Lived Experiences of Surigaonons on the Quality of Education and Life in the Rural

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Abstract— This descriptive Husserlian phenomenological study using the modified Van Kaam's method by Moustakas (1994) with transcribed semi-structured face-to-face interviews explored and described the lived experiences among Surigaonons on their education and life quality in the rural areas of Surigao. Thirteen participants were selected by the criterion-based purposive sampling method specifying those who personally experienced schooling and life in any rural area within the city from the year 2013 to 2023. Two core themes emerged which were put altogether to form the supreme essence of education and life quality in rural Surigao. Surigaonons believed that the Surigaonon Way of Life is PEACEFUL, PRACTICAL, and SATISFYING and that Rural Surigao has QUALITY and REMARKABLE EDUCATION and CULTURE. These imply the indelible marks of the livable rural Surigao found in the quality of life and education of Surigaonons amidst the simplicity of rurality. These core themes and essence were inductively fleshed from the revealed specific themes which represent the participants' stories from their meaningful experiences. This then realizes the love and commitment of Surigaonons to their origins, culture, and heritage.

Indexed Terms— Lived Experiences, Moustakas, Rural Life, Quality of Education, Quality of Life, Surigaonon, Phenomenology, Surigao, Philippines

I. INTRODUCTION

Rural education provision is a key factor both for rural economic development and for the well-being and cohesiveness of rural communities (OECD iLibrary, 2023). This and the life quality in rural areas involve many factors that can impact these areas differently than those in the urban or suburban areas. However, education and life quality in rural areas can be improved through investment in infrastructure and resources, as well as through community engagement and support. One key factor that can impact education and life quality in rural areas is access to resources and opportunities. In many rural areas, there may be limited educational resources, such as schools and libraries, as well as limited job opportunities, healthcare facilities, and other essential services. This can make it difficult for residents to access the resources and opportunities they need to thrive.

Surigao City is a rural city geographically located in the northeastern portion of Mindanao Island in the Philippines. It is bounded by Dinagat Island on the north, the mainland of Surigao del Norte on the south, Hinatuan passage on the east, and the Surigao Strait and Southern Leyte on the west. Surigao City is popularly known as the City of Island Adventures and is considered a haven of leisure and adventure because it has 17 panoramic islands with long stretches of pristine white sand beaches, mystical caves, vast mangrove forest and under water sceneries (Philippines Travel Website, 2022 retrieved from: https://philippines.travel/destinations/surigao-city).

Surigao City is a coastal component city in the province of Surigao del Norte. It is a rural type of community that serves as the provincial capital. The city has a land area of 173.91 square kilometers or 67.15 square miles which constitutes 8.91% of Surigao del Norte's total area. Its population as determined by the 2020 Census was 171,107. This represented 32.00% of the total population of Surigao del Norte province, or 6.10% of the overall population of the Caraga region. Based on these figures, the population density is computed at 984 inhabitants per square kilometer or 2,548 inhabitants per square mile – all living in the rural areas within the rural city of Surigao. Specifically, there are 54 barangays in Surigao City in which all are greatly rural in nature and kind (PhilAtlas Website, 2023 retrieved from:

https://www.philatlas.com/mindanao/caraga/surigao-del-norte/surigao-city.html).

As to education, there is no big difference in terms of the challenges faced by rural schools around the world and those experienced by Surigao City rural areas. Rural schools in western countries for instance are facing smaller schools and class sizes as a result of declining student numbers. As observed and experienced, many rural learners and youth would normally travel and even migrate to central cities or urban capitals to venture higher degree or level of schooling in institutions with greater quality characteristics and marks than the schools in the provinces and rural areas. Educators and academicians accept that the differences in resources in schools in rural areas compared to cities and the financial and quality effect of smaller school sizes in rural areas. As to the educational outcomes in rural schools, there is the disentanglement of the effect of socio-economic and geographical factors on student and teacher performance and motivation. Restructuring school networks with an emphasis on rural school clusters and fomenting new forms of provision including digital approaches in order to bring flexibility to school provision in rural and remote areas may be strongly considered therefore (OECD iLibrary, 2023). On the other hand, Boncinelli, et.al. (2015) emphasized that the quality of life in rural areas plays a key role in rural development. They analyzed the heterogeneity of the determinants of quality of life by looking into the opportunities addressed to rural populations. These are measured as the availability of education, healthcare, economic opportunities, human pressure, environmental conditions, and the accessibility of the areas. Boncinelli, et.al. (2015) found out that the availability of basic services, especially those used frequently, are essential elements for maintaining adequate levels of quality of life in rural areas. Looking into these challenges, addressing these is by critically considering investment in infrastructure and resources. This can include building new schools and libraries, expanding healthcare facilities, and investing in transportation and communication infrastructure. Additionally, offering incentives for businesses to invest in rural areas can help create new job opportunities and boost the local economy. Moreover, community engagement and support can also be important in improving education and life quality in rural areas. Engaging with residents to understand their needs and concerns, and working with them to develop solutions, can help build trust and support for initiatives aimed at improving education and quality of life. Additionally, supporting local organizations and community groups can help build social capital and strengthen community bonds, which can be key to improving education and life quality in rural areas.

Overall, improving education and life quality in rural areas such as in Surigao requires a multifaceted approach that addresses a range of challenges, from access to resources and opportunities to community engagement and support. However, with the right investments and strategies, it is possible to create thriving rural communities that offer a high quality of life for all residents.

It is within all these contexts that the researcher explored the lived experiences of select Surigaonon residents who have directly experienced education and life quality in Surigao rural areas. The study is also relevant since the researcher did not only investigate but also described the lived experiences of the Surigaonons who were able to experience life and schooling in Surigao perhaps giving them the idea and picture of the big differences between how it is to live in a rural area and in urban cities and capitals. It is therefore inclusive in the research objective the identified challenges and opportunities experienced by Surigaonons living in a rural area.

Most especially, the study further described what were the thoughts of the Surigaonon residents about life and education in Surigao; their relevant daily experiences; how they felt and thought about such kind of living and education; and the challenges they faced or opportunities they ventured in Surigao. In the end, the study emphasized that there is an impact of the study outcomes to the City of Surigao highlighting potential implications to its management and implementation of quality public services for the residents as this was aimed to be a desired outcome of this research.

II.   METHODS

This study used the descriptive phenomenological study employing Van Kamm's method modified by

Moustakas (1994). This approach is normally employed when little is known about a specific objective of the subject matter and the purpose of the study is to explore and clearly understand the most essential meaning of a phenomenon of interest from the point of view of those directly involved in such phenomenon or in other words the actual human experiences (Giorgi, 1997). This qualitative research design will be used because the main objective and purpose of the research was to describe, explore, and interpret the human experiences (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). Furthermore, the use of a phenomenological design is appropriate in order to accomplish research aims. This is because describing and exploring experiences rather than analyzing or searching for explanations (Moustakas, 1994) reveals a unique way of understanding the existing phenomenon of the Surigaonon participants. Van Kamm's phenomenological design involved a search for an understanding of wholeness by looking into the components from many angles, differing sides, and conflicting perspectives until a theme or common matter of experience emerges (Moustakas, 1994). In a phenomenological inquiry method, the researcher connected with the primary research problem and has a personal interest in the experience.

The findings are communicated via words and narratives. This phenomenological design entails the exploration and description of the lived experiences of Surigaonons on their Education and Life in the Rural Areas of Surigao.

Using the criterion-based and purposive sampling method, the participants of the study included residents in Surigao City who personally experienced schooling and life in any rural area within the city from the year 2013 to 2023. The experiences are the most recent in their lives and the 'freshest' in their minds. Data saturation was attained in the 13th participant. Data saturation is the point in the data gathering and analysis processes when no new information can be elicited anymore, and thus repetition signals the inquirer that the data gathering may then conclude. Saturation assures researchers that further data gathering would yield similar results and serve to confirm later emerging themes (Faulkner & Trotter, 2017).

The study enlisted thirteen participants who met all the inclusion-exclusion criteria that include:

a) A Surigaonon resident who either or both experienced or is living life and education in Surigao and in any Urban city outside Surigao from year 2013 to 2023.
b) A Surigaonon resident who is at least 19 years old during the data gathering and analysis process of the study within the year 2023.
c) A Surigaonon resident who was born in Surigao City and is either presently living in or already migrated from Surigao City within the year 2023.
d) A Surigaonon resident who is willing to participate and give informed consent.

If the individual has no qualities as mentioned in the requirements for inclusion criteria, they may not take part in this study, hence excluded.

To ensure acceptable data saturation, the topics of the study were communicated in such a way that they are sufficiently clear and ultimately specific. Here, the researcher strongly imposed that careful consideration of participant anonymity is an important aspect of qualitative research (Morse, 2000).

The research environment was in Surigao City. Surigao is recognized as the "City of Island Adventures" and the "Gateway to Mindanao". It is the home of rich water and agricultural resources because of its provincial characteristics that is not so much urbanized but not also totally rural. Surigao City is the capital City of Surigao del Norte Province – one of the major provinces of Caraga Region in the big island of Mindanao, Philippines. The locale of the study was specifically in three nearest and most accessible Barangays to the researcher which are all located in the heart of the City – Brgy. Taft, Brgy. Washington, and Brgy. Luna. Also, the data gathering also happened in a Fast-Food restaurant and in the most common and accessible Coffee Shop in Surigao City.

The main instrument of this study was the researcher himself who used a researcher-made interview guide comprised of semi-structured questions that asked the participants to describe their lived experience about the phenomenon of the research. Hence, the interview guide asked the Surigaonon residents to describe their education and life experience in Surigao and its rural

areas. Moreover, the interview guide encouraged the participants to give an extensive description of their experience including their feelings, thoughts, images, sensations, memories, and stream of consciousness along with a description of the situation in which the experience occurred.

The researcher-made interview guide underwent the process of content validity by three (3) professional experts in the field of research to ensure the reliability of the collected data. The validators are professors and research coordinators of the following colleges in the University, namely: College of Education, Culture and Arts, College of Engineering, and College of Business and Technology, respectively.

The said interview guide was used to conduct face-to-face interviews with the participants of the research. Moreover, the researcher's observation and field notes were included as methods of data gathering and a guide for the qualitative data analysis.

The primary data collection method was that of face-to-face phenomenological interviews in the desired place by both the interviewer and the interviewee. As a matter of policy and observing protocols, the researcher properly communicated with the participants or informants for the conduct of the study. Once the approval was sought, the researcher then proceeded to the actual interview. Before the interview, the researcher explained repeatedly to the participants the ethical content and considerations employed by the researcher as depicted in the signed informed consents. During the interview, follow-up questions were thrown for further description of details, without suggesting what the researcher is looking for. Taking down notes and recording, via mobile recorder, the participants' insights regarding their lived experiences was employed. Interviews with the participants were done conversationally, with open-ended questions which motivated the interviewee to share their experiences. These were transcribed by the researcher.

In addition, the researcher used an Interview Guide. All the queries were supplemented with specific investigations that focused on the phenomenon of interest and were asked as open-ended questions that allowed the free flow of ideas and reflections. As

mentioned, the researcher had his observation and field notes to record the notable demeanor and gestures of the participants during the actual interview session. These notes were the researcher's documentation of events, conversations, and behaviors observed in the field, as well as the researcher's reflections on them while conducting the interview. The researcher interpreted the data from his inter-subjectivity.

Specifically, the research participants participated in around 30-minute-long interviews. The interviews focused on the lived experiences, challenges, success stories, and fulfillment experienced by the participants as the researcher gathered information and confirmed findings of the essence of the experience. The use of semi-structured interviews is a qualitative method, which proceeded as a confidential and closed conversation between the researcher interviewer and the participant. Using a thoroughly composed interview guide, which was approved by the participant, the researcher ensured that the discourse covered the topics that are critical to the purpose and objective of the study. This relates to Boyce's (2006) concept of in-depth interviewing as a qualitative research approach that includes individual interviews that are intensively conducted with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular concept, idea, or scenario.

After the interviews, transcripts and recordings were reviewed by the researcher while listening and viewing to the mobile recorder to check for accuracy every after the interview and the preliminary analysis of the data was also conducted. To protect the identities and biographical data of the participants, recorded conversations and transcripts and all other study materials in with an identification number known only to the researcher – this is Anonymity. With the principle of Anonymity, no participant's name and other demographic profile was written on any of the documents relevant to the study (Ederio, et.al., 2023). The thirteen participants were assigned with coding schemes as follows: P1 – Participant 1; P2 – Participant 2; P3 – Participant 3; P4 – Participant 4; P5 – Participant 5; P6 – Participant 6; P7 – Participant 7; P8 – Participant 8; P9 – Participant 9; P10 – Participant 10; P11 – Participant 11; P12 – Participant 12; and P13 – Participant 13.

The research data collected was limited to the discussions about the schooling and life experience of Surigaonons in the rural areas of Surigao. The data gathering was done on the convenience of both the researcher and the interviewees wherein they were given the choice to speak in either English or in Vernacular for them to genuinely and sincerely express where they are comfortable. However, all participants opted to help the researcher and spoke using the English language to help the researcher in the easy clustering and sorting of the interview data after every interview. There is minimal vernacular spoken expressions and ideas that came from the interviewees but these verbatims were translated to English to cater international audience who were not native Surigaonon and Visaya speakers.

Data was not sorted into categories or themes until all interviews are completed to avoid bias in directing interview questions toward certain themes. For phenomenological research, broad general questions were initially asked to generate participant response (Moustakas, 1994) evolving to more directional questions to obtain an in-depth understanding of the experience.

After the interview with each of the participants, the preliminary data analysis was made. However, it was only after the completion of the seven semi-structured in-depth interviews that transcriptions were made including the reviewing of the field notes and observations for the final data analysis. As part of the data gathering procedures and data analysis process, the relevance of common patterns or themes heard was documented. Moustakas enumerated his modifications of Van Kamm's (1966) method for qualitative data analysis for using the complete transcription of each research participant, following the eight steps:

1. Listing and Preliminary Grouping. This was the listing of every expression relevant to the phenomenon of experience. This is also called as Horizonalization. Listing and preliminary grouping of data included the preparation of interview transcriptions and notes into general categories.
2. Reduction and Elimination. This was the determination of the Invariant Constituents by testing each expressed thoughts and statements under two requirements:
   a. Does it contain a moment of the experience that is a necessary and sufficient constituent for understanding it?
   b. Is it possible to extract and label it? If so, it is a horizon of the experience.

3. Reduction and elimination removed unclear expressions or information that are not relevant to the inquiry and study objectives.
4. Clustering and Thematizing the Invariant Constituents. This was be done when the invariant constituents of the experiences that are related into a thematic label were clustered. The clustered and labeled constituents were the core themes of the experience. Clustering and thematizing involved grouping of data into core themes that emerged from participant's perceptual experiences.
5. Final Identification of the Invariant Constituents and Themes by Application or simply called the Validation. This was done by checking the invariant constituents and their corresponding themes against the participant's complete record. (1) Are they expressed explicitly in the complete transcription? (2) Are they compatible if not explicitly expressed? (3) If they are not explicit or compatible, they are not relevant to the co-researchers experience and should be deleted. Final identification required validating the themes against participants' complete transcription.
6. Construct an Individual Textural Description of the experience. By employing the relevant and validated invariant constituent and themes, the Individual Textural Description of the experience was constructed. This also included the verbatim examples from the transcribed interview data. Constructing an individual textural description entailed recording each participant's experience based on the themes that were revealed during interviews.
7. Construct an Individual Structural Description of the experience. This was done by basing it on the Individual Textural Description and Imaginative Variation. The individual structural description provided a rich account of the fundamental dynamics of the experience, the themes, and characteristics that account for 'how' do teachers

make sense of their lived experiences as academic leaders.

8. Construct a Textural-Structural Description of the meanings and essences of the experiences, incorporating the invariant constituents and themes. A Textural-Structural Description of the meanings and essences of the experience, incorporating the invariant constituents and themes were constructed for each research participant. Constructing a textural-structural description is the final step of the qualitative data analysis process by Moustakas.

9. Composite Textural-Structural Descriptions. From the Individual Textural-Structural Descriptions, the Composite Description of the meanings and essences of the experience, representing the group, was developed. Textural-structural description involved the synthesizing of the themes and meanings from the data collected from the key participants.

Therefore, Van Kamm's (1966) method as modified by Moustakas (1994) served as the appropriate analysis for the data gathered in the study.

Moreover, the researcher used triangulation to further validate the findings. According to Creswell (2007), triangulation is the "process of corroborating evidence from individuals… or methods of data collection in descriptions and themes." Triangulation was employed to ensure the credibility and validity of the research findings. It is a method involved in the data collection and analysis upon yielding the descriptions and themes (Creswell, 2007). The triangulation in this study involved the comparing, matching, and cross-checking of the lived experiences of the participants with the supporting related literatures & studies. Along with this, the researcher asked the participants to cite situations to make evident of their experiences.

Finally, the researcher identified the encapsulating big picture of how the Surigaonons conceptualized their perspectives on Education and Life Quality captured from their lived experiences in the phenomenon; the perspectives of the participants on the difference between how it is to live and experience life and education in rural and urban areas.

Ethical consideration can be manifested by avoiding any risk of considerably harming the participants unnecessarily. The researcher avoided the use of deception on people participating. The researcher also obtained informed consent from all involved in the study. Also, the ethical consideration was made possible by preserving privacy and confidentiality whenever possible (Ederio, et.al., 2023).

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Rural areas such as in Surigao have exceptional challenges in terms of access to good education, quality health care, and even state-of-the-art infrastructure. Today, there are solutions to these challenges, and I was able to explore them to specifically offer for Surigaonons. For education, there are already initiatives that aspire to improve access to quality education for rural children. For instance, in Surigao, there are already affordable private and State Universities and known quality schools that are situated in the heart of Surigao and not very far from rural communities. Also, online learning has become increasingly popular today because of the pandemic and it can be an effective way to provide education to children in rural areas as long as sufficient technological online learning facilities are provided by the local government. When it comes to life quality, providing access to adequate health care delivery and services might be a great challenge indeed in rural communities. If only Telemedicine can be viable in Surigao then it can be a solution to this challenge, as it allows patients to access medical care remotely. Additionally, continuing the putting up or building of infrastructures such as wide roads, bridges, and wider water supply systems could greatly improve the quality of life in the rural areas of Surigao. Overall, improving learning and life quality in rural communities in Surigao entails a multi-faceted approach. It is my hope that this research would be a steppingstone into achieving this goal.

The interview questions centered on the research questions: (1) What are the lived experiences of the Surigaonons in terms of education and daily life in Surigao? (2) What essence and meanings can be derived from the respondents' lived experiences? (3) What themes may be formulated from these lived experiences? And (4) Based on the analyzed data,

what generalizations, implications, and reflections may be drawn to offer insights on the improvement of life and education quality in Surigao?

A. Profile of the Participants

Table 1. Summary of Participant's Profile

Participant Code	Age	Highest Educational Attainment	Current Occupation	Length of Stay in Surigao
P1	25 y.o.	Bachelor's Degree	Office Secretary (School)	25 years
P2	37 y.o.	Master's Degree	Government Worker	37 years
P3	62 y.o.	High School Graduate	Freelance Driver	52 years (10 years in Manila from 1983-1993)
P4	20 y.o.	Ongoing bachelor's degree	Student	20 years
P5	28 y.o.	Bachelor's degree	Call Center Agent	25 years (3rd year in Cebu this 2023; currently in Surigao for short vacation)
P6	45 y.o.	Master's Degree	Office Manager	45 years
P7	37 y.o.	Doctorate Degree	School Professor	37 years
P8	23 y.o.	Ongoing bachelor's degree	Student/Part-time job as delivery guy	23 years
P9	39 y.o.	Bachelor's degree	Government Worker	39 years
P10	39 y.o.	High School Graduate	Security Guard	39 years
P11	45 y.o.	Master's Degree	Government Worker	20 years (first 25 years in Davao then transferred to Surigao after getting pregnant and married)
P12	26 y.o.	Bachelor's Degree	Elementary Teacher	26 years
P13	23 y.o.	Bachelor's Degree	Office Secretary (School)	23 years

B. The Step-by-Step Process of Analysis (Van Kaam's Method modified by Moustakas)

The results are presented in a step-by-step process. The findings and outcomes are discussed as salient points with emphasis on the themes presented. These all started with step one which is the listing and preliminary grouping of the verbatim transcriptions of the in-depth interview conducted with the thirteen participants. I did not omit any statement or word from the transcripts of the interview and considered each phrase equally relevant. This is known as horizonalization or viewing each statement as having equal value. I treated all the data equally and that no quote or excerpt is more important than any other but by listing every quote relevant to the experience/phenomenon under investigation (Statistical Solutions, 2022).

In the second step or the reduction and elimination, I selected all relevant, meaningful, non-repetitive expressions to determine the invariant constituents of the experience or the meaning units. Data reduction was accomplished by repeatedly reading each transcript and eliminating statements that did not answer the guiding questions. But of course, in pursuit of Van Kaam's method modified by Moustakas (1994), each expression was verified based on two requirements: (a) Is this quote important to the participant's lived experience of the phenomenon? (b) Can this quote be reduced to its latent meaning? If the answer to these questions is negative, then the quote is eliminated. This helped separate the invariant constituents of the experience from redundant and ancillary information (Statistics Solutions, 2022).

Some transcription sentences with grammatical errors were slightly revised to align the transcription more

closely with participant conversation. I then eliminated all expressions that did not answer the guide questions as well as those that were overlapping, repetitive, and vague. Finally, the remaining statements became the invariant constituents (the meaning units or horizons) of the experience and described the phenomenon in exact descriptive terms. The analysis of the Reduction and Elimination process of answers to all Questions yielded the corresponding invariant constituents which are also referred to as the meaning units or horizons.

After doing the reduction and elimination process, I clustered the invariant constituents and provided definitions or transformed concepts. This was the third step. Then finally, themes were labeled which in effect defined and represented the core themes of the experience to be able to come up with the emergent core themes. Note that the output from the reduction and elimination conducted for Interview follow-up question letter d was added to the other outputs of the other interview questions when found relevant or related.

This was followed by the validation or final identification of the invariant constituents and themes by application. It is where I checked the invariant constituents and the themes against each raw data and complete record of each participant using two criteria: (a) Are they expressed explicitly in the complete transcription? (b) Are they compatible if not explicitly expressed?

Accordingly, I deleted from the list of invariant constituents those that did not meet the two criteria, and which were inconsistent with the participant's description of the experience of schooling and life quality in Surigao rural areas. These did not give concrete connections to the core themes or clustered invariant constituents that emerged. Moreover, this step put together the related and relevant themes before moving toward the next steps.

These preceding steps led to revealing the development of an individual, textural, and structural description of the data from the perspective of the participating Surigaonons. In the step involving individual textural descriptions, I got into capturing the "what" of the participants' experience on the life

and education in Surigao. In doing so, I was able to discover their lived experiences, insights, and make meanings of those experiences towards having quality and satisfying education and life in Surigao than in urban cities. The textural components are illustrated in the actual words of the participants or explained in a narrative format illustrating my understanding of what occurred. I felt that the use of specific quotes would bring vitality to the design as well as mirror the abstraction behind them.

Furthermore, the results were a description of the underlying structure regarding how the selected Surigaonons experienced what they had in the last ten years in Surigao City. The individual structural description is developed based on the individual textural description, along with the imaginative variation process. For every participant, I incorporated into the textural description a structure explaining how the experience occurred. This process helped in understanding "how" the experience occurred. "Acts of thinking, judging, imagining, and recollecting, in order to arrive at core structure meanings" (Moustakas, 1994) was used. In the construction of a Textural-Structural Description step, I merged the two narratives (textural and structural) that were created from steps five and six. The finished narrative description included the researcher's understanding of "what" (texture) occurred, and "how" (structure) the experience occurred for each participant as analyzed in the previous steps – five and six. After a thorough imaginative and reflective study, supported and supplemented by relevant literatures, I explained the experience according to how I understood it. The next section of this study provides the results from the participants, addresses the research questions, and reveals the emergent themes.

Surigaonon's Experiences on the Quality of Education and Life in the Rurals

- Theme 1: PEACEFUL, PRACTICAL, and SATISFYING Surigaonon Way of Life

Surigaonons believe that their way of life in the rurals is peaceful, practical, and satisfying (Sharma, et.al., 2023; Swami & Todd, 2022). A peaceful, practical, and satisfying Surigaonon way of life can be achieved by incorporating some simple yet effective habits into

your lifestyle. Firstly, we should *embrace a slower pace of life*, that is, living in Surigao often means that you're away from the hustle and bustle of the city. Take advantage of this and embrace a slower pace of life. Enjoy the simple things like nature walks, gardening, or reading a book on your porch. Secondly, *connect with your community*. Rural communities like those in Surigao are often tight-knit, and it's important to connect with the people around you (Wilson and Peterson, 1988). Attend local events, volunteer with community groups, or simply strike up a conversation with someone at the local store. Next, *be self-sufficient*. Living in Surigao, a somewhat rural city, often means that resources can be limited. Be self-sufficient by growing your own food, learning basic do-it-yourself skills, and finding ways to conserve energy. Next, *enjoy the outdoors*. Surigao is naturally surrounded by beautiful landscapes and seascapes. Take advantage of this by exploring the outdoors through activities like hiking, fishing, or camping. By incorporating these habits into your lifestyle, you can achieve a peaceful, practical, and satisfying rural way of life in Surigao. Sub-themes were curated to bunch out the essential ideas under this major theme.

- Sub-theme 1: Surigao's Good Governance and Adequate Provisions and Services for the Citizens

Good governance is essential for the overall development of any nation, and it becomes even more critical when it comes to addressing the needs of rural citizens (Gardiner, 2017).

In this sub-theme, participants shared:

(P$_2$5-7)… The local government also provides assistance to students through scholarship programs and other educational initiatives.

(P$_3$15-20)… To cope with the challenges, well, Surigaonons are survivors, creative, and resilient. I have read in my son's book that Surigao has already developed solutions such as creating water catchment systems, establishing community-based health programs, TESDA diploma and schooling, and implementing disaster preparedness plans.

(P$_4$19-21)… I love Surigao especially that we have a new government administration that is better than before.

(P$_5$29-30)… Living in Surigao is preferrable if you have good positions in organizations, in the government…

(P$_6$24-26)… But anyway, with good governance and administration of officials like what we have now, I believe that Surigao will always be livable and lovable.

(P$_{11}$17-21)… As to opportunities, tourism is number one and that is why the government is really pushing forward our cultural heritage development and promotion for the Surigaonons to be known and loved not only by the people here in Surigao but the people outside.

Upon realizing from the sharing of the participants, I was made to believe in some ways in which adequate provisions and services can be ensured for rural citizens such as those in Surigao. Firstly, it is essential to have a focused approach towards rural development. Governments can strengthen and empower more the departments or agencies for rural development, which can work towards identifying and addressing the specific needs of rural citizens. Secondly, adequate funding must be allocated towards rural development programs and initiatives. Governments can also encourage private sector participation in rural development by providing incentives and tax breaks. Thirdly, the use of technology can be leveraged to bring about significant improvements in rural areas. For instance, e-governance initiatives can be implemented to make governance more accessible and transparent. Access to the internet and digital literacy programs can also help bridge the digital divide in rural areas. Fourthly, initiatives can be taken to improve the quality of healthcare and education in rural areas (OECD iLibrary, 2023; Gardiner, 2017). This can involve building more hospitals and schools, providing healthcare and education scholarships, and ensuring that essential medicines and medical facilities are available in rural areas. Finally, the government can also explore decentralized governance models to bring about more participation among rural residents.

- Sub-theme 2: Both Rural and Urban Way of Life has Challenges and Opportunities but Surigaonon Rural Life is More Preferrable

Apart from the concept of good governance and local leadership, Surigaonons prefer rural life than urban way of living because urban life is more luxurious and costly than spending in the rural places (Swami & Todd, 2022; Liang, Xu, Xia, and Ma, 2020; Duboz, Macia, Diallo, Cohen, Bergouignan, and Seck, 2021). My personal viewpoints may not speak generally for the entire Surigaonon community, but by personal experiences that are consistent and similar with the participants, the following are deduced on both lifestyles: Rural life can offer a slower, more relaxed, and peaceful movement of life with closer connections to nature and the environment. It can also offer a stronger sense of community (Sharma, et.al., 2023; Cheon, Gu, & Kim 2019; Wilson & Peterson, 1988) and greater opportunities to be self-sufficient through farming and other manual labor work. Additionally, living in a rural area often means a lower cost of living and a more affordable lifestyle (Swami & Todd, 2022). Transportation for instance and other expenses are higher in urban than rural areas. Participants shared that:

(P$_1$2-5)… While such local communities can offer a good support system and a simpler movement and slower pace of life, access to resources and opportunities can sometimes be limited.

(P$_1$7-9)… Moreover, some people might find Surigao and other rural areas more peaceful and less chaotic than urban areas.

(P$_2$9-11)… It is really a great place to live and learn. The environment is conducive to learning and the people are supportive of education.

(P$_3$1-4)… Surigao is a good place to live still. I don't like to go to another place permanently or migrate. It is challenging to live my life in Surigao, but I love Surigao because my family and ancestors are from here.

(P$_4$1-10)… Living in a Surigao rural area is peaceful and less disordered than living in a big city like in Cebu, Davao, or Manila. People in Surigao often have stronger relationships with their neighbors and a greater sense of community.

We have more access to fresh air, open spaces, and natural environments. Our life here in Surigao can offer a simpler way of living, which some individuals find more satisfying than the noisy and polluted city life. Additionally, some people enjoy the slower movement of daily life and the opportunity to disconnect from technology and other distractions.

(P$_5$9-20)… But if there were related opportunities in Surigao, why not? I love my place because the places are just nearby each other. In Cebu, my God! My money just almost goes to paying taxis if not jeepneys during dawn which is my shift time at work. Also, my money goes to paying rentals and also paying for my lifestyle. It's expensive living outside Surigao really. In general, it's expensive and luxurious to live in urban cities than living in the province. In my three years of work, I just realized that there might be no difference actually in terms of working in Cebu and working here in Surigao. In fact, I have thought that maybe I was able to earn and save bigger if I just stayed in Surigao and worked here.

(P$_7$1-8)… To be clear, schooling and living in Surigao is like living in a paradise. For me, I prefer Surigao life and schooling because of the peace and quiet that comes with the countryside or seaside most especially. There is also less traffic and pollution in Surigao compared to urban areas, which can make for a more pleasant living environment. Additionally, Surigao schools may have a closer-knit community and smaller class sizes, which I believe can lead to a better quality of education.

(P$_9$5-6)… One reason might be that I find Surigao to be quieter and more peaceful than busy cities.

(P$_{10}$8-14)… Life in the barrio is very nice and peaceful. We don't have a lot of problems there because we live harmoniously with our neighbors, our carabaos, plants, and the farms. That is why I just like staying and working here in Surigao – because it is peaceful and nice. Especially in my work as security guard, I will really choose a place where there is little violence only for my safety and for my family.

(P$_{11}$8-12)… Living in Surigao is less stressful. In Davao, there's a lot of political matters, noisy people and cars, and the places are

far compared here in Surigao. I did not regret transferring residence in Surigao with my husband because everything is okay here.

(P₁₂ 1-4)… Surigao offers a unique way of life that is often different from urban areas like Cebu or Manila. Many people who live Surigao appreciate kind of simple life and the close ties family and community.

(P₁₃6-13)… Living in Surigao can offer a quieter and more relaxed lifestyle. There is typically less traffic and noise, and you can enjoy more green spaces and fresh air. Additionally, the cost of living can be lower than in urban areas. Even the transportation is cheaper here in Surigao than when moving place to place in big cities.

On the other hand, urban life can offer greater access to cultural opportunities, higher-paying job opportunities, and more diverse experiences. Urban areas often have a wider range of resources and amenities, such as healthcare facilities, educational institutions, and entertainment venues (Li, Chi, Zhang, Cheng, Zhang, & Chen, 2015). Both lifestyles have their benefits and drawbacks, and ultimately, it depends on personal preferences and priorities. Participants shared that:

(P₂11-14)… However, just like any other city, there are also challenges that residents and students face such as traffic congestion, limited resources, and economic struggles.

(P₃4-15)… About the challenges, some of the common challenges in Surigao include concerns in schooling and financial problems that's why I only finished high school because I needed to help my parents and my siblings younger than me after high school. Also, there is limited access to basic necessities like clean and enough water and hospital care, transportation difficulties, and natural calamities like typhoons, earthquakes, and floods. Our house was destroyed always by typhoon or earthquake. But even so, Surigao also provides a lot of opportunities for adventure, tourism, and cultural immersion, with its beautiful beaches, coral reefs, waterfalls, and fiestas.

(P₄23-27)… Even in urban cities, they also experience challenges and in fact, they have bigger problems there than us in the rural

areas. The difference is, since I'm in my origin place of birth, no matter how hard life is, I can survive and still manage because there is no place like home.

(P₅20-32)… But again, there are no opportunities for me here. That's the challenging aspect perhaps in living in Surigao – Job opportunities and economic struggles because of lesser opportunities. As to schooling, there's not much. I enjoyed my schooling here in Surigao especially that I came from a good University and this University is also known in Cebu so I felt not left out. But if I am asked what do I really prefer, then I would choose living in Urban cities if your pursuit in life is about lifestyle and greener pastures. Living in Surigao is preferrable if you have good positions in organizations, in the government, companies, and if you are enrolled in good schools like the University I was enrolled in years ago.

(P₇9-15)… However, there are also advantages to urban life and schooling, such as access to more resources, diversity, and cultural experiences which are sometimes not in our places in the rurals. But anyway, what is preferable depends on our individual needs and preferences – what do we want to live; What lifestyle do we want to have; and what kind of environment we want to dwell in.

(P₈1-15)… Living in Surigao or in any rural area can be difficult sometimes to be honest. I needed to work with sidelines to sustain my schooling and also help my parents in our finances. But this is only in my case. I see a lot of Surigaonons who are successful and also working hard. I have not seen Surigaonons and Surigao in general that already dived deep into the abyss of poverty. I could not imagine myself and our family if we are living in big cities and our living conditions are just like this we have now. Surigao has a lot to offer. I was able to work even if I'm studying at the same time with it because of small and big opportunities in the city. I can just work while studying because of online modality. Moreover, our schedules in the school are flexible too. Surigao way of life is not that busy that it becomes troublesome and confusing, chaotic, and struggling.

(P₁₃11-14)… But, living in big cities can give us access to more varied job opportunities and entertainment options. Anyway, the decision on whether to live in the province or the city will depend on our personal preferences and lifestyle or demands.

- Sub-theme 3: Surigao is a Good Place to Grow Old and Retire

To be more particular, it seems that Surigao is a paradise and preferred place for the older people. Definitely! Rural areas can provide a peaceful and relaxed environment for retirees to enjoy their golden years. The slower pace of life can be ideal for those looking to escape the hustle and bustle of city living. Additionally, the cost of living in rural areas tends to be lower than in urban areas, which can make retirement funds stretch further. Access to nature and outdoor activities can also promote healthy living and a more active lifestyle. Overall, rural areas can be a great place to grow old and retire. Participants shared that:

(P₄24-27)… Even in urban cities, they also experience challenges and in fact, they have bigger problems there than us in the rural areas. The difference is, since I'm in my origin place of birth, no matter how hard life is, I can survive and still manage because there is no place like home.

(P₆1-3)… Honestly, I thank the Lord for letting Surigao be my birthplace. There is no other place like Surigao. My entire life and career already moved around here, and I'll just retire here.

(P₇1-2)… To be clear, schooling and living in Surigao is like living in a paradise.

(P₉1-14)… As a person growing older, there can be many reasons why older people like us prefer to live in rural areas like in Surigao. Before, I also wished moving outside Surigao but as time went by, I realized that I just want to stay here in Surigao. I'm tired already although I'm not that too old of course. One reason might be that I find Surigao to be quieter and more peaceful than busy cities. Surigao is also a small place because we often have closer communities where people almost know and look out for one another because we have common families and relatives – and

that's what we need as older people. It is especially important for us older people who need more family support and assistance. Lastly of course, as older person, I have lived in Surigao my whole life and have a strong attachment to the Surigaonons and Surigao soil.

(P₁₁23-25)… After retirement in the future, I will just choose to stay here only in Surigao and just visit from time-to-time Davao City.

These residents have high greater body appreciation and life satisfaction than urban inhabitants (Swami & Todd, 2022). Similarly, the rural adults have better life satisfaction than city-area residents (Duboz, et.al., 2021). Life satisfaction was highly correlated with depressive symptoms, ancestor worship, financial stress, and easy access to healthcare (Li, et.al., 2015). Life satisfaction is also associated with some health-promoting behaviors in rural communities. Rural persons who live in groups or joint families are more satisfied with their life (Cheon, Gu, and Kim, 2019).

- Theme 2: Rural Surigao's QUALITY and REMARKABLE EDUCATION and CULTURE

Good education and learning experience in rural areas truly invite residents to stay and learn. Add more the colorful and festive cultural practices and traditions, then, every resident will be forever in love with the rural way of life. Surigao's quality and remarkable education and culture in rural areas are essential to ensure that youth and learners have access to the same educational and cultural opportunities as those who live in urban areas or sometimes over and above the urban educational and cultural standards. As a person living in a community that values education and culture, I realized some salient things that can help to improve education (OECD iLibrary, 2023; Gardiner, 2017) and further increase love of culture in Surigao. Firstly, as to education, Surigaonons may use technology like online learning platforms to bring quality education (OECD iLibrary, 2023; Gardiner, 2017; Zamora & Dorado, 2015). Next is that Surigaonons may encourage partnerships between schools, parents, and community organizations to provide resources and support for students (Boncinelli, et.al., 2015). Surigaonon teachers should also be provided with professional development opportunities

to improve their teaching skills and stay up to date with the latest educational trends. We should also encourage students to be engaged in the Surigaonon local community, and to take advantage of all the resources and opportunities available to them. Then, Surigaonons may develop mentorship programs to help students connect with individuals in their field of interest who can provide them with guidance and support.

In terms of Culture, support local artists and artisans. Surigao is rich not only in natural resources and tourism but also in culture and traditional practices (Philippines Travel Website, 2022 retrieved from: https://philippines.travel/destinations/surigao-city). Promoting local art and crafts can help to preserve traditional culture. You can organize art exhibitions, craft fairs, and cultural festivals to showcase the work of local artists and artisans. Encourage cultural exchange between rural communities and urban areas can help to promote an appreciation of rural culture. You can organize cultural exchange programs, where people from different areas can learn about each other's cultures. Also, preserve historical sites and landmarks. Surigao has historical sites and landmarks that are important to the culture and history of the Surigaonon community. These sites can be preserved and maintained to promote an appreciation of local history and culture. Furthermore, we should provide educational opportunities. Education is an important tool for promoting culture. You can provide educational opportunities for people of all ages, such as workshops, classes, or cultural tours. Foster community engagement also allows you to be engrossed with the local community by organizing community events, volunteer work, or community service projects. This can help to build a sense of community and encourage people to take pride in their local culture (OECD iLibrary, 2023; Gardiner, 2017; Zamora & Dorado, 2015). These are just a few ideas to promote quality and remarkable culture in Surigao. Sub-themes were curated to bunch out the essential ideas under this major theme.

- Sub-theme 1: Surigao Schools are of Quality and at par with Urban Educational Institutions

While there may be some variations between rural and urban schools (OECD iLibrary, 2023; Gardiner, 2017;

Zamora & Dorado, 2015), it's important to note that both can provide quality education. In many cases, rural schools can offer unique opportunities for students that are not always available in urban areas (Gardiner, 2017; Zamora & Dorado, 2015). For example, smaller class sizes and close-knit communities can foster strong relationships between teachers and students, leading to more individualized attention and support. Rural schools may also provide a greater connection to nature and outdoor activities, which can enhance students' overall learning experiences (OECD iLibrary, 2023). Ultimately, the quality of education depends on the resources and support provided by the school system, which can be found in both rural and urban areas. Participants shared that:

> $(P_15$-7)… However, with the advancements in technology and online resources, distance and isolation are no longer challenging barriers.

> $(P_23$-11)… As for schooling, there are public and private schools in the city, ranging from elementary to tertiary level, that offer quality education. The local government also provides assistance to students through scholarship programs and other educational initiatives. Surigao City also has a good number of universities and colleges that offer specialized programs and courses. It is really a great place to live and learn. The environment is conducive to learning and the people are supportive of education.

> $(P_410$-19)… When it comes to schooling, well, Surigao educational system is not bad. We have achievers in Surigao like topnotchers, smart and genius Surigaonons who are now millionaires, celebrities, and OFWs. There are a lot of Doctors in fact in the City. Today, we have already two Universities signifying that Surigao's educational aspect is blooming and is not left out. That is why I stayed and studied here in Surigao city and did not go with my batchmates in Marawi, Cebu, and even in Manila. What they get there are also here – I get what they also learn in their new places.

> $(P_523$-26)… As to schooling, there's not much. I enjoyed my schooling here in Surigao especially that I came from a good University and

this University is also known in Cebu so I felt not left out.

(P₆10-15)… About our schooling, ah! Surigao is also very good. Your school where you are working sir, before it became a University under a different name, it was one of the most prestigious and excellent schools in the province. That's why we look forward always for the alumni homecoming.

(P₇6-11)… Additionally, Surigao schools may have a closer-knit community and smaller class sizes, which I believe can lead to a better quality of education. However, there are also advantages to urban life and schooling, such as access to more resources, diversity, and cultural experiences which are sometimes not in our places in the rurals.

(P₈11-12)… I can just work while studying because of online modality. Moreover, our schedules in the school are flexible too.

(P₁₀3-6)… . Surigaonon schooling is also not bad. There are a lot of schools in Surigao. Every barangay here has elementary and high school, so we have good education.

(P₁₂11-13)… The schools are good, and they are just close with one another and close from our house before….

- Sub-theme 2: Surigao is a Haven of Filipino Achievers and Excellent Professionals

Yes, this is absolutely true! Many talented and successful individuals come from rural areas in the Philippines. In fact, some of the country's most prominent leaders and personalities, such as former President Elpidio Quirino and boxing legend Manny Pacquiao, hail from humble beginnings in the countryside. The late Senator Robert Z. Barbers and The Voice Teens Grand Finalist Miss Mica Becerro are just two of the Surigaonon advocates and talented or gifted ones recognized in the national stage. Surigao can provide a unique environment that fosters hard work, determination, and a strong sense of community, which can greatly contribute to a person's success. Additionally, with the help of technology and modern communication tools, even those in rural areas can now have access to a wealth of knowledge and resources that can help them achieve their goals and reach their full potential (OECD iLibrary, 2023; Gardiner, 2017; Zamora & Dorado, 2015).

Participants also shared that:

(P₄12-14)… We have achievers in Surigao like topnotchers, smart and genius Surigaonons who are now millionaires, celebrities, and OFWs. There are a lot of Doctors in fact in the City.

(P₆17-20)… They are big business tycoons, doctors, generals, prominent government officials, professors of big universities, and even scientists! That means that Surigao's education is not bad – not even mediocre! It's just the economy that we are challenged.

- Sub-theme 3: Surigao as an Educational Epicenter of Cultural and Traditional Magnitude

The rural areas of the Philippines are indeed full of cultural and traditional significance. From the northern mountain tribes to the southern Muslim communities, each region has its own unique customs and practices that have been passed down through generations. In Surigao for example, the indigenous peoples are testament to the great history and heritage of Surigaonon people. The rich seas and mountains are also great evidence of the province's great natural gifts from the Great Creator. Surigao's Bonok-Bonok Festival is one of the most colorful and vibrant festivals in the country, showcasing Surigaonons' devotion to Señor San Nicolas De Tolentino. The festival is a celebration of abundane, faith, culture, and tradition, with dancing, music, and parades that attract tourists from all over the country and the region (Philippines Travel Website, 2022).

Participants shared that:

(P₂1-2)… Surigao is a beautiful place with a rich culture and history. The people are generally friendly and accommodating to each other.

(P₃12-14)… Surigao also provides a lot of opportunities for adventure, tourism, and cultural immersion, with its beautiful beaches, coral reefs, waterfalls, and fiestas.

(P₉13-14)… I have lived in Surigao my whole life and have a strong attachment to the Surigaonons and Surigao soil.

(P₁₁17-23)… tourism is number one and that is why the government is really pushing forward our cultural heritage development and promotion for the Surigaonons to be known and loved not only by the people here in Surigao but the people outside. Look at me, I'm not a Surigaonon but I already love Surigao a lot because of this culture and tourism.

(P₁₂10-13)… Additionally, Surigao often have a strong connection to the natural world, which can provide unique educational opportunities such as field trips to farms, forests, and other natural areas.

With all being said, truly, Surigao is an educational epicenter of cultural and traditional magnitude.

Quality Life and Education Amidst Simplicity: The Indelible Marks of Livable Surigao

I synthesized all the themes and meanings to create a composite textural and structural description. This process helped determined the essence of the overall experience. In other words, the lived experiences of the Surigaonons on their life and education quality in the rural areas of Surigao varied according to the circumstances of the situation with the local setting in greater perspective. I constructed a comprehensive matrix to depict my understanding of the relationship between the emergent core themes to depict the lived experiences among Surigaonons that captured their perspectives about Quality Life and Education in the livable Surigao rural areas.

Education is essential for the development and improvement of life quality in Surigao and even in any rural community in the country. Quality education provides individuals with knowledge, skills, and tools they need to pursue better job opportunities and create a better standard of living for themselves and their families despite the challenges normally faced in Surigao and any other rural area. Education also empowers individuals and communities to make more informed decisions about their health, finances, and overall well-being. In Surigao, access to education can often be limited due to factors such as distance, lack of

resources, and poverty. However, even in the simplest ways and availability of everything, there are many innovative ways to bring education to rural areas, such as online learning platforms, mobile learning apps, and community-based education programs. These initiatives can help bridge the gap between rural and urban areas in terms of educational opportunities and access and by extension – in terms of all our way of life. Ultimately, by investing in education in rural areas, we can improve the quality of life for individuals and communities, and help them to become more self-sufficient, prosperous, and thriving transforming challenges into opportunities despite the limitedness of Surigao as a rural area. All these make the quality life and education amidst simplicity the indelible marks of the livable rural Surigao.

IV. CONCLUSION and GENERALIZATION

Surigaonons who currently live and enjoy quality rural life and education depict the indelible marks of the livable rural Surigao. This then realizes the love and commitment of Surigaonons to their origins, culture, and heritage. It emerged that Surigaonons can still have quality kinds of living and schooling amidst the simplicity of rurality.

Two core themes emerged which were put all together to form the supreme essence of education and life quality in rural Surigao. The indelible marks of livable rural Surigao are therefore found in the quality of life and education of Surigaonons amidst simplicity. These core themes and essence were inductively fleshed from the revealed specific themes which represent the participants' stories from their meaningful experiences.

Life in Surigao may not be everyone's dream and aspiration. While many Surigaonons accept the fact that living life and schooling in Surigao do not guarantee ultimate success, luxury, and prestige, they still believe that Surigaonon life is unique and worth living to the fullest. Therefore, based on the explored lived experiences of Surigaonons, Surigao City and its rural areas are livable and sufficient for sustaining the life of people, nature, and culture. The phenomenological study and Van Kaam's method of analysis modified by Moustakas (1994) are applicable in investigating the lived experiences among

Surigaonons in achieving quality education and life in rural Surigao.

The study then gives implications to the way Surigaonons live and appreciate life and education the Surigaonon way. Surigaonons should shift away their perspectives about rural ways of living, from considering rural life as something cheap, overly simple, not exciting and conducive, and not luxurious into something that is more meaningful, peaceful, practical, satisfying, and fulfilling. The urban way of life is common to all kinds of urban areas. But, the rural way of life differs depending on the nature and culture of a rural area.

Moreover, the essence of this study is greatly vital for the local governance and leadership in rural areas such as Surigao. The study implies that local officials and advocates should dwell more on lifting the quality of education, life, and culture rather than insisting to transform rural areas into advanced urbanized cities erasing the nature, origin, culture, and ambiance of rurality. Not all citizens or residents want highly advanced, technological, and urbanized communities. Rather, residents need livable communities that are sustainable and not compromising rurality.

On the other hand, this study's findings and outcomes give implications for more and better future research not only focusing on education and life quality of Surigaonons and of any other rural area but also focusing on the lived experiences of the adults and elderly on why they want to stay in rural communities. Also, the push and pull factors on why rural residents migrate may also be focused as it was implied by this study that urban cities also give great opportunities to citizens that rural communities cannot.

Reflection

With the perspectives of Surigaonons on the kind of life and education in Surigao, I reflected that Surigaonons strengthen further its citizenship identity. Characterization of who and what is a Surigaonon should be known to all to concretize our claim that the rural way of life is not something to be abandoned for a better way of living and greener pastures but rather something that is preferable and exciting. Local government officials should center their policies,

resources, and priorities towards lifting up educational standards and services onto the pedestal while strengthening cultural development and heritage promotion.

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