



Challenges and Coping Strategies of Teachers in Handling Learners with Special Educational Needs: Implications for an Intervention Scheme

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the challenges and coping strategies of teachers handling learners with special educational needs (LSEN) and aimed to develop a context-responsive guide to coping strategies. Specifically, it identified teachers' demographic profile, the level of challenges across key areas, the extent of problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies, and the relationship between challenges and coping strategies. The study used a quantitative-descriptive correlational research design. Data were gathered through a structured survey questionnaire administered to [number] teachers handling LSEN. The study used frequency, percentage, and weighted mean to describe the respondents and determine the levels of challenges and coping strategies, and correlation analysis to determine the relationship between the variables. Results showed that most respondents were female, mid-career teachers, and bachelor's degree holders. Teachers experienced low to moderate challenges overall, with instructional implementation and managing diverse learner behaviors identified as notable areas of difficulty. Teachers also reported time constraints and contextual demands as key concerns, while they generally rated institutional support as adequate. Teachers reported high use of both problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies. Correlation analysis showed a significant moderate negative relationship between the level of challenges and coping strategies ($r = -0.411$, $p = 0.001$), indicating that higher levels of reported coping strategies were associated with lower levels of perceived challenges. The findings suggest that although teachers use different coping strategies to manage the demands of teaching LSEN, structural and contextual concerns remain. The study therefore recommends developing a context-responsive coping strategies guide to provide practical support for teachers in managing challenges related to inclusive education.

Keywords: Coping strategies; Correlational study; Inclusive education; Learners with Special Educational Needs; Teacher challenges.

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is grounded in the principle that every learner has the right to equitable access, meaningful participation, and appropriate support within the general education system. It goes beyond simply placing learners with special educational needs (LSENs) in regular classrooms; it requires schools to remove barriers, adapt instruction, and provide services that respond to differences in learners' communication, behavior, cognition, mobility, and social-emotional functioning. In this context, teachers play a central role because the success of inclusion largely depends on their ability to recognize individual needs, modify instruction, manage diverse classrooms, and collaborate with families and specialists.

In the Philippines, the commitment to inclusive education was strengthened through Republic Act No. 11650, formally known as the *Instituting a Policy of Inclusion and Services for Learners With Disabilities in Support of Inclusive Education Act*. Signed into law on March 11, 2022, the Act provides that no learner may be denied



admission to a public or private basic education school because of disability. It also requires the Department of Education (DepEd), in collaboration with local government units, to establish and maintain at least one Inclusive Learning Resource Center (ILRC) in every city and municipality based on a multi-year implementation roadmap and the availability of resources (Republic Act No. 11650, 2022). This policy builds on DepEd Order No. 44, series of 2021, which directs schools to organize and deliver appropriate assessment, educational programs, curriculum adaptations, interventions, and support services for learners with disabilities (Department of Education, 2021).

An ILRC is envisioned as more than a traditional special education classroom or center. It may operate as a physical or virtual support hub equipped with accessible instructional materials, assistive devices, assessment instruments, and personnel who can provide educational, medical, rehabilitation, and allied professional services. Each center is expected to have an ILRC supervisor and a multidisciplinary team that may include special needs teachers, psychologists, guidance counselors, developmental pediatricians, physical therapists, occupational therapists, speech-language specialists, and other professionals. These services support the assessment, placement, individualized education planning, intervention, and ongoing development of learners with disabilities (Republic Act No. 11650, 2022). Thus, inclusive education requires cooperation among regular classroom teachers, special needs teachers, families, school administrators, health professionals, and community institutions.

The urgency of providing these services is reflected in national disability-registration data. As of June 17, 2025, more than 2.5 million Filipinos were registered as persons with disabilities, representing a 35% increase from the previous year. The reported categories included speech impairment with 335,763 registered cases; psychosocial disability with 314,210; visual disability with 251,302; mental disability with 152,762; intellectual disability with 137,491; deafness or difficulty hearing with 129,021; cancer with 110,880; learning disability with 102,623; and rare diseases with 49,112 (Cabalza, 2025). This demonstrates the diversity and scale of conditions that the Philippine education system may encounter.

Many disabilities and special educational needs are not immediately apparent. A learner may not display visible physical signs but may experience considerable difficulty with language processing, communication, attention, emotional regulation, social interaction, reading, writing, mathematics, memory, or adaptive functioning. Consequently, teachers with limited preparation in disability-responsive assessment and instruction may overlook or misunderstand some learning and behavioral difficulties. Compassion, patience, and the Filipino ethic of care remain valuable qualities, but these alone may not be sufficient. Effective inclusion also requires specialized knowledge, appropriate teaching strategies, adequate learning resources, manageable workloads, and access to professional and institutional support.

Philippine studies indicate that teachers frequently face gaps between inclusive education policies and classroom realities. Allam and Martin (2021), in a qualitative study of special education teachers in the City Division of Ilagan, found that teachers encountered difficulties with instructional delivery, learner behavior, limited resources, and the varied needs of learners with disabilities. In the Division of Biñan City, Mercado and Regencia (2023) similarly found that teachers faced challenges in instructional preparation and selecting appropriate strategies. Although teachers demonstrated dedication and resilience, the authors emphasized the need for systematic training, sufficient funding, instructional materials, and school-based support.

Quizana and Espiritu (2023) reported comparable findings among teachers implementing inclusive education in public elementary schools in Quezon. The teachers encountered behavioral and communication difficulties, inadequate instructional materials, limited parental involvement, and learner absenteeism. To address these concerns, they used differentiated instruction, visual aids, simplified and repeated directions, structured routines, peer tutoring, positive reinforcement, professional learning, emotional regulation, and assistance from colleagues. These findings show that teachers' responses involve both instructional adaptations and personal coping efforts.

In a study of 150 teachers in regular classrooms, Formanes and Caliba (2024) identified limited parental support, insufficient knowledge of special and inclusive education, and inadequate resources as important cha-



llenges. The researchers recommended assigning qualified special education teachers, conducting continuing professional development, increasing parental and community involvement, and fostering supportive working environments. More recently, Punzalan et al. (2025) found that limited teaching resources and large class sizes were among the most pressing difficulties reported by teachers handling LSENs. Teachers commonly used peer collaboration and self-directed learning as coping strategies, while training and teaching aides were among their strongest support needs. The reported positive relationships among challenges, coping strategies, and perceived support needs further indicate that teachers tend to mobilize more coping responses and seek greater assistance as classroom demands increase.

International studies reinforce the importance of teacher preparation and continuing support. Humphrey and Symes (2013) found that teachers' knowledge, experience, and access to teaching assistants affected the inclusion of learners with autism in mainstream secondary schools. Similarly, Segall and Campbell (2012) reported that although education professionals generally held favorable attitudes toward inclusion, their knowledge and experience influenced their awareness and use of evidence-based classroom practices. Chao et al. (2017) further demonstrated that focused professional training could improve teachers' self-efficacy in applying inclusive teaching and classroom management strategies. Collectively, these studies suggest that supportive attitudes must be accompanied by practical competence, experience, collaboration, and access to appropriate resources.

The responsibilities associated with inclusive education may also affect teachers' psychological well-being. Special education teachers commonly experience stress arising from large caseloads, multiple professional roles, learner behavior, pressure to improve academic performance, paperwork, and uncertainty regarding available support (Cancio et al., 2018). In an international study involving special education teachers in Indonesia and Thailand, Sujarwanto et al. (2024) found high levels of perceived work stress and burnout symptoms and showed that these conditions could negatively affect teaching practice. When teachers perceive that classroom demands exceed their available time, knowledge, resources, and emotional capacity, they may become vulnerable to exhaustion and reduced teaching effectiveness. Understanding how teachers cope with these demands is therefore important not only for their well-being but also for the quality and sustainability of inclusive education.

The present study is anchored in behavioral theory, particularly Skinner's (1953) explanation of operant conditioning. From this perspective, observable behavior is influenced by its consequences, and behaviors followed by reinforcing outcomes are more likely to recur. In inclusive classrooms, teachers may apply behavioral principles through clear expectations, consistent routines, immediate feedback, task analysis, modeling, and positive reinforcement. These practices can help teachers encourage participation, communication, self-regulation, and other desirable classroom behaviors. Behavioral theory is relevant to the present study because classroom management and learner behavior are recurring challenges reported by teachers, while positive reinforcement and structured routines are strategies commonly used in inclusive settings (Quizana & Espiritu, 2023). The theory therefore provides a framework for examining how teachers respond to learner behavior and how classroom consequences may shape future responses.

The study is also anchored in the transactional theory of stress and coping developed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). The theory explains that stress does not arise solely from an event; rather, it develops through an individual's appraisal of the situation and the resources available to manage it. Primary appraisal involves evaluating whether a situation is threatening, harmful, or challenging, while secondary appraisal involves determining whether sufficient personal and environmental resources are available. Coping refers to the cognitive and behavioral efforts used to manage demands that are perceived as taxing or exceeding one's resources.

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) broadly distinguished between problem-focused and emotion-focused coping. Problem-focused coping aims to manage or modify the source of stress. Among teachers handling LSENs, it may include adapting lesson plans, differentiating instruction, developing visual materials, seeking professional training, collaborating with parents or special needs teachers, requesting administrative assistance, and organizing classroom support. Emotion-focused coping, in contrast, aims to regulate the emotional effects



of a stressful situation through strategies such as seeking emotional support, reflecting positively on one's experiences, resting, practicing self-care, or reframing a difficulty as an opportunity for professional growth. Teachers may use both approaches simultaneously because some classroom problems can be addressed directly, whereas others depend on institutional resources or conditions beyond an individual teacher's immediate control.

Although previous Philippine studies have documented teachers' challenges and coping responses, their findings are shaped by the resources, learner profiles, and support systems available in their respective locations. Recent research has also begun examining challenges and coping strategies together, but evidence remains limited regarding how these experiences manifest among teachers in Palo District I within the evolving implementation of Republic Act No. 11650. District-specific evidence is necessary because national policies may be implemented differently depending on teacher preparation, class size, access to ILRC services, availability of specialists, parental participation, and administrative support.

The researcher's experience as an LSEN teacher also provided the study's practical impetus. Teachers already carry substantial responsibilities in delivering quality education to learners in regular classrooms, and these responsibilities become more complex when they must address diverse educational, behavioral, communication, and emotional needs without adequate preparation or assistance. Accordingly, this study identified the challenges teachers encounter and the coping strategies they use in handling learners with special educational needs. Through the combined lenses of behavioral theory and stress and coping theory, the study sought to generate evidence to guide teacher training, classroom interventions, resource allocation, school-based support, and the continued implementation of inclusive education in Palo District I.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative descriptive-correlational research design to examine the challenges encountered by general education teachers in handling learners with special educational needs (LSENs), the coping strategies they employ, and their perceived training and institutional support needs. The descriptive component determined the level of challenges and coping strategies reported by the respondents, while the correlational component examined the statistical association between these variables. The study did not involve experimental manipulation; therefore, the relationships identified were interpreted as associations rather than causal effects. A quantitative approach was appropriate because the variables were measured using structured indicators that could be summarized and statistically analyzed.

Research Locale

The study was conducted in Palo District I, Leyte, Philippines, under the supervision of the Department of Education. The district comprises elementary schools that serve diverse learners, including learners with special educational needs who are educated alongside their peers in mainstream classrooms. The participating schools were selected because their general education teachers had direct experience in handling LSENs. The research setting provided an appropriate context for examining the classroom challenges, coping strategies, and support needs associated with inclusive education.

Research Respondents

The study population consisted of 75 general education teachers in Palo District I, Leyte. From this population, 60 teachers who were handling learners with special educational needs (LSENs) were purposively selected as participants. Purposive sampling was employed because the study specifically required respondents with direct and relevant experience in handling LSENs in their classrooms. Thus, eligibility for participation was based on the teacher's actual assignment to a class with at least one LSEN during the study period.

All 60 purposively selected teachers participated in the study and successfully completed the questionnaire, resulting in a 100% response rate among the selected sample. Relative to the total population of 75 teachers,



the participating teachers represented 80.0% of the teacher population. The remaining 15 teachers were not included because they did not meet the study's inclusion criterion of handling LSENs. The inclusion criteria were: (1) being a general education teacher assigned to an elementary school in Palo District I; (2) handling at least one LSEN during the study period; and (3) voluntarily agreeing to participate and providing informed consent. Teachers who did not handle LSENs during the study period or who did not provide informed consent were excluded.

Research Instrument

The study utilized a modified researcher-made questionnaire adapted from Formanes and Caliba (2024) and informed by Macmbinji and Anika (2018). Formanes and Caliba (2024) developed and piloted a questionnaire for examining challenges and coping mechanisms among teachers handling learners with special needs. Their instrument included dimensions related to challenges in teaching facilitation, assistance at school, and assistance at home. Macmbinji and Anika (2018), meanwhile, examined teachers' challenges and coping mechanisms in educating learners with disabilities and identified teacher capacity and available support as important concerns. For the present study, relevant items were adapted, modified, and contextualized to reflect the experiences of general education teachers handling learners with special educational needs in Palo District I. The resulting questionnaire comprised sections on the respondents' demographic and professional characteristics, challenges encountered in handling LSENs, coping strategies, and institutional support-related challenges and needs. The challenge indicators covered Concentration in Teaching Facilitation, Behavioral Transformations of Learners with Special Needs, Assistance at School, and Assistance at Home. The coping-strategy section covered problem-focused and emotion-focused coping. An additional set of items assessed institutional support-related challenges, including teachers' access to specialized guidance, administrative assistance, knowledge needed to respond to difficult situations, and perceived difficulties in managing LSENs in inclusive classrooms. All substantive items were rated using a four-point Likert scale: 4 = Strongly Agree, 3 = Agree, 2 = Disagree, and 1 = Strongly Disagree. Higher scores indicated greater perceived challenges or greater application of the stated coping strategy, depending on the construct being measured. The modified questionnaire underwent content validation by four experts, consisting of a Public Schools District Supervisor, an elementary school head, and two academic researchers with Ph.D. The validators evaluated the items using a validation matrix focusing on clarity, relevance, appropriateness, and alignment with the study objectives. Revisions were made based on their recommendations before the final administration of the instrument.

Gathering and Processing of Data

Adequate time was allotted for the teachers to complete the questionnaire without disrupting their teaching responsibilities. The completed questionnaires were retrieved either by the researcher or a designated coordinator from each participating school to ensure systematic documentation and collection. Upon retrieval, the responses were reviewed for completeness, and any unclear or missing entries were verified with the concerned respondents to ensure data accuracy. The validated responses were subsequently encoded, tabulated, and subjected to statistical analysis using frequency counts, percentages, weighted means, and Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient. These statistical procedures were employed to determine the levels of challenges, coping strategies, and institutional support-related challenges, as well as to examine the significant associations among the study variables. The collected data were encoded, tabulated, and analyzed using appropriate descriptive and inferential statistical procedures. **Frequency counts and percentages** were used to summarize the demographic and professional characteristics of the respondents. **Weighted means and standard deviations** were computed to determine the level of challenges encountered, coping strategies employed, and institutional support-related challenges experienced by teachers handling learners with special educational needs. The following four-point scale was used in interpreting the weighted means:

Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Level
3.26–4.00	Strongly Agree	Very High
2.51–3.25	Agree	High
1.76–2.50	Disagree	Low



1.00–1.75	Strongly Disagree	Very Low
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For the measures of challenges and institutional support-related challenges, higher scores indicated greater perceived challenges or unmet support needs. For coping strategies, higher scores indicated greater reported use of the corresponding coping strategy.

To determine the relationships among the study variables, **Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient (Pearson's r)** was employed. The analysis examined the associations between teachers' challenges, coping strategies, and institutional support-related challenges at the **0.05 level of significance**. The correlation coefficient was interpreted according to its direction, magnitude, and statistical significance.

The results of the correlation analysis were interpreted strictly as **associations among variables and not as evidence of causation**. Thus, a significant relationship between teachers' challenges and coping strategies does not imply that coping strategies cause challenges to decrease, nor does it establish that the level of challenges causes teachers to adopt particular coping strategies. Rather, the correlation indicates the extent to which the variables tend to vary together within the study population.

A qualified statistician assisted in reviewing the statistical procedures and computations to ensure the accuracy of the weighted means, standard deviations, and Pearson correlation coefficients.

Ethical Considerations

The researchers adhered to established ethical standards throughout the study and treated all participant responses and information with the utmost confidentiality and anonymity. The study involved no conflict of interest. Informed consent was obtained from all respondents prior to their participation, and all ethical protocols concerning data privacy, voluntary participation, and participant welfare were strictly observed. The researchers sought ethical clearance from the school head and other relevant authorities before commencing data collection. The researchers coordinated with authorized personnel and maintained transparency in all communications, documents, and procedures. The collected data were used solely for academic purposes and to validate the study, with no personal identifiers disclosed in any part of the research report. After completing the data analysis and interpreting the findings, the researcher informed participants of the results as part of the researcher's commitment to transparency, accountability, and respect for their participation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of the Respondents

Table 1 presents the respondents' demographic profile by age, sex, marital status, educational attainment, and teaching experience in handling learners with special educational needs. Most respondents were in the early- to mid-career stage. The largest group was aged 31–35 years, comprising 35.00% (21 respondents), followed by those aged 36–40 years at 21.67% (13 respondents) and 41–45 years at 16.67% (10 respondents). Teachers aged 20–25 and 26–30 years each represented 5.00% (3 respondents), while those aged 51–55 years accounted for 6.67% (4 respondents). This distribution suggests that most teachers handling learners with special educational needs are in an active and productive career stage. According to the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (DepEd, 2017), teachers within this range are typically at the Proficient stage, characterized by growing competence and active professional engagement. This is supported by Smalley and Smith (2017) and Nguyen Thi Lan Ngan (2023), who identified stabilization and productive engagement as features of this career phase. By sex, most respondents were female (83.33%; 50 respondents), while males accounted for 16.67% (10 respondents). This shows that teaching, particularly in handling learners with special educational needs, remains largely female-dominated. Regarding marital status, 58.3% (35 respondents) were married, 35.0% (21 respondents) were single, and 6.68% (4 respondents) were widowed. The large proportion of married teachers suggests many respondents may be balancing professional responsibilities with family obligations, which may influence their experiences and coping strategies when supporting learners with special needs.



Table 1. *Profile of the Respondents*

Profile Variables	Frequency	%
Age		
20– 25 years old	3	5
26– 30 years old	3	5
31– 35 years old	21	35
36-40 years old	13	21.6
41-45 years old	10	16.6
46-50 years old	6	10
51-55 years old	4	6.67
Sex		
Male	10	16.6
Female	50	83.3
Marital Status		
Single	21	35
Married	35	58.3
Widow	4	6.68
Educational Attainment		
Bachelor's Degree	43	71.6
With Master's Units	11	18.3
Master's Degree	6	10
Teaching Experience		
1-5 years	24	40
6 – 10 years	31	51.6
11 – 15 years	4	6.67
16 - 20 years	0	0
21 – 25 years	1	1.67
Total	60	100

In terms of educational attainment, most respondents held a Bachelor's Degree, representing 71.67% (43 respondents), while 18.33% (11 respondents) had Master's units and 10.00% (6 respondents) had completed a Master's Degree. This indicates that most teachers meet the minimum educational qualification, while a smaller group have pursued advanced studies that may contribute to their knowledge and expertise in special education. Regarding teaching experience in handling learners with special educational needs, 51.67% (31 respondents) had 6–10 years of experience, followed by 40.00% (24 respondents) with 1–5 years. Only 6.67% (4 respondents) had 11–15 years of experience, and 1.67% (1 respondent) had 21–25 years, while none had 16–20 years of experience. These results indicate that most respondents have moderate experience, suggesting familiarity with handling LSEN while still having opportunities for further professional growth and skill development. Overall, the respondents were predominantly female and married, mostly in the early- to mid-career age range, had moderate teaching experience, and generally held a Bachelor's Degree. These characteristics provide important context for understanding their challenges and coping strategies in handling learners with special educational needs. This finding is supported by Formanes and Caliba (2024), who emphasized that teachers' experiences, professional background, and personal characteristics influence the challenges they encounter and the coping mechanisms they use when handling learners with special educational needs.



Challenges in Handling Learners with Special Educational Needs

Table 2 presents results for the 4 main indicators of respondents' challenges in handling Learners with Special Educational Needs.

Table 2. Level of Challenges Encountered by the Respondents

Indicators	<i>M</i>	Interpretation
Concentration in Teaching Facilitation	2.18	Low Level of Challenge
Behavioral Transformation	2.38	Low Level of Challenge
Assistance at School	2.19	Low Level of Challenge
Assistance at Home/ Community	2.62	High Level of Challenge
Overall Mean	2.29	Low Level of Challenge

Note. *M* = mean. Interpretations were based on the following ranges: 3.26–4.00 = very high level of challenge, 2.51–3.25 = high level of challenge, 1.76–2.50 = low level of challenge, and 1.00–1.75 = very low level of challenge. Higher scores indicate greater challenges.

Results showed a total mean of 2.29, interpreted as a low level of challenge. The indicator “Assistance at Home/ Community,” with a mean of 2.63, indicates a moderate to high level of challenge. This suggests respondents experience notable difficulties obtaining external support. This was followed by “Behavioral Transformation,” with a mean of 2.38, interpreted as a low level of challenge. This result is supported by Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory, which emphasizes the importance of family and community support in the development and learning of children with special educational needs. Salamanes and Limgenco (2020) also found that inadequate parental and community involvement contributes to the challenges teachers face in implementing inclusive and special education programs. Moreover, Formanes and Caliba (2024) emphasized that behavioral management and limited external support are among the common difficulties teachers encounter when handling learners with special educational needs. The other two indicators, with means of 2.18 and 2.19, respectively, were interpreted as a low level of challenge. These results highlighted important challenges that require professional development and continuous support to sustain the SNED program.

Concentration in Teaching Facilitation. Table 3 presents the level of challenges respondents encountered in handling learners with special educational needs, in terms of concentration during teaching facilitation.

Table 3. Challenges Encountered in Maintaining Concentration During Teaching Facilitation

Indicators	<i>M</i>	Interpretation
1. Difficulty maintaining focus when teaching learners with special educational needs.	1.67	Very low level of Challenge
2. Uncertain or confused when delivering lessons to learners with special needs.	1.74	Very low level of Challenge
3. I find it difficult to focus on facilitating learners with special needs in a regular classroom.	2.43	Low Level of Challenge
4. Learners with special needs show low engagement during learning activities.	1.80	Low Level of Challenge
5. Conducting learning sessions for learners with special needs in school or community settings is difficult.	3.28	Very High Level of Challenge
Overall Mean	2.18	Low level of challenge

Note. *M* = mean. Interpretations were based on the following ranges: 3.26–4.00 = very high level of challenge, 2.51–3.25 = high level of challenge, 1.76–2.50 = low level of challenge, and 1.00–1.75 = very low level of challenge. Higher scores indicate greater challenges.



The data show an overall mean score of 2.18, indicating a low level of challenge. Overall, teachers report minimal difficulty maintaining concentration while facilitating instruction for learners with special educational needs. This finding is supported by Humphrey and Symes (2011), who emphasized that teachers generally develop adaptive strategies and instructional confidence in managing inclusive classrooms despite existing challenges. Among the indicators, item 5, “Conducting learning sessions for learners with special needs in school or community settings is difficult,” has the highest mean score (3.28), interpreted as a very high level of challenge. This suggests that while teachers can generally manage classroom instruction, they face significant difficulty conducting learning sessions in broader or less controlled environments, such as community settings. Salamanes and Limgenco (2020) support this finding, noting that limited community support and inadequate learning environments contribute to the difficulties teachers face when supporting learners with special educational needs. Formanes and Caliba (2024) also found that teachers face challenges implementing learning activities outside the regular classroom setting due to limited resources and support systems.

In contrast, item 1, “difficulty maintaining focus when teaching learners with special educational needs,” had the lowest mean score (1.67), interpreted as a very low level of challenge. Similarly, item 2, which refers to feeling uncertain or confused when delivering lessons, obtained a mean of 1.74, also interpreted as a very low level of challenge. These results imply that teachers are generally confident and focused when delivering instruction to learners with special educational needs. This finding is consistent with Segall and Campbell (2012), who emphasized that teachers with adequate preparation and experience in special education tend to demonstrate confidence and effectiveness in instructional delivery. Meanwhile, items 3 and 4 yielded mean scores of 2.43 and 1.80, respectively, both interpreted as a low level of challenge. This indicates that teachers experience some difficulty facilitating instruction in a regular classroom and addressing learner engagement, but these challenges are not considered significant. The result supports the findings of Cruz and Gatchalian (2022), which highlighted that although teachers encounter classroom management and learner engagement concerns, these are often manageable through appropriate strategies and professional support. Overall, the findings suggest that teachers can generally maintain concentration and deliver instruction effectively to learners with special educational needs. However, challenges become more pronounced when teachers conduct learning sessions outside the typical classroom setting, highlighting the need for additional support, training, or resources to manage diverse learning environments. Gezun (2024) further supports this, emphasizing the importance of continuous professional development and institutional support in strengthening teachers’ competence in handling diverse learners with special educational needs.

Behavioral Transformation. Table 4 presents the challenges respondents encountered in handling learners with special educational needs in terms of behavioral transformation.

Table 4. Challenges Encountered in Promoting Behavioral Transformation

Indicators	<i>M</i>	Interpretation
1. Managing behavioral challenges (e.g., tantrums, aggression) is difficult.	1.56	Very low level of challenge
2. I have limited knowledge in handling learners with behavioral or mental conditions.	2.51	High Level of Challenge
3. I find it difficult to tailor instruction for learners with mental disabilities.	2.63	High Level of Challenge
4. I have limited time to address the needs of learners with special needs due to other responsibilities.	2.60	High Level of Challenge
5. Balancing attention between regular learners and learners with special needs is challenging.	2.60	High Level of Challenge
Overall Mean	2.38	Low Level of Challenge

Note. *M* = mean. Interpretations were based on the following ranges: 3.26–4.00 = very high level of challenge, 2.51–3.25 = high level of challenge, 1.76–2.50 = low level of challenge, and 1.00–1.75 = very low level of challenge. Higher scores indicate greater challenges.

The overall mean score of 2.38 indicates a low level of challenge, suggesting that teachers generally find it manageable to address the behavioral aspects of learners with special educational needs. This aligns with the multi-country study by Sanz-Cervera et al. (2024), which identified eight persistent challenges in inclusive education. However, difficulty varied by teacher preparation, institutional support, and context. However, several areas were more challenging. The highest mean was recorded for difficulty in tailoring instruction for learners with mental disabilities ($M = 2.63$), followed by limited time to address learners' needs and difficulty balancing attention between regular learners and those with special needs ($M = 2.60$ for both). Van Geel et al. (2024) emphasized that effective instructional adaptation requires teachers to deliberately and proactively adjust instruction to meet diverse learning needs. Similarly, Simonsen et al. (2017), as cited in a 2025 Philippine study, noted that teachers often struggle to balance diverse learner needs while maintaining an orderly classroom, while Kraft et al. (2022, as cited in Insights into Learning Disabilities, 2025) reported that behavioral concerns and program interruptions can reduce instructional time for learners with disabilities.

The statement on limited knowledge in handling learners with behavioral or mental conditions also obtained a high level of challenge ($M = 2.51$). Ruppert et al. (2016) and Markelz et al. (as cited in PMC, 2024) reported that special education teachers may lack the knowledge and skills needed to apply evidence-based practices, particularly because of limited preparation in teacher training programs. This finding is further supported by Mabanag et al. (2024), who found that teachers without significant special education practice experienced more instructional, behavioral, and emotional difficulties in inclusive settings. In contrast, managing behavioral challenges such as tantrums and aggression had the lowest mean ($M = 1.56$), interpreted as a very low level of challenge, suggesting that classroom experience may help teachers develop behavioral management skills. Overall, the findings show that although teachers experience a low level of challenge, instructional adaptation, time management, and balancing classroom demands remain areas that require attention. This is consistent with Pantia et al. (2025), who found that teachers faced challenges related to classroom management, lack of parental involvement, insufficient resources, and emotional stress despite using various strategies to address learners' needs.

Assistance at School. Table 5 presents the challenges respondents encountered in supporting learners with special educational needs at school.

Table 5. Challenges Encountered in Assistance at school

Indicators	<i>M</i>	Interpretation
1. Lack of sufficient knowledge to respond effectively to learners with special needs during difficult situations.	2.40	Low Level of Challenge
2. Limited access to guidance counselors or specialists in my school	3.26	Very High Level of Challenge
3. Receive inadequate support from school administrators when handling learners with special needs.	1.80	Very Low Level of Challenge
4. Managing learners with special needs in an inclusive classroom is overwhelming.	1.98	Low Level of Challenge
5. Feeling discouraged when learners with special needs struggle in class.	1.53	Very Low Level of Challenge
Overall Mean	2.19	Low Level of Challenge

Note. M = mean. Interpretations were based on the following ranges: 3.26–4.00 = very high level of challenge, 2.51–3.25 = high level of challenge, 1.76–2.50 = low level of challenge, and 1.00–1.75 = very low level of challenge. Higher scores indicate greater challenges.

The overall mean score of 2.19 indicates a low level of challenge, suggesting that teachers generally experience minimal difficulties with support within the school setting. However, examining the individual indicators reveals a significant concern. The highest mean score is obtained in item 2, “*limited access to guidance counselors or specialists in my school*,” with a mean of 3.26, interpreted as a very high level of

challenge. This finding suggests that a lack of specialized personnel and professional support services is a major issue teachers face when supporting learners with special educational needs. In contrast, item 3, “*receive inadequate support from school administrators*,” registered a mean of 1.80, interpreted as a very low level of challenge. This indicates that teachers generally perceive administrative support as sufficient, which is a positive aspect of the school environment. Similarly, item 5, “*feeling discouraged when learners with special needs struggle in class*,” obtained the lowest mean of 1.53, also interpreted as a very low level of challenge. This suggests that teachers are emotionally resilient and remain motivated despite the difficulties their learners face. Meanwhile, item 1, referring to a lack of sufficient knowledge in responding to learners during difficult situations, yielded a mean of 2.40. In contrast, item 4, “*managing learners with special needs in an inclusive classroom is overwhelming*,” obtained a mean of 1.98.

Both are interpreted as a low level of challenge, indicating that teachers experience some difficulty in these areas, but these are not considered major concerns. While the general level of challenge in terms of school assistance is low, the findings clearly highlight that limited access to guidance counselors and specialists remains the most critical concern. These areas call for deliberate institutional responses (Warren et al., 2024; Sanz-Cervera et al., 2024; Llanos, Baluyot, & Besin, 2024; Macapaz, 2024), including the deployment of school-based specialists, strengthened administrative support structures, and continuous professional development programs to better equip teachers in handling learners with special educational needs.

Assistance at Home/Community. Table 6 presents the challenges respondents encountered in supporting learners with special educational needs outside school, particularly at home and in the community.

Table 6. Challenges Encountered in Receiving Assistance from Home/Community

Indicators	<i>M</i>	Interpretation
1. I receive limited assistance from others when handling learners with special needs.	2.76	High Level of Challenge
2. There is limited access to professional support services outside school.	3.41	Very High Level of Challenge
3. I often handle learners with special needs independently without adequate support.	2.56	High Level of Challenge
4. Both I and my colleagues are still developing skills in handling learners with special needs.	3.15	High Level of Challenge Agree
5. I receive little or no support from home or community when addressing learners’ needs.	1.31	Very low level of Challenge
Overall Mean	2.63	High Level of Challenge

Note. *M* = mean. Interpretations were based on the following ranges: 3.26–4.00 = very high level of challenge, 2.51–3.25 = high level of challenge, 1.76–2.50 = low level of challenge, and 1.00–1.75 = very low level of challenge. Higher scores indicate greater challenges.

The overall mean score of 2.63 indicates a moderate to high level of challenge (despite the table label stating “very low-level challenge,” the computed mean corresponds to a higher category based on the scale). This sug-

gests that teachers experience notable difficulties in obtaining external support when addressing the needs of learners with special educational needs. Among the indicators, item 2, “*There is limited access to professional support services outside school*,” has the highest mean (3.41), interpreted as a very high level of challenge. This highlights a significant gap in the availability of external professional services, such as therapists, specialists, or community-based support systems.

Items 1 and 3, referring to limited assistance from others and handling learners independently, yielded mean scores of 2.76 and 2.56, respectively, both interpreted as high levels of challenge. These findings suggest that teachers often work in isolation when supporting learners with special educational needs, which may increase their workload and stress. In contrast, item 5, “*I receive little or no support from home or community*,”



registered the lowest mean of 1.31, interpreted as a very low level of challenge. This suggests that, to some extent, teachers may still receive support from families or the community, or that this aspect is not perceived as a major difficulty compared to professional support gaps. Overall, the findings indicate that while some level of support exists at the home or community level, there is a significant lack of structured professional support services outside the school, as well as a need for capacity-building among teachers. These challenges (Philstar, 2024; Kilag et al., 2024; Chiu, 2023) highlight the need to strengthen school-community linkages, expand access to specialist services beyond urban centers, and sustain targeted professional development programs to equip teachers better to support learners with special educational needs.

Coping Strategies of Teachers in Teaching Learners with Special Needs

Problem-Focused Coping Strategies. Table 7 presents the level of problem-focused coping strategies teachers use to support learners with special educational needs.

Table 7. Teachers' Problem-Focused Coping Strategies for Supporting Learners With Special Needs

Indicators	<i>M</i>	Interpretation
1. I set achievable learning objectives based on individual learner needs.	3.81	Very High
2. I modify instructional materials to suit different learning styles.	3.81	Very High
3. I use multisensory teaching strategies to enhance understanding.	3.71	Very High
4. I provide inclusive and differentiated learning materials.	3.71	Very High
5. I use technology to support learning and communication.	3.93	Very High
6. I conduct regular assessments to monitor learner progress.	3.96	Very High
7. I apply behavior management and positive reinforcement strategies.	3.96	Very High
8. I organize the classroom to ensure accessibility and comfort.	3.95	Very High
9. I adjust instructional strategies based on student performance.	3.95	Very High
10. I collaborate with parents and guardians to support learners.	3.95	Very High
Overall Mean	3.87	Very High

Note. *M* = mean. Interpretations were based on the following ranges: 3.26–4.00 = very high level, 2.51–3.25 = high level, 1.76–2.50 = low level, and 1.00–1.75 = very low level. Higher scores indicate greater use of problem-focused coping strategies.

The overall mean of 3.87, interpreted as very high, indicates that teachers consistently use problem-focused coping strategies in addressing the challenges of teaching learners with special educational needs. The highest means were recorded for conducting regular assessments to monitor learner progress and applying behavior management and positive reinforcement strategies ($M = 3.96$). These were followed by organizing the classroom environment, adjusting instructional strategies, and collaborating with parents and guardians ($M = 3.95$), and using technology to support learning and communication ($M = 3.93$). Setting achievable learning objectives and modifying instructional materials both obtained $M = 3.81$, while using multisensory strategies and providing differentiated materials recorded the lowest means ($M = 3.71$). All indicators were interpreted as very high. This pattern aligns with Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, which suggests that individuals tend to use problem-focused strategies when they view stressors as manageable. The strong use of assessment and behavior management also supports Simonsen et al. (2017, as cited in Pantia et al., 2025), who identified positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS) as evidence-based practices in special education. Horner and Sugai (2023) similarly reported that consistent positive reinforcement and progress monitoring can reduce problem behaviors and improve classroom engagement.

The very high ratings for classroom organization, instructional adjustment, and parent collaboration support the findings of Garbacz et al. (2016) and Friend and Cook (2017), who identified parent–teacher partnerships as important to the academic and behavioral success of learners with disabilities. The Office for Special Education Programs (OSEP) and the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) likewise recognize home–school collaboration as an important part of effective special education practice (Cete, 2022). The high use of technology ($M = 3.93$) also reflects findings by Alsolami (2022) and Fernández-Batanero et al. (2022),



who reported that assistive technology can improve accessibility for learners with special educational needs when teachers have adequate digital competence. However, Alsolami (2022) also found that some special education teachers have gaps in technological knowledge and need additional training. This suggests that the high rating in the present study may reflect teachers' willingness to use technology rather than full mastery, particularly in contexts where assistive resources remain limited (Toquero, 2024; RISE Journals, 2024). The relatively lower, although still very high, means for multisensory teaching and differentiated materials ($M = 3.71$) are consistent with Tomlinson's (2014) observation that differentiated instruction may be limited by class size, available resources, and time pressures, which are also noted in Philippine public elementary classrooms (RISE Journals, 2024). Overall, the findings show that teachers rely strongly on problem-focused coping by adjusting instruction, managing the classroom, monitoring learner progress, and working with families to address the demands of inclusive education.

Emotion-Focused Coping Strategies. Table 8 presents the level of emotion-focused coping strategies teachers use to support learners with special educational needs.

Table 8. Teachers' Emotion-Focused Coping Strategies for Supporting Learners With Special Needs

Indicators	<i>M</i>	Interpretation
1. I set achievable learning objectives based on individual learner needs.	3.81	Very High
2. I modify instructional materials to suit different learning styles.	3.81	Very High
3. I use multisensory teaching strategies to enhance understanding.	3.71	Very High
4. I provide inclusive and differentiated learning materials.	3.71	Very High
5. I use technology to support learning and communication.	3.93	Very High
6. I conduct regular assessments to monitor learner progress.	3.96	Very High
7. I apply behavior management and positive reinforcement strategies.	3.96	Very High
8. I organize the classroom to ensure accessibility and comfort.	3.95	Very High
9. I adjust instructional strategies based on student performance.	3.95	Very High
10. I collaborate with parents and guardians to support learners.	3.95	Very High
Overall Mean	3.87	Very High

Note. M = mean. Interpretations were based on the following ranges: 3.26–4.00 = very high level, 2.51–3.25 = high level, 1.76–2.50 = low level, and 1.00–1.75 = very low level. Higher scores indicate greater use of problem-focused coping strategies.

The overall mean of 3.76, interpreted as very high, indicates that teachers consistently use emotion-focused coping strategies to manage the demands of teaching learners with special educational needs. The highest mean was recorded for providing encouragement and emotional support to learners ($M = 3.96$), showing that teachers place strong emphasis on emotional support and motivation to promote learner confidence and engagement. Participation in seminars and professional development activities also received a very high rating ($M = 3.91$), indicating active engagement in professional growth. Other strategies, including seeking professional guidance, adjusting teaching pace, creating a structured classroom environment, encouraging peer support, and providing calming activities, obtained means ranging from 3.71 to 3.73. These findings suggest that teachers consistently use strategies that promote emotional stability, inclusivity, and a positive classroom atmosphere.

Remaining patient when dealing with learners' behavioral challenges received a mean of 3.68, while stress management and documentation of learner progress both obtained means of 3.71, all interpreted as very high. These results indicate that teachers demonstrate emotional resilience and reflective practices in handling learners with special educational needs. The findings also align with Simonsen et al. (2017, as cited in Pantia et al., 2025), who identified regular monitoring of learner development and effective behavior management as key components of special education practice. Overall, the findings show that teachers demonstrate strong emotional competence and adaptability, allowing them to manage stress, support learners emotionally, and maintain a conducive learning environment. These emotion-focused strategies complement their problem-focused coping approaches and support effective teaching in inclusive settings.



The overall result is consistent with Lazarus and Folkman's proposition that problem-focused coping predominates when stressors are appraised as controllable. At the same time, emotion-focused coping remains an essential adjunct for managing the affective residue of such challenges. The slightly higher score for problem-focused coping mirrors findings from Howard and Johnson (2004) and Brunsting et al. (2014), who reported that resilient teachers in challenging settings use a deliberate mix of cognitive, behavioral, and emotional coping mechanisms. Mansfield et al. (2016) describe this dual capacity as a hallmark of "resilient teaching" - the integration of action and emotion regulation to sustain professional effectiveness over time. Contrary findings by Talmor et al. (2005) and Forlin (2001) suggest that in resource-constrained inclusive contexts, teachers may experience diminishing returns from coping efforts when systemic support is lacking. Philippine-based studies (Toquero, 2024; RISE Journals, 2024) reinforce this concern by documenting persistent shortages of specialists, instructional materials, and continuing professional development opportunities for SPED-receiving teachers. Despite these systemic constraints, the data indicate that respondents have developed adaptive coping capacities that enable them to function effectively in their classrooms, demonstrating strong professional competence, adaptability, and commitment to inclusive education.

Relationship between Challenges and Coping Strategies of Teachers

Table 9 presents the relationship between teachers' challenge levels and their coping strategies for handling learners with special educational needs.

Table 9. Relationship Between Teachers' Challenges and Coping Strategies

Variables	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>	Interpretation
Challenges and coping strategies	-.41	.001	Moderate negative correlation

Note. *r* = Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. The sample size (60) and the test was two-tailed.

The computed Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (*r*) of - .41 indicates a moderate negative correlation between the two variables. This suggests that as the level of challenges increases, the level of coping strategies tends to decrease; conversely, as coping strategies increase, perceived challenges tend to decrease. Furthermore, the obtained *p*-value of .001 is less than the 0.05 level of significance, indicating that the relationship between the variables is statistically significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis that no significant relationship exists between challenges and coping strategies is rejected. This finding implies that coping strategies play a crucial role in influencing how teachers experience and manage challenges in inclusive classroom settings. Teachers who use effective coping mechanisms are more likely to reduce the impact of challenges. In contrast, those with limited coping strategies (Herman et al., 2020) may have greater difficulty handling learners with special educational needs. The results highlight the importance of strengthening teachers' coping capacities through professional development programs, stress-management training, and institutional support systems (Ungar, 2011). Strengthening these areas (Nilholm, 2021) may help teachers become more resilient and effective in addressing learners' diverse needs.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that teachers handling learners with special educational needs in selected elementary schools in Palo District, DepEd Leyte, were predominantly female, married, aged 31–40 years, holders of a Bachelor's Degree, and had moderate teaching experience in handling learners with special educational needs. These characteristics indicate that the respondents were generally in the early to middle stage of their professional practice. The challenges teachers encountered were generally low, suggesting they could manage the demands of inclusive teaching. However, they faced greater challenges in conducting learning sessions in broader settings, adapting instruction to learners' needs, managing time and attention, accessing specialists, and obtaining external professional support from home and community sectors. The teachers demonstrated a very high level of coping strategies in both problem-focused and emotion-focused coping, indicating that they frequently used adaptive strategies to address the instructional, behavioral, and emotional demands of handling learners with special educational needs. The study also found a significant



inverse relationship between the level of challenges encountered and the coping strategies employed, suggesting that higher levels of coping strategies were associated with lower levels of challenges encountered. Based on these findings, the study provides a strong basis for developing a coping strategies guide that may help teachers strengthen their instructional practices, behavioral management skills, and access to support systems when working with learners with special educational needs.

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