

Leadership Challenges of Teachers Teaching In Last Mile Schools of Labo West District

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the leadership challenges faced by teachers in the last mile schools of Labo West District using a quantitative-correlational research design. Grounded in Distributed Leadership, Transformational Leadership, and Place-Based Education theories, the investigation employed a structured survey of 100 teachers and utilized statistical tools such as weighted means, Somers' Delta Coefficient, and the Contingency Coefficient. Findings revealed that most respondents were early- to mid-career educators, predominantly aged 31–35, with females representing 57% and a majority holding entry-level Teacher I positions. Leadership challenges emerged prominently in socio-cultural aspects, pedagogy, and personal well-being, with significant negative correlations found between age and years in service and these challenges, suggesting that more experienced teachers are better equipped to navigate the difficulties. The study identified pressing concerns such as inadequate school infrastructure, limited resources, and weak parent-teacher relationships that collectively impede effective teaching and learning. In response, the proposed EmpowerED Workshop aims to equip teachers with creative problem-solving skills, stress management techniques, and community-building strategies to address these multifaceted challenges. The implications of these findings underscore the need for enhanced mentorship, targeted professional development, and strategic interventions from educational leaders and policymakers to improve teacher retention and overall educational outcomes in remote settings.

Keywords: Leadership Challenges, Last Mile Schools, Professional Development, Teacher Retention, Educational Interventions

INTRODUCTION

The landscape of education is constantly evolving. To meet the challenges and embrace the opportunities of this changing world, we need empowered educational leaders at the helm. These leaders are more than just administrators; they are passionate advocates, strategic visionaries, and tireless champions for student success (Leithwood et al., 2020). This focus on empowerment recognizes that strong educational leadership is not a one-size-fits-all proposition but rather about cultivating a culture of trust, collaboration, and professional growth within schools and districts (Hallinger, 2003). By empowering leaders, they are equipped to make informed decisions, tap into the talent of their educators, and create dynamic learning environments where all students can thrive (Spillane and Coldren, 2015).

Moreover, a thriving education system depends on effective teachers, but those in remote areas face challenges like limited resources and isolation, hindering their ability to provide quality education (Paideya, 2020). Innovative solutions are needed to support these teachers, and empowering educational

leaders to understand and address these specific challenges can create a more thorough and equitable educational landscape for all students (Durandis, 2024).

In addition, achieving quality education in remote areas is challenging due to limited resources, overcrowded classrooms, and unreliable internet connectivity (Bailey, 2024). Social and economic factors, like poverty and limited parental support, exacerbate the struggle (Boncinelli, 2024). Attracting and retaining qualified teachers is difficult due to lower salaries and isolation, yet teachers employ creative methods to engage students, and students demonstrate remarkable resilience and a strong desire to learn (Darling-Hammond, 2020).

Moreover, Tahir et al. (2024) explored teacher leadership in Malaysian secondary schools through interviews with 10 principals, examining their strategies for mentoring and developing future leaders. The study identified key challenges, such as teachers' reluctance to take on leadership roles due to workload and seniority issues. It emphasized the need for further research and proposed recommendations to enhance teacher leadership practices within the Malaysian education system.

In Australia, the United States, and Zambia, initiatives have been developed to support placing teachers in rural and remote areas, addressing the challenges of recruiting and retaining educators in these locations. Each country employs different strategies, such as incentives and studies, to tackle this issue. Despite the ongoing challenge of a shrinking teacher labor supply, it is hoped that these efforts will lead to effective learning opportunities for children in rural regions (Mitchell et al., 2022).

These international efforts resonate with similar challenges in the Philippines, where ensuring quality education for all, particularly in remote regions, is a priority. Republic Act No. 10533, or the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, reflects this commitment, emphasizing the need to address the unique educational needs of learners in these areas. The K-12 program mandated by Republic Act No. 10533 includes provisions for improving the quality of education and addressing the needs of learners in remote areas. This highlights the importance of providing quality education to all learners, regardless of their geographic location, and relates directly to remote areas. This highlights the importance of providing quality education to address all leadership challenges faced by teachers in the Labo West District.

Moreover, DepEd Order No. 2, s. 2015, or the Policy Guidelines on the Implementation of the Results-Based Performance Management System (RPMS), establishes a performance management system for teachers and school heads to improve performance and accountability. This annual assessment manages records and measures teacher performance, helping to enhance teaching quality using MOVs and KRAs, even in remote areas. Effective educational leadership is crucial for implementing RPMS and ensuring quality education in these areas.

Additionally, DepEd Order No. 44, s. 2015, or the Guidelines on the Enhanced School Improvement Planning (SIP) Process and the School Report Card (SRC), outlines procedures for school improvement planning, especially for remote areas. Educational leaders are essential for guiding the SIP process and implementing improvement initiatives. Active participation of school heads, teachers, and staff in SIP and SRC is evaluated through the Results-Based Performance Management System (RPMS) and documented in the Individual Performance Commitment and Review Form (IPCRF) for teachers and staff or the Office Performance Commitment and Review Form (OPCRF) for school heads.

The Department of Education (DepEd) has initiated efforts to improve communication infrastructure in remote areas to support education. Notably, DepEd Memorandum No. 59, s. 2019, titled "Prioritizing the Development of the Last Mile Schools in 2020–2021: Reaching Out and Closing the

Gap," outlines plans to provide internet connectivity to schools in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas. Enhancing ICT access in these regions is crucial for reducing professional isolation among teachers and improving the quality of education in rural schools.

On these accounts, teachers and school heads of DepEd schools need to be leaders who have the competence to serve their students in a variety of roles. They are the type of leaders who should possess strong leadership and their functions as educational leaders.

In the context of the locale of this study, data shows that Labo West District is comprised of 25 elementary schools with almost 300 teaching personnel. Six (6) of these elementary schools are in far-flung areas and difficult to reach by transportation. Teachers stationed in these areas grapple with distinct challenges that stretch beyond the typical hurdles encountered in urban settings. From scarcity of resources to connectivity limitations, educators in remote areas face an arduous journey, demanding resilience, ingenuity, and unwavering commitment.

As a teacher who has experienced the trials of working in a last mile school firsthand, the researcher aims to shed light on the profound challenges faced by educators and students in these settings. The study seeks to propose strategies to empower educational leaders, ensuring equitable access to quality education for all learners in last mile schools. Additionally, the researcher hopes to advocate for critical support and incentives from concerned agencies to sustain teachers' motivation and effectiveness.

Thus, the researcher is motivated to study and address the multifaceted challenges faced by teachers in last mile schools, aiming to empower educational leaders and ensure equitable access to quality education. The research focuses on the Labo West District schools, identifying gaps in teacher empowerment and assignment. It seeks to determine if significant differences exist between teachers' profiles and the leadership challenges they encounter in remote teaching profiles and the leadership challenges they encounter in remote teaching environments.

Research Questions

This study determined the leadership challenges of teachers assigned to last mile schools in the Labo West District. Specifically, it answered the following questions:

1. How may the profile of the respondents be described in terms of:
 - 1.1 age;
 - 1.2 sex;
 - 1.3 position in school; and
 - 1.4 years in service?
2. What are the leadership challenges encountered by the teachers assigned to last mile schools in terms of:
 - 2.1 resources and support;
 - 2.2 environmental and geographic challenges;
 - 2.3 personal well-being;
 - 2.4 professional development;
 - 2.5 school governance and administration;
 - 2.6 socio-cultural challenges; and
 - 2.7 pedagogical challenges?

3. Is there a significant relationship between the profile and leadership challenges of teachers teaching in last mile schools?
4. Based on the results of the study, what intervention may be proposed to address the challenges encountered by teachers assigned to last mile schools?

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative-correlational design to determine the leadership challenges faced by teachers in last mile schools and to examine the relationship between their demographic profiles, such as age, sex, position in school, and years in service, and the various dimensions of these challenges (Chico and Matira, 2016). A structured survey questionnaire was used to collect numerical data, which were then analyzed with statistical tools including Somers' Delta Coefficient (d) to measure associations between ordinal variables and the Contingency Coefficient (C) to assess relationships between categorical variables, providing empirical evidence of how respondents' profiles influence the challenges they encounter. This design allowed for objective measurement, analysis, and interpretation of data, ultimately contributing to a comprehensive understanding of leadership challenges in the context of last mile schools.

Population, Sample Size, and Sampling Technique

The study focused on six last mile schools in the Labo West district, encompassing a total of 100 respondents, all of whom were teachers assigned to these schools. Total enumeration was chosen as the sampling technique to ensure the highest level of accuracy and inclusivity in the data collection process, enabling the researcher to gather reliable data that reflects the entire population of teachers in the area and captures a wide range of perspectives and insights into the challenges faced by teachers in remote settings.

Table 1. School and Number of Respondents

Name of School	Number of Respondents
School A	19
School B	38
School C	19
School D	4
School E	14
School F	6
Total	100

Data Gathering Procedures

Before the formal implementation of the study, ethical considerations were rigorously addressed by piloting the survey instrument with 20 elementary school teachers from the Labo East District to ensure clarity and reliability, after which formal approvals and permissions were secured from the Schools Division Superintendent of the Department of Education in Camarines Norte, the Public Schools District Supervisor, and school principals. Informed consent was obtained from all teacher-respondents, and data were collected through a structured survey, distributed online via Google Forms for those with internet access and manually for others, while maintaining confidentiality in compliance

with the Data Privacy Act of 2012. The research instrument, a researcher-made questionnaire divided into two parts covering teacher profiles and leadership challenges, was content-validated by five school heads and master teachers from the Labo East and Labo West Districts, and its internal consistency was confirmed by Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.870 to 0.967 using SPSS v. 21, thereby ensuring reliability as supported by Tavakol and Dennick (2011).

Statistical Treatment of Data

Descriptive and inferential statistics were employed to analyze the data using SPSS v.21 for processing and computations, where frequency counts were used to analyze both the demographic profile (age, sex, position in school, and years in service) and leadership challenges encountered by teachers in last mile schools, allowing for identification of trends and prioritization of concerns, while the weighted mean determined the extent of these challenges by assigning numerical values to responses; furthermore, the relationship between respondents' profiles and their leadership challenges was examined using Somers' Delta Coefficient (d) and the Contingency Coefficient (C), with Somers' Delta measuring associations between ordinal variables—indicating that a negative d value reflects a decrease in perceived challenges as factors such as years in service increase, and a positive d value indicating a direct relationship, computed using the formula:

$$\Delta = \frac{C - D}{C + D + T_y}$$

and the Contingency Coefficient assessing the strength of association between nominal variables like sex and position in school, computed using the formula:

$$C = \sqrt{\frac{x^2}{x^2 + N}}$$

thereby providing comprehensive insights into how demographic characteristics influenced the leadership difficulties faced by teachers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of the Respondents

This section presents the respondents' profiles in terms of age, sex, position in school, and years of service, which provide a foundational understanding for analyzing the leadership challenges faced by teachers in last mile schools.

Age. Data from Table 2 reveals that a majority of teachers fall within the 31–35 age bracket (frequency = 26), indicating that these schools primarily attract young and mid-career educators—likely due to fewer job opportunities in urban areas—implying that while these teachers are developing their leadership skills and are receptive to professional development, their relative inexperience may pose challenges in balancing teaching and leadership roles (Tahir et al., 2021). Conversely, the lowest frequency is observed among teachers aged 56 and above, with only five respondents, suggesting lower retention of older teachers in last mile schools, potentially as a result of geographic isolation, physical challenges, or a preference for urban postings near retirement; this raises concerns about the loss of institutional knowledge and mentorship opportunities, highlighting the need for tailored incentives such as reduced workloads or additional benefits to retain experienced educators (Wieczorek and Manard, 2019).

Sex. Table 2 shows that a majority of respondents in the last mile schools of Labo West District are female, comprising 57 of the total 100 teachers, while males account for 43, reflecting a longstanding trend in Philippine elementary education and global studies that document the feminization of teaching due to historical and socio-cultural factors linking the profession to traditionally nurturing roles. This predominance of female teachers may stem not only from gendered occupational patterns but also from practical considerations where women are more willing or perceived as more suitable for challenging remote postings, although it also implies leadership challenges such as systemic gender bias, limited access to leadership training, and societal pressures prioritizing caregiving over career advancement. Conversely, the lower representation of male teachers raises concerns about reduced gender diversity, diminished opportunities for varied leadership styles, and limited male role modeling for students, a situation that reflects broader labor trends and the reluctance of men to engage in lower-paid, service-oriented professions in rural or isolated areas. These dynamics suggest complex socio-professional patterns in the teaching workforce, emphasizing the need to understand how gender affects leadership capacity, role execution, and school culture—a finding conformed by Taufik and Istiarsono (2020), who emphasize that gender roles and expectations significantly shape how teachers experience and exercise leadership, especially in contexts marked by isolation and limited resources.

Table 2. Profile of the Respondents

Indicators	Frequency
Age	
25-30	18
31-35	26
36-40	19
41-45	17
46-50	8
51-55	7
56 and above	5
Total	100
Sex	
Male	43
Female	57
Total	100
Position	
Teacher 1	74
Teacher 2	8
Teacher 3	18
Total	100
Years in Service	
1-5	36
6-10	28
11-15	28

16-20	4
21 and above	4
Total	100

Position. Table 2 indicates that the majority of respondents hold the entry-level position of Teacher I, with 74 out of 100 teachers, reflecting the prominence of early-career educators in last mile schools within the Labo West District and suggesting that these schools primarily serve as starting points for teachers entering the profession; this trend implies a need for targeted mentorship and capacity-building programs to nurture growth and prepare educators for advanced responsibilities, a necessity emphasized by Wieczorek and Manard (2019), who highlight the challenges novice educators face in rural settings. Conversely, only eight respondents are in Teacher II positions, revealing a potential bottleneck in career advancement that may stem from limited access to professional development opportunities or systemic promotion challenges, factors that could adversely affect teacher motivation and retention in geographically isolated schools where incentives for sustained service are critical—a concern further corroborated by Taufik and Istiarsono (2020), who note that career stagnation and limited opportunities for professional growth hinder the leadership capacity of educators.

Years in Service. Table 2 indicates that a significant number of respondents (36) have 1 to 5 years of service, suggesting that the teaching workforce in Labo West District's last mile schools is predominantly composed of early-career educators who face unique challenges such as adapting to remote teaching and building professional resilience, thereby necessitating targeted mentorship and capacity-building initiatives; this observation is supported by Hernandez and Santos (2020), who note that geographic isolation exacerbates challenges for new teachers by limiting access to professional support and affecting morale, while the notably low representation of experienced teachers—with only four respondents each in the 16–20 years and 21+ years categories—suggests difficulties in retaining veteran educators, which can impede the availability of mentors and the development of leadership capacities, a trend further confirmed by Shikalepo (2020), who emphasizes that addressing these retention challenges through incentives, improved working conditions, and career advancement opportunities is vital for sustaining a balanced teaching workforce in rural and last mile schools.

Leadership Challenges Encountered by Teachers in Last Mile Schools

This section explores the leadership challenges faced by teachers in the last mile schools of the Labo West District, revealing obstacles such as limited resources, geographic and environmental difficulties, socio-cultural issues, and challenges in personal well-being and professional development that adversely affect school governance, pedagogy, and overall leadership.

Resources and Support. Table 3 shows that “Quality of school buildings, classrooms, and facilities” has the highest weighted mean of 3.80, interpreted as “Highly Challenging,” underscoring the detrimental impact of inadequate infrastructure on teacher morale and student learning. In contrast, “Reliable internet access for educational resources and communication” scores 3.17 (interpreted as “Moderately Challenging”), highlighting that despite government initiatives such as the DepEd Computerization Program established under Department of Education Order No. 78, s.2010, limited connectivity continues to hinder access to modern teaching resources and professional collaboration. These findings imply a need for specialized professional development that enhances resourcefulness in

adapting to resource-constrained environments, as confirmed by Shikalepo (2020) and Sandvik et al. (2024).

Overall, the weighted mean of 3.50 indicates that resources and support challenges are generally perceived as “Highly Challenging” by teachers in these remote settings, reflecting systemic issues such as problematic road access, insufficient infrastructural support, and limited stakeholder engagement. Addressing these persistent barriers will require comprehensive resource allocation, increased funding, and strategic community engagement, including improved transportation infrastructure and professional networks. Collaborative efforts among government and non-government organizations are essential to foster sustainable educational leadership, a position strongly supported by Tintoré et al. (2020).

Table 3. Leadership Challenges Encountered by the Teachers Assigned in Last Mile Schools in Terms of Resources and Support

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Interpretation
1. Availability of textbooks, teaching aids, and digital resources.	3.50	Highly Challenging
2. Adequate funding for classroom materials and personal expenses.	3.57	Highly Challenging
3. Quality of school buildings, classrooms, and facilities.	3.80	Highly Challenging
4. Reliable internet access for educational resources and communication.	3.17	Moderately Challenging
5. Opportunities to connect with other educators for support and collaboration.	3.74	Highly Challenging
6. Availability of tech support for digital tools and resources.	3.30	Moderately Challenging
7. Reliable delivery of necessary supplies and materials.	3.59	Highly Challenging
8. Access to experienced mentors for guidance and support.	3.67	Highly Challenging
9. Assistance from government and non-government organizations.	3.24	Moderately Challenging
10. Active participation and support from the local community.	3.43	Highly Challenging
Overall Weighted Mean	3.50	Highly Challenging

Rating Scale: Descriptive Interpretation:

- 4.20 – 5.00 Extremely Challenging
- 3.40 – 4.19 Highly Challenging
- 2.60 – 3.39 Moderately Challenging
- 1.80 – 2.59 Slightly Challenging
- 1.00 – 1.79 Not At All Challenging

Environmental and Geographic Challenges. In Table 4, the indicator with the highest weighted mean of 3.63 pertains to “Use of the local environment in teaching and learning activities,” interpreted as “Highly Challenging.” This finding highlights the difficulty teachers face in integrating their

immediate surroundings into instructional practices; while the local environment offers potential for experiential learning and contextualized education, last mile schools often lack the necessary resources, training, and support to harness these opportunities effectively. The implications suggest that environmental challenges may be reframed as opportunities for developing resilience and practical problem-solving skills, indicating a need for teacher training programs focused on transforming environmental limitations into pedagogical assets. The geographical isolation of schools further requires educators to extend their commitment beyond academic instruction to holistic student development, including spiritual growth, and underscores the importance of selecting and supporting educators with a service-oriented mindset, as reinforced by Shabalala et al. (2023).

Table 4. Leadership Challenges Encountered by the Teachers Assigned in Last Mile Schools in Terms of Environmental and Geographic Challenges

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Interpretation
1. Reliable and safe transportation options to and from remote areas.	2.83	Moderately Challenging
2. Strategies to cope with extreme weather conditions.	3.04	Moderately Challenging
3. Techniques to handle geographical isolation from urban centers.	3.15	Moderately Challenging
4. Plans and resources for responding to natural disasters.	3.30	Moderately Challenging
5. Incorporation of environmentally sustainable practices in teaching.	3.54	Highly Challenging
6. Access to healthcare services and emergency medical support.	3.07	Moderately Challenging
7. School buildings and facilities that can withstand harsh environmental conditions.	3.33	Moderately Challenging
8. Efficient use of limited resources like water and energy.	3.15	Moderately Challenging
9. Use of the local environment in teaching and learning activities.	3.63	Highly Challenging
10. Protocols to ensure safety from local wildlife and environmental hazards.	3.46	Highly Challenging
Overall Weighted Mean	3.25	Moderately Challenging

Rating Scale: Descriptive Interpretation:

- 4.20 – 5.00 Extremely Challenging
- 3.40 – 4.19 Highly Challenging
- 2.60 – 3.39 Moderately Challenging
- 1.80 – 2.59 Slightly Challenging

1.00 – 1.79 Not At All Challenging

In contrast, the indicator with the lowest weighted mean, 2.83, concerns “Reliable and safe transportation options to and from remote areas,” which is interpreted as “Moderately Challenging.” Limited access to reliable transportation hinders teachers’ ability to commute regularly and safely, affecting attendance, morale, and overall effectiveness, while intensifying the isolation of last mile schools and deterring potential teacher placements. These transportation difficulties create financial burdens and safety concerns for educators, especially during adverse weather conditions, and point to a need for transportation allowances, subsidies, insurance coverage, or hazard pay, given that many educators must resort to unconventional transportation methods such as rural motorcycle taxis or boat crossings. The development of strong collegial relationships in these settings may help mitigate retention issues, a finding conformed by Wieczorek and Manard (2019).

The overall weighted mean of 3.25, interpreted as “Moderately Challenging,” indicates that environmental and geographic challenges collectively impact the quality of education and the well-being of educators, albeit with varying degrees of severity. This overall rating underscores the need for a holistic approach that addresses both physical and instructional challenges posed by environmental factors, calling for systemic support through targeted interventions such as infrastructure development and localized teacher training. These measures are crucial to overcoming the barriers faced by teachers in remote communities, as emphasized by Smith et al. (2019), thereby enhancing the educational landscape in last mile schools.

Table 5. Leadership Challenges Encountered by the Teachers Assigned in Last Mile Schools in Terms of Personal Well-being

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Interpretation
1. Access to mental health services and stress management resources.	3.39	Moderately Challenging
2. Strategies to maintain a healthy balance between professional and personal life.	3.65	Highly Challenging
3. Opportunities to stay connected with family and friends.	3.76	Highly Challenging
4. Availability of leisure activities for relaxation and rejuvenation.	3.41	Highly Challenging
5. Availability of regular medical check-ups and health services.	2.93	Moderately Challenging
6. Adequate housing and living conditions.	3.30	Moderately Challenging
7. Resources to help adjust to the local culture and lifestyle.	3.46	Highly Challenging
8. Ensuring personal safety in remote locations.	3.35	Moderately Challenging
9. Access to healthy food options and fitness facilities.	3.24	Moderately Challenging
10. Adequate salary and benefits to ensure financial security.	3.24	Moderately

		Challenging
Overall Weighted Mean	3.37	Moderately Challenging

Rating Scale: Descriptive Interpretation:

- 4.20 – 5.00 Extremely Challenging
- 3.40 – 4.19 Highly Challenging
- 2.60 – 3.39 Moderately Challenging
- 1.80 – 2.59 Slightly Challenging
- 1.00 – 1.79 Not At All Challenging

Personal Well-Being. Table 5 reveals that the indicator with the highest weighted mean is “Opportunities to stay connected with family and friends,” rated at 3.76 and interpreted as “Highly Challenging.” This finding underscores the significant emotional and social toll of working in last mile schools, where geographic isolation and limited communication infrastructure restrict teachers’ ability to maintain regular contact with family and friends, intensifying loneliness and impacting mental health and job satisfaction. These conditions suggest that prolonged separation may lead teachers to immerse themselves in work as a coping mechanism, highlighting the urgent need for interventions such as reliable internet access and enhanced transportation options (Hernandez and Santos, 2020).

The indicator with the lowest weighted mean, 2.93, pertains to “Availability of regular medical check-ups and health services” and is interpreted as “Moderately Challenging.” Although less severe, this issue significantly affects the physical well-being and long-term health of teachers in remote schools due to limited access to preventive care and timely treatment, which may predispose educators to chronic health issues. To address these challenges, the Department of Education has implemented measures like hazard pay under DepEd Order No. 82, s.2007 and DepEd Order No. 3, s.2014, and is expected to facilitate regular medical services through partnerships with local government health units; however, factors such as inconsistent local health infrastructure and transportation difficulties continue to hinder effective delivery of these services (Shikalepo, 2020).

The overall weighted mean of 3.37, interpreted as “Moderately Challenging,” reflects that personal well-being issues remain a considerable concern for teachers in last mile schools. While some aspects of personal well-being may be more manageable, challenges related to maintaining social connections and adapting to cultural differences present significant hurdles. These findings underscore the necessity for comprehensive support systems that address both tangible needs, such as healthcare and housing, and intangible needs, such as emotional and social support—a multifaceted challenge that requires systemic solutions to foster teacher resilience and sustain quality education in remote contexts (Tintoré et al., 2020).

Professional Development. Table 6 highlights that professional development is a significant challenge for teachers in last mile schools, with the indicator “Participation in educational conferences and seminars” receiving the highest weighted mean of 3.96 and being interpreted as “Highly Challenging.” This result underscores the difficulty educators face in accessing opportunities for advanced learning and networking due to geographic isolation, financial constraints, and limited institutional support. Despite these obstacles, many teachers actively seek professional growth by attending training sessions and enrolling in online graduate programs, demonstrating a strong intrinsic

motivation for career advancement. These findings emphasize the need for accessible, context-sensitive professional development programs, such as virtual conferences or localized training sessions, tailored to the specific needs of remote educators, as conformed by Wieczorek and Manard (2019).

Conversely, the indicator for “Availability of the latest educational research and resources” has the lowest weighted mean of 3.65, although it is still interpreted as “Highly Challenging.” This reflects the limited access to up-to-date teaching materials, research, and pedagogical innovations, which can constrain teachers’ ability to apply evidence-based practices. Even though some educators may not pursue career advancement as aggressively, they continue engaging in professional learning opportunities to stay informed about current teaching strategies, especially during critical periods such as the pandemic. The lack of accessible educational resources not only suppresses professional growth but also impacts student outcomes, underscoring the need for strategic partnerships with academic institutions and education departments to ensure the dissemination of current research and teaching resources, as corroborated by Shikalepo (2020).

Table 6. Leadership Challenges Encountered by the Teachers Assigned in Last Mile Schools in Terms of Professional Development

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Interpretation
1. Opportunities for ongoing professional education and certification.	3.74	Highly Challenging
2. Regular workshops to update teaching skills and methodologies.	3.85	Highly Challenging
3. Access to online courses and webinars for professional growth.	3.78	Highly Challenging
4. Platforms for collaboration and knowledge exchange with peers.	3.85	Highly Challenging
5. Participation in educational conferences and seminars.	3.96	Highly Challenging
6. Programs to develop new skills and competencies.	3.74	Highly Challenging
7. Guidance from experienced educators and leaders.	3.87	Highly Challenging
8. Regular feedback for professional improvement.	3.89	Highly Challenging
9. Clear pathways for career progression.	3.80	Highly Challenging
10. Availability of the latest educational research and resources.	3.65	Highly Challenging
Overall Weighted Mean	3.81	Highly Challenging

Rating Scale: Descriptive Interpretation:

- 4.20 – 5.00 Extremely Challenging
- 3.40 – 4.19 Highly Challenging
- 2.60 – 3.39 Moderately Challenging
- 1.80 – 2.59 Slightly Challenging
- 1.00 – 1.79 Not At All Challenging

Overall, the weighted mean of 3.81, interpreted as “Highly Challenging,” indicates that professional development remains a pervasive concern for teachers in last mile schools. This composite challenge reflects systemic issues, such as insufficient funding, lack of infrastructure, and minimal institutional support, that significantly impede sustained professional growth and teacher leadership. These challenges are critical to address because they affect instructional effectiveness and the overall quality of education in remote contexts. Developing targeted programs to support teachers’ career advancement is essential, a conclusion that is further emphasized by Tahir et al. (2021).

School Governance and Administration. In Table 7, indicator number 9—“Empowerment of teachers to make decisions in their classrooms”—registered the highest weighted mean of 4.00, interpreted as “Highly Challenging.” This result suggests that teachers in last mile schools struggle significantly with autonomy and decision-making power within their classrooms, which can hinder their ability to adapt to the needs of their students. The lack of empowerment appears to stem from centralized administrative structures that limit their influence over educational practices and classroom management, thus affecting their sense of ownership and morale, a finding conformed by Zydziunaite et al. (2020).

Table 7. Leadership Challenges Encountered by the Teachers Assigned in Last Mile Schools in Terms of School Governance and Administration

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Interpretation
1. Training for teachers in leadership and management.	3.85	Highly Challenging
2. Clear communication between school administration and teachers.	3.98	Highly Challenging
3. Inclusion of teachers in decision-making processes.	3.80	Highly Challenging
4. Efficient administrative processes to support teaching activities.	3.93	Highly Challenging
5. Knowledge of educational policies and regulations.	3.89	Highly Challenging
6. Fair and efficient allocation of resources.	3.85	Highly Challenging
7. Systems for resolving conflicts within the school.	3.76	Highly Challenging
8. Mechanisms to ensure accountability	3.85	Highly Challenging

9. Empowerment of teachers to make decisions in their classrooms.	4.00	Highly Challenging
10. Training in school governance for better administration.	3.78	Highly Challenging
Overall Weighted Mean	3.87	Highly Challenging

Rating Scale: Descriptive Interpretation:

- 4.20 – 5.00 Extremely Challenging
- 3.40 – 4.19 Highly Challenging
- 2.60 – 3.39 Moderately Challenging
- 1.80 – 2.59 Slightly Challenging
- 1.00 – 1.79 Not At All Challenging

Socio-Cultural Challenges. Table 8 reveals that teachers in last mile schools face significant socio-cultural challenges, with the indicator “Building strong relationships with parents” registering the highest weighted mean of 4.24 and being interpreted as “Extremely Challenging.” This illustrates the difficulty in establishing meaningful partnerships with parents, an essential factor for supporting students’ educational outcomes, compounded by cultural differences, geographic isolation, and limited communication infrastructure. These factors can create a social distance, as skepticism and differing perspectives on education make trust-building arduous, a finding conformed by Shikalepo (2020).

Table 8. Leadership Challenges Encountered by the Teachers Assigned in Last Mile Schools in Terms of Socio-Cultural Challenges

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Interpretation
1. Training to understand and respect local cultures and traditions.	3.76	Highly Challenging
2. Active engagement with the local community.	3.93	Highly Challenging
3. Resources for teaching in local languages and dialects.	3.85	Highly Challenging
4. Strategies to include students from diverse backgrounds.	4.00	Highly Challenging
5. Building strong relationships with parents.	4.24	Extremely Challenging
6. Incorporation of local knowledge and practices into the curriculum.	4.00	Highly Challenging
7. Skills to manage socio-cultural conflicts.	3.89	Highly Challenging
8. Opportunities for cultural exchange and learning.	3.65	Highly Challenging
9. Policies to prevent discrimination and promote equality.	4.09	Highly Challenging
10. Respecting and integrating local traditions into school activities.	4.15	Highly Challenging
Overall Weighted Mean	3.96	Highly Challenging

Rating Scale: Descriptive Interpretation:

- 4.20 – 5.00 Extremely Challenging
- 3.40 – 4.19 Highly Challenging
- 2.60 – 3.39 Moderately Challenging
- 1.80 – 2.59 Slightly Challenging
- 1.00 – 1.79 Not At All Challenging

The indicator for “Opportunities for cultural exchange and learning” received a weighted mean of 3.65 and is interpreted as “Highly Challenging,” suggesting that teachers face limited chances for cross-cultural exchange and mutual learning with other communities. Although some communities may be welcoming, differing beliefs and traditions, along with logistical constraints such as limited transportation, insufficient funding, and restrictive policies, hinder the establishment of structured cultural exchange programs. This challenge was corroborated by Zydziunaite et al. (2020), who note that rural schools often lack the resources and external support systems necessary to facilitate such exchanges.

Overall, the weighted mean of 3.96 reflects the cumulative difficulty teachers experience in managing socio-cultural dynamics, underscoring diverse issues from fostering parent engagement to promoting inclusivity in the classroom. These challenges call for targeted interventions aimed at enhancing teachers’ cultural competence and establishing stronger ties between schools and their communities. The importance of culturally responsive teaching practices and active community engagement as strategies to overcome these barriers in remote educational settings is emphasized by Smith et al. (2019).

Pedagogical Challenges. Table 9 shows that indicator number 9, “Encouraging active participation and engagement,” is rated at 4.22 and interpreted as “Extremely Challenging.” This high rating underscores the considerable difficulty teachers in last mile schools face in motivating students to actively participate in learning. Factors such as geographical isolation, inconsistent parental involvement, and limited instructional resources compel educators to become highly adaptable and resourceful, constantly adjusting teaching approaches to meet diverse student needs.

Table 9. Challenges Faced by Elementary School Teachers along Organizational Domain

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Interpretation
1. Strategies to address diverse learning needs	4.09	Highly Challenging
2. Techniques for teaching multiple grades simultaneously.	3.59	Highly Challenging
3. Use of interactive and student-centered teaching methods.	4.09	Highly Challenging
4. Incorporating local resources into the learning process.	4.02	Highly Challenging
5. Effective assessment methods for diverse student populations.	3.91	Highly Challenging

6. Developing engaging and relevant lesson plans.	4.11	Highly Challenging
7. Integrating technology into teaching despite limited resources.	4.09	Highly Challenging
8. Effective classroom management strategies.	4.15	Highly Challenging
9. Encouraging active participation and engagement.	4.22	Extremely Challenging
10. Ability to adapt teaching methods to changing conditions and student needs.	4.09	Highly Challenging
Overall Weighted Mean	4.03	Highly Challenging

Rating Scale: Descriptive Interpretation:

- 4.20 – 5.00 Extremely Challenging
- 3.40 – 4.19 Highly Challenging
- 2.60 – 3.39 Moderately Challenging
- 1.80 – 2.59 Slightly Challenging
- 1.00 – 1.79 Not At All Challenging

This necessity to innovate under pressure not only highlights teacher resilience but also signals the urgent need for better support systems, such as access to developmentally appropriate materials and training in learner-centered methodologies, to sustain student engagement. Despite their best efforts, the absence of external motivation and support continues to impede effective engagement, a challenge that was conformed by Zydziunaite et al. (2020), who emphasize that fostering active student participation remains a significant obstacle in rural educational contexts.

In contrast, indicator number 2, “Techniques for teaching multiple grades simultaneously,” received a weighted mean of 3.59 and is still interpreted as “Highly Challenging.” Teachers in last mile schools must often manage multi-grade classrooms, which present unique challenges in lesson planning, time management, and addressing the varied needs of students, a situation exacerbated by limited support and resources, as corroborated by Wieczorek and Manard (2019). The overall weighted mean for pedagogical challenges is 4.03, reflecting a broad spectrum of instructional difficulties and underscoring the critical need for targeted professional development programs that equip educators with appropriate multi-grade teaching techniques, technology integration in low-resource settings, and engaging, student-centered practices, as highlighted by Tarraya (2023).

Relationship between the Profile of Respondents and Leadership Challenges

This section examines the significant relationships between teachers’ profiles—comprising age, sex, position, and years in service—and the leadership challenges they face in remote contexts, including issues related to resources and support, environmental and geographical factors, personal well-being, professional development, school governance and administration, socio-cultural, and pedagogical dimensions, as determined using Somer’s Delta (d) and the Contingency Coefficient (C) at significance levels of 0.05 and 0.01 (see Table 10). The analysis reveals that with increasing age, teachers experience

fewer challenges in resources and support ($d=-.194$), environmental/geographical barriers ($d=-.201$), and school governance ($d=-.164$), suggesting that mature educators develop greater resourcefulness, stronger networks, and more effective strategies for navigating institutional structures; these findings were conformed by Wieczorek and Manard (2019), Tintoré et al. (2020), and Tahir et al. (2021). Similarly, longer years of service correlate negatively with challenges in resources and support ($d=-.235$), environmental/geographical issues ($d=-.259$), and school governance ($d=-.204$), indicating that professional experience enhances teachers’ ability to secure resources and manage logistical as well as administrative challenges, as supported by Zydziunaite et al. (2020). Notably, no significant relationships were found between teachers’ sex or position and their reported leadership challenges, nor with challenges related to personal well-being, professional development, socio-cultural, and pedagogical areas, suggesting that experience—whether measured by age or years in service—serves as the primary mediating factor in how teachers perceive and respond to leadership challenges in last mile schools, thereby underscoring its critical role in developing resilience and adaptive strategies for effective educational leadership in remote teaching contexts.

Table 10. Test for Significant Relationship between the Respondents’ Profile and their Leadership Challenges in Teaching

Leadership Challenges	Profile							
	Age		Sex		Position		Years in Service	
	<i>Test Statistics</i>	<i>p-value</i>	<i>Test Statistics</i>	<i>p-value</i>	<i>Test Statistics</i>	<i>p-value</i>	<i>Test Statistics</i>	<i>p-value</i>
Resources and Support	-.194**	.004	.060	.949	-.007	.947	-.235**	.001
Environmental and Geographical	-.201**	.003	.096	.627	-.093	.329	-.259**	.001
Personal Well-being	.057	.433	.121	.830	-.164	.113	-.050	.554
Professional Development	-.115	.112	.183	.324	-.014	.898	-.145	.0855
School Governance and Administration	-.164*	.020	.121	.688	-.103	.278	-.204**	.009
Socio-Cultural	-.117	.084	.153	.493	-.083	.426	-.137	.071
Pedagogical	-.057	.435	.159	.461	-.035	.740	-.073	.362

*Correlation is Significant @.05 level

**Correlation is Significant @ .01 level

Proposed Interventions to Address Challenges

Based on the results of the study, the researcher developed the EmpowerED: A School-Based Leadership Enhancement Workshop for Teachers Teaching in Last Mile Schools to address key leadership challenges in areas such as resources, environment, personal well-being, professional development, governance, socio-cultural dynamics, and pedagogy. Aligned with the MATATAG Agenda and DepEd Order No. 32, s. 2011, this two-day school-based intervention scheduled for June 23–24, 2025 at Palali Integrated School includes activities like Zumba, “Campfire Conversations,” “Lessons from Nature,” “Classroom Makeovers,” “Group Decision-Making Exercises,” and a “Community-Based School Maintenance Activity” to foster collaboration, teacher empowerment, and community

engagement. It incorporates a sponsorship activity to support infrastructure needs and emphasizes training on place-based education, ICT integration, differentiated instruction, and classroom management. The workshop also includes modules on instructional leadership, SPTA strengthening, and cultural responsiveness. Through hybrid and online formats facilitated by local experts, the intervention aims to enhance teacher resilience, leadership capacity, and teaching effectiveness in last mile schools, with expected outcomes such as improved well-being, increased engagement, strengthened school-community ties, and innovative classroom practices.

Conclusions

The study concludes that most teachers in the last mile schools of Labo West District are early-to-mid-career professionals, predominantly female, and holding entry-level positions, with the limited presence of experienced educators suggesting gaps in mentorship and retention. Teachers face significant leadership challenges, including poor infrastructure, limited environmental integration in instruction, professional isolation, restricted access to development programs, low decision-making autonomy, weak parental engagement, and difficulties in student motivation. A significant negative correlation was found between age and years in service with leadership challenges in resources and support, environmental and geographical constraints, and governance, indicating that more experienced teachers are better equipped to manage such difficulties due to their adaptability and resourcefulness. These findings underscore the importance of professional experience in overcoming leadership barriers and supporting less experienced peers. In response, the EmpowerED Workshop was proposed as a comprehensive intervention addressing these challenges through practical, school-based activities such as classroom innovations, stress management, environmental learning, and strengthened community partnerships, with the ultimate goal of improving teacher leadership capacity and educational outcomes.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, it is recommended that school principals and master teachers implement targeted professional development and mentorship programs focused on leadership skills, resource management, and career growth to support early-career teachers in last mile schools. Grade-level chairpersons may lead workshops such as "Classroom Makeovers" to promote resourcefulness, while community partnerships can help address infrastructure and technology gaps. Guidance counselors and peer facilitators may organize stress management activities like "Campfire Conversations" to support emotional well-being. Administrators and policymakers are encouraged to create mentorship systems pairing novice teachers with experienced ones to address challenges in resources, geography, and governance. Lastly, future researchers are advised to examine the long-term impact of interventions like EmpowerED on teacher retention and student learning and to explore the role of mentorship and community engagement in sustaining improvements in remote education.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, all data were handled with strict privacy measures. Respondents' personal information and responses were kept confidential and used exclusively for research purposes, in compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012. Letters of request and informed consent forms were distributed to all respondents to formally document their agreement to take part in the study. The data collection process involved multiple methods to accommodate respondents in last

mile schools. Additionally, an online survey was disseminated via Google Forms to reach respondents in distant locations who had internet access, while manual distribution was done for those without access to social media or for teachers who were easier to reach. Respondents were given ample time to complete the surveys to ensure thoughtful and accurate responses.

Throughout the process, the researcher maintained transparency and communication, allowing respondents to ask questions or express concerns regarding the study. Finally, respondents were informed that they could request access to the research findings, promoting ethical responsibility in disseminating results. By adhering to these systematic and ethical procedures, the researcher ensured that data collection was conducted responsibly, respectfully, and with integrity.

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