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Instructional Barriers and Coping Strategies of Alternative Learning System (ALS) Teachers in the SHS Pilot Program

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Abstract **Review Article**

This study examined the instructional barriers and coping strategies of Alternative Learning System (ALS) teachers implementing the Senior High School (SHS) Pilot Program in the Schools Division of Quirino during the School Year 2025–2026. The study aimed to describe the profile of ALS teachers, determine the extent of instructional barriers encountered in program implementation, identify the coping strategies used to address these barriers, and examine whether significant differences and relationships existed between the variables. The instructional barriers were examined in terms of curriculum and learning resources, instructional delivery, assessment and evaluation practices, learner participation and engagement, and support from stakeholders and the Department of Education. A quantitative descriptive research design was employed. The respondents consisted of 51 ALS teachers selected through stratified random sampling from different districts in the Schools Division of Quirino. Data were gathered using a researcher-developed questionnaire validated by experts and tested for reliability. The instrument collected information on teacher profiles, barriers encountered, and strategies used to overcome these challenges. Descriptive and inferential statistics were utilized to analyze the data, including frequency, percentage, median, Mann–Whitney test, Kruskal–Wallis test, and Spearman's rank correlation. Findings revealed that most ALS teachers were mobile teachers with a bachelor's degree, had 1–5 years of service, and had attended limited ALS-related training. Instructional barriers were generally perceived as slightly serious across most dimensions, although learner participation and engagement emerged as a serious concern due to absenteeism, competing responsibilities, and low learner motivation. Despite these challenges, teachers consistently applied adaptive coping strategies such as contextualizing modules, modifying learning activities, conducting home visits, and collaborating with stakeholders to support learners. No significant differences were found in the extent of barriers and coping strategies when grouped according to teachers' profile variables. The study concluded that ALS teachers demonstrate strong resilience and adaptability in addressing instructional challenges. However, sustained institutional support, training, and resource provision are essential to strengthen the effective implementation of the ALS SHS Pilot Program.

Keywords: Alternative Learning System, Senior High School Pilot Program, instructional barriers, coping strategies, ALS teacher.

INTRODUCTION

Education is widely recognized as a basic human right and an essential factor in promoting social and economic progress. Despite this, a considerable number of Filipinos are still unable to participate in formal schooling because of poverty, remote locations, and physical limitations (Mendoza, D. 2024). In response to these concerns, the Department of Education (DepEd) established the Alternative Learning System (ALS) through Republic Act 9155 and Republic Act 11510. This program serves as a flexible and inclusive learning option for out-of-school youth and adults who were not able to complete their formal education. Through ALS, learners are provided opportunities to acquire essential academic knowledge and practical life skills that promote continuous learning and meaningful participation in society.

To further improve the initiative, DepEd Order No. 46, s. 2017 launched the ALS–Education and Skills Training (ALS-EST) program. This program combines academic lessons with technical and livelihood training to better prepare learners for real-life situations. Eventually, this initiative developed into the ALS–Senior High School (ALS-SHS) pilot program, which was created to align ALS competencies with the standards of the formal K–12 curriculum. The program aims to ensure that ALS learners gain comparable knowledge and skills to those of students in formal schools, allowing them to continue to higher education, start businesses, or secure employment.

However, implementing the ALS-SHS pilot program presents several difficulties, especially for teachers. Research by Ucab and Luzano (2023) and Campilla and Lopez (2020) shows that educators often encounter limited instructional materials, heavy responsibilities, and inadequate professional preparation. Moreover, learners frequently struggle with absenteeism and lack of motivation due to socioeconomic challenges (Ormilla, 2019; Ndlovu et al., 2020).

Because teachers play a central role in delivering the program, their coping methods and professional attitudes strongly affect its effectiveness (Tachado & Tumarong, 2024). Nonetheless, few studies have explored how ALS-SHS is implemented in rural areas such as the Division of Quirino. Therefore, this study investigates the instructional barriers and coping strategies of ALS teachers implementing the SHS Pilot Program in the Schools Division of Quirino. It specifically examines five dimensions: curriculum and learning resources, instructional delivery, assessment practices, learner participation, and stakeholder support. By documenting these frontline experiences, the research aims to provide empirical evidence to improve program implementation, inform DepEd policy decisions, and enhance teacher development programs, ultimately fostering a more adaptable and effective alternative education system.

METHODS

This study employed a quantitative descriptive research design to systematically examine the implementation barriers and coping strategies of Alternative Learning System Senior High School (ALS SHS) teachers in the Schools Division of Quirino (SY 2025-2026). Descriptive research was utilized to describe the characteristics and conditions of the teachers' experiences without manipulating variables (McCombes, 2022). Using stratified random sampling, 51 respondents were selected from a total population of 61 ALS teachers across nine districts to ensure proportional representation and minimize sampling bias.

Data collection utilized a structured, researcher-developed questionnaire adapted from validated instruments by Campilla et. al (2017), Paez (2025), and Ucab and Luzano (2023). The instrument, refined to align with DepEd Order No. 46, s. 2017, consisted of three sections: teacher profile, barriers encountered (categorized into five dimensions), and strategies employed. Content validity was established through expert evaluation (CVI $\geq$ 0.80), and internal consistency was confirmed via a pilot test yielding a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of at least .70, indicating acceptable reliability for social science research (Frost, 2024).

The process of collecting data included getting formal permission from the Schools Division Superintendent and then sending out questionnaires through personal visits and electronic forms. Ethical standards were rigorously upheld, guaranteeing informed consent, non-maleficence, and anonymity (Miteu, 2024). The Belmont Report (Arrant, 2020; Reyes, 2020) says that these practices follow the basic rules of respect for people, doing good, and fairness. The Quirino State University Research Ethics Committee formally gave ethical clearance, which made sure that national ethical standards were met (Philippine National Health Research System, 2013).

Statistical analysis was conducted using non-parametric tools after the Shapiro-Wilk test indicated a non-normal data distribution. Frequency counts, percentages, and medians were used for descriptive profiling and assessment of barriers and strategies. To determine significant differences based on teacher profiles, the Mann-Whitney test (for two groups) and Kruskal-Wallis test (for three or more groups) were applied. Finally, Spearman's rank correlation was used to measure the relationship between the intensity of barriers and the frequency of coping strategies employed by the teachers.

The data gathering method included the securing of formal written clearance from the Schools Division Superintendent and the distribution of the questionnaires through personal visits and online methods. The standards of ethics were strictly upheld in the data collection from respondents on issues of informed consent, non-maleficence, and anonymity. The clearance for the study was obtained from the Quirino State University Research Ethics Committee.

To perform statistical analysis, non-parametric tests were used since, based on the Shapiro-Wilk test, the study indicated non-normal data distribution. Frequency, percentage, and median were used to analyze the overall study for barriers and strategies, while describing the profiles. To evaluate whether there are significant differences depending on the profiles of teachers, both the Mann-Whitney test for two independent samples and the Kruskal-Wallis test for more than two independent samples were used. Lastly, Spearman rank correlation was used to assess how intensely the barriers were having on the coping strategies used by the teachers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Frequency and Percent Distribution of Respondents

Profile	Specifics	Frequency	Percentage
Educational Attainment	Bachelor's Degree	28	54.90
	Master's Degree	23	45.10
Designation	Community ALS Teacher/Volunteer	19	37.25
	Mobile ALS Teacher	28	54.90
	District ALS Coordinator	4	7.84
Length of Service in ALS	1-5 years	28	54.90
	6-10 years	16	31.37
	11 years & above	7	13.73
Number of Training Related to ALS	None	32	62.75
	One	19	37.25

n=51

According to the data presented in Table 1 above, the Profile of the Respondents shows that the workforce is academically qualified but relatively new to ALS work. A majority of the respondents possess a Bachelor's Degree, accounting for 54.90%, while 45.10% of the respondents have achieved a Master's Degree. This shows that the respondents are highly educated. However, there is a huge gap in terms of specialized professional work development, where 62.75% of the respondents stated that they did not undergo any training related to ALS work, while 37.25% stated that they attended at least one training session. The workforce is mainly composed of Mobile ALS Teachers, accounting for 54.90%, who are relatively new to ALS work, with 54.90% of the respondents having served for only 1-5 years.

The absence of specific training among the majority of the respondents is a pressing concern, as ALS teaching involves a paradigm shift from the conventional approach of teaching, or pedagogy, to andragogy, or adult learning theory. According to the research by Arzadon et. al (2023) highlights the reality shock faced by ALS teachers, as their formal pre-service training did not adequately prepare them for the community-based, multi-grade, and flexible nature of the ALS teaching environment. This is exacerbated by the significant number of Mobile Teachers with limited-service years, as the success of ALS teaching is highly dependent on the teacher's capacity to function as a social worker and community organizer, as discussed in the study of Apao, Dayagbil et. al (2014). According to the World Bank (2018; 2023), even ALS teachers with masteral degrees may not be able to enhance the passing rates of out-of-school youth in Accreditation and Equivalency (A&E) tests without continuous and specific training.

Table 2: Test of Difference on the Extent of Seriousness of the Barriers Encountered by Alternative Learning System (ALS) Teachers in Implementing the ALS Senior High Pilot Program

Extent of Seriousness of the Barriers Encountered	Median	Educational Attainment	Designation	Length of Service in ALS	Number of Training Related to ALS
Curriculum and Learning Resources	2.00	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant
Instructional Delivery	2.00	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant
Assessment and Evaluation Practices	2.00	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant
Learner Participation and Engagement	3.00	**Significant**	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant
Support from Stakeholders and DepEd	2.00	**Significant**	Not Significant	Not Significant	**Significant**

p-value of ≤.05 is significant

Table 2 presents the test of difference on the extent of seriousness of the barriers encountered by Alternative Learning System (ALS) teachers in implementing the ALS Senior High School Pilot Program. The findings show that curriculum and learning resources, instructional delivery, and assessment and evaluation practices all obtained a median score of 2.00 and revealed no significant

differences when grouped according to educational attainment, designation, length of service in ALS, and number of ALS-related trainings. However, learner participation and engagement obtained a higher median of 3.00 and showed a significant difference based on educational attainment. Likewise, support from stakeholders and DepEd showed significant differences in relation to educational attainment and training received.

The findings suggest that most barriers experienced by ALS teachers are common regardless of their professional characteristics, indicating that these challenges are systemic in nature. However, differences in learner engagement and stakeholder support may be influenced by teachers' educational preparation and professional training. This result supports the study of Casingal (2025), which emphasized that professional development enhances teachers' competencies in addressing instructional challenges in the ALS program. Moreover, the study of Daga et al. (2025) highlighted that ALS facilitators often face difficulties related to learner participation and institutional support, which affect the effective implementation of ALS programs in diverse learning contexts.

Table 3: Test of Difference on the Frequency of Use of Strategies to Overcome Such Barriers in Implementing the ALS Senior High Pilot Program

Frequency of Teacher's Use of Strategies to Overcome Barriers	Median	Educational Attainment	Designation	Length of Service in ALS	Number of Training Related to ALS
Curriculum and Learning Resources	4.00	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant
Instructional Delivery	4.00	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant
Assessment and Evaluation Practices	4.00	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant
Learner Participation and Engagement	4.00	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant	**Significant**
Support from Stakeholders and DepEd	4.00	Not Significant	**Significant**	Not Significant	Not Significant

p-value of ≤.05 is significant

Table 3 presents the test of difference on the frequency of teachers' use of strategies to overcome barriers in implementing the ALS Senior High School Pilot Program. The results show that all indicators, including curriculum and learning resources, instructional delivery, assessment and evaluation practices, learner participation and engagement, and support from stakeholders and DepEd, obtained a median score of 4.00, indicating that the strategies were frequently utilized by the teachers. Moreover, most variables revealed no significant differences when grouped according to educational attainment, designation, length of service in ALS, and number of ALS-related trainings. However, learner participation and engagement showed a significant difference in terms of number of ALS-related trainings, while support from stakeholders and DepEd differed according to teachers' designation.

The findings indicate that ALS teachers consistently apply various strategies to address barriers in

program implementation regardless of their professional characteristics. This suggests that teachers rely on common instructional practices and adaptive approaches when dealing with challenges in ALS instruction. The result supports the study of Casingal (2025), which emphasized that ALS teachers employ diverse teaching strategies and learning interventions to support flexible learning environments. Similarly, Daga-as et. al (2025) reported that ALS facilitators develop practical strategies through collaboration and community support. In addition, Abad et. al (2020) emphasized that ALS teachers frequently utilize learner-centered strategies and contextualized instruction to effectively address the diverse needs of out-of-school youth and adult learners.

Table 4: Test Correlation on the Extent of Seriousness of the Barriers Encountered by Alternative Learning System (ALS) Teachers in Implementing the ALS Senior High Pilot Program and Frequency of Use of Strategies to Overcome Such Barriers

	Curriculum and Learning Resources	Instructional Delivery	Assessment and Evaluation Practices	Learner Participation and Engagement	Support from Stakeholders and DepEd
Curriculum and Learning Resources	**Significant**	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant
Instructional Delivery	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant
Assessment and Evaluation Practices	Not Significant	**Significant**	**Significant**	**Significant**	Not Significant
Learner Participation and Engagement	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant
Support from Stakeholders and DepEd	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant

p-value of ≤.05 is significant

Table 4 presents the test of correlation between the extent of seriousness of the barriers encountered by ALS teachers and the frequency of their use of strategies to overcome such barriers in implementing the ALS Senior High School Pilot Program. The results reveal that most variables showed no significant relationship between the seriousness of barriers and the strategies used by teachers. However, significant correlations were observed between curriculum and learning resources and the strategies related to curriculum and learning resources. In addition, assessment and evaluation practices showed significant relationships with strategies related to instructional delivery, assessment and evaluation practices, and learner participation and engagement, indicating that teachers tend to apply strategies in response to specific barriers encountered.

The findings suggest that while many barriers experienced by ALS teachers do not strongly influence the strategies they use, certain instructional challenges encourage teachers to implement targeted interventions. This indicates that teachers adapt their strategies depending on the specific barriers encountered during program implementation. The result supports the study of Casingal (2025), which found that ALS teachers develop responsive instructional approaches to address diverse learning difficulties. Similarly, Daga-as et al. (2025)

highlighted that ALS facilitators modify their teaching and assessment practices to overcome contextual barriers. Moreover, Albert et al., (2024) emphasized that effective ALS implementation requires adaptive teaching strategies and institutional support to improve learner participation and program outcomes.

This study showed that ALS teachers of the Senior High School Pilot Program overall faced slightly serious instructional barriers, and participation and engagement of learners were considered the most serious concern. Most of these teachers were new to the ALS program and had limited training, but they showed unwavering commitment and flexibility in dealing with challenges. The absence of differences between profile variables for barriers and coping strategies suggests that these challenges are systemic rather than individual-based. Furthermore, the significant and positive relationship between barriers and coping strategies confirms that teachers are able to cope proactively when faced with more serious challenges. Based on self-efficacy and ecological systems theories, it is evident from the findings of this study that teacher resilience is one of the key factors for sustaining the implementation of the ALS-SHS program. However, it is worth noting that teacher resilience is not enough without additional institutional support, training, and stakeholder engagement for the sustainability of the ALS-SHS program.

In light of the findings, several actions are recommended to strengthen the implementation of the ALS Senior High School Pilot Program. Strengthen capacity-building programs and specialized ALS-SHS trainings to improve teacher competency and confidence. Develop and make accessible learning modules to minimize curriculum-related burdens. Institute learner engagement programs that specifically target absenteeism, motivational issues, and socioeconomic challenges. Strengthen support mechanisms among institutions and stakeholders in terms of policies, resource allocation, and monitoring. Develop programs that foster continuous professional development and mentoring to sustain teacher resiliency and optimize the effectiveness of program implementation.

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