



**LIMOG NGA NAGAPANAGHOY SA TUNGA IT KABUKIRAN: A
PHENOMENOLOGICAL RESEARCH OF AKLANON TEACHERS
IN REMOTE SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the lived experiences of Aklanon teachers in remote secondary schools in relation to their decisions to stay or request reassignment. Anchored on Push-Pull-Mooring (PPM) Theory and Job Embeddedness Theory, the study employed a qualitative descriptive phenomenological approach. Six (6) teachers from selected remote schools in the Schools Division of Aklan were purposively selected as informants. Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews, field observation, and photo documentation, and were analyzed using Colaizzi's method. Findings revealed that Aklanon teachers' experiences were shaped by a dynamic interplay of push, pull, and mooring factors. Push factors, such as geographical and travel challenges, financial burden, and limited educational resources, create pressures to consider reassignments, while pull factors, including the desire for proximity to family and desire for a better working condition, directed teachers toward favorable working environment. Despite of these challenges, mooring factors, such as career stability and permanency, dedication and passion for teaching and support from school and community anchored teachers to remain in their current school assignments. Overall, Aklanon teachers'

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lived experiences reflect a continuous interplay between the desire to leave and the decision to stay, reflecting resilience, sacrifice, and commitment. The findings also highlighted a gap between policy and practice, particularly in implementation of the Special Hard Ship allowance (SHA), where schools classified as “accessible” still present significant challenges. Based on these findings, a program was proposed to support policy review, enhance teacher retention, and improved teacher well-being in remote secondary schools.

Keywords: *Lived experiences, remote secondary schools, teacher retention, teachers’ reassignment, Aklanon teachers*

INTRODUCTION

Teaching experiences are diverse and unique, as each teacher has their own story to share reflecting the realities on their professional journeys. Teachers assigned to remote schools face distinct experiences that shape both their professional and personal lives. According to Brillantes and Nebria (2021), educators assigned in this area encounter transportation difficulties, inadequate resources, and professional isolation that may affect their career decisions. While some teachers embrace challenges and remain committed to their assigned schools, others choose to request reassignment.

Several studies highlighted various factors associated with teachers in remote schools, including transportation problems and safety concerns (Equipado and Gilbas, 2021), subject specific difficulties (Basister Jr. And Motus, 2023), the impact of working condition and

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resource limitations (Maghanoy, 2021), and inadequate access to professional development opportunities and instructional technology (Friesen et al., 2012). However, limited studies conducted to explore how these factors, as part of teachers lived experiences in relations to their decisions to stay or request reassignment in remote schools, particularly in the context of secondary school in Aklan.

In the national context, the Second Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM II) (2024) emphasized that the Philippine educational system continues to face significant challenges especially in Geographically Isolated, Disadvantaged and Conflict-Affected Areas (GIDCA). Teachers in this setting often endure excessive workloads, lack of infrastructure, and inadequate supports, leading to teacher migration. These findings underscored the need to strengthen teacher motivation, enhance support systems and retention policies to ensure that competent teachers continue to serve in hard-to-reach schools.

To address these gaps, the Department of Education (DepEd) launching the Last Mile School (LMS) Program through DepEd Memorandum No. 59, s. 2019, aiming to provide adequate infrastructure, instructional materials, and enhance access to education in remote communities. Despite of these efforts, many LMS schools continue to experience persistent challenges, including poor road access, intermittent power supply, limited connectivity and insufficient teaching personnel. Such conditions hinder the delivery of quality education and contribute to the difficulties faced by the teachers assigned in these remote areas (Department of Education, 2019). Moreover, while policies such as provision of hardship allowances under the DBM-DENR-DepEd-DILG Joint Circular No. 1, s. 1990 exist, many teachers report that

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these benefits were insufficient to compensate for the demands and risks associated with remote assignments.

In a related study, Lingo and Garcia (2025) explored the lived experiences of teachers assigned in the last-mile schools in the Philippines, revealing themes of compassion, sacrifice, and perseverance amid limited resources and personal hardship. However, the study also highlighted the need for stronger systemic support and responsive policies. Anchored on DepEd Order No. 42, s. 2017 – the National Adoption and Implementation of the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST) and aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4(Quality of Education), this study aims to explore the factors that influence the lived experiences of Aklanon teachers in relation to their decisions to stay or request reassignment in remote school settings. It also seeks to generate a meaningful insight that can be used to provide a recommendation aimed to improve teachers’ retention and support mechanism in remote secondary school.

“Limog nga Nagapanaghoy sa Tunga it Kabukiran” (Echoing Voices in the Midst of the Mountains) symbolizes the silent struggles, resilience, and dedications of these Aklanon teachers in remote secondary schools. It further represents the voices that seek to be heard and the inner calls that influence their decisions to stay or request reassignment. These voices reflect the underlying conditions shaping their lived experiences that underscore the need for more responsive support systems and policy interventions.

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MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Methodology

This chapter presents the research design, informants of the study, data sources, data-gathering procedures, data analysis procedure, and data validation methods used in the study. The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the lived experiences of Aklanon teachers in remote secondary school and to understand how these experiences influence their decisions to stay or request reassignment.

Research Design

Qualitative research is an approach that seeks to understand the depth and complexity of human experiences as they unfold in their day-to-day life. It explores the richness of lived realities to uncover pattern, relationship and insights that emerge from human experiences. According to Aspers & Corte (2021), qualitative research is characterized by commitment to understand phenomena from point of view of those who live them, capture how people interpret and make sense of their world through their own experiences.

This study is guided by descriptive phenomenology, rooted in the philosophy ideas of Edmund Husserl (1970), which emphasizes uncovering the essence of the lived experiences through intentional reflection and description. According to Christense, Welch, and Barr (2017), Husserlian phenomenology focuses on intentionality, or how individuals direct their consciousness towards their experiences and on reduction, the process of setting aside biases to view phenomena as they appear. Furthermore Jackson et al., (2018) explain that descriptive

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phenomenology enables researchers to access and describe the essence of informants' lived experiences as they are consciously perceived.

This approach is particularly suited to explore how teachers assigned to remote secondary schools navigate their personal and professional realities and how these experiences influence their decisions to stay or request reassignment from their current poss.

Informants of the Study

The study employed a purposive sampling technique to select the informants who could provide deep and meaningful insights into the phenomenon being explored. This sampling method was appropriate for phenomenological studies as it allowed the researcher to intentionally select individuals who had personally experiences and who could articulate and reflect their lived experiences in in-depth and meaningful way.

The inclusion criteria for the selection of informants were as follow:

1. Informants were all willing to participate.
2. Informants were teaching in any subject area.
3. Informants were assigned to remote secondary school within the Schools Division of Aklan for 5 to 25 years.
4. Informants were not a native resident of the local community of the assigned remote secondary school.

Using these inclusion criteria, the researcher purposively selected six (6) teachers from identified remote secondary schools within the Schools Division of Aklan. According to Creswell (2013), this number of participants is appropriate for phenomenological research, typically

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involve small sample sizes that enable a rich and in-depth explorations of teachers' lived experiences. The informants represented a range of teaching experiences, subject areas and geographical contexts to ensure diversity of perspectives.

Data Sources

To ensure a comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of Aklanon teachers in remote secondary schools, the study utilized multiple data sources. The primary instrument was a semi-structured interview guide, complemented by fieldnotes and photo-documentations. These instruments collectively aim to captured the depth and essence of informants' experiences within their social and institutional contexts.

The semi-structured interview guide was developed based on the objectives of the study and consisted of open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed narratives from the informants. It followed Husserlian's descriptive phenomenological interview approach, emphasizing the rich and reflective description of informants' lived experiences. This approach ensured that informant's voices were foregrounded.

Fieldnotes were used to record observation and the researcher immediate reflections during and after school's visitation and interviews. These notes served as valuable supplementary data to support the interpretation of informants' responses.

Additionally, the researcher collected and captured photographs to document the physical environment, working conditions and school context during school visitation. These images served as photo-documentations providing visual evidence that complement and support informants' narratives illustrate the realities of teaching in remote school settings.

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Data Gathering Procedures

The data gathering procedures followed a systematic way of gathering the necessary information that satisfied and answers the research questions of this study.

Preparation Before Data Gathering

Prior to the formal conduct of the study, the researcher undertook several preparatory steps to ensure that all ethical, administrative, and methodological protocols were properly observed. The process began with the preparation and validation of the semi-structured interview guide, which underwent content validation by experts in qualitative research and educational management, including the research adviser, and external evaluators to ensure clarity, relevance and alignment with the study's objective. Moreover, the semi-structured interview guide was pilot tested among selected informants who were not included in the actual informants.

After validation, the researcher sought the necessary administrative approvals. A formal letter was first submitted to the Schools Division office of Aklan, requesting authorization to conduct the study within the division's jurisdiction. The letter was outlined the study's objectives and assurance that all ethical considerations were followed.

Upon receiving the approval from the Division Office, the researcher request permission from the Division Planning Officer to obtain the official list of remote secondary schools within the Schools Division of Aklan. This list served as the basis for

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identifying potential study sites. Following this, a request letter was sent to the Public Schools District Supervisors overseeing the identified areas, seeking permission to gather preliminary data.

After the district level approval, the researcher formally communicated with the School Heads of identified remote secondary schools. The letter requesting relevant data about teachers, including basic information that helped to determine qualified informants who met the study's inclusion criteria. Each communications emphasized that all data collected were treated with the utmost confidentiality and used exclusively for research purposes.

Once the researcher has purposively identified the qualified informants for the study, formal request letters were sent to the both Schools District Supervisor and the School Heads of the identified informant to request for the approval to conduct study. Upon securing the necessary permissions, the researcher proceeded to contact the selected teachers to confirm their willingness to participate with the study.

During Data Gathering

The researcher traveled to the identified school to personally experience setting and to engage with the informants in their nature of work environment. The researcher also stayed overnight in one of the selected schools, allowing firsthand understanding of the teachers' living conditions and daily experiences. All travel activities were documented to ensure transparency and proper record keeping. The interviews were

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conducted face-to-face within the school premises. Each interview was expected to last approximately 45 to 60 minutes, depending on the depth of responses and willingness of the informants to share their experiences. The informants allowed to use any language in which they feel most comfortable, enabling them to express their thoughts and feelings freely and authentically.

On the day of interview, the researcher ensured that all recorded devices were functional, adequately charged and positioned for clear audio capture. The researcher also ensured that the recording instrument had enough storage for the data gathering.

Before the conduct of the interview, the informants underwent a briefing about the purpose of the study and their rights as informants of the study. They were assured of the confidentiality, anonymity, and their right to withdraw at any point. Each informant then signed an informed consent form to confirm their voluntary participations.

The researcher conducted interviews using the validated semi-structured interview guide. To ensure accuracy, all interviews were recorded, allowing the researcher to focus on the informants' responses.

In addition to the interview, the researcher captured images and collected relevant photo-documentations from the informants to supplement with the qualitative data. Furthermore, field notes were prepared to record observation and informal interaction with the members of the school community and stakeholders during data

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collection process. Such observations may capture contextual details, brief exchanges or discussion that are not part of the formal interview but provide valuable insights into informant’s lived experiences and the school setting. These materials served as supporting evidence to validate and enrich the descriptions of teachers lived experiences in remote settings. All collected materials were treated with confidentiality and used solely for research purposes.

After Data Gathering

After completing all the interviews, the researcher proceeded with transcribing the recorded conversation into text format using Microsoft Word. Transcription was done immediately after each interview to maintain the accuracy and contextual integrity of informant’s responses.

The researcher organized and review the documented and collected photographs and field notes obtained during data collection process. This visual and documentary materials served as supporting evidence to enhance the interpretation and contextual understanding of teachers’ lived experiences in remote school settings.

The transcribed interviews and supplementary data underwent phenomenological analysis following Colaizzi’s (1978) descriptive phenomenological method.

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Data Analysis Procedure

Data were analyzed using Colaizzi's (1978) Descriptive Phenomenological Method, as outlined by Praveena & Sasikumar (2021). This analytic method was widely recognized for its systematic and structured approach in phenomenological research, allowing researcher to extract, interpret, and synthesize informants' experiences while remaining true to their original meanings.

The following steps undertaken in analyzing the qualitative data:

1. Familiarization with the data. The researcher read and rereads the interview transcripts to become thoroughly familiar with the informants' narrative and gain comprehensive understanding of their lived experiences.
2. Identifying Significant Statements. From the transcripts, the researcher extracted statements or phrases that are directly related to the phenomenon on teachers' lived experiences in remote schools.
3. Formulating Meanings. The researcher interpreted the underlying meanings of each significant statement to uncover the essential thoughts and emotions expressed by the informants.
4. Organizing Formulated Meanings into Theme Clusters. The formulated meanings were then organized into clusters of themes, reflecting common patterns and shared elements of the informants' lived experiences.

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5. Developing an Exhaustive Description. The researcher integrated all the thematic clusters into a rich, detailed, and comprehensive description of the phenomenon that captures the essence of the informants' experiences.

6. Producing the Fundamental Structure. The exhaustive description was condensed into a concise statement that expresses the fundamental structure or essence of the phenomenon being studied.

7. Validation of the Findings (Member Checking). The researcher returned the findings to the informants to validate whether the description accurately represents their experiences. Revisions or classifications, if suggested by the informants, were incorporated to ensure credibility and trustworthiness of the results.

Data Validation Methods

To ensure the transparency, accuracy, and trustworthiness of the study, data validation was conducted throughout the research process.

Audit Trail

Systematic audit trail was established by documenting all stages of data collection and analysis. This included interview audio recordings, transcriptions, field notes, and photographic documentation, as well as records of coding and theme development. This process was reviewed by an expert in qualitative research to ensure transparency and dependability of the study.

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Member Checking

Member checking was conducted by presenting the transcribed data, identified themes and codes to the informants. The informants were given opportunity to review and validate whether the interpretations accurately reflected their lived experiences. Feedback from informants was incorporated to refine and ensure the accuracy and credibility of the findings.

Data Triangulation

Data triangulation was employed by utilizing multiple data sources, including semi-structured interviews, field notes, and photographic documentations. These sources were compared and analyzed to confirm the consistency of the findings and to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of teachers in remote secondary schools.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The following are the findings of the study:

First, the study revealed that the lived experiences of Aklanon teachers in remote secondary schools were shaped by "Ro Nagatik-eod sa mas Matawhay nga Pangabuhi ag Daean" (Factors Leading to Improved Living Conditions) as push factors that created pressures and difficulties in their current assignments. These includes "Mga Hangkat sa Kalidod it Daean" (Geographical and Travel Challenges), "Paeas-anon Hanungod sa Kwarta" (Financial Burden), and "Kakueangan it mga Kagamitan sa Eskuelahan" (Limited Educational

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Facilities and Resources). Aklanon teachers experienced long-distance travel, unsafe and rugged roads, river crossings, unpredictable weather conditions, and accident-prone routes, making teachers in remote schools a lived experiences of risk, endurance, and uncertainty. These travel-related difficulties affected not only their physical safety but also their emotional well-being and professional responsibilities, aligning with previous findings that unsafe transportation and environmental hazards contribute to teacher stress and reassignment decisions (Maghanoy, 2021; Heffernan et al., 2022). In addition, financial burden emerged through high transportation expenses, lack of hardship allowance, and additional work-related costs, which reduced teachers' actual income despite of having a stable employment. This finding is supported by Malonzo and Genuba (2024), who noted that teachers in remote areas commonly experience financial strain due to transportation costs, limited incentives, and other job-related expenses. Limited teaching and learning resources, inadequate school facilities, lack of technology, and unstable utilities also shaped Aklanon teachers' experiences, requiring them to continuously adjust and become resourceful in teaching and learning process. This finding is consistent with studies showing that far-flung and last-mile schools often experience shortages in learning resources, inadequate facilities, and limited access to technology (Algonos et al., 2024; Baynosa et al., 2024; Lariosa et al., 2022).

Second, the findings showed that teachers' decisions to request reassignment were influenced by "Paadto sa Ginahandum nga Kamaeayran" (Moving towards a Desired Future) which represent as pull factors that lead teachers' toward more favorable living conditions. "Handum nga Mag-eapit sa Pamilya" (Desire for Proximity to Family) emerged as a major

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actor, as teachers experienced emotional strain from being separated from their children, parents, and loved ones. This revealed a lived tension between professional commitment and family responsibility, where teachers had to balance their role as educators with their roles as parents and child. This finding is supported by studies indicating that family-related concerns significantly influence teachers' intention to request reassignment (Fessehatsion & Peng, 2021; Nanda & Sulaipher, 2025). In addition, "Handum sa mas Hilway ag Maayad-ayad nga Kahimtangan" (Desire for a Better Working Conditions) was evident in Aklanon teachers' lived experiences of work-life imbalance, temporary living arrangements in teachers' quarter or payag, physical exhaustion, and limited time with family. These conditions pulled teachers toward more accessible school assignments where they could achieve a more sustainable balance between personal well-being and professional responsibilities.

Third, the study found that despite the difficulties encountered, "Pagpadayon it Pagturo sa Tunga it Kalisod" (Sustaining Teachers' Commitment Despite of Challenges) represents the mooring factors that anchor Aklanon teachers to remain in their current school assignments. "Seguridad ag Permanente nga Karera" (Career Stability and Permanency) served as strong motivating factors, as teachers valued job security and opportunity to hold a permanent position despite the challenges of distance and difficult working conditions. This finding is supported by studies indicating that job security and stability influence teachers' decisions to remain in their positions (Abdullah et al., 2023; Anog et al., 2023). "Dedikasyon ag Pagmahae sa Pagturo" (Dedication and Passion for Teaching) also sustained teachers' commitment, as they found meaning in helping learners, witnessing students' progress, and

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fulfilling their calling as educators. These findings affirm previous studies showing that intrinsic factors such as passion, purpose and fulfillment strengthen teachers' commitment in challenging contexts (Abdullah et al., 2023; Mañoza & Cruz, 2024; Arthur & Bradley, 2023). Furthermore, "Supporta halin sa Eskuelahan ag Komunidad" (Support from School and Community) created a sense of belonging, encouragement, and emotional anchorage. These support systems helped teachers cope with hardship and influence their decision to remain in remote school assignments, supported with studies highlighting the role of supportive relationships and community involvement in teacher retention (Heffernan et al., 2022; Lariosa et al., 2022; Callego, 2022).

Overall, the study found that the Aklanon teachers' lived experiences in remote secondary schools shaped by continuous interplay between the desire to leave and the decision to stay. Hazardous travel, financial burden, limited resources, family separation, and difficult working conditions pushed or pulled teachers toward reassignment. However, career stability, passion for teaching, commitment to learners and strong support from colleagues and the community anchored them to remain. Thus, the essence of their lived experience is characterized by sacrifice, uncertainty, resilience, and meaningful commitment in the midst of challenging remote school settings.

These findings led to the development of the proposed program titled "Bridging Policy and Practice: Presentation of Aklanon Teachers' Lived experiences for the Review and Reassessment of Guidelines on the Provision of Special Hardship Allowance for Public School Teachers (DepEd Order No. 39, s. 2021), which aims to support policy review, teachers

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retention, motivation, and well-being by aligning implementation with the actual field conditions experienced by teachers in remote secondary schools.

Implications to Theory and Practice

The findings of this study provide important implications for theory and practice.

For Theory

The findings of this study provide significant implications for the Push-Pull-Mooring (PPM) Theory in explaining teachers' decisions to stay or request reassignment in remote school context. The Pull-Push-Mooring (PPM) Theory suggests that individual's mobility decisions are influenced by push factors, pull factors, and mooring factors. In the context of this study, Aklanon teachers' lived experiences affirm that hazardous travel conditions, financial burden, and limited educational resources function as push factors that create pressure to leave their current assignments. At the same time, the desire for proximity to family and better working conditions serves as pull factors that influence teachers to seek for more favorable and accessible working environments.

However, the findings further suggest that these factors do not operate independently but rather interact dynamically. Teachers continuously balance their desire to leave with their reasons for staying, indicating that decision-making is shaped by complex interplay of conditions rather than a single determining factor. This extends the application of PPM Theory by demonstrating that teachers' mobility decisions in remote school settings are influenced by the simultaneous interaction of push, pull, and mooring forces.

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Furthermore, the findings support the Job Embeddedness Theory, which explains that employees remain in their positions due to strong connections, alignment with their values, and the perceived benefits of staying. The study revealed that teachers' relationships with colleagues, learners, and the community, along with their sense of purpose and fulfillment in teaching, strengthen their attachments to their school. This implies that retention is not solely dependent on external conditions but also with the deeply rooted social relationships and intrinsic motivations that anchor teachers in their current assignments.

For Practice

The findings of this study provide important implications for educational policy, school management, and teacher support systems in remote secondary schools. The results highlight the need to review of the implementation of the Special Hardship Allowance (SHA), as current classifications of schools as "accessible" does not accurately reflect the actual conditions experienced by teachers. Despite being assigned in geographically isolated areas, teachers continue to face hazardous travel conditions, financial burden, and environmental risks, which indicate a mismatch between policy classification and lived realities of teachers.

This implies that policy decisions should be grounded in empirical evidence and actual field conditions to ensure that the provision of SHA becomes more responsive, equitable, and appropriate to the needs of teachers in remote areas. Reassessing the criteria for hardship posts may help ensure that teachers who are exposed to significant risks and challenges receive adequate support and compensation.

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Furthermore, the findings suggest that school leaders and educational administrators should strengthen support systems with in school and community. Promoting strong relationship, encouraging collaboration, and foster community involvement can enhance the sense of belongingness and emotional well-being. These support systems play an important role in sustaining teachers' commitment and reducing their intention to request reassignment.

In addition, improving teachers' working conditions in remote schools is essential. Addressing challenges related to transportation, temporary living arrangements, and limited access to instructional resources may help reduce the burden experienced by teachers and improve their effectiveness in delivering quality education.

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