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## Research Article

### Life Skills of Junior High School Teachers in Coastal, Rural and Urban Areas in Albay, Philippines

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#### ABSTRACT

This qualitative phenomenological study investigates the lived experiences of teachers in rural, urban, and coastal areas of Albay, Philippines, highlighting the challenges and skills that shape their professional lives. Despite the critical role of teachers in education, little research has focused on how geographical context influences their experiences. In-depth interviews and participant observation were employed to gather data from teacher-participants. The study utilized the phenomenological frameworks of Husserl and Heidegger to analyze the data and capture the essence of the participants' experiences. The findings reveal common life skills among teachers, including adaptability, effective communication, interpersonal skills, pedagogical skills, and practicality. Both rural and urban teachers demonstrated digital literacy, while competitiveness was more pronounced in urban settings. Financial literacy emerged as a strength among rural and coastal teachers, likely due to fewer distractions that lead to excessive spending. Urban teachers were found to be more susceptible to overspending due to the influence of commercial establishments and entertainment options in their environments. These outcomes underscore the importance of understanding how geographical context impacts teachers' experiences and skills, providing insights that can inform educational policy and practice.

**Keywords:** *Life Skills, Teachers, Digital Literacy, Practicality, Financial Literacy, Pedagogical Skill, Social Skill*

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#### Introduction

Education is a fundamental aspect of society, with the potential to transform lives and communities. According to John Dewey, "education is not preparation for life; education is

life itself." The significance of education is evident in the increasing enrollment figures, with the Department of Education (DepEd) reporting 24,892,492 students enrolled in basic education for School Year 2020-2021, representing

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89.63% of the previous year's enrollment (Manila Bulletin, 2020). As the population of schoolchildren grows, so do the challenges faced by educators. In response, DepEd is expanding its efforts to provide quality, accessible, and relevant education (Oxales, 2019).

However, the definition of education varies among individuals, encompassing formal schooling, lifelong learning, and the acquisition of knowledge and skills. Education serves as a vital arena for cultural and philosophical development, significantly influencing a nation's success.

For effective curriculum implementation and to achieve national goals, teachers must be equipped with pedagogical knowledge and a deep understanding of the curriculum. Despite entering the profession with idealism, many beginning teachers experience a decline in passion due to various challenges, including overwork and lack of support (Tapper, 2018). Factors such as workload, school conditions, salary, and personal circumstances often influence teachers' decisions to leave the profession (Smithers & Robinson, 2003).

Given these challenges, it is essential for beginning teachers to be informed about the local culture and develop necessary life skills before their deployment in rural, urban, or coastal areas. This study aims to empower DepEd teachers by creating a life skill guide that reflects the lived experiences of teachers across different contexts. By addressing the needs of teachers, particularly those new to the profession, we can enhance their ability to contribute effectively to the educational landscape.

## Methods

### Research Design

This study employed qualitative research using a phenomenological design to explore the lived experiences of beginning teachers in rural, urban, and coastal schools. Phenomenology focuses on the commonality of lived experiences within a specific group, aiming to describe the nature of a phenomenon through interviews with individuals who have firsthand knowledge of relevant events or situations (Creswell, 2013). The primary phenomenon investigated in this research was the lack of

awareness among beginning teachers regarding local realities. The researcher posited that the life skills demonstrated by key informants—teachers from these diverse contexts—could significantly aid new teachers in adjusting to their environments.

### Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection involved participant observation and in-depth interviews, employing an unstructured interview guide with five purposively selected key informants from each school managed by the Department of Education, Schools Division Office of Albay, Legazpi City, Philippines. The schools included Itaran National High School (INHS), Marcial Rañola Memorial School (MORMS), and Rapu-Rapu National High School (RRNHS). The data from participant observations and interviews were triangulated with responses from community members and leaders to ensure validity.

Key informants were categorized as follows: (a) tenured teachers who were non-residents; (b) tenured teachers who were local residents; (c) beginning teachers who were non-residents; and (d) beginning teachers who were local residents. This selection ensured that participants had relevant insights into community culture and the life skills necessary for adaptation.

The researcher immersed himself in the lived experiences of the key informants, focusing on practices related to teaching, transportation, living conditions, interpersonal relationships, and community adaptation. Secondary data were also collected during triangulation through interviews and observations with local residents, officials, and school heads, further validating the findings and capturing multiple dimensions of the participants' experiences. Additionally, relevant literature and studies were reviewed to support the claims and hypotheses of this research.

### Result and Discussion

As defined by UNICEF (2003), life skills are psychosocial abilities that enable individuals to adapt and behave positively in response to the demands and challenges of everyday life. These skills can be broadly categorized into three ar-

eas: (a) cognitive skills for analyzing and utilizing information, (b) personal skills for developing agency and self-management, and (c) interpersonal skills for effective communication and interaction with others. In this context, life skills encompass the coping mechanisms, strategies, and abilities that teachers have developed throughout their lives, which they apply in their specific geographical assignments to meet the demands of their teaching responsibilities.

The demonstrated life skills of the key informants, who are Junior High School teachers, were derived from data collected through participant observation and a series of in-depth

virtual and in-person interviews. This approach allowed for a comprehensive exploration of their circumstances and coping mechanisms as they adjust to the local culture and realities of their assigned areas.

Based on the life histories and demonstrated skills of these key informants, this study has developed a life skills guide for beginning teachers who may face similar experiences in the profession. It is anticipated that this guide will facilitate their adjustment to their environments and help them effectively fulfill their roles as educators. Table 1 summarizes the life skills of teachers in rural, urban, and coastal areas.

*Table 1. Summary of Teachers' Life Skills in Rural, Urban, and Coastal Areas*

<b>Life Skills of Rural Teachers</b>	<b>Life Skills of Urban Teachers</b>	<b>Life Skills of Coastal Teachers</b>
Digital Literacy	Pedagogical Skill	Pedagogical Skill
Practicality	Good Communication	Adaptability or Flexibility
Financial Literacy	Interpersonal or Social Skill	Interpersonal or Social Skill
Pedagogical Skill	Adaptability or Flexibility	Practicality
Adaptability or Flexibility	Digital Literacy	Good Communication
Interpersonal Relationship or Social Skill	Practicality	Financial Literacy
Good Communication	Competitiveness	

#### *Teacher-Participants from Rural Areas*

Based on the circumstances and life skills of teachers, the rural teachers are computer-literate, practical, financially literate, immersed with theories and principles in teaching, adaptive, and socially/interpersonally abled. These represent their coping mechanisms in adjusting to the present context in Itaran National High School being a rural school in the Schools Division of Albay.

Sir Don, Ma'am Delia, Ma'am Salvy, Ma'am Flora, and Ma'am Marites are found to be computer-literate as they believe that being knowledgeable on how to navigate computers particularly in using Microsoft Office will help them do school paper works easier and faster as it is also one of the demands in the new landscape of education. They are left with a choice but to learn to navigate new platforms and adjust to the new technological trends so that their students will learn from them.

These teachers are also practical in the sense that they have to be resourceful or "*madiskarte*" so that they can live a life that is comfortable and provide for their day-to-day needs while teaching in a rural school. Ma'am Salvy helps on the farm during her free time; Sir Don does part-time teaching in BU Polangui Campus during his free time. Ma'am Delia, Ma'am Salvy, Ma'am Flora do a budget plan to monitor their expenses and as much as possible, do other errands for an additional income aside from their expected salary as public-school teachers. They remain prudent in spending money so that they can avoid availing of loans from lending entities and save money for future use of the family.

Moreover, they are also immersed with theories and principles in teaching as reflected in their teaching views and practices. All of them take into consideration the situation of their students and employ strategies and activities that are within the interest of the learners for

meaningful learning. Sir Don believes that students should be taught well how to write properly as one of the significant macro-skills as he notices that students' writing ability is deteriorating while Ma'am Delia possesses a mastery of the subject matter, asks thought-provoking questions when teaching Science subject to activate curiosity, and lets students do experiments as a means of letting students learn from what they do. Meanwhile, Ma'am Salvy and Ma'am Flora are delivering their lessons from simple to complex for meaningful learning and employs the principle of conditioning which involves reward and punishments among learners while Ma'am Marites engages her students in creative learning activities like role-playing, collaborative activities, and simulations. Hence, teachers in a rural school are taking into account the principle of 'constructivism' in crafting and delivering their lessons.

In addition, they have also demonstrated adaptive skills. They have shown flexibility in adjusting to the new normal because of the COVID-19 pandemic and they have also adjusted to the culture of the place itself. Upon entry as a rural school teacher, they little by little assessed the scenario and coped with the existing reality. Sir Don and Ma'am Salvy, as newbie teachers, coped by observing the personality of their colleagues. To them, having a good relationship with them makes an organization progressive and productive because of the relationship ties that are built in them. Also, part of their adaption mechanism is to learn how to drive a motorcycle as their means of transportation to save money and for fast travel. It is also observed that all of them possess communication skills particularly in writing and speaking, verbal and non-verbal communications which have helped them deliver their lessons well through the blended learning modality of DepED and it has also helped them express their thoughts and ideas for academic, social and personal purposes. Furthermore, this had become one of the keys so that they could easily blend with their colleagues and community nicely as most of them strategically observed and studied the people's behavior and personality to positively approach them and establish a harmonious relationship.

Finally, all of them are socially or interpersonally abled. It was observed that they manifest skill on how to communicate and deal with colleagues and community members to blend with the norm in the place and establish a purpose. Sir Don maintains a good reputation in the community and supports the activities of the community like Ma'am Salvy, Ma'am Flora, and Ma'am Marites, while Ma'am Delia does the "paglalambing" strategy or shows fondness and tenderness to get along with parents. To them, in this way, the community and parents become closer to the school and will also support its endeavors.

The life skills of the teachers in the rural areas dominantly exhibit practicality, adaptability or flexibility, and interpersonal skills or social skills. These are demonstrated by them to be able to adapt to the existing culture of the locale so that they can teach in the place with security and safety, just to be able to carry their duties and responsibilities as teachers.

#### *Teacher-Participants from Urban Areas*

From a thorough analysis of the narratives of urban teachers, significant life skills were elicited which are manifestations of teachers' coping mechanism or adaptation in an urban area to provide premium service to their learners and stakeholders. Accordingly, they possess expertise in applying theories and principles in teaching, they are also good communicators, sociable/interpersonal, adaptive, digitally literate, practical, competitive, and intuitive.

These teachers, Ma'am Maria, Sir Tomas, Ma'am Rose, Ma'am Lilia, and Sir Chris, possess expertise in the application of theories and principles in teaching. They mostly follow the principle of constructivism that they have to consider the interest, needs, and context of their learners so that lessons will become meaningful to the students. They choose strategies and techniques appropriate for learners' context. It is coupled with their way of teaching that they have to develop primordially the foundational skills; hence they teach with the use of the deductive method of teaching where they develop specific or basic concepts to the general aspect. Sir Tomas provides activities that are helpful to the needs of his students and makes his classroom fun and engaging because

he gives practical problems and infuses academic jokes while teaching which his students appreciate. Moreover, the narratives also highlighted that urban teachers are good communicators. They are communicatively facilitative in the sense that they can manage the conversation well, giving them a strong bond of friendship as part of their established social relationship. Along with this, many of the urban teachers are found to be effective speakers. They have performed curricular reforms and many speaking engagements as part of their professional advancements like Ma'am Maria who both good at speaking and writing. Her skills have also honed many generations whose interest is in journalism, too. Additionally, Ma'am Lilia shares the same expertise because she had been a curriculum writer in English.

Furthermore, all the urban teachers demonstrated social or interpersonal skills. To them, the social skill must be developed in them because teaching profession requires interpersonal skills where teacher, as a public figure, needs to mingle with people who have different backgrounds; thus, a teacher needs to know how to talk and deal with students, parents, and other people. Despite their differences and factions in the school, they still find a way to connect through their intuition, being kind, friendly, and approachable. Their joking relationship formed a firm meaning of togetherness and bonding while doing their respective obligations.

Also, they support and help each other's endeavor to go through with it amidst difficulty. Sir Chris, being a beginning teacher, and Ma'am Rose as a reassigned teacher, have the same strategy to positively blend and deal with colleagues and community members. Since they are new to the place, they observe the practices of the school and the behavior of the people to get some idea of the realities of the school. From their observation, they were able to know the socialization mechanisms to bear in mind so that they can fully adjust to their new working environment. The support given to them was intensified by the mentoring, coaching, and consultation with their colleagues.

Furthermore, the transition to blended learning had proved that teachers in the urban area are adaptive and flexible. Though they all

have been challenged by this circumstance, they still they looked for solutions to combat the challenge and demands of the educational system. Ma'am Maria, Sir Tomas, Ma'am Rose, Ma'am Lilia, and Sir Chris, explored other platforms that they could use in the blended learning modality to continue to provide quality learning to their students. Based on their narratives, they are practical and possess everyday skills needed to function and meet the demands of one's environment, including the skills necessary to effectively and independently take care of oneself and to interact with other people.

To them, learning how to use the computer or technology as a means of communication is pivotal because it is part of the educational system. All urban teachers make reports and other paper works using a computer and also make use of social media platforms as their medium of communication during and before the pandemic. Hence, Sir Tomas, Ma'am Rose, Sir Chris, Ma'am Lilia, and Ma'am Maria demonstrate the skills they need to live, learn and work in an environment where communication and access to information are increasingly through digital technologies like the internet platforms, social media, and mobile devices.

In addition, rural teachers were found to be competitive. They work very hard, foster personal development; thus, unwilling to be left out and have that inner drive to study more, work harder, and always improve on what they know or what they have. It was proven by Ma'am Lilia as she shows competitiveness in the submission of school paper works such as lesson plans, grades, and others. Ma'am Maria and Sir Tomas also manifest competitiveness being coaches or advisers in the contest that is why they really prepare their students through trainings, reviews, and practices for them to win the contest. According to them, they have to excel in the competition because it brings the name of the school and that MORMS is known to be one of the performing and competitive schools in the Division of Albay because of its wins for several years.

The glaring life skills demonstrated by the teacher-participants in the urban place are pedagogical skill, digital literacy, competitiveness, good communication, and adaptability or

flexibility. Similar to the participants from rural and coastal key informants, these have been their coping mechanisms to teach in the place, taking into consideration the demands and challenges in the profession.

#### *Teacher-Participants from Coastal Areas*

From a conscientious and in-depth analysis of rural teachers' narratives derived from participant observation and intensive interviews, the rural teachers' skills were: Pedagogical Skill, Adaptability or Flexibility, Interpersonal or Social Skill, Good Communication, Practicality, and Financial Literacy. Teachers in the coastal area are abreast with teaching strategies, theories, and principles in teaching to provide the best learning experiences to their students amid the many circumstances in the locale. From this pedagogy, they would like to develop students' critical thinking skills and problem-solving skills that they can use in their day-to-day activities.

Thus, Ma'am Rosalyn employs engaging activities and lets the students do role-plays and simulations during the advent of the pandemic called COVID-19. Moreover, Ma'am Editha activates her creativity in teaching by integrating the singing component in her lesson which encourages students to focus and learn from her discussion. This way, she brings fun and enjoyment to her students. Meanwhile, Sir Felipe and Ma'am Grace contextualize their lessons anchored to the capability and interest of their students. They make use of the locally available products as examples and provide materials that students can relate to. With this practice, teaching for them becomes meaningful and engaging and truly is a reflection that rural teachers are knowledgeable in terms of the application of pedagogy in teaching.

Moreover, they are considered to be adaptable and flexible because they have demonstrated that they can adapt to changing circumstances and environments and take on board new ideas and concepts. They have personal confidence to respond positively to change and new ways of working and they are ready to rise to the challenge of dealing with the unfamiliar and show that they can cope with the new or unexpected circumstances. Ma'am Editha, who is soon-to-retire from work, showed

adaptability and flexibility in adapting to the new landscape of education by exploring the Google Suite for their meetings even if she thinks it is hard to navigate it. Given her skill in interpersonal skill, it helped her reach her colleagues to teach her how to use it. Furthermore, Ma'am Annabelle and Sir Felipe who are non-resident teachers of the place, took time to observe the culture of the school and the community for them to know how they will respond to them positively, while Ma'am Grace, who is also a non-resident teacher, courageously faces her fear every time she travels to the island via Roro ship just to reach the place and carry out her mandated duties.

Also, they have demonstrated interpersonal skills through managing relationships, understanding the feelings of others, cooperating with others, showing a positive attitude and respect. Accordingly, it is reflected in the narratives of Ma'am Grace, Ma'am Rosalyn, Ma'am Editha, and Ma'am Annabelle that they remain humble, friendly, and approachable to the members of the community, students, and parents so that they can build rapport with them and gain support from each other towards the realization of the school's hopes and dreams. They also extend help and socialize through joining in small talks and asking few questions just to get by and hold on to the conversation.

In addition, they demonstrate understanding instructions, acquiring new skills, making requests, asking questions, and relaying information with ease, which is a manifestation that teachers in the coastal area are good communicators. Like, Ma'am Rosalyn, she deals with her students and other people who she would bump into by being friendly and approachable. Ma'am Annabelle makes sure to be careful in her speech when talking to someone and avoid joining in back fights because she is afraid of losing the respect of the people to her. Thus, she just wants to be neutral in treating every member of the community or even every faction in the school to avoid conflict.

All of them are also financially literate as they have the ability to understand and effectively use various financial skills, including personal financial management, budgeting, and investing for them to survive in the locality. It is coupled with practical skills where coastal

teachers display a high regard for reality rather than the theories or principles. Most of them spend money that is within their expected budget and they live a life that is in accordance with their income as a teacher. Sir Felipe, Ma'am Annabelle, and Grace opted to rent a boarding house on the island rather than buying a house because it is what their money can provide for them so that they could save some and spend for their family and loved ones.

Finally, like teachers in rural and urban areas, teachers in the coastal area are digitally literate. This is because they have the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information, requiring both cognitive and technical skills. Based on the narratives of the teachers in the given geographical contexts, it is observed that the key informants shared and demonstrated similar life skills such as Digital Literacy, Practicality, Adaptability or Flexibility, Pedagogical Skill, and Interpersonal Relationship or Social Skill as coping mechanisms as they adjust to the realities and circumstances they face in the place where they teach so that they can fulfill their duties and responsibilities as teachers.

On the other hand, urban teachers differ life skills from that of rural and coastal teachers. It was noticed that rural teachers are "competitive" than rural and coastal teachers because urban schools particularly big schools have higher allocation of Maintenance and Other Operating Expenses (MOOE) compared to medium and small schools, thus they really can fully operationalize. One factor that is also considered is that they have access to transportation and market which is why they can easily look for more opportunities for the school, teachers, and students; and big schools, like MORMS, mostly win in the competition because they have active students and participation in division, regional and national contests or conferences. In addition, their immediate access to commodities, markets, and wants, actually leads them to become financially challenged because they tend to spend their money even if it is not needed, and also, they spend their money for their family needs, particularly in the educational needs of their children.

Generally, the teacher-participants from the coastal areas have manifested the skills such as adaptability or flexibility, interpersonal or social skills, and practicality, which served as the coping mechanism of the teachers in the coastal place so that they can deliver what are expected of them as teachers. It can be noted that the rural and coastal teachers exhibit the same significant life skills to be able to overcome the challenges and demands they face in their places of assignment.

## **Conclusion**

In particular, the common life skills demonstrated by teacher-participants in rural, urban, and coastal areas include adaptability or flexibility, good communication, interpersonal or social skills, pedagogical skills, and practicality. Teacher-participants from both rural and urban areas are digitally literate, while competitiveness is primarily observed among urban teachers. Conversely, financial literacy is prominently displayed among teacher-participants in rural and coastal areas, likely due to fewer distractions that might tempt them to spend. Urban teachers, on the other hand, tend to be more susceptible to spending because they are surrounded by commercial establishments and entertainment centers. Therefore, it can be concluded that the identified life skills are shaped and influenced by personal circumstances, professional development, and the specific contexts of their deployment.

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