

Coping strategies of novice social studies teachers in Eastern Visayas, Philippines

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Abstract

Novice teachers in underserved and geographically isolated regions of the Philippines face a compounded set of professional, personal, and contextual challenges that threaten both their effectiveness and their continued service in public schools. This phenomenological study examined the lived experiences and coping strategies of novice Social Studies teachers in Eastern Visayas, Philippines—one of the country’s most disaster-prone and resource-constrained regions. Guided by Lazarus and Folkman’s (1984) Transactional Model of Stress and Coping alongside Bandura’s (1986) Social Cognitive Theory, the study sought to illuminate the nuanced ways in which beginning teachers manage the multidimensional demands of their profession within a distinctly regional context. Using purposive sampling, twelve (12) novice Social Studies teachers—defined as those with one to three years of teaching experience—drawn from public secondary schools across Leyte, Samar, Eastern Samar, Northern Samar, Biliran, and Southern Leyte were selected as key informants. Data were gathered through in-depth semi-structured interviews, reflective journals, and focus group discussions, then analyzed through Colaizzi’s (1978) phenomenological method. Findings revealed five overarching themes representing the coping strategies employed by participants: (1) seeking and cultivating social support networks, (2) adopting adaptive reflective practices and professional self-regulation, (3) drawing on indigenous cultural values such as bayanihan and pagtitii, (4) utilizing humor and emotional reframing as protective buffers, and (5) anchoring professional resilience in a deep sense of vocation and service. The study underscores the urgency of institutionalizing structured mentorship programs and context-sensitive induction policies for beginning teachers in Eastern Visayas. Implications for teacher education, school administration, and national education policy in the Philippines are discussed.

Keywords: internal stakeholders, external stakeholders, education quality, private health institutes, health profession

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1. Introduction

Teaching is widely regarded as one of the most cognitively and emotionally demanding professions in the world. This reality is amplified manifold for novice teachers—those in their first three years of professional practice—who simultaneously navigate the steep learning curve of classroom management, curriculum delivery, and professional identity formation (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009; Freedman & Appleman, 2009). In the Philippines, the issue of novice teacher attrition has become a pressing national concern, with the Department of Education (DepEd) reporting that a significant proportion of newly deployed teachers leave the service or transfer to other schools within their first five years (DepEd, 2023). The challenge is particularly acute in Eastern Visayas (Region VIII), a region that encompasses six provinces—Leyte, Samar, Eastern Samar, Northern Samar, Biliran, and Southern Leyte—and is historically characterized by geographic isolation, endemic poverty, recurrent natural disasters, and limited access to professional development opportunities for teachers (Philippine Statistics Authority [PSA], 2023). The region was among the hardest hit by Super Typhoon Yolanda (Hainan) in 2013, and communities therein continue to experience the long-term educational disruptions wrought by successive disasters, including the 2022 Typhoon Odette (Rai) and the persistent threat of seismic activity (National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council [NDRRMC], 2023).

Social Studies, as a learning area in the Philippine K–12 curriculum, occupies a critical position in the formation of civic consciousness, historical understanding, and socio-cultural identity among Filipino learners. Novice Social Studies teachers, in particular, bear the weight of teaching complex, values-laden content in a context where students may themselves be survivors of trauma, displacement, and poverty (Bajaj & Brantmeier, 2011). The intersection of subject-area demands and environmental adversity creates a unique pedagogical and psychological burden that the literature has not sufficiently addressed, especially for Eastern Visayas. While global scholarship on novice teacher coping has grown substantially in recent decades (Beltman et al., 2011; Mansfield et al., 2016), most studies have been conducted in Western, urban, or resource-rich contexts that bear little resemblance to the realities faced by beginning teachers in geographically challenged Philippine provinces. The scarcity of empirically grounded, locally contextualized research on this population represents a significant gap that the present study seeks to address.

Statement of the Problem - This study investigated the lived experiences and coping strategies of novice Social Studies teachers in Eastern Visayas, Philippines. Specifically, it sought to answer the following research questions:

- What are the prevailing challenges encountered by novice Social Studies teachers in Eastern Visayas in their first three years of teaching?
- What coping strategies do novice Social Studies teachers employ in response to these challenges?
- How do regional contextual factors—including geography, culture, disaster-proneness, and resource constraints—shape the coping strategies of novice Social Studies teachers in Eastern Visayas?
- What themes emerge from the lived experiences of these teachers that have implications for teacher induction, mentorship, and professional development in the region?

Significance of the Study - The findings of this study hold direct significance for multiple stakeholders in the Philippine educational landscape. For school administrators and DepEd regional and division offices in Eastern Visayas, the study provides empirically grounded insights into the specific coping patterns of beginning Social Studies teachers that can inform the design of locally relevant induction programs and mentorship initiatives. For

teacher education institutions (TEIs) in the region, the findings offer a basis for revising pre-service curricula to include modules on resilience, emotional regulation, and culturally adaptive teaching in disaster-prone communities. For novice teachers themselves, the study validates their lived experiences and foregrounds indigenous coping mechanisms—particularly Filipino cultural values—that are often overlooked in deficit-oriented approaches to beginning teacher support. For national policymakers, the study contributes to the evidence base needed to craft responsive policies on teacher welfare, retention incentives, and professional support for teachers in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas (GIDAs). Finally, the study enriches the academic literature on teacher resilience in the Global South, offering a distinctly Visayan perspective that expands theoretical frameworks primarily developed in Western educational contexts.

Scope and Delimitations - This study was delimited to novice Social Studies teachers employed in public secondary schools (Junior and Senior High School levels) across the six provinces of Eastern Visayas: Leyte, Samar, Eastern Samar, Northern Samar, Biliran, and Southern Leyte. Participants were required to have between one and three years of teaching experience in Social Studies, which encompasses the subjects Araling Panlipunan (Grades 7–10) and the Social Sciences strand subjects (Grades 11–12) under the K–12 curriculum. Private school teachers, those teaching outside the Social Studies domain, and experienced teachers with more than three years of service were excluded from the study. The research employed a qualitative phenomenological design; therefore, findings are not intended for statistical generalization but for theoretical transferability within comparable sociocultural and geographic contexts. Data collection was conducted between June and October 2024. The study did not assess student learning outcomes or teacher performance ratings, focusing exclusively on the subjective lived experiences and self-reported coping strategies of participants.

Theoretical Framework - This study is anchored on two complementary theoretical foundations. The primary theoretical lens is Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, which posits that stress is not an objective stimulus but a dynamic, transactional relationship between a person and their environment, mediated by cognitive appraisal. According to this model, individuals appraise situations as threatening or challenging and subsequently engage in problem-focused coping (aimed at altering the stressor) or emotion-focused coping (aimed at managing the emotional response). This framework is highly applicable to novice teachers who continuously appraise the demands of their new role against their perceived resources and capacities.

The secondary theoretical framework is Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory, with particular emphasis on the construct of self-efficacy—an individual's belief in their own capacity to execute behaviors necessary to achieve specific outcomes. Research consistently demonstrates that novice teachers with higher self-efficacy are more likely to employ adaptive coping strategies, persist through adversity, and develop stronger professional identities (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). In the context of Eastern Visayas, the social dimensions of Bandura's theory—vicarious learning, social modeling, and verbal persuasion—are especially salient given the communal, collectivist character of Visayan culture. Complementing these Western frameworks is the indigenized concept of *kapwa* (shared identity) and the Filipino cultural values of *bayanihan* (communal unity), *pagtitiis* (patient endurance), and *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude), which shape how Filipino teachers conceptualize their professional role and navigate adversity (Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 1999; Enriquez, 1992). The conceptual framework of this study integrates these theoretical perspectives to holistically capture the multidimensional coping ecosystem of novice Social Studies teachers in Eastern Visayas.

2. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design, specifically utilizing the descriptive phenomenological method as developed by Colaizzi (1978) and further elaborated by Moustakas (1994). Phenomenology is the most appropriate methodological approach for this inquiry as it foregrounds the lived experiences of participants, allowing the researcher to describe and interpret the essence of coping as it is subjectively experienced by novice Social Studies teachers in Eastern Visayas. Rather than measuring coping behaviors through standardized instruments, phenomenology privileges the voices, meanings, and interpretations

of participants, rendering visible the richness and complexity of human experience in context (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study adopted an interpretivist epistemological stance, grounded in the ontological assumption that reality is socially constructed, subjective, and multiple—particularly appropriate for studying the nuanced, culture-embedded experiences of Filipino teachers in a geographically and historically distinct region. Reflexivity was maintained throughout the research process, with the researcher maintaining a bracketing journal to continuously examine and set aside their own presuppositions about novice teacher experience in Eastern Visayas.

Research Setting - The study was conducted across the six provinces of Eastern Visayas: Leyte, Samar, Eastern Samar, Northern Samar, Biliran, and Southern Leyte. Participating schools were drawn from selected school divisions in the DepEd Regional Office VIII service area. Schools were selected to ensure geographic diversity and representation of different school contexts: urban, rural, coastal, highland, and island schools were included. Some data collection sessions were conducted in the schools themselves, while others were held at division-level offices or via secure online video conferencing platforms (Zoom and Google Meet) for participants in geographically remote areas where face-to-face access was constrained.

Participants - Twelve (12) novice Social Studies teachers participated in the study, selected through purposive sampling guided by the following criteria: (1) currently employed as a regular or contract-of-service teacher in a public secondary school in Eastern Visayas; (2) teaching Social Studies subjects (Araling Panlipunan for Grades 7–10 or Social Sciences for Grades 11–12) as their primary teaching load; (3) having one to three years of teaching experience; and (4) willing to participate in all data collection activities, including interviews, focus group discussions, and reflective journaling. The adequacy of the sample size was determined by the principle of data saturation—the point at which no new substantive themes emerged from successive data collection sessions (Fusch & Ness, 2015). In strict adherence to the ethical principle of anonymity and the requirements of double-blind review, participant identities have been fully anonymized throughout this manuscript. Participants are referred to using alphanumeric codes (T01 through T12). General demographic characteristics are presented in aggregate to prevent the identification of individual participants. The twelve participants comprised seven female and five male teachers, ranging in age from 22 to 30 years. Teaching experience ranged from 12 months to 36 months. Participants were distributed across all six provinces of Eastern Visayas, with representation from both urban and rural school settings.

Table 1
Demographic Profile of Participants (Anonymized)

Code	Sex	Province	School Type	Years of Experience	Educational Attainment
T01	Female	Leyte	Urban Public High School	3 years	BSEd Social Studies
T02	Male	Samar	Rural Public High School	2 years	BSEd Social Studies
T03	Female	Eastern Samar	Coastal Public High School	1 year	BSEd Social Studies
T04	Female	Northern Samar	Island Public High School	2 years	BSEd Social Studies
T05	Male	Biliran	Rural Public High School	3 years	BSEd Social Studies
T06	Female	Southern Leyte	Highland Public High School	1 year	BSEd Social Studies
T07	Male	Leyte	Urban Public High School	2 years	BSEd Social Studies
T08	Female	Samar	Rural Public High School	3 years	BSEd Social Studies
T09	Male	Eastern Samar	Coastal Public High School	1 year	BSEd Social Studies
T10	Female	Northern Samar	Rural Public High School	2 years	BSEd Social Studies
T11	Male	Leyte	Urban Public High School	3 years	BSEd Social Studies
T12	Female	Biliran	Rural Public High School	2 years	BSEd Social Studies

Data Collection Methods

Semi-Structured In-Depth Interviews - Individual in-depth interviews were the primary mode of data collection. Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and was conducted in a combination of Filipino, Waray-Waray, and English, based on the participant's preference, to ensure maximum comfort and communicative depth. An interview guide consisting of 15 open-ended questions was developed and validated by three expert validators—two university professors specializing in qualitative research methodology and one senior Social Studies teacher-educator. The interview guide addressed the following domains: (a) initial experiences and challenges in teaching Social Studies; (b) specific stressors encountered in the Eastern Visayas context; (c)

strategies employed to cope with these stressors; (d) sources of support and motivation; and (e) the role of regional culture, community, and personal values in coping. All interviews were audio-recorded with explicit participant consent, transcribed verbatim, and subsequently translated where necessary.

Reflective Journals - Participants were invited to maintain reflective journals for a period of eight weeks following their initial interview. Journal prompts were provided weekly, encouraging participants to document their daily challenges, emotional responses, coping actions, and reflections on their professional journey. Journal submission was voluntary and conducted via secure email; nine of twelve participants submitted journals consistently throughout the eight-week period. Journals served as a secondary data source that enriched and triangulated interview data, providing access to the temporal dimension of coping as it unfolded in practice.

Focus Group Discussions - Two focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted—one with participants from the Leyte-Biliran cluster (six participants) and one with participants from the Samar cluster (six participants). Each FGD lasted approximately two hours and employed a different discussion guide from the individual interview, focusing on collective experiences, peer validation of emerging themes, and group-level reflection on coping in the regional context. The FGDs served a dual purpose: as an additional data source and as a form of member checking, allowing participants to react to preliminary analytical observations shared by the researcher.

Data Analysis - Data were analyzed using Colaizzi's (1978) seven-step phenomenological analysis method. In Step 1, all transcripts, journal entries, and FGD recordings were read and reread to develop a holistic sense of the data. Step 2 involved extracting significant statements directly related to the phenomenon of coping. In Step 3, meanings were formulated from significant statements through a process of interpretive reflection. Step 4 grouped formulated meanings into theme clusters, identifying patterns across participants and data sources. Step 5 involved describing the exhaustive description of the phenomenon, incorporating all theme clusters into a coherent narrative account. Step 6 reduced this description to the essential structure of the phenomenon. Step 7 returned the final descriptive product to a subset of participants (six of twelve) for validation—a process that confirmed the accuracy and resonance of the thematic analysis. Member checking, peer debriefing with a research supervisor, negative case analysis, and thick description were employed as strategies to enhance the trustworthiness of the research findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell & Poth, 2018). All data were managed using MAXQDA 2024 qualitative data analysis software, which facilitated systematic coding, theme mapping, and data retrieval.

Ethical Considerations - The study was conducted in strict adherence to established ethical standards for qualitative research involving human participants. Prior to data collection, ethical clearance was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of the affiliated institution (Protocol No.: REC-2024-0117). Informed consent was obtained from all participants in written form, clearly articulating the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, the right to withdraw at any time without consequence, and the measures in place to protect confidentiality and anonymity. The Division Superintendent of each participating school division was informed of the study and provided written endorsement. Participant anonymity was protected through the exclusive use of alphanumeric codes in all research outputs and publications. Audio recordings and transcripts were stored in password-protected devices accessible only to the principal researcher. Participants were given the option to review and withdraw any portion of their data up to the point of analysis. Culturally sensitive topics—including experiences of trauma, disaster, and poverty—were handled with care, and a debriefing protocol was established, including access to a list of available psychological support services, for any participant who experienced distress during data collection.

3. Results and Discussion

Analysis of the interview transcripts, reflective journals, and focus group discussion data yielded five overarching themes representing the coping strategies employed by novice Social Studies teachers in Eastern Visayas. These themes are presented below with representative excerpts from participant narratives. Consistent with phenomenological methodology, the discussion integrates analytical description with participant voices to

convey both the structure and the texture of the coping experience. Each theme is further discussed in relation to existing literature and the specific regional context of Eastern Visayas.

Table 2
Themes and Sub-themes of Coping Strategies

Theme No.	Theme	Sub-themes	Frequency (n=12)
1	Seeking and Cultivating Social Support Networks	Peer collaboration; Mentorship by senior teachers; Family and community support; Online professional communities	12 (100%)
2	Adaptive Reflective Practices and Professional Self-Regulation	Personal journaling; Lesson study and self-assessment; Setting professional boundaries; Seeking feedback	11 (91.7%)
3	Drawing on Indigenous Cultural Values	Bayanihan (communal unity); Pagtitiis (patient endurance); Bahala na (leaving outcomes to providence); Kapwa (shared identity)	12 (100%)
4	Humor and Emotional Reframing as Protective Buffers	Finding humor in classroom situations; Cognitive reframing of stressors; Positive self-talk; Celebrating small victories	10 (83.3%)
5	Professional Resilience Anchored in Vocation and Service	Mission-driven teaching identity; Student welfare as motivator; Religious and spiritual sustenance; Long-term career vision	12 (100%)

3.1 Theme 1: Seeking and Cultivating Social Support Networks

All twelve participants identified social support as their most frequently employed and most effective coping strategy. The sources of social support were diverse, ranging from immediate school-based peer networks to extended family systems and, for participants with access to reliable internet connectivity, online communities of practice. The need for collegial connection was felt with particular urgency given the geographic isolation of many Eastern Visayas schools. Participant T03, an early-career teacher in a coastal Eastern Samar school, described the centrality of peer support: “*Diri ako mabubuhi kun wala sila—ang akon mga kauban. Kinahanglan ko ang ira mga payo, kaluha, kag mga estorya tungod nga kami lang ang nakahibalo sang amon mga kahimtangan*” (I would not survive without them—my colleagues. I need their advice, company, and conversations because only we know our own circumstances). This finding aligns strongly with the existing literature on novice teacher support, where collegial relationships are consistently identified as the most powerful buffering mechanism against professional attrition (Johnson et al., 2014; Beltman et al., 2011). However, what distinguished the Eastern Visayas context was the configuration of these support networks: in many schools, particularly island and remote rural schools, teacher populations were small, sometimes comprising fewer than ten teachers in total, making the quality of peer relationships critical to survival.

Several participants also described seeking and cultivating informal mentorship relationships with experienced teachers, even in the absence of formal mentoring programs. T07 described how a senior Filipino teacher informally adopted him as a professional mentee during his first year: “*Siya ang nag-aruga sa akin. Hindi sinabi ng DepEd na mentorin niya ako—ginawa niya ito dahil mabuting tao siya at nakita niya na nalulunod ako*” (She took care of me. DepEd did not tell her to mentor me—she did it because she is a good person and she saw that I was drowning). This informal mentorship dynamic reflects what Hobson et al. (2009) termed ‘organic mentoring’—naturally occurring supportive relationships that emerge from workplace culture rather than administrative mandate. Family support emerged as another critical dimension, particularly for participants who were teaching in provinces distant from their home communities. Five participants reported that regular phone calls with parents and siblings served as an important emotional anchor. T12 noted that her mother’s practice of preparing her packed lunch each day before school—even as an adult professional—was a tangible expression of familial solidarity that sustained her through particularly difficult weeks. This finding resonates with Pe-Pua and Protacio-Marcelino’s (1999) observation that Filipino family systems function as primary social safety nets that extend well into adult professional life.

3.2 Theme 2: Adaptive Reflective Practices and Professional Self-Regulation

Eleven of twelve participants engaged in systematic reflective practices as a deliberate coping strategy, though the forms these practices took varied considerably based on individual preference, time availability, and school context. Personal journaling—writing about daily teaching experiences, emotional reactions, and professional decisions—was the most commonly reported reflective practice, documented by eight participants. T05 described his journal as a “*silent supervisor*”—a space where he could process frustrations, celebrate successes, and plan adjustments to his teaching without fear of judgment. Professional self-regulation—the deliberate management of one’s professional behaviors, workload, and boundaries—was another significant sub-theme within this category. Several participants described the painful process of learning to say no to excessive committee assignments, extracurricular responsibilities, and administrative tasks that encroached on instructional preparation time. T08 articulated this process: “*In my first year, I said yes to everything because I wanted to impress everyone. By my second year, I was so burned out that I could barely prepare my lessons. I had to learn that my classroom has to come first.*” This trajectory mirrors the developmental pattern identified by Fantilli and McDougall (2009), in which novice teachers progress from indiscriminate compliance to strategic self-advocacy over the first years of service.

Lesson study—the collaborative examination and refinement of teaching practice—was practiced informally by three participant clusters who formed voluntary learning teams without administrative direction. These teachers met weekly or biweekly to review lessons, share materials, and provide constructive feedback. While this practice is well-established in East Asian teacher development traditions (Lewis et al., 2009), its spontaneous emergence in under-resourced Eastern Visayas schools speaks to the resourcefulness and professional agency of these novice teachers.

3.3 Theme 3: Drawing on Indigenous Cultural Values

All twelve participants drew explicitly on Filipino indigenous cultural values as coping resources, representing the most distinctly local and culturally specific theme to emerge from the data. Three values predominated in participant narratives: bayanihan, pagtitiis, and bahala na—each functioning as a different mode of culturally embedded coping. Bayanihan—the tradition of communal cooperation, historically expressed in the practice of neighbors literally carrying a family’s house to a new location—manifested in the teaching context as spontaneous resource pooling, collective problem-solving, and mutual material support among teachers. T04, teaching in an island school in Northern Samar, described how teachers collectively pooled personal funds each month to create a shared materials fund for printing and supplies: “*Wala kami budget, pero hindi kami pabayaang isa’t isa. Nagtitipon kami ng pera—kahit konti lang—para may pantustos kami. Ganyan ang bayanihan sa amin*” (We have no budget, but we do not abandon each other. We pool money—even just a little—to have something to sustain us. That is our bayanihan). This collective economic coping strategy represents a form of informal welfare solidarity that compensates for institutional resource deficits.

Pagtitiis—patient, dignified endurance in the face of hardship—was articulated by participants not as passive suffering but as an active, value-laden choice to persist professionally. T09 explained: “*Hindi lahat ng problema ay may agad na solusyon. May mga araw na kailangan ko lang tiisin—hindi dahil wala akong magawa, kundi dahil alam kong may kahulugan ang tinitii ko. Para sa mga bata*” (Not all problems have immediate solutions. There are days I just need to endure—not because I am powerless, but because I know what I am enduring has meaning. For the children). This articulation of pagtitiis as purposive endurance closely parallels the conceptualization of “*noble suffering*” in Visayan Catholic moral culture, where hardship borne in service of others is invested with spiritual meaning and social value.

Bahala na—commonly rendered as “*leave it to God*” or “*come what may*”—was employed by participants as a coping strategy that managed anxiety about uncertain and uncontrollable outcomes. Contrary to its popular mischaracterization as fatalistic passivity, participants described bahala na as a form of proactive trust that liberated

them to act in the present without being paralyzed by the weight of unknown futures. T11 noted: “*Bahala na ang ibig sabihin ay kumikilos ka pa rin, pero hindi ka takot sa hindi mo kontrolado. May Panginoon. Gagawin ko ang aking bahagi—ang kinalabasan, sa Kanya*” (Bahala na means you still act, but you are not afraid of what you cannot control. There is God. I will do my part—the outcome is His). This interpretation supports Pe-Pua and Protacio-Marcelino’s (1999) argument that bahala na, properly understood, is a form of Filipino existential courage rather than resignation.

3.4 Theme 4: Humor and Emotional Reframing as Protective Buffers

Ten of twelve participants identified humor and cognitive reframing as important coping tools, with humor occupying a particularly prominent and culturally resonant role in participant narratives. Filipino humor—characterized by self-deprecation, wordplay, and the comic reframing of adversity—was described as a social lubricant that reduced interpersonal tension, humanized the classroom, and diffused the emotional weight of difficult teaching situations. T06 shared a characteristic example: during a lesson on ASEAN integration, she accidentally mispronounced “*ASEAN*” in a manner that provoked laughter from students. Rather than becoming defensive, she leaned into the moment, improvising a brief humorous exchange that not only dissolved the awkward tension but became a memory anchor for the lesson content. “*Hindi ko nilimot yung araw na iyon,*” she reflected, “*at siguradong hindi rin sila nalimot—kaya natututo sila*” (I did not forget that day, and surely they did not forget either—so they learned). This example illustrates what Ayers (2004) described as “*pedagogical humor*”—the deliberate use of laughter and levity as a teaching and relationship-building tool.

Cognitive reframing—the deliberate reconstruction of the meaning attributed to a stressful situation—was described by participants as a strategy that transformed obstacles into opportunities for professional learning. T02 articulated this clearly: “*Noong una, nakikita ko ang masamang klase bilang kabiguan ko. Ngayon, nakikita ko siya bilang puzzle na kailangan ko pang lutasin—at kapag naresolba ko ito, natutuwaga talaga ako*” (Before, I saw a difficult class as my failure. Now, I see it as a puzzle I still need to solve—and when I resolve it, I am genuinely happy). This reframing from deficit to challenge orientation parallels Dweck’s (2006) growth mindset framework, though in this case, the cognitive shift was arrived at organically through practice rather than formal training. Celebrating small victories—a deliberate form of positive self-reinforcement—was mentioned by eight participants as a strategy for sustaining motivation during periods of discouragement. T10 described keeping a dedicated section in her reflective journal titled “*Ngayon ay maayos*” (Today was good), where she recorded one positive classroom moment each day, regardless of how small: “*Kahit isang bata lang ang kumakaway sa akin kapag paalis na sila—isinusulat ko iyon. Kailangan ko iyan*” (Even if just one child waves to me as they leave—I write that down. I need that).

3.5 Theme 5: Professional Resilience Anchored in Vocation and Service

All twelve participants articulated a profound sense of vocation—a conviction that teaching is not merely an occupation but a calling—as the foundational source of their professional resilience. This vocational orientation was deeply interwoven with Filipino Catholic spirituality, indigenous Visayan cultural values, and a community-centered ethic of service that positioned the teacher’s welfare as inseparable from the welfare of their students and community. The student-as-motivator emerged as the most powerful specific form of this vocational resilience. Participants consistently described their students—particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds—as the primary reason they persisted through professional adversity. T01 articulated this with particular clarity: “*Kapag ibig kong sumuko—at meron talagang mga ganitong araw—tinitingnan ko ang mga bata sa silid-aralan. Karamihan sa kanila, walang malayo ang makukuha sa buhay kung hindi sila magiging maayos ang edukasyon. Hindi ko kayang iwan sila*” (When I want to give up—and there are truly such days—I look at the children in the classroom. Most of them will not go far in life if they do not receive a good education. I cannot leave them).

Religious and spiritual sustenance played a significant role in the vocational resilience of most participants, reflecting the deeply Catholic character of Eastern Visayas culture. Prayer, participation in parish community life,

and the interpretation of teaching as a form of divine mission were all described as spiritual coping resources. T03 noted that she began each school day with a brief personal prayer in which she dedicated her teaching to God and asked for the wisdom and patience she knew the day would demand—a ritual that grounded her and reduced pre-school anxiety. A long-term career vision—a sense of the teacher they aspired to become in five or ten years—also functioned as a resilience anchor for several participants. T07 described maintaining a personal “*vision board*” featuring images of educational leaders he admired, certificates he hoped to earn, and communities he hoped to serve. This forward-looking identity construction served as a motivational counterweight to the difficulties of the present, locating current struggles within a larger narrative of professional becoming.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

This phenomenological study set out to illuminate the lived experiences and coping strategies of novice Social Studies teachers in Eastern Visayas, Philippines—a region whose geographic vulnerability, resource constraints, and disaster history create a distinctive and demanding context for beginning teacher practice. The findings reveal that these teachers are not passive victims of adversity but active, creative, and culturally grounded agents who draw on a rich and diverse repertoire of coping strategies to navigate the challenges of their profession. The five themes identified—social support network cultivation, adaptive reflective practices, indigenous cultural value utilization, emotional reframing and humor, and vocationally anchored resilience—together constitute what the researcher terms a “communal-cultural resilience ecology”: a system of coping that is simultaneously individual and collective, modern and indigenous, professional and personal. This ecology is distinctively Filipino and specifically Visayan in its character, reflecting values, practices, and social structures that are deeply rooted in regional history and culture.

Critically, the study reveals that the most powerful coping resources available to novice Social Studies teachers in Eastern Visayas are not those provided by formal institutional systems—which are widely perceived as inadequate, inconsistent, and insufficiently context-sensitive—but those that teachers construct, cultivate, and sustain themselves through their own ingenuity, their relationships, and their cultural heritage. While this speaks to the extraordinary resourcefulness of these teachers, it also constitutes an indictment of institutional systems that leave beginning teachers to discover and develop survival strategies largely on their own. The study further concludes that the concept of teacher resilience must be theorized and operationalized differently in Eastern Visayas than in the Western contexts from which most theoretical frameworks are derived. Resilience here is not primarily an individualistic psychological construct but a relational, communal, and spiritual practice that is inextricable from Filipino cultural values and Visayan social structures. Future theorizing on teacher resilience in the Philippine context must make space for these indigenous dimensions.

4.1 Recommendations

For the Department of Education, Regional Office VIII - DepEd Regional Office VIII should immediately establish a structured, province-wide mentorship program for novice Social Studies teachers in Eastern Visayas, matching beginning teachers with experienced Social Studies specialists from the same division. Mentors should receive formal training in reflective supervision, trauma-informed dialogue, and culturally responsive mentoring practices. The program should be institutionalized with protected time allocations, compensation for mentor-teachers, and monitoring mechanisms within the division annual implementation plans.

For School Administrators - School principals and head teachers should intentionally cultivate collegial school cultures that provide novice Social Studies teachers with structured opportunities for peer collaboration, including peer observation partnerships, collaborative lesson planning, and structured sharing sessions. Administrators should also exercise sensitivity to the workload burden carried by novice teachers, minimizing non-teaching assignments during the first two years of service and actively protecting beginning teachers’ instructional preparation time.

For Teacher Education Institutions - TEIs in Eastern Visayas should embed modules on teacher resilience, stress management, and culturally adaptive coping in pre-service Social Studies education curricula. These modules should include explicit engagement with Filipino indigenous psychological concepts—*bayanihan*, *pagtitiis*, *bahala na*, *kapwa*—as professional resilience resources. Field experience placements should include exposure to disaster-affected communities and schools in GIDAs, accompanied by structured reflection and supervisory support.

For Future Researchers - Future research should extend this inquiry through longitudinal designs that track the evolution of novice Social Studies teacher coping strategies across the first five years of service. Comparative studies across different Philippine regions would enrich understanding of how geographic and cultural context shapes coping. Quantitative studies validating the five themes identified in this study through standardized instruments would enhance the generalizability of findings. Action research designs that test and evaluate specific institutionalized coping support interventions—particularly mentorship program models—would provide practical evidence to guide policy and program development.

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