

Resilience and Challenges in Last-Mile Schools: A Phenomenological Study of Teachers' Experiences in Negros Occidental

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ABSTRACT

Teachers connected in the last mile schools encountered a lot of challenges and sacrifices every day, ranging from the transportation, instructional materials and their basic needs. The purpose of the study is to investigate the various challenges and the coping mechanism of teachers associated with teaching in last-mile schools. A qualitative phenomenological research designed was utilized. The population of this study are public elementary school teachers in two (2) last mile schools in one of the schools division in Negros Occidental, Philippines. Participants of this study are the four teachers who are currently teaching in the last-mile schools of Negros Occidental. The purposive sampling was used to select the participant based on the established criteria. Participants must have at least 1 year of teaching experience in the last mile school and regular employee of Department of Education. Semi-structured interview guide was prepared prior to the in-depth interview. All responses of the participants were recorded using voice recorder and field notes. For data analysis, researchers transcribed the recorded response of participants within 2 days after the interview was conducted. The various functions of Microsoft Excel were used to identify similar information from transcribed responses of all participants. Themes were created by merging similar information, following the phenomenological research design of Colaizzi, to uncover the essence of a phenomenon as perceived by the participants. Based on the findings, eight themes emerged from the lived experiences of teachers which are: (1) monitoring and ancillary works; (2) provisions of supplies and resources; (3) travel and transportation; (4) teaching pedagogies and creating instructional materials; (5) community and parent's involvement; (6) basic needs, safety and effect on personal aspects; (7) coping mechanism; and (8) motivation. It is concluded that teachers showed resilience despite of those difficulties, their resilience and dedication shine through in their commitment to provide quality education and support their students. Despite the hardships, teachers in last mile schools deeply believe the transformative power of education, driving them to continue their work with passion and dedication.

Keywords: teachers, lived experiences, last mile schools, Negros Occidental, challenges, resilience

INTRODUCTION

Teachers are the cornerstone of education, playing a vital role in shaping the future. Often hailed as the noblest profession, teaching embodies challenges and immense rewards. As Aristotle wisely noted, "The roots of education are bitter, but the fruit is sweet," encapsulating the essence of educators' journey, navigating hardships to witness the profound impact of their dedication (Klassen, 2010).

The COVID-19 pandemic brought about extraordinary educational encounters, overwhelmingly distressing teachers globally, including in the Philippines. The sudden change to far-off education accentuated educators' indispensable character in preserving learning permanency amidst countless impediments. This status quo stressed the reputation of positioning with UNESCO's Education 2030 Agenda, converging on providing teaching and helping lifelong education opportunities for all in inclusive and equitable quality (UNESCO, 2015).

In May 2019, the Department of Education (DepEd) took a significant step by releasing DepEd Memorandum No. 059 titled "Prioritizing the Development of Last Mile Schools in 2020-2021: Reaching Out and Closing the Gap." This memorandum aimed to codify and publicly recognize efforts within the Last Mile Schools

Program framework. It outlined criteria for selecting Last Mile Schools and delineated specific initiatives, projects, and events to address the unique demands associated with these institutions. Additionally, it established the Office of the Undersecretary for Administration (OUA) to oversee these efforts. Educators working in Last Mile Schools face distinct challenges stemming from the impoverished or excluded neighborhoods of these educational institutions, including significant infrastructure and financial constraints.

Motivated by these challenges and recognizing the need to shed light on the experiences of educators in last-mile schools, a researcher embarked on a journey to investigate the diverse interactions and deep-seated challenges associated with teaching in Negros Occidental. Adopting an exploratory phenomenological approach, the research aimed to illuminate this educational context's subtle and nuanced characteristics. By delving into teachers' lived experiences in last-mile schools, the study sought to fill a crucial gap in the literature, unveiling both the challenges and the bittersweet moments encountered by these dedicated educators while also seeking to understand their interpretations and thoughts regarding their experiences. The researchers intended to increase an exhaustive understanding of how teachers in the outskirts managed difficulties, from navigating challenging terrains to handling classrooms and facilitating learning, as well as how these experiences molded their teaching philosophy and outlook as professionals deeply committed to their vocation. Additionally, the researcher sought insights into how teachers managed shortcomings in their learning environments and personal lives and how these experiences influenced their perceptions of their roles within society. Ultimately, the researcher aimed to view the meaning of these experiences through the teachers' perspective.

Purpose of The Study

The study aimed to put light on the multifaceted and different sentiments experienced by educators in these detached and neglected locations, correspondingly offering an in-depth account of their teaching experiences during the academic year 2023-2024.

Specifically, it south answers to the following questions:

1. What are the experiences and challenges of last mile school teachers?
2. How do the teachers cope with the challenges encountered while teaching in last mile schools?
3. What motivate teachers to continue teaching in last mile schools?

METHODS

This study utilized a qualitative phenomenological research design. It describes the lived experiences of the participants. It focuses on studying the phenomena that have impacted the participants' thoughts, feelings and experiences. In this study, participants were invited for an in-depth interview and field notes, with prior approval of the division superintendent. After that, the transcribed data were sent to them individually as part of member's checking and followed changes as indicated by the participants. Then, the validated data were used to extract themes from the bittersweet experiences of teacher-participants. The Colaizzi phenomenological research design was used in data analysis to uncover the essence of a phenomenon as perceived by the participants, providing rich descriptions and interpretations of their experiences. The themes and common patterns were extracted from their responses (Jamon & Cabanes, 2019). Researchers used this design to dwell on the individual experiences of the teachers connected in the last mile school.

Participants

The population of this study are public school teachers in two (2) last mile schools in one of the schools division office in Negros Occidental, Philippines. Participants of this study are the four (4) teachers residing in Negros Occidental. The participants must qualify the following inclusion criteria: They must be a public elementary school teacher teaching in last-mile schools of Negros Occidental. They must have at least one (1) year in service as public-school teacher. The participants signed the informed consent prior to data gathering processes. They can withdraw their participation in the study anytime. Identity of school and participants were taken with utmost confidentiality. Other ethical considerations were followed strictly.

Sampling Technique

The purposive sampling was utilized to select the participants of this study. This is appropriate to be used in qualitative research when the researcher selects participants based on specific criteria and the target population is limited and not easily accessible. This technique was employed in this study to gain in-depth insights of the lived experiences of last mile school teachers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The teachers shared their bittersweet experiences of their journey in the last mile school. The themes that emerged after the in-depth interview and field notes conducted are the challenges, coping mechanism and motivation of teachers to stay in the last mile school. These themes are the following:

Theme 1: Monitoring and Ancillary works

The first challenge of the teachers in the last mile school is that they are seldom monitored by their supervisors and difficulties of having ancillary works which are evident from their responses.

“Gasaka gd na to ya sir sila bisan kalayo sang amon school to monitor, psds sds, mga EPS namun.” – Participant 2

(The PSDS, SDS and EPS really tried to monitor us even our school even it is situated in remote areas.)

“Kung may monitoring, ako na lang gakadto para mag interview kay budlay and dalan kag wala service. Kaisa lang gid ang monitoring, last year. Ang reason is ang service.” – Participant 3

(So, if there is monitoring, I manage to go to an interview even its quite difficult to travel since the road is unpaved and there is no availability of the service. Monitoring is done once last year because of the transportation service.)

“Swerte sa amon, daw indi kami ya mapressure sa monitoring. Subong sang na assign ko to so far, wala pa may nagmonitor.” -Participant 4

(Just lucky, because we are not pressured to prepare for monitoring. Since I assigned there, there was no monitoring conducted so far)

“Siyempre apat lang kami bala s ang coordinatorship damo damo, so amo na budlay” Lessen lang tani ang mga coordinatorship, daw kabudlay na kung kis’ah sa part ta stress na ta sa aton nga pagtudlo so damo pata papers nga ubrahon nga mga reports.” -Participant 2

(It’s really difficult, we are tied and bombarded with all the workloads since there are only 4 of us. We’d really appreciate it if they could lighten the coordinator load. We’re drowning in paperwork! Between our regular teaching duties and all the coordinator tasks piled on our tables.)

“Gintawag ko sang supervisor namon nga may ihambal sa nga announcement nga ipromote ko sa teacher-in-charge. Syempre, wala ko experience on handling a school, even small schools. Wala ko experience on handling even small schools. Abi ko indi ko kaya, gina-down ko self ko. Kami nga TIC, pang teacher 1 ang sweldo pero ang obra pang principal. Miski additional lang tani sa mga expenses, pangplete, dako nana ang mabulig.” – Participant 3

(My supervisor called with some big news. She wants to promote me to teacher-in-charge (TIC)! I’ve never actually experience managing even a small school. I thought I couldn’t handle it. TIC positions come with a ton of extra work, but the pay stays the same. Basically, you’re doing a principal’s job for a teacher’s salary. Even a small bump in pay, like a rent allowance, would be a huge help in recognizing the extra responsibility that comes with the role.)

“Kun may meeting kami sa coordinatorship, kaluoy sa mga bata kay wala gid ya klase ma’am kay unlike sa iban nga school ya kun may meeting or seminar may relief or may masalo nga iban, kami ya mam wala kay kami lang to.” -Participant 4

(There's no one to cover your classes when you have meetings. No wonder the students are suffering! In other schools, at least someone jumps in to keep things running smoothly.)

The participants responses emphasized monitoring visits are challenging due to poor travel conditions and heavy workloads, with unpaved roads and long travel hours making it difficult to conduct these visits. Monitoring was done only once last year because of these constraints. The faculty, consisting of only four members, is overwhelmed with paperwork and other responsibilities, highlighting the need for assistance to reduce the workload. Moreover, attending seminars and juggling lesson planning without class coverage during meetings adds to the difficulties, unlike other schools that provide teacher relievers to ensure smooth operations. Teacher-in-Charge role feels overwhelming due to lack of experience in school management and the substantial responsibilities involved, such as handling budgets, paperwork, and curriculum development. The position requires principal-level duties but offers only a teacher's salary. making a small pay increase is appreciated to augment rent allowance and other essential.

Similar to findings of Arañas (2023) that ancillary duties as supplementary responsibilities. While these tasks contribute to their personal and professional growth, they often come at the expense of time dedicated to teaching and family. To address this issue, teachers adopted strategies for managing their workload. Recognizing the need for support from individuals with greater expertise, they highlighted the benefits of mentorship, workshops, and training.

While exploring the lived experiences of novice school heads juggling teaching and leadership responsibilities in remote schools. The challenges stemmed from scarce human and financial resources, the need to multitask as both a leader and a teacher, the importance of learning from personal experiences and training, difficulties associated with risky travel to the school, and the necessity of occasionally leaving classes to attend to administrative duties. (Gonzales, 2024).

Theme 2: Provision of Supplies and Resources

The second challenges of the teachers in the last mile school is provision of supplies and creating instructional materials. These are evident from their responses.

“Kis-a dal-an kami nila tarpapel kay wala kami printer, indi gani isulat na lang sa blackboard ang activity. Damo kami supply halin sa school MOOE. Kag ang budlay pa gid mam ang resources gid ya kay ang books nbamon indi complete. Isa pa gid mam ang hauling. May time nga tagaan kami sports equipment ang pang ping-pong nan ga table. Kag ang sa feeding na ma’am ginahaul namon tanan , isakay sa karusa. Ginapasugat kmai sa parents kag ginapakarga gabayad kami na 300 sa mga parents. Amo na, nabudlayan kami magbaton sang mga resources kay kalayo, imbes nga mahatag kis-a sa amon sa iban na lang.”- Participant 4

(At times they brought us a tarpapel because we don't have a printer, if not it is simply written on the board. We have plenty of supplies from MOOE. What makes it more difficult, is the incomplete set of textbooks, the provision of Ping-Pong equipment and the feeding plus the hauling of it is more tedious. We would ask parents to help us load these materials with the payment of P300. We find it difficult to accept these resources for the fact that the distance is really far. The benefits intended for us often fail to reach us promptly. Those residing in the city typically receive them first.)

Kung may i-hauling ko nga mga supplies, salakyan gamiton ko, ti mahal gid na sa kay kataas daan, 500 mo indi man na makaigo. Other school supplies, ara gid na ya. Pero wala kami mga modules subong kay wala naman ga-module, ga-modules lang kmi during bagyo or may seminars ang teachers. Ang rehabilitation sang

classrooms, budlay mag hauling sang mga hollowblocks, semento. So, kung may maguba nga classroom budlayan gid kami. Ang kontra pagid namon subong is ang mga anay, kay gina-anay ang mga classrooms”-Participant 3

(If I need to haul school supplies, I’d rather use my car but 500 worth of gasoline could not suffice. Other school supplies are given. At present we don’t use modules. We only use it during typhoon or when teachers have seminars. The rehabilitation of the classrooms are tough from hauling of the hollow blocks and cement for repairs isn't exactly the easiest task. Classrooms are being infested with termites.)

“Actually sir may ara na da generator kag solar panel na kmi. last nagdala kami printer didto so mga pila man lang ka beses namon nagamit naguba ang generator. useless ang tv.”-Participant 2

(We actually did have a generator with a solar panel, sadly it broke down right away. The TV is really useless.)

“Ang sa teaching gadgets, tv, mga materials nga teaching aids namon, instructional materials, ang communication kis-a kung magchat kami buwas pa nila mabasa kay wala signal. Ang information naga kadelay kag instructional materials pa gid. Di kami makapurchase tv kay wala man to signal, no electricity. Mga instructional materials more on self-made lang” – Participant 1

(Forget fancy TVs and high-tech learning aids – those are just a pipe dream for us. We can't even afford a TV, and even if we could, there's no signal or electricity to power it anyway. Mostly, I provide self-made instructional materials).

Participants emphasized the challenges confronted by a school situated in a remote area. They face difficulties in accessing printing facilities, textbooks, and supplies, exacerbated by transportation constraints and bureaucratic hurdles. Despite receiving funds, distribution remains inefficient, compounded by unequal resource allocation favoring urban areas. Additionally, technological limitations hinder access to high-tech learning aids, necessitating reliance on self-made instructional materials. The school emphasizes a back-to-basics approach to education due to the unavailability of amenities like TVs. Both statements highlight the need for resilience and innovative solutions to address the challenges posed by the school's remote location. Rehabilitating the classrooms is challenging due to the difficulty of hauling hollow blocks and cement for repairs.

Research by Navarro & Alampay (2020) supports that installation of solar panels to energize schools without electricity, the provision of internet access to schools without internet access, and computerization packages are among the interventions that the Department of Education (DepEd) intends to implement in disadvantaged or "last mile" schools (LMS). These approaches assume that national disparities in obtaining affect learning and school performance through information and energy and communication technology (ICTs). In rural areas, lack of educational resources is the main issue, that to provide a conducive learning environment, one must bring all the necessary materials. Teachers must be very creative in looking for alternatives and should know how to use the available materials and how to contextualize it to its best advantage (Tinampay, 2023). Another is the insufficient instructional technology which included lack of signal and access to network, and students were behind with the use of technologies (Alcontin&Concepcion, 2024).

Theme 3: Travel and Transportation

The third challenges of the teachers in the last mile school is travel time and transportation going to school. These are evident from their responses.

“Sa laktanay, kontra gid namon ang tiempo, amon ginalakat tag around 5 km ma’am so mag ulan perti gid ya kabudlay sang dalan. Indi tapan ang dalan kag lutakon kag batuhon, there was one time nga natumba ko sa motor, nabali akon kamot kay natukod ko pagkatumba upod ko si Ma’am grace.” -Participant 4

(We often contend with the weather, having to walk approximately 5 kilometers. The road becomes exceptionally challenging to navigate during rainfall, as it becomes muddy, rocky, and slippery. On one occasion, I fell off the motorcycle while riding with Ma'am Grace, resulting in a broken hand.)

“Almost 1-hour ang ginawalk from accessible bala sa transportation every Monday morning going to school. Wala talaga regular na nagstay na habal habal doon, kinanglan mo ikontrata sa mga tawo nga may mga motor. Ang ano lang sa amon kay wala kami ya mga river nga tabukon bala. Pagka mag ulan lutak gid ya, muddy (madikit nga pula nga duta). Tapos may mga luhob2 pa sya, kay kampo, sugar cane, gina agyan truck. Pero danger din, ang magsakay sa habal habal ilang beses na kami natumba kay dulhugon sya, magsakay ka sa motor mangapyot ka gid. Kung ang amon nga, iban nga school may service sila but kami wala nagrequest service kay we are just only 4 teachers in the school so wala na nagrequest service sa city. If wala sya (referring to Sir Ardyent) motor, he's not available nagajEEP kami. May part nga bato bato kag danlog gid, kapoy kag sakit sa lawas pa panaog sa motor. 3-hour travel time sa jEEP kasi maraming karga ang jEEP, karga lang sa roof wala naman tao.” -Participant 1

(We got to walk for an hour in an accessible road so that we can get a transportation every Monday in going to school. Transportation during the pandemic was really difficult. Unfortunately, these are the things we experienced, even though we don't have rivers to cross. But it's also dangerous, to ride habal habal we have fallen several times. Got my shoulder swollen because of the bumpy road. In our case, while other schools may have transportation services, we have not made any requests as there are only four teachers in our school, so we didn't requested transportation to the city. If Sir Ardyent is unavailable or doesn't have his motorcycle, we resort to taking a jeepney. During rainy weather the paved sections become slippery. Our commute via public transportation, such as a jeepney, takes approximately three hours. These jeepneys are often overloaded with goods transported from the city.)

“Sang una may service kami nga multicab from the city kaso nadula nasa. Kay kis-a may service man si sir, ti dyutay na lang gasakay sa service sang city.”- Participant 3

(Initially, we had access to a multicab service from the city, but unfortunately, it was discontinued. When our colleague had transportation available, so only a few were left to utilize the city service for transportation.)

“Sang nagligad nagprovide na service te galing wala na kay kanya kanya man bala sakay, kay apat man lang kami te kabudlay man sa driver. Ako kung magmotor ko example, so nagahalin ko 5am from city pasaka to patag. Actually, it is very difficult for us, at the same time challenging because ang lalakton grabe kalayo tapos ang risgo sa maestra perte gd.”- Participant 2

(The last time they offered pick-up service, it wasn't much help because some of us had preferred to travel in their own convenience. With only four of us, it ended up being a hassle for the driver to pick up us. If I am riding a motorcycle, I left the city at 5am going to school. The commute to the school is difficult for us because it's a very long walk and our safety is at risk.)

The responses revealed the arduous journey endured by teachers to reach the school, involving a 5-kilometer route with rough, slippery roads that become hazardous during rain, leading to several accidents, including fractures and dislocations, especially for motorcycle riders. Limited transportation options, like hitching rides or taking jeepneys, result in a lengthy commute of up to three hours. The situation worsened after losing previous transportation services because of only four teachers and some of them sometimes ride motorcycle from the city at 5 am to have control over their schedule.

Teaching in last mile schools define the true essence of teacher's life. Thus, teachers may experience physical discomforts in rendering their service in the last mile school and these includes the travel and transportation. The road leading to the school is narrow and the only form of transport is a motorcycle. The teachers have the option of purchasing their own service motorcycle, rent a tricycle or risk the habal - habal ride. This ride is an innovation of using a single motorcycle as a form of public transport (Gallego, 2022). In the study of Tinampay (2023), about the “Lived Experiences of Teachers in the Hinterland School: Management Plan” it could be observed that the participant's primary concern is the distance of the school, hence, you need to wake

up early and preparing all your things. They also added that the fare for the transportation is very expensive, another is the constant danger they face every time they travel due to rocky and bumpy road.

Theme 4: Teaching Pedagogies and Creating Instructional Materials

The fourth challenges of the teachers in the last mile school is teaching pedagogies and creating instructional materials for their students. These are evident from their responses.

“Ang instructional materials pa gid kulang, di kami makapurchase tv kay wala man to signal, no electricity mga instructional materials more on self made lang, mainnovate ka gid.” – Participant 1

(Instructional materials are inadequate. Buying a TV is not feasible due to the absence of a power source in the area. Consequently, teachers must innovate instructional materials to enhance student learning.)

“Wala absent, wala suspension of classes nga matabo. Ang ibutang mo da sa DLL mo is nag attend ka seminar kung nag attend ka seminar, then i-move mo sa next day imo klase. Pero kung nag-module ka, ibutang mo da ang modality mo is modular. Ang problema galing ma'am is magmulti-grade si teacher, indi siya sa masyado ma-tutokan masyado ang bata. Wala kami actually daan ga-follow sang lesson plan for multi-grade, wala man daan ready-made na nga lesson plan para da, so ikaw gid na ya ma-obra ya. So, mangita ka sang competencies nga magpalarehos si grade 1, 2 kag 3. Same topic, pero lainay ang level sang topic. Ma-differ lang kamo sa activities. Dapat i-consume mo gid ang 30 minutes nga ina sa tatlo ka grade level, so budlay gid sa ya.”-Participant 3

(There should be no absences or suspension of classes. If you indicate in your Detailed Lesson Plan (DLL) that you attended a seminar, you can reschedule the lesson for the following day. However, if you're utilizing a module, you should specify that your teaching method is modular. The issue arises from teachers having to conduct multi-grade teaching, which hinders their ability to focus extensively on each individual child. Moreover, there is no standardized lesson plan tailored for multi-grade teaching, leaving us to devise our own strategies. Consequently, we must align competencies and topics across grades 1, 2, and 3, despite variations in skill levels and activity requirements. Balancing these diverse needs within the allotted 30-minute timeframe for each grade level proves to be particularly challenging.)

“Budlay magtudlo sang lesson nga wala ka laptop kag powerpoint kay mabalik ka gid sa mano-mano kay chalk kag libro lang gid imo kapyutan, kabudlay magconduct lesson sa pupils kay damo ka tani gusto itudlo pero limited na lang kay ang resources mo limited man. May mga activities gashagit lang kami kay wala kuryente pang music. Amo na madownload nan ga daan videos bag-o magsaka.

Akon ginatudluan grades 4,5 and 6 so kabudlay magconduct lesson sa isa ka classroom nga may tatlo ka grade levels. The perdi gid ya ang bata sa amon kay limited sa oras kag kulang kami sa teacher. kay apat kami to, pero tatlo na lang kami gatudlo kay ang amon TIC wala na to gasaka kis-a ma'am kay ang ano man nga mga report siya na lang gaubra reports so need ya gid signal. Isa pa gid mam ang hauling. For example, libro kami nga mga maestra ang mabakintol and isa pa gid may time nga tagaan kami sports equipment ang pang ping-pong nan ga table kabudlay maghakat kag bug at.”-Participant 4

(Teaching becomes challenging when faced with a large number of students and limited resources. We resort to traditional methods like chalk and book due to the absence of laptops and PowerPoint presentations, as there is no access to power supply. Despite the desire to impart comprehensive knowledge, the scarcity of resources hampers effective teaching. During school activities, teachers resort to shouting for accompaniment because there is no electricity for music. You need to download videos before going to school. Teaching a class with students from different grade levels in one classroom is incredibly challenging. Our students are at a disadvantage due to the constraints of limited time, resources, and teaching staff. Although there are four teachers, only three of us handle the teaching responsibilities. Our Teacher In-Charge (TIC) is unable to visit as he is overwhelmed with paperwork and reports, requiring her to be in the city where there is signal. Another issue we encounter is transportation. For instance, teachers often have to transport all the books themselves.

Additionally, there's the challenge of transporting sports equipment, such as the ping-pong table because it is heavy to transport.)

“Actually sir may ara na da generator kag solar panel na kmi. So ang generator indi man nagdugay naguba man dayon. Ang generator na suga man lang ang mgamit namun. Last nagdala kami printer didto so mga pila man lang ka beses namon nagamit naguba ang generator. Subong nagbakal naman si school head namun subong bag’o naman para ara bala ang maka print lang kami example may mga ano nga mga learning materials, assignments maka xerox kmi labi na gid mga pictures noh sa mga kabataan para hapos kag indi man kami mabudlayan nga mga teachers.”-Participants 2

(We initially had a generator with a solar panel, but it didn't last long as it became damaged. Consequently, the generator is now solely used for electricity. We also previously acquired a printer, but it also malfunctioned shortly after. Currently, our school head has purchased a new printer for us to print learning materials, assignments, and photocopy images, making it easier for both students and teachers.)

“Ga homevisit ko kun lapit lang sa school ma’am eh. Kay may mga balay ya nga ato pa gid sa piyak nga bukid, then wala na kami gakadto ginaconsider man namon ang amon safety. May agyan ka nga duwa ka suba the kadelikado.”-Participant 4

(Definitely try to do home visits when it's close by – it's a great way to connect with our students and families. But some houses are way out there, and let's face it, safety is a big concern. You wouldn't believe it, but for some visits, we'd have to cross two rivers! It's a real adventure, but definitely one that needs careful consideration.)

“Ang bata once ara siya sa frustrated reader, nagahatag gid kami na remedial or additional activities nga para makasabay gid siya bala sa mga reader. Gahatag kami remedial one on one ang ano naman namun mga reader gina pair namun sa non-reader kag naga ask kmi help sa parents to follow up sa balay pabasa. Ga gift giving ko, kag sa akon ya bi sir gina encourage ko nga indi sila mag absent kay kung perfect attendance sila naga give gd ko ya small gift / reward. so dira mo makita bla kung ga improve man gd ang imo nga student.”- Participant 2

(Once a child is a frustrated reader, we give them remedial or additional activities so that they can keep up with the readers. We tried to keep them, but we will give remedial one on one. For the nonreaders, they are paired with non-readers and we asked parents for help to follow up reading at home. I started a little incentive program. If a student had perfect attendance, I give them a small reward. So, I can monitor if my students are improving.)

The above responses highlighted the challenges faced by teachers in last mile school, including inadequate teaching tools and limited resources due to power and signal issues. Teachers innovated instructional materials to compensate and balance teaching across multiple grade levels without standardized lesson plans. Efforts to acquire equipment like generators and printers have been unsuccessful until recently, when a new generator was purchased, offering hope for improved printing capabilities. Despite transportation issues exacerbating resource constraints, the focus remains on meeting students' foundational learning needs, particularly in basic literacy and numeracy skills.

According to Enhanced Basic Education Information System (EBEIS) of the Department of Education and Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) survey, there were 37,697 public elementary schools, and 12,225 of these are multi-grade for various reasons such as low enrolment, and lack of teachers (SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2013). Many of these schools are isolated and sparsely populated, geographically inaccessible or lack of educational resources making multi-grade classes the best option (ibid). The need for multigrade classes is driven by factors such as the limited number of pupils in each grade level, the lack of teachers, the distance from the community to the closest school, inadequate funding, and the lack of classroom space. Combination classes are classes with two grade levels taught by the same teacher in the same classroom in the public school system of the Philippines. Multigrade or multilevel classes are those that have three grade levels taught by a single teacher in a single classroom. (Reyes & Ebisa, 2023)

The distance between the barangays, shortages of teachers, budget, and school facilities was among the factors that led to the formation of multigrade classes in numerous parts of the Philippines. Multigrade types were established because the number of students enrolled in each grade level was insufficient to form a single grade class (Ballesteros & Ocampo, 2016).

Educational resources have a favorable impact on students' academic achievement. Quality school facilities should always be available for teachers to do their tasks and assist students in learning and achieving efficiently Paul, A. (2015) as cited in (Felongco, et al 2022). Maffea, J. (2020) mentioned that a shortage of resources in the classroom may be extremely stressful for both students and teachers. Not only are students and teachers in misery, but they are also unable to study to their full capacity due to a lack of resources.

The contextualized lesson, challenges, and struggles in individualized teaching, and daily teaching experiences of teachers in far-flung schools revealed different scenarios: diverse learners need a contextualized lesson, exciting but full of struggles and challenges, and in addressing varied students' learning competencies, the specific board works, individualized teaching. Lariosa, et al (2022) mentioned, teachers in far-flung who found hard times in dealing with different tasks, the most challenging parts were the following: approaches to multi-grade learners, preparation of the instructional materials, handling other behavior, guiding students to value education, and lastly, the challenging road. Far-flung schools are mostly deprived of the much-needed facilities (Figueroa et al., 2016), and the teachers are exposed to various types of stress, which may affect their performance (Hartney, 2020; Quejada, A. B., & Orale, R. L. (2018). Remote schools in the Philippines still face an insufficiency of teaching resources, and teachers are continuously challenged in delivering quality primary education in remote areas Lariosa, et al. (2022)

Quality of education received by students will depend on the facilities and the facilitators of learning. Far-flung schools are often deprived of the much-needed facilities (Figueroa et al., 2016; Philrights.Org, 2016) and teachers who are exposed to various types of stress which may affect performance (Hartney, 2016; RabagoMingoa, 2017). Critical issues in curriculum implementation of multigrade teachers in last mile schools include teacher-related factors such as work or ancillary overload, lack of teacher training, a fair opportunity to a promotion, compensation consideration, and concerns of their immediate family, difficulty to access school location due to physical geography and school distance, teaching-learning process consist of multi-grade teaching and lacking instructional and learning materials, as well as student-related factors, and the facility. (Falcunaya et al., 2020)

Challenges encountered by last mile schools teachers include the emergency suspension of classes, the danger of going to their respective stations such as crossing rivers and mountain hikes, and some students especially the higher grade level may not listening to the teacher while discussing because they already know the topic, there are no available contextualized lessons for multigrade class, and multigrade teachers need to overtime for learners' remediation and printing of materials and resources and having lots of ancillary functions. (H. Dulana et al., 2023)

Multigrade schools encountered scarcity on school resources that deemed necessary in supporting children's learning. Schools have a surplus of both textbooks and chairs. Some schools have limited access to resources like computers, libraries, and the internet, and they may not have the resources necessary to conduct experiments or teach students about scientific concepts. Most teachers assigned to teach multigrade classes in multigrade schools are newly hired teachers who are struggling to manage time and tasks because most ancillary overloads are visible in smaller schools with fewer teaching personnel. Teachers are having difficulty dealing with paperwork congestion because they are handling more than one grade level. Most multigrade classes have at least two to three grade levels per teacher. As a result, managing the test papers to be checked, results to be evaluated, and feedbacks to be given outright or later becomes difficult (Reyes & Ebisa, 2023b). The need for multigrade classes is driven by factors such as the limited number of pupils in each grade level, the lack of teachers, the distance from the community to the closest school, inadequate funding, and the lack of classroom space. Combination classes are classes with two grade levels taught by the same teacher in the same classroom in the public school system of the Philippines. Multigrade or multilevel classes are those that have three grade levels taught by a single teacher in a single classroom (Philippine Official Gazette, 2012). Morris's

(2018) claimed that multigrade classes were frequently found in Philippine elementary schools in distant places with few kids in one-year level, as a result, teachers managed several grade levels simultaneously.

Theme 5: Parents Involvement and Community

The fifth challenges of the teachers in the last mile school is the community and parent's involvement in school activities. These are evident from their responses.

“Nalipay gani mga parents nga maka participate na kami sa athletics, kaluy-an nga makadivision meet man kami. budlay kag risiko mag haul bata pero supportive ang parents. Nag-ayo kami sa barangay nga servisan kami sang canter, sugaton lang sa sementado nga dalan kag nag upod man mga parents. Kag ang sa feeding na ma'am ginahaul namon tanan, isakay sa karusa. Ginapasugat kami sa parents kag ginapakarga, gabayad kami na 300 sa mga parents.”-Participant 4

(Parents are delighted to see their children participate in athletics, win, and qualify for the division meet. I find it risky due to potential consequences and logistical challenges, but the parents are incredibly supportive. We seek assistance from the barangay to use their canter as our transportation service, along with the parents, on the paved road. In the feeding program, we must transport everything and load it onto the carriage. Parents assist us by providing transportation, but we contribute 300 pesos for the load and transportation costs).

“Barangay officials willing man sila magbulig. Ara gid na ang support sang barangay. Then naga give sila every Christmas sa mga kabataan.”-Participant 2

(The barangay officials are incredibly supportive. They're always willing to lend a helping hand whenever they can. During Christmas time, they organize something special for the younger students.)

“Wala enrollees sa grade 1 Sir, its because nga nagtransfer of residence sila because ang ila bala pangabuhian nagtransfer naman, siyempre kabudlay kay indi sila maka adapt bala sa didto nga pangabuhi. Matyag ko indi na gid mag exist ang school dugay it's because waay naman sang nagapamata kag ka jutay gid ya sang population.”- Participant 2

(We have no enrollees in Grade 1 this year, Sir. Some families with young children have had to move on to find new work opportunities. It feels like our school community will not exist longer. With many families having fewer children and the overall population decreasing.)

“Isa pa gid nga challenge namon subong ang possible closure sang school mam, kay gadecrease ang enrollment tungod sang mga Yolanda nga housing sa ubos. Pag mapping namon basi mag 21 na lang amon enrollment basi magtransfer na lang sa Yolanda. Kag kun indi page close mam, buhinan kami isa ka teacher. Ang magwa kaluoy gid sa amon nga bata kag kami may makinder ang isa ma grade 1-6.” -Participant 4

(There's a real concern about the school's future, sir. Enrollment has dropped significantly because of the new housing project down in Yolanda. If our projections are right, we might only have around 21 students next year. If closure won't happen, one of us will be transferred out. It implies students would be more disadvantaged and one teacher will handle grade 1-6.)

“One of the factors nga gadecrease enrollees is the change in location and ang project sang government nga Yolanda Housing.”- Participant 3

(The change in location and Yolanda housing project definitely had a big impact on decline of number of enrollees.)

“Parang may plano i-close ang school kay ang number of enrolles nga diutay, kung matabo na i-assign kami sa ibang school dito sa city.” - Participant 1

(Enrollment has been dropping and we've heard rumors about a possible closure. Of course, if that happens, they'd reassign us teachers to another school in the city.)

The school faces uncertainty due to dropping enrollment and rumors of possible closure, with families moving away for various reasons, including relocation to the Yolanda Housing project, which now has its own school. The opening of Silay Yolanda Elementary School in the city further impacts enrollment, as older siblings may opt to enroll their younger siblings there. Concerns about job losses for teachers and the impact on families are heightened. Despite the challenges, the community collaborates to support students, including securing transportation for school events and organizing special activities. The declining school community and enrollment present significant changes, with efforts to attract new students through competitions and activities. Transportation and logistical challenges persist, requiring collaboration with barangay officials and parents.

Parents' involvement in elementary school children's remote learning experiences can be categorized into in-class support, cognitive involvement, academic involvement, and emotional involvement (Nam & Kim, 2023).

Theme 6: Basic Needs, Safety and Effects on Personal aspects

The sixth challenges of the teachers in the last mile school is on their basic needs, safety and effects on their personal aspects. These are evident from their responses.

“Naexperience ko liwat ang mangabuhi sa daan nga tiempo, daw nagbalik ko sa daan nga time.

Kadako gid sang akon nga gin adjust kay from complete facility like electricity sa ginhalinan ko pakadto sa wala electricity. Ang cellphone indi mo mapuslan. Mangabuhi ka gid ya mam payak gid nga pamumuhay. Naanad naman kami maglakat eh. Ang risiko kay maglakat ko kun ako lang isa basi may mga NPA nga masugata kay ang amon school daw alagyan sang mga rebelde. Ara gid kami sa alang alang. Kis-a may mga army nga ga roving sang alagyan, kulbaan ka man kis-a. Pero ang mga tawo daw kilala naman kami tanan.” - Participant 4

(It feels as though we're stepping back in time, returning to a bygone era. A lot of adjustments have to be made from the previous school where facilities are available to none in our present school. You won't get much cell phone reception here. Life is very simple. But the good thing is, we're all used to walking for errands and getting things done. It's the safety that worries me a bit. Walking alone can be nerve-racking, especially with the NPA activity in the area. Our school seems to be on one of their routes. Imagine the feeling on tense situation because of military presence on the roads, even if the locals all seem to know us.)

“Na-experience namon na mapalayo sa family, kay gasaka ka di sa Monday tapos manaog kana sa Friday, indi ka man ka chat kay wala man signal. Personally, ma apektuhan gid ang social life mo since indi ka ka night out and communicate sa imo friends and family. Ang gina-imnan namon now is from tuburan since wala kami potable water. May gasul kami, kabudlay abi kung kahoy kay madugayan kami kung aga magdigamo kami. Damo na ganilapta nga fake news after sang engkwentro nga texts na basi kono i-abduct or hold-apon sang mga NPA ang mga teachers nga gasaka didto. Indi man kami ma-arabutay magsaka kami, na-trauma kami sa mga balita nga galapta. Mayo lang gani may mga watchman didto.” – Participant 3

(We find ourselves distanced from our families as we remain at school from Monday to Friday, returning home only on weekends. The lack of signal makes communication with our families impossible. Personally, this arrangement greatly impacts our social lives, as we are unable to spend time with friends or connect with our families. Furthermore, the absence of internet signal, power, and even running water further complicates matters. We rely on spring water for drinking. We've switched to LPG for cooking. It's a lot more convenient than wood, which takes a lot of effort to use. There were rumors and scary texts, after the NPA encounter, started circulating stories about teachers getting arrested or abducted. The thought of going back uphill with all that uncertainty is terrifying and traumatizing. Having some sort of security presence at the school would make a huge difference for our peace of mind.)

“Daw kabudlay amo na iban nga teachers kung didto bala ma assign, nagakabudlayan gid kay indi sila sanay sa amo na pangabuhi. indi sila ka adapt dali dali. Parehas na sa kay sir sa upod namun gapuli puli gid sya. Very difficult for us kay wala kami to electricity sa amon, of course water supply eventhough nga ara kami sa bukid it's because layo pa ang ginasa-uban namun.

As teacher naga provide kami, nagaluto kami feeding para sa ila nga kis-a halin gid sa amun pocket. May ara gid kami student nga ano bala ginapapanyaga gid siya namun ya.”-Participant 2

(It appears challenging for some teachers when they are assigned here. They struggle because they are not accustomed to the way of life, finding it difficult to adapt. Some may stay temporarily but eventually leave or express a desire to return home frequently. Sometimes, our students head to school on empty stomachs, which affects their ability to concentrate during lessons. To help them, we provide meals through our feeding program, though the funding comes out of our own pockets.)

“Challenging sya, sang bag uhan ko to gani daw mahibi ko nga wala kuryente kag tubig. Cguro mga 5 months ko na overcome ang amo na. Ang first week budlay gid ya eh kay ang needs dal-on prior kami magsaka. Ako lang naga stay to ya isa, mas budlay ang paggawi kay wala bi tubi. May tubi man sya pero ang source is spring. Wala purified water pero safe man imnon ah kay 4 years na ko gainom da. Kung mag-ulan amo man na ang ginapanglaba, ginapaligo, ginagamit sa everyday tubig ulan. Kung wala ulan ti manaog gid kami sa spring na, taklaron! May fence naman nga cyclone pero ang gate nya guba ehe, pwede lang masulod kay may areas nga guba nga kudal kay indi pa sya namon mapaobra kay ang land title di pa nkapangalan sa school. It was only donated kag CLOA lang sya. Pag didto ko magtulog may 2 ka watchman kami nga nagaduty kung gab-i, city paid sila nga taga didto (patag diutay) man sila.” -Participant 1

(It was quite challenging for newbie. There was no electricity or running water. It took some adjustment, about 5 months to get the hang of things. The first week was especially overwhelming because I need to gather all our needs first before I will go to school. I am alone staying there and there's no running water system. The only source is a natural spring. The spring water is actually safe to drink, been doing it myself for four years now! On rainy days, I have to collect rain water for washing, bathing, everything. Otherwise, I have to rely solely on the spring water. It's definitely tough because I need to go down the spring to fetch water. We have cyclone fences around the school. Unfortunately, the gate was broken leaving some gaps. Anyone could potentially get in through those areas. The problem is, getting it fixed is tied up with the Certificate of Land Ownership (CLOA), the school doesn't officially own the property yet. There were two watch man being paid by the city to look after for our safety every night.)

Living at the current school presents challenges reminiscent of a bygone era, with limited facilities like cell phone reception, power, and potable water. The lack of basic utilities like electricity and running water poses significant challenges, requiring resourcefulness to manage daily tasks. Efforts are made to adapt to the situation, such as switching to LPG for cooking and relying on a feeding program to address student hunger. Safety concerns due to nearby NPA activity add tension, compounded by difficulties in communication with families and lack of internet access. Teacher safety is a major concern, with past incidents prompting calls for improved security measures like fixing broken fences and securing the school gate. Moreover, issues regarding land ownership affect security arrangements, although watchmen provided by the city offer some assurance. Despite the difficulties, the school community strives to provide a safe and supportive environment for both students and teachers.

The rural areas have always endured harsh economic conditions and have somehow survived. Many far-flung educators struggle daily to provide quality learning experiences in communities under siege. Teachers in far flung areas understand the chaos and misunderstanding within the community are inevitable due to the presence of insurgents within the area Lariosa et.al (2022). Similarly, Quejada A.B. and Orale R.L. (2018) stated that teachers in remote areas also put their lives at stake. Teachers in the school walk for kilometers to be in the class. It is particularly challenging during the rainy days, making trails going to school.

Theme 7: Coping mechanism

This portion describes the coping mechanism of last mile teachers to all challenges They have encountered. This presents the different ways on how they went through adjustment to cope with the challenging situations. These are evident from their responses.

In terms of Ancillary works

“Sa ubos na lang nagbakal balay kay para kahimo sa mga reports kag damo iya coordinatorships amo na mag meeting kami sa mga parents kag gapadala kami modules teh indi man masabtan sang iban kay indi man kabalo ang iban nga parents. So ang gakatabo gid ya, before kami magsaka gadownload na kami daan lesson sa phone kag amo na amon tan-aw tan-awon.”- Participant 4

(Our coordinator bought a house nearby in order to do the needed reports. Often times we would call for a parents’ meeting and we give out modules to them. So what’s really happening is, before we go to school, we would download teaching/ learning materials in our phone as our guide.)

“Mayo man kay daw wala man boundary sa amon nga mga school heads, kundi daw ka open gid sa amon. Pero naghambal ko na sa ila during that time, “Ma’am/sir, actually upod ta di, pero ang gina-obra ko indi man ko ni kabalo, buligay lang ta.” -Participant 3

(There were no gaps between us school heads. Everyone gets the chance to open. I remember talking to them. We are all have the same work, but I’m not sure if it’s right. We should help each other.)

In terms of resources

“Subong nagbakal naman si school head namun subong bag-o para maka print lang kami example may mga ano nga mga learning materials, assignments, maka xerox kami labi na gid mga pictures noh sa mga kabataan para hapos kag indi man kami mabudlay nga mga teachers.”- Participant 2

(The school head managed to get a new one. The good news is we can finally print some materials – things like assignments and maybe some learning aids especially pictures of important stuff for the kids and even some learning materials. These would ease our difficulties in teaching.)

In terms of instructional materials and pedagogies

“So naga ano na lang kami as teachers, naga provide sang mga available materials sa amon. Then naga print sang mga materials nga daan nga inugklase namun. Amo na ang budlay kag isa pa as a multigrade teacher. Kay kabudlay man sir kapin pagd magdala ka to bondpaper kabug’at kalayo lakton mo, so didto na lang gid kami ga print. Sa pagtudlo, may set rules ka gid dapat as multigrade teacher kay para indi ka mabudlayan.” Participant 2

(We provide whatever materials are available at hand. We print only for class use. This is how it works, very difficult, if you are assigned as a multigrade teacher. Its really difficult to bring reams of printed copies that far, instead we print materials in school. In teaching, there should have established rules for multigrade teacher. It’s essential to have your own set of rules to ease the process.)

“Ang focus gid bi namon to ma’am is literacy and numeracy, kay hambal namon miske indi namon matudlo tanan kay kulang kami sa oras, ang importante kabalo lang gid sila magsuma kag magbasa. Like sa mga lessons nga indi namon matudlo kay wala resources like digital printing bi nga topic kay indi namon ma apply kag maappreciate, nagpabasa na lang gid ko.” – Participant 4

(Our primary focus is on literacy and numeracy. Although we may not cover every subject extensively, we ensure that they can read and count proficiently. For instance, in our digital printing lesson, where resources are lacking so our students cannot apply and appreciate it. Instead, we taught them how to read.)

“Mga instructional materials more on self made lang, mainnovate ka gid. Ginahimo ang printing in the city, gina print na nga daan kag ginakarga namon.”- Participant 1

(Instructional materials are self-made so that you can innovate instructions. Printing is done in the city and we load it in the motorcycle.)

In terms of travel and transportation

“Nagkuwa ko motor para bala in case may mga emergency, nga may mga report , trainings seminars makapanaog man bala dayon.- Participant 2

(Having a motorcycle here has been a lifesaver. It might seem like a personal thing, but it's actually really helpful for the school too. In case of emergencies such as needing to attend a training or seminar out of town, having my own transportation is a great help. It saves time and ensures I can get where I need to be quickly.)

“Naga civilian kami, tapos ilis lang pag-abot kay basa ka sa ulan eh. Kis-a wala na ko nagasakay, mas prefer ko na nga maglakat na lang kay budlay ang dalan. Wala talaga regular na nagstay na habal habal doon, kinanglan mo ikontrata sa mga tawo nga may mga motor. Dapat mapa schedule ka 1 day before kay may mga work sila, gaobra sa kampo.” -Participant 1

(Typically, we dress in civilian attire and later switch back to our uniforms due to wet of the rain. I don't ride anymore, I prefer to walk because the road is bumpy. No motorcycle service would stay. you need to set schedule to owners of motorcycle a day before because they have work at the farm.)

In terms of basic needs

“Ang amun nga school head nagkwa na lang sang rain catcher bala. Para na lang may source of water kami nga gamiton.”-Participant 2

(Since we don't have running water, our school head took the initiative to set up a rain catcher. Now we have at least source of water to rely on

“Naga share kami foods, kaso ako lang babaye ti ako man iyawan luto. Daw pamilya kami (laughing) ehe nga ara kami sa balay ni big brother (laughing). Need mag adjust kag makibagay.” Participant 1

(We shared foods. Since, I'm the only girl, I ended up doing most of the cooking. It's funny! We are like siblings living in a big brother's house (laughs). Need to adjust and get along with each other.)

“Budlay gid pag may emergency! May mga medicine man sa school pero kung grabe gid nga sakit mabudlayan gid kami kay ang transportation. Mayroon kami first aid kit pero di complete.”-Participant 1

(Access to medical care is difficult! The school has some basic medicines, but for anything serious, getting proper treatment can be a real challenge because transportations are limited here. We have first aid kit but incomplete and we had also training on how to handle basic emergencies.)

The school head bought a house nearby to facilitate report preparation and organize parent meetings where modules are distributed. Teachers download teaching materials on their phones before heading to school, printing only what is necessary. Instructional materials are self-made and printed in the city, then transported on motorcycles. Multigrade teachers faced challenges in bringing printed materials due to distance of school from city where they usually do printing. Personal motorcycles are important for emergencies and attending trainings and seminars. The school head initiates solutions like setting up a rain catcher to address the lack of running water. Access to medical care is limited during emergencies, although basic first-aid training provides some reassurance. The sense of camaraderie among staff fosters a supportive environment despite the challenges of living and working in far flung areas.

Findings of this study is contrary to the study of Jia and Huang (2016) that educators can create interactive teaching materials for far-flung schools by using multimedia technology and teaching resource cloud platforms, which enable digital processing of traditional paper content for various electronic terminals. On the other hand, Pancho (2023) said that newly-hired teachers in far-flung schools use personal and professional coping interventions to endure challenges and survive everyday situations. They survive challenges like limited internet access and low motivation by creating interesting teaching modules, coordinating with related parties, carrying out blended learning, and setting up offline classes (Amelia & Istianah, 2021). School heads

in remote areas use coping mechanisms such as physical enduring practices, emotional surviving techniques, teaching and community coping techniques, and positive work atmosphere (Gallego,2022).

Theme 8: Motivation

This portion presents the motivation of last mile school teachers to stay on their profession despite of those challenges mentioned above. These are evident from their responses.

“Pero I am proud nga during that time, ang amon supervisor, nagbulig gid ya sa akon grow. Ginpa-experience ya sa akon nga indi budlay ang path nga imo agyan kung may naga-guide sa imo during sa imo panglakaton as a school head. Tapos, actually, I am proud gid ya sa amon supervisor kay grabe gid ya ang tutok ya sa amon.”
– Participant 3

(But I am proud that during that time since our supervisor really helped me grow. I have experienced that the path you are on is not difficult if someone guides you during your journey as a school head. Then, actually, I am really proud of our supervisor because he is very focused on us.)

“Sa pinakalayo na school is ang mga estudyante super eager to learn gid, bisan mag ulan pana tudo-tudo or miski ila nga balay is 1 kilometer away pa ya, ara gid na sila gyapon ya sa eskwelahan. Mainspire ka gid! Shempre, ang experience mo maka-mingle ka sa new surroundings, sa mga neighbor mo da, kag makakilala ka mga new and experienced teachers na dugay na da nagatudlo and mabal-an mo man da ang ila mga naagyan for pila na ka years da sila nga nagatudlo.” – Participant 3

(The students in that remote school have this incredible thirst for knowledge. Rain or shine, even if they live a kilometer away, they're there, eager to learn. It's truly inspiring. Of course, teaching in a new environment like this is brand new experience. You get to connect with the local community, build relationships with your neighbors, and learn from seasoned teachers who've been there for years. It's a chance to learn their wisdom and see how they've tackled challenges over time.)

“Ang mga graduates namon some of them mga friends ko pa until now. Kis-a upod ko man sila tulog da, mga 3rd year high school na kay close man kami gyapon. Amo na sya gani nga daw indi gid ko didto maghalin, nami man akon experience daw hard sya kag difficult pero sa physical facilities lang. I will stay as long as nanjan pa ang passion to teach.” -Participant 1

(This school community is truly special to me. Some of my former students are even close friends to this day. That bond is definitely one of the reasons I've stayed here for so long. Of course, there have been challenges, mostly regarding the physical facilities. But those haven't overshadowed the amazing experiences I've had here. As long as that passion for teaching burns bright, I'll stay)

“Makahambal ka sa self mo nga nahimu ko man ang akon part as a teacher nga maga improve man ang imo mga learner eventhough nga ara sila sa far flung area kag dako gid man mabulig mo sa imo mga learners nga ma encourage mo sila. Nga ara bala ang indi lang kay ari sa far flung area, wala ta sang mahimu. But still gina encourage ko gid sila nga mag matuon sila mayo kay sang una madumduman ko Sir gakasup'ay man ko sa gutom para lang maka eskwela. Mga buot na da ya mga estudyante kag kung may mga bisita ga behave man sila dayon. Nami sir sa isa ka eskwelahan ang gabuligay ang upod, wala bala factor sa isa kag isa. Kung ano ang problem gina solve na daan namun. - Participant 2

(Even though we're in a remote area, I truly believe that what we do here makes a difference. We can empower our students to learn and grow, no matter the circumstances. Encouragement is the key. I always tell them that anything is possible with hard work. It reminds me of my own days in school, when I'd go hungry just for the chance to learn. The students are well behaved if we have visitors. There's a real sense of teamwork here, sir. We're all in this together. No matter what challenges come up, there's no finger-pointing or division. Everyone pitches in and works together to find solutions.)

“Huo gina enjoy na lang kay amo na, wala man kami choice. Manug 6 years na ko sa public, hopefully

makadulhog na after this kay wala na man iban kay kami ang pinakalast. Kami ang pinakalayo. so manaog gid amat-amat kabay pa sa Lantawan, kay kilid dalan lang.” – Participant 4

(We make the most of things here even though it can be challenging being the farthest school. We don't have many choices, but we find ways to enjoy those experience. Six years in the public service, and hopefully, we can transfer to Lantawan eventually. It would definitely make things a little easier for everyone.)

The supervisor's guidance has been instrumental in the growth of the teacher as a school head, fostering pride in their achievements. Despite challenges in remote areas, the students' eagerness to learn is inspiring, driving the teacher's passion for teaching. Teaching in such environments provides opportunities to connect with the community, learn from experienced colleagues, and build lasting relationships. The sense of teamwork and collaboration among teachers is commendable, fostering a supportive environment. Despite physical facility challenges, the teacher remains committed to making a difference in students' lives and believes in the power of encouragement and determination. The school's sense of community and shared purpose is evident, despite being the farthest school. The teacher hopes to be transferred in nearby school eventually to enhance their experience.

Lariosa, et al (2022) mentioned the two stand factors that motivated the teachers to teach in far-flung schools: encouraged by the learners' situation, that love of profession even goes to the extent of taking part of their inadequate salary for classroom use to provide learning and teaching materials for their learners and have a conducive learning environment to make the learning happen. Felongo et al (2022) added that teachers in far flung schools expressed happiness when they achieved something and received compliments from colleagues, students, parents, and the community. Teachers in far flung schools felt fulfilled as their students learned, appreciated their efforts, and expressed how the students and parents remembered and invited them to celebrations.

This study supports the study of Into (2018), that despite the challenges faced by teachers juggling numerous ancillary responsibilities, they expressed positive perspectives on their experiences, highlighting themes of commitment, dedication, positivity, growth, development, and self-belief, fostering personal and professional growth. 1 The experience of teachers in a challenging environment is a complex mix of challenges and sources of joy. Despite the difficulties they face, educators find profound meaning and gratitude in being entrusted with the opportunity to truly serve their students and the broader school community. While the participants have been shaken by the very real dangers and multifaceted concerns that come with working in these areas, their unwavering commitment to their mission of service and their unconditional love for their students shine through.

Concluding Remarks

The challenges faced by schools in remote areas are profound and multifaceted, ranging from poor infrastructure and limited resources to safety concerns and bureaucratic hurdles. Despite these difficulties, the resilience and dedication of teachers and school staff shine through in their commitment to providing quality education and support to their students. The sense of community and teamwork among staff members is remarkable, illustrating a shared purpose and determination to overcome obstacles. These stories underscore the importance of innovative thinking, adaptability, and collaboration in addressing the unique challenges of remote education. Despite the hardships, there is a deep-seated belief in the transformative power of education, driving these educators to continue their work with passion and dedication.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of this study, it is highly recommended to reduce the ancillary tasks assigned to teachers, allowing them to concentrate more on teaching. Increasing human and financial resources should be a top priority of the Department of Education to ensure schools are adequately supported. Moreover, there should be an enhancement in the provision of supplies, allowances, transportation and learning resources. Frequent monitoring by top management is also essential to address any issues promptly, particularly in last mile schools.

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