

Guiding Learners Facing Academic Challenges: An Inquiry

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Abstract: This qualitative inquiry explored the lived experiences of Grade VI public elementary school teachers in addressing academic difficulties among learners. Anchored in a phenomenological approach, the study aimed to uncover how teachers guide and support struggling students amid the growing demands of the 21st-century classroom. Data were gathered through In-Depth Interviews (IDI) and Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with ten purposively selected participants from the Langilan District, Division of Davao del Norte, each having at least five years of teaching experience. Through Thematic Analysis, three major themes emerged: building meaningful teacher-student relationships, implementing differentiated instruction, and displaying patience, emotional regulation, and encouragement. Coping mechanisms included fostering collaborative reflection, setting realistic expectations, and seeking administrative and institutional support. Teachers also demonstrated strategic leadership, integrated technology-supported engagement, and exhibited adaptive patience in guiding learners. The findings offer practical implications for improving instructional practices, teacher support systems, and educational leadership, particularly in addressing the needs of academically challenged learners in public elementary education. To broaden its impact and contribute to educational practice and policy, the publication of this study in a reputable academic journal is strongly recommended.

Keywords: Guiding Learners; Academic Challenges; Inquiry.

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I. INTRODUCTION

➤ Background of the Study

Grade Six is a critical stage in learners' academic development as they prepare to transition to secondary education. At this level, teachers face increasing academic demands and diverse learner needs, making it essential to identify and support students who experience difficulties in learning. This study focuses on the lived experiences of Grade Six teachers in recognizing struggling learners, the strategies they use to provide academic support, and the factors that contribute to learners' improvement. Addressing learning gaps at this stage is important because unresolved difficulties may become more challenging to overcome in higher grade levels.

Internationally, teachers continue to encounter barriers in providing appropriate support to academically challenged learners. In the United States, socioeconomic disparities, limited individualized resources, and inadequate professional development make it difficult for teachers to provide targeted interventions (Smith & Lee, 2024). Similarly, teachers in the United Kingdom experience difficulties balancing curriculum requirements with individualized support, particularly because of large classes and limited instructional time (Thompson et al., 2024). In Australia, insufficient

training in special education, limited resources in rural areas, and unequal access to technology further affect teachers' ability to address diverse learning needs (Johnson & Brown, 2025).

Teacher workload and well-being also influence the quality of academic support. Australian teachers, for example, experience considerable stress due to the increasing demands of managing behavioral concerns and diverse academic and emotional needs, with many reporting intentions to leave the profession (D'Ortenzio, 2024). These concerns demonstrate that supporting struggling learners requires not only effective classroom strategies but also adequate teacher preparation, manageable workloads, and institutional support.

In the Philippines, large class sizes remain a major challenge, particularly in public and rural schools where teachers may handle more than 40 learners. Such conditions limit opportunities for individualized attention and targeted intervention (Gonzales & Cruz, 2024). The shortage of updated textbooks, instructional materials, and other teaching resources also makes differentiated instruction difficult to implement (De la Cruz & Santos, 2024). These challenges have become more evident following pandemic-related

learning disruptions, increasing the need for effective remedial programs and additional learner support.

Similar concerns have been reported in Zamboanga Sibugay and Davao del Norte. Teachers use remedial classes, phonics instruction, and other interventions to assist struggling learners, but limited parental involvement and inadequate reading materials reduce the effectiveness of these efforts (Reyes et al., 2023). In rural areas of Davao del Norte, shortages of textbooks, digital resources, and other instructional tools further restrict teachers' capacity to provide differentiated and targeted support (Flores & Mangao, 2024). These conditions emphasize the need for stronger resources and sustained support for both teachers and learners.

Considering these challenges, the study seeks to highlight practical ways of strengthening academic support for Grade Six learners experiencing difficulties. It emphasizes the importance of collaboration among teachers, parents, school leaders, and policymakers in identifying learning needs and providing appropriate interventions. By examining teachers' lived experiences and practices, the study may contribute to a more inclusive and responsive educational environment where struggling learners receive the support they need to improve and succeed.

➤ Research Questions

In line with the purpose of exploring the lived experiences of teachers in guiding learners facing academic challenges including the coping mechanisms with the challenges that they encountered, this study specifically sought answers to the following research questions:

- What are the lived experiences of teachers in guiding learners facing academic difficulties?
- How do they cope with the challenges encountered in guiding learners facing academic difficulties?

- What educational management insights can be drawn in guiding learners facing academic difficulties?

➤ Theoretical Lens

The theoretical lens of the study is grounded in Social-Constructivist Theory, Self-Determination Theory, and Constructivist Learning Theory, which emphasize social interaction, motivation, teacher support, and active learning in addressing students' academic challenges. Social-Constructivist Theory, influenced by Vygotsky (1978), views learning as a socially and culturally mediated process in which teachers and peers provide scaffolding within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Through supportive guidance and individualized activities, teachers can help learners overcome academic difficulties and develop cognitive and emotional skills (Jones & Green, 2021). Complementing this perspective, Self-Determination Theory developed by Deci and Ryan (1985) highlights three psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. When teachers support these needs and encourage intrinsic motivation, students are more likely to become engaged, persistent, and resilient in their learning (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Miller & Huang, 2023).

The study is further supported by Constructivist Learning Theory, which explains that learners actively construct knowledge through experiences, reflection, prior knowledge, and social interaction (Piaget, 1970; Bruner, 1966). From this perspective, teachers serve as facilitators who design meaningful and contextualized learning experiences suited to individual learners. Strategies such as individualized instruction, culturally responsive pedagogy, and formative assessment reflect constructivist principles by recognizing learners' differences and connecting new knowledge to their existing experiences. Together, these theories provide a strong foundation for understanding how teachers can guide, motivate, and support academically challenged learners toward improved learning outcomes.

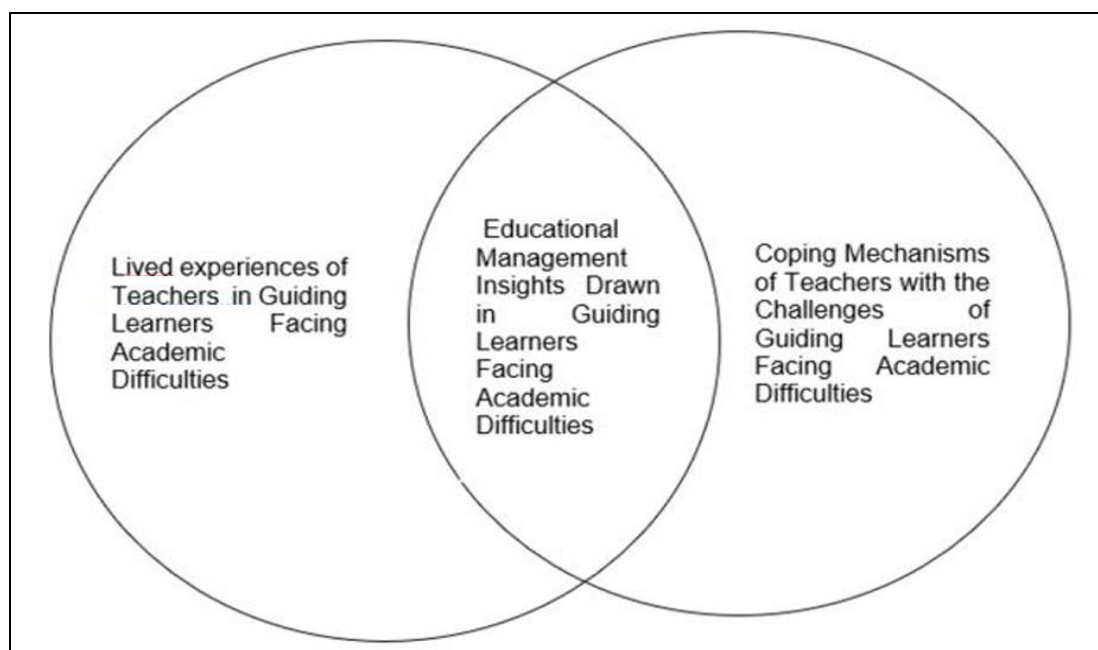


Fig 1 Conceptual Framework of the Study

II. METHODOLOGY

➤ *Design and Procedure*

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological design to explore teachers' lived experiences, challenges, and coping strategies in supporting learners with academic difficulties. Following Lester (1999 as cited in Smith et al., 2022), phenomenology seeks to understand how individuals interpret their experiences by setting aside assumptions and focusing on their perspectives. Data collection and analysis were conducted concurrently, allowing themes to emerge from participants' narratives (Qutoshi, 2021). In-depth interviews and open-ended questionnaires were used to gather detailed data, while purposive sampling ensured the selection of teachers with relevant experiences (Delve & Limpachcher, 2022). Participants' responses, including verbal and emotional expressions, were carefully examined, coded, and analyzed to identify recurring themes that captured the challenges and coping strategies involved in guiding academically challenged learners.

➤ *Research Participants*

The study involved ten (10) Grade VI public elementary school teachers from Langilan District, Division of Davao del Norte. Participants were purposively selected based on specific criteria: they were actively teaching Grade VI learners experiencing academic difficulties, had at least five years of continuous teaching experience, held a Teacher I to Teacher III plantilla position, and had received a Very Satisfactory performance rating for the past three consecutive years. All genders were eligible to participate. Purposive sampling was used to select information-rich participants with direct experience relevant to the study (Robinson, 2021). Of the ten participants, six participated in in-depth interviews (IDI), while four joined a focus group discussion (FGD).

The sample size was guided by the principle of information power, considering the participants' homogeneity, focused research questions, and use of rich data collection methods. A sample of ten was deemed adequate for generating meaningful insights, consistent with Braun and Clarke (2021), who support smaller samples for focused qualitative studies, and Guest, Namey, and Chen (2020), who noted that thematic saturation can often be reached within six to twelve interviews. Thus, the selected participants and sample size were considered sufficient to produce credible and in-depth findings on teachers' experiences in supporting learners with academic difficulties.

➤ *Research Instrument*

To explore the lived experiences and coping mechanisms of Grade Six teachers in Langilan District, Division of Davao del Norte, the study used audio-recorded in-depth interviews (IDIs), focus group discussions (FGDs), and observational field notes. Each session lasted approximately one hour to one hour and fifteen minutes and was conducted across multiple days. An open-ended interview guide, aligned with the study objectives, was used to gather detailed narratives about teachers' experiences,

challenges, and coping strategies in supporting learners with academic difficulties. In-depth interviews provided participants with opportunities to freely express their personal and professional experiences (Fuster-Guillén, 2019).

The study involved six teachers in individual interviews and four in the FGD. The focus group allowed participants to exchange experiences and build on one another's perspectives, providing deeper insights into shared challenges and strategies (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2019). It also helped identify both individual viewpoints and common experiences among teachers (Krueger & Casey, 2020). Together, these qualitative methods provided a comprehensive understanding of how Grade Six teachers manage academic difficulties and support learners in the basic education setting.

➤ *Data Analysis*

The study employed thematic analysis to examine qualitative data gathered from in-depth interviews with Grade Six teachers, following an analytical approach informed by Creswell (2012 as cited in Chali, Eshete, & Debela, 2022). The process involved familiarizing with the transcripts, coding significant statements, identifying and reviewing emerging themes, defining and naming themes, and developing the final narrative. These steps were used to capture the teachers' lived experiences, challenges, perceptions, and coping mechanisms in supporting learners with academic difficulties. Participants' direct quotations were incorporated to preserve their authentic voices, while the findings were connected to relevant literature to strengthen interpretation and inform recommendations for teacher training and classroom interventions.

➤ *Analytical Framework*

Framework analysis was also employed to systematically organize and interpret the qualitative data, following the approaches of Fuchs (2023) and Goldsmith (2021). The process included organizing the data, identifying and categorizing recurring concepts, developing broader themes, and ensuring trustworthiness through triangulation across participants and data sources. The analysis required both structure and reflection to identify meaningful patterns while remaining responsive to participants' experiences. As emphasized by Ritchie and Spencer (1994, as cited in Goldsmith, 2021), rigorous yet flexible analysis is essential for generating meaningful insights from qualitative data.

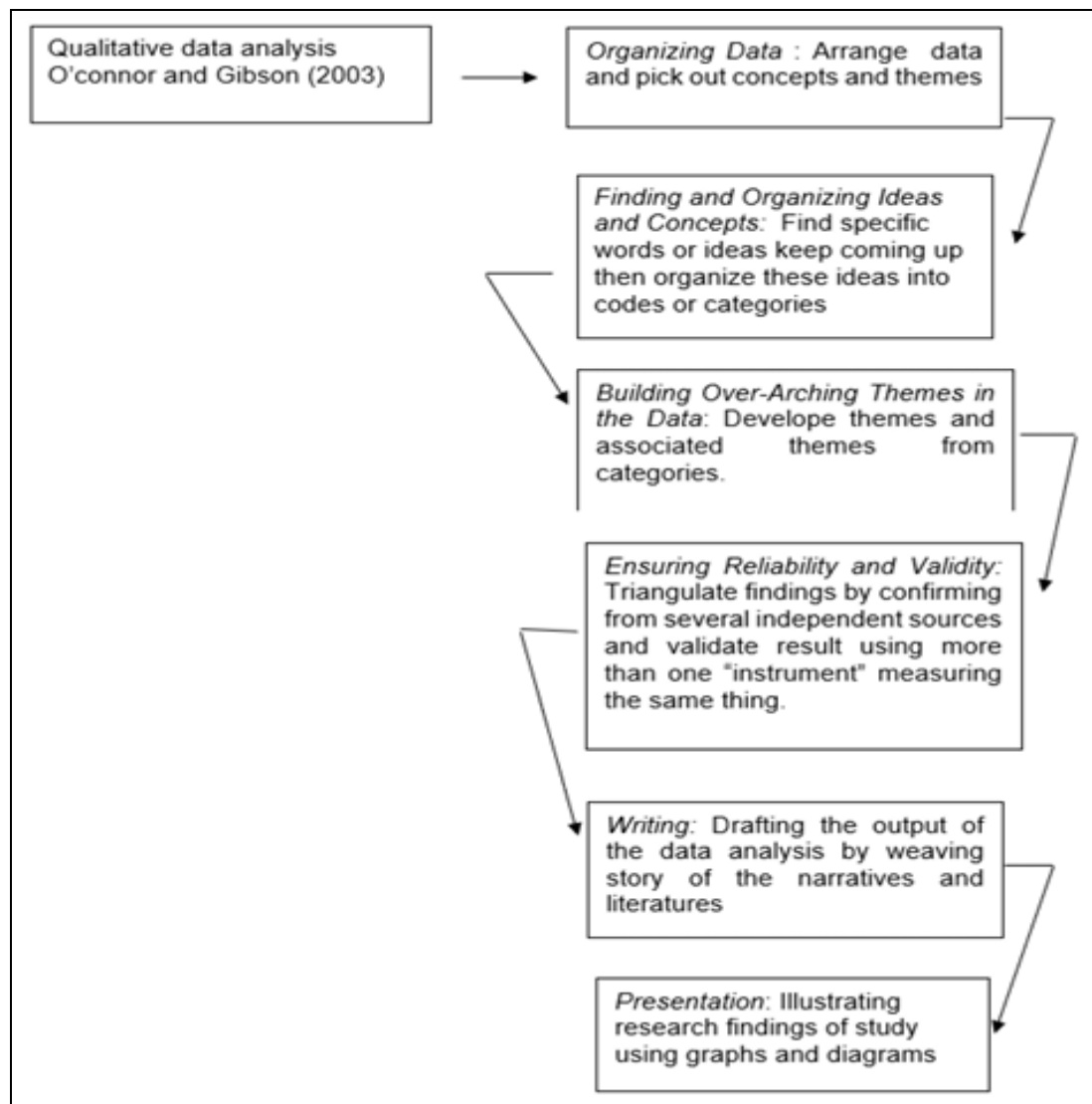


Fig 2 Analytical Framework of the Study

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

A. Experiences of Teachers in Guiding Learners Facing Academic Difficulties

Elementary teachers support academically challenged learners through personalized, empathetic, and differentiated strategies that promote engagement and motivation. Building strong teacher-student relationships helps establish trust and allows teachers to understand learners' needs and backgrounds, enabling more responsive instruction (Reyes et al., 2021). Teachers also use scaffolding, step-by-step guidance, and immediate constructive feedback to help struggling learners remain engaged, build confidence, and develop a growth mindset while reducing academic anxiety (Garcia & Mendoza, 2022).

➤ Building Meaningful Teacher-Student Relationships

A key theme in the teachers' experiences was the importance of strong teacher-student relationships in supporting academically challenged learners. Participants emphasized that trust, empathy, and consistent communication help students feel valued, secure, and motivated to participate despite academic difficulties. This

finding aligns with Pianta and Allen (2020), who noted that positive teacher-student relationships strengthen students' sense of belonging, motivation, participation, and willingness to take learning risks.

Teachers also shared that being approachable and attentive helped them recognize changes in learners' behavior and respond to their needs promptly. Roorda et al. (2021) similarly found that emotionally responsive teachers can lessen academic anxiety and build resilience through meaningful interactions. Thus, supportive teacher-student relationships serve as an important foundation for creating emotional safety and encouraging learners to persist despite academic challenges.

"Ang naranasan kong mahalaga ang pagbibigay ng indibidwal na atensyon at pag-unawa sa kanilang pinagdaanan. Ang aking praktis ay ang regular na pag-uusap sa kanila nang harapan, pagtatanong tungkol sa kanilang mga interes at mga alalahanin, hindi lang tungkol sa aralin. Nakatulong ito sa aking mga learners dahil naramdaman nilang pinapahalagahan sila, na nagpatibay ng kanilang kumpiyansa at nagpababa ng kanilang takot na

magtanong." (*"I've experienced the importance of providing individual attention and understanding of their struggles. My practice involves regularly talking to them face-to-face, asking about their interests and concerns, not just about the lesson. This helped my learners because they felt valued, which boosted their confidence and reduced their fear of asking questions."*) (P1)

"Sa mga mag-aaral na may academic difficulties, naranasan kong kritikal ang paglikha ng ligtas at suportadong kapaligiran sa klase. Ang aking praktis ay ang pagtatatag ng 'zero-judgment zone' kung saan malaya silang makapagkamali at matuto mula dito nang walang pangungutya. Nakatulong ang praktis na ito sa aking mga learners dahil naging mas komportable silang mag-participate, sumubok ng mga bagong ideya, at humingi ng tulong nang hindi natatakot na husgahan." (*"In guiding students with academic difficulties, I've experienced that creating a safe and supportive environment in the classroom is critical. My practice involves establishing a 'zero-judgment zone' where they are free to make mistakes and learn from them without ridicule. This practice helped my learners become more comfortable participating, trying new ideas, and asking for help without fear of judgment."*) (P3)

The narratives revealed that teachers strengthen learner engagement by providing individual attention, maintaining open communication, and creating a safe, supportive classroom environment. Participant 1 emphasized regular face-to-face conversations that help learners feel valued, build confidence, and reduce their hesitation to ask questions, while Participant 3 highlighted the importance of establishing a zero-judgment classroom where students feel comfortable participating, expressing ideas, and seeking help without fear.

Teachers also reported using affirmative language, active listening, and regular check-ins to build trust and encourage learners to openly discuss their academic challenges. These practices are consistent with Quin (2021), who emphasized that teacher responsiveness and genuine care improve student engagement and academic performance. Similarly, Hattie and Donoghue (2022) noted that when learners perceive their teachers as supportive and fair, they are more likely to persevere and actively engage in learning despite academic difficulties. Two participants shared similar experiences that reflected this theme:

"Sa mga nahihirapan sa akademiko, naranasan kong may mga bata na napakabagal umunlad, na minsan ay nakakaramdam ng frustrasyon. Ang aking praktis ay ang pagpapakita ng labis na pasensya, pag-uulit ng mga konsepto sa iba't ibang paraan, at pagbibigay ng sapat na oras para maunawaan nila. Nakatulong ito sa aking mga learners dahil nabawasan ang kanilang stress at pressure, na nagpahintulot sa kanila na matuto sa sarili nilang bilis nang hindi natatakot na maiwanan." (*"In guiding academically struggling learners, I've experienced that some children progress very slowly, which can sometimes be frustrating. My practice is to show extreme patience, repeating concepts in different ways, and providing ample time for them to understand. This*

helped my learners by reducing their stress and pressure, allowing them to learn at their own pace without fear of being left behind.") (P7)

"Sa paggabay sa mga mag-aaral na may academic difficulties, naranasan kong ang pagiging accessible at pagbuo ng tunay na koneksyon ay susi. Ang aking praktis ay ang paglalaan ng oras bago o pagkatapos ng klase para makipag-usap sa kanila, o kaya ay pagpapadala ng simpleng mensahe para kamustahin sila. Nakatulong ang praktis na ito sa aking mga learners dahil naramdaman nilang mayroong nakikinig at nagmamalasakit sa kanila, na nagpapagaan ng kanilang emosyonal na pasanin at nagpapataas ng kanilang kagustuhang matuto." (*"In guiding students with academic difficulties, I've experienced that being accessible and building a genuine connection is key. My practice involves setting aside time before or after class to talk with them or sending a simple message to check in on them. This practice helped my learners because they felt heard and cared for, which lightened their emotional burden and increased their desire to learn."*) (P9)

Teachers also recognized that their own growth contributed to stronger relationships with struggling learners. Participant 7 emphasized that patience, repeated explanations, and allowing learners to progress at their own pace reduced pressure and improved understanding. Similarly, Participant 9 found that being accessible and maintaining genuine connections through conversations and regular check-ins helped learners feel supported, increasing their confidence and motivation to learn.

Despite these positive practices, teachers acknowledged that building meaningful relationships requires considerable time, emotional effort, and reflection, which are often limited in busy classroom settings. Hamre et al. (2023) emphasized the need for institutional support to help teachers balance relationship-building with instructional responsibilities. These findings reinforce that student engagement depends not only on effective teaching strategies but also on caring teacher-student relationships that foster learners' confidence, resilience, and academic success (Wyatt, 2020).

➤ *Implementing Differentiated Instruction*

The study revealed that elementary teachers viewed differentiated instruction as a key strategy for supporting learners with academic difficulties. By adapting content, teaching methods, learning tasks, and classroom activities to match students' readiness levels, interests, and learning needs, teachers promoted inclusive learning, reduced frustration, and increased student engagement. This finding is consistent with Tomlinson and Imbeau (2021), who emphasized that differentiated instruction provides multiple pathways to learning without lowering academic standards. Teachers reported using strategies such as tiered activities, flexible grouping, learning stations, and choice boards to ensure equitable learning opportunities while maintaining high expectations.

The findings are further supported by Hall (2022), who noted that instruction responsive to both academic and

emotional needs encourages learners to persist despite challenges. Teachers also highlighted the importance of integrating students' interests, cultural backgrounds, and preferred learning styles to strengthen motivation, participation, and perseverance. The participants shared the following experiences regarding their implementation of differentiated instruction:

"Sa paggabay sa mga nahihirapan sa akademiko, naranasan kong may mga bata na hindi makasabay sa pace ng klase. Ang aking praktis ay ang pag-implement ng differentiated instruction sa pamamagitan ng pag-a-adjust ng nilalaman ng aralin. Binibigyan ko sila ng simplified texts o graphic organizers para mas maintindihan ang konsepto. Nakatulong ito sa aking mga learners dahil nabigyan sila ng pagkakataong matuto sa kanilang sariling bilis, na nagpataas ng kanilang comprehension at kumpiyansa." (*"In guiding academically struggling learners, I've experienced that some children cannot keep up with the pace of the class. My practice is to implement differentiated instruction by adjusting the content of the lesson. I provide them with simplified texts or graphic organizers to better understand the concept. This helped my learners because they were given the opportunity to learn at their own pace, which increased their comprehension and confidence"*)(P2)

"Sa paggabay sa mga mag-aaral na may academic difficulties, naranasan kong magkakaiba ang kanilang paraan ng pagkatuto. Ang aking praktis ay ang pagbabago ng proseso ng pagkatuto sa pamamagitan ng pagbibigay ng iba't ibang paraan para matuto sila. Halimbawa, pinapayagan ko ang ilan na mag-drawing, mag-research online, o gumamit ng manipulatives imbes na puro lecture. Nakatulong ang praktis na ito sa aking mga learners dahil nabigyan sila ng autonomy sa kanilang pag-aaral, na nagpasigla sa kanilang interest at nakatulong sa kanilang pagkaunawa." (*"In guiding students with academic difficulties, I've experienced that they have different learning styles. My practice is to vary the learning process by providing different ways for them to learn. For example, I allow some to draw, research online, or use manipulatives instead of just lectures. This practice helped my learners because it gave them autonomy in their learning, which stimulated their interest and aided their understanding."*)(P4)

The teachers' narratives showed that differentiated instruction helped learners with academic difficulties become more engaged and confident. Participant 2 shared that modifying lesson content through simplified texts and graphic organizers enabled learners to understand concepts at their own pace, improving both comprehension and self-confidence. Similarly, Participant 4 found that using varied instructional approaches, such as drawing, online research, and manipulatives instead of traditional lectures, increased learner autonomy, interest, and understanding.

One participant also shared a similar experience that reflected this theme:

"Sa mga nahihirapan sa akademiko, naranasan kong minsan ay nahihirapan silang ipakita ang kanilang natutunan

sa tradisyonal na paraan. Ang aking praktis ay ang pag-iba-iba ng produkto o output na inaasahan sa kanila. Sa halip na written exam, pinapayagan ko silang gumawa ng oral presentation, poster, o maikling video. Nakatulong ito sa aking mga learners dahil nabigyan sila ng pagkakataong ipakita ang kanilang kaalaman sa paraang mas kumportable sila, na nagpataas ng kanilang motibasyon at nagbigay ng mas tumpak na pagtatasa ng kanilang pag-unawa." (*"Guiding academically struggling learners, I've experienced that they sometimes struggle to demonstrate what they've learned in traditional ways. My practice is to vary the product or output expected from them. Instead of a written exam, I allow them to give an oral presentation, create a poster, or make a short video. This helped my learners because they were given the opportunity to show their knowledge in a way they were more comfortable with, which increased their motivation and provided a more accurate assessment of their understanding."*)(P5)

Participant 5 shared that using varied assessment methods, such as oral presentations, posters, and videos instead of traditional written exams, allowed learners to demonstrate their understanding in ways that matched their strengths, increasing both motivation and confidence. However, teachers acknowledged that effective differentiated instruction requires careful planning, collaboration, and continuous professional development, as managing diverse learning needs can be demanding. Moon (2023) likewise emphasized the importance of strong institutional support to help teachers implement differentiated instruction effectively and sustainably.

Overall, the findings highlight differentiated instruction as a practical, learner-centered approach that promotes engagement and supports students with academic difficulties. This aligns with Santangelo and Smith (2020), who emphasized that responsive and inclusive teaching requires adapting instruction to meet the diverse needs of all learners.

➤ *Displaying Patience, Emotional Regulation, and Encouragement*

Teachers in this study identified patience, emotional regulation, and encouragement as essential qualities for engaging learners with academic difficulties. These dispositions helped create a supportive classroom environment where students felt valued, understood, and motivated to learn. Participants emphasized that patience was especially important when learners required additional time, repeated instruction, and continuous scaffolding to master concepts. This finding is consistent with Jennings and Greenberg (2020), who noted that teacher patience and emotional competence positively influence classroom climate and student behavior.

Teachers also recognized that managing their own emotions enabled them to respond calmly and constructively to learners' frustrations, setbacks, and behavioral challenges. By modeling self-control and providing consistent encouragement, they helped strengthen students' confidence, self-regulation, and motivation. Brackett et al. (2020) similarly emphasized that emotionally regulated teachers are

better able to promote students' academic engagement and emotional well-being, particularly in challenging learning situations. The participants' responses reflected the importance of these qualities in supporting struggling learners.

"Naranasan kong mahalaga ang pagkilala sa kanilang mga lakas at pagbibigay ng positibong feedback, gaano man kaliit ang progreso. Ang aking praktis ay ang paghahanap ng mga pagkakataon para purihin sila sa kanilang pagsisikap, hindi lang sa resulta, at pagpapakita ng kanilang pag-unlad sa konkreong paraan. Nakatulong ito sa aking mga learners dahil nagpatibay ito ng kanilang intrinsic motivation at nagpataas ng kanilang self-esteem, na nag-udyok sa kanila na magpatuloy sa pag-aaral." (*"I've experienced the importance of recognizing their strengths and providing positive feedback, no matter how small the progress. My practice involves finding opportunities to praise them for their effort, not just the result, and showing their progress in concrete ways. This helped my learners because it strengthened their intrinsic motivation and boosted their self-esteem, encouraging them to continue learning."*)(P6)

"Naranasan kong may mga pagkakataon na nakakaramdam ako ng pagkabigo o pagod, lalo na kapag paulit-ulit ang kanilang pagkakamali. Ang aking praktis ay ang emotional regulation sa pamamagitan ng paggamit ng deep breathing techniques at pag-iisip ng positibong pananaw bago mag-react. Nakatulong ang praktis na ito sa aking mga learners dahil nanatili akong kalmado at suportado, na nagbigay sa kanila ng pakiramdam ng seguridad at naghikayat sa kanila na magpatuloy sa pagsubok." (*"I've experienced moments of frustration or exhaustion, especially when they repeatedly make mistakes. My practice is emotional regulation by using deep breathing techniques and adopting a positive outlook before reacting. This practice helped my learners because I remained calm and supportive, which gave them a sense of security and encouraged them to keep trying."*)(P8)

The teachers' narratives further showed that encouragement and emotional regulation played significant roles in supporting learners with academic difficulties. Participant 6 shared that recognizing learners' strengths and providing positive feedback on their efforts and progress increased their confidence and intrinsic motivation. Likewise, Participant 8 found that practicing emotional regulation through deep breathing and maintaining a positive outlook helped create a calm and supportive learning environment where learners felt secure and motivated to persevere despite repeated mistakes.

Teachers also emphasized that consistent encouragement through words of affirmation, recognition of small achievements, and positive reinforcement strengthened learners' self-efficacy and classroom participation. This finding is supported by Martin and Marsh (2021), who emphasized that encouragement promotes learner confidence and a growth mindset. Similarly, Turner and Meyer (2020) noted that teachers who demonstrate empathy, optimism, and

perseverance foster stronger teacher-student relationships and greater learner engagement. Similar experiences were also shared by participants during the focus group discussions.

"Naranasan kong madali silang madiskurage kung nakikita nilang nahihirapan din ang guro. Ang aking praktis ay ang pagpapanatili ng positibong pananaw at enerhiya sa klase, sa kabila ng anumang hamon. Ginagawa ko ito sa pamamagitan ng paggamit ng playful tones, smiles, at pagtutok sa mga solusyon imbes na sa problema. Nakatulong ang praktis na ito sa aking mga learners dahil naramdaman nilang may pag-asa, na nagpagaan ng kanilang pagkabalisa at nagbigay sa kanila ng inspirasyon na magpatuloy sa pag-aaral nang may masaya at positibong saloobin." (*"I've experienced that they can easily get discouraged if they see their teacher struggling too. My practice is to maintain a positive outlook and energy in class, despite any challenges. I do this by using playful tones, smiles, and focusing on solutions rather than problems. This practice helped my learners because they felt a sense of hope, which eased their anxiety and inspired them to continue learning with a happy and positive attitude."*)(P10)

Participant 10 shared that maintaining a positive attitude through smiles, playful interactions, and a solution-focused approach helped reduce learners' anxiety and encouraged a more positive attitude toward learning. Teachers emphasized that patience, emotional regulation, and encouragement are intentional practices that promote resilience, confidence, and sustained engagement among struggling learners. This finding is supported by Osher et al. (2022), who noted that emotionally supportive teaching improves academic outcomes and resilience, and by Reyes et al. (2020), who emphasized that learners often reflect the emotional climate established by their teachers.

Overall, three major themes emerged from the participants' responses: building meaningful teacher-student relationships, implementing differentiated instruction, and demonstrating patience, emotional regulation, and encouragement. Teachers viewed strong relationships as the foundation for understanding learners' needs and effectively applying personalized instruction (Li & Sun, 2021). They also highlighted the value of adapting teaching methods and assessments to accommodate diverse learning needs, consistent with the findings of Thomas and Nunes (2020). Finally, participants stressed that patience, empathy, and step-by-step guidance are essential in helping struggling learners overcome academic challenges, reinforcing the importance of scaffolding as described by Davidson and White (2022).

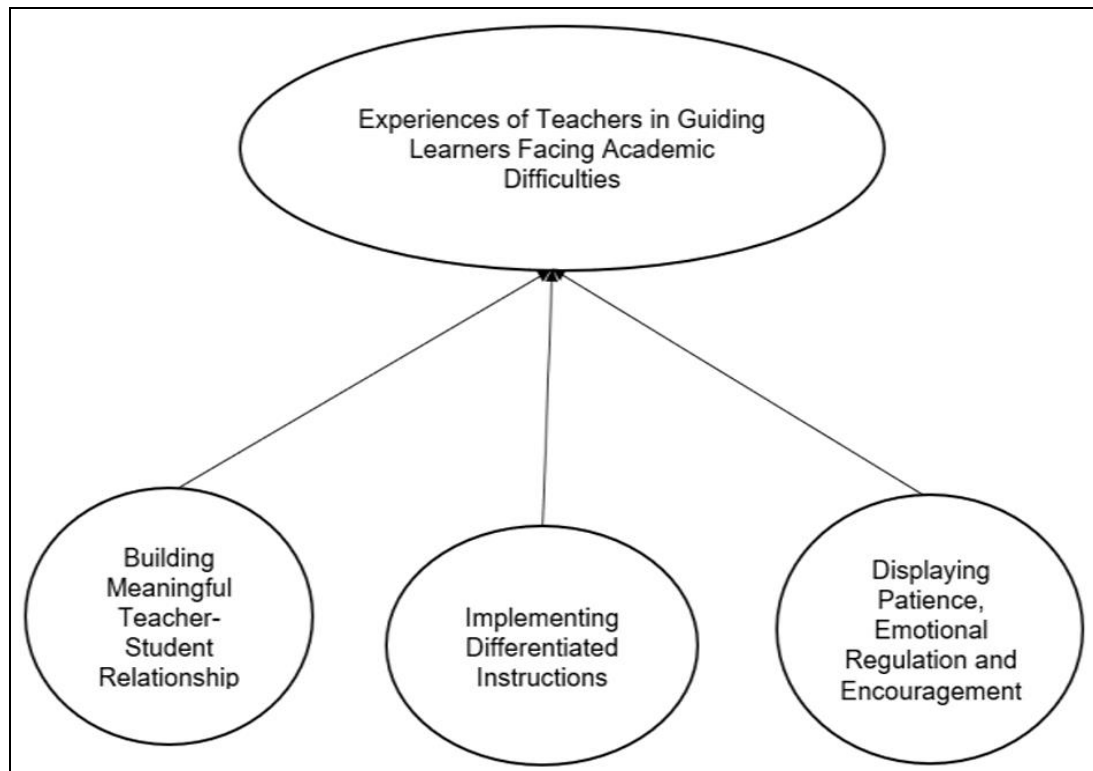


Fig 3 Emerging Themes on the Experiences of Teachers in Guiding Learners Facing Academic Difficulties

B. Coping Mechanisms of Teachers with the Challenges Encountered in Guiding Learners Facing Academic Difficulties

Elementary teachers face various emotional, instructional, and behavioral challenges when supporting learners with academic difficulties, including learner disengagement, slow progress, behavioral issues, and limited time and resources for differentiated instruction. To address these challenges, teachers rely on personal and professional coping strategies such as collaborating with colleagues, practicing reflective discussions, and engaging in mindfulness and emotional self-regulation techniques. Peer collaboration helps reduce stress and strengthen professional support (Day & Gu, 2020), while mindfulness practices, including reflective journaling and deep breathing, enhance teachers' well-being, emotional regulation, and their ability to create positive learning environments that promote student engagement (Jennings et al., 2021).

➤ Fostering Collaborative Reflection

The increasing need to support learners with academic difficulties has encouraged teachers to develop reflective and coping strategies alongside effective instructional practices. Participants emphasized collaborative reflection as an important approach for sharing experiences, identifying effective strategies, and strengthening resilience in addressing learners' diverse needs. This finding is supported by Delgado (2020), who highlighted collaborative reflection as a valuable professional development practice that enhances both teacher effectiveness and student outcomes. Teachers also recognized the importance of coping strategies such as mindfulness, peer support, and instructional adaptability in managing professional stress while maintaining meaningful student engagement (Mercado,

2021). The teachers shared the following experiences on fostering collaborative reflection:

"Ang isa sa mga hamon na aking naranasan sa paggabay sa mga learners na may academic difficulties ay ang pag-unawa sa iba't ibang learning styles ng bawat isa, lalo na kapag marami sila. Para matugunan ito, ang ginagawa ko ay nagpapasimula ako ng mga group discussions sa aming team ng mga guro, kung saan kami ay nagbabahagi ng mga observation at nagbibigay ng mga ideya. Nakatulong ito dahil sa fostering collaborative reflection, nakakuha ako ng iba't ibang pananaw at estratehiya mula sa aking mga kasamahan, na mas nagpabisa sa aking mga pamamaraan sa pagtuturo." (*"One of the challenges I've encountered in guiding learners with academic difficulties is understanding the different learning styles of each one, especially when there are many of them. To address this, what I do is initiate group discussions with our team of teachers, where we share observations and brainstorm ideas. This helped because by fostering collaborative reflection, I gained diverse perspectives and strategies from my colleagues, which made my teaching methods more effective."*) (P1)

"Ang isa pang hamon ay ang limitadong oras na maibibigay para sa remedial classes dahil sa dami ng sakop ng curriculum. Para matugunan ito, ang ginagawa ko ay nakikipagtulungan ako sa aking mga kapwa guro sa parehong grade level para magplano ng mga interbensyon. Regular kaming nagpupulong para suriin ang data ng mga estudyante at magdesisyon kung aling estratehiya ang pinakamabisa. Ang collaborative reflection na ito ay nakatulong sa amin na makahanap ng malikhaing solusyon na akma sa aming schedule at resources." (*"Another challenge is the limited time that can be allocated for*

remedial classes due to the extensive curriculum coverage. To address this, what I do is collaborate with my fellow teachers in the same grade level to plan interventions. We regularly meet to review student data and decide which strategies are most effective. This collaborative reflection helped us find creative solutions that fit our schedule and resources.")(P2)

Participants highlighted the value of collaborative reflection in addressing instructional challenges among learners with academic difficulties. P1 shared that discussions with fellow teachers helped identify diverse learning styles and develop appropriate teaching strategies, while P2 emphasized collaborating with grade-level teachers to plan interventions, review learner progress, and create practical solutions despite limited time for remedial activities.

These experiences support the findings of Castillo and Reyes (2022), who noted that reflective teaching practices combined with engaging strategies such as manipulatives, project-based learning, and storytelling improve student participation. Similarly, Santos and Lim (2023) emphasized that professional learning communities strengthen teacher resilience and innovation by allowing educators to share practices and develop learner-centered interventions, particularly in literacy and numeracy. The participants shared the following statements:

"Ang isang hamon na lumalabas ay ang pagkakaisa sa mga estratehiya sa disiplina para sa mga batang nahihirapan na minsan ay nagpapakita rin ng behavioral issues. Para matugunan ito, ang ginagawa ko ay nagsasagawa kami ng mga case discussions sa aking mga kapwa guro at school guidance counselor. Nagbabahagi kami ng insights at nagkakasundo sa isang consistent approach. Ang fostering collaborative reflection ay nakatulong dahil naging mas coherent ang aming pagharap sa behavioral challenges, na nagdulot ng mas positibong pagbabago sa asal ng mga bata." ("A challenge that arises is consistency in disciplinary strategies for struggling children who sometimes also exhibit behavioral issues. To address this, what I do is conduct case discussions with my fellow teachers and the school guidance counselor. We share insights and agree on a consistent approach. Fostering collaborative reflection helped because our approach to behavioral challenges became more coherent, leading to more positive changes in the children's behavior.")(P3)

The response revealed that teachers addressed behavioral challenges among struggling learners by engaging in case discussions with colleagues and the school guidance counselor, resulting in more consistent disciplinary approaches and improved learner behavior. Teachers also recognized the importance of understanding students' emotional and psychological needs by integrating socio-emotional learning, reflective dialogue, journaling, and peer consultations to sustain motivation and support holistic development (Navarro, 2024). Moreover, emerging challenges in education have encouraged teachers to adopt technology-based reflection platforms and mental wellness

initiatives as additional support in addressing learning gaps and learner needs after the pandemic (Dela Cruz & Manlapig, 2025).

➤ *Setting Realistic Expectations*

Elementary teachers often balance academic expectations with the diverse needs of learners, making realistic goal-setting an important coping strategy. Participants emphasized that setting achievable and gradual goals for struggling learners helped reduce stress, maintain motivation, and create more responsive teaching approaches. This supports Ramos and Javier (2021), who noted that unrealistic expectations may contribute to teacher burnout, while attainable goals promote effectiveness and control. Teachers also highlighted the role of reflective practices in adjusting expectations and improving support strategies, such as differentiated instruction, peer tutoring, and formative assessment (Santos, 2022). The participants shared the following experiences regarding setting realistic expectations:

"Ang isa sa mga hamon na aking naranasan sa paggabay sa mga learners na may academic difficulties ay ang pag-adjust sa iba't ibang 'pace' o bilis ng pagkatuto ng bawat estudyante. Para matugunan ito, ang ginagawa ko ay nagtatakda ako ng realistiko at indibidwal na ekspektasyon para sa bawat bata, batay sa kanilang kakayahan at simula. Nakatulong ito dahil sa halip na ma-frustrate sa mabagal na pag-unlad, nakatuon ako sa maliliit na tagumpay at progresong nakikita ko sa kanila." ("One of the challenges I've encountered in guiding learners with academic difficulties is adjusting to the different learning paces of each student. To address this, what I do is set realistic and individualized expectations for each child, based on their abilities and starting point. This helped because instead of getting frustrated with slow progress, I focused on the small successes and visible progress I saw in them.")(P4)

"Isang hamon na lumalabas ay ang external pressure mula sa mga magulang na gustong makita ang mabilis na pag-unlad ng kanilang anak, kahit alam kong mahirap. Para matugunan ito, ang ginagawa ko ay nakikipag-ugnayan ako sa mga magulang at malinaw na nagtatakda ng realistiko na expectations para sa pag-unlad ng kanilang anak. Nagbibigay ako ng mga konkreong data at nagpapaliwanag kung bakit ang dahan-dahan na pag-unlad ay normal. Nakatulong ito dahil nagkaroon ng mutual understanding at nagpababa ng stress para sa akin at sa bata." ("A challenge that arises is external pressure from parents who want to see quick progress in their child, even when I know it's difficult. To address this, what I do is communicate with parents and clearly set realistic expectations for their child's progress. I provide concrete data and explain why gradual progress is normal. This helped because it led to mutual understanding and reduced stress for both me and the child.")(P6)

Participants emphasized the importance of setting realistic and individualized expectations in supporting learners with academic difficulties. P4 shared that recognizing each learner's pace and celebrating small improvements helped reduce frustration and encouraged

continuous progress. Similarly, P6 managed parental expectations by providing clear explanations and evidence-based updates on learners' gradual development, fostering better understanding and reducing pressure.

The findings suggest that realistic goal-setting helps teachers manage emotional demands, develop patience, and strengthen teacher-student relationships (Reyes & Bautista, 2023). Additionally, involving students in setting learning goals through open dialogue allows teachers to align strategies with learners' needs and abilities while promoting student ownership of learning (Cruz & Manalo, 2024). Another participant also highlighted the importance of maintaining realistic expectations:

"Ang pinakamalaking hamon ay ang pagiging isolated sa pagharap sa mga batang may academic difficulties, na parang ako lang ang may responsibilidad. Para matugunan ito, ang ginagawa ko ay aktibo akong nagtutulak para sa pag-establish ng isang school-wide support system para sa mga batang nangangailangan. Iminungkahi ko ang regular na inter-departmental meetings at ang pagkakaroon ng dedicated resource room. Nakatulong ito dahil sa institusyonal na suporta, nagkaroon ng mas koordinadong paggabay sa buong paaralan, na nagpabuti sa pangkalahatang sistema ng suporta para sa mga mag-aaral at sa mga guro." (*"The biggest challenge was feeling isolated in dealing with children with academic difficulties, as if I alone bore the responsibility. To address this, what I do is actively advocate for establishing a school-wide support system for children in need. I propose regular inter-departmental meetings and the creation of a dedicated resource room. This helped because with institutional support, there was more coordinated guidance across the entire school, which improved the overall support system for both students and teachers."*)(P10)

The participant addressed the challenge of feeling unsupported in assisting academically struggling learners by initiating a school-wide support system through collaborative meetings and the establishment of a resource area. This approach promoted coordinated interventions and strengthened support for both teachers and students. Additionally, teachers have adapted their academic and behavioral expectations in response to learning gaps brought about by remote education by adopting flexible pacing and integrating socio-emotional learning into instructional planning (Villanueva, 2025). Setting realistic expectations has also become an important coping strategy, helping teachers manage stress while encouraging learner engagement through achievable goals (Lopez, 2020).

➤ Seeking Administrative and Institutional Support

Elementary teachers rely on administrative and institutional support as an important coping mechanism in addressing the needs of learners with academic difficulties. This support includes professional development, responsive leadership, mental health initiatives, and access to necessary resources. The findings align with Johnson (2021), who emphasized that clear communication, constructive feedback, and instructional autonomy from school leaders enhance teachers' confidence in managing classroom challenges.

Similarly, Patel (2021) highlighted that strong institutional policies and support systems enable teachers to implement differentiated and inclusive practices effectively. During the interviews, participants shared their experiences in seeking administrative support, which were further reinforced by similar insights from another participant.

"Ang isa sa mga hamon na aking naranasan sa paggabay sa mga learners na may academic difficulties ay ang kakulangan sa espesyal na kagamitan o resources na akma sa kanilang mga pangangailangan. Halimbawa, kulang kami sa adaptive reading materials o learning tools para sa iba't ibang styles ng pagkatuto. Para matugunan ito, ang ginagawa ko ay humihingi ako ng administratibong suporta sa pamamagitan ng pormal na pagsumite ng request para sa mga materyales na ito. Nakatulong ito dahil sa tulong ng administrasyon, unti-unti kaming nakakuha ng mga kagamitan na nakapagpabuti sa aking pagtuturo at pagkatuto ng mga bata." (*"One of the challenges I've encountered in guiding learners with academic difficulties is the lack of special equipment or resources suited to their needs. For example, we lacked adaptive reading materials or learning tools for different learning styles. To address this, what I do is seek administrative support by formally submitting a request for these materials. This helped because with the administration's assistance, we gradually acquired equipment that improved my teaching and the children's learning."*)(P5)

"Isang hamon na aking kinaharap ay ang pagharap sa malaking klase habang marami ang may academic difficulties, at kakulangan ng support staff o teacher's aide. Mahirap bigyan ng indibidwal na atensyon ang lahat. Para matugunan ito, ang ginagawa ko ay humihingi ako ng suporta mula sa administrasyon para sa karagdagang manpower o system support. Nagmumungkahi ako ng paraan para sa small-group instruction o targeted interventions. Nakatulong ito dahil sa pakikinig ng administrasyon, nagkaroon kami ng mga adjustment sa schedule o allocation ng resources, na nagpagaan sa aking pasanin at nagpabuti sa pagkatuto ng mga bata." (*"One challenge I faced was handling a large class with many students having academic difficulties, compounded by a lack of support staff or a teacher's aide. It's difficult to give individual attention to everyone. To address this, what I do is seek administrative support for additional manpower or system support. I suggest ways for small-group instruction or targeted interventions. This helped because the administration listened, and we had adjustments in the schedule or resource allocation, which eased my burden and improved the children's learning."*)(P7)

Participants highlighted the importance of administrative support in addressing resource limitations and classroom challenges. P5 shared that requesting adaptive materials and learning tools from school administrators helped improve instructional practices and learner support. Similarly, P7 sought administrative assistance in managing large classes by proposing additional support and alternative strategies, such as small-group instruction and targeted

interventions, which reduced teacher workload and enhanced student learning.

These experiences reflect the importance of responsive school leadership in sustaining teacher effectiveness and morale. Lee (2022) emphasized that administrators who address teacher concerns, including overcrowded classrooms and limited planning time, help educators develop stronger engagement strategies. Moreover, access to counseling and wellness programs supports teachers' emotional well-being, enabling them to remain focused and patient when assisting learners with academic difficulties (Thompson, 2022). Another participant during the FGD shared a similar experience:

"Ang pinakamalaking hamon ay ang pagiging isolated sa pagharap sa mga batang may academic difficulties, na parang ako lang ang may responsibilidad. Para matugunan ito, ang ginagawa ko ay aktibo akong nagtutulak para sa pag-establish ng isang school-wide support system para sa mga batang nangangailangan. Iminungkahi ko ang regular na inter-departmental meetings at ang pagkakaroon ng dedicated resource room. Nakatulong ito dahil sa institusyonal na suporta, nagkaroon ng mas koordinadong paggabay sa buong paaralan, na nagpabuti sa pangkalahatang sistema ng suporta para sa mga mag-aaral at sa mga guro." (*"The biggest challenge was feeling isolated in dealing with children with academic difficulties, as if I alone bore the responsibility. To address this, what I do is actively advocate for establishing a school-wide support system for children in need. I propose regular inter-departmental meetings and the creation of a dedicated resource room. This helped because with institutional support, there was more coordinated guidance across the entire school, which improved the overall support system for both students and teachers."*) (P8)

The participant's insight highlighted the importance of developing a school-wide support system to address teachers' feelings of isolation when assisting academically struggling learners. Through initiatives such as inter-departmental meetings and resource spaces, schools can promote coordinated interventions and strengthen support for both teachers and students. This aligns with Garcia (2023), who emphasized that involving teachers in decision-making increases ownership, strengthens the implementation of engagement strategies, and improves teacher satisfaction. Additionally, adequate resources and infrastructure are essential, as limited materials and outdated technology can increase teacher stress and restrict effective learning support (Nguyen, 2024).

Based on the identified themes, teachers' coping mechanisms in addressing learners' academic difficulties include fostering collaborative reflection, setting realistic expectations, and seeking administrative and institutional support. Collaborative reflection allows teachers to share experiences, strategies, and solutions, reducing feelings of isolation and strengthening professional support (Tan, 2021). Through peer collaboration and mentorship, teachers also gain insights that help them adjust expectations, recognize learner progress, and manage challenges more effectively (Lee & Chan, 2022).

Teachers further cope by seeking assistance from school leaders and external stakeholders to access resources, training, and additional support. Administrative support enables teachers to address classroom challenges while strengthening partnerships with parents and the wider community. Nguyen and Lee (2023) emphasized that collaboration with parents helps extend academic support beyond the classroom, highlighting the importance of a strong institutional network in helping teachers guide learners with academic difficulties.

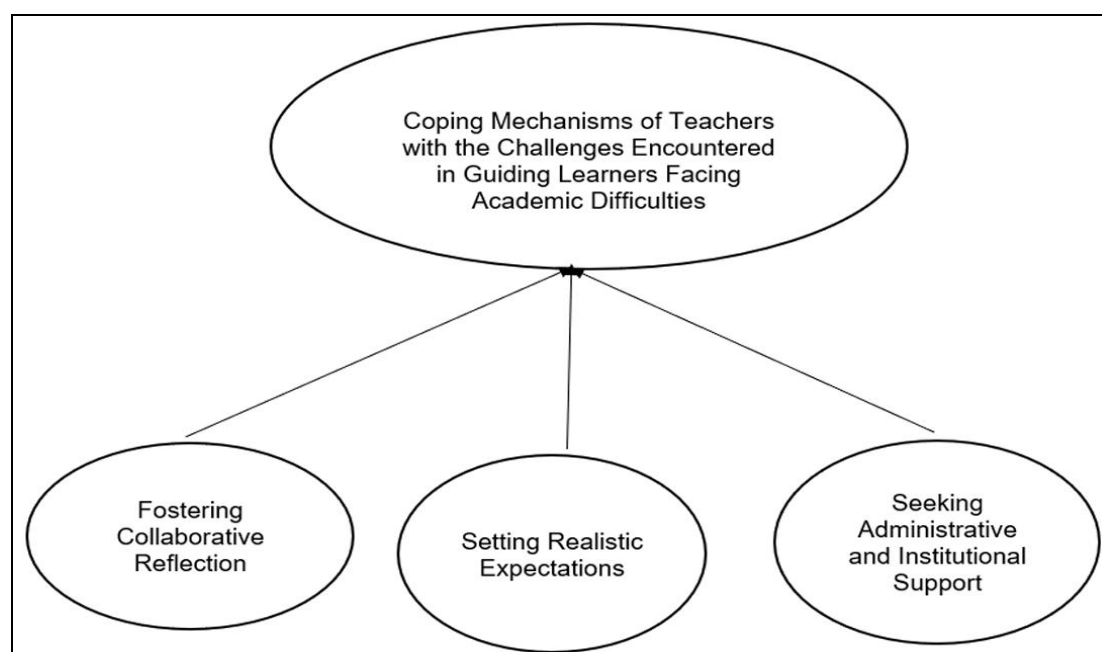


Fig 4 Emerging Themes on the Coping Mechanisms of Teachers with the Challenges Encountered in Guiding Learners Facing Academic Difficulties

C. Educational Management Insights Drawn from the Findings of the Study in Guiding Learners Facing Academic Difficulties

The participants' educational management insights were analyzed and synthesized to generate the emerging themes. These themes were derived from the informants' narratives, experiences, and reflections, ensuring that the identified patterns accurately represented their perspectives. The corresponding subthemes are presented below:

➤ Demonstrating Strategic Leadership

Strategic leadership plays an important role in supporting learners with academic difficulties by establishing clear goals, strengthening teacher capacity, and creating a responsive learning environment. Participants emphasized that vision-driven leadership helps educators understand school priorities and confidently implement appropriate engagement strategies. This is consistent with Santos and Rivera (2021), who found that clear instructional goals and consistent leadership support contribute to improved outcomes for struggling learners.

The findings also highlighted the value of data-informed decision-making in identifying learning gaps and developing targeted interventions. As Ocampo (2022) explained, school leaders who utilize student performance data can better guide teachers in creating responsive strategies that enhance learner engagement and achievement. Participants shared their perspectives on strategic leadership during the interview:

"Ang aking pangunahing realisasyon sa paggabay sa mga nahihirapan sa akademiko ay ang pangangailangan para sa malinaw na direksyon at kolektibong layunin sa antas ng paaralan. Kung walang sentralisadong plano, magkakanya-kanya ang guro at nagiging fragmented ang suporta. Batay sa aking karanasan, irerekomenda ko na ang strategic leadership ay magtatag ng isang komprehensibong balangkas para sa pagtukoy at pagsuporta sa mga struggling learners. Ito ay dapat kasama ang pagtukoy ng roles at responsibilities, at ang pagtatakda ng measurable goals na alam ng lahat." (*"My primary realization in guiding academically struggling learners is the need for clear direction and collective goals at the school level. Without a centralized plan, teachers work in isolation, and support becomes fragmented. Based on my experience, I would recommend that strategic leadership establish a comprehensive framework for identifying and supporting struggling learners. This should include defining roles and responsibilities and setting measurable goals that everyone is aware of."*)(P1)

"Narealize ko na sa pagharap sa academic difficulties, hindi sapat ang pagsisikap ng isang guro lang; kailangan ang pagbuo ng kultura ng kolaborasyon sa buong faculty. Ang aking karanasan ay nagpapakita na mas epektibo ang mga interbensyon kung may pagtutulungan. Irerekomenda ko na ang strategic leadership ay magbigay ng regular na oras at plataporma para sa mga guro upang magbahagi ng best practices, mag-analisa ng data, at magtulungan sa paggawa ng mga solusyon. Dapat silang magbigay ng insentibo sa team-based problem-solving." (*"I realized that in addressing*

academic difficulties, one teacher's effort alone is not enough: there's a need to build a culture of collaboration across the entire faculty. My experience shows that interventions are more effective with teamwork. I would recommend that strategic leadership allocate regular time and platforms for teachers to share best practices, analyze data, and collaborate on solutions. They should provide incentives for team-based problem-solving.")(P4)

The participants emphasized that strategic leadership requires clear direction, shared goals, and collaborative efforts to effectively support learners with academic difficulties. P1 highlighted the need for a school-wide framework with defined roles, responsibilities, and measurable targets to ensure coordinated interventions. Similarly, P4 stressed that addressing academic challenges requires collective action among teachers through regular collaboration, data analysis, and sharing of effective practices.

These insights align with Bautista and Liwanag (2023), who noted that teacher involvement in school planning strengthens commitment, innovation, and reflective practices. Additionally, effective leadership involves providing adequate resources, such as instructional materials, digital tools, and classroom support, which enable teachers to implement differentiated strategies and improve learner engagement (De Vera, 2024). The same theme emerged during the interview, as another participant shared:

"Ang isang mahalagang realisasyon ay ang kahalagahan ng paglalaan ng sapat na resources at patuloy na professional development para sa mga guro. Marami sa amin ang kulang sa kasanayan at kagamitan para sa iba't ibang academic challenges. Irerekomenda ko na ang strategic leadership ay mag-invest sa mga targeted professional development programs na nakatuon sa differentiated instruction, assessment for learning, at social-emotional learning. Dapat din silang maglaan ng budget para sa mga modernong learning materials at technology na makakatulong sa mga struggling learners." (*"A crucial realization is the importance of allocating sufficient resources and continuous professional development for teachers. Many of us lack the skills and materials for various academic challenges. I would recommend that strategic leadership invest in targeted professional development programs focused on differentiated instruction, assessment for learning, and social-emotional learning. They should also allocate a budget for modern learning materials and technology that can assist struggling learners."*)(P6)

The participant emphasized the importance of providing adequate resources and continuous professional development to strengthen teachers' capacity in supporting struggling learners. They recommended that strategic leaders invest in training programs on differentiated instruction, assessment practices, and social-emotional learning, while also allocating resources for updated learning materials and technology.

Professional development remains essential in sustaining effective engagement strategies, as continuous coaching and mentoring help teachers apply classroom interventions more consistently (Cruz & Manalo, 2025). Moreover, strategic leadership must remain flexible and responsive to changing educational demands by balancing instructional support, teacher well-being, and learner needs in the post-pandemic context (Torres, 2025).

➤ *Incorporating Technology- Supported Engagement*

Technology integration has become an important strategy in improving learner engagement, particularly among students experiencing academic difficulties. Educational leaders play a significant role in establishing systems, providing resources, and supporting teachers in the effective use of digital tools. Learning management systems such as Google Classroom and Seesaw help teachers personalize instruction, provide timely feedback, and strengthen communication with learners and families when supported by proper training and infrastructure (Lopez & De Leon, 2021).

Additionally, gamified learning platforms like Kahoot, Quizizz, and ClassDojo can increase motivation, participation, and interest among academically challenged learners through interactive activities and immediate feedback (Alvarez, 2023). Participants shared their experiences and insights on incorporating technology-supported engagement strategies during the interview:

“Ang aking pangunahing realisasyon sa paggabay sa mga nahihirapan sa akademiko ay ang pangangailangan para sa malinaw na direksyon at kolektibong layunin sa antas ng paaralan. Kung walang sentralisadong plano, magkakanya-kanya ang guro at nagiging fragmented ang suporta para sa mga bata. Batay sa aking karanasan, irerekomenda ko na ang strategic leadership ay magtatag ng isang komprehensibong balangkas para sa pagtukoy at pagsuporta sa mga struggling learners. Ito ay dapat kasama ang pagtukoy ng roles at responsibilities, at ang pagtatakda ng measurable goals na alam ng lahat sa komunidad ng paaralan.” (*“My primary realization in guiding academically struggling learners is the need for clear direction and collective goals at the school level. Without a centralized plan, teachers work in isolation, and support for children becomes fragmented. Based on my experience, I'd recommend that strategic leadership establish a comprehensive framework for identifying and supporting struggling learners. This should include defining roles and responsibilities, and setting measurable goals known to everyone in the school community.”*)(P2)

“Narealize ko na sa pagharap sa academic difficulties, hindi sapat ang pagsisikap ng isang guro lang; kailangan ang pagbuo ng kultura ng kolaborasyon sa buong faculty. Ang aking karanasan ay nagpakita na mas epektibo ang mga interbensyon kung may pagtutulongan ang lahat ng kasama. Irerekomenda ko na ang strategic leadership ay magbigay ng regular na oras at plataporma para sa mga guro upang magbahagi ng best practices, mag-analisa ng data, at magtutulongan sa paggawa ng mga solusyon. Dapat silang magbigay ng insentibo sa team-based problem-solving.” (*“I*

realized that in addressing academic difficulties, one teacher's effort alone isn't enough; there's a need to build a culture of collaboration across the entire faculty. My experience shows that interventions are more effective when everyone works together. I'd recommend that strategic leadership allocate regular time and platforms for teachers to share best practices, analyze data, and collaborate on solutions. They should also provide incentives for team-based problem-solving.”)(P3)

Participants emphasized that effective technology-supported engagement requires clear leadership direction, shared goals, and collaborative efforts among teachers. P2 highlighted the importance of establishing a school-wide framework with defined roles and measurable objectives, while P3 stressed the need for collaboration through regular sharing of practices, data analysis, and joint problem-solving among faculty members.

The findings also highlighted the value of assistive technologies, such as text-to-speech tools, captioning, and reading support applications, in reducing learning barriers for struggling students (Tolentino, 2022). Additionally, continuous professional development is essential to ensure teachers can effectively use technology for instruction, differentiation, and assessment. Ramirez and Santos (2024) emphasized that teachers who are confident in using educational technologies are better equipped to support learners with academic difficulties. Other participants also shared the importance of incorporating technology-supported engagement strategies:

“Ang isang mahalagang realisasyon ay ang kahalagahan ng paglalaan ng sapat na resources at patuloy na professional development para sa mga guro. Marami sa amin ang kulang sa kasanayan at kagamitan para sa iba't ibang academic challenges na aming kinakaharap. Irerekomenda ko na ang strategic leadership ay mag-invest sa mga targeted professional development programs na nakatuon sa differentiated instruction, assessment for learning, at social-emotional learning. Dapat din silang maglaan ng budget para sa mga modernong learning materials at technology na makakatulong sa mga struggling learners.” (*“A crucial realization is the importance of allocating sufficient resources and continuous professional development for teachers. Many of us lack the skills and materials for the various academic challenges we face. I'd recommend that strategic leadership invest in targeted professional development programs focused on differentiated instruction, assessment for learning, and social-emotional learning. They should also allocate a budget for modern learning materials and technology that can assist struggling learners.”*)(P5)

“Narealize ko na ang paggabay sa mga batang may academic difficulties ay hindi lang responsibilidad ng paaralan; kailangan ang matibay na partnership sa komunidad at mga magulang. Ang aking karanasan ay nagpakita na ang suporta mula sa bahay ay malaking tulong sa pag-unlad ng bata. Irerekomenda ko na ang strategic leadership ay bumuo ng mga programa na aktibong magpapasali sa mga magulang at komunidad sa proseso ng

pagkatuto. Maaaring kasama dito ang parent workshops sa pagsuporta sa pag-aaral sa bahay, o pagtatatag ng community mentorship programs para sa mga bata.“ (*“I realized that guiding children with academic difficulties isn't solely the school's responsibility; it requires a strong partnership with the community and parents. My experience has shown that support from home greatly aids a child's development. I'd recommend that strategic leadership develop programs that actively involve parents and the community in the learning process. This could include parent workshops on supporting home learning or establishing community mentorship programs for children.”*)(P10)

Participants emphasized the importance of resources, professional development, and community involvement in supporting learners with academic difficulties. P5 highlighted the need for strategic leadership to provide teacher training on differentiated instruction, assessment for learning, and social-emotional learning, along with sufficient materials and technology. Meanwhile, P10 stressed the value of strong partnerships with parents and the community through initiatives such as parent workshops and mentorship programs.

The findings also highlighted the role of educational technology in improving targeted interventions. Data analytics from digital platforms can help teachers and leaders monitor learner progress, identify skill gaps, and design timely support strategies (Garcia, 2025). Furthermore, Villanueva (2020) emphasized that meaningful technology integration in blended and hybrid learning environments promotes sustained engagement and strengthens digital literacy among struggling learners.

➤ *Prioritizing Curriculum Flexibility*

Curriculum flexibility is essential in addressing the diverse learning needs of students experiencing academic difficulties. It allows teachers to modify content, instructional processes, and assessments based on learners' abilities, readiness, and learning needs, promoting engagement and inclusion. Educational leaders play an important role in supporting these adaptations by providing teachers with the autonomy and resources needed to implement responsive instruction.

Research shows that inflexible curricula often fail to address the academic and emotional needs of struggling learners, while flexible approaches encourage differentiated instruction and meaningful learning experiences (Lopez & Santos, 2021). Fernandez and Cruz (2022) further emphasized that curriculum flexibility enables teachers to adjust lesson pacing, materials, and activities, resulting in improved learner participation and performance. The importance of prioritizing curriculum flexibility was also highlighted by participants during the FGD, who shared:

"Ang aking pangunahing realisasyon sa paggabay sa mga nahihirapan sa akademiko ay ang kahalagahan ng pag-angkop ng kurikulum sa iba't ibang bilis ng pagkatuto. Hindi lahat ng bata ay kayang sumunod sa iisang takdang aralin sa parehong oras. Batay sa aking karanasan, irerekomenda ko

ang paggamit ng curriculum flexibility upang payagan ang mga guro na mag-adjust ng pace ng kanilang lessons. Dapat may kalayaan tayong maglaan ng mas maraming oras sa mga challenging concepts para sa mga nangangailangan ng karagdagang suporta.“ (*“My primary realization in guiding academically struggling learners is the importance of adapting the curriculum to diverse learning paces. Not all children can follow the same lesson schedule at the same time. Based on my experience, I'd recommend using curriculum flexibility to allow teachers to adjust the pace of their lessons. We should have the freedom to dedicate more time to challenging concepts for those who need additional support.”*)(P7)

"Narealize ko na ang pagharap sa academic difficulties ay nangangailangan ng iba't ibang landas para sa pagkatuto, hindi lang isang prescriptive method. Ang aking karanasan ay nagpapakita na ang mga tradisyonal na pamamaraan ay hindi gumagana sa lahat. Irerekomenda ko na ang paaralan ay magbigay ng mas malaking kalayaan sa mga guro na mag-modify ng instructional methods sa ilalim ng curriculum flexibility. Sa gayon, makakagamit tayo ng hands-on activities, visual aids, o project-based learning para sa mga batang mas natututo sa alternatibong paraan.“ (*“I realized that addressing academic difficulties requires diverse learning paths, not just one prescriptive method. My experience shows that traditional methods don't work for everyone. I'd recommend that the school grant teachers more freedom to modify instructional methods under curriculum flexibility. This way, we can use hands-on activities, visual aids, or project-based learning for children who learn better through alternative approaches.”*)(P8)

Participants emphasized the importance of curriculum flexibility in addressing the diverse needs and learning paces of students with academic difficulties. P7 highlighted the need for adaptable lesson pacing, allowing teachers to provide additional time and support for challenging concepts. Similarly, P8 stressed that flexible curriculum implementation enables teachers to use varied approaches, such as hands-on activities, visual aids, and project-based learning, to better support learners.

In the Philippine setting, DepEd's Most Essential Learning Competencies (MELCs) demonstrated the value of curriculum flexibility by allowing teachers to prioritize essential skills and adjust instruction based on learners' needs (Garcia, 2023). This approach supports inclusive education by ensuring that all learners receive appropriate and achievable learning opportunities (Villanueva & Ramos, 2024). The same theme emerged during the FGD, as participants shared their experiences:

"Ang isang mahalagang realisasyon ay ang prioridad sa pagtatayo ng matibay na pundasyon ng kasanayan kaysa sa pagpilit na sundin ang striktong progresyon ng kurikulum. Marami sa mga nahihirapan ay may gaps sa basic skills. Irerekomenda ko na ang curriculum flexibility ay payagan ang mga guro na bumalik sa mga foundational concepts at magbigay ng masusing remedial work bago lumipat sa mas advanced na paksa. Dapat nating pahalagahan ang mastery

ng basic skills higit sa pagsunod sa iskedyul.” (“*A crucial realization is the priority of building a strong foundation of skills over strictly adhering to curriculum progression. Many struggling learners have gaps in basic skills. I’d recommend that curriculum flexibility allow teachers to revisit foundational concepts and provide thorough remedial work before moving to more advanced topics. We should value mastery of basic skills more than adherence to a schedule.*”)(P9)

The participant emphasized the importance of prioritizing mastery of foundational skills rather than strictly following the curriculum timeline. They suggested that curriculum flexibility should allow teachers to revisit basic concepts, provide remediation, and ensure learners develop essential skills before moving to more advanced lessons. Effective flexibility also includes varied assessment practices, such as formative assessments, self-reflections, and project-based outputs, which give learners different ways to demonstrate their understanding and progress (Tan & Dominguez, 2025). Thus, responsive curriculum implementation requires school leaders to actively support

personalized learning approaches that address the needs of learners facing academic challenges (Delos Reyes, 2020).

Based on the participants’ responses, three major themes emerged: demonstrating strategic leadership, incorporating technology-supported engagement, and guiding learning through adaptive practices. Strategic leadership was viewed as essential in establishing clear intervention goals, providing resources, and strengthening teachers’ capacity to identify and support struggling learners. This aligns with Adams and Lee (2021), who emphasized the importance of formative assessments in recognizing learning gaps and developing appropriate interventions. Technology-supported engagement was also highlighted as a valuable tool for improving learner participation, monitoring progress, and providing responsive support through interactive platforms and digital tracking methods (Kim & Zhang, 2023). Lastly, curriculum flexibility emerged as a key strategy, allowing teachers to adjust instruction, pacing, and learning approaches according to learners’ needs. Wilson et al. (2022) further noted that flexible and collaborative approaches enable teachers to better understand student progress and share responsibility for learner success.

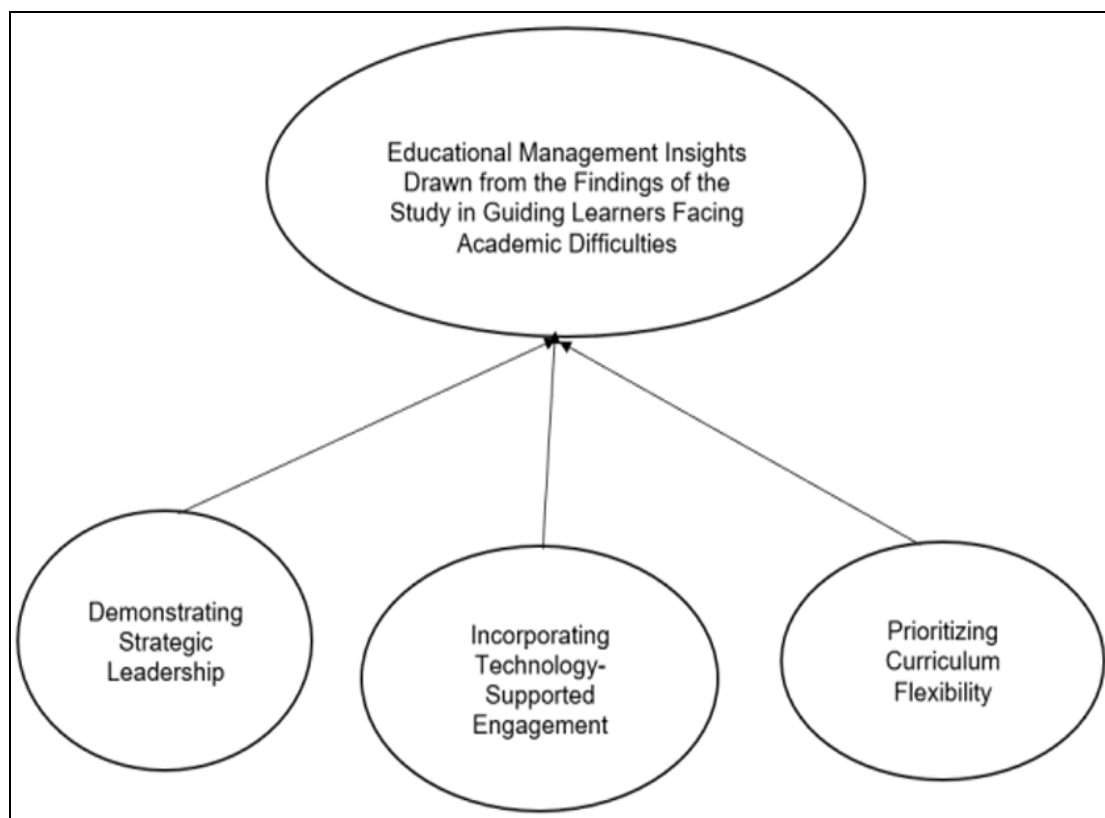


Fig 5 Emerging Themes on the Educational Management Insights Drawn from the Findings of the Study in Guiding Learners Facing Academic Difficulties

IV. IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

➤ Implications

The findings of the study provide important implications for improving practices that support learners facing academic difficulties. Three themes emerged from

teachers’ experiences: building meaningful teacher-student relationships, implementing differentiated instruction, and demonstrating patience, emotional regulation, and encouragement. Strong relationships promote learners’ sense of belonging and motivation, consistent with Self-Determination Theory, while differentiated instruction reflects Constructivist Learning Theory by recognizing

learners' unique needs and prior knowledge. Teachers' patience and emotional support further align with Social-Constructivist Theory, particularly Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, where guidance and encouragement help learners overcome challenges through effective scaffolding.

Teachers' coping mechanisms were also identified through three themes: fostering collaborative reflection, setting realistic expectations, and seeking administrative and institutional support. Collaborative reflection allows teachers to share knowledge and develop solutions collectively, reflecting the social nature of learning emphasized by Social-Constructivist Theory. Setting realistic expectations supports learners' developmental readiness, enabling teachers to provide appropriate challenges based on students' abilities. Meanwhile, institutional support strengthens teachers' autonomy, competence, and motivation, as explained by Self-Determination Theory, allowing them to better address learner needs.

Educational management insights from the study highlighted three major themes: strategic leadership, technology-supported engagement, and adaptive curriculum practices. Strategic leadership encourages collaboration among teachers and supports shared problem-solving, while technology integration provides personalized and interactive learning opportunities aligned with Constructivist principles. Curriculum flexibility promotes learner autonomy and mastery by allowing teachers to adjust instruction according to students' needs, supporting motivation and engagement. These implications emphasize the need for responsive leadership, supportive systems, and learner-centered practices to improve outcomes for academically challenged learners.

➤ Future Directions

The study provides directions for future efforts aimed at strengthening support systems for learners facing academic challenges. For learners, future initiatives should promote self-advocacy, goal-setting, reflection, resilience, and intrinsic motivation to encourage ownership of their learning journey. For teachers, continuous professional development in differentiated instruction, trauma-informed practices, technology integration, and assessment strategies is essential. Providing opportunities for collaborative planning and knowledge-sharing can further enhance teachers' capacity to design responsive interventions.

Parents should be empowered as active partners through home-learning support programs, effective communication systems, and workshops that develop positive reinforcement and academic assistance strategies. School administrators should strengthen inclusive and equitable learning environments by allocating resources, supporting early intervention programs, using data-informed practices, and fostering collaboration among stakeholders. These efforts can create a coordinated support system where learners receive consistent guidance from both school and home.

The Department of Education should continue developing evidence-based policies, strengthening teacher development programs, and ensuring equitable access to resources, particularly in underserved communities. Future researchers should further explore the long-term effects of academic interventions, technology-supported learning, social-emotional learning, and culturally responsive approaches. Continued research on the connection between motivation, mental health, and academic performance can contribute to more holistic strategies that address the diverse needs of learners.

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