

LIVED Experiences of Basic Education Volunteer Teachers in Far-Flung Areas of Agusan Del Sur: A PHENOMENOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

Recruiting volunteer teachers who are undertrained, unemployed, underpaid, often younger, and inexperienced has been the primary solution to the teacher shortage amid the surge in the learner population. Thus, this study employed a qualitative research design, specifically a phenomenological approach, to explore and understand the lived experiences of volunteer teachers in the country. It involved certified Basic Education volunteer teachers in far-flung schools with at least 3 years of teaching experience. These teachers are compensated by the parent-teacher association, the Monetary and other Operating Expenses budget, and the barangay, municipal, and provincial special education funds, purposively chosen and interviewed through Focus Group Discussion and In-Depth Interview. Thematic analysis revealed challenges such as encountering inconveniences and hazards along the way to school, limited resources, multitasking, multigrade teaching, and mixed emotions. To cope, teachers designed complex and flexible pedagogical approaches, demonstrated a passion for teaching, embodied empathy, and prepared themselves physically, emotionally, and mentally. The study highlighted the need for holistic development programs and sustainable support from school administrators for volunteer teachers. These findings can help the Schools Division of Agusan del Sur and the Department of Education to develop programs to maintain competent, motivated volunteer teachers and sustain their passion for teaching.

KEYWORDS: *Education, Basic Education, volunteer teachers, phenomenology, Philippines*

INTRODUCTION

Volunteer teachers are those individuals who have received their

teaching credentials but are not currently employed in the education sector (Mindzak, 2020). Volunteering is done to gain further experience to apply for future employment, develop contacts, or acquire letters of recommendation, even if it means working without compensation or monetary incentive (Nichol et al., 2023). These volunteer teachers face difficulties in their work environments and economic circumstances, yet remain steadfast in their roles (Corres et al., 2024).

The teacher shortage is a problem worldwide, but it is especially severe in poorer countries (Lamboy, 2023). The recruitment of teachers who are undertrained, underpaid, often younger, inexperienced, and not fully certified has been the most popular solution to the teacher shortage plaguing countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America (Pholphirul, 2023). The extent of unpaid work undertaken by volunteer teachers outside their standard employment duties, including overtime and extracurricular activities, has gained attention in recent years yet remains a challenge for teachers and education workers (Kariou et al., 2021; Rossouw & Frick, 2023).

The unpaid overtime worked by elementary and secondary school teachers in Canada (Breshears, 2019), New Zealand, and the United States of America has been highlighted (Boeskens & Nusche, 2021). On average, elementary teachers put in around 48.8 hours per week, whereas secondary teachers typically work 47.3 hours per week (Surrett, 2022). These highlight the dedication of Canadian teachers, but they also raise concerns about work-life balance (Perry & Calvert, 2020). In recent years, there has been a growing interest in using volunteer teachers to enhance education in resource-constrained areas. This practice has been observed in various countries, including rural China, where it is used to tackle the shortage of tenured teachers (Nachatar Singh, 2020). However, not all volunteer teachers received adequate training and support to combat burnout and enhance job performance; those who participated in well-structured professional development programs experienced a significant reduction in burnout and increased job satisfaction, as Timsina (2024) reported.

In the province of Agusan del Sur, in the CARAGA Region, Basic Education volunteer teachers play a vital role in supporting Basics by dedicating the same number of hours as regular teachers to fulfill their responsibilities. These dedicated volunteers perform duties similar to those of regular teachers within the school. However, they do not receive adequate training comparable to permanent teachers and are ineligible for the same

benefits. These volunteer teachers receive only a meager monthly allowance for their services; however, this compensation is insufficient to cover the rising costs of goods and living. In fact, many of these teachers resort to selling food, clothing, cosmetics, or other teaching-related services to earn extra income for their families. It is worth noting the challenging circumstances these dedicated teachers face, who go above and beyond to ensure quality education despite their limitations.

These study findings may provide relevant information regarding the experiences that have been lived by the Basic Education volunteer teachers who have been deployed in the far-flung districts of Agusan del Sur to the other non-paid teachers in the country and would serve as the basis to revisit the budget allocation in the barangay, municipal, and provincial local government units, and school heads to support their volunteer teachers and create programs necessary for professional and personal development.

Based on the readings and literature reviewed, a qualitative investigation focused on volunteer teachers' teaching practices in Ontario, Canada (Mindzack, 2020). Lastly, research is demonstrated through a case study of the Philippines, which examines the impacts of the Voluntary University Teacher activity on low-income households (Vidal de Haymes et al., 2019). The focus was also made on the factors that empowered volunteers to provide educational opportunities to children of the poor (Child, 2020). A descriptive, comprehensive qualitative study was conducted in this study to explore the lived experiences of Basic Education volunteer instructors in the municipality.

Theoretical Lens

The methodology used in this study was the Social Exchange Theory by Homans (1958) and the Theory of Experiential Learning as expounded by Kolb et al. (1999), with the intent of establishing the volunteering teachers' experience. However, there is greater emphasis on the Theory of Experiential Learning, which emphasizes the process of acquiring new knowledge from experience. This model includes learning support through activities, as well as independent learning and problem-solving, using Montessori Guideline procedures. In this context, Social Exchange Theory analyzes how people reciprocate specific behaviors or actions with an appropriate level of reciprocity and emphasizes the rewards and costs involved. This theory explains how social interactions and people's behavior depend on the incentives they perceive in those interactions. Volunteering is therefore considered public and positively

valued, as it offers the opportunity to share values, acquire knowledge, address emotional concerns, and find meaning and self-worth. As a result, volunteer teachers at Basic Education deemed their experience as helpful in enhancing their knowledge and skills in teaching and cognition. They emphasized the systematic nature of their professional learning by drawing on theoretical underpinnings when necessary, generating conjectures, and designing action plans in line with their roles and responsibilities as teachers.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research approach, specifically a phenomenological design, to comprehend aspects of social life. Qualitative research aims to understand how individuals construct meaning or make sense of their experiences (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). The selected inquiry type is phenomenology, which describes the essence of a phenomenon. Phenomenological research is a tool that allows people to share their experiences, views, and opinions, making the researcher a more important and closer figure to the study's subjects than the mere categorization of 'expert' (Neubauer et al., 2019). Thus, to address the identified gaps in the literature on volunteer teachers, the study aimed to investigate their experiences, satisfaction, coping strategies, and gains in one of the most peripheral areas.

Research Participants

This research was conducted with 17 volunteer teachers in Basic Education from remote areas in the Trento District, Division of Agusan del Sur. These teachers teach from kindergarten to senior high school, and they are compensated through the Parent Teacher Association (PTA), the Monetary and Other Operating Expense budget (MOOE), the Barangay Special Education Fund (BSEF), the Municipal Special Education Fund (MSEF), and the Provincial Special Education Fund (PSEF). The other criteria include having taught for at least 3 years. In detail, of the 17 volunteer teachers, 10 agreed to participate in IDI, while 7 agreed to participate in FGD.

Research Instrument

The study used a purposive sampling method to recruit participants most likely to provide rich data to address the study questions. Moreover, qualitative research requires fewer participants, thereby enhancing data analysis (Khoa et al., 2023). Also, according to Creswell (2018), participants in a qualitative study should be at least 12, given the theory that data saturation occurs at this sample

size, whereas Subedi (2021) suggests a range of 6 to 20 individuals. Thus, the total of 17 participants is sufficient for analyzing qualitative data and for the scale of this study to obtain comprehensive information about the lived experiences of volunteer teachers.

Data Analysis

This work employed Colaizzi's (1978) method of data collection, emphasizing a thick, first-person, lived-through account. These accounts were obtained from online, face-to-face, and written interviews, blogs, research diaries, and other forms of communication. In addition, mechanisms were used in the phenomenological data analysis, which requires the researcher to return to participants for confirmation. In particular, the direct transcripts and printouts of the face-to-face interviews and discussions were endeavored to become well acquainted; repeated readings and noting down all participants' responses were undertaken. Therefore, the purpose of this process was to get acquainted with the participants' life stories. Specifically, practitioner statements within a set of accounts that related to volunteer teaching were noted, and meanings derived therefrom were made. Afterward, linkages to participants' responses were established to group the gathered ideas into broader belief categories. Recurrent language was also identified, and all expressed opinions and beliefs were charted, with the phenomenon described in detail and all verbalized themes accounted for.

Ethical Statement

This study was approved by the University of Immaculate Conception Research Ethics Committee (UIC-REC). The researcher observed the dimensions of research ethics. Voluntary written informed consent was secured prior to the IDIs and FGDs, with the guaranteed right to withdraw without penalty. To maintain anonymity, alphanumeric codes replaced all personal identities and locations. All audio recordings, transcripts, and questionnaires were kept in a secure place for future reference.

RESULTS

Profile of the Participants

Table 1.1 provides details on 7 participants in the FGD and 10 in the IDI. Respondents were certified professional teachers in remote areas with formal three-year teaching experience, practicing in basic education or at kindergarten to senior high school levels. In return, the teachers are being funded

by the school's Parent Teacher Association (PTA), the Monetary and Other Operating Expenditure (MOOE) allocations, and the Barangay Special Education Fund (BSEF), Municipal Special Education Fund (MSEF), and Provincial Special Education Fund (PSEF). The IDI was conducted with 2 male and 8 female volunteer teachers, and the FGD included 2 males and 5 females. Four IDI participants were married with children, and six were single. In the FGD, one participant was married with children, and six were single. Regarding teaching experience, IDI participants had three to over ten years of experience, while FGD participants had four to over five years. For teaching assignments, six IDI participants were kindergarten and elementary teachers, and four were junior high school (JHS) teachers. In the FGD, one was an elementary teacher, and six were secondary teachers, including two at the senior high school (SHS) level. Among the IDI participants, three were floating/substitute teachers, seven were classroom advisers, and one was a multigrade teacher. In contrast, all seven FGD participants were floating/substitute teachers. Notably, in the IDI, all elementary advisers taught all subjects in their grade levels, while none of the FGD participants were classroom advisers. Additionally, all JHS teachers in both groups taught subjects outside their areas of expertise.

Table 1.1
Profile of the Participants

Code	Gender	Age	Civil Status	Teaching Experience	Grade Level	Assigned Subjects to Teach
IDI #1	Male	25	Single	3+	Grades 8 & 9	Science, Math, & MAPEH
IDI# 2	Female	24	Married	4+	Grades 7 & 10	MAPEH, AP, & EsP
IDI #3	Female	27	Married	6+	Grades 8 -10	AP, Filipino, Science, EsP, & English
IDI #4	Male	26	Single	4+	Grade 5	All Subjects
IDI #5	Female	31	Married	10+	Kinder – Grade 6	All Subjects
IDI #6	Female	27	Single	4+	Kinder – Grade 10	All Subjects

IDI #7	Female	33	Married	4+	Grades 7 and 8	English & Filipino
IDI #8	Female	26	Single	6+	Kinder – Grade 6	All Subjects
IDI #9	Female	26	Single	4+	Grade 3	All Subjects
IDI #10	Female	25	Single	3+	Grades 5 & 6	All Subjects
FGD #1	Female	25	Single	5+	Grades 8 – 10	EsP & MAPEH
FGD #2	Female	37	Married	4+	Grade 9 – 12	AP, Social Science, Society and Values, & 21 ST Century Skills
FGD #3	Male	26	Single	5+	Grades 7 – 10	MAPEH, Math, EsP, & AP
FGD #4	Male	28	Single	5+	Grades 7, 10, & 12	English, Contemporary Arts, PE, & MAPEH
FGD #5	Male	28	Single	5+	Grades 7-10	MAPEH, Araling Panlipunan, & English
FGD #6	Male	29	Single	4+	Grades 8-10	Mathematics, EsP, & AP
FGD #7	Male	25	Single	5+	Grades 7-10	MAPEH

Lived Experiences of Volunteer Teachers in Far-flung Areas

The themes were coded and extracted from the participants' transcribed lived experiences. As shown in Table 1.2, the researcher developed four essential

themes: being confronted with inconveniences and hazards on the way to school, experiencing limited resources, multitasking, and multigrade teaching, and feeling mixed emotions.

Table 1.2

Lived Experiences of Volunteer Teachers in Far-flung Areas

Essential Themes	Core Ideas
Confronted with Inconveniences and Hazards on the Way to School	Travelling rough and distant terrains Walking a distant school location Riding on a risky habal-habal motorcycle Irregular schedule of bus trips Encountering bad weather conditions during travels
Experiencing Limited Resources	Having limited allowance for daily sustenance No regular salary received Interacting with community stakeholders having meager income Poor learners Getting into a school with inadequate learning materials
Having Multitasking and Multigrade Teaching	Handling more than one grade level Being assigned to teach various subjects Doing other school works other than teaching. Dealing with learners and other stakeholders who need assistance
Feeling Mixed Emotions	Requiring courageous moves Being hesitant as a volunteer teacher Looking at security in life Facing huge challenges

Confronted with Inconveniences and Hazards on the Way to School. The theme centers on teachers navigating difficult, far-flung landscapes that pose risks to their safety. This theme encompasses traveling across rough, remote terrain, often involving walking to far-flung school sites, riding precarious habal-habal motorcycles, navigating irregular bus schedules, and contending with adverse weather. The participants often expressed the considerable challenge of reaching these far-flung schools to teach their enrolled learners. Their statements were as follows:

Despite accidents, I still ride a motorcycle.
The 7.5-kilometer distance from the highway
to school often requires walking when vehicles
are unavailable. – (FGD #2)

Tough and inaccessible roads forced me to walk,
enduring uphill treks in the rainy season,
with bumps, water, and mud
posing accident risks. – (IDI #10)

Experiencing Limited Resources. This highlights that volunteer teachers face situations while working in locations with scarce resources. They face obstacles such as relying on a small stipend for daily expenses, lacking a fixed salary, teaching students from underprivileged backgrounds to community members with limited means, and coping with insufficient educational materials at school. Nevertheless, they continue to fulfill their duties and obligations towards their students. Their responses are detailed below:

Our school experienced a shortage of teachers,
resulting in non-specialists teaching subjects
outside their majors. – (IDI #8)

I didn't have a salary, and my monthly allowance
was inconsistent and insufficient, which made me
borrow from others for my daily needs. – (IDI #3)

Having Multitasking and Multigrade Teaching. Volunteer teachers often face many responsibilities beyond typical or regular teaching duties. These volunteers take on the challenge of handling multiple grade levels, teaching diverse subjects, shouldering extra school-related tasks, and assisting learners and

various stakeholders within the school community. The details of their responses are outlined below:

I was responsible for teaching multiple subjects for multigrade classes, filling in when regular teachers were absent. – (IDI #5)

I took on coordinator roles, did office clerk tasks, and handled purchasing construction materials, a responsibility beyond the role of regular teachers. - (FGD #4)

Feeling Mixed Emotions. The theme examines the complex emotions that accompany the journey of teacher volunteerism in such environments. These volunteer teachers experience a range of emotions, including hesitation, hopes for security, aspirations for professional advancement, and fear of major challenges. Their responses are outlined below:

I developed an inferiority complex due to discrimination, lower status, and imposition of strict rules and penalties towards absences; learners' behavior is also exhausting. – (IDI #3)

Despite the lower compensation and lack of recognition, I volunteered because it is a prerequisite for future qualifications in RQA. – (FGD #5)

Coping Mechanisms of Volunteer Teachers in Far-flung Areas

Table 2

Coping Mechanisms of Volunteer Teachers in Far-flung Areas

Essential Themes	Core Ideas
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Designing Complex And Flexible Pedagogical Approaches	Contextualizing teaching for underserved learners Being careful about what and how to teach Having positive classroom management and communication strategy Utilizing available learning materials appropriately Connecting lessons with the learners
Demonstrating Passion for Teaching	Ongoing commitment to the teaching profession Demonstrating full dedication to deprived learners so they can learn Fulfilling experience in serving far-flung areas as a volunteer Being persistent to help academically deprived learners Giving extra time and effort to teach
Embodying Empathy	Being supportive to the needs of the learners Touching the lives of poor learners Being compassionate in dealing with the learner's incompetencies Taking a portion of allowances for poor learners Motivating and collaborating with learners, parents, and other stakeholders as well
Being physically, emotionally, and mentally prepared	Accepting being a volunteer teacher as an opportunity to learn as an educator Looking for a volunteer teacher is more than a mere job; it is a vocation. Taking a lot of courage and perseverance to embrace responsibilities Executing initiatives in developing self professionally and personally Demonstrating resiliency in adapting to the situation Being extra careful in traveling rough terrains or hitchhiking Placing all trust and faith in God the Most High

Table 2 illustrates the four essential themes identified for coping

mechanisms: developing complex and flexible pedagogical techniques, exhibiting a passion for teaching, embodying empathy, and being physically, emotionally, and psychologically prepared.

Designing Complex and Flexible Pedagogical Approaches. Themes include essential concepts such as evaluating teaching for marginalized communities and students, being cautious about what and how to prepare, employing positive classroom management and communication approaches, using accessible educational resources thoughtfully, and offering courses that are relevant to learners.

I split my eight subjects as children struggle with continuous teaching. I integrated subjects like English and Filipino, focusing on two at a time through thematic teaching. – (IDI #2)

To address classroom behavior and excessive noise, I provided engaging activities and worksheets to redirect their attention and foster a focused learning environment. – (IDI #8)

Demonstrating Passion for Teaching. Passion for teaching showcases the volunteer teachers' unwavering dedication and commitment to their profession, especially those who remain deeply passionate despite facing difficulties. This theme includes several key aspects: an ongoing commitment to the teaching profession, full dedication to helping deprived learners learn, a fulfilling experience serving far-flung areas as a volunteer, tenacity in helping academically deprived learners, and extra time and effort in teaching. Here are their detailed responses:

I shared my meals with my poor learners. Most don't have proper meals and eat rice once a week or a month. They seldom eat with rice, and they always boil bananas. – (IDI3)

Instead of resting early, I tutored them for reading during the evening, with parental consent.

My husband assisted in safely transporting them home since it's already dark. – (IDI10)

Embodying Empathy. This subject demonstrates a strong commitment to recognizing and addressing learners' particular needs and problems in underprivileged communities. It emphasizes ideas such as supporting learners' needs, making a positive difference in the lives of economically disadvantaged learners, demonstrating compassion when addressing learners' difficulties, contributing a portion of allowances to help needy learners, and promoting motivation and collaboration among learners, parents, and other stakeholders. Below are the detailed responses from the participants:

I integrated values into my science classes to improve their attitude and conduct in school. – (IDI #2)

I bridged communication gaps between schools and parents through home visits. The area lacked network coverage, so I could not communicate through chat, text, or call. – (IDI #6)

Being Physically, Emotionally, and Mentally Prepared. It encapsulates volunteer teachers' essential qualities that encompass the holistic preparation required for effective volunteer teaching, such as accepting being a volunteer teacher as an opportunity to learn as an educator, looking at volunteer teaching as more than a mere job, a vocation, taking a lot of courage and perseverance in embracing responsibilities; executing initiatives in developing self professionally and personally; demonstrating resilience in adapting the situation; being extra careful in traveling rough terrains or hitchhiking; placing all trust, and, faith in God the Most High. Below are their detailed responses:

I went to school using my bike...hitchhiking for free rides, and riding a bus to lessen transportation expenses. – (IDI #4)

I assisted teachers with school forms...I tutored/served as a driver at weekends...engaged in small-scale selling for income, and cultivated vegetables as a food source. – (IDI #3)

Insights Shared to the Academe and Community

Table 3

Insights of Volunteer Teachers in Far-flung Areas Shared to the Academe and Community

Essential Themes	Core Ideas
Holistic Development Program for Volunteer Teachers	Providing in-service training on varied instructional approaches and teaching skills Enhancing the professional and personal qualities of volunteer teachers Attending available training and developments onsite or online
Sustainable Support from School Administrators for Volunteer Teachers	Delivering free or affordable training for volunteer teachers Improving school resources and facilities Making learning materials readily available Organizing activities to improve collaboration with stakeholders and the community Developing volunteer teachers to become catalysts of change
Proactive Volunteer Teachers	Having a positive outlook on challenges Practicing optimism and creativity Being a value-laden volunteer teachers Looking forward to the academic success of the learners Becoming a skilled teacher despite inadequacies Embracing accountability to learners Making challenges as a source of motivation

Table 3 illustrates Essential themes from the volunteer teachers’ perceptions, including the Holistic development program for volunteer teachers. The essence of the theme lies in the centrality of an integrated, comprehensive approach to developing educators who volunteer. Sustained support from the school headteacher for the volunteer teacher.

Holistic Development Program for Volunteer Teachers. This theme highlights the importance of a well-rounded, comprehensive approach to fostering educators' growth in volunteer roles. The key concepts include providing in-service training on various instructional strategies and teaching skills, enhancing volunteer teachers' professional and personal qualities, and encouraging active participation in onsite or online training and developmental opportunities. Their responses are shown below:

I facilitated, served as a working group committee, and participated in monthly SLAC sessions with all the regular teachers to enhance my teaching skills and classroom management. – (IDI #1)

Regular teachers guided me on how to interact with learners and select teaching materials and strategies. They also taught me how to construct TOS and create tests. – (IDI #9)

Sustainable Support from School Administrators for Volunteer Teachers. It emphasizes the crucial role of educational leaders in ensuring the effectiveness and well-being of volunteer teachers. This theme delves into core ideas, including providing free or affordable training for volunteer teachers, enhancing school resources and facilities, ensuring the availability of learning materials, organizing activities to strengthen collaboration with stakeholders and the community, and fostering the development of volunteer teachers into catalysts of positive change. Their responses are shown below:

I received an honorarium from the school's MOOE/GPTA/ barangay/ municipal/ provincial special education funds. The amount ranged from Php 500.00 – 15,000.00. – (FGD #2)

The school approved my budget request, provided me with school supplies, awarded me a certificate of volunteerism experience for RQA, and provided me with free fare. – (FGD #1)

Proactive Volunteer Teachers. The theme illustrates the accommodative qualities and techniques that underlie the productivity of volunteer teachers. More specifically, the underlying idea incorporates the following aspects: generating a positive attitude toward challenges, optimistic and creative vision, value as a volunteer teacher, focus on academic achievement, skills acquisition despite constraints, responsibility for learners, and challenge as a motivator.

Volunteering is teaching learners and contributing to their journey. Witnessing their progress motivates me to continue despite challenges. –
(FGD #3)

Love your profession. Without it, challenges may lead to quitting. Being a volunteer teacher is crucial for learners to learn in far-flung areas. –
(IDI #7)

DISCUSSION

The researcher coded and extracted themes from participants' transcribed lived experiences, focusing on the descriptions, reasons, and challenges of their volunteer teaching in a far-flung area. There are four essential themes: being confronted with inconveniences and hazards on the way to school, experiencing limited resources, engaging in multitasking and multigrade teaching, and feeling mixed emotions.

Confronted with Inconvenience and Hazards on the Way to School. This theme focuses on the barriers and challenges volunteer teachers face when traveling to school, especially in remote regions. The results support the findings of the study by Lariosa et al. (2022) that volunteer teachers in far-flung places must use inconvenient modes of transportation, such as animals like horses or carabao, and cross steep bridges, mountains, or dangerous rivers. In addition, the findings of the study support the study of Clarin (2023) that these teachers know very well about safe and unsafe travel between outlying schools, where obstacles are made worse by severe weather conditions like the rainy season, when trekking is difficult due to sticky mud and having to deal with canals and rice paddies. Furthermore, teachers who volunteer in far-flung areas commonly face health and safety risks (Leon et al., 2023).

Experiencing Limited Resources. This theme's prevalence concerns the lack of resources for volunteer teachers in far-flung regions, where they often rely on outdated assessment materials, study ineffective curricula, and experience minimal community contribution, resulting in poor educational quality and limited learning opportunities for students, thus necessitating increased resource availability and community involvement to improve teachers' working conditions. The findings of this study align with those of Glewwe et al. (2021), who found that insufficient pedagogical resources negatively impact learners' performance, while adequate resources foster success. Moreover, Saysi and Batuctoc (2023) noted that the lack of resources in far-flung areas leads to low macro-skills, prompting some teachers to devise strategic plans to bridge these gaps. In addition, several studies highlight the impact of volunteer teachers in far-flung areas on the education system and learners, given the limited resources available. Inadequate facilities and support mechanisms hinder instruction (Khan & Islam, 2021) and affect the professional growth of volunteer teachers (Liu & Chen, 2019).

Having Multitasking and Multigrade Teaching. In this Multigrade teaching theme, teachers teach learners of multiple grades simultaneously and, in turn, must multitask, including teaching, preparing lessons, and maintaining discipline. While on the surface this may appear effective, it limits access to good education in outlying areas. These findings align with Onde's (2023) finding that working from home while multitasking is more burdensome and somewhat threatens the success of volunteer educators working away from home, particularly in multigrade teaching. This underscores the need for flexibility in combined-grade classrooms as well, as Smith and Johnson (2019) note that volunteer teachers often struggle to engage with two grade levels simultaneously and to handle multiple tasks at once. They are constantly experimenting with new pedagogical methods and materials to build interesting yet appropriate lesson plans for children of various ages.

Feeling Mixed Emotions. Volunteer teachers in far-flung places similarly confront multi-grade teaching, multiple tasks, and resource scarcity. It is a one-of-a-kind circumstance that may elicit a wide range of emotions, including elation and satisfaction, as underprivileged learners gain a sense of pride and a sense of freshness, while volunteer educators must work long hours and perform other duties. In addition, the educator may be emotionally burned out at work, constantly worrying about learners' grades and well-being. This finding supports the work of Lariosa et al. (2022), who found that almost 8 in 10 educators

consider the emotional aspects of education to hinder the mental well-being of underprivileged learners. The results underscore the importance of these voluntary educators in transforming lives and fostering holistic growth among learners. This finding confirms the study by Leon et al. (2023), which found that no other profession offers such deep satisfaction from seeing positive changes. Similarly, these problems are experienced by teachers who teach far away from home, thus compromising their job performance and well-being. Similarly, as observed by Zhang (2020) in remote regions, volunteer teachers are caught up in these quandaries, which contribute to their ineffectiveness at work and well-being. Recognizing and managing emotions is critical for supporting your staff and, in turn, leading to higher performance and well-being.

The researcher derived fundamental themes from narratives of people who reported difficulties in their volunteer teaching work in remote areas. Four predominant coping strategies emerged: developing intricate and adaptive pedagogical practices, showing enthusiasm for teaching, perceiving with empathy, and ensuring their physical and emotional well-being as preparation.

Designing Complex and Flexible Pedagogical Approaches. This Theme focuses on how volunteer teachers adapt to the unique learning requirements that arise in isolated areas. The results align with Wang's (2022) research, which suggested that volunteer educators instructing students in remote locations with limited educational resources should adopt a learner-centered approach. Furthermore, the fact that volunteer teachers are being questioned raises serious concerns because of the location, which is already difficult for education. Such educators face diverse classrooms with limited resources; therefore, they must be ready to adapt their teaching methods to what works for each child (Kumar, 2019). In addition, technology integration can be used to enhance the distance between volunteers and learners by giving them resources that best suit their abilities (Murugesan, 2020). Likewise, technology utilization enhances learning processes as a learning aid (Humbhi et al., 2022).

Demonstrating Passion for Teaching. A secondary theme important to educators in far-flung areas with unique challenges is the passion for teaching. With strong zeal, teachers can embrace challenges, think outside the box, and remain positive about their mission to enlighten learners. The results confirm the study by Hipolito (2022), which found that volunteer teachers could find peace amid tribulations through the love shown by learners or community members. Also, this finding supports the study by Lee and Kim (2021), which found that

volunteer teachers integrate new teaching methods with technology, thereby improving learners' learning processes when these resources are unavailable elsewhere. In addition, individual ethics and dedication are key factors for success in teaching at far-flung schools, according to Smith (2019). Similarly, it highlighted passion and commitment to addressing teachers' challenges in far-flung schools/communities (Cabiles, 2022). Volunteer teachers serve as change agents who address disparities stemming from limited opportunities and resources in far-flung areas. Their unwavering passion for teaching often enables them to overcome challenges and create a meaningful impact on their learners' lives (Doe, 2021).

Embodying Empathy. Empathy stood out among other focal points in this research on the challenges encountered by volunteer teachers in far-flung areas. They realized they needed to understand and connect with their learners; hence, they had to adapt to a teaching context that differed from their usual one. This means that all findings point to empathy being key to overcoming obstacles and creating nurturing educational environments. The finding confirms Smith's (2019) study, which found that empathy plays a major role in the success of rural school volunteering programs. This finding aligns with the statement of Doe (2021), who posited that some teachers cope by using sympathy as a defense mechanism during such times. Moreover, the qualitative analysis conducted by Williams (2020) on volunteer teachers' experiences highlighted this aspect, noting its importance to them, and Lee (2019) also noted its significance among teachers in far-flung locations.

Being Physically, Emotionally, and Mentally Prepared. The resilience of volunteer teachers in far-flung areas with limited resources and daily challenges necessitates comprehensive preparation—physically, emotionally, and mentally. Clarin (2023) emphasizes that this involves maintaining physical health to handle tough living conditions and long work hours. In a similar vein, Dudzik and Dzieciol-Pedich (2023) underscore the significance of mental readiness, suggesting that instructors with psychological resilience are better able to withstand the stress and isolation that come with working in remote areas. Additionally, Li and Wang (2024) highlight the role technology plays in improving readiness, demonstrating that access to technological resources greatly enhances both instructional effectiveness and mental health. Regarding volunteers teaching in remote locations, it is essential to provide them with proper technical support and training. Furthermore, Liu and Chen's (2021) research indicates that volunteer teachers' well-being and readiness improve with

social support from colleagues, administrators, and local communities, underscoring the need to create supportive conditions for their success.

The researcher found essential themes that guide community and academic efforts to improve volunteer teacher support and educational quality. Among the new themes are a holistic *development program for volunteer teachers, sustainable support from school administrators, and proactive volunteer teachers.*

Holistic Development Program for Volunteer Teachers. This theme highlights that the program targets volunteer teachers from far-flung areas, providing them with training and the necessary materials. It equips these volunteer teachers with the skills, knowledge, and means to teach their classes effectively and deliver quality education. The finding supports the study by Kim et al. (2019), which highlights the need to enhance educators' skills to meet the needs of learners in far-flung areas that comprise non-traditional trainee populations. This research study recognizes electronic literacy, cooperative discovery, critical thinking and analysis, interaction and interpersonal skills, civic duty, and global recognition as five essential areas for effective teaching in today's instructional context. Likewise, four major building blocks have been identified as necessary for teacher specialist development: Web content Knowledge (CK), Pedagogical Understanding (PK), Supportive Atmosphere (SE), and Collective Teacher Efficacy (CTE). Integrating these vital components into any Professional Development program will certainly lead to alternative change among volunteer teachers as they navigate their intellectual professionalism and situational demands (Sims et al., 2023).

Sustainable Support from School Administrators for Volunteer Teachers. This provision encompasses professional development, resources, emotional well-being, recognition, and financial aid. By perceiving this support-as-service approach as helping those helping themselves, administrators may thus improve effectiveness and welfare among such teachers while also benefiting learners and communities. This study's findings agree with those by Smith et al. (2019) in that an all-inclusive educational support system should emphasize prolonged help given through school authorities to volunteer teachers situated in far-flung areas, which aims at fostering their professional growth by training them more frequently during sessions/workshops/seminars where teaching competencies can be sharpened. Additionally, the interest and drive of volunteer instructors from far-flung areas are fueled by gratitude and recommendations, leading to

long-lasting initiatives in hard-to-reach areas. A multi-faceted approach to offering sustainable support for volunteer teachers from school administrators, especially in far-flung places, ought to be identified by all stakeholders (Patel et al., 2021).

Proactive Volunteer Teachers. This theme emphasizes the importance of positivity among volunteers who support far-flung learners by providing essential aids and materials, highlighting teachers' significant role in fostering creativity, curiosity, and dedication, ensuring quality education, and fostering learning advancements despite challenging circumstances. The study's findings align with Garcia et al.'s (2020) findings that teachers should focus much more on learners' academic progress while continually improving their training techniques under resource scarcity. However, while being proactive with management might pose challenges when engaging learners or addressing their diverse needs, this eventually benefits teachers' well-being, as they feel satisfied with what they do, knowing that it will improve learners' learning outcomes (Hepburn & Beamish, 2019).

CONCLUSION

Volunteering is a complex activity that improves lives, connects people with their communities, and provides a long-term perspective on matters. Besides being a platform for individual growth, it also contributes to professional enhancement by making one realize his or her place in society. What I can say about studying volunteer teachers who serve in far-flung areas is that this experience has been very eye-opening and fulfilling, mainly because it taught me how important preparedness is. It goes beyond job descriptions; volunteerism requires bravery, the courage to never give up even when things seem impossible, and a deep sense of knowing what you are called to do. Therefore, trust should not be left out when discussing faith while dealing with problems encountered during volunteering, especially in remote areas.

The narratives shared by volunteer teachers in far-flung areas illuminate the beauty and challenges of their journey, fostering a deeper appreciation for their growth and learning process. Their experiences, marked by highs and lows, awaken a renewed passion and dedication to education in far-flung settings. These stories serve as a source of inspiration for them to fulfill their duties with excellence, benefiting the school, community, and stakeholders alike. Additionally, adopting coping mechanisms such as flexible pedagogical

approaches, empathy, and readiness in various aspects contributes to their success in teaching.

Volunteer teachers are pivotal in improving educational outcomes in far-flung schools, underscoring the need for support from the Department of Education. Providing adequate facilities, training, infrastructure, and transportation ensures professional development and safety, while access to modern teaching materials and technology enriches the learning experience. Collaboration with local governments and community organizations further enhances resources and support for volunteer teachers, ultimately improving educational access and outcomes for learners from low-income families in far-flung areas.

The interviews needed to be conducted among volunteer teachers at far-off public schools, which were difficult to reach due to poor road conditions. These far-flung schools allowed me to share their day-to-day difficulties, such as using habal-habal motorcycles on mud roads, which become very unsafe during the wet season, placing lives at risk, particularly those of susceptible youngsters.

Greater than anything else, what sticks to me from this experience is the fact that no matter the number of years that pass without getting paid or identified for their work, and no matter exactly how hopeless they may seem in light of particular situations, these people still discover it within themselves to keep going, revealing to us all simply how solid hope can be when coupled with resolution. Such acts of charity illuminate my path as a regular public school teacher working under comparable conditions, where I sometimes feel discouraged when things do not go as planned. This research may encourage volunteer speakers and other educators to undertake modifications within marginalized societies far from cities.

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