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**LOCALLY FUNDED TEACHERS' CHALLENGES AND COPING STRATEGIES IN THE INTEGRATED SCHOOLS: BASES FOR POLICY RECOMMENDATION**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study investigated the challenges and coping strategies of four locally funded teachers in an integrated school in the District of Leon II using a phenomenological, qualitative approach and in-depth interviews through a researcher-made questionnaire. The research revealed that these educators lead a "professional double life," navigating heavy workloads, resource scarcity, and the pedagogical duality of teaching both elementary and secondary levels. Findings indicate that while teachers demonstrate high resilience through resource improvisation, self-directed learning, and informal peer support, the lack of structural backing leads to significant stress, burnout, and fragmented professional identities. Consequently, the study proposes the Integrated School Professional Support & Resource Framework (ISPSRF). This framework recommends institutionalizing resource subsidies, reducing ancillary duties, and establishing formal mentorship and specialized training in "dynamic versatility." The study concludes that sustaining quality integrated education depends on proactive systemic support rather than individual teacher endurance.

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**Keywords:** *Locally funded teachers, Integrated schools, Challenges, Coping Strategies, Policy, Recommendation*

## INTRODUCTION

In the Philippines, the Department of Education (DepEd) has increasingly moved toward an integrated model where single campuses serve both elementary and secondary levels to increase geographical access to education.

However, this administrative convenience often places a disproportionate burden on locally funded teachers, who are hired by Local Government Units (LGUs) rather than the national government and frequently lack the standardized support systems provided to their national counterparts (EDCOM II, 2025). This discrepancy creates a "capacity gap," where teachers are expected to meet the same high-level instructional standards for diverse age groups while navigating systemic resource scarcity and lower job security (Fernandez, 2026).

The core of the issue lies in the phenomenon of "Pedagogical Duality," where a single educator must pivot between the high-energy, foundational needs of elementary pupils and the specialized, independent academic demands of high school students within the same workday. Recent research suggests that this constant shifting leads to "instructional friction," a cognitive strain that significantly depletes a teacher's mental bandwidth (Anzano et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the lack of dedicated funding for integrated settings often forces these educators to become "primary financiers," spending their own limited income on

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Contextualized Learning Materials (CLM) and visual "paraphernalia" to ensure student engagement (Dicdiquin et al., 2025). Without institutionalized support, these teachers face a heightened risk of "Inclusion Fatigue," a specialized form of burnout characterized by the physical and emotional exhaustion of managing multiple cognitive levels and delivery methods simultaneously (ResearchGate, 2026).

Consequently, the study of coping strategies among locally funded teachers is essential to understanding how the Philippine education system survives at the grassroots level. Current literature indicates a shift toward "Social Capital" as a survival mechanism, where teachers build informal "communities of practice" via social media and peer mentorship to compensate for the lack of formal workshops (Timotheou et al., 2022). By examining the specific challenges and adaptive measures of teachers, this study aims to mitigate inclusion fatigue and "instructional friction" by institutionalizing "protected preparation time" and providing specialized training in dynamic versatility, allowing educators to effectively reset their pedagogical approach when moving between foundational elementary needs and specialized secondary demands.

As a permanent elementary teacher in an Integrated School (IS), I see a clear gap between job security and the system's reliance on "flexible labor." Due to global teacher shortage, schools have depended more on alternative hiring. However, this has created a divide among teachers within the same school.

As we move into the MATATAG Curriculum (2024–2026), the lack of equal training is very noticeable. I receive formal and structured training, but my locally funded co-teachers-

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who handle the same workload—often rely only on shared notes or self-study. The large salary gap makes this situation even harder. Despite these challenges, locally funded teachers show strong dedication. They find ways to cope, such as sharing resources and supporting each other. However, many of them take extra jobs to meet their needs, which can lead to exhaustion and burnout.

This situation shows an important need for change. Teachers’ resilience should not replace fair support from the system. Schools need better policies to ensure that all teachers—especially those in uncertain positions—are given equal respect, support, and opportunities.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Research Methodology

This chapter presents the research method, research design, participants of the study, data-gathering procedures, research instrument, and data analysis used in this study. The purpose of the study was to find out the locally funded teachers challenges and coping strategies in the integrated school: bases for policy recommendation.

### Research Method

The research method used in this study was descriptive-qualitative using in-depth interviews. The interviewer and the respondents were engaged in a one-on-one setting to elicit thoughtful responses. The interviewer asked few questions about the locally funded teachers challenges and coping strategies in the Integrated School: bases for policy

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recommendation. The aim was to get their views and experiences through their response to the questions.

## Research Design

This study utilized the Phenomenological Approach as suggested by Fura and Negash (2021). Phenomenology was defined by Neubauer et al. (2021) as a science whose purpose is to describe phenomena or the appearance of things, as lived experiences. The main goals of this approach are to describe and capture the experiences of the participants of the study (Nicholls,2021) and to arrive at a description of the nature of the phenomenon (Neubauer et al., 2022). It should be noted that the lived experiences of the participants are the one that will give meaning to everyone’s perception of a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2021).

## Participants of the study

The identified participants of the study were four (4) locally funded teachers in the integrated school in the districts of Leon II during the school year 2025-2026.

Purposive sampling (also known as judgment, selective or subjective sampling) is a sampling technique in which the researcher relies on his or her own criteria and characteristic that will best provide the information needed when choosing members of population to participate in the study. The main selection criteria are four (4) locally funded teachers in the integrated school in the District of Leon II.

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## Data Gathering Procedures

The researcher wrote a letter and was approved by the Assistant Division Superintendent and OIC-Principal Public Schools District Supervisor asking permission to allow the former to conduct the said activity. Upon approval of the letter, the researcher presented the letters to the school principals and picked those qualified locally funded teachers. Interviews were conducted at a convenient time for each participant and were done face-to-face. The interview format adopted the three different types: open-ended, semi-structured, and structured interviews centering on the interview questions.

Using in-depth interview, voice recording was provided to completely capture the interviewees' responses. Approval from the participants to have the recording taken during the interview was made prior to actual capture. The researcher transcribed, collated the data and consolidated them for analysis.

After completing the interviews, voice recordings were transcribed. The original and translated transcripts were categorized into meaning units (Ratner, 2022) and were thematically analyzed. Ratner (2022) underscores that the meaning unit must preserve the psychological integrity of the idea being expressed. It must neither fragment the idea into meaningless, truncated segments nor confuse it with other ideas that express different themes. Therefore, coherent and related comments were coded as one meaning unit. In a meaning unit, the participants' comments were always included, and if necessary, clarifying questions were included as well.

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## Sampling Design

In this study, a purposive sampling design was utilized. According to Nikolopoulou (2023), purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling method where participants are chosen on the basis of the desired traits they possess. In purposive sampling, the participants are chosen "on purpose". Also known as judgmental sampling, this sampling method is based on the researcher's discretion on who to include in the study and who they perceive to best inform the study.

## Research Instrument

The research instrument used in this study was the researcher-made interview schedule. A panel of experts did the validation of the researcher-made interview guide. All comments and suggestions relative to the validation of the tool were considered.

Face to face or personal interview was used to conduct one-on-one the in-depth interviews. A mobile phone with audio recorder was used to capture all the proceedings during the in-depth interviews. The responses of the participants were transcribed thereafter.

## Data Analyses

The information gathered was analyzed using the thematic approach. Thematic analysis or approach is a method of analyzing qualitative data. It is usually applied all texts, such as interview transcripts. The researcher closely examines the data to identify similarities or common themes topics, ideas and patterns of meaning that come up repeatedly.

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## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This study was conducted to find out the locally funded teachers challenges and coping strategies in the integrated schools: bases for policy recommendation in the district of Leon II during the school year 2025-2026.

This study used the phenomenological approach under the qualitative research. This approach was appropriate because the researcher studied a group of people to gain a larger understanding if their lives or specific aspects of their lives focuses on the study of practices.

The respondents of this study were four (4) locally funded teachers in the integrated school in the district of leon II during the school year 2025-2026.

The research instrument utilized in this study was a researcher-made interview schedule.

A mobile phone with audio recorder was used for data gathering and documentation depending upon the permission of the respondents.

A panel of experts validated the interview guide. All comments and suggestions relative to the validation of the tool were considered.

All permits especially from the individual respondents obtained to allow the researcher to conduct the study. The researcher personally went to the schools/community/place convenient on the part of the respondents to conduct the interview.

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Using the in-depth interview, a mobile phone with audio recorder was provided to completely capture the interviewee's words. The respondents were asked individually to get the responses to the questions. The object is to get the respondents' view about the study. The researcher consolidated all of the collected data after series of interviews.

The information gathered was analyzed using thematic approach.

The study concludes that locally funded teachers in the integrated schools operate in a state of high professional demand characterized by "Pedagogical Duality" and systemic resource gaps. The primary challenges identified include the presence of diverse learners, which triggers "inclusion fatigue" due to the simultaneous management of elementary and secondary students; excessive lesson preparation, creating a state of "time poverty"; and instructional friction, where teachers struggle to reset their pedagogical approach between foundational child-centered learning and specialized adolescent education.

To navigate these hurdles, teachers have shifted from relying on formal institutional support to practicing individual resilience and informal collaboration. The results highlight two core coping mechanisms: Collaborative Mentorship, where teachers "crowdsource" expertise from seasoned colleagues to bridge subject-matter gaps; and Resource Improvisation/Self-Directed Learning, where educators act as primary financiers and content creators to provide "paraphernalia" and instructional materials that the system lacks. While these strategies demonstrate significant professional agency, they highlight a "capacity deficit" where personal sacrifice is the only buffer against systemic underfunding.

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## Conclusion

Based on the findings, the following insights were drawn:

The findings reveal a critical disjunction between the ideals of inclusive education policy and the lived reality of classroom practice. Integrated teachers often live a “professional double life,” expected to manage multiple grade levels, diverse learning needs, and administrative tasks within a single workday. This is not merely a logistical or scheduling problem; it imposes a substantial cognitive and emotional burden that contributes to teacher burnout and a fragmented professional identity.

Moreover, the analysis shows that many teachers rely heavily on informal social capital—peer support, personal networks, and self-initiated learning—as a coping mechanism. While this “shadow safety net” is effective for short-term survival and demonstrates remarkable teacher adaptability, it is not a sustainable model for long-term professional development. The absence of strong institutionalized support systems, consistent training, and clear policy implementation places the burden of adaptation squarely on teachers, which may gradually lead to more surface-level or “shallow” instruction and undermine the overall quality and equity of inclusive education.

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