings, where educators must continuously adapt to shifting challenges. The findings from this theme highlight the importance of cultivating a positive mindset, navigating technological hurdles, and maintaining strong personal and professional connections. These factors should inform future teacher development programs and support structures. Teachers must be equipped with the tools to foster a positive attitude despite adversity, and training should emphasize the importance of leveraging available technology to enhance teaching and learning outcomes.

Cultivating a positive mindset is essential for teachers in remote settings. The implications suggest that education systems should prioritize developing emotional intelligence, resilience, and coping strategies in teachers. Professional development programs should integrate modules on positive psychology and mindfulness techniques, helping teachers stay motivated and focused in challenging environments. Schools should also foster a culture of positivity, where teachers feel valued and supported in their efforts to create engaging learning experiences despite external challenges.



The importance of building and sustaining support systems is crucial for teachers in remote settings. The findings show that when teachers feel connected to their peers, students, and the community, their overall well-being improves. Education leaders should facilitate opportunities for collaboration, both within schools and across districts. This includes organizing regular professional learning communities (PLCs), offering mentorship programs, and using online platforms to foster virtual connections. Support from local communities and governments is also vital, and policies should be implemented to encourage the involvement of parents and community members in the educational process.

**Main Theme 3: The Metamorphosis of Education in Island Communities**  
The third main theme focuses on the transformative potential of education in island communities, where the unique challenges of geography, isolation, and resource limitations are balanced by strong community engagement and practical learning approaches. The findings suggest that the role of community and family is integral to the educational process, and teaching methods must adapt to the local context.

Shifting paradigms in education on remote islands reflect the necessity for education to adapt to local conditions. Teachers and policymakers must prioritize context-specific curriculum designs that reflect the lived realities of island communities. This includes integrating local knowledge and practices into the curriculum, enabling students to see the relevance of their education. Furthermore, educational systems must support the continuous professional development of teachers to foster innovation and adaptability in these unique environments.

**Future Directions**  
DepEd (Department of Education)  
For DepEd, the future directions must focus on strengthening the support systems and infrastructure for remote education. Policy initiatives should prioritize the development of comprehensive programs that address the unique challenges of teaching in island communities, such as inadequate resources, technological limitations, and limited access to professional development opportunities. DepEd should invest in creating tailored professional development programs that equip teachers with the skills to innovate and adapt to the specific needs of island students. Furthermore, there must be an emphasis on creating more inclusive education policies that empower teachers and students in remote areas, ensuring that education is accessible, sustainable, and relevant.

Moreover, DepEd should advocate for better infrastructure—such as reliable internet access and digital tools—so that teachers and students can fully benefit from technological advancements in education. Additionally, fostering a culture of collaboration between schools, local governments, and community stakeholders will be critical in driving positive change and improving educational outcomes on islands like Alut.

**Principals**  
Principals play a crucial role in creating an environment that supports teachers' professional growth and well-being. They should be proactive in ensuring that teachers have access to the resources and support they need to thrive in their roles. Principals in remote areas like Alut should encourage collaborative approaches within schools, fostering a culture of innovation, support, and peer learning among teachers. They should prioritize emotional and mental health support for their staff, integrating well-being initiatives and promoting work-life balance.

In terms of leadership, principals should advocate for the integration of local culture and knowledge into the curriculum, ensuring that education remains relevant to students' daily lives and future prospects. They should work closely with DepEd to secure funding and resources, while also acting as advocates for the specific needs of their communities. Furthermore, principals can facilitate stronger connections with local governments and community members, fostering partnerships that support educational initiatives.

**Teachers in Balut Island**  
Teachers in Balut Island should continue to adapt and innovate in response to the unique challenges they face. They should embrace opportunities for professional development, particularly in areas related to technology integration, pedagogical innovation, and emotional resilience. Teachers should engage in collaborative learning communities, where they can share experiences and strategies for overcoming obstacles, particularly those related to limited resources.

Moreover, teachers must focus on adapting their teaching methods to make lessons more relevant and applicable to students' real-life experiences, incorporating local materials and context-based learning strategies. Building strong relationships with students and their families will remain crucial in ensuring educational success, as teachers in Balut Island can play a key role in fostering community development through education. Teachers should continue to advocate for the resources and support they need to succeed, while also cultivating a positive and resilient mindset in the face of adversity.

**Community in Balut Island**  
The community in Balut Island has an essential role to play in supporting education. Future efforts should focus on strengthening the partnership between the school and the community. This could involve community-based initiatives that support education, such as creating local educational support groups, promoting volunteerism in schools, and offering mentorship programs for students. Community members should take an active role in the educational process, providing real-world experiences and fostering a culture of lifelong learning.

### Future Researchers

For future researchers, there is a need to conduct more studies on the experiences of teachers and students in remote island communities. Future research should focus on the long-term impact of remote education on student outcomes, teacher well-being, and community development. Researchers can explore the effectiveness of different teaching methods, particularly those that incorporate local knowledge and resources, to understand what works best in island settings.

Additionally, studies that examine the psychological, emotional, and professional challenges faced by teachers in these settings can provide valuable insights into the types of support systems that are most effective. Researchers should explore innovative educational technologies and how they can be best adapted for remote island communities. Furthermore, there is a need for research that evaluates the effectiveness of community involvement in education and how local partnerships can enhance educational outcomes.

Finally, researchers should focus on policy-oriented studies that can inform and shape future educational policies, ensuring that remote island communities receive the necessary support, infrastructure, and resources to provide quality education. These studies can serve as a critical tool for educational leaders, policymakers, and community organizations working to improve education in these challenging environments.

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