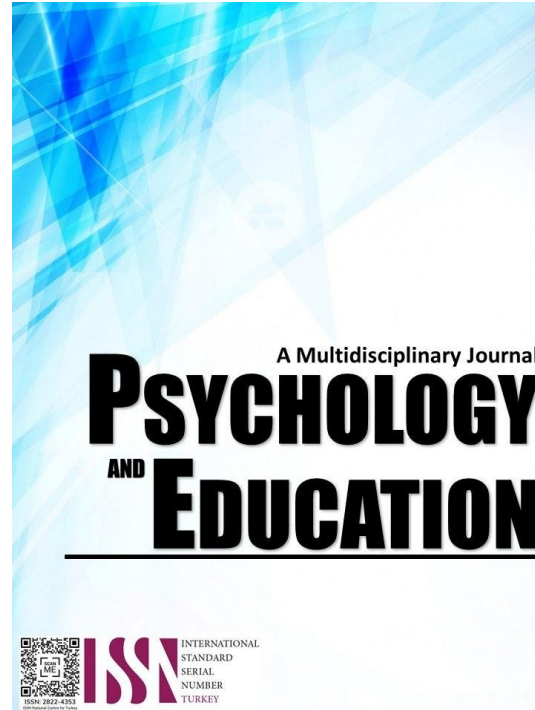


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PSYCHOLOGY AND EDUCATION: A MULTIDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL

Volume: 50

Issue 8

Pages: 978-991

Document ID: 2025PEMJ4913

DOI: 10.70838/pemj.500807

Manuscript Accepted: 11-23-2025

From Struggle to Strength: Learners' Adaptation and Insights in Alternative Delivery Mode Education

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Abstract

Alternative Delivery Mode (ADM) programs provide flexible learning opportunities for students who face barriers to traditional schooling. Understanding how learners navigate these circumstances is essential for strengthening support systems and enhancing program implementation. This qualitative case study examined the experiences of three (3) ADM learners from the 2024–2025 school year, focusing on the challenges they encountered, the coping strategies they adopted, and the insights they gained throughout their learning journeys. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings revealed three significant challenges: limited access to learning materials and teacher guidance; emotional and psychological stress resulting from academic pressure and isolation; and household responsibilities that frequently interfered with schoolwork. To cope with these challenges, participants sought support from teachers and advisers, developed self-directed learning habits, and practiced motivational self-talk and perseverance. These strategies highlight the learners' resilience and determination to persist despite constraints. Through these experiences, learners reported improved self-discipline, a greater appreciation for education, and gratitude toward individuals who supported their learning. The study emphasizes the need for targeted, context-sensitive support systems that address the academic, emotional, and motivational needs of ADM learners. Strengthening guidance mechanisms, enhancing access to learning resources, and providing structured opportunities for teacher–learner interaction may help improve learners' experiences and outcomes within the ADM setting.

Keywords: *alternative delivery mode, resilience, self-directed learning, emotional well-being, secondary education, qualitative research, SDG 4*

Introduction

School dropout continues to challenge education systems worldwide, threatening learners' academic achievement, employability, and social inclusion. Students who disengage from formal schooling face long-term disadvantages, including limited employment opportunities, reduced access to healthcare, and increased vulnerability to poverty and social marginalization. In today's knowledge-driven society, understanding the causes of school dropout and identifying effective support mechanisms are essential for ensuring equitable educational outcomes.

Globally, millions of high school students drop out each year, with approximately one in four first-year students failing to graduate on time (Ressa & Andrews, 2022). Despite intervention programs, dropout rates remain persistently high in some countries (Lee & Polachek, 2018). Students who leave school prematurely are particularly exposed to economic and social instability, facing barriers to employment, education, and civic participation (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021; Obinna & Ohanian, 2020; Peguero et al., 2018). These patterns show that school dropout is not merely an individual failure but a manifestation of broader systemic inequities that require multifaceted solutions.

In the Philippines, dropout is especially pronounced in geographically isolated and economically disadvantaged areas. Factors such as socioeconomic inequality, limited educational resources, and household responsibilities contribute to school non-completion. To address these challenges, the Department of Education introduced the Alternative Delivery Mode (ADM) through DepEd Order No. 54, series of 2012, providing flexible, learner-centered pathways for at-risk students. While ADM promotes inclusion, research shows persistent challenges, including insufficient teacher preparation, limited learner support, and low engagement (Lucero, 2020). Its effectiveness also relies heavily on learners' self-discipline and intrinsic motivation, which can be difficult to sustain under socioeconomic hardship or unstable learning environments (Calamaan & Trinidad, 2025).

Locally, ADM learners face additional hurdles, including limited access to learning materials, minimal teacher interaction, and the need to balance schoolwork with household duties. Data from School Year 2023–2024 indicate that approximately 38% of ADM learners failed to submit modules on time, reporting feelings of isolation and inadequate academic guidance. These challenges have significant implications for learners' academic performance, emotional well-being, and sense of belonging.

Despite research on ADM policy and implementation, there is a critical gap in understanding learners' lived experiences. Most studies focus on administrative structures, pedagogical models, or performance outcomes, leaving unexplored how students perceive and navigate the realities of flexible learning. Addressing this gap, the present study examines the lived experiences of ADM learners in one secondary school in Kiblawan, Davao del Sur, focusing on the challenges they face, the coping strategies they employ, and the insights they gain. By centering learners' voices, this study aimed to provide a humanized and context-sensitive understanding of ADM, informing interventions that better support at-risk learners.

This study aligned closely with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4: Quality Education, which emphasizes inclusive and equitable quality education and promotes lifelong learning opportunities for all. By centering learners' voices, the research contributes to understanding how alternative learning modalities can be improved to ensure no learner is left behind.

The theoretical foundation of this study was grounded in Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986), which highlighted the role of personal agency, self-efficacy, and observational learning in human behavior. This framework helped explain how learners actively engage in self-directed learning and employ coping strategies to overcome the unique challenges posed by the Alternative Delivery Mode (ADM). By adopting a humanized, context-sensitive approach, this study also aimed to inform targeted interventions that better support at-risk learners in flexible education settings.

Research Questions

The primary objective of this study was to explore learners' experiences and coping mechanisms in the Alternative Delivery Mode (ADM). Specifically, this sought to answer the following questions.

1. What are the challenges do learners encounter in the Alternative Delivery Mode (ADM) of education?
2. What coping strategies do ADM learners adopt to manage the demands of flexible, self-directed learning?
3. What personal insights and transformations do learners experience because of participating in the ADM program?

Literature Review

Alternative Delivery Modes have become essential strategies for supporting non-traditional learners and reducing school dropout rates. In Australia, flexible modalities such as blended, online, and mobile learning were rapidly adopted to maintain access for remote and international learners, which demonstrates ADM's relevance even within mainstream educational systems (Universal Business School Sydney, 2021).

Moreover, in Southeast Asia, countries have implemented ADM programs tailored explicitly to marginalized populations. For instance, Indonesia introduced a Multiple Entry-Exit System, allowing learners to pause and resume schooling depending on personal circumstances. In the same way, Vietnam developed island learner programs, and Thailand promoted home-schooling initiatives for students in remote areas (SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2019). Additionally, in Cambodia, the government responded to school closures in 2020 by deploying blended learning platforms, televised lessons, and a mobile e-learning application. This effort was supported by partnerships with civil society organizations and local communities, which allowed learning to continue despite over 80% of learners lacking digital access (Heng & Sol, 2020; UNDP Cambodia, 2021). Similarly, in Indonesia, printed modules, localized radio programs, and community-based study groups were implemented to minimize learning loss among disadvantaged learners (UNESCO & UNICEF, 2021). As such, these examples highlight the importance of context-specific, community-driven, and flexible strategies for sustaining education during periods of disruption.

In the Philippines, access to quality education remains a pressing concern, particularly for marginalized communities. The Education for All (EFA) 2015 National Action Plan, implemented through Memorandum Circular No. 141, aimed to equip learners with essential skills, reduce dropout rates, and promote functional literacy. As a result, the program emphasized inclusive and equitable opportunities for all learners (Rivera-Santisimo et al., 2019). Despite these efforts, millions of Filipinos remain functionally illiterate, which limits their ability to participate fully in social, economic, and civic life.

In response to these challenges, the Department of Education introduced Alternative Delivery Modes under DepEd Order No. 54, series of 2012. These modes provide flexible learning pathways, such as face-to-face, distance, and blended approaches, to accommodate learners facing obstacles such as long travel distances, household responsibilities, or overcrowded classrooms (DepEd, 2012; Llego, n.d.). Notably, programs such as the Modified In-School, Off-School Approach (MISOSA) and the Enhanced Instructional Management by Parents, Community, and Teachers (e-IMPACT) offer modular instruction, flexible entry and exit points, and mastery-based assessments (National Economic Development Authority, 2019).

However, these programs continue to face challenges, including limited funding, curriculum gaps, insufficient learning materials, inadequate teacher training, and inconsistent monitoring and evaluation. Consequently, these issues constrain both the effectiveness and scalability of ADM initiatives (SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2017; Rivera-Santisimo et al., 2019).

On the positive side, studies indicate that ADM offers critical opportunities for learners facing socio-economic or personal constraints. For example, Rivera-Santisimo et al. (2019) reported that the Off-School ADM program allowed learners, including those managing early pregnancy, employment, chronic absenteeism, or low academic performance, to continue their education. The simplified lessons improved accessibility and promoted academic progress, while simultaneously fostering values such as cooperation and respect. Likewise, Morastil and Balicoco (2023) found that ADM's flexible schedules and tailored content effectively support at-risk learners.

Even so, modular distance learning presents additional difficulties. Many learners struggle to complete tasks correctly due to limited real-time teacher support, leading to incomplete outputs or gaps in understanding (Paz et al., 2023). Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed learners' lack of preparedness for independent study, contributing to emotional stress, academic burnout, and reduced confidence (DepEd, 2020; Matolo, 2022; Garingan, 2023). Without adequate intervention, ADM may unintentionally widen

learning gaps, particularly in core subjects such as Mathematics and Science (Apura, 2023). These concerns highlight the need for learner-centered support systems, resilience-building strategies, and the development of self-regulation skills.

Equally important, ADM's effectiveness is closely linked to teacher preparedness and support. Research demonstrates that professional development enhances competencies in lesson planning, instructional delivery, digital proficiency, and classroom management, thereby enabling educators to respond effectively to flexible learning demands (Padillo et al., 2020).

Nevertheless, teachers continue to face practical challenges. For example, Pradia et al. (2024) reported that limited access to printing devices and instructional materials restricts teachers' ability to deliver diverse and engaging lessons, thereby negatively affecting learner engagement. In addition, teacher motivation and preparedness are closely associated with student achievement in non-traditional settings (Dahri et al., 2024). Therefore, sustained investment in training, logistical support, and administrative guidance is necessary to ensure that ADM achieves its intended goals. Teachers not only deliver content but also foster learner engagement, particularly in remote or underserved communities, making their role essential to program success.

Despite the growing body of literature, existing studies primarily focus on policy, implementation, and challenges, leaving a notable gap in understanding learners' lived experiences. Most research emphasizes administrative processes, program outcomes, or teacher perspectives, while overlooking learners' perceptions and management of flexible learning. Accordingly, this study addresses that gap by investigating the experiences of ADM learners in a secondary school in Kiblawan, Davao del Sur, aiming to generate context-specific, humanized insights that can inform more effective and learner-centered interventions.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore the experiences and coping strategies of learners enrolled in the Alternative Delivery Mode (ADM) at one secondary school in Kiblawan, Davao del Sur. A case study allows an in-depth examination of a bounded system in its real-life context, providing detailed insights into complex social phenomena that large-scale quantitative approaches cannot capture (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 1995). This design was particularly suitable for understanding how ADM learners navigate academic, emotional, and personal challenges and how these experiences shape their overall learning journey. Participants were purposively selected to represent learners actively engaged in ADM, and data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which allowed learners to share their thoughts and feelings while maintaining focus on the research objectives (Merriam, 2009). Observations of verbal and non-verbal cues were also conducted to capture meaning beyond spoken words.

Reflexivity was maintained throughout the research process by keeping reflective journals and engaging in regular discussions regarding the researchers' positionality and potential biases, ensuring that interpretations reflected participants' perspectives rather than assumptions. Trustworthiness was strengthened through multiple strategies: triangulation of data sources was used to cross-check information from interviews, observations, and relevant documents for consistency; peer debriefing involved discussing preliminary findings with colleagues not involved in data collection to provide external critique and reduce subjectivity; and member-checking allowed participants to review summaries of their interviews to verify accuracy and ensure their experiences were authentically represented. This approach provided a comprehensive, context-sensitive understanding of ADM learners' experiences, highlighting the challenges they faced, the adaptive strategies they employed, and the personal growth that resulted from engagement in this alternative learning environment. The insights gained aim to inform the development of more responsive and effective flexible learning practices in similar educational contexts.

Participants

The study focused on learners enrolled in the Alternative Delivery Mode (ADM) program at one secondary school in Kiblawan, Davao del Sur, during the School Year 2024–2025. This site was deliberately selected because it represents a context where flexible learning is actively implemented to support learners at risk of dropping out. Following Yin's (2014) guidance for case study research, the school and its ADM learners constituted the bounded system under investigation.

A purposive sampling technique was employed to identify participants who could provide rich and detailed accounts of their experiences in ADM (Merriam, 2009). Eligible participants were officially enrolled in the ADM program, had completed at least one full academic quarter, and demonstrated consistent engagement through module submission or participation in face-to-face, remote, or blended sessions. Selection also considered learners' willingness and ability to articulate their experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms. Demographically, the three participants who completed the study were all Grade 11 learners aged 16–17 years, including two females and one male student, providing a diverse perspective within this small cohort.

Learners were excluded if they were not actively participating in ADM, lacked verification of attendance or output submission, had incomplete enrollment documentation, or declined to provide informed consent. Ethical procedures ensured that all participants understood their rights, including the freedom to withdraw at any time without penalty.

Initially, five learners were invited to participate, but two withdrew during data collection. Their decision was fully respected in accordance with ethical research practices. Despite the small sample size, this number aligns with qualitative case study norms, where

depth of inquiry is prioritized over numerical representation (Stake, 1995; Creswell, 2013). Data adequacy and thematic saturation were achieved as recurring patterns and meaningful narratives emerged early in the interviews, providing sufficient information for robust thematic analysis (Guest et al., 2006).

Instrument

The study utilized an interview guide to gather in-depth insights into the experiences and coping strategies of students enrolled in the Alternative Delivery Mode (ADM). The guide consisted of open-ended questions designed to encourage participants to share their thoughts and reflections freely, capturing both factual responses and personal narratives. To ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment with the research objectives, the interview guide was reviewed and validated by research experts, including one Senior High School Master Teacher, one English Coordinator, and the District Research Coordinators, all experienced in qualitative research. The validators assessed the instrument based on clarity, appropriateness of language, alignment with research objectives, and its ability to elicit rich and meaningful data. Their feedback guided revisions in the wording, sequencing, and phrasing of questions, enhancing the guide's reliability and effectiveness.

Although pilot testing was not conducted due to the small, focused nature of the participant pool, expert validation ensured the instrument was contextually appropriate and capable of eliciting comprehensive responses. The interview guide was written in Filipino and, where necessary, adapted to local dialects to ensure linguistic accuracy and facilitate participant comprehension. Careful attention was paid to phrasing and translation to maintain the intended meaning of each question and minimize misinterpretation. This rigorous development and validation process enhanced the study's credibility by reducing researchers' bias and ensuring the voices of ADM learners were authentically represented.

Procedure

Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews (IDIs) to explore participants' challenges, coping strategies, and learning experiences in the Alternative Delivery Mode (ADM) program. Before the interviews, an interview guide was developed to align with the research objectives and facilitate the collection of rich, meaningful data. Necessary approvals to conduct the study were secured from the school principal and the District and Division Research Committees.

Once approvals were obtained, the researchers approached the selected participants, explained the study's objectives and procedures, and obtained informed consent to ensure voluntary participation. The researchers maintained a neutral, non-intrusive role during the interviews to minimize bias and encourage honest, open responses. Interviews were conducted in a comfortable and non-threatening environment, using a mix of English and local dialects as appropriate to ensure participants' comprehension. Each session lasted approximately seven to ten minutes, depending on the participant's willingness and depth of response. With participants' permission, all interviews were audio-recorded to preserve accuracy. The recordings were then transcribed verbatim, with attention to maintaining the original language and meaning. Any necessary translations from local dialects into Filipino or English were carefully conducted to ensure linguistic accuracy and preserve participants' intended expressions.

After transcription, significant statements were identified and organized into thematic categories. The coding process involved repeated reading of the transcripts to detect patterns, recurring insights, and nuanced meanings, ensuring that the resulting themes accurately reflected the participants' lived experiences. The entire process was documented to maintain transparency and enhance the reliability and trustworthiness of the findings. Data collection was conducted over one week in March 2025, allowing sufficient time for in-depth engagement with all participants.

Data Analysis

The study adopted Creswell's (2012) qualitative data analysis approach to examine the lived experiences and coping mechanisms of learners enrolled in the Alternative Delivery Mode (ADM). This method offers a systematic yet interpretive framework that enables researchers to identify patterns, derive meaningful themes, and understand the shared essence of participants' experiences.

The analysis began with the careful preparation and organization of all qualitative materials. Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim, and all field notes and related documents were gathered into a complete dataset. Each transcript was read multiple times to build an initial understanding of the learners' accounts and to allow the researchers to immerse themselves in the narratives fully.

After becoming familiar with the data, the researchers examined and manually coded the information. Significant statements reflecting learners' experiences in ADM were identified and treated with equal importance, in accordance with Creswell's principle of horizontalization. Each meaningful segment was assigned a descriptive code that captured its core idea.

The coded data were then reviewed, compared, and grouped into emerging categories. These categories were refined into broader themes that captured recurring patterns in learners' experiences. Developing these themes involved analyzing similarities and differences among the coded segments and ensuring that each theme logically aligned with the study's purpose.

These finalized themes provided the basis for presenting and describing the findings. Textural descriptions were crafted to explain what the learners experienced, while structural descriptions illustrated how these experiences unfolded within their contexts. Together, these descriptions created a holistic representation of ADM learners' realities.



The researchers then interpreted the overall meaning of the findings by synthesizing the themes and descriptive accounts. This enabled more profound insights into the challenges learners faced, the coping strategies they employed, and the personal changes they underwent during their ADM journey.

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the results, several validation strategies were implemented. Participants were invited to review and confirm the interpretations through member checking, while peer debriefing provided external feedback to minimize bias. An audit trail was also maintained to document all analytical decisions and promote transparency throughout the research process.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to rigorous ethical standards to safeguard the rights, dignity, and welfare of all participants. Prior to data collection, participants were thoroughly oriented on the study’s purpose, procedures, potential risks, and expected benefits (Liang et al., 2025). They were encouraged to raise questions freely, ensuring that consent was fully informed. Participation was strictly voluntary, and individuals were reminded that they could decline or withdraw at any stage without penalty. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants, with parental or guardian consent and minor assent secured for those below the legal age.

To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, all personal identifiers were replaced with coded labels, and data were stored in encrypted, password-protected digital files accessible only to the research team (Chevis, 2025). In line with ethical best practices, participants were assured that their responses would be used solely for academic and research purposes and that no identifying information would appear in any reports or presentations. A clear data retention and disposal policy was also followed. All records will be securely stored for five years after publication and permanently deleted thereafter.

The study adhered to the district research committee’s ethical guidelines. It aligned with established frameworks, including the American Psychological Association (APA) ethical standards and the Department of Education’s Research Management Guidelines. The research proposal underwent institutional review to ensure compliance with these principles.

Given the qualitative nature of the study, the researchers maintained reflexivity throughout the inquiry. The researchers continuously examined personal assumptions, biases, and positionality to prevent undue influence on data collection, interpretation, and interaction with participants. A respectful, non-coercive, and supportive environment was upheld during all interviews and engagements.

All ethical procedures were consistently applied throughout the research process to uphold transparency, integrity, and participant protection.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the thematic analysis of participants’ lived experiences in the Alternative Delivery Mode (ADM). Through careful coding, clustering, and cross-case comparison, the study identified recurring patterns that reflect the learners’ challenges, coping strategies, and learning insights. The analysis balances direct narratives with interpretative commentary, integrating learners’ voices with relevant empirical literature. Figures and tables are included to enhance clarity and provide a concise overview of the themes. Additionally, the section highlights subtle variations across participant experiences that reveal how contextual factors shape individual learning trajectories. It also underscores the importance of understanding not only what learners experience but how they make sense of these experiences within the ADM environment. Furthermore, the thematic presentation serves as a foundation for discussing broader implications for policy development and instructional practice.

Table 1. Summary of Emergent Themes, Sub-Themes, and Core Ideas

Major Theme	Sub-Theme	Core Ideas
Challenges in ADM	Lack of Learning Materials & Guidance	“Naglisod gyud ko og sabot sa mga leksyon... wala gyud nako nakuha ang akong gipangita.” – T1_L1_P1
		“Gusto gyud unta ko makat-on og daghan pa, pero dili ko kabalo unsaon pagpangayo og tabang o pagpakig-istorya.” -T3_L1_P3
	Emotional & Psychological Stress	“Usahay, limitado ra among internet... Lisod kaayo mag-research sa mga leksyon.” - T2_L2_P2
		“Maguol ko usahay ug mawad-an og gana... Maka-apekto gyud siya sa akong tinguha.” – T1_L1_P1
Coping Mechanisms	Conflicting Home Responsibilities	“Usahay walay tawo nga makatabang nako sa akong pagtuon.” - T2_L2_P2 “Naabot ko sa punto nga gusto nako magpakamatay kay grabe gyud akong gibati... Gipugos gyud nako akong kaugalingon nga mobalik og skwela-T3_L1_P3 “Daghan ko og buhaton sa balay... kinahanglan ko mutabang.” – T2_L1_P2 “Naglisod mi sa kwarta. Lisod magpokus sa pag-eskwela kay kinahanglan ko mutabang una sa balay.” - T3_L4_P3
	Seeking Help from Teachers and Advisers	“Niadto ko sa eskwelahan para mangayo og tabang.” – T2_L4_P2 “Mao to nga mas permi nako gitawagan og gipangayoan og tambag akong adviser.” - T3_L6_P3
	Self-Directed Learning	“Ako ra gyud usa magpraktis... manan-aw og mga video.” – T2_L5_P1 “Naningkamot lang gyud ko nga maka-adjust, bisag hinay-hinay lang ang pagkat-

Learning Insights	Motivational Self-Talk	on.”- T2_L4_P2 “Gipahinudoman nako akong kaugalingon nga kinahanglan ko magpadayon.” – T2_L6_P3 “Ginaingnan nako akong kaugalingon kanunay kung ngano gusto nako mahuman og eskwela- T3_L4_P2
	Self-Discipline and Responsibility	“Nakat-on ko nga tarongon ang pag-manage sa oras.” – T3_L8_P2 “Ang ADM nagtudlo nako nga dapat kabalo ko mudala sa akong kaugalingon nga responsibilidad.” - T2_L6_P3 “Bisan daghan problema, kinahanglan gihapon paningkamotan.” – T1_L6_P1
	Value of Education & Resilience	“Narealize nako nga bisan og daghan problema, kinahanglan gihapon nato paningkamotan ang atong mga damgo.”- T1_L6_P1 “Mas na-appreciate nako ang skwela karon kay nakasabot ko nga lisod gyud kung ikaw ra usa magtuon.”- T3_L10_P2
	Gratitude for Support Systems	“Dako gyud kog pasalamat sa among mga magtutudlo, wala gyud sila niundang og suporta sa amo.”- T2_L11_P3 “Gibilib nako ang mga tawo nga mitabang nako sa tunga sa akong mga kalisod.” - T3_L9_P1

Table 1 presents a detailed summary of the emergent themes, sub-themes, and core ideas derived from the participants' experiences in the Alternative Delivery Mode (ADM). It captures the primary challenges they encountered, including limited learning materials and guidance, emotional and psychological stress, and the challenge of balancing academic demands with household responsibilities. Additionally, the table highlights various coping strategies employed by learners, including actively seeking support from teachers, engaging in self-directed learning using available resources, and using positive self-motivation to persevere.

Finally, the table reflects important insights gained by the participants, emphasizing the development of self-discipline and time management skills, and a strengthened appreciation for education despite adversity.

Theme 1. Challenges Encountered in the Alternative Delivery Mode

Although ADM provided flexible pathways for learners unable to attend traditional classes, participants emphasized that the modality presented multiple academic, emotional, and situational barriers. Cross-case analysis indicates that while all learners experienced difficulty, the intensity and sources of challenges varied, shaped by differences in home responsibilities, financial conditions, and emotional resilience.

Figure 1 below illustrates the key sub-themes related to the challenges participants faced. As shown in the figure, three primary sub-themes emerged from the analysis of participants' experiences. These include: limited access to learning materials, emotional and psychological stress, and the difficulty of balancing conflicting responsibilities at home.

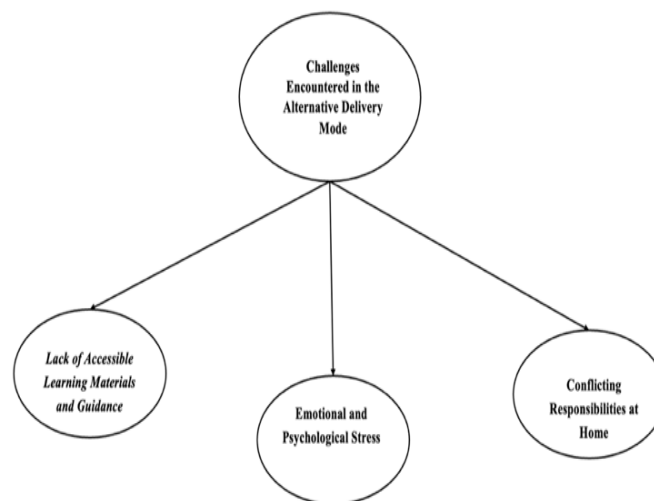


Figure 1. Sub-themes on the Challenges Encountered in the Alternative Delivery Mode

Lack of Accessible Learning Materials and Guidance

Learners consistently highlighted inadequate learning materials and limited instructional guidance as major barriers. Without consistent teacher presence, learners were frequently left to interpret lessons independently.

“Naglisod gyud ko og sabot sa mga leksyon... Nisuway kog tan-aw sa YouTube pero wala gyud nako nakuha ang akong gipangita.” (I struggled a lot with understanding the lessons... I tried YouTube, but I couldn’t find what I needed.) T1_L1_P1

“Gusto gyud unta ko makat-on og daghan pa, pero dili ko kabalo unsaon pagpangayo og tabang o pagpakig-istorya.” (I really wanted to learn more, but I didn’t know how to speak or ask for help.) T3_L1_P3

“Usahay, limitado ra among internet... Lisod kaayo mag-research sa mga leksyon.” (Internet access was sometimes limited... it was hard to research lessons.) T2_L2_P2

These statements reveal both structural barriers, such as poor module clarity, limited resources, and technological barriers, such as unstable internet. All three participants experienced similar difficulties, particularly when modules were vague or lacked examples. This lack of access to both digital resources and human support became a significant barrier to their learning. While some learners sought answers on their own, many found the process confusing and discouraging, especially when modules lacked clear explanations and guidance. These findings align with the study by Dangle and Sumaoang (2020), which reported that learners found it challenging to engage in self-directed learning due to unclear module instructions and inadequate guidance, leaving many parents unable to provide academic support. Analogously, Tanucan et al. (2023) conducted a meta-synthesis revealing that poorly structured printed modules, characterized by vague directions and a lack of contextual relevance, caused widespread confusion among learners. In addition, studies found that many learners failed to complete their tasks or delayed them due to difficulties understanding the content, limited internet connectivity, and heavy academic workloads (Boholano et al., 2022; Bayron, 2023; Cabardo et al., 2022).

Emotional and Psychological Stress

Learners described feeling overwhelmed, isolated, and emotionally drained, with one participant reaching a critical point of psychological distress.

“Maguol ko usahay ug mawad-an og gana... Maka-apekto gyud siya sa akong tinguha nga makat-on.” (I felt sad and discouraged... It affected my motivation.) T1_L1_P1

“Usahay walay tawo nga makatabang nako sa akong pagtuon.” (Sometimes, no one is available to assist me with my studies.) T2_L2_P2

“Naabot ko sa punto nga gusto nako magpakamatay kay grabe gyud akong gibati... Gipugos gyud nako akong kaugalingon nga mobalik og skwela.” (I even attempted suicide because I felt overwhelmed... I pushed myself to go back to school.) T3_L1_P3

The emotional strain stemmed from isolation, academic pressure, and lack of support systems. Cross-case comparison shows that while all participants felt discouraged, Participant 3 experienced extreme emotional distress, indicating that ADM may amplify vulnerabilities among at-risk learners. Research indicates that online and modular learning setups often result in increased anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and a decline in motivation. In the Philippines, Rotas and Cahapay (2021) documented that Filipino university learners experienced significant stress related to remote learning due to limited interaction, overwhelming workloads, and insufficient academic support. Likewise, Zaccoletti et al. (2020), in a cross-national study, found that reduced peer and teacher interactions during distance learning significantly heightened learners’ psychological distress, leading to decreased motivation and elevated anxiety levels. A study conducted at Western Mindanao State University by Lemana (2022) reported low mental health scores among online learners, linking the decline to academic overload, unstable internet connectivity, and a lack of structured support systems. Also, Cadornigara and Mahanlud (2023) found that learners in Nazarene educational institutions engaged in remote learning experienced moderate levels of stress across the academic, psychosocial, and health domains, with coping strategies offering only limited relief.

Conflicting Responsibilities at Home

Learners faced significant challenges balancing chores, caregiving responsibilities, and financial pressures alongside schoolwork.

“Daghan ko og buhaton sa balay... Kinahanglan ko mutabang sa mga buluhaton.” (I have responsibilities at home... I also must help with chores.) T2_L1_P2

“Naglisod mi sa kwarta. Lisod magpokus sa pag-eskwela kay kinahanglan ko mutabang una sa balay.” (We were facing financial difficulties. I could not focus on school because I prioritized helping at home.) T3_L4_P3

Home responsibilities were a common burden, but they differed in magnitude: Participant 3 bore economic-related duties, whereas Participant 2 managed household tasks. Learners enrolled in Alternative Delivery Modes (ADM) often face the challenging task of balancing academic responsibilities with domestic duties. This challenge is particularly pronounced in low-income households, where learners are often expected to participate in daily chores, caregiving roles, and income-generating activities. Toquero (2020) noted that many Filipino learners during the pandemic struggled to concentrate on schoolwork due to heightened expectations to assist with household tasks, especially in the absence of adult supervision. These competing demands contributed to cognitive overload and a decline in academic performance. Likewise, Bali and Liu (2018) highlighted that distance learners from economically disadvantaged backgrounds often face blurred lines between academic and household obligations, which negatively affect their engagement and persistence in learning. The issue is further intensified by gender-based household expectations, as female learners are more likely to bear a greater share of domestic responsibilities compared to their male peers, thereby reducing their study time and hindering academic achievement (OECD, 2021). These findings highlight the significant impact of the home environment on the academic success of ADM learners, influenced by socioeconomic status, family roles, and the allocation of responsibilities.

Coping Mechanisms Used to Combat Challenges in ADM Settings

Despite the numerous obstacles presented by the Alternative Delivery Mode (ADM) of learning, learners have demonstrated resilience by devising their strategies to cope and continue their educational journey. The responses revealed a variety of coping mechanisms that helped them manage the academic, emotional, and situational difficulties they faced.

Figure 2 below revealed three major themes that emerged from the participants' shared experiences. These include seeking support from teachers and advisers, engaging in self-directed learning and adaptation, and practicing motivational self-talk alongside perseverance.

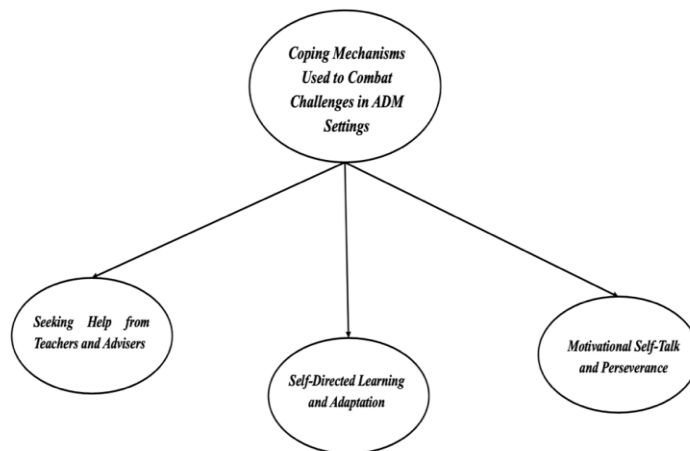


Figure 2. *Sub-themes on the Coping Mechanism*

Seeking Help from Teachers and Advisers

Many learners learned to reach out for help when they could no longer manage on their own. Teachers and advisers became crucial figures in their learning journey.

The participants shared,

“Niadto ko sa eskwelahan para mangayo og tabang, ug naningkamot pud ang mga magtutudlo nga mutudlo nako.” (I went to school to ask for help, and the teachers tried to guide me.) T2_L4_P2

“Mao to nga mas permi nako gitawagan og gipangayoan og tambag akong adviser.” (That’s when I had to reach out to my advisers more often.) T3_L6_P3

This willingness to reach out signaled a growing initiative among learners to overcome their limitations. Teacher support not only provided academic assistance but also offered emotional encouragement. The role of teachers and advisers is crucial for learners in Alternative Delivery Modes (ADM), especially when learners face academic or emotional difficulties. Research consistently highlights that perceived teacher affective support is strongly associated with increased student engagement and psychological well-being in distance learning contexts. In the Philippine setting, Sinuhin (2022) found a strong connection between affective teacher behaviors, such as expressing empathy and providing encouragement, and learners' cognitive and emotional engagement, particularly in STEM-focused distance education. On a broader scale, Barrot et al. (2021) found that Filipino learners often rely on help-seeking as a coping mechanism, with teacher responsiveness playing a vital role in sustaining learners' motivation and persistence in online learning environments. Also, Pastor et al. (2022) emphasized that learners' willingness to seek guidance, combined with the active support of teachers and advisers, enabled learners to manage modular distance learning more effectively, thereby preventing disengagement and misunderstandings.

Self-Directed Learning and Adaptation

Some learners turned to self-study as their primary strategy. With limited guidance, they sought alternative ways to understand lessons through self-practice and digital platforms.

“Ako ra gyud usa magpraktis, usahay motan-aw ko og mga video para mas masabtan nako ang leksyon.” (I practiced on my own, and sometimes I watched videos to understand better.) T2_L5_P1

“Naninkamot lang gyud ko nga maka-adjust, bisag hinay-hinay lang ang pagkat-on.” (I did my best to adjust and learn slowly.) T2_L4_P2

By relying on themselves and maximizing available resources, these learners adapted to their learning environment. Their efforts reflect

growing independence and perseverance. In Alternative Delivery Mode (ADM) environments, many learners adopted self-directed strategies to manage the limited instructional guidance. Research in the Philippine context shows that digital literacy and self-directed learning are strong predictors of success in online education, particularly among college learners in STEM programs. Pepito and Acledan (2022) found that learners with higher levels of digital competence and self-directed learning achieved better academic outcomes in remote learning settings. Similarly, Amorin and Orbino (2023) at West Visayas State University revealed that learners engaged in modular distance learning exhibited strong self-directed learning skills and academic self-efficacy, both of which were positively associated with their performance in course assessments. These findings emphasize that proactive approaches, such as effective time management, resourcefulness, and the strategic use of digital tools, enable learners to stay engaged and succeed even in remote or less-structured educational settings.

Motivational Self-Talk and Perseverance

When emotional challenges emerged, many learners turned inward for strength, using self-motivation and positive thinking to keep moving forward. Participants stated that,

“Gipahinumdoman nako akong kaugalingon nga kinahanglan ko magpadayon... bisan og lisod.” (I told myself I must continue... even if it's hard.) T2_L6_P3

“Ginaingnan nako akong kaugalingon kanunay kung ngano gusto nako mahuman og eskwela.” (I reminded myself why I want to finish school.) T3_L4_P2

In the context of Alternative Delivery Modes (ADM), learners who face emotional and psychological challenges often employ internal strategies, such as motivational self-talk and goal-oriented reminders, to persevere. Research indicates that motivational self-regulation serves as a key mediator between emotional support and academic engagement. Learners who practice positive self-instruction, such as telling themselves "I can do this" or "Keep going," tend to show greater persistence and enhanced well-being (Villar et al., 202). Additionally, studies on the use of positive self-talk as an educational intervention demonstrate that it can boost self-confidence, reduce anxiety, and improve learning outcomes, particularly for learners with disabilities (Latinjak et al., 2023). These findings underscore the importance of self-motivation and intentional self-reminders, which are integral to motivational self-talk, in enabling learners to stay focused on their academic goals and develop resilience in the face of adversity. This internal dialogue helps learners manage stress, overcome procrastination, and maintain a positive mindset despite challenges in the learning environment. Moreover, learners who regularly engage in motivational self-talk are more likely to exhibit self-regulation and confidence, which are essential traits for success in flexible learning settings such as ADM.

Learning Insights and Realizations of ADM Learners

Amidst the challenges and adjustments brought about by the Alternative Delivery Mode (ADM), learners gained meaningful insights that shaped their attitudes, values, and perspectives toward education and life. Their experiences, though difficult, offered opportunities for growth and reflection.

Figure 3 shows three core themes that emerged, highlighting the participants' key realizations: increased self-discipline and responsibility, a deepened appreciation for the value of education, and resilience coupled with gratitude for their support systems. These themes reflect the personal growth and strengthened mindset developed through their learning experiences.

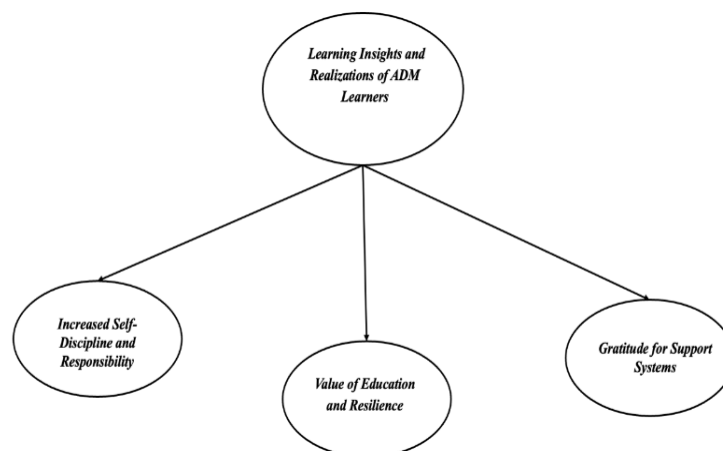


Figure 3. *Sub-themes on the Learning Insights*

Increased Self-Discipline and Responsibility

The ADM setup taught learners how to take responsibility for their learning. Without a teacher always present, they had to manage

their time and learning tasks independently.

“Nakat-on ko nga tarongon ang pag-manage sa oras ug mga buluhaton.” (I learned how to manage my time and tasks better.) T3_L8_P2

“Ang ADM nagtudlo nako nga dapat kabalo ko mudala sa akong kaugalingon nga responsibilidad.” (Being in ADM taught me how to be responsible on my own.) T2_L6_P3

This experience cultivated habits of discipline, independence, and time management, essential life skills that extend beyond the classroom. The experience of learning through Alternative Delivery Mode (ADM) cultivates important qualities such as self-discipline, independence, and effective time management. Without real-time supervision or fixed schedules, learners must engage in self-regulated learning by planning their tasks, setting their own pace, and adapting their strategies as needed. Empirical evidence supports this pattern. Klimova et al. (2022) found, in a systematic review, that successful self-regulated learning, particularly in timely planning and effort regulation, is closely linked to improved academic performance in online learning environments. Likewise, Pelikan et al. (2021) observed that learners with a strong sense of self-competence were better able to manage their time, organize academic tasks, and work independently toward their learning goals in distance education settings. These findings demonstrate how ADM contexts encourage learners to take ownership of their educational progress, developing greater responsibility and discipline that go beyond the traditional classroom.

Value of Education and Resilience

Through the hardship, learners came to appreciate education even more. They developed a stronger resolve to pursue learning despite difficulties.

“Ang ADM nagtudlo nako nga dapat kabalo ko mudala sa akong kaugalingon nga responsibilidad.” (Being in ADM taught me how to be responsible on my own.) T2_L9_P3

“Narealize nako nga bisan og daghan problema, kinahanglan gihapon nato paningkamotan ang atong mga damgo.” (I realized that even if we have problems, we should still fight for our dreams.) T1_L6_P1

“Mas na-appreciate nako ang skwela karon kay nakasabot ko nga lisod gyud kung ikaw ra usa magtuon.” (I appreciate school more now because I’ve seen how hard it is to learn on your own.) T3_L10_P2

Their experiences helped shape a deeper understanding of the role of education in achieving personal and family goals. Despite the challenges, learners in Alternative Delivery Mode (ADM) often developed a stronger appreciation for education and enhanced personal resilience. Many Filipino learners reported a renewed motivation to pursue their studies, viewing education as a vital pathway toward personal growth and improved family well-being. Supporting this perspective, Berdida and Grande (2023) found that resilience significantly buffered the adverse effects of academic stress on the quality of life among Filipino nursing learners during the COVID-19 pandemic. Analogously, Gaylo et al. (2022) described resilience in their study of learners stranded during lockdowns as a dynamic process that moved from confusion to determination, demonstrating how adversity contributed to the development of mental strength. In addition, Barrot et al. (2021) found that learners who assigned a high value to education were more likely to use coping strategies, such as help-seeking and effective time management, both of which enhanced academic motivation and engagement during remote learning.

Gratitude for Support Systems

Learners expressed profound gratitude to the people who stood by them. Whether it was a teacher, parent, or friend, the support they received helped them endure the challenges of ADM.

“Dako gyud kog pasalamat sa among mga magtutudlo, wala gyud sila niundang og suporta sa amo.” (I’m thankful for my teachers, they didn’t give up on us.) T2_L11_P3

“Gibilib nako ang mga tawo nga mitabang nako sa tunga sa akong mga kalisod.” (I value those who helped me during my struggles.) T3_L9_P1

These support systems became a source of strength, reminding learners that they were not alone in their journey. Support systems, including family, teachers, and peers, play a crucial role in sustaining learners' resilience and academic engagement, particularly in the challenging context of Alternative Delivery Modes (ADM). Numerous studies confirm that social support acts as a protective factor against stress, enhances psychological resilience, and fosters academic persistence. To support this, Huang and Zhang (2021) emphasized the importance of broad support mechanisms such as constructive feedback, encouragement, and digital communication, which help reduce psychological distance between teachers and learners and promote engagement and well-being. In a separate review, Asghar et al. (2021) noted that learners with strong support from family and peers demonstrated significantly higher levels of academic resilience, especially amid pandemic-related challenges. This finding implies that educational institutions must intentionally strengthen partnerships among families, teachers, and peer networks to build a support-rich environment that fosters learner retention, particularly for those at risk of dropping out in flexible learning setups like ADM.

While this study provides valuable insights into the challenges, coping strategies, and learning experiences of ADM learners, it is

limited by its small sample size and focus on a specific context, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Future research should involve larger, more diverse populations to better capture the varied experiences of ADM learners across regions and socioeconomic backgrounds. Despite these limitations, the findings underscore important implications for ADM policy and practice, highlighting the need for more explicit instructional materials, enhanced teacher accessibility, mental health support, flexible academic policies, and improved digital infrastructure. Addressing these areas can help create more equitable and supportive learning environments. Additionally, further studies exploring the long-term impact of ADM on learner outcomes and well-being will be critical in refining and optimizing alternative education delivery modes in the evolving educational landscape.

Conclusions

The findings indicate that the Alternative Delivery Mode (ADM) broadens educational access for learners with diverse life circumstances, yet significant challenges persist that limit its overall effectiveness. Learners continue to encounter barriers, including insufficient learning resources, emotional stress, and competing household responsibilities. Despite these constraints, the adaptive behaviors demonstrated by students show that ADM has the capacity to nurture independence and resilience when supported by strong, responsive learning structures.

These results emphasize the need for systemic and evidence-based enhancements to ADM rather than temporary or surface-level adjustments. Schools must cultivate learning environments that integrate sustained teacher mentorship, mental health support, and flexible, adaptive pedagogical strategies. Policymakers also play a crucial role by establishing clear quality standards, allocating sufficient resources, and maintaining continuous monitoring and evaluation to strengthen ADM's long-term viability. Re-envisioning ADM as a transformative approach to inclusive education aligns with national priorities and Sustainable Development Goal 4, ensuring equitable and high-quality learning opportunities for all students.

This study also recognizes its limitations, including reliance on self-reported data and the focus on a single ADM context, which may influence the generalizability of the results. Future research may benefit from broader sampling, the use of mixed-methods or longitudinal designs, and a deeper examination of socio-economic and contextual factors that shape ADM implementation.

Based on the findings of this study, several measures are proposed to strengthen the implementation and sustainability of the Alternative Delivery Mode (ADM). At the policy level, the Department of Education may prioritize developing a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework that establishes clear quality standards, ensures equitable allocation of learning resources, and integrates psychosocial and technological support systems. Evidence-based assessments should be promoted to guide ongoing policy refinement and maintain consistent implementation across schools and regions.

School administrators can reinforce ADM by creating responsive, school-based mechanisms such as teacher mentoring programs, flexible learning schedules, and systematic learner monitoring processes that address both academic and emotional needs. Partnerships with local government units, community organizations, and other institutions may be expanded to provide supplementary learning spaces, technology access, and additional resources that reduce learner disengagement.

Teachers may adopt adaptive, learner-centered strategies emphasizing mentoring, continuous formative assessment, and socio-emotional support. Engaging in ongoing professional development can further enhance instructional competence and the effective integration of digital tools to support communication and continuity of learning.

Families and community members also play a crucial role by fostering a supportive home-learning environment, monitoring learners' progress, and participating in community-driven initiatives such as peer tutoring, local learning hubs, and resource-sharing. Such collaboration reinforces shared responsibility for learner success and strengthens the broader learning ecosystem.

Finally, future researchers may examine the long-term effects of ADM on learners' academic performance, resilience, and life skills through longitudinal or experimental studies. Investigating socio-economic and contextual factors influencing ADM implementation can provide deeper insights to inform policy development and program improvement. Through these concerted efforts, ADM can evolve into a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable educational framework that empowers learners to overcome barriers and achieve lifelong learning.

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