

## **SURVIVING THE TRAILS: TEACHERS' LIVED EXPERIENCES IN REMOTE AREAS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This qualitative phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of teachers assigned in remote areas of M'lang, Cotabato Province, focusing on the challenges they faced, the coping strategies they employed, and the support they needed to enhance their teaching experience and professional well-being. Guided by in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with fifteen participants, the study sought to capture the personal, professional, and contextual realities shaping teachers' work in geographically isolated schools. The phenomenological approach allowed the researcher to uncover the essence of teachers' day-to-day encounters, generating thematic insights grounded in their narratives. Findings revealed that teachers encountered significant challenges rooted in geographical isolation, inadequate infrastructure, limited access to teaching resources, professional isolation, and emotional strain. Long travel hours, unsafe road conditions, weak internet connectivity, and lack of materials created persistent barriers to effective teaching. Emotional challenges such as loneliness, stress, fatigue, and prolonged separation from family further intensified the difficulties experienced. Despite these constraints, teachers demonstrated resilience through instructional improvisation, community partnerships, collegial support, personal faith, and adaptive digital strategies. These coping mechanisms helped sustain motivation and instructional continuity even in difficult working conditions. The study also revealed that teachers urgently needed improved infrastructure, adequate learning materials, accessible professional development, financial incentives, and supportive leadership to enhance their well-being and effectiveness. Teachers emphasized the role of multi-sector collaboration involving DepEd, LGUs, and local communities in addressing resource gaps and strengthening school environments. The study's implications highlight the need for targeted policy interventions that prioritize remote schools, strengthen community-based educational support systems, and expand teacher welfare programs. Directions for future research include examining long-term psychological impacts of remote teaching, evaluating localized professional development models, and conducting comparative studies across districts to deepen understanding of remote teaching contexts.

**Keywords:** *remote area teachers, lived experiences, coping strategies, professional well-being, qualitative phenomenology, support needs, Mlang, Cotabato*

## INTRODUCTION

### Background of the Study

Teachers assigned in remote and geographically isolated communities often confronted conditions that tested their professional commitment, personal resilience, and sense of public service. In many developing countries, particularly the Philippines, the teaching profession in these locations was shaped by limited infrastructure, scarce resources, and social isolation that influenced teachers' lived experiences and their capacity to deliver quality instruction. Abueva (2022) emphasized that the struggles faced by teachers in remote areas reflected broader structural inequalities that hindered equitable access to education, while Atienza (2022) noted that rural schools continued to lag behind their urban counterparts due to persistent logistical and contextual barriers. These realities revealed an urgent need to examine teachers' lived experiences to understand the depth of the challenges they navigated within these learning environments.

Growing problematic issues were documented in recent studies, drawing attention to pressing gaps that required systematic investigation. National surveys showed that nearly 45 out of 100 teachers assigned in geographically isolated schools reported extreme difficulty in accessing instructional materials and support systems, while 38 out of 100 expressed concerns about safety during travel to their assigned schools (Alfaro and Tan, 2022). Baluyot and Aquino (2021) found that 7 in every 10 teachers in far-flung communities struggled with inadequate digital equipment and unstable connectivity, especially during the transitions to modular and blended learning. In addition, De Castro and Ramos (2022) documented gender-related hardships affecting female teachers who often managed teaching responsibilities alongside community expectations. Despite these findings, research continued to show gaps in understanding the daily lived experiences and emotional labor of teachers who persisted in remote assignments, as existing literature tended to focus more on student outcomes rather than teachers' perspectives and professional well-being.

International studies offered further insights into the complexities of remote teaching and highlighted experiences comparable to the Philippine context. Al-Shaibani and Al-Maadeed (2021) reported that teachers in rural areas in Asia and Africa experienced significant workload strain due to multi-grade responsibilities and insufficient instructional resources. Similarly, Björk and Hällgren (2023) found that teachers in underserved communities in Europe described their work as emotionally demanding due to isolation and limited institutional support. Research in Australia and Canada revealed that 60 out of 100 rural teachers perceived a mismatch between policy expectations and on-the-ground realities, which contributed to frustration and burnout (Chin and Rajendran,

2022). These international findings reaffirmed the global nature of the issue and emphasized the need for contextualized studies that examined the unique nuances of teachers' lived experiences in the Philippines.

If the challenges experienced by teachers in remote areas remained unaddressed, significant consequences could have arisen for both the teaching workforce and learners. Studies warned that unresolved professional hardships could have escalated into high levels of burnout, absenteeism, and attrition among teachers, which could have led to shortages in hard-to-reach schools (Goswami and Kumar, 2022). Such shortages directly undermined Sustainable Development Goal 8 aspirations for decent work and community development, as stable educational services were central to improving local economies (Hess and Meiners, 2021). Additionally, insufficient support for teachers in remote areas increased the risk of low learner achievement, poor curriculum implementation, and recurring educational inequities that disproportionately affected marginalized populations (Bhan, 2021; Anderson, 2021). These consequences highlighted the importance of addressing the problem urgently.

Therefore, this study was conducted to explore and understand the lived experiences of teachers who were deployed in remote and geographically isolated locations. The study sought to provide a comprehensive account of how these teachers navigated daily challenges, managed personal and professional demands, and sustained their commitment to public service despite resource limitations. As Caguioa (2022) suggested, understanding the human dimension of teachers' professional realities was essential for strengthening educational governance and sustainability in underserved regions. By documenting these experiences, the study aimed to fill the conceptual and practical gaps identified in local and international literature and generate insights that could inform policies, support mechanisms, and professional development initiatives.

This background established the relevance and necessity of examining the lived experiences of teachers in remote areas, recognizing them as crucial contributors to educational equity and national development. Through understanding their narratives, this study positioned teacher voices at the center of research, ensuring that policy recommendations and institutional interventions responded to the actual conditions of those who carried education to the country's most isolated communities.

## **METHODS**

This chapter presents the discussions on the methods being used in this study, specifically the research design, research participants, data collection, procedures, data analysis, ethical considerations, trustworthiness of the study, potential research bias, and limitations.

## **Research Design**

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the depth and significance that participants attributed to their experiences, particularly in relation to the strategies they used to sustain their professional roles and navigate the challenges of working in remote areas. This approach allowed the researcher to capture the complexities of teachers' narratives by delving into the nuanced realities they faced within their educational contexts, consistent with Spady's (2021) view that qualitative inquiry enables a rich understanding of lived experiences. Through this design, the study provided a contextualized portrayal of the challenges, insights, and adaptive practices that shaped teachers' work in geographically isolated settings.

To interpret and make sense of the findings, the researcher immersed themselves in qualitative analysis, examining the data within the natural settings described by participants in order to construct detailed accounts of both routine and challenging moments, in line with Rust's (2022) assertions regarding qualitative research immersion. The flexible nature of the qualitative design supported a dynamic and iterative analytic process, allowing the researcher to refine procedures and revisit data collection strategies when needed. This adaptability ensured that the study maintained methodological rigor, especially when assessing whether data saturation had been reached, which contributed to triangulation and credibility.

Guided by Creswell's (2013) framework, the study adopted a phenomenological approach to capture the essence of teachers' lived experiences in remote areas. This methodology was appropriate for uncovering the personal and collective meanings participants ascribed to their journeys as educators in challenging contexts. By offering space for teachers to articulate their stories, reflections, and interpretations, the phenomenological method facilitated an in-depth exploration of how they made sense of their professional realities.

The phenomenological design also enabled the researcher to examine how teachers' emotional, physical, and social experiences intersected with their broader roles within the educational system. Through close engagement with participant narratives, the study generated insights into the professional identities, coping mechanisms, and sources of motivation that supported teachers' work in isolated environments. This design was essential for understanding how participants constructed meaning around their experiences and how these meanings shaped their actions and perspectives.

Overall, the qualitative phenomenological research design provided the structure needed to explore teachers' lived experiences in a comprehensive and meaningful way.

Through this design, the study revealed the depth of the challenges encountered by educators in remote areas and the resilient strategies they developed in response. In doing so, the research offered valuable insights that extended beyond surface-level descriptions, capturing the human dimension of teaching in contexts marked by adversity and limited support.

## **Research Participants**

For the purpose of selecting research participants, this qualitative study made use of purposive sampling. This method ensured that only individuals who possessed the necessary experience and expertise contributed to the study. The participants were public elementary school principals assigned to rural locations in the Municipality of M'lang in the province of Cotabato. The study sought to explore the lived experiences of these school administrators as they adopted strategies that supported and enhanced teacher well-being within demanding and resource-constrained environments.

For this investigation, the sample size was composed of fifteen school heads who met the established inclusion criteria. Two approaches to data collection were employed with the participants. In-depth interviews were conducted with nine participants, and focused group discussions were carried out with six participants. This combination ensured that their experiences, strategies, and insights were examined in a balanced and comprehensive manner, allowing both individual perspectives and collective reflections to surface during the analysis.

The inclusion criteria required that participants were permanent or regular public elementary school teachers in the Municipality of M'lang who had served as school heads for at least three years and were assigned to various remote areas in the municipality. These criteria ensured that the individuals selected possessed appropriate expertise and practical knowledge related to school management and teacher support in geographically isolated contexts. By identifying participants with sufficient experience, the study secured credible and contextually grounded accounts pertaining to administrative leadership in remote schools.

Individuals who did not meet the inclusion criteria fell under the exclusion criteria. This group included teachers who were not school heads, students, parents, and other stakeholders who, while important to the educational system, were not directly responsible for implementing initiatives that promoted teacher well-being. By focusing the study exclusively on school administrators, the investigation maintained a clear scope and facilitated a deeper understanding of the leadership challenges encountered in remote educational settings.

Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and participants were free to withdraw at any stage without experiencing any form of penalty. Withdrawal could occur due to personal discomfort, scheduling conflicts, or a change in willingness to participate.

The study adhered to the ethical requirement of informed consent, ensuring that all participants were fully aware of their rights, responsibilities, and the purpose of the research before data collection began.

The selection of fifteen school heads aligned with established guidelines for qualitative research. Patton (1990) suggested that qualitative studies prioritize depth rather than fixed sample sizes, allowing researchers to focus on the richness of the participants' experiences. Likewise, Leedy and Ormrod (2010), as cited in Coy (2019), noted that qualitative research often reaches data saturation with samples ranging from five to twenty-five individuals. The chosen sample size ensured that the study gathered sufficient data to identify meaningful patterns while remaining manageable for in-depth analysis.

Purposive sampling, a nonprobability sampling technique, allowed the researcher to intentionally select participants based on their expertise, knowledge, and relevance to the research topic. Creswell (2018) described this method as one in which the researcher exercises informed judgment in choosing individuals capable of providing rich and substantial data. By employing purposive sampling, the study concentrated on school heads who possessed direct experience with leading schools in remote areas and supporting teacher well-being. This contributed significantly to the validity, credibility, and contextual accuracy of the findings.

### **Data Collection**

Public elementary schools in the designated municipality served as the primary locations for the data collection process. Since the purpose of the study was to examine the real-life experiences of school heads in implementing strategies that promoted teacher well-being, the research was carried out in specific schools within the division where the participating school heads were assigned. These locations provided the natural settings needed to capture their authentic narratives and contextual experiences.

Fifteen school heads who met the inclusion criteria participated in the study. Nine took part in in-depth interviews, while six participated in focused group discussions. Their selection was guided by purposive sampling, based on qualifications outlined in the earlier section of the study. As Biggs and Tang (2021) noted, qualitative research did not require a fixed sample size, although they recommended five to fifteen participants to achieve data saturation. With a total of fifteen participants, the study ensured adequate representation and depth. Purposive sampling was employed because the aim was to gather insights from individuals who possessed first-hand knowledge about promoting teacher well-being in remote areas.

The primary data collection instrument used in the study was an interview guide. This guide contained questions that focused on uncovering the lived experiences of the school heads. Items in the guide were used both during the in-depth interviews and during the focus group discussions. Before its administration, experts in the field reviewed the

interview guide to ensure content validity and alignment with the objectives of the research. This validation process ensured that the questions elicited responses that contributed meaningfully to the interpretation and examination of the phenomenon under investigation.

The participants' responses gathered through the in-depth interviews and focused group discussions served as the main sources of data. Two sets of interviews were conducted, one for the IDI and another for the FGD. The in-depth interviews were used because they encouraged participants to discuss the topic openly and reflectively, consistent with Gronlund's (2021) explanation of their value in qualitative inquiry. The focus group discussions allowed participants to share experiences, exchange ideas, and build collective insights that supported triangulation. All responses were audio-recorded and later transcribed. A denaturalized transcription process was applied, which involved converting the spoken responses into a clear written format suitable for analysis, following the technique described by Harlen and Deakin (2022).

## **Procedures**

Prior to data collection, the researcher secured all required permissions from appropriate authorities. Approval was obtained from the Dean of the Graduate School of Education at CMC to confirm that the instrument had undergone review. The research instrument was also evaluated by the CMC Ethics Review Committee to ensure alignment with ethical standards and research objectives. Following institutional approval, the researcher complied with the procedures established by DepEd by seeking authorization from the Schools Division Superintendent through a formal letter. Once approval was granted, letters were forwarded to participating school principals along with the approved request and informed consent forms. Information about the nature of the study and the participants' roles was included in these communications.

The researcher worked to establish rapport and trust with the participants in order to facilitate open sharing during data collection. Fink (2022) highlighted the importance of reducing participant stress and preventing silence during interviews, which the researcher addressed by maintaining a respectful, objective, and professional demeanor. Participants received informed consent forms before any data were gathered, ensuring that they fully understood their rights, the voluntary nature of participation, and the procedures of the study.

During the data collection period, audio recordings were made for both the in-depth interviews and the focus group discussions. These recordings were then transcribed to create written documentation that supported systematic analysis. Transcripts complemented the recordings and allowed for careful examination of participant responses. Informed consent forms were provided either physically or digitally, depending on participant preference. If any individual declined participation, the researcher honored the decision and invited other eligible school heads to meet the required sample size.

Once the target of fifteen participants was reached, scheduling arrangements were made according to each participant's availability.

The focus group discussions served an additional purpose of triangulating data gathered from the individual interviews. During the FGD, participants exchanged insights and clarified shared experiences relevant to the research questions. Sessions typically lasted one to two hours, consistent with Mager's (2020) guidance on effective group discussions. Through this combination of IDI and FGD, the researcher gathered comprehensive data that reflected individual perspectives as well as collective understanding.

## **Data Analysis**

The data analysis process began with the coding of interview transcripts. The researcher examined the transcripts using the theoretical framework that guided the study. This coding stage was essential for conducting an in-depth analysis of the qualitative data and involved interpreting participants' narratives to identify subjects, issues, similarities, and differences. Through this process, the researcher gained insight into how participants constructed meaning within their experiences, consistent with the perspective of Sutton and Austin (2015), who explained that coding assists researchers in understanding how individuals perceive and define their realities.

After the initial codes were identified and categorized, the researcher proceeded with thematizing the dataset. Thematizing involved organizing the extracted codes in a coherent and logical structure so that emerging patterns could be clearly presented. During this stage, the identified themes served as headings for the presentation of findings, while the corresponding codes were arranged under each theme together with analytical explanations. This analytical process followed Sutton and Austin's (2015) guidance on organizing qualitative findings to ensure clarity and depth.

The study applied Colaizzi's descriptive phenomenological approach to guide the deeper stages of analysis. The first step involved reading and re-reading the interview transcripts to extract significant statements and textual data. The researcher then identified sections of the text that reflected connections to predetermined codes based on the study's theoretical framework. These codes were further classified into clusters to facilitate the emergence of broader thematic patterns, following the clustering procedures described by Hsieh and Shannon (2005) and Assarroudi et al. (2018).

Phenomenology informed the overall analytic approach, focusing on both what the participants experienced and how they encountered the phenomenon. Creswell and Poth (2017) emphasized that phenomenological inquiry seeks to deepen understanding of social, cultural, and psychological experiences by examining descriptions, judgments, emotions, and reflections shared by individuals. Guided by this perspective, the researcher sought to uncover the essence of the participants' lived experiences by encouraging them to articulate their insights in detail. This approach enabled an in-depth

exploration of teachers' perceptions and interpretations of their roles in remote school settings.

The analytical process involved several iterative cycles. The researcher repeatedly reviewed the transcripts, refined coding categories, and reexamined thematic clusters to ensure analytic precision. As Sutton, Pitt, and Martens (2020) noted, this iterative analysis helps the researcher understand the world from the participants' viewpoints and interpret how they construct meaning within their lived contexts. After clustering the themes, the findings were arranged systematically for presentation, with themes serving as section headings supported by coded statements and the researcher's interpretive analysis. This final organization of themes was also consistent with the procedural recommendations of Prosser and Trigwell (2019) for applying Colaizzi's phenomenological method.

Through these procedures, the study produced a structured and rigorous analysis of qualitative data, ensuring that the themes reflected the authentic experiences and perspectives shared by the participants.

## **Ethical Considerations**

Since the study involved human participants who shared personal insights, emotions, and potentially sensitive experiences, strict adherence to ethical standards was essential. Ethical safeguards were observed throughout the research to ensure that the rights, dignity, and well-being of all participants were protected. Following the ethical principles outlined by Suskie (2020), the study adhered to voluntary and informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity, and the minimization of harm with the promotion of beneficence and reciprocity. Given the emotional depth of the narratives shared, the researcher committed to the highest standards of ethical practice.

To secure **informed consent**, participants were thoroughly briefed on their roles in the study. They were informed of the study's purpose, the nature of the data collected, the methods used, and how their information would be stored and reported, following Rust's (2020) guidance. Participation was voluntary, and individuals retained the right to decline or withdraw at any point without penalty in accordance with Tucker and Stronge (2020). For participants in geographically isolated areas with limited digital access, face-to-face interviews were offered as alternatives. Safety protocols were implemented during fieldwork, including notifying local authorities, conducting interviews during daylight hours, and maintaining communication with a designated contact person throughout the data collection period.

When online platforms such as Zoom were inaccessible due to weak connectivity, the researcher provided support mechanisms including mobile data assistance, flexible scheduling, and the use of low-bandwidth communication tools. These measures ensured equitable participation opportunities despite technological limitations. Data security was strictly maintained by storing digital files on password-protected devices and keeping

physical documents in locked storage. All personal identifiers were removed, and pseudonyms were assigned to protect participant identity, consistent with Fink's (2022) recommendations.

The researcher disclosed any potential risks associated with participation and highlighted the potential benefits of contributing to research focused on amplifying the voices of teachers in underrepresented areas. In line with Creswell's (2013) principle of reciprocity, participants received small tokens of appreciation as acknowledgment for their time and insights. Additional ethical principles were also observed throughout the study.

**Social value** was demonstrated by ensuring that the findings of the research were shared with participants and relevant educational offices. Copies of results were provided to school heads, the district supervisor, and the division office to support informed decision-making in improving teacher well-being initiatives. This practice ensured that the study contributed meaningfully to both the participants and the wider educational community.

The process of **informed consent** was carried out with great care. Participants were given sufficient time to read the consent forms, ask questions, and decide freely whether to participate. The reflective and emotional nature of the study required the researcher to remain sensitive and empathic, especially during interviews where personal and challenging experiences were shared. Participants were oriented about all methods used, including interviews and focus group discussions, and were informed of the expected duration and relevance of each method.

**Confidentiality** was strictly upheld. All information shared by participants was treated with privacy, identities were concealed through pseudonyms, and sensitive details were handled with caution. Participants who wished to withdraw their statements or end their participation were allowed to do so freely. The researcher also briefed research assistants, documenters, and transcribers on confidentiality protocols.

Although participants were not considered legally or institutionally vulnerable, the researcher acknowledged the indirect vulnerabilities teachers faced due to geographical isolation, travel risks, or adverse weather conditions. To address these concerns, contingency plans were established. When face-to-face interviews posed safety risks, data collection shifted to phone calls or online platforms when accessible. In remote areas with poor connectivity, arrangements were made through school heads or community leaders to identify safe and convenient venues for interviews. If unforeseen issues arose such as illness, conflict, or travel hazards, fieldwork was postponed or rescheduled to protect participants and the researcher.

Psychological safety was also prioritized. The researcher remained attentive to emotional cues, pausing or terminating interviews if participants showed signs of

discomfort or fatigue. Confidentiality was preserved through secure data handling and the use of pseudonyms. By anticipating challenges and integrating protective strategies, the ethical integrity of the study was upheld.

**Consideration of risk, benefits, and safety** informed the entire research process. The time participants invested in interviews or discussions required accommodating their schedules, often after work hours or during weekends. The researcher recognized that sharing personal experiences could evoke unpleasant memories or emotions. In such cases, empathy and respect guided the researcher's responses. Privacy was protected, and no identifiable information was disclosed in the reporting of results.

**Justice** was observed by ensuring fairness and impartiality in selecting participants. Any school head who met the qualifications was considered eligible. All participants were treated equally during interviews and focus group discussions. Tokens of appreciation were given to compensate for time spent participating.

**Transparency** governed the implementation of the methods. The researcher provided clear documentation of procedures and ensured that readers could review supporting materials to understand how results were derived. The researcher also clarified their involvement, maintaining objectivity and integrity throughout data collection and analysis.

The researcher acknowledged their limited exposure to certain methodological procedures and sought guidance from mentors, panelists, and experienced peers. This support ensured proper implementation of the method. The researcher demonstrated moral courage, cultural sensitivity, professionalism, and integrity throughout the study.

**Adequate facilities and resources** were also secured. Access to libraries, internet resources, audio recorders, cameras, and other necessary tools ensured successful documentation and data collection. Expert validators provided critical guidance in refining the research design, analyzing results, and ensuring ethical rigor.

To address the challenges faced by participants in isolated areas, the researcher provided data assistance when feasible and identified quiet and accessible interview venues such as unused classrooms or community centers. Flexible scheduling allowed participants to engage in the study without compromising personal or professional responsibilities. These provisions supported meaningful participation and upheld ethical engagement.

**Community involvement** was respected throughout the process. All research activities were conducted with permission from school administrators, department heads,

and program coordinators. The researcher demonstrated respect for the faculty and school communities in the district, ensuring that all interactions upheld dignity, professionalism, and collaboration.

### **Trustworthiness of the Study**

In this study, trustworthiness was a very important attribute, especially in phenomenological inquiry, because it supported the argument that the investigation focused on findings worth paying attention to. Trustworthiness demonstrated the validity, soundness, and significance of the data. To establish trustworthiness and credibility, Creswell and Miller's (2000) suggestions regarding the legitimacy of procedures guided the researcher. The discussion of trustworthiness was influenced by the research lens and the paradigm assumptions that shaped the methodological decisions of the study. The plausibility of the findings was determined by the responses and interpretations provided by the participants.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), credibility involved evaluating whether the research findings represented a credible conceptual interpretation drawn from participants' original data. To address credibility, the researcher employed several techniques. First, the researcher ensured that the lived experiences presented in the findings truthfully reflected the participants' phenomenological realities. Second, during the design of the research procedures, the researcher deliberately recorded conversations with participants to capture detailed, accurate accounts of their experiences. These steps ensured that the interpretations remained grounded in authentic participant narratives.

**Transferability**, defined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as the extent to which the findings of an inquiry could apply beyond the bounds of the study, was addressed by providing detailed documentation of the data sources. The researcher included these materials in the Appendix to allow other scholars to examine the context in which the findings were generated. This documentation enabled potential transfer of the conclusions or recommendations to related research or practice, supporting broader applicability.

**Dependability** emphasized the need for the researcher to account for the evolving context in which the research occurred. The researcher documented changes that emerged during fieldwork and described how these variations influenced the study's procedures and analysis. By acknowledging these shifts, the researcher ensured that the study demonstrated consistency and logical progression despite contextual changes.

**Conformability** measured the extent to which the findings were supported by the collected data. To address dependability and conformability, the researcher recorded

interviews, transcribed the responses, and compiled the transcripts into organized data sets, consistent with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) recommendations. For conformability, the researcher sought input from college instructors and students to confirm and clarify interpretations drawn from the data. This process ensured that the findings reflected the participants' perspectives rather than the researcher's personal biases.

### **Potential Bias of the Study**

This qualitative phenomenological inquiry was subject to several potential biases that may have influenced the interpretation of data. First, researcher bias was a possibility due to the close involvement of the researcher in data collection and analysis. As Creswell and Poth (2017) noted, qualitative researchers served as primary instruments in interpreting meaning, which raised the risk that personal beliefs or expectations could unintentionally shape interpretations. Although reflexive journaling and validation procedures were used, the risk of interpretive bias remained inherent in the phenomenological approach.

Second, participant bias may have occurred. Participants might have given responses that aligned with socially desirable expectations or emphasized positive aspects of their work due to professional identity or loyalty to their institution. Patton (2015) explained that participants often adjusted their narratives based on what they perceived the researcher wanted to hear or what reflected positively on their professional reputation. This tendency may have influenced the authenticity of their responses.

Third, selection bias was possible due to the use of purposive sampling. While purposive sampling was appropriate for phenomenological studies, it depended heavily on the researcher's judgment in identifying participants who could provide rich data (Creswell, 2018). Because the sample consisted only of school heads assigned to remote areas, the findings might have reflected perspectives of individuals who were more experienced, resilient, or willing to participate, potentially overlooking the views of those who declined or those who were newly assigned.

Fourth, recall bias may have influenced participants' narratives. Since participants were asked to reflect on lived experiences that occurred over extended periods, their recollections may have been shaped by memory lapses, personal interpretations, or emotional responses. According to Sutton and Austin (2015), qualitative data that relied heavily on memory carried the risk of selective or incomplete recall.

Lastly, contextual bias was also a potential issue. Interviews were conducted in settings familiar to participants, which may have influenced how openly they expressed concerns or negative experiences. Lincoln and Guba (1985) emphasized that environmental familiarity could either promote comfort or encourage self-censorship, depending on participants' perceived risks.

## **Limitations of the Study**

The study also faced several limitations related to scope, context, and methodology. First, the study was limited to fifteen school heads from remote areas in one municipality. While qualitative research did not require large samples, the geographic concentration of participants restricted the generalizability of the findings. Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted that qualitative results were context-bound, and therefore conclusions drawn from one locality might not fully apply to other regions or school systems.

Second, the study relied heavily on self-reported data gathered through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Self-reporting was subject to subjective interpretation and personal bias, as participants framed their experiences based on individual perception. Rust (2020) explained that such data were inherently influenced by participants' emotional states, attitudes, and memory, which might not always align with objective occurrences.

Third, logistical limitations in remote areas posed challenges for data collection. Weak digital connectivity, long travel distances, and safety concerns sometimes affected scheduling, interview duration, or the depth of discussions. These contextual constraints may have limited the richness of some narratives, consistent with findings from research on remote data collection (Tucker & Stronge, 2020).

Fourth, the phenomenological design itself presented limitations. While phenomenology allowed for deep exploration of lived experiences, it did not aim to establish causality or measure the prevalence of specific phenomena. Creswell and Poth (2017) reminded that phenomenological findings provided interpretive insights, but not predictive or statistical conclusions, which restricted the scope of inference to meaning-making rather than measurable outcomes.

Fifth, the involvement of a single researcher in coding and thematizing the data may have constrained the interpretive breadth of the findings. Even with validation and triangulation procedures, qualitative analysis depended on the researcher's interpretive skill, which Lincoln and Guba (1985) considered both a strength and a limitation.

Lastly, time constraints limited the possibility of conducting prolonged engagement or multiple rounds of interviews. Prolonged engagement was often recommended to enhance trustworthiness, yet practical limitations prevented extended immersion in field sites, which may have reduced opportunities to capture evolving or nuanced experiences.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presented, interpreted, and discussed the results of the qualitative phenomenological inquiry that explored how teachers assigned to remote and geographically isolated areas described and made sense of their lived experiences. Guided by narratives gathered through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, the chapter organized the teachers' accounts thematically to portray the conditions, challenges, meanings, and contexts that shaped their professional and personal lives in underserved settings. Through this thematic structure, the chapter provided a contextualized discussion of the realities teachers encountered as they carried out their roles in difficult environments, offering insight into the experiences that defined their journey of “surviving the trails” in remote areas.

### Challenges Experienced by Teachers in Remote Areas

**Table 1. Thematic Analysis on the Challenges Experienced by Teachers in Remote Areas**

<b>Issues Probed</b>	<b>Codes / Categories</b>	<b>Significant Statements (Attributed)</b>	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Meanings / Interpretations</b>
Physical and geographical barriers teachers encounter in reaching remote schools	Long travel; unsafe roads; weather-related risks	“We walk long distances on muddy terrains and sometimes cannot reach the school after heavy rain.” (IDI1, IDI3, IDI13)	Geographical and Travel-Related Difficulties	Teachers experienced strenuous travel conditions and safety risks due to poor terrain and unpredictable weather, affecting attendance and well-being.
Availability and quality of resources and school infrastructure	Lack of materials; weak internet; damaged facilities	“Remote schools lack textbooks, proper facilities, stable electricity, and strong internet	Limited Resources and Poor Infrastructure	Inadequate instructional materials, unreliable electricity, and weak internet connectivity hindered effective teaching and

Issues Probed	Codes / Categories	Significant Statements (Attributed)	Themes	Meanings / Interpretations
Access to professional development and instructional support	Limited PD; weak connectivity; distance barriers	connection.” (IDI2, IDI3, IDI14) “We cannot attend training because of poor signal and long travel requirements.” (IDI2, IDI11, IDI12)	Professional Isolation and Limited Training Access	reduced learner engagement. Teachers in remote areas had limited opportunities for capacity building due to connectivity issues, long travel requirements, and geographic isolation.
Emotional and personal challenges related to remote assignments	Stress; fatigue; separation from family; safety concerns	“Being far from family causes loneliness, emotional stress, and frequent mental fatigue.” (IDI1, IDI7, IDI15)	Personal and Emotional Strain	Teachers faced emotional burdens and mental fatigue due to isolation, safety concerns, and prolonged separation from family.
Instructional challenges arising from learner diversity and classroom setup	Multi-grade classes; absenteeism; low engagement	“Handling multi-grade classes and irregular pupil attendance makes teaching very challenging.” (IDI3, IDI12, IDI15)	Classroom Complexity and Learner Challenges	Multi-grade setups, inconsistent attendance, and low participation levels intensified workload and reduced instructional efficiency.

Table 1 presented the challenges experienced by teachers assigned in remote and geographically isolated contexts, illustrating how structural constraints, environmental difficulties, and personal burdens intersected to shape their daily teaching realities. The themes encapsulated the layered hardships teachers confronted as they navigated long travel routes, scarce instructional resources, weak infrastructure, professional isolation, emotional strain, and complex learner needs. By examining these experiences, the analysis shed light on systemic inequities that hindered their ability to deliver equitable and high-quality education, while also illuminating the broader conditions that constrained both teaching effectiveness and teacher well-being in remote areas.

## **Geographical and Travel-Related Difficulties**

Teachers described the daily physical strain and danger brought by the terrain, unpredictable weather, and long travel routes.

One said, *We walk long distances on muddy terrains and sometimes cannot reach the school after heavy rain* (IDI1.1.1).

Another added, *Teachers face long, difficult travel time and partially poor road conditions in going to school* (IDI6.1.1).

A participant shared, *Some teachers cannot reach the school after heavy rains because of rugged roads and muddy terrain* (FGD13.1.1).

One explained, *Walking long distances, crossing rough roads, and dealing with unpredictable weather disrupt classes* (FGD15.1.1).

Another stated, *Daily travel through unsafe and slippery roads exposes teachers to risk and delays* (FGD14.1.1).

These accounts reflected how mobility barriers became significant impediments to attendance, punctuality, safety, and overall readiness to teach. The narratives demonstrated how exposure to harsh environments affected teachers' physical health and increased absenteeism. This gains support from the findings of Anderson (2021) who emphasized that rural teachers often endure harsh terrains and weather risks that hinder regular school attendance. The results corroborate with the study of Cabusao and Dela Cruz (2023), which revealed that remote areas frequently face impassable roads, delaying instruction. This is congruent with the findings of Buchanan and Harrison (2022),

who noted that geographic isolation and travel hazards significantly affect teachers' willingness to remain in remote postings.

### Limited Resources and Poor Infrastructure

Teachers consistently highlighted the scarcity of materials and inadequacy of school facilities.

One stated, *Remote schools lack textbooks, proper facilities, stable electricity, and strong internet connection* (IDI2.1.2).

Another shared, *Limited materials in creating and conducting experimental studies affect the quality of instruction* (IDI1.2.2).

A participant said, *We are lacking classrooms due to damaged buildings caused by earthquakes and flooding* (IDI3.1.2).

One added, *Poorly maintained classrooms, lack of sanitation facilities, and inadequate lighting create an uncondusive learning environment* (IDI5.1.2).

Another explained, *Limited access to technology and basic supplies hinders effective teaching* (FGD14.1.2).

These statements revealed how structural deficiencies constrained instructional delivery, restricted learning opportunities, and undermined students' academic growth. This was supported by Alfaro and Tan (2022), who found that outdated and insufficient learning resources in rural Philippine schools negatively affect classroom performance.

This is true as the study of Hall and Wadsworth (2021) reveals that poor infrastructure and unstable facilities significantly reduce student engagement. The results also align with the findings of Adams and McMillan (2022), who emphasized that weak ICT access and inadequate school buildings exacerbate inequalities in learning.

### Professional Isolation and Limited Training Access

Teachers expressed difficulty accessing professional development due to poor connectivity and distance.

One explained, *We cannot attend training because of poor signal and long travel requirements* (IDI2.1.3).

Another shared, *Isolation affects collaborations because teachers cannot easily attend training or enrichment activities* (FGD12.1.3).

A participant noted, *Collaboration with other schools is limited because we are far from each other* (FGD11.1.3).

One added, *Teachers lack opportunities to upskill because of inaccessible workshops and unstable internet* (FGD10.1.3).

Another expressed, *Limited access to PD restricts teachers' ability to update skills and address student needs* (IDI5.1.3).

These narratives illustrated how geographical isolation restricted teachers' professional growth, leading to stagnant instructional practices and diminished competence development. This gains support from the findings of Bjork and Hallgren (2023), who noted that rural teachers rarely access professional learning due to distance barriers. This was corroborated by Baluyot and Aquino (2021), whose study showed that

many rural educators lacked digital access needed for PD during the pandemic. This is congruent with the findings of Gonzalez (2020), who emphasized that limited access to updated training reduces teachers' confidence and instructional quality.

### Personal and Emotional Strain

Teachers described how emotional distress, loneliness, and fatigue affected their well-being.

One shared, *Being far from family causes loneliness, emotional stress, and frequent mental fatigue* (IDI1.1.4).

Another added, *Teachers experience emotional exhaustion, decreased motivation, and strain on personal life* (IDI5.1.4).

A participant stated, *Teachers feel isolated and stressed, especially younger teachers far from families* (FGD11.1.4).

One expressed, *Poor living conditions and unstable signal affect their mental health* (FGD14.1.4).

Another said, *The stress, travel, and being away from their families create emotional strain* (FGD15.1.4).

These accounts showed that emotional burdens significantly influenced teachers' morale, well-being, and retention. This gains support from Hernandez (2022), who found that mental fatigue and stress are prevalent among rural educators. This was supported by Jafari and Thompson (2020), who emphasized that isolation negatively impacts teachers' psychological health. This is consistent with the findings of Chin and Rajendran (2022), who noted that emotional strain is intensified in geographically isolated contexts.

## Classroom Complexity and Learner Challenges

Teachers encountered significant difficulty managing multi-grade classes, absenteeism, and low learner engagement.

One said, *Handling multi-grade classes and irregular pupil attendance makes teaching very challenging* (ID13.1.5).

Another shared, *Learners are unengaging and not interactive, causing reduced interest and motivation* (ID11.3.5).

A participant explained, *Some learners struggle because they lack exposure to technology that aids learning* (ID16.1.5).

One noted, *High absenteeism due to poverty and limited resources affects lesson continuity* (ID12.3.5).

Another expressed, *Lower academic performance and higher dropout risks result from limited resources and isolation* (ID13.2.5).

These narratives reflected how diverse learning needs, inconsistent attendance, and low readiness intensified teachers' workloads and decreased instructional efficiency. This gains support from the study of Atienza (2022), which found that rural teachers are burdened with socio-cultural and learner-related challenges that hinder instruction. The results corroborate with David and Smith (2023), who emphasized that multi-grade and underserved classes increase teacher fatigue and compromise learning outcomes. This is congruent with the findings of Chavez and Dizon (2021), who noted that learner disengagement and absenteeism are prevalent in remote teaching contexts.

## Coping Mechanisms Used by Teachers in Remote Areas

**Table 2. Thematic Analysis on Coping Mechanisms Used by Teachers in Remote Areas**

Issues Probed	Codes / Categories	Significant Statements (Attributed)	Themes	Meanings / Interpretations
How teachers manage instructional tasks despite limited materials	Localized materials; handmade aids; creativity	“If there is no printer, we handwrite materials and use recyclable resources for teaching.” (IDI1, IDI2, IDI9)	Instructional Improvisation and Resourcefulness	Teachers maximized creativity and improvisation to compensate for shortages in teaching materials and equipment.
How communities contribute to school operations and teacher support	Parent involvement; barangay support; volunteerism	“Parents volunteer to repair classrooms and assist teachers with school activities.” (IDI2, IDI11, IDI13)	Community Partnership and Local Support	Parents and barangay stakeholders provided essential material, labor, and emotional support, helping sustain school functions.
How teachers support one another in remote-post assignments	Sharing resources; SLAC/DSLAC; school based collaboration	“We form support groups, share materials, and help each other with tasks.” (IDI10, IDI12, IDI15)	Collegial Solidarity and Peer Support	Teachers relied on collaborative work, shared resources, and mutual encouragement to manage instructional demands and emotional strain.
Internal coping strategies teachers use to maintain resilience	Resilience; spiritual grounding; optimism	“Resilience and faith help us cope with stress and limitations.” (IDI1, IDI4, IDI7)	Personal Strength, Faith, and Positive Mindset	Teachers drew strength from personal values, faith, and optimism, helping them cope with environmental hardships and isolation.

Issues Probed	Codes / Categories	Significant Statements (Attributed)	Themes	Meanings / Interpretations
How teachers continue professional development despite digital constraints	Offline downloads; webinars; self study	“We download lessons and join webinars when the signal allows.” (IDI6, IDI8, IDI9)	Adaptive Digital Strategies and Self-Directed Learning	Teachers used flexible digital approaches and self-directed learning to sustain professional growth despite weak connectivity.

Table 2 presented the strategies teachers used to manage persistent constraints and professional stressors in remote areas. Their narratives revealed adaptive responses shaped by creativity, social connectedness, intrinsic motivation, and self-directed learning. These coping mechanisms served as lifelines that allowed teachers to function effectively in difficult environments despite the absence of institutional resources. By examining these themes, the table highlighted both individual resilience and collective problem-solving as essential features of remote teaching.

### **Instructional Improvisation and Resourcefulness**

Teachers repeatedly emphasized their creativity and improvisation as primary strategies to address shortages of learning materials.

One explained, *If there is no printer, we handwrite materials and use recyclable resources for teaching* (IDI1.1.1).

Another shared, *We utilize localized materials present in the area to address the shortage of resources* (IDI2.1.1).

A third teacher mentioned, *Modular learning is made with locally available resources and contextualized emergency learning kits* (IDI3.1.1).

One participant added, *Teachers creatively improvise materials when textbooks or devices are unavailable* (IDI5.1.1).

Another said, *We recycle old materials and create visual aids from local resources* (FGD10.1.1).

These statements revealed teachers' persistent efforts to maintain instructional quality despite lacking essential facilities. Their improvisation demonstrated functional flexibility and deep commitment to meeting learner needs by transforming local materials into pedagogical tools. This gains support from the findings of Chavez and Dizon (2021), who noted that rural teachers maximize indigenous and recyclable resources to sustain instruction. This is congruent with the study of De Guzman (2023), which revealed that experiential and localized strategies strengthen relevance in low-resource settings. The results corroborate with the findings of Cabusao and Dela Cruz (2023), who emphasized that rural educators rely heavily on creativity to overcome material deprivation.

### **Community Partnership and Local Support**

Teachers described strong engagement with community actors as crucial coping mechanisms.

One stated, *Parents volunteer to repair classrooms and assist teachers with school activities* (IDI2.2.1).

Another mentioned, *We team up with local stakeholders to support pupils through feeding programs and school activities* (IDI2.2.2).

A participant shared, *Parents escort teachers during long walks, especially when the terrain becomes unsafe* (FGD13.2.1).

One explained, *Community participation helps address shortages through donations and volunteer work* (IDI3.2.1).

Another added, *Stakeholders' collaboration during Brigada Eskwela helps teachers cope* (FGD11.2.1).

These statements showed that the community acted not only as a source of material assistance but also as emotional and logistical support, reducing teachers' burden in maintaining school operations. Community partnerships strengthened social cohesion and built a shared sense of responsibility for education. This gains support from Banerjee and Duflo (2022), who highlighted the importance of community participation in sustaining teacher motivation. This was supported by Canlas and Soriano (2021), who found that collaborative local networks increase job satisfaction among rural teachers. This is congruent with the findings of Goswami and Kumar (2022), who emphasized that strong community ties reduce professional isolation in geographically marginalized schools.

### **Collegial Solidarity and Peer Support**

Teachers emphasized that collaboration and mutual assistance among colleagues served as vital support systems.

One explained, *We form support groups, share materials, and help each other with tasks* (IDI10.1.1).

Another shared, *Teachers conduct in-school SLAC sessions to address instructional gaps when they cannot attend formal training* (FGD12.2.2).

A third teacher noted, *We build strong bonds by sharing resources, food, and sometimes even financial support* (FGD10.2.1).

One participant added, *Teachers collaborate by mentoring and coaching each other* (IDI5.2.1).

Another said, *Experienced teachers guide and support newer colleagues, fostering camaraderie* (FGD8.2.1).

These narratives revealed how collegial solidarity mitigated the effects of isolation and resource scarcity. Through shared practices and collaborative work, teachers created an internal safety net that enhanced both instructional capacity and emotional resilience. This gains support from De Silva (2023), who found that informal learning communities strengthen rural teachers' pedagogical competence. The results corroborate with Dewey (2021), who noted that democratic collaboration enhances teacher empowerment in constrained contexts. This is consistent with the findings of Nicolas and Osias (2020), who emphasized that collegial networks provide essential emotional and professional stability for teachers in remote postings.

### **Personal Strength, Faith, and Positive Mindset**

Teachers repeatedly described resilience, spirituality, and intrinsic motivation as key coping mechanisms.

One explained, *Resilience and faith help us cope with stress and limitations* (IDI1.3.1).

Another stated, *Teachers maintain a positive attitude and find joy in learners' progress despite the challenges* (IDI8.3.1).

A participant shared, *Teachers rely on intrinsic motivation to stay dedicated despite the hardships* (IDI5.3.1).

One added, *Teachers develop a positive mindset, viewing challenges as opportunities for growth* (FGD4.3.1).

Another expressed, *Teachers' commitment to service helps them persevere despite difficulties* (IDI3.3.1).

These statements highlighted the deep inner resources teachers drew from to sustain their morale and sense of purpose. Faith and psychological resilience functioned as protective factors against burnout and emotional fatigue. This gains support from Guerrero (2020), who emphasized that intrinsic motivation sustains teachers' perseverance in disadvantaged locations. This is congruent with the findings of Chin and Rajendran (2022), who identified emotional resilience as essential for coping with rural isolation. The results corroborate with Dizon and Santos (2023), who found that teachers with strong personal beliefs maintain higher levels of well-being despite challenging environments.

### **Adaptive Digital Strategies and Self-Directed Learning**

Teachers described how they maximized technology whenever possible and sought learning opportunities through self-study.

One explained, *We download lessons and join webinars when the signal allows* (IDI6.3.1).

Another said, *We join free webinars when connectivity permits* (FGD10.3.1).

A participant shared, *Teachers download modules and learning materials whenever they find a stable signal* (IDI9.3.1).

One added, *Teachers use offline apps and digital tools when internet access is unavailable* (IDI3.3.2).

Another mentioned, *Some teachers keep abreast of their teaching by enrolling in graduate studies to update knowledge* (IDI6.3.2).

These narratives reflected teachers' desire to sustain professional learning even with limited digital access. Their willingness to find alternate ways to learn demonstrated strong agency and professional commitment. This gains support from Chung and Yu (2022), who noted that mobile and offline technologies help bridge instructional gaps in rural education. This was supported by Cassar and Thomas (2021), who emphasized that digital adaptation improves teacher capacity in low-connectivity environments. This is congruent with the findings of Bjork and Hallgren (2023), which showed that self-directed learning becomes a primary strategy when formal training is inaccessible.

**Needed Support for Teachers in Remote Areas**

**Table 3** *Thematic Analysis on Needed Support for Teachers in Remote Areas*

<b>Issues Probed</b>	<b>Codes / Categories</b>	<b>Significant Statements (Attributed)</b>	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Meanings / Interpretations</b>
Recommended improvements in infrastructure and school accessibility	Better roads; reliable transportation; improved school facilities	“We need better roads, improved classrooms, stable electricity, and strong internet connection.” (IDI1, IDI9, IDI14)	Infrastructure and Accessibility Improvement	Enhancing transportation systems, school facilities, and connectivity is crucial for ensuring safety, accessibility, and effective teaching in remote areas.
Needed provision of materials and instructional resources	Learning materials; supplies; digital technologies	“Teachers need complete learning materials, classroom supplies, and digital tools to teach effectively.” (IDI1, IDI2, IDI8)	Provision of Adequate Teaching Resources	Sufficient learning materials and updated digital tools enable teachers to deliver quality instruction and support diverse learner needs.
Professional development needs and career mobility concerns	Accessible PD; reduced paperwork; easier promotion	“We need training opportunities without long travel and reduced requirements for promotion.” (IDI2, IDI7, IDI15)	Professional Development and Career Advancement	Accessible professional development and fair promotion pathways enhance teacher competence, motivation, and career satisfaction.
Financial needs and compensation for remote-post hardships	Hazard pay; salary increase; travel allowance	“Hazard pay should not be selective, and salary increase with travel	Financial Incentives and Compensation	Providing equitable hazard pay and sufficient allowances reduces financial strain,

<b>Issues Probed</b>	<b>Codes / Categories</b>	<b>Significant Statements (Attributed)</b>	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Meanings / Interpretations</b>
		allowance is needed.” (IDI12, IDI13, IDI15)		supports retention, and acknowledges the challenges of remote teaching.
Desired leadership practices and emotional support from administration	Recognition; mental health programs; reduced workload	“Less paperwork, recognition, and mental health support would greatly help teachers in remote areas.” (IDI1, IDI9, IDI11)	Supportive Leadership and Emotional Care	Supportive leadership that reduces administrative burdens and prioritizes teacher well being strengthens morale and job satisfaction.
Need for inter-agency and community collaboration to sustain support	LGU–DepEd–community partnership; PTA involvement	“LGUs, DepEd, and communities must coordinate to support remote teachers.” (IDI3, IDI10, IDI12)	Multi-Sector Collaboration	Coordinated support among LGUs, DepEd, communities, and PTAs fosters a holistic and sustainable system for improving teaching conditions in remote schools.

Table 3 presented the forms of support teachers in remote areas perceived as necessary to improve their teaching experience, sustain their well-being, and enhance their professional competence. Their narratives showed that the needed support spanned structural, instructional, administrative, financial, and psychosocial dimensions. These needs reflected not only gaps in the existing support system but also the enduring inequities affecting geographically isolated schools. The findings highlighted that improving conditions for remote teachers requires comprehensive, multi-sector involvement and long-term, policy-oriented interventions.

## **Infrastructure and Accessibility Improvement**

Teachers consistently emphasized that inadequate roads, poor transportation, and substandard school facilities were major barriers to effective teaching.

One teacher explained, *We need better roads, improved classrooms, stable electricity, and strong internet connection* (IDI1.1.1).

Another shared, *Roads are unsafe and muddy, especially during rainy days, making it hard to reach school* (FGD13.1.1).

A third teacher stated, *Improved school facilities and stronger internet connectivity will greatly help us* (FGD14.1.1).

One participant noted, *Better infrastructure and increased MOOE can support remote schools* (FGD13.1.2).

Another remarked, *Safe and functional buildings must be prioritized because damaged classrooms affect learning* (IDI3.1.1).

These statements indicated that infrastructure deficiencies significantly limited teachers' instructional efficiency and confidence in delivering daily tasks. Accessibility constraints heightened physical risks and caused chronic fatigue, while poor facilities and unstable electricity weakened instructional quality. Such conditions undermined equitable education and discouraged teachers from staying long-term in remote postings. This gains support from Anderson (2021), who emphasized that unsafe terrain and poor facilities in remote schools reduce instructional effectiveness. This was supported by Alfaro and Tan (2022), who found that inadequate infrastructure in rural Philippine schools severely disrupts teaching continuity. This is congruent with Buchanan and Harrison

(2022), who noted that teachers in remote and hazard-prone areas face safety risks that directly affect retention.

### **Provision of Adequate Teaching Resources**

Teachers expressed the urgency of receiving complete instructional materials, basic supplies, and digital tools to carry out lessons effectively.

One explained, *Teachers need complete learning materials, classroom supplies, and digital tools to teach effectively* (ID11.2.1).

Another stated, *Sometimes even basic supplies are hard to come by in remote schools* (FGD15.2.1).

A participant shared, *We need learners' basic needs kits so teachers do not have to use their own money* (IDI2.2.1).

One teacher added, *Improving school libraries and providing technology will support teaching and learning* (IDI8.2.1).

Another remarked, *A single textbook is often shared by several students, so more materials are needed* (FGD11.2.1).

These statements showed that long-standing resource shortages placed teachers at a disadvantage, often forcing them to use personal budgets just to meet learners' needs. The lack of educational tools limited pedagogical options and discouraged innovative practices, thereby diminishing the quality of classroom instruction. The availability of adequate resources was therefore perceived as essential to ensuring meaningful learning experiences. This gains support from Hall and Wadsworth (2021), who emphasized that complete materials improve both teacher morale and student

outcomes. This was supported by Lansang (2023), who found that modern learning tools and adequate library materials significantly enhance teaching preparedness. This is consistent with Baluyot and Aquino (2021), who reported that many rural teachers lack digital tools needed for updated instruction.

### **Professional Development and Career Advancement**

Teachers highlighted that training and promotion systems must be accessible, practical, and responsive to the realities of remote postings.

One teacher stated, *We need training opportunities without long travel and reduced requirements for promotion (IDI1.3.1).*

Another expressed, *Teachers need localized professional development programs and easier career progression (IDI2.3.1).*

A third noted, *Access to high-quality training tailored to remote schools is essential (IDI8.3.1).*

One participant said, *SLAC and DSLAC help us share expertise when we cannot attend formal training (FGD13.3.1).*

Another remarked, *Professional development must be accessible and aligned with our daily constraints (FGD10.3.1).*

These narratives revealed that professional stagnation was a serious concern, with teachers desiring opportunities to update their skills without incurring travel expenses or sacrificing personal time. Career advancement systems were seen as burdensome, especially with voluminous paperwork and stringent requirements that were

disproportionate to remote teachers' realities. This gains support from Bjork and Hallgren (2023), who found that rural educators lack access to formal training because of distance and connectivity barriers. This was supported by De Silva (2023), who highlighted the importance of in-school learning communities for professional growth. This is congruent with Gonzalez (2020), who argued that tailored professional development strengthens teacher competence in rural contexts.

### **Financial Incentives and Compensation**

Teachers described financial support as crucial in alleviating the economic burden associated with remote posting.

One teacher stressed, *Hazard pay should not be selective, and salary increase with travel allowance is needed* (IDI1.4.1).

Another added, *Salary increases and accessible promotion will improve teachers' satisfaction* (FGD12.4.1).

A participant shared, *Government must not be selective in giving hazard pay to all personnel in remote areas* (FGD12.4.2).

One teacher explained, *Financial tensions due to low salaries and supporting both family and pupils cause strain* (IDI2.4.1).

Another said, *Transportation assistance and additional allowances would greatly help* (IDI3.4.1).

These statements indicated that inadequate compensation intensified teachers' hardships, especially when they spent personal money on school materials or

transportation. Financial support was perceived not only as economic relief but as recognition of their sacrifices and motivation to remain in remote service. This gains support from De Beer and Ferreira (2023), who emphasized operationalizing SDG 8 through financial incentives for rural teachers. This was supported by Keet and White (2022), who argued that hardship allowances and travel subsidies reduce teacher turnover. This is consistent with Ansu (2023), who highlighted that equitable financial incentives strengthen retention in isolated areas.

### **Supportive Leadership and Emotional Care**

Teachers underscored the need for leadership that is empathetic, supportive, and responsive to their well-being.

One teacher stated, *Less paperwork, recognition, and mental health support would greatly help teachers in remote areas* (IDI1.5.1).

Another said, *Teachers feel emotionally drained and need reduced administrative tasks* (FGD11.5.1).

A participant added, *Supportive school leadership and recognition of our efforts make a big difference* (IDI3.5.1).

One remarked, *Teachers need mental health programs and work-life balance initiatives* (IDI8.5.1).

Another said, *Proper supervision, mentoring, and emotional care help teachers stay committed* (IDI4.5.1).

These accounts revealed that emotional well-being was deeply interconnected with administrative systems. Supportive leadership was seen as crucial in reducing burnout, promoting psychological safety, and improving classroom performance. When leaders showed appreciation and care, teachers felt valued and empowered to continue

working despite difficult conditions. This gains support from Hernandez (2022), who highlighted that emotional support enhances teacher resilience. This is congruent with Jafari and Thompson (2020), who argued that mental health support increases teacher productivity and satisfaction. This was supported by Mabuyo (2021), who emphasized that decentralized, empathetic leadership strengthens teacher morale in remote schools.

### **Multi-Sector Collaboration**

Teachers viewed collaboration among LGUs, DepEd, and communities as essential in ensuring sustainable support.

Some emphasized, *LGUs, DepEd, and communities must coordinate to support remote teachers* (IDI3.6.1; FGD10.6.1; FGD12.6.1).

Another added, *General PTA assemblies and community programs help address gaps in remote schools* (FGD12.6.2).

A participant stated, *Administrators, government agencies, and communities must work together to improve working conditions* (IDI4.6.1).

One remarked, *Collaboration through SLAC, budget meetings, and community assemblies helps identify solutions* (IDI1.6.2).

Another explained, *Community involvement ensures that teachers' needs are heard and addressed* (FGD15.6.1).

These statements demonstrated that sustainable support requires interlocking systems of cooperation. Teachers recognized that no single entity can sufficiently meet the demands of remote education; instead, long-term improvement depends on coordinated and purposeful partnerships. This gains support from Caguioa (2022), who emphasized coordinated interventions for rural education. This was supported by Bradshaw and Kaplan (2023), who argued that social sustainability in education requires integrated institutional and community support. This is congruent with Liu and Xu (2020), who found that multi-sector approaches improve working conditions and teacher retention in disadvantaged settings.

## **Synthesis of the Findings**

The synthesis of the results from the three tables revealed a deeply interconnected set of experiences that shaped the professional and personal lives of teachers assigned in the remote areas of M'lang, Cotabato.

The first table showed that teachers consistently encountered structural and contextual barriers linked to geography, infrastructure, and institutional support. Long and risky travel, unpredictable weather, and rugged terrain made daily commuting physically draining and unsafe, which was consistent with Anderson's (2021) finding that poor accessibility significantly weakens teacher attendance and instructional stability. The lack of adequate school facilities, unstable electricity, and insufficient learning materials highlighted a persistent resource gap that reflected Alfaro and Tan's (2022) observation that rural schools in the Philippines continue to suffer from chronic shortages. Professional isolation also emerged strongly, as teachers struggled with poor connectivity and limited access to training, reinforcing the conclusion of Bjork and Hallgren (2023) that educators in remote locations encounter serious disadvantages in accessing professional development. The emotional strain, loneliness, and fatigue experienced by teachers due to family separation and environmental constraints further supported the perspective of Batac (2022), who explained that rural postings expose teachers to heightened levels of stress that affect overall well-being.

The second table illustrated that teachers adopted a range of coping mechanisms shaped by resource limitations, community dynamics, and personal resilience. Instructional improvisation was a common strategy, with teachers creating their own materials and relying on localized, low-cost resources, an approach that closely aligns with the observations of Chavez and Dizon (2021) regarding the creative adaptability of rural educators. Community partnerships also emerged as a major coping mechanism,

particularly through parent volunteers, barangay officials, and local stakeholders who provided labor, materials, and moral support. This is congruent with Canlas and Soriano (2021), who emphasized that social sustainability in education is strengthened when communities actively assist teachers. Collegial support among teachers, including sharing of materials and participating in school-based learning sessions, reflected De Silva's (2023) findings that informal professional communities function as vital support systems in geographically isolated postings. Teachers also relied on personal strength, spirituality, and intrinsic motivation, which was supported by Guerrero (2020), who found that teachers who view their work as a calling tend to sustain commitment in difficult environments. Additionally, teachers used adaptive digital strategies, accessing webinars and downloadable modules whenever connectivity allowed, which resonates with Chung and Yu's (2022) assertion that rural teachers utilize creative digital solutions to overcome connectivity barriers.

The third table identified the forms of support that teachers believed were necessary to improve their working conditions, professional growth, and well-being. Chief among these was the need for infrastructural improvement, including better school buildings, water access, electricity, and stable internet connectivity. This was supported by Hall and Wadsworth (2021), who stressed that improving school infrastructure significantly enhances teaching effectiveness and student outcomes. Teachers also emphasized the need for adequate teaching resources and digital tools, echoing the argument of Lansang (2023) that modern instructional materials are essential for equitable education in rural schools. Professional development opportunities that are localized, accessible, and less burdensome were likewise prioritized, reinforcing Gonzalez's (2020) explanation that sustained teacher training is crucial for improving instructional quality in underserved areas. Financial incentives were also identified as essential, including hazard pay, transportation allowance, and salary adjustments, which resonates with the analysis of Hess and Meiners (2021) that fair compensation is directly tied to teacher motivation and retention in remote contexts. Finally, teachers called for stronger multi-sector collaboration among DepEd, LGUs, and communities, a finding that aligns with Bradshaw and Kaplan (2023), who argued that sustainable educational improvement depends on integrated partnerships across local and institutional stakeholders.

Generally, the findings across the three tables demonstrated that teachers' challenges, coping mechanisms, and support needs are interdependent realities shaped by structural inequities, community interactions, and personal resilience. The challenges they faced created conditions that required adaptive coping mechanisms rooted in creativity, community engagement, and internal motivation. However, these coping strategies alone were insufficient to compensate for systemic gaps. The supports identified by teachers pointed to the need for comprehensive interventions that address

infrastructure, resources, professional development, financial incentives, and strong institutional partnerships. These results gained support from Caguioa (2022), Ansu (2023), and Liu and Xu (2020), who collectively emphasized that holistic and context-based educational policies are essential for improving teacher retention, professional satisfaction, and instructional quality in geographically isolated schools. The synthesis presented a clear narrative that remote-area teachers demonstrate exceptional resilience, yet their long-term well-being and instructional effectiveness depend on sustained, multi-level reforms grounded in equity, policy responsiveness, and community partnership.

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