

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY: APPLIED BUSINESS AND EDUCATION RESEARCH

2023, Vol. 4, No. 9, 3188 – 3196

<http://dx.doi.org/10.11594/ijmaber.04.09.11>

Research Article

Sacrifice and Satisfaction: Exploring the Quality of Life of Public Secondary School Volunteer Teachers in Remote Areas

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Article history:

Submission September 2023

Revised September 2023

Accepted September 2023

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the quality of life of selected secondary school volunteer teachers in the remote areas of the Schools Division of Sultan Kudarat. This qualitative study utilizes phenomenology as its method and used convenience sampling as the sampling technique. Six (6) volunteer teachers were the study's participants. Moreover, the study employed a semi-structured interview guide with open-ended questions, and the data were analyzed using Thematic Analysis.

Through thematic analysis, some emerging themes were extracted after an exhaustive and systematic process of thematic coding, analysis, and categorizations of the transcripts from the interview. Such themes include teachers' passion for teaching, enhancement of teachers' skills, teachers' psychological condition, qualifications, financial stability, long-distance travel, unsafe roadways, classroom management skills, faith, community linkages, classroom management skills, seminars and training, multi-talented teachers, and allowances.

This study concludes that volunteer teachers in remote areas need more financial stability. Some of the teachers have limited seminars and training attended. Although they show incredible resilience and courage, they cannot cope with the increasing daily expenses, and a positive outlook cannot buy even the necessities a teacher needs to sustain himself, their family, and even the teaching-learning process itself.

The study recommends that more be done to support and train volunteer teachers. Initiatives like professional development programs, access to teaching resources, provision of allowances and hazard pay, provision of plantilla positions in remote areas, and social support networks can go a long way in supporting volunteer teachers and improving education in remote areas.

How to cite:

Leon, M. B., Mokamad, R. F., Almirante, J. F., Mandado, A. Y., Barcenal, S. E., Salvadico, J. L., & Salendab, R. L. A. O. (2023). Sacrifice and Satisfaction: Exploring the Quality of Life of Public Secondary School Volunteer Teachers in Remote Areas. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary: Applied Business and Education Research*. 4(9), 3188 – 3196. doi: 10.11594/ijmaber.04.09.11

Keywords: Challenges, Coping mechanisms, Opportunities, Remote areas, Sacrifice, Satisfaction, Secondary school, Volunteer teachers

Introduction

Teachers play a crucial role in the development of both students and society. Salendab (2023) asserted that teachers play a pivotal role in shaping their pupils' futures during times of crisis and conflict to provide quality learning opportunities. Salendab & Akmad, 2023 stressed that teachers make learning possible regardless of the environment or location, and they are one of the essential components of any educational system.

Further, volunteer teachers play an essential role in remote areas, where access to education is often limited and resources are scarce. These individuals volunteer their time and expertise to teach in schools in remote or underprivileged areas. These areas may have limited resources and access to education, and volunteer teachers are important in providing education and opportunities to students needing access. Thus, these teachers may experience sacrifices and challenges such as a lack of reliable internet access, limited access to materials, or limited professional development (Madruino, 2016, as cited by Salendab & Akmad, 2023).

Most schools in remote areas lack the necessary facilities, and teachers are exposed to various forms of stress, which can hinder their performance. According to Diaz (2015), one of the most difficult aspects of leading a school in a remote area is its location. He adds that most school administrators and teachers assigned to these areas reside in the city or nearby and that traveling to distant schools will harm their health, particularly if they must cross several rivers and mountains to reach the school. In addition, he stated that the paucity of instructional materials posed a problem for these public-school principals, prompting them to use their funds to purchase the school's needs.

Moreover, the Department of Education, as the agency for basic education, has been implementing programs and initiatives to improve the quality of education in remote areas. Some of these programs include providing access to distance learning technologies and improving school facilities. Despite these efforts, there are

still challenges in providing quality education in these areas, such as more resources and low teacher retention rates where volunteer teachers are the substitutes.

Equipado and Guilbas (2021) claim that teaching in remote locations is, in fact, quite difficult since instructors must utilize unpleasant modes of transportation, like herbal habits, only to get to the station. Suppose you do not own a motorbike and cannot afford to pay for special tricycle trips. In that case, your only alternative is a habal-habal, a motorcycle available for rental in the area. Going to their school presented additional hurdles or problems for several instructors. Some of them remarked that the route itself is dangerous since it might contain unanticipated poisonous snakes that could hurt them or result in a car accident. The treacherous roads, particularly on rainy days, are another problem or difficulty those instructors face.

Furthermore, Quejada and Orale (2018) stated that instructors and school heads must walk, create, innovate, and re-invent instructional materials using local resources. Absence-related issues arose because of the fact that the majority of students, regardless of age, must assist their parents at home or labor in the field to supplement the family's daily survival. Nevertheless, despite the obstacles they face, they continue to serve.

It is important to note that every nation provides and considers the welfare and prosperity of every teacher as stipulated in the Magna Carta for Public Teachers (Llego, 2019). One of the provisions of this act is to promote and improve public school teachers' social and economic status and promote their living and working conditions.

Consideration must be given to the notion that teacher welfare is one of the most important aspects of the teaching-learning process. According to David et al. (2019), there were numerous instances in which teachers sacrificed more than just their time to fulfill their commitment. Similarly, volunteer teachers also made self-sacrifices to devote

themselves to teaching. These teachers often need help with significant obstacles, such as lack of funding, inadequate infrastructure, and minimal community support. Often, they may have to deal with other issues, such as language barriers, cultural differences, and challenging living conditions (David et al., 2019).

There are numerous accounts of the sacrifices made by public school teachers. According to Regalado (2020), those teachers' stories greatly manifest their struggles and dedication to work. Despite the number of issues and challenges these teachers face, it is safe to say that there are many unwritten and undocumented problems and challenges.

With these findings, the researchers explored the quality of life of selected public secondary school volunteer teachers assigned in remote areas under the Kalamansig District II Schools Division of Sultan Kudarat. Most of the public secondary schools in this place are in remote areas, and many teachers in the said schools are pure volunteer teachers and residents of the mainland of Kalamansig municipality. Thus, this study is considered significant and worthwhile research.

Statement of the Problem

This study explored the quality of life of public secondary school volunteer teachers in the remote areas at Kalamansig District II, Schools Division of Sultan Kudarat.

Specifically, this study sought answers to the following questions:

1. How do these experiences impact the Volunteer Teacher's personal and professional growth?
2. What are the challenges, and how do they cope with these challenges?
3. What are the opportunities encountered by the Volunteer Teachers?
4. Based on the findings, what emerging themes can be drawn?

Methods

The study utilized the qualitative research design employing the phenomenological research method. This study aims to understand and describe the lived experience of individuals about a particular phenomenon. It focuses on interpreting subjective experiences

rather than objective facts or behavior. It typically employs in-depth interviews with participants to gain insight into their unique experiences and points of view and then analyzes the collected data to identify common themes and patterns (Cresswell, 2018). This method is deemed appropriate because the study aimed to explore the quality of life of selected public secondary school volunteer teachers in remote areas at Kalamansig District II, DepEd Schools Division of Sultan Kudarat. Its design aided in describing the situation as it existed at the time of the study and determining the causes of a particular phenomenon.

Participants

Six (6) volunteer teachers in the selected public secondary schools under the Kalamansig District II, DepEd Schools Division of Sultan Kudarat, were the study participants. These participants were selected using the convenience sampling technique. These participants are appropriate for this study because they live in the municipality but have volunteered in remote areas for almost five years. They are all licensed professional teachers, and they are the persons who can provide the information through knowledge and experience.

Research Instrument

The study used the semi-structured interview guide question containing open-ended questions to elicit the responses and experiences of volunteer teachers in remote areas, such as the impact of volunteer teachers' experiences, the challenges and their coping mechanisms, and the opportunities they have encountered, which would serve as the baseline data for the formulation of emerging themes. The researchers formulated the interview guide questions upon reviewing related articles and journals and submitting them to the subject experts for validation.

Data Analysis

Colizzi's thematic analysis was used to examine and describe the quality of life of public secondary school volunteer teachers in remote areas in relation to the impact of volunteer teachers' experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, and opportunities encountered.

The Colizzi method of analysis is a technique for interpreting qualitative research data that seeks to extricate meaning from transcribed data by identifying meaningful information and organizing it into themes and groups.

Result and Discussion

Table 1. The Personal and Professional Growth of Volunteer Teachers in Far-Flung Areas.

Significant Statement	Participants	Formulated Meaning	Cluster Themes	Emerging Themes
"I was called to do my chosen career... it resulted in having a strong connection...."	VT1,12-13	Participants are passionate about teaching, which results in favorable outcomes.	Passion for teaching	Teachers' mounting their passion for teaching.
"I was assigned in different ancillary loads."	VT1, 47	Teachers were assigned additional teaching loads.	Teaching in supplementary subjects	
"It will test how far you can fly."	VT1,59	The willpower of the teacher to pursue the job	Passion for Teaching	
"develop ang aking kakayahan sa pagtututo"	VT2, 11-12	The improvement of teaching capacity.	Teachers' skills	Enhancement of teachers' skills.
"improving and building my skills and capabilities ... social interaction with students and teachers... served as my foundation as a novice."	VT3, 11-13	The improvement of teaching capacity.	Teachers' skills	
"I was a product of pandemic... nahihirapan ako in terms of paper works and teaching strategies... dahil sapag volunteer ko... na enhance yung mga skills ko doon"	VT3, 23-25	The improvement of teaching capacity.	Enhancement of Teachers' skills	

Table 2. The Challenges Encountered by a Volunteer Teachers

Significant Statement	Participants (Part Pg no/Line no.)	Formulated Meaning	Cluster Themes	Emerging Themes
"Really measure my temper, patience, and even mental and emotional matters."	VT1, 24-25	Students' behavior challenged the psychological aspect and strength of the teachers.	The psychological state of teachers	Factors affecting the psychological state of teachers.
"first time also to live in remote areas...no electric, no signal and no internet"	VT 1, 31-33	Most volunteer teachers need to become acquainted with the living conditions of remote areas.	Unfamiliar way of life	
"sa pag apply"	VT2, 17-18	Volunteering is one of the most important aspects of accumulating points during the application process.	One of the various qualifications needed for ranking	Application process
"isa rin ang salary kasi walang-wala ka talagang matanggap"	VT2, 17-18	Volunteer teachers, of course, do not receive a salary for their daily expenses.	No salary	Financial stability
"Financial matters... when we are in the field, it involves money...."	VT3, 16-17	It is already knowledge that teachers spend their own money beautifying their classrooms; this is an extra challenge if the teacher is only a volunteer.	Grievously needs more financial allowance.	
"The way going here in school...."	VT4, 74-75	Teachers are not from within the locality.	Travel distance of teachers going to school	Long travel distance
"I travel every day from Centro to Obial."	VT5,19	Teachers are not native to the area.	Traveling the distance from home to school	
"umuuwi kami na grabi ang baha... isa yan sa mga na experience ko na nakakatakot"	VT6, 72-75	Flash floods may occur anytime, especially if the weather is bad	Hazardous road	Unsafe roadways
"Going to the station was not that easy... I cried, because... I experienced flood and landslide along the way."	VT1, 29-30	Teachers are faced with nerve-breaking catastrophes that endanger their safety.	unsafe road conditions	
"may mga estudyante na napak-sama ng ugali at nilalabanan nila ang kanilang mga guro"	VT6, 24	Teachers are faced with ill-mannered students who fight against their teachers.	Inappropriate behavior of students	Classroom management issue

Table 3. The Coping Mechanisms of Volunteer Teachers

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Significant Statement	Participants (Part/Pg no/Line no.)	Formulated Meaning	Cluster Themes	Emerging Themes
"embracing it... loving the current situation... praying for strength and good health"	VT1, 41-43	They are prayerfully accepting their fate as teachers in remote areas.	Faith	Faith
"experience is the best teacher."	VT5, 13-14	An iconic saying: We learn the best through our experiences	Passion for teaching	Passion for teaching
"nakakasurvive parin kami with the help of BLGU, tanod or BPAT"	VT6, 73-74	In times of catastrophic events, BLGU needs to extend its hand in its education sector.	Community linkages	Community linkages
"so ganon hindi ako nagpatinag... Ako dapat ang superior, ako dapat ang masusunod"	VT6,94-96	Teachers should be able to handle ill-mannered students. However, they should also refrain from raising their hands to their students.	Address bad behavior quickly.	Classroom management skills

Table 4. The Opportunities of Volunteer Teachers

Significant Statement	Participants (Part/Pg no/Line no.)	Formulated Meaning	Cluster Themes	Emerging Themes
" attended lots of seminars and training."	VT1,48	They were sent to various seminars and trainings.	Attendance to Seminars and training	Seminars and trainings
"our school head allowed us to join... some of the DepEd program...to learn more about the field of teaching"	VT 4, 33-34	School heads did not limit their volunteer teachers from attending seminars spearheaded by DepEd.	Attendance to Seminars and training	
"Aside from my major...another talent na meron ako is... decorating... invitation lahat-lahat... ako lang yung. You know, and gender."	VT6, 109-113	Volunteer teachers have been utilizing their skills not only in teaching but also in extra-curricular activities.	The flexibility of teachers' abilities	Multi-talented teachers
"local <i>subord</i> or subordinate teacher ako...paid by the ... municipal sa SET meron akong tinatanggap"	VT6, 137-139	Volunteer teachers receive allowances from either or both BLGU and LGU.	Financial Support from the Local Government Body	Allowances

• **Teachers' passion for teaching**

Salendab (2023) describes passionate teachers as those who truly feel that teaching energizes them, as opposed to those who have lost faith in their employment and exert less effort. The commitment of volunteer teachers to educating students was demonstrated through their willingness to share their experiences and

provide feedback on their lives in remote areas. Despite their challenges, their passion for imparting knowledge and supporting their students remained unwavering. The following responses serve as clear evidence of their dedication.

"I was called to do my chosen career... it resulted in having a strong connection...."

"I was assigned in different ancillary loads."

"It will test how far you can fly."

- **Enhancement of teachers' skills**

Salendab and Laguda (2023) concluded that learning is an active procedure in which experience derives meaning.

The volunteer teachers shared the knowledge they acquired through seminars and the moral support received from their co-teachers. They effectively applied this knowledge to enhance their skills in handling students in various situations. The answer provided below clearly shows their ability to utilize this knowledge effectively.

"develop ang aking kakayahan sa pag-tututo"

"Improving and building skills and capabilities... social interaction with students and teachers... served as my foundation as a novice."

"I was a product of pandemic... nahihirapan ako in terms of paper works and teaching strategies... dahil sa pag volunteer ko... na enhance yung mga skills ko doon."

- **Factors affecting the psychological state of teachers**

Teaching is highly stressful, with multiple stresses leading to a high exhaustion risk (Hartney, 2020). Volunteer teachers drew from their teaching experience to share various factors that can impact mental health. These factors include heavy workloads resulting from a shortage of teachers, daily interactions with students exhibiting diverse behaviors, and the challenge of language differences. The following answer from a volunteer teacher serves as clear evidence of these aspects.

"Really measure my temper, patience, and even mental and emotional matter."

"First time to live in remote areas... no electric and no internet."

- **Qualifications**

Volunteer teachers share their firsthand experience of the application process for becoming a volunteer teacher at a specific school. However, they encountered difficulties as some

mainland schools needed more positions available for volunteer teachers. Despite this setback, they persevered and eventually found a school in a remote area that needed a volunteer teacher. Their dedication to teaching shines through in the response provided below by a volunteer teacher. The volunteer teachers with a consistent four-year commitment demonstrate a deep passion for education and a strong dedication to making a difference in the lives of others. Their long-term engagement showcases their perseverance, adaptivity, and the valuable skills they have developed, earning them a well-deserved 10 points for their teaching experiences.

"sa pag apply."

- **Financial stability**

The volunteer teachers also discussed their financial stability and the challenges they faced in meeting their daily needs and experiencing financial growth while living in remote areas. The shortage of allowances they received was highlighted, which required them to limit their budget for expenses such as transportation and instructional materials. Volunteers may be motivated by intrinsic factors, such as the satisfaction or gratification derived from the activity itself, or by extrinsic factors, such as performing an activity to obtain a distinct outcome. (Ferrer J., 2017). This information is evident in the response provided below by the volunteer teachers.

"isa rin ang salary kasi walang-wala ka talagang matatanggap"

"financial matters... when we are in field, it involves money..."

Also, when vehicular accidents happen, volunteer teachers do not have an allowance that may be received so that they may be able to pay for the hospital bills at the very least. Although volunteer teaching requires voluntarism, it does not excuse them from experiencing catastrophe; these teachers do not have the vulnerability and immortality to withstand accidents. Thus, these volunteer teachers need hazard pay too, although not as much as the permanent teachers get, but at least they can pay their hospital bills.

- **Long distance travel**

The volunteer teachers shared their experience of the arduous travel of reaching remote areas from the mainland. They encountered poor road conditions, which made the journey difficult. They had to endure uncomfortable modes of transportation like habal-habal (motorcycle taxis) to reach their work destination. This information is evident in the response provided below by a volunteer teacher: Emerging themes reveal that teaching in distant schools is detrimental in various ways: geographically distant and dangerous for pupils and educators, living away from home and hospitals, and incurring additional costs. Quejada, A.B. and Orale, R.L. (2018) stated that remote institutions are difficult to access and frequently hazardous. Due to the road challenges, the volunteer teachers shared their experience with the long travel distance from the mainland to the remote area. They struggle due to the uncomfortable modes of transportation like habal-habal to reach their workplace destination. This sentence is evident in the answer below from the volunteer teacher:

*"The way going here in school...."
"I travel every day from Centro to Obial."*

- **Unsafe roadways**

The volunteer teacher further recounted their experience, shedding light on their challenges while traveling from the mainland to their assigned remote area for teaching. In the same study experienced by volunteer teachers cited by (Equipado and Guilbas, 2021), during the rainy season, hiking was arduous because the mud was very sticky. But with no regrets. During their journey, they encountered unexpected situations, such as adverse weather conditions leading to flooding, slippery roads, and vehicular accidents that compromised their travel safety. The answer provided by the volunteer teacher below serves as clear evidence of these circumstances.

*"umuwi kami ng grabi and baha... isa yan sa mga experience ko na nakakatakot"
"Going to the station was not that easy... I cried because... I experienced flood and landslide along the way."*

- **Classroom management issue**

The volunteer teacher recounted their personal experience concerning challenges encountered within the classroom environment. Generally, The function of a teacher in the classroom is to impart knowledge to the students. According to the research of Salendab and Akmad (2023), teaching is more of a calling than a job. They discussed unexpected situations arising from student behavior, such as disruptive attitudes, excessive noise during discussions, lack of cooperation, and instances where students did not follow instructions. The volunteer teacher's answer below serves as evidence of these circumstances.

"may mga estudyante na napakasama ng ugali at nilalabanan nila ang mga guro nila."

- **Faith**

The volunteer teacher expressed their unwavering faith and determination despite being assigned to remote areas like Kalamansig. They view this opportunity as a stepping stone towards fulfilling their desire to teach and gaining valuable experience in the field before becoming a regular teacher. The volunteer teacher's answer below shows their commitment and aspirations.

"Embracing it... loving the current situation... praying for strength and good health."

- **Community Linkages**

The volunteer teachers share their experiences regarding the impact of catastrophic events, emphasizing the crucial role played by the BLGU (Barangay Local Government Unit) in addressing the challenging situations they encounter while teaching in remote areas. This sentence demonstrates the significance of the volunteer teachers' response, as evident in their statement below:

"nakakasurvive parin kami with the help of BLGU, tanod or BPAT."

- **Classroom management skill**

The volunteer teachers openly discuss the continuous development of their skills, including classroom management techniques. They also share their experiences handling students,

particularly in dealing with challenging attitudes that arise in unexpected situations. Their response below clearly reflects the significance of their encounters and the daily challenges they face while teaching:

"so ganon hindi ako nagpatinag...ako dapat ang superior, ako dapat and masusunod."

- **Seminars and Training**

The volunteer teachers highlight the importance of their professional growth by attending various events, such as workshops, seminars, and other activities organized by the Department of Education (DepEd). These experiences have greatly contributed to their teaching skills, enabling them to effectively practice and apply their acquired knowledge to benefit their students. The following statement from the volunteer teachers underscores the significance of their participation in such events:

"Attended lots of seminars and training."

"Our school head allowed us to join... some of the DepEd program... to learn more about the teaching field."

- **Multi-talented Teachers**

Galvanni (2015), multi-talented is very important nowadays as it helps do things simultaneously. However, most teachers must remember the quality of work and performance in school and improve students' mental abilities. The volunteer teachers further emphasize the need for flexibility in their teaching approach. In addition, they share their experiences of being prepared for unexpected events, such as incoming programs in their school. These events often require them to take on additional responsibilities, such as decorating, hosting, creating certificates, and other assigned tasks. The following statement from the volunteer teachers clearly illustrates their adaptability and willingness to go beyond their teaching duties:

"aside from my major... another talent na meron ako is... decorating... invitation lahat-lahat... ako lang yung... you know ang gender."

- **Allowances**

The volunteer teachers highlighted the issue of their allowances about the allowances

they receive from the Barangay Local Government Unit (BLGU) and Local Government Unit (LGU).

"local subord or subordinate teachers ako... paid by the municipal sa SET meron akong tinatanggap"

Conclusion

Based on the general findings of the data, the various challenges that volunteer teachers face are cultural differences, isolation, lack of resources, and limited access to necessities. Despite these challenges, the volunteer teachers also find joy in their work, including building relationships with the community, learning from the culture, and making a positive difference in their student's lives.

One of the study's main findings is that volunteer teachers in remote areas need more financial stability. This exacerbates the stress the volunteer teachers experience in these challenging regions. Some teachers are also limited by their lack of training, making it difficult to develop effective teaching strategies or deal with the complexity of various student needs. Although they show incredible resilience and courage, they cannot cope with the increasing daily expenses; a positive outlook cannot buy even the necessities a teacher needs to sustain himself, their family, and even the teaching-learning process itself.

The study highlights the need for better support and resources, specifically amid volunteer teachers' stresses and social problems. The findings suggest that the lack of support for these teachers affects the quality of education in remote areas. The study also highlights that more needs to be done to support and train volunteer teachers.

Therefore, initiatives like professional development programs, access to teaching resources, and social support networks can support volunteer teachers and improve education in remote areas.

The Barangay Local Government Unit may increase volunteer teachers' educational assistance and allowances in their locality. Also, the Local Government Unit may increase the allowance allocated to volunteer teachers and may provide hazard pay in case of unforeseen incidents that a volunteer teacher may claim. They

can help improve and maintain the order of the road to alleviate unexpected incidents.

Lastly, the DepEd may lessen the minimum and required years of teaching experiences for point allocation for teachers teaching in remote areas and may prioritize the Item/ plantilla positions to schools in remote areas.

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