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Challenges and Coping Mechanisms of Alternative Learning System (ALS) Teachers

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Abstract

In the Philippines, the Alternative Learning System (ALS) provides a practical option to the existing formal instruction. When an individual does not have or cannot afford to access formal education, ALS is an alternate or ancillary. Nevertheless, ALS teachers experience difficulties like restricted ability or resources to deliver lesson effectively and handling learners with different characteristics, abilities, and learning needs. The study is anchored on Lazarus and Folkman's Theory of Stress and Coping (1984), which focused to the level of challenges by the ALS teachers, the coping mechanisms, and how these relates to demographic profiles (age, teaching experience, and educational attainment).

Data were gathered from 48 ALS teachers using descriptive-correlational design through the Coping Strategies Inventory (CSI) and Perceived Stress Scale (PSS). It was revealed that ALS teachers experienced moderate challenges (M = 3.15) and employed adaptive coping mechanisms (M = 4.06) in most instances. Differences in the challenges encountered by the ALS teachers were tested using analysis of variance (ANOVA), with age, educational attainment and sex as independent variables.

Some coping strategies (i.e., promoting collaboration between community and adaptive teaching) were directly related to low levels of perceived stress. Such findings underscore the need for targeted interventions by demographic factors, specifically target professional development and systemic support. And by tackling these challenges, they empower teachers to strengthen their resilience and learner outcomes and, as a result, equitable education for everyone.

Keywords: Alternative Learning System, challenges, coping strategies, perceived stress, demographic factors.

1. Introduction

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The Alternative Learning System (ALS) continues to operate in a number of distant areas of the country, including large urban centers and smaller provincial communities by offering alternative course schedules to out-of-school youth planning to complete their elementary education. The ALS is an important program in the initiative to promote equity in education aiming to provide fully subsidized, equitable, sustainable, and appropriate alternative learning system pathways for learners who are located in areas that have limited or no access to formal education institutions.

ALS teachers face many organizational and managerial issues (Baccal, Ormilla, 2022). Outdated instructional materials and poorly written modules have also created additional challenges for teachers when adapting content to meet learners' needs (Cagang, 2014). Aside from teaching challenges are organizational problems consisting of insufficient institutional funding, late release of allowances and the limited availability of established learning hubs intensify these limitations (Francisco, Buri, 2024; Arpilleda et al., 2018). The shortage of permanent venues for teaching disturbs regularity and weakens the consistency of service implementation, particularly in geographically detached communities.

Teaching assignment loads also pile on the professional obligation of ALS teachers. Many are designated to various learning centers situated far from one another, causing in heightened travel time and widened field hours (Agayon et al., 2022). This several-center arrangement not only forces teachers' physical strength but also changes their work-family integration and mental well-being. In addition to learner-specific factors, there are many other barriers to education due to the complexity of education. For example, frequent absenteeism (due mainly to business and family commitments) can negatively impact the structure of lessons and how quickly students can learn (Campilla et al., 2023). Moreover, the structural and contextual barriers of teaching in the ALS environment show that the ALS is more than just a classroom; it requires both commitment for an extended period of time and the ability to adapt to change continually.

In this regard, the teaching of English literacy contributes to the overall teaching of any subject area currently taught in the classrooms. Being able to read and write in English is very often linked to having access to more employment and having access to information from around the world.

For learners from poor backgrounds, reinforcing literacy abilities is viewed as a means toward improved economic mobility. However, adopting literacy gaps while steering material shortage and unpredictable learning situation raises the intellectual and emotional needs identified on teachers. Thus, pedagogical problems in ALS go beyond logistical concerns and affect teacher effectiveness and well-being.

While studies have classified shared challenges within ALS, less consideration has been given to the coping mechanisms teachers use to handle these needs and how such approaches relate to their stress levels. Coping strategies, whether problem-focused, emotion-focused, or avoidance-oriented, are fundamental to understanding teacher resilience and sustained performance. According to research conducted by Baticulon et al., 2021, adaptive coping mechanisms are related to teachers in the midst of the global pandemic. This would suggest that the coping processes between individuals may have a substantial impact on how people (i.e., teachers) react within difficult work settings. Nevertheless, there is little research to support these findings inside of an Alternatives Education System (ALS) context.

Previous studies indicate that Institutional and administrative support systems are also important in developing teacher resilience. Villaber (2023) mentioned strengthened administrative management, provision of instructional materials and frequent communication with mobile teachers as factors that increase instruction effectiveness and teacher flexibility. A similar observation was reported by Alviso and Tacadena (2023), who note that supported teachers' capacity to manage multiple learning centers and maintain quality of instruction despite limited resources gave rooms for them to perform. In contrast, a shortage of organizational support was associated with isolation and professional stress. These findings show that it is important to consider not only structural barriers but also how teachers are equipped to resist and negotiate them.

The way in which demographic variables affect people's experience of what they are faced with and how they handle it. Tachado and Tumarong (2024) observed differences between younger and more experienced teachers in adjusting to classroom needs and coping with the physical demands of multi-center transfers. Disparities in educational attainment may also affect instructional flexibility and pedagogical innovation. Notwithstanding these insights, the interaction among demographic characteristics, experienced challenges, coping strategies, and stress levels stay underexplored within

the ALS framework. Understanding these associations is vital for developing targeted interventions that recognize differences in teacher profiles and professional needs.

This study used an empirical quantitative correlational research design to evaluate the relationship(s) between the different challenge types that ALS teachers experience, the coping strategies utilized to deal with those challenges, the level of stress experienced by those teachers. Specifically, the study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of instructional, learner-related, and resource-related challenges experienced by ALS teachers?

2. Are there significant differences in experienced challenges across demographic groups (age, teaching experience, and educational attainment)?

3. Is there a significant relationship between coping strategies experience, and perceived stress among ALS teachers?

In this manner, the analysis moves beyond merely describing systematics constraints and instead examines by moving outside the description and listing of systemic constraints alone to pay attention to how structural challenges are mediated in the lives of individuals, the analysis contributes a more robust framework for understanding teacher resilience in alternative education contexts. Results may be used to develop professional development, stress management and institutional interventions to increase both teacher wellness and instructional effectiveness. Lastly, strengthening support structures for ALS educators is imperative to preserving the program's larger purpose of promoting educational equity and social inclusivity in the Philippines.

Conceptual Framework

The Theory of Stress and Coping by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) forms a solid base for why and how individuals cope with the stressors they may face in life. Stress transaction model highlights the interaction between the individual and the environment, as it stresses the need to appraisal of stressors and search for coping strategies. Stress occurs when there is a perceived imbalance between the demands that the environment places on someone and the resources the individual possesses to meet those demands. The primary and secondary appraisal models as well as the related coping processes are at the core of this theory.

The theory groups coping strategies based on: a) those aimed at problem-solving (problem-focused), b) those aimed at alleviating the emotional experience (emotion-focused), c) mechanisms that steer individuals away from stressors (avoidance-focused), and it further summarizes more outward behaviors as seeking support. Problem-focused coping is taking direct steps to solve the problem, e.g., prioritizing what needs to be done, asking for solutions, or working on skills through feedback and training. These strategies fall under the umbrella of "modifying the environment to reduce stressors", as formulated by Lazarus and Folkman. Emotion-focused coping, on the other hand, seeks to manage the emotional reactions to stress. Stay positive, practice relaxation techniques, and vent to trusted individuals (also examples). This strategy is informative especially when stressors are beyond one's control. While not suggested as a positive strategy explicitly by the theory, avoidance coping is noted as a common protective response. It involves behaviors like procrastination, distraction or emotional withdrawal, which are often considered maladaptive in the long term. Support-seeking coping, which is related to both problem-focused and emotion-focused strategies, entails reaching out to the social network for instrumental help or for emotional support. The key is leveraging social resources to cope with stress.

It aligns itself with the transactional model and addresses the reciprocal relationship between personal appraisal factor and environmental factor. The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) also reflects this approach as it emphasizes individual perceptions and responses to stress. The scale explores primary appraisals of stressors, like feeling overwhelmed by a multitude of tasks or having insufficient resources to confront challenges. It further covers secondary appraisals, which assess the existence of coping resources, including institutional support and professional development resources. Also included are emotional and physical stress response, which can involve emotional states like feeling drained or physical reactions like headaches or fatigue. In addition, the PSS describes the impact of stress, including impaired teaching performance and poor work-life balance.

Other theoretical frameworks that add on to Lazarus and Folkman's model include One is known as the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model differentiating between job demands (stressors) and job resources (stress-reducing factors). This is consistent with any standards, like the PSS, that emphasize adequate support systems and professional development opportunities.

Adding further dimension, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) provides insight through consideration of psychological needs such as competence, relatedness, and autonomy, seen in items relating to motivation and skill development.

Through the incorporation of these theoretical anchors, the conceptual framework acknowledges the complexity of stress and coping experienced by ALS teachers. It highlights the vital influence of the appraisal process, coping strategies, and the resources at hand on stress and its eventual consequences. Such a multifaceted approach offers a deeper understanding of the specific pressures that teachers face, as well as the ways in which they cope with stress in a productive fashion.

2. Methods

Descriptive-correlational research design was employed in the study. This design was chosen as it appropriately responds to the study's aims of describing the challenges experienced by ALS teachers and exploring the relationships between their coping mechanisms and perceived levels of stress. With this methodology, the study not only reports on the problems the teachers faced on the ground, it also investigates correlations and differences between demographic variables.

The Pearson Correlation coefficient was utilized in the study to assess the relationship between the use of coping strategies and perceived stress levels among the respondents. Coping strategies were assessed with the validated Coping Strategies Inventory (CSI), which can evaluate different approaches individuals use to cope with stress. The perceived stress level was assessed using a questionnaire tool called Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), a widely accepted tool for measure of stress levels in different populations. The Pearson Correlation is calculated to evaluate the degree and direction of the relationship between the above-mentioned variables which explains how they affect the stress levels of ALS teachers. The findings help determine if effective coping can lessen stress's negative impact in their special teaching context.

Aside from correlating variables, the study also sought to determine the differences in the level of difficulties encountered by ALS teachers when grouped according to demographic factors like age, teaching experience, and educational attainment. A one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used for this purpose. We used ANOVA, a powerful statistical method used to compare means between two or more groups. This data analysis enabled the researcher to identify if demographic factors had statistically relevant impact on perceived challenges, contextualizing how teacher experience was still different given the diversity of the population in the study.

Data for the study was collected through an online survey questionnaire which was posted through Google Forms. The questionnaire included sections inquiring about demographic characteristics, challenges faced by ALS teachers, their coping strategies using the CSI, and their stress levels using the PSS. The questionnaire is developed and validated for content and face validity. The study was made reliable through two means: first Cronbach's Alpha, which measures how close the items of a test are as a group, and second a test-retest method, the same measure being administered to a group of respondents at two different points in time. Both approaches validated that the research instruments used in the survey had high internal consistency and thus are appropriate for use in this research context.

The respondents of the survey are the 48 Junior High School teachers of the Department of Education's Alternative Learning System (ALS) program. The sample size may be small but enough for correlational research which aims to discover the relationships among multiple correlates within a single-group sample, like the ALS teachers. Cohen (1992) mentioned that for a moderate to large effect sizes of correlational experiments with $p < 0.05$, a priori from 27 to 47 respondents should attain acceptable statistical power to identify considerable relationships. Obtaining quantitative data through purposive sampling, this method allowed data collection from participants who are in a unique position to inform about challenges and coping strategies appropriate to the aim of the study. The small sample size was sufficient due to the specifics of the type of study being conducted, and the specific population under investigation. You are responsible for teaching out-of-school youth and adults, often in difficult situations that require ingenuity and resilience.

However, its techniques were systematically chosen to dovetail with its goals, guaranteeing the dependability and authenticity of the data gathering. Combinations of descriptive and correlational analyses, along with stringent validation of the measuring instrument, provide a big-picture view of not only the challenges faced by ALS teachers but also how these aforementioned factors help cope with those challenges. With an emphasis on informing policymakers and stakeholders about the

assistance required to support the health and effectiveness of these educators, the findings serve as a foundation for future policy and action.

3. Results

Table 1. Extent of Challenges Encountered by ALS Teachers

Challenges in Instructional Delivery	Mean	SD	Interpretation
I find it difficult to deliver lessons effectively due to limited instructional resources.	2.90	0.95	Neutral
The lack of access to technology hampers my ability to implement diverse teaching strategies.	3.00	0.97	Neutral
I face challenges adapting my teaching methods to accommodate learners with varying needs.	3.29	0.80	Neutral
Insufficient training opportunities hinder my ability to improve my instructional delivery.	2.71	0.99	Neutral
I struggle to maintain the quality of instruction in a non-traditional teaching setup (e.g., modular, blended).	2.96	0.94	Neutral
Grand Mean	2.97	0.93	Neutral
Challenges in Learner Engagement			
Many learners lack motivation, making it hard to engage them in lessons.	3.50	0.80	Agree
Irregular attendance of learners disrupts the teaching and learning process.	3.79	0.92	Agree
I find it challenging to build strong teacher-learner relationships in the ALS setup.	3.00	0.85	Neutral
Learners often struggle to complete assignments and tasks on time.	3.81	0.89	Agree
Limited communication tools affect my ability to interact effectively with learners.	3.04	0.85	Neutral
Grand Mean	3.43	0.87	Agree
Challenges in Resource Availability			
I lack access to adequate learning materials and teaching aids.	2.73	0.84	Neutral
Budget constraints prevent me from acquiring the necessary resources for teaching.	3.38	0.89	Neutral
There are insufficient facilities (e.g., classrooms, and learning spaces) to support effective instruction.	3.15	1.20	Neutral
Administrative support for addressing resource gaps is inadequate.	3.06	0.98	Neutral
I often have to use personal funds to supplement teaching materials or activities.	3.63	0.98	Agree
Grand Mean	3.19	0.98	Neutral

Table 1 summarizes the extent of challenges encountered by ALS teachers in terms of instructional delivery, learner engagement, and resource availability. Generally, in instructional delivery challenges with a mean score of 2.97, teachers neither strongly experience nor completely reject the existence of the challenges. This implies that the issue may happen occasionally but is not recognized as a constant or highly critical concern. ALS teachers might have adopted those situations (lack of technology) over time. It is also observed that lower variability in the scores was assigned by the respondents (SD = 0.98)

On the contrary, learner engagement was more of a problem with a mean score of 3.43. Mostly, ALS teachers agree on challenges they encountered in the learner engagement. More

specifically, ALS teachers agreed that learners often struggle to complete assignments and tasks on time. One contributing factor is the socio-economic status of the ALS learners, employed and with family, resulting in their splitting time to studying and earning a livelihood.

ALS teachers, neither strongly encounter nor completely decline resource availability challenges (M = 3.19). More specifically, ALS teachers agree that they often use personal funds to support teaching materials or activities. The "neutral" responses (4 out of 5 indicators) of ALS teachers indicate that they moderately experience resource-related challenges. While some restrictions on materials and facilities exist, these challenges may not be perceived as severe, probably because teachers have adjusted to the current situations within ALS setting.

Table 2. Variations in the Extent of Challenges Faced by ALS Teachers Across Demographic Groups

	F	**F crit**	**P-Value**
Age	2.2135	0.0834	2.5888
Gender	1.0435	0.3606	3.2043
Years of Teaching Experience	1.2193	0.3139	2.8165
Educational Attainment	3.6085	0.0486	3.2043

The data show that age, gender and years of teaching experience do not significantly influence the challenges experienced by the ALS teachers. However, a significant difference is observed when teachers are grouped in terms of their educational attainment (p = 0.0486). It only explains that the level of education may affect how ALS teachers manage the challenges associated with their work.

Table 3. Coping Strategies Inventory (CSI) for ALS Teachers

	Mean	**SD**	**Interpretation**
Problem-Focused Coping	4.15	0.83	Agree
I prioritize tasks and create a schedule to manage my workload.	4.06	0.84	Agree
I seek support from colleagues to solve work-related challenges.	3.83	1.02	Agree
I focus on finding solutions to problems rather than dwelling on them.	4.19	0.76	Agree
I actively participate in training or workshops to improve my teaching skills.	4.40	0.71	Strongly Agree
I use feedback from learners or supervisors to improve my teaching methods.	4.25	0.81	Strongly Agree
Emotion-Focused Coping	3.90	0.95	Agree
I talk to friends or family about my frustrations.	3.63	1.08	Agree
I engage in activities (e.g., hobbies, exercise) to reduce stress.	3.83	1.02	Agree
I practice relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing or meditation.	3.60	1.09	Agree
I try to stay optimistic and look for positive aspects in difficult situations.	4.31	0.75	Agree
I avoid dwelling on negative emotions and try to maintain emotional balance.	4.15	0.82	Agree
Avoidance Coping	3.37	1.12	Neutral
I put off dealing with difficult tasks until later.	3.25	1.04	Neutral
I distance myself emotionally from stressful situations.	3.77	0.90	Agree
I avoid discussing work challenges with others.	3.21	1.17	Neutral
I spend time on unrelated activities to distract myself	3.42	1.09	Agree

	Mean	SD	Interpretation
from stress.			
I rely on substances (e.g., caffeine, comfort food) to cope with stress.	3.21	1.40	Neutral
Support-Seeking Coping	3.91	0.99	Agree
I ask my supervisor for help when challenges arise.	3.73	1.16	Agree
I seek advice from experienced ALS teachers.	3.96	1.13	Agree
I join professional groups or forums to discuss teaching-related issues.	3.94	0.86	Agree
I collaborate with other teachers to share resources and strategies.	4.00	0.88	Agree
I attend peer-support meetings to address stress or challenges of teaching.	3.92	0.92	Agree

Table 3 presents the coping strategies employed by the ALS teachers. Overall, the results indicate that ALS teachers normally use problem-focused (M = 4.15) and support-seeking (M = 3.91) coping strategies, as mirrored by the "agree" interpretations in most (8 out of 10 indicators) items. In particular, ALS teachers actively participated in training and workshops to improve their teaching skills for them to cope up with the current challenges they encountered.

Avoidance coping has the least mean score (M = 3.37), signifying that ALS teachers manage to use this strategy less commonly compared to other coping strategies. The comparatively lower mean value for avoidance coping directs more hands-on methods in handling the weights of their work.

Table 4. Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) for ALS Teachers

	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Problem-Focused Coping	3.04	1.14	Neutral
I prioritize tasks and create a schedule to manage my workload.	3.40	0.98	Agree
I seek support from colleagues to solve work-related challenges.	2.92	1.11	Neutral
I focus on finding solutions to problems rather than dwelling on them.	2.90	1.19	Neutral
I actively participate in training or workshops to improve my teaching skills.	2.90	1.19	Neutral
I use feedback from learners or supervisors to improve my teaching methods.	3.10	1.21	Neutral
Emotion-Focused Coping	2.40	0.88	Disagree
I talk to friends or family about my frustrations.	2.46	0.92	Disagree
I engage in activities (e.g., hobbies, exercise) to reduce stress.	2.79	0.74	Neutral
I practice relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing or meditation.	2.15	0.95	Disagree
I try to stay optimistic and look for positive aspects in difficult situations.	2.25	0.89	Disagree
I avoid dwelling on negative emotions and try to maintain emotional balance.	2.33	0.91	Neutral
Avoidance Coping	2.74	1.14	Neutral
I put off dealing with difficult tasks until later.	3.15	0.99	Neutral
I distance myself emotionally from stressful situations.	2.81	1.07	Neutral
I avoid discussing work challenges with others.	2.67	1.19	Neutral

I spend time on unrelated activities to distract myself from stress.	2.52	1.24	Disagree
I rely on substances (e.g., caffeine, comfort food) to cope with stress.	2.54	1.22	Disagree
Support-Seeking Coping	2.85	0.94	Neutral
I ask my supervisor for help when challenges arise.	2.71	0.90	Neutral
I seek advice from experienced ALS teachers.	2.92	0.87	Neutral
I join professional groups or forums to discuss teaching-related issues.	2.73	0.92	Neutral
I collaborate with other teachers to share resources and strategies.	2.94	1.02	Neutral
I attend peer-support meetings to address stress or challenges of teaching.	2.94	1.00	Neutral

Table 4 summarizes the perceived stress by ALS teachers. The results reveal that with these several coping extents took "neutral", suggesting that ALS teachers neither strongly experience nor entirely avoid the stressful circumstances defined in the items. Neutrality may entail that while teachers meeting certain stressors in their work, they are still able to handle them to a reasonable extent, resulting in stable responses rather than extreme agreement or disagreement. Among the indicators, the maximum mean score was achieved by prioritizing tasks and creating a schedule to manage workload (M = 3.40, agree). The result proposes that ALS teachers manage to count on task organization and time management as real-world strategies for handling the requirements of their work. However, the lowest mean score as reported for practicing relaxation techniques like deep breathing or mediation (M = 2.15). The result explains that ALS teachers may not usually involve in proper relaxation practices as an approach for handling stress.

4. Discussion
The findings of this study reveal that ALS teachers encounter a range of challenges across three core domains: instructional delivery, learner engagement, and resource availability. While the overall responses for instructional delivery and resource availability were interpreted as neutral, the data suggest that these issues – though not immediately critical – can have long-term implications for teaching effectiveness and learner success.

For instructional delivery, teachers expressed difficulties in adapting their strategies to meet diverse learner needs. This issue may stem from limited opportunities for professional training and a lack of adequate instructional materials. Although not seen as severe, these challenges could accumulate and negatively affect learning, especially for students with learning gaps or irregular schooling backgrounds. As highlighted by Villegas-Reimers (2003), the ability of teachers to meet varying learner needs is largely dependent on access to quality professional development.

Learner engagement emerged as the most significant challenge. Teachers observed that many learners show low motivation, irregular attendance, and a tendency to miss assignments. These patterns likely reflect broader socio-economic realities, such as poverty, family responsibilities, and the need to work. These barriers not only affect learner participation but also disrupt the continuity and quality of instruction. Campilla et al. (2023) noted that ALS learners are often burdened by economic and personal obligations, which take precedence over education.

Although resource availability received a neutral interpretation, concerns about insufficient teaching materials, inadequate budget support, and the need for teachers to shoulder expenses personally point to deeper systemic problems. These resource-related challenges, while often managed by teachers, create inequities and place a disproportionate burden on those working in under-resourced communities. Similar findings were reported in a study conducted in the Katima Circuit, where inadequate educational resources significantly affected instructional delivery and teacher morale (Sakuzita, 2021).

Despite these challenges, ALS teachers demonstrated strong commitment through their coping mechanisms. Problem-focused strategies, such as attending workshops and continuously improving teaching methods, were most commonly used. This reflects a proactive stance and a desire for growth and effectiveness. These findings are supported by Baticulon et al. (2021), who found that such strategies foster resilience among educators.

Teachers also made moderate use of emotion-focused and support-seeking coping strategies, relying on personal reflection and peer collaboration. Avoidance strategies were used less frequently, suggesting that teachers generally prefer to engage with, rather than escape from, their challenges. However, in prolonged high-stress situations, avoidance may become more common, highlighting the need for wellness programs and mental health support.

The analysis also showed that personal demographics such as age, gender, and years of teaching experience did not significantly affect the challenges teachers faced. However, educational attainment was found to be a relevant factor. Teachers with higher degrees appeared to handle instructional and resource-related challenges more effectively, likely due to stronger pedagogical and professional backgrounds. This reinforces the importance of providing advanced training opportunities for ALS educators at all levels.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The results reveal that ALS teachers face moderate challenges, especially in engagement of learners which affecting their quality of instruction. Although the most popular strategy is problem-focused, teachers also resort to emotion-focused and support-seeking coping to relieve stress. This has demonstrated a strong role of educational attainment in buffering against challenges, which highlights the need for professional development of ALS teachers. These results highlight the potential need for more tailored efforts to help ALS teachers address these challenges while also preserving program effectiveness.

The current research has limitations namely: the sample size; dependence on self-reported measures; and the research design. The sample size was limited only to 48 ALS teachers within a specified area. As a result, it may limit the applicability in broader contexts. The use of participants' responses may introduce response bias, specifically when respondents provide answers that match with socially desirable behaviors like coping practices. Depending on single-phase design restricts causal examination of relationships among challenges, coping strategies, and stress. Future studies may consider larger, multiple regional samples to improve generalizability. Time-series study could better examine how coping strategies grow over time to sustainable structural problems. Moreover, qualitative research design may produce deeper view into how teacher interpret "neutral" experiences of challenge, particularly in relation to institutional constraints within ALS.

Recommendations for Professional Development on Scale

The current study revealed that the most often used Adoptive Coping Strategies among ALS teachers are collaboration with the community and flexible teaching. These are evidence of strong soft skills and pedagogical adaptability. But in perception of the researchers, most difficult challenges are those identified by respondents, particularly limited instructional resources, multi-grade/multi-level teaching, and irregular attendance of learners, call out for specific professional competencies that are not now a part of the standard teacher training.

The following professional development targeting ALS teachers should concentrate on the following skills:

1. Differentiated instruction and multi-level classroom management (Tomlinson, 2017) to cater for the heterogeneity of students in ALS contexts.
2. Resourceful pedagogy and low-cost material development, enabling teachers to develop context-specific learning materials without textbooks or ICT resources.
3. Community based education and stakeholder commitment training to prepare teachers in establishing stronger dealings with barangays, parents and NGOs, which is necessary to encouraging attendance and support for learners.
4. Psychological first aid and mental health knowledge, given that teachers may play the role of counselor for students feeling stress from the situations of their lives (Tanaka et al., 2020).

They have implications not only for teaching efficacy, but also for decreasing burnout and retaining teachers in resource poor settings.

Policy Implications for the Results

Although the paper already highlighted the need for systemic support, it goes a step further to propose that the Department of Education (DepEd) and other parties should focus on:

Establishing permanent centers for ALS learning to sustain and simplify the logistics.
– Uniform distribution of IMs and teacher kits for ALS facilitators including those who

handle various barangays/center.

– Prompt disbursement and increment of teacher allowances and travel funds in order to alleviate financial hardship and facilitate more effective outreach work.

– Integration of ALS-specific course modules in teacher education programs, or the creation of a certification course for non-formal education contexts.

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