

Original Article

Teaching Experiences, Challenges, Joys, and Coping Mechanisms of Veteran Educators in the Farthest Schools of Maguindanao del Sur

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Abstract. Teaching in the farthest schools can be both sacrificing and rewarding. Inevitably, teachers are confronted with challenges like poor educational materials and teaching resources, Physical inaccessibility and dangerous transportation, insufficient support systems and professional development, and social isolation and emotional stress. This study explored the experiences of four veteran educators assigned to the farthest public elementary school in the Division of Maguindanao del Sur, Ministry of Basic, Higher and Technical Education-Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (MBHTE-BARMM), using a qualitative multiple-case interpretative approach. The participants were veteran educators with extensive teaching experience in geographically isolated settings, selected through purposeful sampling to provide rich, in-depth narratives. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, field observations, and field notes to capture their experiences, challenges, joys, and coping mechanisms. The findings revealed that participants demonstrated strong resilience, adaptability, and commitment despite facing geographical isolation, limited resources, logistical difficulties, and bureaucratic constraints. Teachers relied on community collaboration, improvisation with instructional materials, and strong teacher-student relationships to maintain continuity of learning. Emotional fulfillment came from students' progress, gratitude, and long-term success, which strengthened teachers' sense of purpose. Coping mechanisms included reflective practices, peer support, stress management activities, and faith-driven perseverance. Across ecological systems, environmental, institutional, and relational factors collectively shaped teachers' professional lives, highlighting both persistent hardships and meaningful rewards. The study concludes that veteran educators in the farthest schools play a crucial role in sustaining equitable education in geographically isolated communities and underscores the need for localized professional support, strengthened institutional assistance, and teacher well-being programs to ensure long-term sustainability in remote educational settings.

Keywords: Coping mechanisms; Farthest school; Geographically isolated education; Teacher resilience; Veteran educators.

Education is a key to social and economic progress, and UNESCO's Sustainable Development Goal 4 emphasizes inclusive and equitable quality education for all learners, regardless of geographic location. Unfortunately, teachers assigned to remote and geographically isolated schools continue to face significant challenges, including long travel distances, limited professional development opportunities, and delayed access

to resources.

In the Philippines, particularly in Mindanao, teachers in the farthest schools face challenges due to poor educational materials and teaching resources. Teachers face severe shortages of instructional materials, such as textbooks, teaching aids, and basic school supplies, which hinder their ability to deliver quality lessons (Felongco et al., 2022). Physical inaccessibility and dangerous transportation worsened their situation. They also face challenges, particularly in accessing isolated schools due to rugged terrain, poor roads, and long distances. They trek mountainous paths and cross rivers to reach their school, which contributes to their fatigue, travel risks, and reduced instructional time (Albina et al., 2025). They adapt to limited resources by using locally available materials (Fabrigas & Paglinawan, 2025; Cudal & Paglinawan, 2025).

Additionally, teachers also experience insufficient support systems and professional development. There is limited access to opportunities, support networks, and development. Due to geographic isolation, attending workshops and continuing education programs is often impractical for teachers without up-to-date pedagogical knowledge or support in coping with complex challenges (Johnson et al., 2025). The World Bank (2022) stresses that teachers in remote areas worldwide face similar difficulties but demonstrate resilience and innovation.

In many far-flung schools, teachers remain underrepresented in various training and seminars, which has also led to social isolation and emotional stress. Teachers have limited interaction with colleagues and a lack of community support structures, which impact their well-being, motivation, and retention (Algonos et al., 2024; Baynosa et al., 2024). It is disheartening to note that teachers in geographically isolated areas, like in BARMM, face comparable or even greater distance-related challenges, yet these contexts continue to be overlooked in empirical research (Fabrigas & Paglinawan, 2025; Salazar & Plaza, 2025; Mopuyang, 2024).

Studies on veteran teachers in the farthest or remote schools only focus on the teaching across urban and rural contexts, transitioning to remote learning, teachers undertaking professional experience in regional, rural, and remote schools, readiness for teaching in rural and remote, emergency remote teaching, transitioning to remote instruction, teaching physical education in remote areas, special education, challenges and opportunities, and expectations and experiences (Aguiera & Nightengale-Lee, 2020; Boltz et al., 2021; Harris et al., 2025; Hudson et al., 2020; Juárez-Díaz & Perales, 2021; Marshall et al., 2020; Mercier et al., 2021; Schuck & Lambert, 2020; Sepulveda-Escobar & Morrison, 2020; Van der Spoel et al., 2020). However, there is a lack of literature on the overall experiences, challenges, joys, and coping mechanisms of veteran teachers who are confronted with physically demanding and structurally challenging teaching contexts in which to provide quality education.

Hence, an empirical investigation was conducted to explore the experiences, challenges, joys, and coping mechanisms of veteran teachers who spend their lives teaching learners in the farthest schools. By addressing these gaps, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how distance and teaching missions collectively shape teachers' experiences in Maguindanao del Sur, BARMM, offering insights for policy and educational practice in remote and marginalized contexts.

Research Questions

1. *How do veteran educators describe their experiences in teaching in the farthest school?*
2. *What challenges do veteran educators encounter in delivering education in the farthest school?*
3. *How do veteran educators narrate their joys while teaching in the farthest school?*
4. *What coping mechanisms do veteran educators adopt to address the challenges?*

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a multiple-case design to explore the experiences of four veteran educators teaching in the most remote public elementary schools in Maguindanao del Sur. Each educator was treated as a distinct case, allowing the study to capture rich, in-depth narratives of their daily experiences, professional challenges, sources of joy, and coping mechanisms while situated within a shared remote school context. This design identified common patterns and contextual variations, providing a nuanced understanding of how remoteness, limited resources, and community dynamics influence teaching practices and well-being in geographically isolated schools, where educators must adapt creatively and collaboratively to sustain learning. The use of a case study

approach is well-supported for investigating complex phenomena within natural contexts, and the specific form of multiple mini-case studies has been discussed as a pragmatic way to conduct systematic comparisons when individual cases involve limited evidence (Crowe et al., 2011; Kass et al., 2024).

Participants and Sampling Technique

Four veteran educators, representing various grade levels and subjects, were selected through purposeful sampling. To ensure the selection of knowledgeable participants, the following criteria were used: (a) at least 5 years of active teaching in the farthest school in Maguindanao del Sur, (b) willing to share detailed narratives regarding their professional experiences, challenges, joys, and coping mechanisms, and (c) direct classroom involvement. This approach ensured that the study captured varied experiences and strategies employed by educators in this unique remote context. Galut (2025) emphasizes the importance of selecting participants who can provide rich and diverse insights into the challenges of remote teaching. Participants with less than 5 years of teaching experience in the most remote schools or who were not directly involved in classroom instruction were excluded to ensure the inclusion of information-rich cases.

Research Instrument

The study used a semi-structured interview guide to collect detailed narratives from the veteran educators about their professional experiences, challenges, joys, and coping mechanisms. This approach enabled flexible responses, allowing researchers to probe deeper into specific issues that emerged during the interviews. The interview protocols and questionnaire were developed with reference to the work of previous researchers, including Bolido (2025), Protacio (2021), Sonza et al. (2022), and Accad (2015), and were modified to align with qualitative research focused on remote educational settings. Additionally, field notes were taken during data collection to capture nonverbal cues and contextual observations, enriching the analysis. These field notes were considered alongside interview transcripts to provide deeper context for the educators' experiences. Veteran educators served as key informants, and their narratives were used to triangulate and validate the findings, ensuring reliable and nuanced data on teaching in remote schools. To ensure validity and trustworthiness, the interview guide was subjected to expert validation, and member checking was conducted to confirm the accuracy of participants' responses. These procedures enhanced the credibility and reliability of the qualitative data.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers obtained formal approval from the administrative authorities of the Ministry of Basic, Higher, and Technical Education (MBHTE) in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region and Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), Maguindanao del Sur Division, prior to initiating the data collection process. After approval, the researcher coordinated with the identified veteran educators to schedule data collection sessions. Face-to-face, in-depth interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide. The interviews were held in mutually convenient locations, and each participant was fully oriented about the purpose of the study. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Written informed consent was secured from each participant, including permission for audio and video recording of the interviews for transcription purposes. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. A data analyst and qualitative consultant were involved in coding and interpreting the data. To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, member checking was also conducted. After transcription, preliminary interpretation was presented to the participants, who reviewed the transcripts and interpretation for accuracy. This process allowed participants to validate the findings and provide additional context if needed.

Data Analysis Procedure

This multiple qualitative case study employed thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2022) six-phase framework, to analyze the interview data. First, the transcripts were read repeatedly to ensure thorough familiarization with participants' narratives. Second, systematic initial coding was conducted to identify meaningful segments across the data set. Third, related codes were clustered to generate preliminary themes. Fourth, these themes were reviewed against the coded extracts and the entire dataset to ensure coherence, consistency, and analytic rigor. Fifth, the themes were refined, clearly defined, and appropriately named to capture their central organizing concepts. Finally, the validated themes were synthesized into a cohesive narrative report, integrating representative excerpts to illustrate the lived experiences, challenges, sources of joy, and coping mechanisms of veteran educators in remote school contexts.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were strictly adhered to in this study to ensure the protection of, and respect for, the rights and welfare of all participants. Formal permission was obtained from the administrative authorities of the MBHTE-BARMM, and written informed consent, adapted from Protacio (2021) and Accad (2015), was secured after participants were fully informed of the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks and benefits, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty was emphasized. To maintain anonymity and confidentiality, unique participant codes and fictitious names were assigned to protect identities. All data were securely stored and accessible only to the researcher. Interviews were conducted with cultural sensitivity to minimize emotional discomfort and to create a supportive, trusting environment. Throughout the study, the researcher affirmed that no conflict of interest was identified or disclosed.

Results and Discussion

Through rigorous, systematic, and iterative data analysis, four major themes were identified. These themes reflect the contextualized experiences and case-based realities of veteran educators assigned to the farthest public schools. The findings provide contextual, psychological, and cultural insights into the professional realities of teaching in remote and resource-constrained educational environments. Specifically, the results illuminate the teachers' professional mission and identity, and meaning-making processes that shape their pedagogical experiences in the farthest school settings.

One overarching theme emerged in response to the first research question, which describes veteran educators' experiences teaching in the most remote schools, specifically, Teaching as a Life and Professional Mission in Geographically Isolated Schools. This theme was supported by three subthemes: Teaching as Social and Moral Responsibility; Navigating Distance, Mobility, and Geographic Barriers; and Meaning-Making of Teaching in Remote Communities.

Teaching Life and Professional Mission in Geographically Isolated Schools

This theme reflects the mission-driven professional identity of veteran educators in geographically isolated schools. Teaching in farthest schools extends beyond professional obligation and is shaped by moral, cultural, and socially embedded practices influenced by educational inequities, geographic isolation, and limited institutional resources. Teachers construct their professional roles within contextualized professional realities, in which teaching is viewed as both a vocation and a social responsibility to promote equitable access to education for vulnerable learners in Maguindanao del Sur. The findings highlight that teacher professionalism in isolated contexts is socially constructed, culturally situated, and morally grounded, demonstrating that professional mission emerges from lived professional realities within remote communities.

Teaching as Social and Moral Responsibility

This subtheme emphasizes that teachers in geographically isolated schools interpret their work as a moral and social obligation rather than a contractual duty. Although transportation barriers and environmental risks present persistent challenges, these structural constraints function as contextual conditions within which ethical commitment is enacted. Rather than withdrawing in response to geographic hardship, educators frame perseverance as necessary to protect learners' futures. Structural adversity, therefore, does not diminish professional identity; it intensifies teachers' sense of moral accountability toward marginalized students, as one participant shared:

" ... there are times, ma'am, when you really need to persevere because you can see that if you do not persevere, the children's future might be neglected if you do not help them right away..." [P2]

These narratives indicate that teacher perseverance is driven by strong moral and psychological commitment to learners' educational futures. Teaching in the farthest schools is experienced as purpose-driven work that strengthens intrinsic motivation through a sense of perceived social responsibility. This finding aligns with Ryan & Deci's Self-Determination Theory (2000), which posits that purpose and relatedness sustain motivation, and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979), which explains that socio-cultural environments shape professional commitment. From an applied perspective, the findings suggest that educational policies and leadership practices should strengthen psychosocial support, community engagement, and teacher welfare programs to sustain educators' resilience in remote schools. Consistent with resilience literature, teacher resilience

is best understood as a socially embedded adaptive capacity rather than an individual psychological trait (Masten, 2021).

Navigating Distance, Mobility, and Geographic Barriers

This subtheme illustrates how veteran educators reinterpret geographical distance as an integral component of their professional identity in farthest schools. Rather than viewing distance solely as a logistical challenge, teachers frame mobility as part of their vocational commitment to ensuring educational access for marginalized learners. Traveling across difficult terrain becomes a symbolic expression of professional dedication, in which endurance reflects moral responsibility for sustaining the continuity of learning in remote communities. These experiences show how distance and transportation challenges are embedded in their daily teaching experiences. As one participant shared:

"... in our school, it is quite far. You still need to ride vehicles... It is really far... Along the roads, there are parts where you have to take another route if you cannot pass through that road. So, there are also obstacles you may encounter when going there." [P2]

The narratives indicate that geographic barriers function not only as physical challenges but also as symbolic and psychological experiences that require resilience and purpose-driven perseverance. Teachers internalize mobility difficulties as integral to their professional mission to ensure educational continuity in geographically isolated communities. Within this multiple-case framework, navigating geographic distance emerges as a meaning-making process that reinforces teachers' professional identity as social agents of educational access. This finding aligns with resilience theory, which conceptualizes adaptation as a contextually embedded and relational process rather than an individual psychological trait (Masten, 2021). Practically, the findings underscore the need for institutional policies that provide transportation support, deployment incentives, and community-based welfare programs to strengthen teacher retention and professional sustainability in remote schools.

Meaning-Making of Teaching in Remote Communities

This subtheme highlights the emotional, psychological, and moral dimensions of teaching among veteran educators in farthest schools. Teaching in remote communities is constructed not merely as an occupational responsibility but as a life-centered professional mission shaped by socio-cultural and environmental realities. Teachers' narratives reveal that professional perseverance is strongly anchored on a sense of moral obligation to support learners' long-term educational and life opportunities rather than personal comfort or material rewards. Meaning-making processes thus serve as a psychological and professional resource that sustains pedagogical commitment in marginalized educational contexts, as strongly illustrated in experiences shared by one participant:

"...I come from a remote area, so I experienced firsthand how difficult it is to study when you are in a remote area. I want my students to build themselves up through my teaching, so I can see what their future might be if they follow my advice. We persevered and achieved a better future. That is what I want to happen to the students I teach." [P2]

This narrative demonstrates how personal history within marginalized contexts becomes internalized as professional purpose, positioning teaching in remote communities as a socially transformative mission that advances learners' life opportunities. Grounded in Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979), teacher commitment is shaped by socio-cultural environments that frame education as a pathway for collective advancement. Within this ecological context, perseverance is sustained through intrinsic motivation anchored in purpose and relatedness, consistent with Ryan and Deci's Self-Determination Theory (2000). Teacher resilience, therefore, emerges as a socially embedded adaptive process rather than individual endurance. These findings highlight the importance of strengthening psychosocial support and community-oriented leadership practices to sustain teachers in remote school contexts.

Structural and Psychosocial Challenges and Remote Teaching in Geographically Isolated Contexts

The second research question generated the overarching theme, Structural and Psychosocial Challenges in Geographically Isolated Teaching Contexts, which reflects the difficulties experienced by veteran educators in delivering instruction in the most remote schools. These challenges are manifested through four subthemes: Physical Access and Transportation Difficulties; Resource and Instructional Material Limitations; Emotional Stress, Isolation, and Workload Pressures; and Institutional and Professional Development Constraints. This

theme highlights the structural and psychosocial challenges experienced by veteran educators in geographically isolated schools. Teaching in the most remote schools is shaped by systemic educational inequities, geographic remoteness, limited infrastructure, and psychosocial pressures in underserved educational environments. These conditions reflect broader structural disparities rather than individual teacher limitations. Teacher experiences are socially and environmentally constructed through the interaction of institutional constraints, community contexts, and workplace demands. This theme contributes to remote education literature by emphasizing how structural and psychosocial stressors influence teacher professional sustainability, resilience, and functioning in marginalized educational settings.

Physical Access and Transportation Difficulties

This subtheme examines transportation barriers as structural determinants of teacher functioning in geographically isolated schools. It highlights the meaning of mobility, which situates physical access within broader systemic inequities that shape educational delivery. Poor road conditions, mechanical breakdowns, and limited infrastructure reflect institutional gaps that extend beyond individual agencies, as one participant stated:

"... first of all, you experience a flat tire... You are far from any place where someone can repair it, so what you really have to do there is push the vehicle yourself." [P2]

Transportation barriers function as structural determinants of teacher performance in geographically isolated schools. Rather than purely logistical challenges, physical access difficulties reflect systemic inequities that limit instructional continuity, teacher safety, and professional sustainability. Participant narratives illustrate how mobility challenges become part of teachers' lived professional experiences, as transportation problems require additional physical effort and time investment. This finding aligns with Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979), which explains that environmental and institutional structures shape teacher functioning. From a resilience perspective, teacher adaptation reflects context-embedded coping and professional commitment rather than individual psychological endurance. These findings suggest the need for institutional policies that improve transportation support and infrastructure to strengthen teacher welfare and instructional effectiveness in remote schools.

Resource and Instructional Material Limitations

This subtheme highlights instructional resource limitations as structural constraints influencing teaching effectiveness in geographically isolated schools. It emphasizes how scarcity of teaching materials, limited technological tools, and inadequate learning resources shape pedagogical practices in remote communities. Rather than being viewed as individual teaching deficiencies, resource limitations reflect systemic inequities that affect instructional quality and continuity of learning. Teachers respond by maximizing available local materials and employing adaptive instructional strategies to sustain learning delivery. These challenges were clearly reflected, as one participant stated:

"... we need to find ways to overcome daily challenges... for example, when there is a lack of reading materials... sometimes we improvise, we use recycled materials ... so that it can be used for teaching the children." [P1]

The narrative demonstrates teachers' pedagogical creativity in addressing material shortages through instructional improvisation in resource-limited environments. Teaching in the most remote schools extends beyond knowledge transmission and involves managing structural constraints to sustain continuity of learning. This finding is consistent with Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979), which explains that socio-economic and institutional contexts influence teacher effectiveness. From a resilience perspective, teacher sustainability reflects adaptive coping, resourcefulness, and professional commitment rather than dependence on external support systems (Masten, 2021). These findings imply that educational leaders should provide contextualized instructional support, augment learning resources, and offer capacity-building programs to strengthen teachers' adaptive teaching practices in remote schools.

Emotional Stress, Isolation, and Workload Pressures

This subtheme examines emotional stress, professional isolation, and workload pressures as psychological and occupational challenges experienced by veteran educators in geographically isolated schools. It highlights how teaching in farthest schools extends beyond instructional responsibilities and involves managing emotional, social, and professional demands. Limited collegial interaction, heavy workload demands, and challenging

learning conditions contribute to emotional strain among teachers, reflecting broader systemic conditions rather than individual professional limitations. These challenges are illustrated, as one participant expressed:

"... stress is always there; it cannot really be eliminated. But, in some way, we find ways to cope, like watching movies... reading books... playing games." [P1]

The narratives demonstrate how teachers use personal coping strategies to manage emotional and occupational stress in remote teaching environments. Teaching in the farthest schools requires psychological endurance alongside instructional competence, as professional support systems may be limited. This finding aligns with Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979), which explains that social and institutional contexts shape teacher well-being. From a resilience perspective, teacher coping reflects adaptive psychological regulation and meaning-centered professional commitment rather than individual vulnerability (Masten, 2021). These findings suggest the need for institutional mental health programs, workload management policies, and stronger professional support systems to sustain teacher well-being and performance.

Institutional and Professional Development Constraints

This subtheme illustrates how veteran educators experience institutional and professional development limitations as structural conditions shaping instructional effectiveness in geographically isolated schools. Rather than interpreting these challenges as individual shortcomings, teachers frame the lack of formal training and instructional resources as systemic gaps in curriculum implementation and professional support. Limited preparation, insufficient pedagogical orientation, and the absence of essential teaching materials become defining features of their professional environment in the farthest schools. These show how inadequate institutional preparation affects their ability to confidently implement new curriculum reforms. As one participant shared:

"... the problem is that we weren't given proper training... we were just handed a lesson and told to teach it... the biggest problem is really the lack of books." [P1]

Professional constraints in geographically isolated schools reflect systemic gaps in teacher preparation and institutional support, demonstrating that structural and socio-environmental conditions shape professional development. Grounded in Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979), teacher capacity is influenced by organizational structures, policy implementation, and resource distribution mechanisms that affect instructional effectiveness in remote educational contexts. The lack of structured training and adequate instructional materials limits pedagogical confidence, curriculum implementation, and professional growth, compelling teachers to rely on self-directed adaptive learning strategies. Consistent with Masten's resilience theory (2021), resilience is understood as a contextually embedded and relationally mediated process rather than an individual trait. These findings highlight the need for equitable professional development, context-responsive training programs, and improved resource allocation to strengthen teacher resilience, instructional quality, and sustainable educational reform in remote and marginalized school settings.

Emotional Fulfillment and Professional Satisfaction in Teaching Service

The third question revealed the overarching theme of Emotional Fulfillment and Professional Satisfaction in Teaching Service, reflecting the meaningful, psychologically rewarding experiences of veteran educators in the farthest schools. These positive experiences are manifested through three subthemes: Joy from Student Academic and Personal Growth; Gratitude and Positive Teacher-Student Relationships; and Community Recognition and Social Value of Teaching. This theme highlights the emotionally meaningful and purpose-driven experiences of veteran educators in geographically isolated schools. Emotional fulfillment and professional satisfaction are derived from positive learner outcomes, expressions of gratitude, and the perceived transformative impact of teaching on students' lives. Teaching in farthest schools becomes a relationally mediated professional experience, where emotional and psychological satisfaction is sustained through teacher-learner interactions, community recognition, and perceived social value of teaching. Emotional meaning is constructed through professional service experiences, demonstrating that professional satisfaction is socially and culturally embedded within community-oriented educational service systems rather than derived from material rewards.

Joy from Student Academic and Personal Growth

This subtheme reflects the emotionally rewarding and psychologically meaningful experiences of veteran educators derived from learners' academic and personal development. Emotional fulfillment in teaching is

primarily anchored on observing improvements in student confidence, participation, and learning competence despite the challenges of remote teaching contexts. Rather than external rewards, professional satisfaction is constructed through positive learner transformation and psychosocial empowerment. This is illustrated in the narratives, as one participant shared:

“When I help students find their voice from very silent ones inside the classroom to the ones who started to participate actively... makes my heart very happy.” [P4]

These indicate that emotional satisfaction is closely linked to learners’ academic and psychosocial progress, with the shift from passive to active participation reflecting meaningful learning. In geographically isolated schools in Maguindanao del Sur, teacher motivation and professional satisfaction are sustained by perceived instructional impact on learner confidence and achievement. This finding supports Ryan & Deci’s Self-Determination Theory (2000), which posits that intrinsic motivation is strengthened when teachers experience purpose, competence, and relational fulfillment. From an ecological and psychosocial perspective, emotional rewards in teaching are socially constructed through teacher–learner interactions rather than material incentives. These findings imply that school leaders and policymakers should promote supportive learning environments, strengthen teacher–learner relationships, and provide psychosocial and professional support programs to sustain teacher motivation and emotional well-being in remote schools.

Gratitude and Positive Teacher-Student Relationship

This subtheme illustrates how veteran educators derive emotional fulfillment from expressions of gratitude and positive relational connections with students in geographically isolated schools. Rather than viewing teaching solely as instructional work, teachers interpret their role as relational and psychosocial labor, in which emotional bonds with learners become central sources of professional satisfaction. Expressions of gratitude from students, respectful interactions, and sustained teacher–student relationships become defining features of meaningful teaching experiences in farthest schools. This shows how learners’ appreciation reinforces their commitment to teaching despite environmental and occupational challenges. As one participant shared:

“Yes... because when a child thanks you for what you have done, it feels even more valuable than being given money.” [P2]

Teacher–student relational quality functions as a psychological and motivational resource in remote teaching contexts by strengthening teachers’ professional identity, emotional satisfaction, and sustained commitment to learner development. Grounded in Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), intrinsic motivation is strengthened when teachers experience relatedness, emotional validation, and meaningful social connection with learners. Expressions of gratitude from students function as symbolic reinforcement mechanisms that sustain professional fulfillment beyond material incentives. Consistent with Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory (1979), teacher emotional experiences are shaped by microsystem interactions within classroom and community learning environments. Similarly, resilience theory (Masten, 2021) conceptualizes positive relational experiences as protective adaptive factors that buffer occupational stress and support long-term professional sustainability. These findings emphasize the importance of strengthening socio-emotional learning environments, institutionalizing teacher well-being programs, and promoting supportive relational cultures in geographically isolated schools.

Community Recognition and Social Value of Teaching

This subtheme illustrates how veteran educators derive emotional fulfillment and professional satisfaction from community recognition and the perceived social value of teaching in geographically isolated schools. Teaching is experienced not only as instructional work but as socially meaningful labor where appreciation from learners, parents, and community members reinforces teachers’ sense of purpose and professional validation. These emphasize that emotional reward is derived from witnessing learners’ academic and personal growth and receiving expressions of gratitude for their teaching efforts, as reflected in the participant narrative:

“... you feel happy that you were able to teach and share knowledge with the children... then seeing them happy, seeing them express gratitude for the knowledge they were given. You feel happy that your dream of helping the children learn, even the most basic skills like reading and counting, is being fulfilled. It is truly a big thing... It is a source of satisfaction for us to be able to help the children learn to read... know how to count.” [P1]

The narrative demonstrates that emotional fulfillment is socially constructed through learner outcomes and community-based appreciation, where teaching is framed as a socially transformative practice that supports learner empowerment and community development. Grounded in Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979), teacher satisfaction is shaped by socio-environmental interactions, cultural values, and community support structures in geographically isolated contexts. Consistent with Masten's resilience theory (2021), emotional sustainability in teaching is understood as a relationally mediated and contextually embedded adaptive process rather than an individual psychological trait. These findings imply that educational leaders and policymakers should strengthen community engagement programs, recognition systems for teachers, and psychosocial support mechanisms to reinforce teacher professional identity, emotional sustainability, and instructional perseverance in geographically isolated schools.

Coping Strategies and Resilience Maintenance in Remote Teaching

The fourth research question generated the overarching theme, Coping Strategies and Resilience Maintenance in Remote Teaching, which reflects how veteran educators manage occupational, emotional, and environmental challenges in farthest schools. These coping mechanisms are manifested through four subthemes: Personal Stress Management and Self-Care Practices; Reflective Teaching and Continuous Self-Improvement; Peer, Family, and Community Social Support; and Faith-Based and Value-Driven Perseverance. This theme situates veteran educators' coping strategies and resilience within the structural, occupational, and socio-emotional realities of geographically isolated schools in Maguindanao del Sur. Teaching in the farthest schools is physically and emotionally demanding, requiring teachers to adopt adaptive coping mechanisms, such as stress management practices, reflective teaching, and seeking social support from peers and community members. These strategies enable teachers to sustain professional functioning, maintain psychological well-being, and continue supporting learners' academic and personal development despite resource limitations and environmental challenges.

Teacher resilience in remote teaching contexts is socially and environmentally constructed rather than solely an individual psychological capacity. By managing occupational stress and professional pressures, veteran educators demonstrate adaptive professional sustainability and continued commitment to educational service. Research supports that teacher well-being, self-efficacy, and social support systems strengthen resilience, reduce occupational stress, and promote sustained professional performance in challenging educational environments.

Personal Stress Management and Self-Care Practices

This subtheme highlights how veteran educators maintain emotional stability and professional resilience through personal stress management and self-care practices in geographically isolated schools. Teaching in the farthest schools is physically and emotionally demanding, requiring psychological regulation to manage occupational stress, environmental hardships, and workload pressures. Teachers employ coping strategies such as leisure activities, reflection, and recreation to sustain well-being and instructional effectiveness. These practices indicate that resilience in remote teaching contexts is socially and personally constructed, with self-care serving as a protective psychological resource that supports long-term professional sustainability despite structural and environmental challenges. This coping mechanism was illustrated, as one teacher shared:

"... stress is always there; it cannot really be eliminated. But, in some way, we find ways to cope, like watching movies... reading books... playing games." [P1]

The narrative demonstrates that personal coping strategies function as psychological resources that help teachers regulate emotional pressure and maintain professional functioning. Grounded in Masten's resilience theory (2021), teacher well-being is viewed as a contextually embedded, adaptive process influenced by environmental and occupational conditions, rather than by individual psychological strength alone. Similarly, Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979) explains that resilience and coping behaviors are shaped by socio-environmental support systems within geographically isolated communities. These findings imply that educational institutions should promote structured wellness programs, peer support systems, and workload management policies to strengthen teacher resilience and long-term professional sustainability in remote schools.

Reflective Teaching and Continuous Self-Improvement

This subtheme illustrates how veteran educators maintain professional growth and instructional effectiveness through reflective teaching practices and continuous self-improvement in geographically isolated schools. Teaching in the farthest schools requires adaptive learning, critical self-evaluation, and professional learning

despite limited training opportunities and resource constraints. Veteran educators engage in reflective practices such as evaluating teaching strategies, modifying instructional approaches, and planning improvements to enhance learner understanding and classroom engagement. These practices demonstrate that professional growth in remote teaching contexts is socially and professionally constructed, where reflection functions as a cognitive and professional resource that supports long-term instructional competence despite structural and environmental challenges. These coping strategies are clearly illustrated, as one participant shared:

“Prayer, but also do your research (evaluate what you did the whole day), write what you want to change, and do it tomorrow.” [P4]

The narrative demonstrates that reflective practices function as professional learning strategies that help teachers improve instructional delivery and sustain teaching effectiveness. Grounded in Masten’s resilience theory (2021), professional development is understood as a contextually embedded adaptive process influenced by workplace realities rather than individual competence alone. Similarly, Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory (1979) explains that teacher professional growth is shaped by institutional, community, and environmental conditions in geographically isolated contexts. Reflective teaching and continuous self-improvement serve as adaptive mechanisms that enable veteran educators to sustain professional competence, instructional quality, and long-term commitment to teaching. These findings suggest that schools and education authorities should institutionalize reflective practice programs, provide professional learning communities, and strengthen access to training opportunities to support sustained teacher development in remote schools.

Peer, Family, and Community Social Support

This subtheme illustrates how veteran educators sustain emotional resilience and professional commitment through social support from peers, families, and communities in geographically isolated schools. Teaching in the farthest schools is socially and emotionally demanding, requiring collaborative relationships and shared psychosocial resources to manage occupational stress and environmental challenges. Veteran educators rely on collegial support, family encouragement, and community assistance to maintain psychological stability and professional motivation. These social support systems demonstrate that resilience in remote teaching contexts is relationally and socially constructed, where interpersonal connections function as protective resources that sustain long-term professional engagement despite structural and environmental constraints. These are clearly illustrated, as one teacher shared:

“They’ve been a big help. When we, the fellow teachers, discuss a student’s problems, we talk about how to motivate them...It is also difficult when you do not have someone to ask for advice.” [P3]

The narrative demonstrates that social support systems function as psychological and professional resources that help teachers manage workplace pressures and improve instructional practices. Grounded in Masten’s resilience theory (2021), teacher coping and professional sustainability are understood as relationally and contextually embedded processes rather than individual psychological capacity alone. Similarly, Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory (1979) explains that teacher well-being and professional functioning are influenced by family, peer, and community environmental systems in geographically isolated contexts. Peer, family, and community social support serve as adaptive mechanisms that enable veteran educators to sustain emotional well-being, professional motivation, and instructional effectiveness. These findings imply that educational leaders should strengthen collaborative school cultures, community partnerships, and institutional support programs to enhance teacher well-being and professional sustainability in remote schools.

Faith-Based and Value-Driven Perseverance

This subtheme highlights how veteran educators sustain resilience and professional commitment through faith-based and value-driven perseverance in geographically isolated schools. Teaching in the most remote schools is understood not only as professional work but also as a moral and spiritual mission shaped by personal beliefs, cultural values, and a service-oriented commitment to learners’ futures. Although environmental hardships, workload pressures, and resource limitations are persistent challenges, these structural conditions also create contexts in which spiritual faith and personal values strengthen teachers’ determination to continue teaching. Rather than withdrawing from challenges, educators frame perseverance as part of their life mission to support learners’ long-term educational opportunities. This is strongly illustrated, as one teacher shared:

"I come from a remote area, so I experienced firsthand how difficult it is to study when you are in a remote area. I want my students to build themselves up through my teaching, so I can see what their future might be if they follow my advice. We persevered and achieved a better future. That is what I want to happen to the students I teach." [P2]

The narrative demonstrates that perseverance is driven by moral purpose, spiritual meaning, and social responsibility toward learners rather than external rewards. Grounded in Ryan & Deci's Self-Determination Theory (2000), value-driven and faith-based teaching strengthens intrinsic motivation through a sense of purpose and relatedness. Similarly, Masten's resilience theory (2021) conceptualizes teacher perseverance as a contextually embedded adaptive process shaped by cultural, spiritual, and environmental conditions. In the Maguindanao del Sur context, faith-based values function as psychological and spiritual resources that sustain emotional stability, professional satisfaction, and long-term teaching commitment in geographically isolated settings. These findings suggest that education authorities and school leaders should recognize the role of cultural and spiritual dimensions in teacher support programs, promote values-oriented professional development, and strengthen psychosocial support systems to sustain teacher resilience and professional sustainability in remote schools.

Conclusion

This study contributes to remote education scholarship by reframing teacher experiences in geographically isolated schools of Maguindanao del Sur as socially constructed, culturally situated, and ecologically mediated professional realities rather than purely occupational or psychological conditions. The findings demonstrate that veteran educators sustain educational continuity in farthest schools not only through instructional competence but through strong moral commitment, community-embedded relationships, culturally grounded values, spiritual orientation, and a deep sense of professional mission. Teaching in last-mile contexts emerges as a socially, culturally, and psychologically embedded professional service anchored on learner empowerment, social responsibility, and community development.

By situating teacher experiences within psychosocial-ecological systems, this study extends the resilience literature by emphasizing that resilience in remote education is not solely an individual coping mechanism but a relational, contextually mediated adaptive process. Emotional fulfillment derived from learner achievement, expressions of gratitude, and positive teacher-student relationships reinforces professional identity and intrinsic motivation. These findings suggest that teacher resilience in geographically isolated schools is dynamically shaped by social, cultural, and environmental ecosystems that support meaning-making and professional sustainability.

The study has significant implications for educational practice and policy. Strengthening education in remote and geographically isolated areas requires systemic and institutionalized support mechanisms rather than expecting teachers to adapt to structural hardships on their own. Policy interventions should prioritize localized and culturally responsive professional development programs, structured psychosocial support systems, improved transportation and mobility assistance, and provision of adequate instructional resources. Sustainable education in farthest schools depends not only on material support but also on strengthening community partnerships, stakeholder collaboration, and relational educational ecosystems that promote teacher well-being and long-term professional retention.

In the field of research, the findings offer opportunities for further investigation into community-based education models, culturally responsive pedagogical strategies, and long-term trajectories of teacher development in marginalized educational settings. Future studies may examine how ecological, sociocultural, spiritual, and institutional factors interact to sustain teacher resilience across different geographically isolated regions in the Philippines and other developing contexts. Expanding research in this area can contribute to more inclusive, equitable, and contextually grounded educational systems that support both teachers and learners in last-mile communities.

Contributions of Authors

Author 1: conceptualization, proposal writing, literature review, development of research instruments, data gathering, data analysis, and manuscript writing
Author 2: validation of research instruments, formatting of the manuscript, editing, and checking the results for clarity, coherence, and correct grammar

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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