



FAR-FLUNG TEACHERS ASSIGNED AT SITIO TAGA-IBO, MARILOG DISTRICT: A STUDY ON THEIR EXPERIENCES AND RESILIENCE

Grace C. Vallente ¹

¹Student, Graduate School, Rizal Memorial Colleges, Inc.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences and resilience of teachers assigned at Sitio Taga-Ibo, Marilog District. The participants of the study were six (6) elementary teachers officially assigned at Sitio Taga-Ibo, Marilog District, and had been working in the area for at least one year in the service. Their experience was crucial for providing informed perspectives on their professional development needs and challenges. I utilized a qualitative phenomenological approach in this study. This method allowed for an in-depth exploration of teachers' experiences and resilience regarding their unique challenges that significantly impact teachers' professional experiences and well-being in teaching at a far-flung school. The study's findings underscore the importance of challenges of teachers in far-flung areas, teachers' coping mechanisms and teachers' insights teaching in far-flung schools. The study's implications suggest that teachers should be supported in their professional development journey to better address teachers' challenges in far-flung schools. These strategies can be aligned with theoretical frameworks such as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, and David McClelland's Theory of Needs. Teachers' challenges and insights gained from teaching in remote areas underscore the need for systematic support to ensure teachers' well-being and professional development. It contributes to the growing body of education in marginalized areas and emphasizes the importance of systematic changes to improve teaching quality and student learning in remote regions.

KEYWORDS: Education, Far-Flung Schools, Teachers' Lived Experiences, Teachers' Resilience, Qualitative-Phenomenological Research

INTRODUCTION

Teachers posted in remote locations usually experience high obstacles that make it difficult for them to provide quality education. Some of these obstacles include poor infrastructure, insufficient materials, and few opportunities for professional development. Remote schools tend to have unreliable transport, which affects the ability of teachers to travel, particularly under adverse climatic conditions. Apparently, certain teachers are expected to handle more than one grade level in one classroom, thus adding to lesson planning and customized teaching complexities. The isolation of such spaces can also result in professional and emotional burnout, since teachers can have restricted access to peer support networks or community interaction.

In the Lubombo region of Eswatini in Southern Africa, a study found that teachers face challenges in rural schools, including inadequate housing and a lack of essential services, with clean water and electricity being primary concerns. Insufficient infrastructure and students' lack of appreciation for education were also noted. Teachers in these areas feel demotivated due to limited resources, increased workloads, and high turnover rates, compounded by a shortage of qualified educators (Dlamini et al., 2022).

The challenges of teaching in remote and rural areas in Australia have continued to be a critical area of concern in educational research, particularly in the years following the 2020s. Teachers in these areas often face significant geographic and social isolation, which limits opportunities for professional development and collaboration. According to recent studies, such as those by Hargreaves and Fink (2020), educators in remote schools struggle with a lack of access to quality resources, both physical (e.g., textbooks, technology) and human (e.g., specialized staff).

These teachers also report feeling disconnected from urban education communities, with limited opportunities for networking and professional growth. This isolation contributes to emotional and professional burnout, as teachers often lack adequate support systems that are more readily available in metropolitan schools. Moreover, the challenges of adapting teaching methods to meet the diverse needs of rural students, many of whom face socio-economic hardships or come from Indigenous backgrounds, further complicate the teaching experience in these areas (Biddle & Smee, 2021).

In addition to isolation and resource constraints, teacher retention in rural and remote areas remains a persistent issue. Studies such as those by Searle and Rudd (2022) emphasize that while financial incentives, such as higher salaries and relocation allowances, are commonly used to attract educators to these areas, they are not always



sufficient to mitigate the personal and professional challenges teachers face. High turnover rates are often driven by the lack of social amenities, professional isolation, and limited career progression opportunities.

The impact on students can be significant, as frequent staff changes disrupt the continuity of education. To address these issues, experts suggest a more comprehensive approach, including increased investment in technology for remote teaching, greater emphasis on mental health support for teachers, and stronger community engagement initiatives to reduce isolation (Hargreaves & Fink, 2020). These strategies could help enhance the resilience of teachers and improve the quality of education in these challenging environments.

Du Plessis and Mestry (2019) categorized public schools in South Africa's rural areas according to several criteria that have a detrimental effect on the delivery of high-quality education. Generally, rural areas are isolated and underdeveloped. The Philippines' distant schools continue to struggle to offer high-quality basic education because of a lack of resources. Moreover, teachers who are passionate about their work and provide high-quality public services are needed at this rural school.

Teachers must engage in culturally responsive teaching practices, which include incorporating local knowledge, traditions, and languages into the curriculum. This requires ongoing learning and flexibility, as many teachers may not have prior experience working with Indigenous communities and may need to address their own cultural biases. However, the emotional challenge of this work is significant, as teachers often become deeply involved in the communities they serve, sometimes feeling the weight of representing both the educational system and the needs of the students and their families.

To date, remote schools in the Philippines still need more teaching resources, continuously challenging teachers to deliver quality basic education in rural areas, particularly in Sitio Taga-Ibo, Marilog District, a remote community nested in the mountains. The conditions of far-flung schools necessitate passionate, committed teachers to provide essential services. Moreover, there is a pressing need to devise interventions to overcome far-flung teachers' challenges and enhance their situation. Despite these challenges, dedicated teachers assigned to these far-flung areas demonstrate remarkable resilience, employing innovative coping strategies and community engagement to provide education to marginalized communities. While these experiences and challenges can defeat everyone, they can also catalyze enhancement in preparation for a promising development in the cognitive, spiritual, social, personal, and understanding of one's professional opportunities and trials (Bilbao, et. al, 2018).

Teaching in remote areas of Surigao City, located in the Caraga region of Mindanao, presents unique challenges for educators. According to a study by Calimbo (2021), teachers in these areas often face geographic isolation, lack of basic educational resources, and limited access to professional development opportunities. Schools in remote barangays struggle with inadequate infrastructure, such as unreliable electricity and limited access to technology, which affects both teaching and learning.

Thus, the cultural diversity in these areas, which includes Indigenous communities, requires teachers to adopt culturally responsive teaching methods and integrate local knowledge into the curriculum. The emotional and psychological strain on teachers is also significant, as they are not only tasked with educating but also with addressing the socio-economic challenges faced by students, many of whom come from marginalized backgrounds. Despite these challenges, teachers demonstrate remarkable resilience by forming strong community ties and utilizing creative teaching strategies to overcome resource gaps (Calimbo, 2021).

Teaching in remote areas of Marilog District, Davao City, presents significant challenges due to the region's geographical isolation, limited infrastructure, and socio-economic difficulties. According to a study by Dela Cruz (2022), teachers in Marilog often work in schools that are far from the urban center, where access to basic resources like textbooks, learning materials, and even electricity is minimal. The lack of modern technology and teaching tools further complicates the educational experience, making it difficult for teachers to implement effective, engaging lessons.

Importantly, teachers in Marilog work with a diverse student population, including Indigenous communities, requiring them to be culturally sensitive and adapt their teaching methods to respect local customs and languages. The emotional and psychological demands on teachers are high, as they often go beyond their teaching duties, providing support to students facing various socio-economic hardships. Despite these challenges, teachers in Marilog exhibit remarkable resilience, drawing on their strong sense of community and resourcefulness to deliver education in these difficult conditions (Dela Cruz, 2022).

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Aquino (2019), the conditions of far-flung schools require passionate, committed teachers to provide much-needed services. Teachers must ride a motorcycle and walk kilometers in sometimes slippery/muddy trails to reach the school. Several teachers go above and beyond to teach the students in remote Samar areas, with some having to cross rivers, climb mountains, and walk for hours to reach the school.

According to Azoulay (2022), inadequate training, unappealing working conditions, and insufficient money all degrade the teaching profession and exacerbate the worldwide learning problem. UNESCO has long prioritized



teachers for the right to inclusive and high-quality education. There is a pressing need to adequately recognize this profession, on which our children's future rests. The teacher needs to be given more opportunities for grade-to-grade training. In single-grade (regular) classes, on the other hand, students are assigned to a full-time teacher. Culturally responsive teaching practices are essential for creating inclusive learning environments that honor and embrace the diverse cultural backgrounds of students. Employing a variety of instructional methods that cater to different learning styles and cultural preferences can enhance inclusivity in the classroom. By accommodating diverse learning needs, educators can ensure that all students have equal opportunities to succeed academically (Sengupta, et al., 2019; Kunene, et al., 2020)

The Department of Education must provide additional benefits and compensation to teachers in far-flung areas. Monthly or even quarterly incentives will do because aside from offering a portion of their salaries to buy food and school supplies for students who cannot afford to buy their needs, they are more than challenged because some have to walk some kilometers in muddy and slippery trails and has to wake up very early just to come to school on time (Limin, 2018).

The study by Pancho (2022) suggested that the Schools Division of the Department of Education should offer teachers professional development opportunities, such as attending conferences and seminars on teaching, to assist them in performing better. Also, school administrators in remote locations should always encourage teachers to be dedicated educators by providing them with opportunities to attend seminars and conferences, regularly directing them through the School Improvement Plan, providing in-service training for teachers, and other preparatory activities to inspire recently hired teachers to raise and elevate their level of performance.

Additionally, Cultural competence in education has emerged as a critical area of focus in contemporary educational discourse, aiming to create inclusive learning environments that celebrate diversity and promote equitable opportunities for all students. To foster cultural awareness among educators, Providing ongoing training and workshops on cultural competence can help educators deepen their understanding of cultural diversity and develop the necessary skills to support diverse student populations effectively. By acknowledging and challenging unconscious biases, educators can create more equitable learning environments where all students feel valued and respected (Mouchou et al., 2021). Teachers develop a connection with the community over time due to the warmth and appreciation expressed by the people for the teachers' services (Javilla and Fabilla (2019).

Apart from cultural competence, educators emphasized that job satisfaction is important in teaching in far-flung schools. The study of Ritzi (2021) supports this, stating the importance of building relationships among teachers, students, and the school community in remote areas. The research revealed that teachers actively engaged with students and collaborated with colleagues, fostering a supportive learning environment. Educators emphasized that strong interpersonal relationships not only enhance students' engagement and motivation but also provide teachers a sense of belonging and professional satisfaction.

Furthermore, educators' job satisfaction is not only a challenge but also the learning environment in far-flung area schools. School in far-flung areas strived to attain significant progress in maintaining a clean environment and resources that shall aid in setting a conducive learning environment for the development of students' competencies and the fostering of their aspirations. This reflects the concept of Nindie (2022) and Zaid et al., (2022) that if the school has good management, and everyone is smooth and harmonious. In the study of Siswanto and Hidayati (2020), schools are seen to possess a strong administration when there is a calm and cooperative learning environment and atmosphere. This means that the learning environment is good, conducive, and preferable for learning to take place. This is supported by Shaturaev (2021) that the learning environment should be peaceful and friendly.

Research Questions

This study aims to describe the experiences and resilience of teachers assigned to remote areas, particularly at Sitio Taga-Ibo, Marilog District:

1. What are the challenges of teachers assigned to far-flung areas in Sitio Taga-Ibo, Marilog District?
2. How did teachers cope with their experiences in teaching in Sitio Taga-Ibo, Marilog District?
3. What insights do teachers rely on to maintain their well-being in teaching in Sitio Taga-Ibo Marilog District?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative design, explicitly employing a phenomenology approach. The phenomenological design describes the participants' interpretations of their experiences. According to Burns & Grove (2007), qualitative research is more closely related to words, language, and experiences than measurements, statistics, and numbers. Inductive, holistic, epic, subjective, and process-oriented methodologies used to comprehend, interpret, characterize, and formulate a theory about phenomena or environment are called qualitative research methods. Furthermore, a phenomenological technique was chosen for this study to gather information on the actual experiences of the teachers teaching in the far-flung area, particularly at Sitio Taga-Ibo, Marilog District.



The research methodology would contribute to a deeper understanding of the nature and significance of ordinary events. Interviews are an in-depth (IDI) strategy that can provide access to profound knowledge and explanations and aid in the conduct of phenomenological research, according to Corbetta (2003). Also, Bryman (2008), subjective and in-depth personal stories can be communicated through interviews or in-person talks, emphasizing the interviewee's comprehension and explanation of various phenomena. In Addition, collecting the data includes audio recordings, journals, personal comments, and anything else that can deliver the actual words or actions of the people concerned in the study. This qualitative research is an inquiry approach useful for exploring and understanding a phenomenon (Creswell 2022).

Research Participants

In this study, the participants were far-flung teachers officially assigned to Sitio Taga-Ibo, Marilog District. These teachers had been working in the area for at least one year in the service. There are six (6) teachers in the school. Only six (6) elementary teachers comprised the study's research participants. The researcher used purposive sampling to select the participants. It is widely used and popular in qualitative research to identify and choose information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest (Patton, 1990). The purpose of this study was to examine homogenous sampling. This purposive sampling strategy allows researchers to get opinions about a topic of interest from various sources. This sampling technique is appropriate when conducting qualitative research and looking for informants with the most in-depth knowledge of the subject matter (Creswell, 2012).

Research Instruments

A qualitative research approach would be employed in this study, utilizing in-depth semi-structured interviews as the primary research instrument. This instrument allows for open-ended responses that encourage teachers to share their personal experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms in their own words. The interview guide would include key questions designed to explore areas such as the teachers' day-to-day responsibilities, emotional and psychological challenges, support systems, and strategies for overcoming the difficulties associated with teaching in remote, multi-grade classrooms. Examples of questions might include, "What are the most significant challenges you face while teaching in a remote area?", "How do you cope with the emotional strain of teaching in isolation?", and "Can you describe any strategies you use to manage in the classroom?" These questions are designed to capture the lived experiences of the teachers, providing rich, detailed data that can be analyzed for patterns and themes.

Data Analysis

Data analysis used three steps: data reduction, display, and conclusion. The study of qualitative research notes began in the field, during observation, interviewing, or both, as the researcher identifies problems and concepts that appear likely to help understand the situation. The data for a qualitative study were the notes jotted down in the field or during an interview from which the original comments, observations, and feelings were reconstructed or transcribed from audio recordings. The essential data were the observations and conversations, the actual words of participants reproduced from the field notes to the best of my ability.

Examining relationships was the centerpiece of the analytic process; it allowed the researcher to move from a simple description of the people and setting to explain why things happened with those people in that setting. Examining relationships was captured in a matrix that showed how different concepts were connected.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Implications

This study provides valuable implications for the professional growth of educators, particularly in addressing teachers' challenges assigned to far-flung areas. One key implication is the challenges of teachers in far-flung places.

Teachers identified the challenges of limited resources, accessibility of transportation, language barriers, learning materials not accessible, and learning of the learners, which are essential in creating a meaningful learning environment. By aligning these findings with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory, it is evident that teachers need to attain their necessities in assigning far-flung area schools, particularly in Sitio Taga-Ibo, Marilog District. Their experiences and challenges need to be addressed so that they can understand the holistic needs of their learners and tailor their teaching practices to support their learners' growth and success.

Another significant implication of the study is the teachers' coping mechanisms to foster engagement and learning strategies among learners, colleagues, and stakeholders. Teachers' responses include engaging with coworkers, receiving support from family and friends, and collaborating with the school community. Developing Strong bonds with coworkers and the local community is crucial for teachers. Social interaction fosters a sense of belonging and mutual support, essential for mental and emotional well-being.

These coping strategies of teachers in far-flung areas resonate with Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory. This theory emphasizes self-efficacy, or the belief in one's capacity to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific performance attainments. Encouraging teachers in far-flung areas to adopt proactive coping, persistence, and adaptive behavior despite obstacles. Social modeling and verbal encouragement from colleagues or community members enhance teachers' confidence in managing challenges.



Furthermore, the study revealed that teachers' insights into teaching in far-flung schools were influential strategies for benefiting learners and teachers in far-flung area schools. Teachers emphasized the importance of hopes and improvements in the school, accepting the challenges for the upcoming teachers, localization of teachers' assignments, and flexibility and adaptability. This finding supports David McClelland's Theory of Needs; the overall results support the process of needs through three primary human needs that drive motivation and behavior in personal and professional contexts: need for achievement, affiliation, and power. Teachers in far-flung schools must be committed and passionate about education, which can inspire hope and change, even in the most challenging situations, particularly in Sitio Taga-Ibo, Marilog District.

In conclusion, the study's findings underscore the importance of teachers' challenges, teachers' coping mechanisms, and teachers' insights into teaching in far-flung schools. The study's implications suggest that teachers should be supported in their professional development journey to better address teachers' challenges in far-flung schools. These strategies can be aligned with theoretical frameworks such as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, and David McClelland's Theory of Needs. Teachers' challenges and insights gained from teaching in remote areas underscore the need for systematic support to ensure teachers' well-being and professional development. It contributes to the growing body of education in marginalized areas and emphasizes the importance of systematic changes to improve teaching quality and student learning in remote regions.

Future Directions

This study opens several avenues for future research and practice, offering valuable directions for teachers, school administrators, parents, learners, policymakers, and future researchers.

Teachers. Teachers assigned to far-flung areas should focus on enhancing support systems, professional development, and community engagement to address their unique challenges. Implementing mentorship and peer support networks can provide teachers with the emotional and professional guidance necessary to thrive in isolated environments.

School Administrators. School administrators play a critical role in Supporting teachers by prioritizing providing adequate resources, including teaching materials and infrastructure, to create conducive learning environments. Furthermore, fostering strong partnerships with local relevance in teaching and promoting a sense of belonging for educators. Addressing teachers' well-being through mental support and wellness programs is essential to sustain their motivation and effectiveness, especially teachers assigned to far-flung areas.

Parents. Parents in remote areas must embrace technology to enhance their children's educational opportunities and social connections. Establishing strong communication channels with educators will help parents stay informed about their children's progress and available resources. By fostering a sense of community and actively engaging in their children's education, parents can help bridge the gap created by geographical isolation, ultimately leading to better outcomes for their families.

Learners. Learners in remote areas can access quality education through digital learning platforms and online resources; learners can access quality education despite geographical challenges as they navigate their educational journeys, support networks, including mentorship programs and online communities that connect them with educators and professionals from various fields to unlock their potential and contribute meaningfully to their communities and beyond.

Policy Makers. For policymakers to support teachers in far-flung areas should prioritize developing and implementing comprehensive policies that address the unique challenges these educators face. Policymakers should invest in infrastructure improvements, ensuring that schools in these areas have the necessary resources, technology, and facilities to enhance the teaching and learning experience.

Future Researchers. Future researchers need to continue. Investigating the impact of teachers assigned to far-flung areas. Future studies should explore the longitudinal studies examining the long-term effects of remote teaching assignments on educators' professional development, job satisfaction, and learners' outcomes, which can provide valuable insights into teaching sustainability in isolated environments. Future researchers should also explore the effectiveness of teachers' coping strategies, identifying which methods are most successful in mitigating stress and enhancing resilience in challenging contexts.

The future directions of this study suggest a comprehensive understanding of the experiences and coping mechanisms of teachers assigned to far-flung areas. It identifies their distinct challenges, strategies to overcome them, and insights for improving the teaching-learning experience in remote locations.

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