

Sailing against the Waves: Challenges and Coping Mechanisms of Teachers Assigned in a Coastal School

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Abstract: *The study aimed at investigating the lived experiences of teachers assigned in bay school areas. To achieve this aim, the researchers used ten (10) secondary teachers at Sta. Cruz National High School, in the Municipality of Paombong, Bulacan. The researcher used the phenomenological method of research, which utilized researchers-made survey questions as primary data gathering technique through a form of interview. The study found out that the challenges encountered by teachers in bay schools are mainly concerned with safety in travelling, means of communication, lack of instructional materials, and the students' economic status. Despite these challenges, teachers in coastal schools are coping up using the following mechanisms: (in terms of safety in travelling) wearing of life support materials, conquering one's fear, school boat service, school head support, time management, (in terms of means of communication) place of access, coordination with LGUs in times of calamities, (in terms of lack of learning materials) being resourceful and creative, (in terms of students' economic status) teachers' optimism and love for work. The Department of Education may conduct school needs assessment for them to really identify other issues and problems in bay school areas. Doing this may really help them formulate a developmental framework for the programs and activities especially for teachers assigned in bay schools.*

Keywords—Challenges, Coping Mechanisms, Teachers at Coastal Schools, Qualitative Study

1. INTRODUCTION

Teaching is not just a noble profession; it is a mission, it is not salary-driven but rather commitment and dedication driven. Teaching involves giving oneself to the others so that, the piece that one gives will blossom in the heart of another and, even more importantly might cause others to blossom. A teacher's passion in teaching involves hardship and sacrifices.

2. RELATED WORKS

Currently, there are 880,000 public school teachers in our country (DepEd 2018). These public school teachers have their own share of stories of challenges and struggles. Frequently, teachers keep on doing demonstrations and rallies to ask for reasonable and justifiable compensation. The Teachers' Dignity Coalition (TDC) and the Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT) both urged DepEd and the government to at least give "priority to their welfare" concerns as it would be very "crucial to ensure the delivery of education service that redounds to quality output for the country's citizen."

Some of these public school teachers are working in far flung areas such as mountains, islands, fields and the likes. These teachers have benevolently shared their passion for teaching. Moreover, those teachers also sacrifice their spare time for their family because instead they are going home

every day after a tiring day of teacher, many of them just chose to stay at the place where they are teaching because the communities are just too far away from their homes. Their original home where their family lives is somehow becoming their vacation house because they just go home during weekends and sometimes just few times a month depending on the number of school duties that are needed to be done.

Despite the situation, teachers in far-flung areas have not ceased from constantly wearing cheerful faces and optimistic outlook for the love of work and to inspire the lives of the children who are patiently waiting for every start of the week for their love and care, and that somehow change their lives through education. Nevertheless, these teachers come across different challenges as they give service in coastal schools.

This study focuses on teachers, mainly assigned in bay school whom are said to experience challenging tasks of practicing their noble profession. It aims to identify the common challenges encountered by teachers at coastal schools, explain how they apply their coping mechanisms in addressing the challenges encountered and suggest recommendations based from the findings of the study to further improve the status of teachers at coastal schools.

To further discuss and see the significance of this matter, related studies and literature might be a great help.

The challenges faced by coastal schools are related to geographical, economic, and culture factors: declining industry, limited transport infrastructure, low-paid work and few opportunities. Coastal populations simply have fewer choices than many others. The sea has turned from the basis of local wealth to a barrier that restricts opportunity [1].

Head teachers in some coastal schools in the study reported low response to job adverts. The big challenge is that coastal areas are isolated, with little or no transport links, long commutes and few employment opportunities for partners and family.

3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study aimed at investigating the experiences of teachers assigned in Sta. Cruz National High School in the Municipality of Paombong and how do they cope with their challenging situations in dispose of their noble duties of teaching in bay school.

Specifically, this study is conducted in order to answer and figure out the following.

1. What are the challenges encountered by teachers in bay school?
2. What are the common challenges of teachers in bay school?
3. What coping mechanisms do teachers employ in addressing the challenges encountered?
4. What are the recommendations of the respondents to further improve their status as teachers assigned in bay school?

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Design

The qualitative research design was used in this study. In-depth individual interviews were conducted with the teacher-participants to explore their insights about their lived experiences as they selflessly fulfill their duty as teacher in bay school. The method was phenomenological as it aimed to describe their perceptions and lived experiences. According to Center for Innovation in Research and Teaching of Grand Canyon University, this design is used to describe how human beings experience a certain phenomenon and attempts to set aside biases and preconceived assumptions about human experiences, feelings, and responses to a particular situation. It allows the researchers to delve into the perceptions, perspectives, understandings, and feelings of those people who have actually experienced or lived the phenomenon or situation of interest, or the so-called, "lived-experiences."

This qualitative study obtained phenomenological inquiry through casual and informal conversation to obtain the lived experiences of ten Secondary teachers which were conducted from August to September 2019. The said study utilized the voice of the participants who are living and working in coastal areas of Sta. Cruz National High School in the Municipality of Paombong, Bulacan. The research mode of attempt was to have common understanding the meaningful events and interactions to ordinary people in particular

situations, to capture personal growth as a passionate educator.

4.2 Respondents

The respondents of the study comprised 10 public school secondary teachers who are teaching at Sta. Cruz National High School in the Municipality of Paombong, Bulacan. As observed, the researchers did not go with the detailed presentations of the respondents so as to hide their identity for confidentiality purposes.

4.3 Instrument

Semi-structured interviews which are interviews that allow the researchers to have flexibility were utilized in interviewing the participants. Questions were validated by the experts in the field to ensure that the needed data would be elicited. Likewise, the researchers wished to accurately capture the data and as a result all the interviews were tape-recorded. After the interviews were transcribed and analyzed, the data was treated and kept carefully for confidentiality purposes. The following questions were:

1. What challenges do you encounter in bay school?
2. What coping mechanisms do you employ in addressing the challenges you encountered?
3. What can you recommendations to further improve the status of teachers assigned in bay school?

4.4 Data Analysis

The code and theme procedures were used in analysing and interpreting the narratives of the respondents. The researcher abstract the themes from the code. Afterwhich, the data processed were triangulated and checked by the respondents.

4.5 Data Gathering

For the smooth flow of the data collection, the following procedures were carefully followed by the researchers: (1) The researchers briefed the participants about the study and informed them that participation was voluntary. They were given a choice if they wanted to be part of the study or not. (2) The tape-recording consent form was then presented to them, which asked for their permission for the interviews to be recorded. (3) The researcher wished to be transparent, and as a result, the participants were given the interview guideline. The interview guideline was given ahead of time before the day of interview to help them prepare themselves. The interview guideline aided in providing information-rich answers, as the researcher had time to prepare for the interviews. (4) The participants were interviewed individually in a private and quiet room. Semi-structured, one-to-one interviews were used as in-depth information of the understanding was needed, and also to allow the researchers some degree. (5) The tape recorder was used during each interview. Making use of an audio recorder allowed the researcher to record fully and accurately what was being said rather than taking notes during the interviews of flexibility in asking questions.

4.6 Ethical Considerations

This research considered the ethical standards set by the generic research ethics. In so doing, the participants were informed about all the steps that were to be taken in this research. The participants were more important than the study, and therefore always respected. The participants were informed that the study was completely voluntary and would not affect their lives as students and as persons, even their families, in any way. Confidentiality was provided, as the participants' identifying information was not sought. The data collection material was kept and destroyed on completion of the study.

5. RESULTS

The results were presented based from sequence and order of the questions raised:

Problem 1: What are the challenges encountered by teachers in bay school?

Safety in Travelling. According to the Teacher 1, it is not easy to go to school because riding a motorized boat is the only means of transportation in going to or from school. It is not that safe because we cannot predict the weather sometimes specially during the rainy season, the wind and the waves are strong that the teacher are being scared of the boat being capsized. Fortunately the school provided us life vest to wear for our safety. Teacher 2 added that as a teacher in a bay school, it was a scary experienced during my first few weeks of travel because I have fears of riding a boat since my childhood days plus the fact that I don't know how to swim. Additionally, I have thoughts in my mind that the boat might overturn and it was not safe. With the same answers from Teachers 3 and 6, they stated that transportation is really the main challenge that bay teachers encounter. Knowing their situation, it is important that they must come early so they could arrived at school on time. Sometimes, frequent flood due to high tide and heavy rain also put them in difficult position.

Meanwhile, Teacher 4 said that unlike in the typical schools, motorized boat is the only means of transportation when we are going to school, no other transportation like pedicab or tricycle that can reached the school. There comes a time when a weather condition challenge us since that the school is located at the bay. It is hard of us to bay there are tendencies that there is a change in weather condition: for example regarding the precipitation, current of the water and wind direction. Supported by Teacher 5, she said, My home was quite far from the school that I've been teaching, I need to take a tricycle going to the place where I will take a boat. Then from there it takes more than 30 minutes travel going to my school. During the boat ride there were cases that we're facing risk due to waves brought by heavy winds or inclement weather. There were times that we got wet during our travel. Our entire travel in boat was really risky especially in times of bad weather. Aside from that, being a bay teacher I also experienced that we're having class and our area for teaching got flooded because of high tides.

Aside from challenges due to weather conditions, Teacher 7 told the researchers about their challenging day to day experiences in travelling towards the bay school from her place. She said, it is quite difficult to travel of 1 hour or less than one hour in boat going home and going to school. I need to woke up early to prepare all the thing before I leave the house, my transportation are two tricycle rides and a jeepney ride before the boat ride. But it was exciting and I really appreciate people in the island of Sta Cruz, also my co-teachers. The calling of my work for me is I consider as God's will so it is my pleasure to be more responsible as a teacher and doing the work that God gave me. Hence, there are lots of sacrifices that teachers in bay school. In fact, for Teacher 8, teaching in a bay area is not as easy as others think because there are many things you have to consider first. The first one is, you have to possess the bravery to face or conquer your fear of the things that might happen while travelling (you have to board a boat before you reach the area) but since I am living here, not much thinking about that.

Means of Communication. Internet connections are very important for teachers especially in doing their jobs and responsibilities not just in teaching but also in other school-related works. Teachers 1 and 4 and 5 and 10 stipulated that they have internet connection at school so it is easy for them to communicate with others specially in sending reports online but sometimes when the wind blows strong the connection gets weak. Meanwhile, when it comes to network signal, there are just some parts of the school where you can get a signal. Since the school is near the sea it is difficult to communicate to other people using their cellphones.

For teachers in bay schools, it very important that they have a good internet connections in their workplace. Having this would make them feel connected with the teachers teaching in land areas. Using mobile phones and internet in school can boost productivity, mobility, safety and morale of your workforce. Mobiles can help employees to: improve customer service, remain in contact with the office, customers and suppliers, increase mobility, increase productivity, and work remotely (nibusinessinfo.co.uk).

Lack of Learning Materials. According to Teachers 8 and 9, everybody has to be resourceful enough to execute the lesson very well because of lack of materials. We do not even have a conducive learning environment here because we are just using the church and barangay hall as our classrooms. These challenge us but still doing our best to impart the lessons we prepared for our students. We also need to be flexible because we also teach some subjects which we did not take in college. Teacher 10 have identified some of the root cause of the problems: there is a lack of attention from stakeholders/ authorities due to small number of enrollees. Poor lacking facilities and instructional materials including books and teaching aids such as microscope, laboratory tools and equipment. Hence, teachers in bay schools believe that the community partnerships and collaborations with the local government units could really be of help to solve these challenges and play a vital role in transforming the lives of each learners and in providing a good breeds of future leaders

of the society. Investments in learning materials and classrooms conducive to learning is a big factor of students' success. Hence, the school and the community should work hand in hand and think of ideas on how they could be able to attend to the needs of the learners in bay schools.

Students' Economic Status. Poverty is not just a problem in land areas which is the normal setting in typical schools. This could also be seen in bay school which is far beyond the experiences of other students. In this view, Teacher 9 stated that, I also encounter some students who are having difficulties when it comes to reading some texts that are not familiar to them, maybe because they will choose to earn money rather than to see a book. The socio-economic status here is not stable so some of the students had already experienced catching fishes with their parents or other jobs at the very young age. These are just some problems I have had as a new teacher in our school but I will prepare myself for the inevitable things. We know for a fact that poverty is still one of the main hindrance for the students to go to school. Thus, it is a challenge for us teachers in bay schools to motivate our students and make them appreciate the values and possible avenues for them when they are able to finish their study and uplift their economic status in their own families.

Problem 2. What are the common challenges of teachers in bay school?

To synthesize and to extract the prevailing themes and ideas coming from the answers of the respondents, the common challenges of teachers in bay school can be summarized in Figure 1 as follows: (1) Safety in Travelling, (2) Means of Communication, (3) Lack of Learning Materials, and (4) Students' Economic Status.

Problem 3. What coping mechanisms do teachers employ in addressing the challenges encountered?

In terms of Safety...

Wearing of Life Support Materials. Teacher 1 purported that I always wear my life vest whenever we travel by boat so I'm in safety. I also bring umbrella and wear jacket to protect me from rain or heat of the sun.

Conquering one's fear. For Teacher 2, the coping mechanism that I employed was, first, to set my mind that I need to be braved and conquered my fear because it is needed in the profession that I am into though I have the chance to choose. Hence, it is very important for Teacher 2, though it is really a big adjustment from the usual, to face one's fear and conquer one's weaknesses in order to fight against the trials in mission.

School Boat Service. For Teacher 4, however, "sa pagpunta sa school walang problema Sapagkat may bangka na nagsisilbing service, ang kahirapan ay ang panahon kung saan ay may biglaang meeting wala kang choice kundi umarkila ng maliit na bangka. As of now maagang declaration of suspension of classes thru Paombong MDRRMO kapag may masamang panahon or kung sakaling mataas ang tubig or high tide." It was also supported by Teacher 6, she said, when there is unexpected meeting, I have no choice I rent small boat to bring me to town. Now, when

the weather is not in good condition or there is high tide. We are informed early about classes' suspension through the help of our school head and barangay officials.

School Head's Support. Despite this situation, the school head untiringly reaches out the needs of their teachers by showing their full support and give materials from the best that they can give even if it comes from their own pocket. Respondent 1 stipulated, it is good that our school head provided us life vest because of that it lessen my fear and feel safe every time I ride in a boat. This means that in order to lessen the fear of teachers is just not about wearing of vest in travel but wearing the support the love of their school heads.

Time Management. Another coping mechanism of teachers in bay is the time management. According to Teachers 3 and 5, time management is really important to avoid missing the boat trip. I even stayed in the Island of Masukol so there's no need for me to ride in tricycle and boat daily. It gives me enough time to prepare for my class, though that decision of staying in Masukol made me lived away from my family. Being a teacher is not just about teaching, it is everything.

In terms of Means of Communication...

Place of Access. Regarding the problem in terms of communication, Teachers 1 and 9 said that they go to the place where there is a signal/hotspot so they can get in touch with the people they need to talk to.

Coordination with LGUs in time of Calamities. One of the duties and responsibilities of the local government units especially the barangays is to be vigilant in time of calamities and to inform and protect the welfare of its people. This is evident in the statement of Teacher 4. She stated, may means of coordination between the school and local baranggay officials para sa suspension of classes, as of now mas madaling makapagsubmit ng report thru internet or even communicating to others.

In terms of Insufficient Learning Materials...

Being Resourceful and Creative. Teachers 9 and 10 believes that if the materials for learning are not enough you have to do something about it. Look for other resources, provide what is needed, and use what is available in the school. Those are some things that I am doing to keep going as a teacher in Bay School. I do love my profession and that is my best coping mechanism in facing challenges as a teacher.

In terms of Students' Economic Status...

Teachers' Optimism and Love for Work. The problem on the economic status of students is directly a problem of a bay teacher as in individual. But this problem really affects the totality of the performance of the school where a bay teacher is serving. Hence, it is indeed a call for every teachers to put extra efforts to lead and motivate their learners despite their situations. For Teacher 7, "My positive way of thinking is my coping mechanism as an individual or as a teacher. The proper mindset and my optimistic way and strategies of doing the right behavior to manage the situations that I must face either good or bad. As a teacher I need to be flexible in all aspects." The same is true with Teacher 8, "I think you will

do everything when you are doing what your heart truly desires that's why despite having these problems, I am still here, battling using my knowledge and love for my students. I will not let those problems become an obstacle to touch the heart and change the life of each student in our beloved school. I will keep searching or looking for the solution and make sure that I am leading them into the right path." Although it really takes a lot of courage and sacrifices for being a teacher in bay school, these teachers are really considered as heroes not just of their learners but also of the whole society because of their great impact and influence to other people. Teaching is really a call, a vocation, and a challenge. Not all teachers are called to be teachers in bay schools because many are called but few are chosen. Those who can share their lives, sacrifice their safety and their own family, and those who could really love their work and could be able find joy in their profession, are indeed considered the 'chosen' ones.

Problem 4. What are the recommendations of the respondents to further improve their status as teachers assigned in bay school?

Seminars and Training on Safety. With regards to their concern in their safety, Teachers 1, 2, and 3 got the same answers by saying that the government may consider giving them seminars and training in terms of safety. The said seminar and training may focus on giving standard first aid, about the dos and don'ts during the times of calamities and emergencies at the middle of the bay.

Early Announcements. According to Teacher 2, "I would like to recommend the early announcement of no classes if in case there is no classes due to typhoon/ habagat for the safety of the students as well as the teachers."

Material Support System. For Teacher 5, maybe our agency should provide additional care to bay teachers. They may ask about the needs of the teachers in bay area and provide those needs. They can also provide a program for us so we can enhance our teaching in a place that doesn't have everything. Meanwhile, Teacher 3 stated that the government may provide them with boat service and materials or equipment needed with flood or inclement weather such as boots and raincoats. For Teacher 7, she said, I recommend a safety house for teachers in Bay, so that when calamity comes they can stay for their safety. They also need always the courage and perseverance to do their work properly even that they know the risk of transporting by boat, they must put God first whatever they do on intended to do. Besides this, Teacher 9 added the following recommendation: a service credit every time they have classes in high tide, an increase the hardship allowance, and complete the facilities needed in teaching for free. Hence, it may seem that all these recommendations are about the material supports that the bay teachers need but it can be an eye opener for other people that these teachers are really in need of supports.

Professional Training and Development. According to Teachers 4 and 6, teacher must undergo professional trainings or continue their studies in graduate school to educate themselves for their progress and development. Doing this

may realize that all teachers have to show passion not only in front of their co-teachers but most especially in their students. With that, they will see their teachers' worth and inspire them to study hard. Teacher 9 reminded that, "We also have to consider their status so we will prevent degrading or discriminating any of them. We have to strive harder and always extend our hands to our colleagues and cope with the challenges we are encountering as one." For Teacher 9, it is the real essence of professionalism. Lastly, Teacher 10 recommended that, "We must not sugar coat, hide or deny the challenges we are facing as a teacher in bay schools, instead we must acknowledge the problem and let the authorities know whatever exists and what the real situation is so they can assist us because education isn't just a teacher's responsibility, it is everyone's task to secure bright future for our younger generation."

According to Solheim, (2017), effective teacher learning and professional is important for student achievement. Teacher learning is a continuous process that promotes teachers' teaching skills, master new knowledge, develop new proficiency which in turn, help improve students' learning. Additionally, if the teachers have received effective training and induction program, they can implement their teaching profession effectively and keep their retention in their profession and then can provide the improved students' learning. This means to say that it is with vital importance that teachers are continuously engaging themselves for professional development. Doing this would ignite their leadership skills, as well as cognitive skills in delivering a profound instructional content and pedagogy.

6. DISCUSSION

In the study conducted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) published in 2017, a safe school is one that ensures the health, safety and security of the learner during times of normal operation as well as during emergencies. Such a school is structurally sound and can withstand potential hazards. A safe school is one that is surrounded by a community that is committed to safety. Inclusive to such an environment are elements of what a safe school feels like and what a safe school looks like. While some of the elements of safety contained in this unit may be out of ones' control, it is important that teachers are aware of them so that they may advocate for the right to safety of their peers and even themselves. This means that, safety awareness is not about being responsible to one's self, but also to others. If the whole community is committed to safety, then, all its members may feel safe and resilient to all forms of emergencies [2].

Learning materials are important because they can significantly increase student achievement by supporting student learning. It appears that student interest and ability are very important to the teacher. Teachers also modify the characteristics or methods of use of instructional materials to fit their perceived needs [3]. There is a great need for teachers to work with educational researchers so that more can be

known about teachers' planning, decision making, and material selection processes. This means that one of the main contributing factors of having a quality education is the sufficient learning materials for the students as well as school facilities.

In an article, it reflected the implementation of lifelong professional development for teachers based on their analysis and understanding of the participation of elementary and secondary school teachers in the Teacher Professional Development and Evaluation (TPDE) programme. They found out that the two main factors influencing teachers' commitment to the programme: self-direction and resource supportability. Based on the findings, they proposed and argued that the teacher life world-based approach, which raises awareness of and considers teachers' own specific situations and purposes, be used as an alternative or supplement to the knowledge- and practice-based professional development approaches advocated in the literature to ensure the attainment of authentic outcomes. This means to say that, teachers do love their work and profession because they know what they are doing and since they know what they are doing, they have self-direction. They are committed in the sense that they are willing to take risk and make everything for the sake of professionalism and love for work [4][5][6][7].

7. CONCLUSIONS

The main purpose of this study was to present the lived experiences of the challenges and coping mechanisms of teachers in bay school. This also intent to disseminate knowledge about the common challenges encountered at coastal schools and suggest recommendations based from the findings of the study to further improve the status of teachers at coastal schools.

The following are the brief summary of the important points gathered and analyzed based from the findings of the study:

1. Teachers in coastal schools are challenged with their safety in travelling from their own houses going the area. In such coastal area, they are also challenged with the difficulty in communication especially in communicating important matters. Additionally, there were insufficiency with regards to instructional materials such facilities and other school supplies. Lastly, they are challenged to put extra effort in motivating their students due to their socio-economic factor - that instead of going to school, they might rather work in order to survive.
2. Teachers in coastal schools, therefore, are sink with the different challenges in their situations such as safety in travelling, difficulty in communication, insufficient learning materials, and the economic status of their learners.
3. Despite of aforementioned challenges, teachers in coastal schools are coping up using the following mechanisms: (in terms of safety in travelling) wearing of life support materials, conquering one's fear, school boat service, school head support, time management, (in terms of means of communication) place of access, coordination with LGUs in

times of calamities, (in terms of lack of learning materials) being resourceful and creative, (in terms of students' economic status) teachers' optimism and love for work.

4. Considering the respondents' needs assessments, they recommended the following: (1) Seminars and Training on Safety, (2) Early Announcements, (3) Material Support System, and (4) Professional Training and Development.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based from the proceedings and conclusions of the study, the researchers recommended the following:

1. The school head and the local government unit (LGU) may collaborate one another in enhancing and providing the needs of teachers in bay school within their locality. Doing this may provide funds for teachers with additional life support materials such as service boats, life vest, and even houses where they can stay during calamities and other times of calamities. This collaborations may also be extended in terms of requesting the needs for safe and sound school facilities and learning materials to the proper authorities. Partnerships with other stakeholders may also be strengthened in terms of formulating different avenues to attend to the needs of learners and provide livelihood programs for the parents of their learners.

2. It appears exigent that the challenges raised in this study may be given an enough attention. This may be an eye opener not just for the school community but even for the whole Department of Education under Bureau of Learning Delivery.

3. Teachers in coastal schools may sustain their way of coping up with the challenges they encounter in their school while the assistance from the higher school authorities in still on the process.

4. The Department of Education may conduct school needs assessment for them to really identify other issues and problems in bay school areas. Doing this may really help them formulate a developmental framework for the programs and activities especially for teachers assigned in bay schools.

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