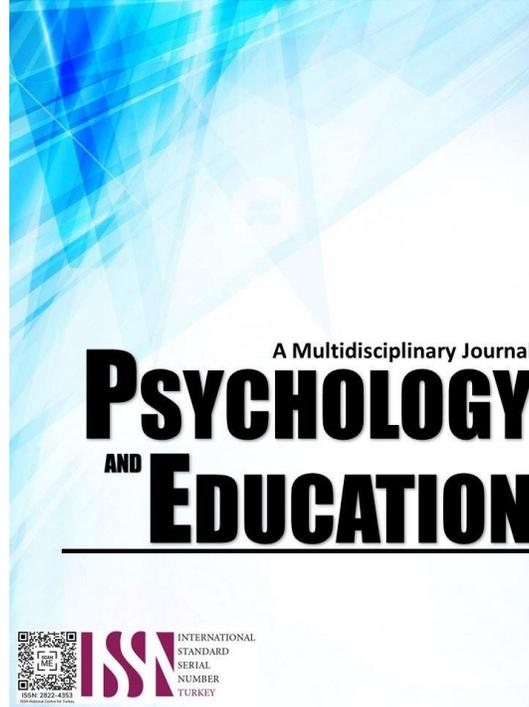


UNVEILING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF TEACHERS ASSIGNED IN LAST-MILE SCHOOLS: A PHENOMENOLOGY OF UNQUALIFIED COMPASSION AND SACRIFICE



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Unveiling the Lived Experiences of Teachers Assigned in Last-Mile Schools: A Phenomenology of Unqualified Compassion and Sacrifice

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to find out the lived experiences, coping mechanisms, and insights of teachers assigned in last-mile schools in the Municipality of Kiamba. The study utilized a qualitative research design using phenomenological approach with 5 female married teachers chosen through purposive sampling. The results of the interview were transcribed, translated and coded to produce themes. As regards to their teaching experiences in last-mile schools: laborious workload, far and uneasy road, unenviable circumstances, language barriers, and distant from home were the challenges encountered by the teachers. To cope with these identified challenges, they found solution for every problem, that is, making prayer as their best weapon, focusing with a positive outlook, and employed collaboration. With these, they extended help to IP learners, a blessing in disguise, stopped complaining, made a difference, performed job religiously, and savor time and enjoy as their insights. Teaching in the last-mile schools required immense commitment and passion, and has been a challenge and opportunity to transform a community and transfer effective learning to students.

Keywords: educational management, last-mile school teachers, lived-experiences, phenomenology, Philippines

Introduction

Teachers are the custodians of any top-down teaching innovation or education reform. To facilitate policy-driven changes in teaching content and practices, it is helpful to understand how these innovations spread to teachers and how this process and their experiences can be analyzed. Receiving a quality education is a constitutional right of every learner across the globe, regardless of the school's location. Its realization lies in the quality of teaching/learning under the management of the teacher in the class.

Moreover, the delivery of quality education is a role of every school in all countries globally, regardless of its geographical location. Likewise, it is a constitutional right of a learner as mandated by Article XIV Section 1 of the 1987 Philippine Constitution. However, despite the Department of Education's effort to provide quality instruction, the system still needs to be challenged, particularly those geographically isolated schools with limited learning resources (Symaco & Bustos, 2022).

Also, schools in South Africa, particularly in the rural communities of Mpumalanga, strive to overcome many problems and resist rural difficulties to improve the learning culture. The issues of self-management and educational resilience have always become the most important for South Africa's challenges.

In addition, Philippine education today faces perennial problems in various learning context, such as; a shortage of text books, facilities and classrooms, particularly in the public-school system of qualified teachers to be aware. The conditions of the remote school require passionate people and teachers committed to providing the necessary services to the public. The aim to deliver quality, accessible, relevant, and liberating education should always be practiced. However, according to the report of the former DepEd Secretary in 2019, 7,144 schools across the country need immediate support on accessibility. These were those schools located remotely, and the challenges teachers and learners were the unavailability to limited resources in teaching/learning situations. The teachers in the last mile schools were tested more than those in the areas near the town proper.

In the Division of Sarangani, there are last-mile school implementers in every municipality in the province. This impacted why I was interested in identifying the dilemma of the research endeavor. As an investigator, I intended to discover the phenomenological experiences of teachers in the Sarangani Division, specifically in the Municipality of Kiamba. Based on the related literature and studies gathered, there are a few studies about the lived experiences of teachers assigned to last mile schools. It would be more interesting to have an in-depth research to help them improve their school experiences. This sought to advance how teachers in the last-mile schools would provide that strong identity as effective and efficient curriculum implementers based on their lived experiences. The Municipality of Kiamba has six schools, all categorized as last-mile program implementers based on the criteria set forth, mainly established by at least 75% of IP learners.

Moreover, the effectiveness of deliberate efforts in our teacher-preparation program to increase readiness for rural teaching. Their analysis and discussion, drawn on critical and sociocultural theories to comprehend the experiences of a group of teacher candidates as they investigate expectations, the significance of place, personal histories, and teaching methods intended for rural settings. Teachers and other professionals have historically found it challenging to find and stay employed at schools in remote locations. Due to the difficulty in finding and keeping qualified instructors in rural schools, teaching conditions continue to deteriorate (Shikalapo, 2020).

However, every experience differs, depending primarily on where they were assigned. What remains the same is the fact that they must go through many challenges. Despite long-standing concerns among rural education researchers about teacher recruitment and

retention, efforts to specifically prepare educators for rural classrooms remain relatively obscure. Significantly, the benefits of rural living are consistently overshadowed by poverty, remote location, low teacher pay, and insufficient community amenities (Azano et al., 2019).

Methodology

Teachers play a vital role in educating and inspiring the next generation of leaders. They serve as influential people in the children's lives. They can make a real difference by using their inborn abilities and those developed through the learning process and experiences within their professional work. However, this mission still needs to be fulfilled due to the conflict in their assigned areas. It was both safe and unsafe in last-mile schools traveling back and forth. They feel safer with a good companion and journey with extra caution. The same as the experiences of teacher Pascual, during the rainy season, hiking was arduous because the mud was very sticky. She jumped over the canals, walled in the creeks, and walked in rice paddies with sweat dripping from her forehead to her toes. Nevertheless, with no regrets, she thanked God for the chance of a real immersion in school life at a far-flung barrio (Kos, 2018).

Moreover, it is indisputable that the volunteers were drawn to rural schools to improve the lives of the kids who live in these isolated communities. They discussed how much fun it is to learn something new and how much joy it is to teach in far-off places. Thus, teachers are the prominent people overseeing and assisting the learner's activities and learning process. Accessibility issues have challenged education in isolated neighborhoods, leading to nonstandard schools and a lack of essential services (Matalang, 2019).

In like manner, based on the teachers' experiences in last-mile school areas, it is indeed very challenging because they encounter uncomfortable means of transportation like *habal-habal* to reach the station. *Habal-habal* is a local dialect for motorcycles for hire, and it is the last option for those who do not have a motorcycle and cannot afford to pay for unique tricycle rides. Some teachers also experienced other difficulties or challenges when going to school. Some mentioned that the path is hazardous, and unexpected venomous animals like snakes may harm them or cause vehicular accidents. Furthermore, the challenges or difficulties cited by the participants of the study also include the slippery road, especially during the rainy season (Equipado & Gilbas, 2021).

In another study, the same challenges were mentioned: the teachers and school heads need to walk, create, innovate, and re-invent instructional materials using local materials. Issues related to absences became another problem because most of the pupils need to help their parents at home or to work in the field to augment the family's daily survival, no matter how young they are. However, despite the challenges encountered, they continue to serve. Unlike any other profession, teaching requires dedication and service for an individual to be considered a natural teacher. Teaching may not be a profitable job. It may not even provide them with financial security. It consumes a lot of their time, energy, and resources. At times, it causes disappointments, heartaches, and pain. Nevertheless, touching the children's hearts and opening their minds will offer rewards that are not quantifiable (Quejada & Orale, 2018).

According to the remote educator of the northern territory, you might go through some culture shock when you first get there, a feeling of confusion, uncertainty, and frustration when you come into contact with a new culture. It can affect individuals differently and varies according to life experiences. Under certain circumstances, individuals in any profession can experience stress, especially teachers who are not immune to this feeling (Barcena, 2018; Russell, 2017).

Moreover, some public-school teachers are employed in remote locations like fields, islands, mountains, etc. These educators generously shared their love of teaching. Additionally, those teachers give up their free time for their families because, rather than returning home each day after a long day of teaching, many opt to remain at their teaching location. After all, the communities are too far from their homes. Their original home where their family lives is somehow becoming their vacation house because they go home during weekends and sometimes just a few times a month, depending on the number of school duties needed (Marsh, 2021).

In addition, most of them (teachers) struggled and were challenged when arriving at the school, knowing they would be assigned to schools on top of the mountains. The lives of teachers in far-flung schools are challenged to work out of their comfort zones and deal with students and communities of different cultures. They employed various strategies for adaptation that helped them survive and stay in far-flung areas. Teachers who work in remote locations frequently face security threats. They might operate in hazardous, conflict-prone, or natural disaster-prone areas. They might even be in danger of experiencing violence or being robbed at gunpoint in certain situations. This implies that educators working in these regions must exercise extra caution and be watchful to protect themselves. (Brillantes & Nebria, 2021; Lariosa et al., 2022; Leocadio, 2023).

Additionally, teachers face emotional health struggles because of the demands of their profession, which sometimes leads to overthinking and feeling sick. The experience of this participant is common to teachers. In their statement, they mentioned why they sometimes feel mental discomfort while serving their station in remote areas. The reason is that they are far from their families. Many of these school professionals have never lived in remote or isolated communities where social support networks such as family and friends are scarce, social norms such as drinking alcohol are prohibited, access to their favorite sports and cultural activities and hobbies, as well as medical, dental, and allied health services, is limited, and housing and weather conditions are harsh (Rotas & Cahapay, 2020).

On the other hand, many participants revealed that the most enjoyable parts of teaching in far-flung schools were during outings in nearby rivers, during different students' activities, when they felt a warm acceptance and welcome into the community. Additionally,

teachers described higher levels of enjoyment towards teaching on a student-focused approach (Lariosa et al., 2022; Trigwell, 2022).

Nevertheless, it is a practice in the Philippines that neophyte teachers are assigned to less attractive places, like far-flung barangays or mountainous areas. Moreover, teachers assigned to these locales such as a far-flung school usually are neophytes to teaching they are young but are dedicated, committed, and passionate to their profession. They see their current assignment as temporary and that eventually they would be reassigned to a much better school (Quejada & Orale, 2018).

Furthermore, these teachers also sacrifice their spare time from their families because instead of going home every day after a tiring day, many choose to remain at their teaching location. After all, the communities are simply too far from their homes and, thus, they can visit their family's original home on weekends and occasionally only a few times a month, depending on how many school-related tasks they need to be completed, their home turns into their vacation home. (Wang et al., 2019).

Based on the study of Villa-Conejos, five (5) science teachers teaching in urban remote schools were challenged to work out of their comfort zone and deal with Indigenous students in the mountainous school. Still, they have gone far in their journey to deal with those students in that environment. She concluded in her study that the situation of teachers in mountainous schools is challenging. Teachers have adjusted and gratification of themselves but still have positive experiences. They also have encountered different experiences that made them become better and manifested the desire to stay and reach the poorest families in remote areas. However, through her study, teachers could to cope with the trusting relationship among their colleagues that developed their willingness and growth, making them decide to stay in their respective schools (Villa-Conejos, 2019).

Indeed, teaching in a small school is an enormous challenge. Teachers would encounter a variety of uncomfortable means of transportation like "habal-habal" and even use animals such as horses or carabao to reach the school. To follow their chosen careers, teachers put their entire family and their own lives at risk. In these places, educators must go hundreds of meters over rugged terrain. Few studies conducted in the nation have examined the lifestyles of teachers who work in isolated regions. These come from news organizations that detailed their struggle to provide the kids with services. These accounts detail the struggles of an elementary school teacher who travels 23 kilometers a day, hikes into the mountains, and holds classes whenever space permits (Barcena, 2018; Quejada & Orale, 2018).

Despite most teachers reporting isolation in rural communities, some teachers were raised in rural areas and still reside there with their families. These teachers opted to stay with their families and helped them because they had grown up in rural areas and were accustomed to country life. Teachers chose to stay in rural areas because of the familiar surroundings and proximity to family. This implies that not all is negative about rural teaching, as working and living in a rural location might be rewarding. Rural locations offered a secure environment with a welcoming sense of community and connection to nature. Rural-born educators did not feel lonely and were pleased in their familiar surroundings. Along with being more accustomed to the surroundings, living in rural locations was less expensive than in cities, especially when living with family, which was common practice in rural areas (Shikalepo, 2020).

Furthermore, teaching at a last-mile school/ rural school is a significant task. To get to the station, teachers would have to endure a variety of unpleasant modes of transportation, including "bangka," "habal-habal," and even the employment of animals such as horses or carabao. To follow their chosen career, teachers risk their lives as well as the lives of their families. They have also gone through various situations that have shaped who they are as people and motivated them to stay and assist the most underprivileged rural households. However, the trusting connections among their colleagues helped instructors cope with the phenomenon of their study, strengthening their willingness and growth and ultimately leading them to choose to remain in their specific schools (Barcena, 2018; Matalang, 2019).

Also, for teachers of last-mile schools who have difficult time in dealing with different tasks, the most challenging parts were the following: approaches to multi-grade learners, preparation of the instructional materials, handling other behavior, guiding students to value education, and lastly, the challenging road. Many argue that teaching is a vocation and challenging profession. Teachers are entrusted with many responsibilities every day, and they encounter them as part of their work or mission. Understanding the need to motivate is necessary since this will help learners learn better. However, encouraging the students requires a very demanding role from the teacher. It entails various teaching styles or techniques to capture students' interests (Khan, 2017; Larkin, 2019).

Undoubtedly, the revelations of the teacher-participants on language barriers are one of the challenges they encountered in the area, which they believed would hamper learning. Even with the burning desire of the teachers to teach the students, teachers can still experience barriers in delivering the goods to the students. Most of the teachers shared during the interview that barriers in communication are a common issue in the instruction of the lessons. They shared that most of their students are IPs, and they need a background in their dialect, making it difficult for them to deliver instruction (Lariosa et al., 2022).

In addition, teaching in last-mile schools can be considered unsafe because of the different incidents, which are geographically far. Teachers in remote areas also put their lives at stake. Teachers in the school walk for kilometers to be in the class. It is particularly challenging during the rainy days, making trails to go to school. Filipino teachers are like second parents to their students and their associates. They risk their lives and their entire family to pursue their chosen vocation. Detriments in teaching in far-flung schools come in many ways as emergent themes revealed: geographically far and risky for students and teachers, living away from home and hospitals, and burden for additional expenses. Far-flung schools are difficult to reach and often dangerous. Traveling to the nearest

reachable road requires endurance and courage (Quejada & Orale, 2018).

Besides, teaching is a vocation rather than a mere job; some term it a calling; contextually, education is considered as such due to the extreme dedication beyond what is expected costs. Remote schools in the Philippines still need more teaching resources, and teachers are continuously challenged to deliver quality primary education in remote areas. The conditions of schools require passionate and committed teachers to provide much-needed services (Blustein & Goldschmidt, 2021).

However, teachers serve as resource persons, confidants, friends, and models. That is why they have an eminent impact not only on their students but also on other people and the schools where they teach. Reaching out to the students and making a difference in their lives was fundamental in deciding to remain in the teaching profession. With this, teachers in far-flung areas could develop their students' minds, teaching them the importance of having a good education and changing an individual into a productive member of the community by helping them. Those learnings develop the teachers to handle multi-grade learners, to communicate, socialize, and love their work (Barcena, 2018).

However, teachers have to deal with the limitations of teaching in Indigenous schools, such as lack of learning materials, students not attending classes on specific seasons, students' lack of motivation, and lack of support from parents, also the language barrier, which could ultimately affect the quality of the teaching-learning process. Hence, there is no other way but for teachers to know the language of the IP learners since it is part of their cultural identity. Not knowing the language could lead to misinterpretation of ideas and thoughts and could peril the quality of education these learners receive (Sani & bin Idris, 2017).

Also, teachers were shown to employ various coping mechanisms, including social, professional, institutional, and personal, to manage stress. It is still being argued that place-based informal design immersion programs could be a novel method of using design to involve and instruct instructors and students, thereby building the competencies required for successful 21st-century futures, since educators in regional and rural areas frequently experience geographical, social, and professional isolation (Aziz et al., 2019).

Accordingly, a good education is personal, and the individual learner is the focus of good instruction and development. "Effective learning in the classroom depends on motivating and keeping the students interested in the teaching-learning process". As they quoted, teachers' experiences affect their teaching and development as passionate yet resilient individuals. Indeed, teachers' experiences affect their teaching, making them more determined, effective, efficient, flexible, and committed to their profession and vocation (Quejada & Orale, 2018).

Consequently, one of the most essential factors in developing a passion for teaching is teachers' commitment and dedication to students' welfare and learning. Teachers passionate about their work are wholly committed to it and immensely inspire their students. Teachers keep the passion burning to continue teaching, for it is a mission/vocation. As stated by the participants, the benefit of remaining in the teaching profession was seeing students succeed. He indicated that when the former students return and tell him they are graduating from high school, they will attend college or do other things; it is satisfying (Quejada & Orale, 2018).

Likewise, teachers have utilized their experiences, good or bad, as a chance to grow as individuals. This section discusses instructors' natural tendency to learn new skills, methods, and essential life lessons to succeed in their chosen careers. Because of the significant experiences they had, their enthusiasm and commitment to teaching have increased even further. These realities were pronounced in their study, and the experience of teaching in a remote school and community has been personally and professionally rewarding and often life-changing. Working together as a family will produce a school climate that endorses positive student outcomes and improves job satisfaction (Javilla & Fabella, 2019).

Furthermore, teaching as a vocation is finding more meaning for non-indigenous teachers. Commitment and love for IP learners are the driving forces for Filipinos to teach in indigenous schools. Teaching in last-mile schools is a challenging task but full of challenges. Teachers are known for their dedication, commitment, and resiliency. It is recommended that educators create a suitable plan and implement sufficient measures to meet the demand for education. Teachers find ways in all circumstances, subjecting themselves beyond what is required and expected of them (Guiamalon et al., 2021).

Thus, although the teaching profession can be demanding, various ways exist to survive and thrive. Knowing themselves also means knowing how they react under pressure and thinking about coping without their close buddies and family nearby. Also, despite the challenges of the public-school heads in remote areas, they have not denied that they have found comfort in serving. As they continue to serve, they find their journey in a remote area self – fulfilling, for they have found their true mission in academia. They found a new family with their peers, colleagues, and community. Moreover, mold them to be an artistic educator, for they use their extra talent to bring quality education to all (Gallego, 2022; Javilla & Fabella, 2019).

Results and Discussion

This qualitative phenomenological research aimed to unveil the lived experiences of teachers, coping mechanisms, and insights assigned in last-mile schools in the Municipality of Kiamba.

The study also presented the results of the interviews. Each participant was disguised under a pseudonym to protect the chosen instances' identities and privacy.

Experiences of Teachers Assigned in the Last-Mile Schools

The table shows the lived experiences of teachers assigned in the last-mile schools, and it includes laborious workload, unenviable circumstances, language barrier, far and uneasy road, and distance from family.

Table 1. *Experiences of Teachers Assigned in the Last-Mile Schools*

<i>Clustered Themes</i>	<i>Emergent Themes</i>	
A lot of coordinatorship	Laborious Workload	
Too few teachers but many tasks		
Heavy workloads	Unenviable Circumstances	
Usually 5-7 coordinatorship		
Stressful workloads		
Concerns on the road, dialect, safety, and student's learning		
Pressure when it comes to teaching		
Back to basic in teaching so that students can understand		
Left behind with new teaching pedagogy		
Very limited training		
Students have poor comprehension on the lessons		
Need to go home after work no matter how far it is because of having a baby at home		
Cannot understand with some terminologies of students	Language Barrier	
Different dialect with the students		
Need to adjust when talking to students with different language	Far and Uneasy Road	
Other students cannot speak Cebuano		
It is challenging to understand student's dialect		
The road is very difficult		
It is very far and safety is not a guarantee		
Need to sacrifice going to school		
Distance and condition of road makes uneasy to transport		
The difficult road causes stress and nervousness		
Workplace is very far which hinder quality time with family		Distant from Family
Unable to go home and be with the family every day		
Sacrifice quality time with the family because of working distantly		
Misses family because of being far away		
Sacrifice being away with the family		

Laborious Workload. Last-mile schools lacked ample human resources. According to the participants, they were designated with additional workloads aside from their teaching-related loads, 5-7 coordinatorships, fewer teachers, but many tasks, and heavy stressful workloads were some of the main points of the participants. Moreover, Participants 2 and 4 said:

Mas bug-at among trabaho dri sa bukid kay very small lang human resource. Ang paghati-hati sa work is gamay lang ang maghati. Ang isa ka teacher usually gunit naa sa 5-6 coordinatorships. Plus, may mga other auxillary services pa offer ang school. Kaya when it comes to work load bug-at jud siya. Minsan mag render og OT just to finish reports and other things. (P2-Ilocano-Line 012-020)

(We have a heavy workload in the mountains because of minimal human resources. The people involved in the division of labor are limited. One teacher usually handles 5-6 coordinatorships. Plus, the school offers other auxiliary services. That is why the workload is heavy. Sometimes, we render overtime just to finish reports and other things.)

Ahhhh. ang workload diri sa bukid ma'am kay stressful hehehehe. stressful kay lima lang man gud teacher diri ma'am ikalima na among head. Akong ginagunitan pajud kay Grade 1 ug grade 2 aside sa teaching ma'am naa pamiy mga coordinatorship na tag lima lima me ug assignment. Pero bisan stressful ma'am lipay man gihapon ko diri kay naga tinabanganay me para maging successful among pagtudlo sa mga bata. (P4-Ilocano-Line 009-014)

(Ahhhh, the workload here in the mountain is stressful, because there are only five teachers, including our head. I handled grades 1 and 2, and aside from teaching ma'am, we also have five coordinatorships dealt with. However, even if it is stressful, ma'am, I am still happy here because we help each other successfully teach our learners.)

The statement of the participants above shows that teachers in last-mile schools experienced a lack of human resources, resulting in a laborious workload. Their teaching workload is confined to regular teaching activities like delivering classes, preparing lesson plans, and assessing students' homework. However, time spent in teaching, administrative or additional and extracurricular activities, and performing co-curricular or designated auxiliary responsibilities made the teachers' workloads in last-mile schools heavy and stressful.

In addition, many jobs demand in the teaching profession contribute to the feeling of a heavy workload. One of the things contributing to teacher burnout, which lowers their emotional and physical vitality, is work overload. Thus, the high workload was not associated with the teaching itself but with the continuous growth of new demands that were added without removing other work tasks. Teachers stated that they must cope with new technology, new demands for long-term planning in education to match instruction to objectives,

new requirements for grading and evaluating student performance, and comprehensive individual development plans for every student under growing time constraints. It was perceived to result in unforeseen schedule modifications and increased workload (Arvidsson et al., 2019).

Unenviable Circumstances. The undesirable conditions experienced by the participants were road, dialect, safety, and student learning. They also have limited training about teaching pedagogies. They felt the pressure when it came to teaching because students had poor lesson comprehension. With that, Participants 3 and 5, who have been teaching for seven years, shared their experiences and they said:

Uhmm dali ra, no pressure kay layo sa monitoring, layo sa mga bisita... kung бага, ga work me without any pressure however, left behind pod me sa mga technical assistance from supervisors and other deped officials. When it comes sa teaching, mao ni ang medyo pressure kay ako as grade 5 adviser, dapat ang mga bata kabalo na sa 4 basic operations sa math pero the reality dili pa diay. Mao back to basic sa pagtudlo, kay looy mga bata. Kahit walay supervision, ginatudloan jud namu mga bata dri iba sa ginaingon sa uban na ahhh bukid mana sila wala na gatudlo (P3-Cebuano-Line 006-013)

(Uhmm, it is easy, no pressure because it is far from monitoring and visitors... in other words, we are working without any pressure. However, regarding technical assistance from supervisors and other DepEd officials we are left behind. There is a little pressure when it comes to teaching because I am a grade 5 adviser, and learners are expected to perform the four basic operations in math, but in reality, they cannot. That is why we are back to basic teaching for the sake of learners. Even without supervision, we teach our children differently from what others say in the mountains, they do not teach.)

Ahmm... una is ang kakapoy sa byahe. Taga adlaw jud nako byahion ang dalan na lubak-lubak, slide ug tabukon ang sapa kay tungod di man ko pwede matulog sa eskwelahan kay naa koy anak na gina breast feed pa. ikaduha, kanang magdala ug bug-at na mga learning resources, halimbawa printed materials na gamiton sa pagtudlo sa lessons arun mas masabtan sa mga bata ug mga reading materials arun gamiton sa mga bata inig basa nila arun dili sila ma pul-an. Gina print ug ginadala nako ni adlaw adlaw inig adtog school kay wala man mey kuryente sa school mao sa balay ko naga print. (P5-Ilocano-Line 040-047)

(Ahmm... first is the hustle in transportation. Every day, I traveled bumpy, slippery roads, and I had to cross the river since I could not sleep in school because I was a lactating mom. Second, bringing heavy learning resources, for example, printed materials, need in teaching the lesson for the learner's easy understanding and reading materials for them to use in learning reading and avoid boredom. I printed and brought all those things daily going to school because we do not have current in school, and I have to print at home.)

Based on the responses above, it highly showed the frustration of the last-mile schools' teachers regarding the teaching-learning process. For teachers in far-flung who found hard times in dealing with different tasks, the most challenging parts were the following: approaches to multi-grade learners, preparation of the instructional materials, handling other behaviors, guiding students to value education, and lastly, the challenging road.

Also, many argue that teaching is a vocation and not an easy profession. Teachers are entrusted with many responsibilities daily and encounter these as part of their work or mission. Understanding the need to motivate is necessary since this would help learners learn better. However, encouraging the students requires a very demanding role from the teacher. It entails various teaching styles or techniques to capture students' interests (Khan, 2017; Larkin, 2019).

Language Barrier. Communication between teachers and learners is crucial in the teaching and learning process. According to the participants, teaching was difficult because they did not speak the same language. Understanding the teachers' local dialect posed a big problem in the teacher-student interaction. According to the participants, it was a struggle to teach because they did not speak the same language. They believed it would be easier for them if they could only speak the learners' language. The problem with communication, because of the language barrier, served as the most challenging hurdle in the teaching-learning process, especially for new teachers. According to the participants, the only way was to learn the IP learners' dialect. Participant 4, who has been teaching IP learners in last-mile schools, shared her experience:

Inig saka namo ug Monday ma'am kay malate nami sa among tudlo kay almost 2 hours pud namo byahion gikan sa baba paingon diri sa among station. Tapos usahay dili ko makasaka dayon diri sa bukid labi na inig uli nako sa amoa naay mga unexpexted na mga mahitabo dili dayon ko makasaka ug makatudlo. Labi na pag-abot sa ilang language kay maglisod jud ko ug tudlo ug sabot sa ilaha kay naay uban bata dili kabalo mubisaya ilaha ra jud language ila kabalo naka apekto jud nig maayo sa akong performance. Pero thankful gihapon ko kay willing to learn kaayo ang mga bata diri. Magtinabanganay ra jud me diri sa babaw kay looy pud kaayo sila ug dili ko/me maningkamot. (P4-Ilocano-Line 032-040)

(Every time we go to school on Monday, ma'am, we are already late because we traveled 2 hours from the lowlands to our station. Sometimes, I cannot report to school to teach children when there are unexpected circumstances at home. Especially in teaching the language because I find it challenging to teach and understand since some learners cannot also understand Cebuano only the language they know, affecting my performance. Nevertheless, I am still thankful because learners are willing to learn. We help each other in the mountains, so we must persevere.)

Based on the shared experiences of Participant 4, having a common language is a vital part of the teaching-learning process. However, in the case where non-indigenous teachers handled IP learners in last-mile schools, language becomes a hindrance to the teaching-

learning process. Although, the teacher could speak the Visayan language, which the majority in the Municipality used in communicating, still, they considered the language barrier to be a significant concern.

Undoubtedly, the revelations of the teacher-participants on language barriers as one of the challenges they encountered in the area, which they believed would hamper learning. The above-cited statements acknowledged the study of Lariosa et al. (2022) that an accurate message during the lesson results from effective communication. Even with the burning desire of the teachers to teach the students, teachers are not free from experiencing barriers in delivering the goods to the students. Most of the teachers shared during the interview those barriers.

Far and Uneasy Road. Most of them felt the struggle and challenge in arriving at the school, knowing they would be assigned to schools that were located on top of the mountains. This is most certainly the explanation for the fact that assignment is transferred to younger teachers. In addition, teachers felt a deeper connection and attachment to the learners, which made them feel the fulfillment of being a teacher, not just simply a teacher, but a teacher to IPs. Participants 2 and 3 said:

Traveling from home to school would be one of the challenges I encountered. Ang kalisod sa dalan ug kalayo. Distance and road condition make us uneasy to transport things we wanted to bring at school. Moreover, with an IP community, language barrier was also a great challenge as a teacher in last-mile school. Plus, ang kulang sa standard classrooms, mao nagstay nalang sa mga Makeshift. (P2-Ilocano-Line 014-021)

(Traveling from home to school would be one of the challenges I encountered: the difficulty and the distance. Distance and conditions make transporting things we want to bring to school uneasy. Also, with the IP community, the language barrier was a great challenge in last-mile school. Plus, the lack of standard classrooms.)

Kahadlok ug kalayo sa dalan mao jud na ang pinakadakong sakripisyo nako as last mile school teacher. (P3-Cebuano-Line 015-016)

(The frightening and far distance of the roads are my most considerable sacrifices as a last-mile school teacher.)

According to the claims above, long-distance travel and difficult terrain from home to school were the main obstacles faced by educators at last-mile schools. Most of the teachers could not go home daily as transportation was a challenge. Added to that was the poor road conditions. There were instances when they needed to walk long distances just to reach the school, especially if it was raining. As a result, they had to adjust to the circumstances, such as navigating a muddy and uneven route. In other words, distance was a big concern for the participants.

In like manner, based on the teachers' experiences in last-mile school, areas, it is indeed very challenging because they have encountered uncomfortable means of transportation like habal-habal just to reach their destination. According to some, the trail is dangerous and could result in accidents or injuries from poisonous creatures like snakes. Furthermore, the challenges or difficulties cited by the study participants included the slippery road, especially during the rainy season (Equipado & Gilbas, 2021).

Distant from Family. The workplace of teachers may hinder quality time with family. Some participants could not go home and be with their families daily. They missed their family and have to sacrifice quality time with them because of their work distance. Furthermore, Participant 3 who have been teaching for 7 years and Participant 4 who have been teaching for 6 years shared their experiences, they said:

Ahhh actually ang kamingaw sa pamilya gadala jud ko ug Family picture, ginatan.aw nako everyday tapos mangita me signal kay may part man sa school na nay signal na maka text para maka kumusta sa akong mga anak...Sa Kalayo ug kalisod, dri nako gatulog para safe sa travel every day. And of course, Pray always sa tanan butang na ginabuhat. (P3-Cebuano-Line 057-061)

(Ahhh actually the longing for family, I brought our family picture, I look at it every day and then I search for signal since there are parts of school where there is signal to text them and ask how are my children...because of the distance and difficult road I sleep here for my safety. And of course, always pray in everything I do.)

Ahmmmm... Isa sa akong mga sacripisyo as teacher diri sa last-mile school kay giantos nako ang kamingaw na malayo sa akong pamilya ma'am labi na sa akong mga anak. Dili nako sila maatiman sa ilang pag-eskwela ug kanang labi na magsakit sila na wala ko. Mabal-an nalang nako pag uli nako inig Friday na nagsakit diay akong anak. Wala man pud guy signal diria ma'am. Ikaduha kay ang financial ma'am kay naay mga times na gapakaon me diri sa mga bata kay looy pud kaayo ilang sitwasyon diri musulod na walay kaon. (P4-Ilocano-Line 042-048)

(Ahmmmm... one of the sacrifices as teacher in last-mile school is sacrificing the time to be with my family ma'am especially for my children. I cannot take care on their studies also if they got sick and I am not with them. I will just know when I got home on Friday that my children got sick. There is no signal here ma'am. Second is the financial ma'am because there is a time that we sponsor our learners feeding because we witness how difficult their situations going to school without breakfast.)

In addition, listening to the responses of Participants 3 and 4, no one can imagine the sacrifices these teachers had to endure daily. To be assigned to last-mile schools is a big challenge and sacrifice for them.

Furthermore, these teachers also sacrifice their spare time with their families as instead of going home every day after a tiring day of

teaching; because the teaching communities are simply too far from their homes, thus, many choose to remain in the location where they are teaching. Their family's initial residence, where they currently reside, has somehow become their vacation house because they go home only during weekends and sometimes just a few times a month, depending on the number of school duties that need to be done (Wang et al., 2019).

Coping Mechanisms of Teachers Assigned in the Last-Mile Schools

It is shown from the qualitative data gathered that finding solutions to every problem, making prayer the best weapon, having a positive outlook, employing collaboration, and setting a time to bond were the coping mechanisms of teachers assigned in last-mile schools.

Table 2. Coping Mechanisms of Teachers Assigned in the Last-Mile Schools

<i>Clustered Themes</i>	<i>Emergent Themes</i>
Look for the benefits of everyone	Find Solution in Every Problem
Think that every problem has a solution	
Lift-up others specially if they feel down	Make Prayer as Best Weapon
Crack jokes	
Talk about the problem	
Prayer is the best weapon	
Pray constantly in every situation	
Prayer is a way to overcome challenges	Positive Outlook
Think positive	
Just think of positive things and be grateful	
Train one's mind to think positively	
Maintain happy and positive atmosphere	Employ Collaboration
Free one's mind from negative thoughts	
Influence others to be positive in life	
Cooperate with colleagues	
Help each other	
Extend kindness	
Offer help	
Understand each other	
Be friendly all the time	
Be considerate with each other	
Motivate and encourage others	

Find Solution in Every Problem. Teachers in last-mile schools are known for their unique ability to find a solution to every problem. This involves constructing a course of action to transform their current situation into one where their objective could be achieved. They become more resilient in whatever challenges they encounter with their teaching journey. In addition, Participant 5 said:

Hehehe. Ako kay hilig man jud kaayo ko muistorya ug mga jokes labi na kabalo ko na nay problema akong kauban na teacher. Istoryahon nako na siya hantod mukatawa nalang sya. Sabay pud me mangaon every lunch time mao napud na among bonding. Tapos ug naay mga dili pagsinabtanay sa amoa na mga teachers diri, istoryahan dayon ug dili na sulsolan ang teacher na ing-ani, ana arun dili na magdako ang problema. Instead mag tinabanganay nalang me diri kay gamay ra baya me diri. Ug suportaran ang co teacher labi na ug sya ang nag nag lead sa program o activity sa school. (P5-Ilocano-Line 072-079)

(Hehehe, I enjoy telling jokes, especially if my colleagues have problems. I will talk to him until he smiles. We eat together as a bond every lunchtime. And then, if there is a misunderstanding within us, we will eventually talk to solve the problem. Instead, we help and support one another, especially if he is the focal person of the program or activity in school.)

In addition, listening to the experiences of Participant 5, she thinks that every problem has a solution. Despite the challenges, they lift one another up by cracking jokes and discussing the problem.

Furthermore, most participants revealed that the enjoyable parts of teaching in far-flung schools were: outings to nearby rivers, different students' activities, receiving the warm acceptance and feeling welcome by the community. Additionally, teachers described higher levels of enjoyment towards teaching on a student-focused approach (Lariosa et al., 2022; Trigwell, 2022;).

Make Prayer as the Best Weapon. Prayer is a mighty weapon for every man or woman who loves the Creator. Regardless of how challenging the work of teachers assigned in last-mile schools, constant prayer is their way to overcome challenges they face consequently, Participants 2 and 3 shared:

Prayer is the best weapon jud... Mao jud na akong dala dala permi kung asa man ko mag adto... Kabalo ko na this difficult roads will bring me into beautiful destination.(P2-Ilocano-Line 053-055)

(Prayer is really the best weapon... This is what I have everywhere I go... I know this difficult road will bring me into beautiful destination.)



Prayer jud. Mao na akong weapon para ma overcome ang mga challenges as last mile school teacher. (P3-Cebuano-Line 063-064)

(Prayer is really my weapon to overcome the challenges as a last-mile school teacher.)

The responses above show how prayerful teachers are in last-mile schools. They handle their problems by seeking guidance and protection from the Almighty God. They constantly pray in every situation and make it their best weapon. Thus, even though they would be sent to last-mile schools, teachers consider the job in the classroom with no regrets. We learn best to pray by consistently breaking the chains of rugged individualism (Moser & Fazey, 2021).

Positive Outlook. Mindset is a fantastic choice of control and ability to do many things. The positive energy of teachers assigned in last-mile schools put into the world will return tenfold if you focus on the right things as they look at the beauty of every situation. Participants 4 and 5 shared about their coping mechanisms to overcome the challenges:

Positive outlook sa kinabuhì. Mao na akong weapon para ma overcome ang mga challenges as last mile school teacher. Think positive and be grateful all the times. (P4-Ilocano-Line 069)

(Positive outlook in life. That is my weapon to overcome the challenges as a last-mile school teacher. Think positive and be grateful all the time.)

Train your mind to think positively. And always pray. (P5-Ilocano-Line 069)

(Train your mind to think positively. Moreover, always pray.)

Just like Participants 4 and 5, they showed optimism in every situation. No matter how hard the situation was, they found ways to overcome it. Thus, a positive attitude helps to manage the everyday life's affairs. It infuses your life with optimism and facilitates the avoidance of anxiety and pessimism. Adopting it as your way of life will make your life more successful, happier, and brighter while bringing about positive improvements. Positivity makes you hopeful, find the good in everything, and anticipate the best.

Employ Collaboration. According to the participants, they understand, cooperate, motivate and encourage each other's. Support from learners, colleagues and one another was a big help for them to cope up with their challenges. Participants 1 and 2 said:

I always make sure that I cooperate with my colleagues, understand each other, and help one another especially when someone needed too. Dili mag tinabangay ug doot, magtinabangay aron mag grow. (P1-T'boli-Line 062-065)

(I always ensure that I cooperate with my colleagues, understand each other, and help one another, especially when someone needs to. Not helping others to get down but helping one another to grow.)

...friendly and atmosphere between sakoa ug sa mga bata. Sa akong. mga co-teachers, so far wala koy ma recall na naa me mga di pagka sinabtanay, lain pod kaau gamay nalang gane be dili pame magsinabtanay. Mao mag sinabtanay nalang jud me. (P2-Ilocano-Line 062-065)

(...friendly and the atmosphere between me and my learners. So far, I cannot recall misunderstanding among my colleagues. It is not good to have one since we are a small organization, and yet we do not understand each other. That is why we have to understand each other.)

Based on their responses, teachers in last-mile schools had a healthy working relationship, which created a healthy working environment. Despite their situations, they believed one way to overcome there were to be with each other. Thus, by collaborating on a specific task, coworkers could share their ideas, and others could give feedback. This feedback may be constructive and help in increasing the level of understanding.

Insights of Teachers Assigned in the Last-Mile Schools

Table 3 shows the insights of teachers assigned in the last-mile schools. Based on the table, extend help to IP learners, which is a blessing in disguise. Stop complaining, make a difference, perform your job religiously, and savor time and enjoy.

Table 3. *Insights of Teachers Assigned in the Last-Mile Schools*

<i>Clustered Themes</i>	<i>Emergent Themes</i>
Help IP learners to become somebody	Extend Help to IP Learners
Help IP learners achieve their dreams in life	
Help IP learners to have a better life	
Double your effort to help the IP learners	
Love teaching and embrace IP learners' diversity	
Teach IP learners from the heart	
Aspire to help the IP learners	
Love the community and extend help to IP learners	
Everything happened for a reason	
There is a blessing in every trial	
It is a blessing to teach in the last mile school	A Blessing in Disguise

Teaching in the last mile school is a gift from God	
When feeling down, think of your purpose being destined in last mile school	
Do not complain because learners are struggling too	Stop Complaining
The life of learners is way difficult than yours	
Always put your shoes on the shoes of parents and learners	
Keep on fighting and avoid complaining	
Teach students in an innovative and unique way	Make a Difference
Have something to give without expecting in return	
Touch the lives of learners and parents	
Be an effective teacher in the last mile school	
Go beyond the limit of traditional teaching, explore more	
Perform job well despite all the struggles	Perform Job Religiously
Provide quality education	
Work amazingly	
Do one's best as a teacher	
Motivate everyone to value work	
Be motivated and perform job better	
Enjoy life being a teacher in the last mile school	Savour Time and Enjoy
Savour time with learners	
Spend quality time with learners and parents	
Devote time in teaching	

Extend Help to IP Learners. Teachers in the last schools encouraged others to extend help to Indigenous learners. Teachers serve as resource persons, confidants, friends, and models. That is why they have an eminent impact not only to their students but also to other people and the schools where they teach as well. Teachers felt a stronger bond and commitment to the IP students, allowing them to experience the satisfaction of becoming a coach, not only a teacher but a change agent. As such Participants 1 and 4 shared these insights with others when they said:

My inisght is makatabang ko sa mga IPs learner to become Somebody... Kana bitawng naabot nila ilang mga pangandoy sa Kinabuhi. I hope one day aduna nay teacher na magtudlo dri sa swkelahan na taga dri jud sa ilaha, aron mahimong example na dili babag ang kalisod to reach ilang mga pangadoy sa kinabuhi. (P1-T'boli-Line 080-084)

(My inisght is to help IP learners to become somebody...I mean, they can achieve their ambitions in life. I hope one day that there will be a teacher who is a resident of the school so that he becomes an example that poverty is not a hindrance to reaching for their dreams.)

Mag double effort jud ko/me na mga teachers na naa sa last-mile schools kay looy kaayo ang mga bata na dili matudloan ug tarong. Dili purkit naa me sa bukid mag relax nalang me. Mas na love pud nako ang teaching kay siguro napud sa sitwasyon sa mga bata diri. Na love napud nako sila as mga anak nako diri sa bukid. (P4-Ilocano-Line 086-090)

(I/We teacher/s in last-mile schools have to double effort; let's have mercy for those children who were not taught rightly. Not because we are here in the mountains we are relaxed. I am more love with teaching, maybe because of the situation of children here. I loved them as my sons/daughters here in the mountains.)

Based on their responses which showed how teachers loved their learners and how they worked for the sake of our Indigenous learners. They have hopes and aspirations for their learners. Moreover, the role of the teachers is to help learners achieve their goals and ambitions in life.

A Blessings in Disguise. According to participants, they were destined to teach in last-mile schools to make a difference in the lives of the learners. Although they felt the insecurities of those teachers teaching in low lands, they realized how special they were to be assigned to last-mile schools. With this, Participants 2 and 5 said:

.. I am here kay tungod I am destined to be here. Usahay maibog ko sa kong mga kasabayan na sila na assign sa patag og dool lang sa ilang balay. Samtang ako, layo kaau sa kabihasanan. Pero behind this kabalo ko na mas mag grow ko dri ug daghan ko matabangan. (P2-Ilocano-Line 082-085)

(. I am here because I am destined to be here. Sometimes, I felt insecure with my batch, assigned to the lowlands and near their houses. I was far away from civilization. However, behind this, I know that I will grow more and help more here.)

I came to realize many things as a teacher in last mile school. Isa ani kay, kini na trabaho kay Gift kini na gihatag sa Ginoo kanako kay mao kini ang nagbuhi sa akong pamilya ug kung wala pud akong mga learners wala pud ko dinhi karun. (P5-Ilocano-Line 085-087)

(I came to realize many things as a teacher in last-mile school. One, this job is a gift from God because this is the bread and butter for my family, and if there are no learners here, I do not have a job now.)

Like what they are saying, they believe it was a blessing and gift from God to teach in last-mile schools. They see it as a blessing rather than a curse. Teachers were very proud and loud to say to everyone how blessed they were as they were the chosen few. To teach in

last-mile schools is an inspiration to others because it is not an easy task to perform.

Stop Complaining. Teachers in last-mile schools have many things to complain about, but they advise others to stop complaining, instead be thankful and see other situations. They advised others not to complain because learners and parents struggle with their conditions. On this note, Participants 1 and 3 shared:

No, kay basig lisod ang dalan, daghan challenges and sacrifices, kabalo ko naa pakoy mission dri. 5 years palang ko dri kaya... murag need pa ug another 5 years para e serve nako ang IP community. Ang akong pamilya kasabot man sila sakong situation. Kana lang ang kamingaw ug kalisod usahay dili jud mabayran pero Laban lang japon. Hehehe... (P1-T'boli-Line 100-104)

(No, even though it has been difficult road, with many challenges and sacrifices, I still have a mission here. I am in my fifth years here... I think I need another five years to serve the IP community. My family understood my situation. Nevertheless, I am still fighting. Hehehe...)

Kuan kanang..dili na mag reklamo sa kalisod kay ang mga bata gane nagapaningkamot muadto sa skwelahan to learn maskin ang uban dra walay kaon ug gabaktas ug layo. Kini among mga sakripisyo, wala ra pod ni sa sakripisyo sa mga bata dri sa bukid ug sa ilang mga ginikanan. (P3-Cebuano-Line 094-097)

(I mean, do not complain about the difficulties because our children work hard just to go to school to learn even though some have no food to eat and walk far. These sacrifices we had been far away from the sacrifices of our children and parents here in the mountains.)

With these responses from the participants, the life of learners is way trickier than that of the teachers. They show empathy to others by putting themselves in the shoes of their learners and parents. They advised others to keep “fighting” and avoid complaining.

Make a Difference. Teachers make a difference by accompanying learners in everything. Teachers share more than knowledge; wisdom comes from life, although knowledge may be acquired by reading and experimentation. Participants 3 and 4 shared their experiences on this theme when they recount:

Ingon pa sa akong kaila na teacher pod “Make a difference”. Dili nato e underestimate ang mga bata dri sa bukid because they have something to offer. They have something to give. Kay akong aspiration na pohon tanan namu kalisod sa kinabuhi kauban ang mga bata kay nay beautiful plan na naka abang sa amo. My na realization dili na mag reklamo sa kung unsa ang sitwasyon karon kay this is part of God’s plan na mag serve dri sa bukid. Kung dili ako, kinsa?... I mean naa ko dri or naa me dri kauban akong mga kaubanan na teachers to touch lives and help them achieved ilang mga pangadoy sa kinabuhi. (P3-Cebuano-Line 100-107)

(My known teacher friend said, “Make a difference.” Do not underestimate learners in the mountains because they have something to offer. They have something to give. I aspire that one day, all our sacrifices in life, including our children have a beautiful plan waiting for us. That is, I realized I should not complain about the current situation because; this is part of God’s plan to serve here on the mountain. If not me, who else?... I mean, I am here, or we are here with my colleagues to touch lives and help them achieve their ambitions in life.)

... ah... tarungon jud ang pagtudlo sa mga bata. Be an effective teacher bisan naa sa bukid and be a blessing sa mga kaubanan sa school, sa community ug labi na sa mga bata.(P4-Ilocano-Line 093-095)

(...ah... teach our children well. Be an effective teacher despite being assigned to the mountain and be a blessing to colleagues in schools, the community, and most especially to the children.)

Based on the responses above, teaching was about touching the lives of learners’ and parents’ lives. As a teacher, one has to go beyond the limits of traditional teaching to explore and be an effective teacher. Despite the situation of learners, they have something to give as well. Some participants manifested that many teachers find that their passion for children attracts them to teaching or that their desire for learning draws them to teaching. Many teachers go into teaching because they want to make a difference.

Thus, Gallego (2022) states that teaching in remote schools defines the true meaning of a teacher’s life. Teachers are considered the richest in experience because of their commitment and passion in their chosen profession. Being a teacher in the Philippines is a far more exciting story. The challenges abound, and one’s passion can be tested; the winner is a diamond in the rough. This proved the study of Durisic and Bunijevac (2017) that reaching out to the students and making a difference in their lives was crucial in deciding to remain in the teaching profession.

Perform Job Religiously. Despite the challenges they experienced, the participants singled out their passion and commitment to the teaching profession as their motivations. They mentioned love as the key to surviving the difficulties they encountered. For example, they looked to their learners as an inspiration who had to walk many kilometers daily just to go to school. They said they could not afford not to give their best for those kids. In other words, they were faithful to their calling while at the same time gaining inspiration from their students. Participants 1 and 5 shared their views this way:

With these motivations, I was able to perform my duty well. Kanang buhaton nimu ang mga ways para makatoon jud sila despite sa ilang mga situation. Ang uban layo pag gina baktas padulong sa school pero Makita nimu na they are willing to learn ug uhaw sila sa learnings. Kay as a teacher ginabuhat pod nako akong part para sakong mga bata. (P1-T'boli-Line 093-097)

(With these motivations, I was able to perform my duty well. You should do everything to ensure they are learning despite their situations. Some walked far going to school, but you can witness that they were willing to learn and long to learn. That is why, as a teacher, I always do my part for my learners.)

Ahhh. By performing my job everyday. Despite sa mga struggles na akong maagian diri sa bukid ginahimo gihapon nako akong trabaho ug tarong aron makab-ot nako akong goal kauban sa DepEd ang quality na education bisan naa me diri sa bukid. Gina himo nako ang mga bata ug inspiration arun mahimo ko ug effective teacher sa ilaha. (P5-Ilocano-Line 090-094)

(Ahh, by performing my job every day. Despite all the struggles I have experienced here in the mountains, I am still doing my job well to achieve my goal with the DepEd, the quality education despite being assigned in the mountains. I make my learners my inspiration so that I can become effective teachers for them.)

Just like they are saying, they see their learners as their motivation in their teaching. The learner is the center of the educative process and is the reason teachers exist. Although there are challenges, they must deliver and perform what is expected of them as a teacher.

Savour Time and Enjoy. For all times, teaching has been regarded as the noblest profession. There will be no other occupation produced if teachers do not exist. In particular, teaching is viewed as the occupation of all professions. Participant 5 observed that teaching in last-mile school differ from teaching in low-lying areas. She experienced a profound sense of satisfaction recognizing that she has become a part of the children's learning experience. Participants 1 and 2 said:

Just enjoy!... Be an agent of change... and keep the love for teaching, especially sa atong mga last mile learners.(P1-T'boli-Line 106-107)

(Just enjoy!... Be an agent of change... and keep the love for teaching especially to our last mile learners.)

For now, ... No..kay naga enjoy pako dris bukid. Nalingaw pako sakong mga kaubanan, sa mga bata ug sa community. (P2-Ilocano-Line 105-106)

(For now,...No, because I still enjoy it here. I enjoyed the companionship with the colleagues, learners, and the community.)

Their responses show that teachers were not seeking to transfer to low-land schools. They preferred to extend their service in their current school because they enjoyed relationships among the learners, colleagues and the community. They encourage future teachers assigned to last-mile schools to be an agent of change.

The critical factors that should be considered when a school is classified as a last-mile school have been the subject of numerous studies. Teachers assigned to remote schools are typically new, but they work for three years to teach in this project. Even if some of them are older, they remain enthusiastic, engaged, and devoted.

Based on the participants' responses, codes and themes were developed to unlock research questions and fill in the gray areas. Teachers in last-mile schools have many things to share about their different experiences. Despite their challenges in the workload, language, terrain, language, and distance from family, they still found ways to overcome those challenges, like finding solutions to every problem, making prayer the best weapon, having a positive outlook, and employing collaboration. This is how resilient teachers are in last-mile schools. Thus, they have insights that they have shared with others, like extending help to IP learners, considering the situation as a blessing in disguise, stopping complaining, making a difference, performing a job religiously, and savoring time and enjoyment.

Conclusions

The challenging experiences, coping mechanisms, and insights of last-mile school teachers generated fifteen themes. These themes may lead to instilling awareness among department heads, division heads, district heads, principals, and even teachers, who can benefit from the findings of this study. This qualitative study, along with previous studies on teachers' lived experiences at Last Mile Schools or in rural places, supports the premise that providing more assistance to all schools in geographically isolated schools can improve education quality.

Laborious Workload. The result of this study implied that teachers in last-mile schools are overworked due to a lack of human resources which may result in poor-quality output for their performance and their learner's performances. Usually, teachers in last-mile schools handled multi-grade classes just to cope with the shortage of human resources. Also, having laborious work in any organization may lead to depression and anxiety caused by burnout.

Unenviable Circumstance. This implies that teachers in last-mile schools experience undesirable circumstances wherein their main concerns are on the road, dialect, safety, and students's learning performance. However, teachers continued their dedication to work to deliver quality education to their learners despite those challenges encountered. With this, teachers assigned to last-mile schools have strongly committed to their profession. They see teaching as not only a profession but also a vocation.

Language Barrier. Teachers in last-mile schools cannot understand some students' terminologies or the community itself. This can lead to difficulties in understanding the lessons, and poor academic performance. Another challenge is that teachers may not be fluent students' different languages. This implies that teachers assigned to this school must adjust and learn the language for accessible

communication.

Far and Uneasy Road. This result implies that teachers assigned in last-mile schools have greatly sacrificed their daily transportation to their respective stations. The distance and condition of the road make transportation difficult, which may result in stress and nervousness. Also, teachers assigned to such areas are prone to accidents due to rugged terrains. If the road is in bad condition, travel will be long and uncomfortable. So, teachers must be prepared at all times when they travel.

Distant from Family. The distance from home to school hindered the quality of time with their family. This implies that they must sacrifice quality time with their family to serve our learners in last-mile schools. With these routine periods of separation, the teachers may experience constant worry about being apart from their spouse or family, have nightmares, be unable to leave home to go to work, struggle with physical complaints, and other symptoms, all of which significantly impact their lives.

Find Solution in Every Problem. Despite the challenges and problems teachers encountered in last-mile schools, teachers always found ways to bridge the gap. This implies that teachers are resilient; no matter their challenges, difficulties, and problems they experience, they find solutions. Teachers need problem-solving skills to help them succeed in their jobs. Problem-solving skills help them work more effectively with others. Problem-solving skills and problem-solving are critical parts of daily life for individuals and organizations.

Make Prayer as Best Weapon. Teachers in last-mile schools pray constantly in every situation they experience. Even if they experienced difficulties in their work stations, they believed prayer is their best weapon. This implies our teachers have strong faith in our Creator and can surpass all the challenges because of their strong faith. Prayers are used as a coping tool that can aid believers in confronting a specific stressor or in overcoming negative emotions.

Positive Outlook. Teachers in last-mile schools encountered challenges, problems, or difficulties but still maintained a happy and positive atmosphere in every problematic situation. They just think of positive things and are still grateful. This implies that teachers are optimistic and free their minds from negative thoughts. Educators who cultivate a positive mindset can also significantly impact student success. Teachers can inspire their students to achieve their full potential by creating a supportive and engaging learning environment.

Employ Collaboration. Teachers in last-mile schools helped one another in every difficult situation and always extended kindness. This implies that teachers in last-mile schools have tight relationships; they are great motivators and encouragers of one another. Also, teacher collaboration provides fellow educators opportunities to meet, share insights, create cohesive plans, and work together effectively. Thus, creating a collaborative environment is no small task. Schools must figure out how to set up and include such a big project because collaboration is site-based, so schools must determine how to establish and integrate such a significant undertaking. People must work together to support and mutually benefit students. Because it is site-based, the possibilities and different configurations for collaboration are "truly endless".

Extend Help to IP Learners. One of the insights of teachers assigned in last-mile schools was that they are embracing IP learners' diversity. They are helping this kind of learner to become somebody and achieve their dreams in life. This implies that our teachers are the torch bearers who give light and hope to our learners. They teach IP from the heart and want to make a difference in their lives. Thus, The IPs deserve holistic Education. Education that represents their beliefs, feelings, principles, and general ideas that share a family resemblance. Teachers become the bridge to connect the gap and deliver quality education among our IP learners.

A Blessing in Disguise. They saw teaching in last-mile schools as a blessing in disguise and a gift from God. They believed that everything happened for a reason. This implies that when they feel down, they always return to their purpose of being assigned in last-mile schools. At first, they see things as problems and difficulties, but later, they understand it was the best thing to have happened.

Stop Complaining. Teachers in last-mile schools recognized not to complain because their learners are struggling too. The lives of their learners with their parents are pretty tricky compared to them. So, they kept on fighting and avoid complaining. This implies that instead of complaining, just be grateful because you have a better situation than others.

Make a Difference. Teaching is to touch the lives of learners and their parents. Teachers in last-mile schools realized they had something to give without expecting anything in return. This implies that teachers teach our learners in an innovative and unique way. They go beyond the limits of traditional teaching and explore more. Most teachers aren't in it for the money (and indeed, many grants are available for teachers to make funding a bit easier). They're not in it for the time off or the recognition. They're in it to make a difference, learn, and inspire, and they teach because they realize the value of education. Only they can set goals for themselves. Only they know why they want to teach. But no matter what those specific goals are, they can be summed into a single goal: You want to help people.

Perform Job Religiously. Teachers assigned in last-mile schools realized that despite all the struggles they experienced, they had to perform their jobs and be motivated to work religiously. This implies that teachers must perform their job regularly to provide quality education. Teachers must not be inclined to do unrelated things that may distract their function. They must focus and work by or beyond what is expected.

Savour Time and Enjoy. This result implies that teachers must enjoy teaching in last-mile schools and spend quality time with learners and their parents. Also, they must devote their time to teaching by intensifying the engage-time-on-tasks with learners. This finding, can be a material for reflection among those planning to teach in last-mile schools. Before being assigned, they can reflect on the participants' experiences in this study. At least they can prepare themselves for eventualities and surprises in the field.

Thus, the Department of Education may consider the result of this study as feedback in preparing neophyte teachers who will be assigned to last-mile schools. From the feedback, they can use this as their basis in designing programs related to teachers' well-being to mutually plan and carry out projects, undertakings, and exercises to speed up the conveyance of the required administrations in the last-mile schools.

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