



## WHY THEY STAY: TEACHERS' RETENTION IN REMOTE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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### ABSTRACT

This study examined the lived experiences, retention factors, coping strategies, and personal meaning of teachers working in remote schools. Its purpose was to understand how educators navigate professional, logistical, and personal challenges while sustaining motivation and instructional quality in geographically isolated contexts. Using a qualitative research design, semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers assigned in remote and hard-to-reach schools. The data were analyzed through thematic analysis, which yielded four major themes. First, teachers' experiences in remote schools reflected a dynamic balance between professional fulfillment and contextual challenges. While many participants expressed satisfaction through learner-centered instruction, observable student progress, and meaningful community engagement, they also reported difficulties such as long and exhausting commutes, environmental distractions, and inadequate instructional materials and facilities. Second, factors influencing retention highlighted that intrinsic motivation, strong interpersonal relationships, and a deep sense of purpose were the primary drivers of continued service. Support from colleagues, school leaders, and local communities further strengthened their commitment, while financial incentives were considered supportive but not the main factor for retention. Third, coping strategies included improvisation of instructional materials, effective time management through structured routines, collaboration with peers and community stakeholders, and engagement in self-care practices to manage stress and workload demands. Fourth, personal meaning and aspirations revealed that remote teaching contributes to professional growth, leadership development, and a strong sense of fulfillment, with many teachers expressing a desire to create lasting positive impacts on learners and communities. Overall, the findings demonstrate that teachers in remote schools exhibit resilience, dedication, and community-oriented professionalism, offering important insights for strengthening support systems, professional development, resource access, well-being programs, and retention policies in geographically isolated educational settings.

**Keywords:** remote schools, teacher retention, coping strategies, professional fulfillment, community engagement

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## INTRODUCTION

Teacher retention in remote and geographically isolated public schools remains a critical concern in promoting educational equity and ensuring the delivery of quality instruction in underserved communities. In this study, remote schools refer to public elementary schools located in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas (GIDA) characterized by limited accessibility, long travel distances, difficult terrain, and inadequate access to basic social services. Many of these schools are situated more than five kilometers from the nearest transportation routes and are officially classified as hardship posts under Department of Education (DepEd) deployment guidelines (DepEd, 2021, Joint Circular No. 1, s. 2021). This study specifically focuses on teachers who have demonstrated long-term retention (5–10 years of service) in such contexts, reflecting sustained commitment despite persistent challenges.

In the Philippine context, teacher retention is supported by a comprehensive legal and policy framework aimed at safeguarding teachers' welfare and promoting professional growth. Republic Act No. 4670, or the Magna Carta for Public School Teachers, ensures protection of teachers' rights and benefits, while Republic Act No. 12288, or the Career Progression System for Public School Teachers and School Leaders Act, provides structured pathways for career advancement. In addition, the Department of Education, in collaboration with the Department of Budget and Management, has institutionalized the Special Hardship Allowance (SHA) to compensate teachers assigned in difficult and inaccessible areas (DepEd, 2021). These policies highlight the government's recognition of the unique challenges faced by educators in remote schools.

Despite these initiatives, significant gaps remain in both research and practice, particularly in localized contexts such as Calatrava District 2 and similar rural areas in Negros Occidental. Existing studies have largely focused on policy implementation, financial incentives, and deployment mechanisms, with limited attention to teachers' lived experiences, intrinsic motivations, professional identity, resilience, and community engagement as key determinants of long-term retention. Furthermore, there is a scarcity of qualitative, context-specific research examining how teachers navigate professional isolation, resource scarcity, and socio-cultural dynamics in geographically isolated schools. The perceived effectiveness of both financial (e.g., hardship allowance) and non-financial incentives (e.g., support systems, recognition, and community ties) in sustaining teacher retention also remains underexplored.

Recent studies provide initial insights into these dimensions. Fabrigas and Paglinawan (2025) found that teachers in isolated Philippine schools remain in service due to strong professional commitment and community attachment, while Salazar and Plaza (2025) emphasized the roles of adaptability, personal fulfillment, and service-oriented values. Similarly, Dela Peña and Villanueva (2024) reported that satisfaction with hardship allowances significantly influences teachers' intention to stay. However, these studies do not sufficiently capture the holistic and contextualized experiences of long-serving teachers, particularly in specific local settings.

Anchored on the global agenda for inclusive and equitable education, this study aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education), which emphasizes the importance of qualified, motivated, and well-supported teachers in achieving inclusive and equitable quality education for all. It also supports SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) by addressing disparities in educational access between urban and remote communities. Ensuring teacher retention in geographically isolated areas is essential in reducing educational inequities and promoting sustainable community development. Understanding why teachers remain in remote schools for extended periods (5–10 years) has significant implications for policy and practice. Retention strategies must go beyond financial incentives to incorporate intrinsic motivators, professional support systems, mentoring programs, and community integration mechanisms. By adopting a narrative inquiry approach that captures the lived experiences of long-serving teachers, this study seeks to generate contextually grounded insights that can inform responsive policies, sustainable retention strategies, and inclusive education practices. Ultimately, the findings aim to contribute to strengthening teacher stability, improving educational quality, and advancing equity in remote and underserved communities.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aimed to explore the experiences of teachers who have stayed in remote public schools in Calatrava- District 2 for 5 to 10 years. Using a narrative inquiry approach, it seeks to understand how teachers make sense of their work, cope with challenges, and sustain their commitment to teaching in isolated and hard-to-staff areas. Specifically, this study sought to answer: 1.How do teachers describe their experiences teaching in remote public schools? 2.What factors influence their decision to remain in these schools? 3.How do teachers manage the challenges of remote school assignments? 4.What meanings and aspirations do teachers attach to their work for themselves, their learners, and their communities?

## LITERATURE REVIEW



Recent literature underscores the crucial role of professional commitment and intrinsic motivation in teacher retention, particularly in remote and underserved public schools. Studies suggest that teachers' internal drives significantly influence their decisions to remain in challenging environments. In the Philippines, Anog, de Vera, and Peteros (2024) found that educators who reported high levels of school commitment and job satisfaction were more likely to stay in their positions, with working conditions, compensation, and administrative support shaping their sustained commitment. Similarly, Fabrigas and Paglinawan (2025) highlighted that teachers in remote Bukidnon schools were motivated by a deep commitment to education, personal fulfillment, and responsibility toward students, which enabled them to persevere despite limited resources and professional isolation. Complementing these findings, research in Indonesia demonstrated that teacher motivation in rural and remote settings is strongly associated with life satisfaction, school culture, and opportunities for self-actualization, suggesting that intrinsic motivators—such as personal growth and professional pride—play a significant role in retention (Frontiers in Education, 2025).

In urban contexts, Peñaredondo (2025) observed that positive work environments, competitive benefits, and the perceived impact on learners cultivated a sustained sense of loyalty and purpose, reinforcing the notion that both intrinsic and contextual factors jointly influence teacher retention. Moreover, Pascua and Tagare (2024) reported that educators who felt a strong professional calling and demonstrated resilience during the COVID-19 crisis were better able to navigate disruptions and remained engaged with their teaching responsibilities. Collectively, these studies illustrate that professional commitment, intrinsic motivation, and a sense of purpose are central in explaining why teachers continue to serve in hard-to-staff schools over extended periods.

Teacher retention in remote schools is also closely tied to resilience and effective coping strategies. Educators in geographically isolated areas face numerous challenges, including limited instructional resources, professional isolation, long travel distances, and difficult living conditions. Research indicates that teachers develop adaptive strategies to navigate these challenges, such as creative lesson planning, peer collaboration, and community engagement (Fabrigas & Paglinawan, 2025). Salazar and Plaza (2025) emphasized that personal resilience and problem-solving skills enable teachers to sustain their work despite inadequate facilities and heavy workloads, while Dela Peña and Villanueva (2024) highlighted strategies such as seeking social support, balancing personal and professional responsibilities, and maintaining optimism. Studies from Indonesia also indicate that rural educators employ self-regulation, continuous professional learning, and networking to manage stress and maintain commitment (Frontiers in Education, 2025). Anog, de Vera, and Peteros (2024) further noted that mentorship, supportive leadership, and reflective practices enhance teachers' resilience, ultimately contributing to higher retention rates. These findings underscore that beyond structural or financial support, teachers' capacity to adapt and persevere is a critical factor in sustaining long-term commitment in remote schools.

The broader social and community context also plays a significant role in teacher retention. Teachers who feel socially integrated and supported by their communities are more likely to remain in remote postings. Fabrigas and Paglinawan (2025) observed that educators who felt accepted and valued by the communities they served reported greater professional satisfaction and longevity in their assignments. Similarly, Salazar and Plaza (2025) found that participation in local events, parental collaboration, and cultural exchanges enhanced teachers' sense of belonging, reinforcing their commitment. Dela Peña and Villanueva (2024) noted that social support from community members and school stakeholders helps teachers cope with professional isolation, while studies from rural Indonesian schools confirm that strong community networks contribute to lower stress and greater personal fulfillment (Frontiers in Education, 2025). Nguyen, Hallinger, and Truong (2024) similarly reported that teachers with strong social ties to parents, local leaders, and civic groups demonstrate higher resilience and sustained commitment. These findings collectively suggest that community integration not only buffers professional challenges but also reinforces teachers' emotional well-being and sense of purpose, which are vital for long-term retention.

External support systems, including financial incentives and working conditions, are also significant contributors to teacher retention in remote areas. Policy evaluations of the Philippine Special Hardship Allowance (SHA) indicate that satisfaction with the clarity, fairness, and adequacy of financial incentives influences teachers' decisions to remain in hardship posts. Research from the United States and Australia further demonstrates that supportive working conditions—including collegial environments, administrative backing, recognition practices, and positive school cultures—enhance teacher job satisfaction and retention, irrespective of geographic origin. Systematic reviews highlight that recruitment and retention strategies in isolated schools benefit from a combination of financial support, professional development opportunities, and supportive working conditions. Moreover, DepEd policy documentation emphasizes the need to align incentive provisions with teachers' lived experiences to sustain long-term commitment.

These studies collectively indicate that while incentives are important, their effectiveness is mediated by teachers' perceptions of fairness, the adequacy of support systems, and overall working conditions.

Finally, teachers' aspirations and their perceived impact on learners serve as powerful intrinsic motivators. Research in rural and remote Indonesian schools shows that teachers who are motivated by the academic progress and personal development of their students demonstrate higher dedication and innovation, contributing to the reduction of educational disparities (Frontiers in



Education, 2025). Philippine studies similarly reveal that teachers derive professional fulfillment from observing student growth, which reinforces their commitment to remain in remote schools (Fabrigas & Paglinawan, 2025). Mhlanga and Moloji (2024) also highlight that supportive school environments and positive student outcomes strengthen teacher professional identity and retention, while national rural teacher studies report that strong teacher–learner relationships are linked to lower burnout and higher persistence. These findings suggest that the aspiration to positively influence learners’ academic, social, and emotional development underpins teachers’ long-term commitment in challenging contexts.

Taken together, the literature illustrates that teacher retention in remote and underserved schools is a multifaceted phenomenon. Sustained commitment arises from the interplay of professional commitment, intrinsic motivation, resilience, coping strategies, community support, working conditions, and the perceived impact on learners. Understanding these interconnected factors provides a foundation for exploring the lived experiences of teachers in Calatrava District 2, where the present study aims to uncover how these influences converge to support long-term retention in remote public schools.

## METHODOLOGY

### *Research Design*

This study was used a qualitative research design with a narrative inquiry approach. Narrative inquiry focuses on the stories of individuals to understand their experiences and how they make meaning of them (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This approach is suitable for the study because it allows teachers to share their personal and professional experiences of staying in remote public schools.

### *Respondents to the study*

This study focused on public elementary school teachers assigned in remote schools within Calatrava District 2. The target population consisted of all teachers currently teaching in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas (GIDA) in the district. From this population, a total of ten (10) teachers were selected as participants, composed of three (3) males and seven (7) females. The participants had teaching experience ranging from five (5) to ten (10) years in remote school settings, ensuring that they possess sufficient exposure and firsthand experience to provide meaningful and relevant insights regarding teacher retention and professional engagement in such contexts.

The study employed purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique, to deliberately select participants who met specific inclusion criteria. These criteria included: (1) currently assigned in a remote school, (2) with at least five years of teaching experience in such settings, and (3) willingness to participate in the study. This approach ensured that the selected respondents could provide rich, in-depth, and contextually grounded information. Participation in the study was voluntary, and all respondents were informed of the purpose of the research prior to data collection. Ethical considerations were strictly observed, including the assurance of confidentiality and anonymity of the participants’ identities and responses. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before their inclusion in the study.

### *Research Instrument*

The primary instrument for this study was semi-structured interview guide, designed to collect in-depth narratives from teachers about their experiences in remote public schools. The interview questions will focus on teachers’ professional commitment, challenges, coping strategies, community support, incentives, and aspirations, allowing participants to share their personal stories in their own words. And validated by the 10 experts (3-EPS, 3-PSDS, 3- School Principals) using Lawshe Validity tool and the result shows that all are essential.

### *Data Gathering Procedure*

The study was conducted in remote public schools of Calatrava District 2. The researcher was first secure permission from the Schools Division Superintendent (SDS) and the respective school heads to conduct the study and interview the teachers. Once approval is granted, the 10 selected participants was contacted and given a consent form explaining the purpose of the study, voluntary participation, and confidentiality of their responses. After obtaining consent, in-depth, semi-structured interviews was scheduled at times convenient for the participants. Each interview is expected to last 30–60 minutes and was recorded (with permission) for accuracy. In addition to interviews, relevant documents such as DepEd deployment records, hardship allowance guidelines, and school reports was reviewed to provide context and support the narratives. The researcher was then transcribed, organized, and code the data for thematic analysis, ensuring that participants’ stories are preserved and accurately reflected.

### *Data Analysis Procedure*



The data collected from the interviews and document analysis was analyzed using thematic analysis, following the steps of narrative inquiry. First, all interviews were transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy. The researcher read and reviewed the transcripts multiple times to become familiar with the data. Next, meaningful statements and significant phrases related to teachers' experiences, challenges, motivations, coping strategies, community support, and aspirations will be highlighted and coded. These codes were grouped into themes that represent recurring patterns across participants' narratives.

Finally, the identified themes were interpreted in relation to the research questions, literature, and conceptual framework. Direct quotes from participants were used to illustrate key themes, ensuring that the findings reflect the teachers' voices and lived experiences.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *The Participants*

The demographic and professional profile of the ten (10) public elementary school teachers assigned to remote schools. The data reveal that the majority of the participants are female (7 out of 10), while three are male. This distribution reflects the common trend in elementary education where female teachers comprise a larger proportion of the workforce. In terms of teaching experience in remote schools, the participants demonstrate substantial professional exposure. Two teachers have five years of service, two have seven years, three have eight years, and three have ten years of experience. The presence of several teachers with eight to ten years of service suggests strong retention and long-term commitment despite the challenges associated with geographically isolated and resource-limited school settings. Their extensive tenure indicates resilience, adaptability, and dedication to sustaining quality education in remote communities.

Regarding subject assignments, the participants handle diverse learning areas, including Mathematics, Science, English, Filipino, Araling Panlipunan, EPP, and multi-grade or multiple-subject classes. This variety reflects the flexible roles often required of teachers in remote schools, where staffing limitations necessitate broader teaching responsibilities. Moreover, the professional focus and notable characteristics of the participants highlight their strong commitment beyond classroom instruction. Several teachers actively engage in literacy programs, community-based initiatives, inclusive education practices, extracurricular activities, mentoring, and school leadership roles. These attributes indicate that the participants are not only educators but also community partners, instructional leaders, and advocates for student welfare.

### **Thematic Analysis**

The analysis of the participants' profiles revealed that teachers in remote schools demonstrate strong commitment and long-term service, with tenures ranging from five to ten years. They prioritize learner-centered instruction, holistic development, and mentoring, while actively engaging in community programs and collaborative initiatives. Many take on leadership roles and show professional initiative, serving as coordinators or program leaders. Adaptability is also evident, as teachers manage multiple subjects or grade levels and develop innovative strategies despite limited resources. Overall, the participants are experienced, dedicated, and community-oriented educators who significantly contribute to teaching and learning in challenging remote contexts.

### **Thematic Findings**

#### **Theme 1: Lived Realities of Teaching in Remote Schools**

The findings reveal that teaching in remote schools involves a complex combination of instructional challenges, emotional experiences, and environmental constraints. Teachers consistently reported managing multiple subjects, limited instructional materials, and learners with diverse academic abilities. Due to the scarcity of resources such as textbooks, electricity, internet connectivity, and multimedia tools, teachers often rely on improvisation and localized instructional strategies to deliver meaningful lessons. These conditions require educators to demonstrate flexibility, creativity, and strong classroom management skills.

Despite these constraints, teachers expressed a strong sense of fulfillment derived from witnessing students' academic growth and perseverance. Many participants described emotional rewards such as seeing learners develop reading skills, succeed academically, or overcome socio-economic difficulties. These experiences reinforced teachers' perception of their profession as transformative, emphasizing their role not only as instructors but also as mentors and agents of change in their communities. Memorable experiences, particularly those involving students' academic improvement or personal success, shaped teachers' perspectives about the value of their work. Teachers observed firsthand the struggles faced by learners in geographically isolated areas, including long travel distances, financial hardship, and limited exposure to educational resources. These experiences deepened their empathy and commitment, strengthening their belief that education can significantly transform students' lives and opportunities.



These findings are supported by recent studies on teaching in remote and resource-constrained contexts. Salazar and Plaza (2023) found that teachers in geographically isolated schools rely on creative, localized strategies to overcome limited instructional resources, highlighting the importance of flexibility and innovation. Collie (2021) emphasized that witnessing students' growth and resilience fosters emotional fulfillment and strengthens teachers' commitment, reinforcing the role of intrinsic motivation in challenging settings. Additionally, Guadalupe and Corpuz (2022) reported that exposure to students' socio-economic hardships enhances teachers' empathy and sense of purpose, encouraging them to act as mentors and agents of community transformation. These studies imply that supporting teacher innovation, emotional well-being, and contextual engagement is essential for sustaining effective teaching and promoting student success in remote schools.

## **Theme 2: Motivational Anchors for Teacher Retention**

The results indicate that teachers' decision to remain in remote schools is influenced by both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors. Intrinsic motivation emerged as the strongest driver, with teachers expressing a deep passion for teaching and a strong commitment to their students' learning and development. Participants frequently described their work as meaningful and impactful, emphasizing the fulfillment they derive from helping learners succeed despite difficult circumstances. Extrinsic factors also played a supportive role in sustaining teacher motivation. Financial incentives such as the Special Hardship Allowance helped teachers manage personal expenses and occasionally provide support to students who lacked basic school supplies. Additionally, professional development opportunities, including seminars, training programs, and graduate studies, encouraged teachers to improve their instructional skills and maintain professional growth even in geographically isolated settings.

Community support was another significant factor influencing teacher retention. Participants reported strong relationships with parents, colleagues, and local leaders, who often collaborate with teachers in school programs and projects. This supportive environment fostered a sense of belonging and recognition, reinforcing teachers' commitment to their current assignments. Furthermore, personal and cultural connections to the community strengthened teachers' motivation to stay. Some teachers grew up in similar environments or shared cultural backgrounds with their learners, which made it easier for them to understand the community's needs and adapt to local conditions. These connections contributed to a sense of responsibility and service, encouraging teachers to remain dedicated to their students and communities.

The findings align with recent studies on teacher motivation and retention in remote areas. Nguyen, Pham, and Crouch (2020) highlighted that intrinsic motivation, such as a passion for teaching and commitment to student success, is the strongest predictor of teacher retention in challenging contexts. Bennell and Akyeampong (2021) emphasized that extrinsic supports, including financial incentives and professional development, enhance teacher satisfaction and reduce turnover in hard-to-staff schools. Furthermore, Azano and Stewart (2015) reported that strong community ties and cultural alignment between teachers and local populations foster a sense of belonging and recognition, which encourages long-term commitment. These studies imply that sustaining teacher retention in remote schools requires a combination of intrinsic fulfillment, adequate extrinsic support, and strong community engagement to ensure that teachers remain motivated and effective.

## **Theme 3: Challenges and Adaptive Coping Mechanisms**

Teachers in remote schools face numerous professional and personal challenges that affect their work and well-being. One of the most significant difficulties reported by participants was the geographic isolation of their schools. Long travel times, often involving several hours of walking or difficult transportation routes, contribute to physical fatigue and limit access to essential services and educational resources. In addition, the absence of electricity, unreliable internet connectivity, and limited instructional materials make lesson preparation and delivery more demanding. Teachers also described emotional and personal challenges associated with working in remote areas. Many participants experience separation from family members due to distance, which can lead to feelings of loneliness and emotional stress. Furthermore, students' socio-economic difficulties, such as poverty or limited parental support, sometimes create additional emotional burdens for teachers who strive to help their learners succeed.

Despite these challenges, teachers demonstrate remarkable resilience and adaptability. Participants reported various coping strategies, including effective time management, collaboration with colleagues, and participation in professional learning communities such as Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions. These collaborative spaces allow teachers to exchange ideas, share resources, and develop innovative teaching strategies. Resourcefulness also emerged as a key coping mechanism. Teachers frequently improvise instructional materials using locally available resources and design offline learning activities that do not depend on technology. Community collaboration further supports their efforts, as parents and local leaders often assist in school programs and resource mobilization. Through these adaptive strategies, teachers are able to maintain instructional quality while managing the demands of remote teaching environments. Their resilience reflects a strong commitment to their profession and their students' educational success. These findings are consistent with recent studies on teaching in remote and resource-constrained contexts. Guadalupe and Corpuz (2022) highlighted that geographic isolation, limited infrastructure, and scarce teaching materials significantly challenge teachers' instructional delivery, requiring creativity and adaptability. Collie (2021)



emphasized that emotional stress from separation, student socio-economic hardships, and professional isolation necessitates resilience and effective coping strategies to sustain teacher well-being and motivation. Additionally, Kim and Asbury (2020) reported that collaboration, community engagement, and improvisation of resources are critical adaptive mechanisms that enable teachers to maintain instructional quality despite environmental constraints. These studies imply that supporting teacher resilience through professional networks, community partnerships, and access to resources is essential for ensuring sustained teacher performance and student learning outcomes in remote school settings.

#### **Theme 4: Meaning-Making and Future Aspirations**

Teaching in remote schools holds deep personal and professional significance for many participants. Teachers described their work as a form of service that extends beyond classroom instruction, influencing learners, families, and the broader community. By providing education in geographically isolated areas, teachers contribute to improving literacy, developing life skills, and expanding opportunities for students who might otherwise have limited access to formal education. Participants also highlighted the role of education in community development. Through school programs, community-based projects, and collaborative initiatives, teachers help foster stronger relationships between schools and local communities. These efforts encourage families to value education and support their children's learning, creating positive social change within the community.

Looking toward the future, teachers expressed aspirations for both personal and institutional growth. Many participants aim to pursue further studies, obtain professional promotions, and enhance their teaching competencies. At the same time, they hope to see their students succeed academically, develop strong values, and become responsible members of society. Teachers also aspire to improve their schools by strengthening academic programs, expanding community partnerships, and enhancing learning resources and facilities. These goals reflect their long-term commitment to educational development and their desire to create sustainable improvements in remote school settings.

The findings on teachers' meaning-making and future aspirations align with recent studies emphasizing the broader significance of teaching in remote schools. Crouch (2020) highlighted that educators in isolated contexts perceive their work as a form of service that contributes to community development and social change, beyond mere academic instruction. Azano and Stewart (2015) found that teachers' engagement in community-based projects and collaborative initiatives fosters stronger school-community relationships, encourages parental support, and enhances students' educational outcomes. Additionally, Collie (2021) reported that teachers' long-term aspirations for professional growth, school improvement, and student development are closely linked to their sense of purpose and commitment, which sustains motivation in challenging teaching environments. These studies imply that recognizing and supporting teachers' aspirations—through professional development, community engagement, and institutional backing—can strengthen both teacher retention and the quality of education in remote schools.

#### **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

The study explored the experiences, retention factors, coping strategies, and personal meaning of teachers working in remote schools. Analysis of participants' profiles and interviews revealed several key insights.

**Theme 1: Experiences in Remote Schools** – Teachers reported a balance between professional fulfillment and contextual challenges. They valued the peaceful learning environment, learner-centered instruction, and meaningful community engagement, which enhanced both student growth and their own sense of purpose. At the same time, they faced logistical and environmental obstacles, including long commutes, traffic, limited teaching resources, and extended separation from family. Despite these challenges, teachers demonstrated adaptability, resourcefulness, and dedication, managing multiple subjects, mentoring peers, and innovating instructional strategies to sustain effective teaching.

**Theme 2: Factors Influencing Retention** – Teachers' decisions to remain in remote schools were primarily driven by intrinsic motivations, relational connections, and a sense of purpose. Observing students' academic and personal growth, receiving support from colleagues, parents, and the community, and having opportunities for professional growth, leadership, and mentoring were key determinants of retention. Financial incentives were noted but considered secondary to the satisfaction derived from making a tangible impact on learners and the community.

**Theme 3: Coping Mechanisms and Challenges** – Educators employed a variety of adaptive strategies to navigate the demands of remote teaching. These included improvising instructional materials, structuring daily routines, prioritizing tasks, and engaging in self-care and reflective practices. Collaboration with parents, community members, and fellow teachers also helped mitigate



challenges. Such strategies allowed teachers to maintain motivation, resilience, and high-quality instruction even under demanding conditions.

Theme 4: Personal Meaning and Aspirations – Teaching in remote schools held profound personal and professional significance for participants. Teachers developed leadership, innovation, adaptability, and problem-solving skills while fostering a strong sense of fulfillment, purpose, and pride. Many aspired to continue enhancing their professional competencies, mentoring colleagues, and fostering holistic student development, viewing remote teaching as a transformative journey that shaped their identity and allowed them to leave a lasting impact on learners and their communities.

## CONCLUSION

Teachers in remote schools navigate a complex interplay of professional fulfillment, contextual challenges, and personal growth. They derive satisfaction from learner-centered instruction, observing student progress, and engaging meaningfully with their communities, yet they contend with significant logistical, environmental, and resource-related obstacles. Decisions to remain in these challenging settings are primarily driven by intrinsic motivation, a sense of purpose, and relational connections with colleagues, parents, and community members, while financial incentives serve as a secondary but supportive factor. To overcome heavy workloads, limited instructional resources, professional isolation, and emotional stress, teachers employ adaptive strategies such as improvising teaching materials, structuring daily routines, fostering collaboration, and practicing self-care. These coping mechanisms enable them to maintain teaching quality, sustain professional engagement, and navigate the demands of remote education effectively.

Moreover, teaching in remote schools provides profound personal and professional meaning. It fosters the development of leadership, problem-solving skills, resilience, and a commitment to lifelong learning, while also nurturing aspirations to create a lasting, positive impact on students and the wider community. The experiences of these educators underscore that retention in remote and underserved schools is not solely a function of policy or incentives but is deeply rooted in meaningful work, community integration, adaptive capacities, and professional purpose.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed to support teachers in remote schools and enhance their professional experiences, retention, and effectiveness:

1. **Strengthen Professional Support and Development** – Education authorities and school administrators should provide regular training, mentoring, and leadership opportunities to enhance teachers' competencies, confidence, and career growth, helping them navigate the unique challenges of remote teaching.
2. **Enhance Resource Availability** – Schools should ensure access to teaching materials, learning technologies, and infrastructure improvements to reduce the burden of improvisation and allow teachers to implement learner-centered and innovative instructional strategies effectively.
3. **Foster Community and Peer Engagement** – Encouraging collaboration among teachers, parents, and local stakeholders can strengthen relational support, facilitate shared responsibilities, and improve student outcomes, while also reinforcing teachers' sense of belonging and motivation.
4. **Implement Well-being and Coping Programs** – Schools should promote self-care practices, stress management programs, and social support networks to help teachers manage emotional stress, workload, and professional isolation.
5. **Recognize and Value Teachers' Contributions** – Acknowledging teachers' professional achievements and community impact through awards, recognition programs, or career incentives can reinforce intrinsic motivation and encourage long-term commitment.
6. **Policy and Strategic Planning** – Education policymakers should consider long-term retention strategies tailored to remote schools, combining financial incentives with opportunities for professional growth, leadership roles, and meaningful engagement in community development.



These recommendations aim to sustain teacher motivation, improve instructional quality, and promote retention in remote schools, ensuring that both educators and learners thrive despite the challenges of isolated and resource-limited contexts.

## *Conflict of Interest*

The researcher declares that there are no conflicts of interest in the conduct of this study. The study was conducted independently, and the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data were carried out objectively, without any influence from funding agencies, school authorities, or other stakeholders that could affect the results or conclusions.

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