Research Article

Navigating challenges, triumphs, and transformations of the college of teacher education graduates assigned in the geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the lived experiences of teachers in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas (GIDAs) in the Philippines, specifically in the municipalities of Barbaza and Tibiao in the province of Antique. Using a qualitative narrative approach, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with teachers working in GIDAs. It focuses on the difficulties they encounter and the resilience they exhibit in delivering quality education under demanding conditions. Thematic analysis revealed four key themes: (1) Pre-employment Barriers, (2) Persistent Career Concerns, (3) Resilience and Determination, and (4) Strengthened Commitment to Service. These themes illustrate not only the hardships these educators endure but also their personal and professional growth in the face of adversity. Despite various limitations, teachers demonstrated unwavering dedication to their profession, showcasing adaptability and perseverance. However, the lack of systemic support amplifies their struggles, potentially affecting the quality of education provided in these areas. To address these concerns, the study recommends the development of targeted teacher support programs, improved infrastructure and resources, and enhanced professional development opportunities. These initiatives can help create a more sustainable and inclusive educational environment in GIDAs, ultimately improving learning outcomes for students in these underserved communities.

Keywords: Geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas, challenges, triumphs, transformations, graduates

1. Introduction

Education serves as a cornerstone of societal development, fostering knowledge, skills, and values that contribute to both individual growth and community advancement. Educators play a pivotal role in promoting educational equity, particularly in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas (GIDAs), where they must navigate numerous challenges, including limited access to resources, inadequate infrastructure, and minimal institutional support [1]. These areas, often marked by inaccessibility, socio-economic hardships, and the absence of basic services, demand exceptional commitment from teachers who strive to meet the diverse and evolving needs of their students [2]. Despite these challenges, teachers remain central to efforts aimed at ensuring quality education, which is crucial for fostering rural development and

reducing educational disparities.

Prior research underscores these difficulties. For example, teachers in GIDAs often struggle with the lack of funding and equipment, forcing many to purchase classroom materials with their own money [3]. Geographic isolation and inadequate transportation infrastructure further exacerbate stress, as educators frequently endure long and risky commutes over rough terrain, rivers, or mountains. Beyond logistical barriers, teachers experience emotional strain from heavy workloads, procedural constraints, and vicarious trauma—taking on the psychological burdens their students carry from home environments [4].

Professional challenges are compounded by limited access to training opportunities. Many GIDA teachers report that existing professional development programs are general in scope and not suited to the unique demands of remote teaching, leaving them feeling unprepared for multi-grade classrooms and diverse learner needs [3]. Similarly, professional isolation is a recurring issue, with teachers and principals having few peers or mentors to consult. While attachment to the community can foster resilience, the lack of structured support networks and mentorship exacerbates the feeling of "being on their own" [5]. These findings suggest that systemic interventions, such as comprehensive professional development and targeted TESDA certifications, could strengthen teacher effectiveness and align their competencies with national standards [6].

While significant efforts have been made to improve education in GIDAs, teachers continue to face professional and personal challenges that impact their effectiveness and well-being. Issues such as professional isolation, resource scarcity, and socio-cultural integration difficulties create complex work environments that require adaptability and resilience. However, the voices and lived experiences of teachers in these contexts remain largely underrepresented in academic and policy discussions. Existing research has primarily focused on systemic challenges, such as poor infrastructure and resource deficits [7-10], rather than the adaptive strategies, triumphs, and transformative journeys of educators themselves.

In the Philippines, the College of Teacher Education (CTE) serves as the primary academic institution responsible for preparing pre-service teachers for licensure and professional practice. CTE graduates, particularly those from local universities, often return to their home provinces to serve in GIDAs. However, there is limited research examining how these graduates experience and respond to the unique demands of teaching in remote, underserved areas.

This study seeks to address these gaps by exploring the lived experiences of CTE graduates from the University of Antique Tario-Lim Memorial Campus (UA-TLMC) who are assigned to GIDAs, specifically in Mayabay Elementary School in Brgy. Mayabay, Barbaza, Antique, and Flores Integrated School in Barangay Flores, Culasi, Antique. By examining their challenges, successes, and transformations, this research aims to contribute valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders committed to fostering quality education in underserved communities.

Specifically, the study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What challenges do CTE graduates experience before employment and throughout their careers in GIDAs?

2. What factors contribute to the success of CTE graduates assigned in GIDAs?

3. What are the implications of the lived experiences of CTE graduates in GIDAs?

2. Methods

2.1. Research design

This study utilized a qualitative narrative approach, which is well-suited for capturing the rich and personal experiences of teachers in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas (GIDAs). This method allows participants to share their stories in their own words, providing deeper insights into their challenges, triumphs, and transformations. By focusing on individual narratives, the study highlights the lived realities of these educators, revealing patterns and themes that amplify their voices as teachers in GIDAs. This, in turn, contributes to a more nuanced understanding of their professional and personal journeys.

2.2. Participants

The study participants comprised 10 multi-grade elementary teachers from Mayabay Elementary School and Flores Integrated School, selected through purposive sampling. The selection criteria focused on College of Teacher Education (CTE) graduates who had served as regular-permanent multi-grade teachers in GIDAs for at least three years, ensuring the depth and relevance of their insights. Participant recruitment was facilitated by the school heads of the identified study sites, with additional assistance from the Alumni Office of the University of Antique Tario-Lim Memorial Campus in tracing eligible teachers. Pseudonyms were assigned to participants to ensure confidentiality and protect their identities. They were informed of the study's purpose and provided written informed consent, ensuring ethical compliance.

The "Teaching Position" listed in the demographic profile refers to the official rank classification used by the Department of Education (DepEd) in the Philippines. Teacher I generally denotes entry-level teaching positions, Teacher II represents mid-level appointments, and Teacher III signifies a higher-level rank often associated with longer service and greater responsibilities. These ranks determine salary grades, promotion pathways, and levels of accountability.

Table 1. Summary of the Participants' Demographic Profile

Participant	Age	Teaching Position	Years of Teaching Experience in Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Area (GIDA) Schools
Teacher Leo	28	Teacher I	4
Teacher Mark	29	Teacher I	4
Krystian	32	Teacher I	4
Teacher Victor	35	Teacher I	5
Teacher Julia	41	Teacher III	5
Teacher Ana	42	Teacher II	7
Teacher Cherry	42	Teacher II	7
Teacher Mary	43	Teacher II	8
Teacher Sam	44	Teacher I	8
Teacher Kris	45	Teacher I	9

2.3. Ethical consideration

As part of the ethical considerations in research involving human participants, the researchers obtained informed consent from CTE graduates serving as teachers in GIDAs. Interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) were scheduled at a time convenient for each participant, taking into account their class schedules at their respective schools. Before each interview session and FGD, the researchers thoroughly explained the

study's objectives. Participants also provided consent for audio recording, ensuring accurate documentation of their narratives. All participants signed an informed consent form, acknowledging their voluntary participation and agreement with the study's objectives.

2.4. Instrument

The research instrument is composed of two parts. The first section collects personal information about CTE graduates serving as teachers in GIDAs, while the second consists of open-ended questions designed to capture their experiences and perspectives. To encourage participants to fully express their thoughts, they were given the freedom to elaborate on their responses. Furthermore, researchers asked follow-up questions to clarify and deepen the discussion.

2.5. Data collection process

Preliminary interpretation of the narratives was conducted concurrently with data collection to assess data saturation. After the 10th participant was interviewed, no new themes or significant statements emerged, signaling that data saturation had been reached. As a result, the sample size was deemed adequate, in line with the inductive thematic saturation model proposed by Yang et al. [11]. Each participant took part in two interview sessions: a one-on-one interview and a focus group discussion (FGD), each lasting between 30 and 45 minutes. The first interview aimed to build rapport and gather basic personal information using a semi-structured format. The second session focused on exploring the participants' lived experiences as teachers in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas (GIDAs) through open-ended questions. Before each session, the study's objectives were explained, and consent to audio-record the interviews was obtained. The sessions concluded with expressions of gratitude and the distribution of tokens to the participants.

2.6. Data analysis

The data analysis followed a systematic approach using thematic analysis. Initially, the transcribed interviews were read multiple times to become familiar with the data, allowing for an understanding of the participants' experiences. A predetermined coding scheme was applied to the transcripts, and the data were systematically coded to identify key features related to the challenges, triumphs, and transformations of the participants. These initial codes were then organized into broader themes, highlighting recurring patterns across the narratives. The researchers reviewed and refined these themes by revisiting the coded data, ensuring internal consistency and relevance to the research questions. The themes were defined and named to reflect the core ideas emerging from the data. The final step involved writing the findings, where each theme was illustrated with direct quotes from participants, offering an in-depth portrayal of their lived experiences. Thematic analysis provided a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of how CTE graduates navigate the complexities of teaching in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas. By focusing on the stories of resilience and growth, the analysis revealed the profound impact of their teaching experiences on both their personal and professional lives.

2.7. Trustworthiness of data

The trustworthiness of data is a foundational element in qualitative research, encompassing four key dimensions: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Each of these aspects was carefully addressed to ensure an accurate representation of the narratives of CTE graduates teaching in GIDAs. To establish credibility, which refers to the confidence in the truthfulness of the data and its interpretation, member checking was employed. This process allowed participants the opportunity to review and validate the analysis outputs. To enhance transferability, or the applicability of findings to other contexts, interview transcripts were included in the full manuscript. This practice created a paper trail that enables other researchers to draw insights and apply the conclusions of this study in different settings. To ensure

confirmability**,** or the objectivity of the data, and dependability**,** or the stability of the data over time and across conditions, independent expert auditing was conducted. This comprehensive approach to trustworthiness strengthens the validity and reliability of the research findings.

2.8. Limitations of the study

This study has several potential limitations. One limitation is transferability, which refers to the extent to which the qualitative findings can be applied to other contexts, and this may be influenced by the sample size. However, the in-depth interviews provided rich and detailed insights into the participants' experiences and processes. Another limitation involves the possibility of data loss or distortion during transcription and management, a common issue when handling qualitative data. To address this, meticulous and careful transcription procedures were implemented to maintain the depth and accuracy of the participants' narratives.

3. Results and discussions

The findings highlighted the interconnected challenges and motivations that shape the experiences of College of Teacher Education graduates in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas (GIDAs). The key themes that were identified include 1) Pre-Employment Barriers, (2) Persistent Career Concerns, (3) Resilience and Determination, and (4) Strengthened Commitment to Service. Participants encountered significant obstacles before securing employment, such as **Pre-Employment Barriers**, and continued to face **Persistent Career Concerns** related to job stability, professional growth, and working conditions. However, their strong sense of purpose fueled their **Resilience and Determination**, ultimately leading to a **Strengthened Commitment to Service**, demonstrating their unwavering dedication to educating students in underserved communities despite the difficulties they faced.

The thematic analysis of the transcripts illuminated substantial challenges encountered by College of Teacher Education (CTE) graduates during the pre-employment phase as they prepared for professional engagement in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas (GIDAs). These barriers were categorized under the major theme of **Pre-Employment Barriers (Table 2)** which included four sub-themes: (1) Limited Job Opportunities and Competition, (2) Licensure Examination Pressure, (3) Financial Constraints, and (4) Lack of Pre-Service Training for GIDAs. Each of these barriers significantly influenced the graduates' pathways to employment in GIDAs, with implications for their professional development and ability to perform effectively in these challenging contexts.

Table 2. Pre-Employment Barriers of CTE Graduates

Theme	Subtheme	Description	Transcripts
Pre-employment Barriers	Limited Job Opportunities and Competition	CTE graduates struggle to secure teaching positions due to the limited vacancies, particularly in their local communities.	"I had to apply to several schools, but most positions were already taken." "There were no plantilla positions available."
	Licensure Examination Pressure	The need to pass the LET adds stress, because it means delaying employment for those who do not pass on their first attempt.	"I felt pressure to pass the LET, as failing would mean a waste of time, effort, and money."
	Financial Constraints	Graduates face financial difficulties in processing job applications, traveling for interviews, and meeting employment requirements.	"I had to borrow money just to cover my travel expenses and documents for my application."
	Lack of Pre-Service Training for GIDAs	Teacher training programs do not always prepare graduates for the realities of teaching in underdeveloped areas.	"We were trained for regular classroom settings, but teaching in a multi-grade class was never given much emphasis."

Limited Job Opportunities and Competition

One of the primary barriers identified was the limited availability of teaching positions in GIDAs, coupled with high competition for these roles. Participants noted that many graduates struggled to find teaching positions in their desired areas due to a lack of available opportunities. This scarcity was compounded by the influx of graduates each year, creating intense competition for the few available posts in GIDAs. Similar findings have been reported in previous studies, where competition for teaching positions in remote areas often limits access to employment [12] Furthermore, some participants highlighted that securing a job in a GIDA often required relocation, adding another layer of complexity to the already challenging process of entering the teaching profession [13]

Licensure Examination Pressure

The pressure to pass the Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET) was another significant barrier. Participants expressed stress and anxiety surrounding the exam, which they viewed as a critical hurdle to obtaining employment. In line with previous research, the pressure associated with licensure exams is a well-documented challenge for new graduates, particularly in the Philippines, where passing the LET is a requirement for securing a teaching job [14]. Some participants also mentioned the financial burden of taking the exam multiple times, especially for those from financially constrained backgrounds, which further delayed their entry into the profession [15].

Financial Constraints

Financial constraints were another pervasive barrier mentioned by the participants. Many graduates indicated that they faced significant financial difficulties in securing the necessary resources for their job search and licensure exam. This theme resonates with existing literature, which underscores how financial hardship can limit access to opportunities for professional advancement and hinder career progression [16]. Participants highlighted the additional costs of relocating to GIDAs, further compounding their financial burdens. Financial difficulties not only delayed their entry into the teaching profession but also had long-term implications for their overall career satisfaction and stability.

Lack of Pre-Service Training for GIDAs

Lastly, the lack of pre-service training specifically tailored for teaching in GIDAs emerged as a critical barrier. Many participants felt that their pre-service education did not adequately prepare them for the unique challenges of teaching in remote and resource-limited environments. Bergman [17] pointed out that teacher training programs often fail to equip graduates with the skills needed for GIDAs, particularly in addressing the infrastructural and cultural challenges specific to these regions. With this, graduates who were placed in GIDAs often felt not well-prepared for the isolation, limited resources, and diverse learner populations they encountered, which impacted their confidence and effectiveness as educators.

Table 3. Enduring Career Concerns of CTE Graduates in GIDAs

Theme	Sub-Theme	Description	Transcripts
Enduring Career Concerns	Accessibility, Safety and Security Concerns	Teachers often feel unsafe navigating rivers, slippery terrain, and makeshift boats, especially during typhoons. Fear of accidents and limited emergency support affect teachers' mental well-being..	"Crossing the river feels like gambling with my safety. One strong wave, and I could lose my footing." "I find myself awake at night, worrying about the next day's commute, especially if the weather forecast predicts rain."
	Cultural Adaptation and Language Barriers	Teachers assigned to GIDAs have to make adjustments in their daily routines and communication, particularly due to	"I had to learn their dialect to effectively teach and communicate with my students. Also, I had to adjust to things that I was

Theme	Sub-Theme	Description	Transcripts
		language differences.	previously accustomed to doing at home."
	Insufficient Teaching Resources and Facilities	Schools in GIDAs often lack instructional materials, textbooks, and technological support specifically ICT equipment, requiring teachers to be resourceful.	"We have to be resourceful and creative to compensate for the lack of instructional materials." "Sometimes, we rely on donated supplies because the school budget is insufficient for both teaching materials and facility improvements."
	Multi-Grade Teaching and Heavy Workload	Teachers handle multiple grade levels in a single classroom, increasing their workload and instructional planning responsibilities.	"Teaching different grade levels at the same time is exhausting and overwhelming."
	Professional Isolation and Limited Mentorship	Limited access to training, professional development, and peer collaboration hinders teachers' career growth.	"Transportation and accessibility issues made it difficult for us to attend workshops and seminars." "There were times we couldn't make it to trainings or seminars because of bad weather in our community."
	Emotional and Psychological Strain	The demanding work conditions, coupled with the constant concern for the participants' families from afar, contribute to stress and burnout.	"There are times when the challenges feel overwhelming, and I consider giving up. In addition to my work, I also have the responsibility of taking care of my family."
	Low Compensation and Delayed Benefits	Teachers receive low salaries and experience delays in receiving their remunerations and allowances for remote area assignments.	"Due to accessibility issues, we usually experience delays in receiving our salaries and benefits." "I hope that teachers' salaries will increase to adequately support both my personal needs and those of my family."

Table 3. (*Continued*)

4. Enduring career concerns

The analysis of participants' narratives revealed a range of enduring career concerns experienced by College of Teacher Education (CTE) graduates assigned to geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas (GIDAs). These concerns, presented in **Table 3,** shaped by both environmental and institutional factors, significantly influenced their teaching experiences and overall well-being. The study identified seven key sub-themes: (1) Accessibility, Safety, and Security Concerns, (2) Cultural Adaptation and Language Barriers, (3) Insufficient Teaching Resources and Facilities, (4) Multi-Grade Teaching and Heavy Workload, (5) Professional Isolation and Limited Mentorship, (6) Emotional and Psychological Strain, and (7) Low Compensation and Delayed Benefits.

Accessibility, Safety, and Security Concerns

One of the primary challenges faced by teachers in GIDAs is the difficulty of accessing their assigned schools due to poor infrastructure, hazardous terrain, and unreliable transportation. Participants reported that reaching their schools often required crossing rivers, hiking long distances, or relying on infrequent public transport, which posed risks to their safety. Studies have shown that teachers in remote areas frequently encounter safety hazards such as natural disasters, crime, and conflict, which affect their sense of security and job satisfaction [18]. The lack of security measures in these areas further exacerbates their vulnerability, making it difficult for them to focus on their teaching responsibilities [19].

Cultural Adaptation and Language Barriers

Adjusting to new cultural environments and overcoming language barriers were significant concerns for teachers, particularly those assigned to indigenous or ethnolinguistically diverse communities. Some participants struggled with unfamiliar dialects, which hindered effective communication with students and community members. This finding aligns with previous research indicating that language barriers can affect instructional delivery and student engagement, especially in multicultural classrooms [20]. To cope, teachers employed various strategies such as learning the local dialect and collaborating with community members to bridge communication gaps. However, the absence of structured language training for teachers assigned to GIDAs remains a major challenge [21].

Insufficient Teaching Resources and Facilities

The lack of instructional materials, outdated textbooks, and inadequate classroom infrastructure were common issues reported by participants. Many relied on self-funded teaching aids or sought donations to supplement limited school resources. This shortage of materials negatively impacted student learning outcomes, reinforcing disparities between rural and urban education systems [8]. Prior studies have emphasized that insufficient teaching resources hinder effective curriculum implementation and reduce the quality of education in disadvantaged areas [9]. Addressing this issue requires targeted government interventions, including increased funding and resource allocation to underserved schools.

Multi-Grade Teaching and Heavy Workload

Teachers in GIDAs frequently handled multiple grade levels within a single classroom, significantly increasing their workload. Participants expressed difficulties in managing diverse student needs, preparing lesson plans for multiple curricula, and maintaining classroom discipline. Research suggests that multi-grade teaching, though common in rural settings, requires specialized training and adaptive strategies, which many teachers lack [22]. Moreover, the heavy workload, combined with administrative tasks, left little time for professional development, further limiting their career growth.

Professional Isolation and Limited Mentorship

Due to the isolated nature of their assignments, many teachers experienced professional isolation, with limited access to mentorship, training, and peer collaboration. Participants reported difficulties in seeking guidance or sharing best practices due to the absence of experienced mentors and professional development opportunities. This aligns with findings by Cruz and Javier [23], who noted that isolation negatively affects teacher motivation and instructional effectiveness. Strengthening mentorship programs and integrating remote learning opportunities for teachers in GIDAs could help mitigate this issue [24].

Emotional and Psychological Strain

The cumulative effect of these challenges resulted in emotional and psychological strain, with some teachers experiencing stress, anxiety, and burnout. The lack of social support, combined with the demanding nature of teaching in GIDAs, contributed to mental health concerns. Similar studies have highlighted the prevalence of emotional distress among teachers in remote areas, emphasizing the need for mental health programs and stress management initiatives [25]. Providing psychological support, peer counseling, and wellness programs could help teachers cope with the pressures of working in isolated settings.

Low Compensation and Delayed Benefits

Financial difficulties were a persistent concern among participants, as many reported low salaries and delays in receiving benefits. Some teachers struggled to cover personal and professional expenses,

particularly those who had to relocate for their assignments. Research indicates that inadequate compensation is a major factor contributing to teacher attrition in underserved communities, as educators seek better-paying opportunities elsewhere [26]. Delays in salary disbursement and limited financial incentives further discouraged retention, emphasizing the need for timely salary processing and improved compensation policies for teachers in GIDAs.

Table 4. Resilience and Determination of CTE Graduates in GIDAs

Theme	Sub-Theme	Description	Transcripts
Resilience and Determination	Growth Mindset	Teachers possess a growth mindset and embracing to adapt and become resourceful in handling challenges, fostering professional and personal growth.	"At first, it was difficult, but now I have learned to adjust and embrace the environment. " "I always believe in the power of positive mindset and be open to change."
	Intrinsic Motivation and Passion for Service	Despite hardships, teachers remain committed due to their passion for educating children in underserved communities.	"Seeing my students learn despite the limitations keeps me going." "My greatest reward as a teacher is seeing my students succeed in life. "
	Community Engagement and Support Networks	Teachers develop strong relationships with the local community, which provides social and emotional support.	"The parents, barangay officials, and community members are very supportive with school activities."
	Adaptability	The challenging environment of GIDAs helps CTE graduates develop resilience, flexibility, and adaptability in the face of adversity.	"At first, I felt overwhelmed, but now I've learned to find solutions on my own. It's made me stronger."

The theme of **Resilience and Determination,** shown in **Table 4** emerged as a dominant factor shaping the experiences of College of Teacher Education (CTE) graduates assigned to geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas (GIDAs). The analysis of participants' narratives revealed key sub-themes that highlight their capacity to overcome challenges and remain committed to their teaching roles. These sub-themes include (1) Growth Mindset, (2) Intrinsic Motivation and Passion for Service, (3) Community Engagement and Support Networks, and (4) Adaptability. Each of these factors contributed significantly to their ability to persist and thrive in challenging working conditions.

Growth Mindset

A prominent theme among participants was the presence of a growth mindset, which enabled them to approach challenges with a positive outlook and a belief in their ability to improve through effort and perseverance. Many participants reflected on how they viewed difficulties as opportunities for personal and professional growth rather than insurmountable obstacles. This mindset is consistent with research by Dweck [27], who argued that a growth mindset fosters resilience by encouraging individuals to embrace challenges and view setbacks as part of the learning process. For teachers in GIDAs, a growth mindset was particularly vital, as it allowed them to stay motivated despite the limited resources and challenging work environments they faced.

Intrinsic Motivation and Passion for Service

Another key factor in participants' resilience was intrinsic motivation, which is the deep sense of purpose and passion for their work. Teachers expressed that their desire to make a meaningful impact on the lives of their students and contribute to the community's development drove them to continue working in GIDAs despite the difficulties. According to Deci and Ryan [28], intrinsic motivation is characterized by doing something because it is inherently satisfying, rather than for external rewards. This finding aligns with

the literature on teacher motivation, which emphasizes that teachers who are intrinsically motivated are more likely to persevere in challenging educational settings [29]. For participants, the intrinsic reward of seeing their students succeed and knowing they were making a difference in their communities provided the emotional fuel to persist in their roles.

Community Engagement and Support Networks

The importance of *community engagement* and the support networks within the local community was another recurring theme in the participants' experiences. Many teachers noted that their relationships with community members, including parents, local leaders, and fellow educators, played a crucial role in helping them adapt and stay committed to their work. These networks not only provided emotional support but also facilitated practical solutions to logistical problems, such as transportation and resources. As noted by Hall and Hord [30], strong community engagement can enhance teacher retention by fostering a sense of belonging and collective responsibility for the success of students. The teachers in this study emphasized that their sense of community ownership, alongside support from local stakeholders, helped mitigate the challenges they encountered in remote areas.

Adaptability

Lastly, the participants' ability to demonstrate adaptability was essential to their resilience. Teachers consistently reported needing to adjust to changing circumstances, from unpredictable weather conditions that hindered school attendance to the constant need for improvisation due to the lack of instructional materials. This adaptability was not only necessary for overcoming daily obstacles but also contributed to the teachers' professional growth and sense of accomplishment. Studies by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy [31] have shown that teachers who are adaptable are better equipped to handle stress and maintain their commitment to the profession, particularly in challenging contexts. For the participants in this study, adaptability was key to maintaining effective teaching practices and fostering positive learning environments despite limited resources.

Table 5. Strengthened Commitment to Service of CTE Graduates in GIDAs

Theme	Sub-Theme	Description	Transcripts
Strengthened Commitment to Service	Creativity and Resourcefulness	The unique challenges in GIDAs push participants to become more creative and resourceful in delivering lessons, even with limited resources.	"I have become more innovative with my teaching, using local materials to create effective lessons."
	Sense of Purpose	Despite facing challenges, many CTE graduates of UA-TLMC develop a deep sense of purpose and commitment to improving the education of children in underserved communities.	"Even if it's tough, I stay because I want to make a difference for these kids." "It feels like my calling."

5. Strengthened commitment to service

The theme of **Strengthened Commitment to Service**, shown in **Table 5,** was evident in the narratives of participants, as they demonstrated an unwavering dedication to their roles despite the significant challenges they faced in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas (GIDAs). Teachers expressed that their commitment to service was fueled by their deep sense of responsibility to both their students and their communities. This finding is consistent with research by Johnson et al. [32], who found that teachers who possess a strong sense of purpose and dedication are more likely to stay in challenging environments, motivated by their desire to contribute to societal development. The teachers' ability to persist, even in the face of adversity, reflects their long-term commitment to educational equity and community service.

6. Creativity and resourcefulness

Participants consistently exhibited creativity and resourcefulness as vital elements of their strengthened commitment to service. Teachers in GIDAs reported developing innovative teaching methods, often creating their own instructional materials due to the lack of resources in their schools. This mirrors findings by Lapada et al. [33], who noted that teachers working in resource-constrained environments often leverage their creativity to meet the needs of their students. The teachers' resourcefulness allowed them to sustain their teaching practices and continue to provide quality education despite the limitations, further reinforcing their dedication to their students' success.

7. Sense of purpose

A strong sense of purpose emerged as a key driver of the participants' commitment to their work in GIDAs. Many teachers shared that their desire to make a meaningful difference in the lives of their students and contribute to community development kept them motivated despite the challenges they faced. According to Salazar and Mercado [34], having a sense of purpose enhances intrinsic motivation and fosters resilience, especially in the face of adversity. For these teachers, the fulfillment derived from seeing their students succeed and knowing they were contributing to the long-term development of the community provided a powerful source of strength and determination.

8. Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into the stories of teachers in GIDAs, underscoring the barriers they face and the adaptive strategies they employ to fulfill their roles. While these educators exhibit resilience and dedication, there is a clear need for targeted support to improve their teaching conditions. Development of targeted teacher support programs, improved infrastructure and resources, and enhanced professional development opportunities are crucial steps toward supporting teachers in GIDAs. These initiatives can help create a more sustainable and inclusive educational environment in the underserved communities in the country, ultimately improving learning outcomes for learners. By addressing these needs, policymakers and educational stakeholders can better support teachers who play an instrumental role in advancing education in some of the most underserved communities in the Philippines.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, several recommendations are proposed. First, educational policymakers should prioritize infrastructure improvements in GIDAs, ensuring that schools have basic facilities, access to stable electricity source, and internet connectivity. Additionally, professional development programs should be tailored to address the specific needs of teachers in remote areas, potentially through distance learning modules that mitigate isolation. Cultural sensitivity training should also be integrated into teacher preparation programs to equip educators with skills for working effectively in indigenous and rural communities. Finally, establishing support networks, both online and offline, could offer teachers in GIDAs opportunities for collaboration, mentorship, and knowledge exchange.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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