

Teachers Assigned in Remote Schools: A Phenomenology

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ABSTRACT

Teachers who work in schools that are far away or have been affected by war are very important in making sure that students from disadvantaged groups can go to school. However, they have to deal with constant problems that affect both the quality of their lessons and their health. This study looked at the real-life experiences of public-school teachers in North Cotabato's town of Pikit who were sent to schools that were far away. Ten teachers were chosen at random to take part in in-depth, semi-structured talks. To get to the heart of their feelings, data were studied using Moustakas' phenomenological method. Findings showed that many problems were linked, such as not having enough teaching materials and facilities, unsafe or inconvenient transportation, not having enough access to basic services like electricity, water, and the internet, problems with community and culture, problems with relationships and leadership, and being exposed to armed conflict, which made fear, stress, and emotional exhaustion worse. Even though these things were happening, teachers showed they were strong by using coping techniques based on professional values, cultural adaptability, creativity, and a strong dedication to their students. The study's conclusion is that teachers can keep going in tough situations because they are resilient as individuals, but that remote education needs structural and policy-level changes to get better over time. Strengthened facilities, better safety and mental health support for teachers, professional development that takes culture into account, helpful school leadership, and better application of incentive and localization policies are some of these. The results add to the small body of research that has been done on education in the Philippines, which is influenced by violence and rural areas. and work-life balance, thereby enhancing the empowerment of women in higher education.

Keywords

social studies, education, lived experiences, phenomenology, teachers

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INTRODUCTION

There are still significant differences between urban and rural learning settings around the world, especially in hard-to-reach areas, places with limited resources, or areas affected by conflict. International studies show that rural schools often have poor infrastructure, limited teaching materials, slow internet connections, and many teachers leaving. All of these problems affect the quality of teaching and students' results (Dlamini et al., 2022; Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019; Kaşkaya et al., 2025). Although changes are being made in the Philippines to make education more accessible, relevant, and of higher quality (Cariaga, 2023; Galaura & Simpall, 2025), systemic inequalities remain clear. Studies also show that the uneven application of national programs, such as the K–12 curriculum and Indigenous Peoples Education initiatives, makes it harder for teachers in rural and underprivileged areas to do their jobs (Casamayor & Plaga, 2025; Sison & Simpall, 2025).

In addition to structural problems, teachers in remote and rural areas face significant professional, emotional, and social stress. Researchers in different places have found that teachers in remote schools have to deal with unsafe transportation, too much work, emotional labor, and not enough support from the school, all of which can lead to stress, burnout, and an unhealthy work-life balance (Jan, 2020; Burak & Yıldırım, 2024; Barbarona-Gudelosao & Escote, 2025). In the Philippines, these problems are made worse in rural and conflict-affected areas where armed conflicts, forced migration, and school closures make it hard to keep teaching going and put teachers' and students' health at risk (Algones et al., 2024). Emotional labor and occupational stress research indicate that teachers' health, professional commitment, and ability to teach can suffer when they are exposed to these conditions for prolonged periods and lack sufficient support (Garraio et al., 2022; Peng et al., 2023, p. 30).

Even with these problems, more and more research shows that teachers' ability to bounce back, adapt, and generate new ideas is very important in underprivileged school settings. Research on teacher innovation shows that teachers can come up with creative ways to teach even when they don't have many resources (Cai & Tang, 2022; Liu et al., 2024) because they work in supportive schools and their basic psychological needs are met. Culturally responsive teaching methods let teachers adapt their lessons to their students' social and cultural backgrounds, which makes students more interested and helps them learn more (Morrison et al., 2022). Studies in the Philippines show that teachers' commitment to teaching 21st-century skills, using new teaching methods, involving parents, and working with the community has a significant effect on how well their students do in school and how far they get, especially in rural areas (Cariaga, 2024; Cariaga et al., 2024; Ventura & Cubero, 2025; Saro et al., 2025). Effective instructional leadership, collaborative support among coworkers, and welcoming school environments all help teachers stay motivated, believe in their own abilities, and stay in their jobs (Lacaza & Dioso, 2025; Ypil et al., 2025; Villocino & Villocino, 2025).

Existing studies provide valuable insights into teaching in rural areas and the resilience of teachers. However, we still do not fully understand what it is like to be a teacher in Mindanao, especially in North Cotabato, a remote area marked by violence. Previous studies in related areas, such as challenges for new teachers, using ICT in rural schools, graduates finding jobs, and managing research, provide valuable

insights. However, they do not fully show how teachers in this area are affected by being far from home, having different cultures, armed conflict, and limited resources (Cariaga & ElHalaissi, 2024; Cariaga et al., 2024; Cariaga et al., 2025; Guiani & Robles, 2025). This gap needs to be addressed so that context-sensitive decisions can be made about how teachers are deployed, how they receive support, and how they receive professional development. This phenomenological study aims to describe the real-life experiences of teachers who work in remote schools in the municipality of Pikit, North Cotabato. It will focus on the problems they face, how they address them, and the lessons they can teach us about improving education in high-risk and marginalized areas.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore and understand the lived experiences of teachers assigned to remote schools in Pikit, North Cotabato.

Participants and Locale

Ten teachers with at least three years of teaching experience in remote schools participated in the study. Participants were selected through purposive sampling and were non-residents of the communities where they were assigned.

Data Collection Instrument

Data were gathered through a validated semi-structured interview guide consisting of open-ended questions aligned with the research objectives.

Data Collection Procedure

Ethical approval and informed consent were obtained prior to data collection. In-depth interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and anonymized.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Moustakas' phenomenological data analysis procedure, including horizontalization, clustering of meaning units, textural and structural description, and synthesis of essences.

Ethical Considerations

Confidentiality, voluntary participation, and data protection were strictly observed. The study received institutional ethics approval prior to implementation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study's findings show that being a teacher in a remote school presents many challenges, including the atmosphere, safety, facilities, management, and your own health. Some of these ideas have already been discussed in the context of schooling in rural areas and conflict zones. They show how systems and events can make things complicated for teachers.

Problems with teaching when there are not enough materials

In country school systems, inequality still exists, as teachers can see when they have to deal with kids who are not learning to read or write, are making slow progress, or do not have the right teaching materials. It is harder to teach and keep students excited when there are not enough facilities or tech tools available (Cariaga et al., 2024; Vlachopoulos et al., 202[^]). There is a strong link between the facilities and government funding in rural schools and the level of teaching (Dlamini et al., 2022; Galaura & Simpal, 2022).

Background and involvement in the community in terms of culture

Through the stories of the people, we can see how important it is to learn about other countries when we are online. Parents and kids are both less likely to want to go to school when they see it as a job instead of a treat. Studies back up the idea that open relationships between schools and communities and methods that are sensitive to different cultures are important for getting kids in rural areas interested in learning and helping them do better in school (Morrison et al., 2022; Cariaga et al., 2021).

Trouble, Fear, and the Teachers' Health and Happiness

Being near gun violence has a big effect on teachers' mental health and on how well they do their jobs. Conflict-affected education research has shown that fear is linked to teacher burnout, loss, and less effective teaching (Algonos et al., 2024; Burak & Yıldırım, 2024). This fits with what the participants said about violence becoming normal. Because of this, these situations need solutions that focus on safety and provide psychological support.

It is harder for teachers to deal with their physical and mental stress when they cannot get to work or when they do not have access to simple things like electricity, clean water, and the internet. These problems with infrastructure make it harder to get fair education for everyone and widen the gap between rural and urban places (Cariaga, 2023; Dlamini et al., 2022).

The way teachers have dealt with these issues shows that they are coping, being strong, and coming up with new ideas. Teachers are persistent when they change with the times, come up with new ideas, and stick to professional standards. Cai & Tang (2022) and Liu et al. (2024) both do research that shows teachers who are self-motivated and have psychological support are more likely to be creative in the classroom. They care about their students' progress, as shown by the fact that they use new ways to teach and rely on personal resources.

The numbers show that measures at the system and policy levels are needed to support teachers in schools far away. For educational inequality to go away for good, we need to focus on building better schools, offering mental health support, encouraging culturally aware professional development, and hiring caring school leaders (Cariaga, 2023; Dlamini et al., 2022). Both Algonos et al. (2024) and Saro et al. (2025) say that policies that stress localization, community involvement, and teacher safety are needed to boost teacher retention and efficiency in conflict-affected areas. It is clear that teachers are strong, but for long-term growth, institutions need to commit and work together. This study helps us get a better sense of the human side of rural education by giving teachers' points of view more weight. To support educational freedom and make sure that all students have the same chances, it is important to deal with the issues that teachers in remote schools face.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The present phenomenological study shed light on the complicated and linked problems that teachers in remote schools face, which go beyond their official tasks as teachers. These problems include not having enough teaching materials and infrastructure, unsafe transportation, limited access to basic services, cultural barriers, and being exposed to violence and conflict. All of these things have a big effect on teachers' physical and mental health as well as their ability to do their job. The study's results show that structural differences in rural schools make it harder to teach and learn, which widens the gap between schools in cities and those in remote areas. Even with these problems, teachers show they are strong, flexible, and dedicated to their jobs by using new ways to teach, being open to cultural differences, and keeping students interested by making sacrifices and working hard. However, the study makes it clear that personal strength alone can't make up for problems

with the way things are set up. This shows how important it is for institutions and policies to step in right away to make sure that classrooms are fair, safe, and helpful places to learn.

Based on these results, it is suggested that education officials and local government units put infrastructure development at the top of their lists. This includes making sure that remote schools have access to classrooms, power, clean water, the internet, and enough learning materials. Hardship payments, help with transportation and housing, and easy access to psychosocial and mental health services should all be made available to teachers more often, especially in areas that have been affected by violence. Professional development programs for teachers should focus on culturally responsive teaching methods, community involvement, and stress relief techniques. At the same time, they should give school leaders the tools they need to be open and empathetic leaders. When it is possible, assigning teachers to different areas of the country could help with culture fit and staff retention. Finally, it is suggested that more research be done with a wider range of people and in a wider range of places in order to help make responsive policies and long-lasting interventions that protect teachers' health and safety and improve the quality of education for students in remote and underserved areas.

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Conflicting Interest

The authors declared no conflict of interest in the preparation and publication of this research.

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Contribution

The authors contributed to the overall conduct and writing of the study.

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