

LIVING THE LESSON: THE LIVED REALITIES AND EMOTIONAL ADJUSTMENTS OF BEGINNING TEACHERS IN EASTERN SCHOOLS OF BOTOLAN, ZAMBALES

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ABSTRACT

Teaching in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas (GIDA) presents unique professional and emotional challenges, particularly for beginning teachers. This study explored the lived realities and emotional adjustments of newly hired teachers assigned to the Eastern schools of Botolan, Zambales. Employing a qualitative phenomenological design, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with fourteen (14) beginning teachers. Thematic analysis revealed six major themes: (1) geography of isolation as physical and emotional strain, (2) reality shock and the double burden of frontier teaching, (3) emotional labor and silent struggles, (4) emotional rewards through student and community connections, (5) coping strategies and emotional resilience, and (6) gaps in institutional support. Findings indicate that while teachers experience significant emotional challenges, meaningful relationships and personal coping mechanisms sustain their commitment. The study recommends strengthening teacher induction programs by integrating psychosocial and mental health support tailored for GIDA contexts to promote retention and well-being.

Keywords: Beginning Teachers, Lived Realities, Emotional Adjustment, GIDA Schools, Phenomenological Study

INTRODUCTION

The pursuit of quality education in geographically isolated communities places teachers at the frontline of educational equity. Global education reports highlight that millions of learners remain underserved due to geographical barriers, underscoring the critical role of teachers assigned to remote areas. In the Philippine context, newly hired teachers deployed to GIDA schools often face extreme isolation, limited resources, and cultural adjustments that extend beyond pedagogical responsibilities. Beginning teachers in Eastern Botolan experience what has been described as a “double burden”—the demand to demonstrate professional competence while simultaneously adjusting emotionally, socially, and physically to an isolated environment. While institutional programs focus on curriculum delivery and compliance, limited attention is given to teachers’ emotional well-being, despite evidence that emotional adjustment significantly influences teacher retention and effectiveness. This study sought to document and understand the lived experiences of these teachers, giving voice to their emotional journeys and contributing insight to policies aimed at sustaining quality education in marginalized communities.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to examine the lived realities and emotional adjustments of beginning teachers assigned to the Eastern schools of Botolan, Zambales.

Participants and Research Locale

The participants consisted of fourteen (14) beginning teachers with zero to three years of teaching experience in GIDA schools located in the upland and mountainous areas of Eastern Botolan. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure rich and relevant accounts.

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted between February and March 2026. Interviews focused on participants’ daily experiences, emotional challenges, coping strategies, and perceived institutional support. All interviews were audio-recorded with informed consent and transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke’s six-phase process was used. This included data familiarization, coding, theme development, theme review, theme definition, and reporting. Member checking was conducted to ensure credibility and accuracy of interpretations.

RESULTS

Analysis of the interview data yielded six major themes describing the lived realities of beginning teachers in Eastern Botolan.

1. Geography of Isolation as Physical and Emotional Strain

Teachers described daily travel involving mountain trails, river crossings, and long walks, leading to exhaustion before instruction began. Physical fatigue was closely intertwined with emotional stress.

2. Reality Shock and the Double Burden of Frontier Teaching

Participants reported a sharp contrast between pre-service training and actual field conditions, highlighting feelings of unpreparedness for isolation and multigrade teaching.

3. Emotional Labor and Silent Struggles

Teachers experienced homesickness, loneliness, and anxiety but often suppressed these emotions due to professional expectations of strength and resilience.

4. Emotional Rewards and Meaningful Connections

Despite hardships, students' progress and community acceptance provided deep emotional fulfillment and motivation to stay in service.

5. Coping Strategies and Emotional Resilience

Teachers relied on prayer, peer support, self-reflection, and emotional reframing to manage stress, gradually developing resilience.

6. Gaps in Institutional and Socio-Emotional Support

Participants noted that existing induction and professional programs were largely administrative and did not adequately address emotional and psychological needs.

DISCUSSION

The findings reveal that teaching in GIDA schools is a holistic experience shaped by environmental, emotional, and social factors. Emotional labor emerged as a defining aspect of beginning teachers' professional lives, aligning with literature emphasizing the importance of emotional resilience in rural education contexts. While teachers develop personal coping strategies, reliance on individual resilience without institutional support places them at risk of burnout.

Meaningful student-teacher relationships functioned as significant protective factors, reinforcing the importance of community integration in teacher retention. However, the lack of structured socio-emotional support highlights a critical gap in existing educational policies.

CONCLUSIONS

The study concludes that beginning teachers in Eastern Botolan face profound emotional and physical challenges associated with geographical isolation. Despite strong intrinsic motivation and emotional rewards, inadequate institutional support places emotional well-being at risk. Emotional resilience develops over time but should not be left solely to individual effort.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Department of Education – Integrate mental health and psychosocial support modules into the Teacher Induction Program, particularly for GIDA assignments.
2. School Heads and Supervisors – Implement localized mentoring and peer-support systems focused on emotional well-being.
3. Beginning Teachers – Engage actively in peer networks and reflective self-care practices.
4. Future Researchers – Conduct longitudinal studies examining emotional adjustment and retention of teachers in geographically isolated schools.

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