



NAVIGATING LIMITED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: A CASE STUDY OF SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION TEACHERS SUPPORTING LEARNERS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

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ABSTRACT

Limited professional development weakens inclusive special education support. This study examined the challenges, appraisals, coping strategies, and insights of Special Needs Education (SNED) teachers at Koronadal City in supporting learners with disabilities despite limited professional development opportunities. A single-case study research design, purposive sampling, a semi-structured interview guide, in-depth interviews, and thematic analysis were utilized. Experiences of 10 SNED teachers revealed that despite carrying the burden of overwhelming workload demands, diverse learner needs, limited resources, and insufficient professional development opportunities, Special Needs Education (SNED) teachers continued to demonstrate steadfast resilience, adaptive strength, and deep commitment in supporting learners with disabilities. The findings highlight the urgent need for sustained, context-responsive professional development programs that strengthen the competence, resilience, and support systems of Special Needs Education (SNED) teachers, while guiding future quantitative validation of the study's framework.

Keywords: *navigating limited professional development, case study, special needs teachers, supportive learning environment*

INTRODUCTION

As the researcher continues to explore the challenges faced by special education teachers, the researcher has noticed a significant concern regarding their limited professional development opportunities. According to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (2023), SNED teachers play a crucial role in ensuring inclusive education; however, the researcher found that many teachers still lack sufficient training, particularly in low-and middle-income countries, which affects their ability to support learners with special needs effectively (Smith & Brown, 2023). Through the researcher's readings, he realized that this issue has become a global concern, significantly affecting teachers' instructional competence and confidence, as well as the quality of education provided to learners with disabilities.

As the researcher delved deeper into the global concern about limited professional development for SPED teachers, the researcher found that this issue remains prevalent across countries. In the United States, Canada, and Brazil, insufficient training affects teachers' motivation, pedagogical performance, and professional growth (McGuire & Jones, 2023; Thompson & Edwards, 2023; Mendes & Oliveira, 2024). Similarly, in Australia, Clark et al. (2022) reported that SPED teachers with minimal professional development experience high levels of stress and burnout. In developing countries such as India and South Africa, teachers face additional barriers, including limited resources and institutional support (Kumar & Patel, 2023). While these challenges are widespread, each country faces unique circumstances, necessitating localized solutions to address professional development gaps.

In the Philippines, even if the Department of Education (DepEd) has made efforts to promote inclusive education through the adoption of the Inclusive Education Policy (Department of Education, 2019), several studies indicate that many SPED teachers still receive limited professional development opportunities. As the researcher reflected on the study of Gaspan and Sasot (2024), they found that inadequate training significantly affects teachers' ability to design individualized educational programs and implement differentiated instruction. Furthermore, Real and Flordeliz (2024) emphasized that the lack of specialized training for SPED teachers contributes to poor learning outcomes for students with disabilities. These challenges highlight the urgent need for comprehensive professional development programs for special education teachers nationwide.

Given this existing problem, if it is not addressed immediately, Special Needs Education (SNED) teachers may continue to struggle to provide appropriate support and inclusive instruction for learners with special needs, despite the presence of policies such as the Department of Education's Inclusive Education Policy Framework and Republic Act No. 11650. The continuous lack of professional development opportunities may further weaken teachers' instructional competence, increase stress and burnout, and negatively affect the learning outcomes of students with disabilities. As inclusive education remains a priority in the Philippine educational system, there is an urgent need to conduct this case study to understand the realities of SNED teachers and provide

insights that may strengthen professional development programs, institutional support, and inclusive educational practices. Hence, the researcher conducted this study.

Research Questions

In this study, the researcher aimed to examine the case of the special needs education teachers at Koronadal National Comprehensive High School (KNCHS) who have limited access to professional development. Specifically, this study answered the following questions:

1. What challenges do special needs education (SNED) teachers at Koronadal National Comprehensive High School (KNCHS) encounter in supporting learners with special needs in the context of limited access to structured professional development?
2. What are the appraisals on the demands encountered by teachers in supporting learners with special needs?
3. What coping strategies do SNED teachers at KNCHS employ to manage the professional demands associated with supporting learners with disabilities?
4. What insights have SNED teachers at KNCHS gained from their experiences in supporting learners with disabilities despite limited professional development?

Theoretical Lens

The researcher anchored this single case study in Stress and Coping Theory, as articulated by Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman (1984). The Stress and Coping Theory posited that coping was a continually changing process used to manage specific external and/or internal demands that were appraised as taxing or exceeding a person's resources. This process involved two key appraisal stages: primary appraisal, in which an individual evaluated the significance of a situation for their well-being (e.g., as a threat, challenge, or harm/loss), and secondary appraisal, in which they evaluated their coping resources and available options. In the context of special education teachers at KNCHS, who had limited professional development, this theory enabled a nuanced exploration of their professional realities, focusing on how they appraised their professional challenges as stressors and the diverse coping mechanisms they employed. By examining the interplay between these perceived demands and their adaptive responses, the researcher aimed to uncover the fundamental structure of their professional realities and the strategies they developed to navigate their roles in supporting learners with special needs.

Conceptual Paradigm

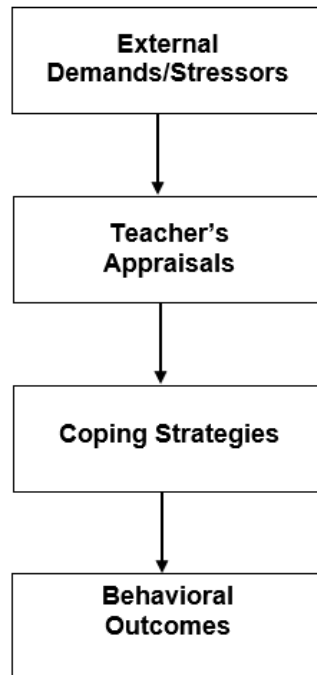


Figure 1: Stress and Coping Theory Paradigm

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The researcher's study used a single-case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of a particular phenomenon in its real-life context. A case study approach allowed the researcher to explore a bounded system and understand complex issues through detailed investigation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This design was suitable for the researcher thesis, as it sought to examine the experiences of special education (SPED) teachers at KNCHS who had limited access to professional development within their school environment. By using this approach, the researcher aimed to gain a deeper understanding of how SPED teachers managed instructional challenges, developed coping strategies, and sustained their professional roles in supporting learners with special needs despite limited access to structured professional development.

Locale of the Study

This study was conducted in a public secondary school located in Koronadal City, South Cotabato, which offered Special Education (SPED) programs for learners with diverse needs. The school was known for its commitment to inclusive education, catering to students with a range of exceptionalities, including intellectual disabilities, learning disabilities, and autism spectrum disorder. The researcher chose this site because it

provided valuable insights into the experiences of SPED teachers, particularly in settings with limited professional development opportunities. Conducting the study in this locale allowed an in-depth examination of how SPED teachers adapted their instructional practices and responded to the demands of inclusive education despite resource constraints.

Sample and Sampling Technique

In this study, the researcher identified ten (10) SNED teachers who were fitted based on the following criteria: 1. The participant is a SNED teacher who had teaching experience in the SNED program at Koronadal City; 2. The participant has limited access to professional development opportunities, as defined by the absence or insufficiency of structured training in inclusive education; 3. The participant is actively involved in supporting learners with special needs, particularly in designing individualized educational programs (IEPs) and implementing inclusive teaching strategies; and 4. The participant is willing to share their professional insights through in-depth interviews.

Additionally, the researcher utilized purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique in which participants are intentionally selected based on experiences relevant to the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This technique enabled me to gather rich, in-depth data from individuals directly connected to the research problem. The final number of participants was determined by data saturation, in which no new themes emerged during data collection. To strengthen the credibility of the researcher's findings, I interviewed five (5) parents of learners with disabilities to provide supporting perspectives and validate the emerging themes of the study.

Data Gathering Technique

A validated, semi-structured questionnaire was used as the study tool. An in-depth, face-to-face interview was conducted after. The tool was intended to gather detailed insights into selected special needs education (SNED) teachers, focusing on their experiences, challenges, and coping strategies for supporting learners with disabilities despite limited professional development. An in-depth interview is a qualitative data-gathering method used to obtain meaningful and comprehensive perspectives from participants (Patton, 2015). With the participants' consent, the researcher utilized audio recordings to ensure accurate transcription and analysis of the data. This method was appropriate for the researcher's study because it enabled him to explore participants' professional experiences deeply. At the same time, the systematically analyzed findings served as a basis for recommendations to improve professional development opportunities and support systems for special education teachers.

Data Analysis Technique

In analyzing the interview data, the researcher employed thematic analysis as described by Creswell and Poth (2018). The interview transcripts were first organized and carefully reviewed to familiarize the researcher with the participants' responses, after

which significant statements related to SPED teachers' experiences were identified, coded, and grouped into meaningful categories. Through the systematic identification of recurring patterns, overarching themes were developed and refined to ensure clarity and coherence. Direct quotations from participants were incorporated to support the findings and enhance the analysis's authenticity. This process enabled the researcher to present a comprehensive account of the experiences, challenges, and coping strategies of SPED teachers with limited professional development, while providing meaningful insights into the realities faced by SPED educators at Koronadal City.

RESULTS

This chapter presents the study's findings on the experiences of special education teachers in supporting learners with disabilities at Koronadal National Comprehensive High School (KNCHS), despite limited professional development. The chapter draws on participants' interview responses, which were analyzed to identify recurring patterns, shared challenges, and adaptive practices shaping their day-to-day professional realities. The findings further highlight how these experiences influence teachers' professional growth, emotional strength, and sustained commitment to supporting learners with disabilities. Overall, the chapter foregrounds the participants' voices to illuminate the realities of SPED teaching within the context of KNCHS and the resilience that sustains inclusive educational practice.

Professional Challenges Encountered by Special Needs Education Teachers with Limited Professional Development

High Parental Expectations

In line with this theme, High Parental Expectations reflects how teachers experience additional pressure when parents expect clear strategies, visible progress, and professional certainty despite limited training. Participant 1 shared that when behavioral concerns arise, the pressure extends beyond the learner to meeting parental expectations.

"It was difficult because I felt responsible for the child's safety and learning, but at the same time, I did not have enough skills to handle the situation properly. I was scared of making mistakes that could worsen the behavior. I also felt pressure because parents expect me to know what to do as a SPED teacher."-IDI_ST1-PAGE2-L67-70

Participant 3 expressed that the pressure becomes personal—parents' questions make her revisit her own performance and ask herself if she is helping the "right way."

"Nakakahiya rin minsan kapag parents ask for progress. Ang dami kong iniisip — 'Am I doing enough? Am I helping the right way?'"-IDI_ST3-PAGE2-L67-70
(It's also embarrassing sometimes when parents ask for progress. I keep thinking about so many things — 'Am I doing enough? Am I helping in the right way?')

To strengthen the credibility of the findings, perspectives from parents of learners with special needs were also gathered to support the teacher participants' claims. To further validate participants' claims, perspectives from parents of learners with special needs were also gathered. Parent 1 shared that, as a parent of a learner with special needs, she often expects the teacher to provide clear strategies and guidance to help her child improve.

“Bilang magulang, talagang umaasa kami sa guro kung ano ang dapat gawin para matulungan ang anak namin. Minsan nagtatanong kami kung ano pa ang puwedeng gawin para mas mapabilis ang pagkatuto niya. Alam ko na hindi madali para sa guro, pero natural lang na umasa kami sa kanila dahil sila ang mas may alam sa pagtuturo.” IDI_P1-p1-L7-10

(As parents, we really rely on the teacher regarding what should be done to help our child. Sometimes, we ask what else can be done to further improve and speed up our child's learning. I know that it is not easy for the teacher, but it is only natural for us to depend on them because they are more knowledgeable when it comes to teaching.)

In the same way, Parent 3 acknowledged that parents sometimes ask frequent questions about their child's progress because they want reassurance that their child is receiving proper support.

“Minsan napapadalas ang tanong namin sa teacher tungkol sa progress ng anak namin. Hindi naman dahil nagdududa kami, pero gusto lang naming malaman kung may improvement ba at kung tama ba ang ginagawa namin sa bahay para makatulong.” IDI_P3-p1-L16-18

(Sometimes, we frequently ask the teacher about our child's progress. It is not because we doubt them, but because we simply want to know if there is improvement and if we are doing the right things at home to help.)

As the researcher listened to the participants and parents, the researcher constantly heard a shared tension between expectation and uncertainty, with teachers striving to meet parents' hopes while silently questioning their own preparedness. I see this clearly in Participant 1's actions, who carried the weight of responsibility even in moments of doubt, while parents, through their constant inquiries and desire for progress, reveal their deep trust in the teacher's role. The researcher feels the quiet pressure that builds within these interactions, not as conflict, but as a heavy responsibility rooted in care from both sides. Moreover, the researcher realized that high parental expectations are not merely demands placed upon teachers; they are reflections of shared hope for the child, yet they become burdensome when teachers are expected to provide certainty without sufficient support, until these expectations begin to overflow into time, tasks, and the growing weight of everything a teacher must carry at once.

Workload & Time Pressure

This theme highlights how teachers navigate the increasing demands of planning, documentation, and coordination, particularly when limited professional development makes these responsibilities more time-consuming and mentally exhausting. Participant

1 shared that creating IEPs becomes overwhelming because uncertainty leads to repeated revisions and extended working hours.

“I felt overwhelmed when I had to create an IEP for a learner with multiple difficulties. I was not trained deeply in writing IEPs, so I doubted if my goals were correct. I stayed late at school just to revise it many times.”-IDI_ST1-P4-L166-168

Participant 2 shared a similar experience, emphasizing how she stayed after school repeatedly because she was unsure whether the IEP goals were measurable and realistic.

“Yes, I felt very stressed when designing an IEP for a student with multiple disabilities. I was unsure if the goals were measurable and realistic. I stayed after school just to revise the plan multiple times.”-IDI_ST2-PAGE4-L171-173

Participant 8 explained that the workload does not come solely from teaching but also from paperwork, coordination, and reports, which consume time and add stress, especially when training opportunities are limited.

“Sometimes, the workload feels overwhelming—managing individualized education plans, coordinating with mainstream teachers, and handling paperwork takes a lot of time. But seeing my learners progress... makes it worthwhile.”-IDI_ST8-PAGE8-L346-349

To strengthen the credibility of the findings and provide additional perspectives on the teachers' experiences, parents of learners with special needs were also interviewed. The participants' claims were supported by Parent 1, who observed that SPED teachers spend significant time preparing plans and discussing their child's learning progress.

“Napapansin ko po na talagang pinaglalaanan ng oras ng teacher ang paggawa ng plano para sa anak ko. Minsan sinasabi niya na kailangan pa niyang ayusin ang mga goals at activities para siguradong akma sa kakayahan ng bata. Nakikita ko rin na kahit tapos na ang klase, patuloy pa rin siyang nag-aasikaso ng mga dokumento para sa progress ng anak ko.” IDI_P1-p1-L31-34

(I notice that the teacher really dedicates time to preparing plans for my child. Sometimes, the teacher says that the goals and activities still need to be adjusted to make sure they fit the child's abilities. I can also see that even after class hours, the teacher continues working on documents related to my child's progress.)

Parent 5 also emphasized that teachers manage several responsibilities simultaneously while supporting learners.

“Sa tingin ko po mahirap ang trabaho ng SPED teacher kasi sabay-sabay nilang inaasikaso ang pagtuturo, paggawa ng lesson plans, at pakikipag-usap sa mga magulang. Kahit ganoon, nakikita ko pa rin ang effort nila na matulungan ang mga bata.” IDI_P5-p2-L50-52

(“In my opinion, the work of a SPED teacher is difficult because they simultaneously handle teaching, preparing lesson plans, and communicating with parents. Despite that, I can still see their effort in helping the children.”)

As the researcher reflected on the voices of the participants and parents, the researcher repeatedly noticed how time extended far beyond the classroom, how teaching continued in silent revisions, late hours, and the constant effort to make every plan appropriate. The researcher sees this in the actions of Participant 1, who stayed late to revise IEPs despite uncertainty, and in the parents who recognized and affirmed the dedication teachers invest even beyond school hours. The researcher feels the quiet exhaustion that comes not only from numerous responsibilities, but from carrying them with doubt, where each decision requires careful checking and rechecking. Moreover, the researcher realized that workload and time pressure are not merely about the number of tasks teachers handle, but about the weight of doing them responsibly without enough guidance, until this stretching of time begins to uncover a deeper reality: that teachers are not only managing tasks, but are also navigating the complexities of learners who think, learn, and grow in profoundly different ways.

Diverse Learner Needs

Handling learners with diverse disabilities and learning profiles presents a complex instructional reality, particularly when teachers have limited access to structured professional development. Participant 1 shared that diversity can be demanding because she must constantly adjust her teaching, yet she feels uncertain about which strategies are appropriate.

“Because each learner is different. I have students with learning disabilities, and then I also have students with autism. Without proper training, it feels like I am guessing what strategy will work. It becomes a demand because I need to adjust my teaching style, my materials, and even my attitude, but I am not always sure how to do it correctly.”-IDI_ST1-PAGE1-L13-17

Participant 6 emphasized that basic preparation is not enough, and teachers must continuously adapt through observation, reflection, and trial-and-error.

“Honestly, it’s a journey of continuous learning. Each learner is different, and hindi sapat yung basic training. I have to constantly adapt strategies, observe behaviors, and reflect on my methods.”-IDI_ST6-PAGE1-L42-44

(Honestly, it’s a journey of continuous learning. Each learner is different, and basic training is not enough. I have to constantly adapt strategies, observe behaviors, and reflect on my methods.)

Support for these accounts also emerged from parents' narratives. The participants' claims were supported by Parent 1, who shared that learners with disabilities require different approaches depending on their specific needs, which makes the teacher's role more challenging.

“Napapansin ko po na iba-iba talaga ang pangangailangan ng mga batang may special needs. Yung anak ko halimbawa, kailangan niya ng mas maraming repetition at visual materials para maintindihan ang lesson. Sinasabi rin ng teacher na kailangan niyang baguhin ang paraan ng pagtuturo depende sa kakayahan ng bata.” IDI_P1-p2-L57-60

(I notice that children with special needs truly have different needs. For example, my child needs more repetition and visual materials to understand the lesson. The teacher also says that teaching strategies need to be adjusted depending on the child's abilities.)

This perspective was also expressed by Parent 4, who emphasized that teachers handle learners with different conditions, which requires flexibility and patience.

"Nakikita ko po na ang teacher ng anak ko ay kailangang maging flexible sa pagtuturo. May mga batang may autism, may ADHD, at may learning disability. Iba-iba ang paraan kung paano sila tutulungan para matuto, kaya talagang malaking effort ang ginagawa ng teacher." IDI_P4-p2-L72-74

(I can see that my child's teacher needs to be flexible in teaching. Some children have autism, some have ADHD, and others have learning disabilities. They each require different ways of support in order to learn, which is why the teacher exerts a great deal of effort.)

As the researcher engaged with the accounts of both teachers and parents, the researcher consistently heard how teaching in SPED is a constant process of adjustment, where no single approach works for all learners. The researcher sees this in Participant 1's actions, who continuously modified her strategies despite uncertainty, and in the parents who recognized how teachers adapt their methods to each child's unique needs and responses. The researcher feels the weight of managing these differences simultaneously, where every decision carries the responsibility of meeting each learner where they are. Furthermore, the researcher realized that diverse learner needs are not merely about differences in abilities, but about the continuous demand to respond, adjust, and persist without certainty, until these differences begin to surface not only in how learners think, but also in how they feel and behave within the classroom.

Behavior & Emotional Demands

Navigating learners' behavioral and emotional challenges poses a complex, immediate challenge for teachers, especially when limited professional development leaves them unsure how to respond appropriately. Participant 1 recalled a situation where she felt lost when a learner with autism had sudden tantrums, highlighting how a lack of training intensified the difficulty of managing behavior.

"One situation I remember clearly was when I had a learner with autism who would suddenly have tantrums in class. I did not receive proper training on behavior management for autism, so I felt lost. I tried to calm the child using techniques I saw online, but I was not confident if I was doing the right thing. It became challenging because the other learners were also affected when he had meltdowns." IDI_ST1-PAGE1-L9-13

Participant 5 described the emotional weight of handling severe autism without ABA training, which led to feelings of guilt and stress even beyond school hours.

"There was this learner with severe autism... Wala po akong formal training sa ABA... It was frustrating because hindi agad gumagana, and I felt helpless at

times... I felt anxious and guilty—parang I'm not doing enough. There were nights I couldn't sleep.”-IDI_ST5-PAGE3-L34-36

To further substantiate the teacher participants' claims, perspectives from parents of learners with special needs were also gathered. The participants' claims were supported by Parent 2, who shared that children with special needs sometimes experience emotional outbursts and that teachers play an important role in helping them calm down and return to learning.

“Minsan po hirap mag-focus ang anak ko at madaling ma-distract sa klase. Sinasabi ng teacher na kailangan talaga ng ibang approach para matulungan siyang makapag-concentrate. Naiintindihan ko na mahirap din ito para sa guro dahil kailangan nilang bantayan ang behavior ng bata habang nagtuturo.” IDI_P2-p2-L485-88

(Sometimes, my child has difficulty focusing and is easily distracted in class. The teacher says that a different approach is really needed to help the child concentrate. I understand that this is also difficult for the teacher because they need to monitor the child's behavior while teaching.)

In addition, Parent 3 stated that teachers must manage both a child's behavior and the entire class's learning environment.

“May mga pagkakataon na nagiging restless o nagkakaroon ng emotional reactions ang mga bata sa classroom. Sinabi ng teacher na kailangan niyang alagaan hindi lang ang anak ko kundi pati ang ibang estudyante sa klase. Kaya talagang malaking responsibilidad ang pag-handle ng behavior ng mga batang may special needs.” IDI_P3-p2-L90-93

(There are times when children become restless or show emotional reactions in the classroom. The teacher said that they need to take care not only of my child but also of the other students in the class. That is why managing the behavior of children with special needs is truly a great responsibility.)

As the researcher immersed himself in the experiences shared by teachers and parents, the researcher constantly heard that behavioral and emotional situations demand immediate yet uncertain responses, in which teachers are expected to act with confidence even when they feel unprepared. The researcher sees this in the actions of Participant 1, who tried to calm a learner during a meltdown despite not being sure if her approach was correct, and in the parents who recognized the patience and care teachers show in guiding learners through emotional difficulties. The researcher feels the intensity and pressure of these moments, where teaching becomes less about instruction and more about maintaining safety, control, and emotional balance for everyone in the classroom. Moreover, the researcher realized that behavioral and emotional demands are not simply challenges within teaching but are high-stakes situations that expose the limits of teachers' preparation, until these repeated moments begin to reveal deeper gaps in the systems meant to support them.

Administrative/ System Gaps

Beyond the immediate realities of classroom instruction and learner needs, gaps within the system itself further intensify the challenges faced by SPED teachers, particularly when structured support, mentoring, and specialized training are limited. Participant 1 shared that most available trainings are too general and do not address the specific needs of SPED teaching.

“For me, the trainings are very limited. Most seminars are general education seminars, not really focused on SPED. Sometimes we attend inclusive education webinars, but they are too broad. We rarely have specific training on IEP writing, behavior intervention, or handling different disabilities.”-IDI_ST1-PAGE2-L79-82

Participant 6 reflected on the lack of structured mentorship and continuous development, emphasizing that occasional workshops are insufficient to sustain professional growth.

“They exist, pero marami pa ring gaps. Most trainings are short workshops or generic seminars, not tailored for specific learner needs. I wish there were structured mentorship programs and continuous professional development specific for SPED.”-IDI_ST6-PAGE3-L102-105

Further evidence from parents highlights the realities described by the teachers. The participants' claims were supported by Parent 1, who shared that although teachers try their best to support learners with special needs, schools also need stronger programs and resources to better assist them.

“Nakikita ko po na ginagawa ng teacher ang lahat para matulungan ang anak ko, pero minsan kulang din ang support system sa school. Sana mas marami pang trainings at programs para sa mga guro na nagtuturo ng mga batang may special needs.” IDI_P1-p3-L103-105

(I can see that the teacher is doing everything to help my child, but sometimes the support system in the school is also lacking. I hope there will be more trainings and programs for teachers who handle children with special needs.)

In support of this observation, Parent 3 expressed that schools should strengthen programs and support mechanisms for both teachers and learners with disabilities.

“Bilang magulang, nakikita ko na malaki ang effort ng teacher, pero sana mas palakasin pa ng paaralan ang mga programs para sa mga batang may special needs. Kung may mas maraming training at support para sa teachers, mas matutulungan din nila ang mga bata.” IDI_P3-p3-L111-113

(As a parent, I can see the great effort of the teacher, but I hope the school will further strengthen its programs for children with special needs. If teachers receive more training and support, they will be able to help the children even more effectively.)

As the researcher looked closely into the shared experiences of teachers and parents, the researcher constantly heard how support within the system remains limited, leaving teachers to navigate their roles with minimal guidance. The researcher sees this

in the actions of Participant 6, who continues to seek growth despite the absence of structured mentorship and sustained training, and in the parents who recognize that teachers are doing their best even when institutional support is not enough. The researcher feels the frustration that comes not from unwillingness, but from working within a system that expects much yet provides little in return. Moreover, the researcher realized that administrative and system gaps are not just background challenges; they shape the very conditions of teaching, where teachers are left to bridge the gap between expectations and reality on their own, until these limitations begin to surface not only in support systems, but also in the resources available for teaching and learning.

Limited Resources & Materials

Providing effective instruction for learners with disabilities requires access to specialized materials, tools, and assistive technologies; however, the absence of these resources places additional demands on teachers, especially when they must make up for them through their own efforts and creativity. Participant 4 shared that the lack of training and materials for speech intervention prompted her to search for and experiment with communication strategies independently.

“One time, I had a learner with severe speech delay. I didn’t have specialized training for speech interventions, so I had to research online and try different communication tools—like visual cards and gestures. Medyo overwhelming po, pero it pushed me to be creative.”-IDI_ST4-PAGE1-L30-32

Participant 8 shared that she had to adapt classroom activities through self-directed research because she lacked formal preparation in multisensory reading strategies.

“I had a student with severe dyslexia who struggled significantly with reading comprehension. I didn’t have specialized training in multisensory reading interventions, so I had to research strategies online and adapt classroom activities.”-IDI_ST8-PAGE2-L53-55

Participant 10 discussed the expectation to integrate technology-assisted learning without proper training on how to use devices and software for learners with disabilities.

“For example, bago lang po yung curriculum update, and we were expected to integrate technology-assisted learning for learners with disabilities. Wala po kaming formal training sa paggamit ng devices or software, so we had to learn through trial-and-error.”-IDI_ST10-PAGE2-L67-69

(For example, the curriculum update was still new, and we were expected to integrate technology-assisted learning for learners with disabilities. However, we did not receive formal training on how to use the devices or software, so we had to learn through trial and error)

The learners' parents also acknowledged these realities. The participants' claims were supported by Parent 1, who shared that teachers sometimes need to create or modify materials to help learners understand the lessons.

“Napansin ko po nga nga ginahimo sang teacher ang iya best para makabulig sa mga bata. May mga materials siya nga ginahimo niya mismo pareho sang visual aids kag activity sheets para mas maintindihan sang bata ang lesson. Bisan kulang ang resources, ginapangitaan gid niya sang paagi.” IDI_P1-p3-L122-125

(I noticed that the teacher is really doing their best to help the children. The teacher creates materials personally, such as visual aids and activity sheets, so that the child can better understand the lesson. Even when resources are limited, the teacher still finds ways to make things work.)

Finally, Parent 4 emphasized that teachers often become creative in providing instructional support despite limited resources.

“Makita gid namon nga ginapaninguhan sang teacher nga mabuligan ang mga bata bisan kulang ang kagamitan. Kis-a ginapangita pa niya sa internet ang mga activities kag ginahimo niya ini para magamit sa klase. Dako gid nga bulig in isa pagtuon sang mga bata.” IDI_P4-p3-L135-137

(We can truly see that the teacher is making every effort to help the children despite the lack of resources. Sometimes, the teacher even searches for activities on the internet and prepares them for use in class. This is a great help in the children’s learning.)

As I examined more closely the experiences shared by teachers and parents, I constantly heard that teaching in SPED often means creating what is not readily available, requiring teachers to go beyond instruction to design and improvise learning tools. I see this in the actions of Participant 4, who independently searched for communication strategies and developed materials despite limited resources, and in the parents who recognized the effort teachers invest in making lessons more accessible for their children. I feel the weight of this added responsibility, where teaching is no longer confined to delivering content but extends into constant innovation and adaptation. And the researcher realized that limited resources and materials are not simply logistical concerns; they reshape teachers’ roles into creators and problem-solvers, bridging gaps so learning can continue, until these external demands shift inward, influencing how teachers perceive, interpret, and appraise the challenges they face in their professional practice.

Teachers’ Interpretation of the Professional Demands

Perceived Challenges

Faced with unfamiliar learner behaviors and complex instructional demands, teachers often initially interpret these situations as difficult and overwhelming, especially when limited professional development leaves them uncertain about how to respond effectively. Participant 1 shared that these experiences initially led her to question her competence as a teacher.

“At first, I see it as a threat to my effectiveness as a teacher. I ask myself, ‘Am I really fit for this?’ But later, I try to see it as a challenge. I tell myself that maybe this is something I need to learn from.”-IDI_ST1-PAGE3-L136-138

Participant 3 shared that decisions feel heavy because she understands their impact, which heightens the perceived challenge.

“Parang pressure. I have to improvise, adapt, and make decisions without knowing kung tama or effective. Every decision feels heavy kasi may impact sa learners’ learning and emotional well-being.”-IDI_ST3-PAGE1-L28-30

(It feels like pressure. I have to improvise, adapt, and make decisions without knowing whether they are correct or effective. Every decision feels heavy because it has an impact on the learners’ learning and emotional well-being.)

These statements from parents validate the teachers’ experiences. The participants’ claims were supported by Parent 1, who shared that teachers sometimes face challenging situations when working with learners with special needs, but still find ways to help the child.

“May mga pagkakataon nga nga nahihirapan ang anak ko sa lesson o sa behavior niya sa classroom. Nakikita ko nga ginapangitaan gid sang teacher sang paagi kung paano niya matabuligan ang bata bisan indi gid dayon makita ang solution.” IDI_P1-p4-L147-149

(There are times when my child struggles with the lesson or with behavior in the classroom. I can see that the teacher really tries to find ways to help the child even when the solution is not immediately clear.)

In the same way, Parent 3 noted that teachers often face situations in which they must carefully decide which approach will work best for the learner.

“Sinasabi rin ng teacher na hindi pareho ang paraan ng pagtuturo sa bawat bata. Minsan kailangan niyang mag-adjust o mag-isip ng ibang strategy depende sa response ng bata. Nakikita ko na talagang pinag-iisipan niya kung ano ang pinakamabuti para sa anak ko.” IDI_P3-p4-L155-157

(The teacher also says that the teaching approach is not the same for every child. Sometimes, the teacher needs to adjust or think of a different strategy depending on the child’s response. I can see that the teacher really thinks carefully about what is best for my child.)

As the researcher engaged with the experiences shared by teachers and parents, the researcher constantly heard how uncertainty shapes how teachers perceive their roles, with unfamiliar situations first perceived as overwhelming before gradually becoming manageable through effort and reflection. The researcher sees this in the actions of Participant 1, who initially questioned her capability yet chose to reframe the situation as a learning opportunity, and in the parents who recognized how teachers persist in finding ways to support learners despite difficulties. The researcher feels the tension between doubt and responsibility, where teachers must make decisions even when they are unsure of their effectiveness. Furthermore, the researcher realized that perceived challenges are not merely obstacles in teaching but moments that shape how teachers understand their competence and redefine their role—until these internal interpretations surface as emotional reactions that influence how they experience their professional responsibilities.

Emotional Responses

Responding to complex learner needs without sufficient preparation often evokes strong emotional reactions among teachers, particularly when they feel that their strategies may not be adequate to support learners effectively. Participant 3 candidly shared how the pressure affected her emotionally during IEP planning.

“During IEP planning for a learner with multiple needs, I spent nights revising and worrying if it’s realistic. I felt so drained, thinking I’m not prepared enough. I cried a bit that night, honestly.”-IDI_ST3-PAGE5-L198-200

Participant 9, as a beginning teacher, expressed feelings of being unprepared.

“Honestly po, challenging siya. I feel na minsan hindi pa ako handa sa lahat ng situations... Minsan hindi ko alam kung anong gagawin.”-IDI_ST9-P8-L372-374
(Honestly, it is challenging. I feel that sometimes I am still not prepared for all situations. There are moments when I do not know what to do.)

These accounts from parents strengthen the credibility of the teachers' narratives. These were supported by Parent 2, who shared that teachers demonstrate strong concern and emotional investment in supporting learners with disabilities.

“May mga pagkakataon po na sinasabi ng teacher na nahihirapan ang anak ko sa activity at pinag-iisipan niya kung paano siya mas matutulungan. Nakikita ko po na talagang iniisip ng teacher ang kapakanan ng bata.” IDI_P2-p4-L170-172

(There are times when the teacher says that my child is struggling with an activity and that they are thinking of ways to better help the child. I can see that the teacher truly considers the child’s well-being.)

Another parent, 3, highlighted and expressed that teachers often show patience and understanding when learners experience emotional or behavioral difficulties.

“Kapag nahihirapan o nagiging emotional ang anak ko, sinasabi ng teacher na kailangan lang ng mas maraming pasensya at guidance. Nakikita ko rin na hindi siya agad sumusuko sa bata kahit mahirap ang sitwasyon.” IDI_P3-p4-L174-176

(When my child struggles or becomes emotional, the teacher says that the child simply needs more patience and guidance. I can also see that the teacher does not easily give up on the child even when the situation is difficult.)

As the researcher immersed himself in the experiences shared by teachers and parents, the researcher constantly heard that teaching in SPED is not only a cognitive but also an emotional challenge, where uncertainty and responsibility deeply affect teachers' inner well-being. The researcher sees this in the actions of Participant 3, who spent sleepless nights revising IEPs and questioning her preparedness, and in the parents who recognized how teachers go beyond their roles—showing care, patience, and continued concern for learners even outside classroom hours. The researcher feels the emotional weight that teachers carry, where frustration, anxiety, and guilt are not simply reactions, but reflections of how deeply they are invested in their learners' progress. And the researcher realized that emotional responses are not signs of inadequacy, but manifestations of commitment, where teachers continue to give despite feeling

overwhelmed—until these emotions begin to shape not only how they feel, but how they understand their responsibility and role as educators, gradually anchoring a deeper sense of accountability toward the learners they serve.

Sense of Responsibility

Carrying the role of supporting learners with disabilities often strengthens teachers' sense of accountability, making responsibility for learners' safety, growth, and well-being central to their professional identity, despite feelings of stress and uncertainty. Participant 7 emphasized how this responsibility pushed her to persist even when she questioned her own ability.

“When we communicate consistently, set shared goals, and monitor progress together, learners respond better.”-IDI_ST7-PAGE3-L115-116

Participant 10 reflected on long-term commitment despite limited training.

“Never stop learning... Patience and empathy are key, and remember that every small progress of your learner is a big achievement.”-IDI_ST10-PAGE7-L326-329

These reflections from parents provide additional context to the teachers' experiences. The participants' claims were supported by Parent 2, who shared that teachers demonstrate a strong sense of responsibility in monitoring the progress of learners with special needs.

“Makita gid namon nga ginahimo sang teacher ang iya best para sa bata. Bisan may mga difficulties ang anak ko sa pagtuon, ginapangitaan gid niya sang paagi kung paano siya matabangan kag mapasunod sa lesson.” IDI_P2-p5-L190-192

(We can truly see that the teacher is doing their best for the child. Even though my child has difficulties in learning, the teacher continues to find ways to help the child and guide them in following the lesson)

Finally, Parent 4 emphasized that teachers maintain communication with parents to ensure that the learner receives proper support both at home and in school.

“Ang teacher ng anak ko ay palaging nakikipag-communicate sa amin tungkol sa progress ng bata. Pinapaliwanag niya kung ano ang mga dapat gawin sa bahay para matulungan ang bata. Makikita mo talaga na may malasakit siya sa pag-unlad ng mga estudyante.” IDI_P4-p5-L198-200

(My child's teacher constantly communicates with us regarding the child's progress. The teacher explains what should be done at home to help the child. You can truly see the teacher's genuine concern for the students' development.)

As the researcher immersed himself in the experiences shared by teachers and parents, the researcher constantly heard how responsibility becomes the force that keeps teachers grounded in their roles despite uncertainty and pressure. The researcher sees this in the actions of Participant 1, who chose to persist because she felt accountable for her learner's safety and progress, and in the parents who recognized how teachers consistently monitor, communicate, and guide learners even beyond classroom hours. The researcher feels the weight of this responsibility, where teaching is no longer just a

task but a personal commitment to each learner's well-being and growth. And the researcher realized that a strong sense of responsibility does not remove the challenges teachers face, but instead pushes them to continue striving despite limitations, until this responsibility begins to influence how they view and assess their own competence in fulfilling their roles.

Self-Perceived Competence

Evaluating one's own ability to meet the demands of SPED teaching becomes a continuous internal process, especially when limited professional development leaves teachers uncertain about the effectiveness of their strategies. Participant 4 admitted her uncertainty in IEP writing.

"I feel anxious about it. I do it, but I am not fully confident that I am doing it correctly all the time."-IDI_ST4-PAGE3-L98-99

Participant 2 expressed similar hesitation.

"I think I'm doing okay, pero may gaps pa rin sa knowledge ko... Minsan unsure ako kung tama ang approach ko."-IDI_ST2-PAGE3-L391-392

(I think I'm doing okay, but there are still gaps in my knowledge. Sometimes, I am unsure whether my approach is correct.)

Taken together, these parental perspectives reinforce the teachers' accounts. The participants' claims were supported by Parent 1, who shared that teachers are making efforts to improve their strategies to support learners with disabilities.

"Napansin ko po na kapag may nahihirapan ang anak ko sa lesson, ang teacher ay nag-aadjust ng paraan ng pagtuturo. Minsan gumagamit siya ng ibang activities o visual materials para mas maintindihan ng bata." IDI_P1-p5-L205-207

(I noticed that whenever my child struggles with the lesson, the teacher adjusts the teaching approach. Sometimes, the teacher uses different activities or visual materials so that the child can understand the lesson better.)

Adding to this perspective, Parent 4 emphasized that teachers remain patient and persistent in helping learners progress.

"Makita gid namon nga ang teacher naga-adjust gid sa needs sang bata. Kis-a ginapangitaan niya sang bagong paraan sang pagtudlo para mas maintindihan sang bata ang lesson. Dako gid ini nga bulig sa pag-improve sang bata." IDI_P4-p5-L217-219

(We can truly see that the teacher really adjusts to the child's needs. Sometimes, the teacher looks for new ways of teaching so that the child can better understand the lesson. This is a great help in the child's improvement.)

As the researcher reflected more deeply on the experiences shared by teachers and parents, the researcher constantly heard how competence is something teachers grow into rather than begin with, shaped by moments of doubt, effort, and persistence. The researcher sees this in the actions of Participant 1, who continues to carry out her responsibilities despite uncertainty, and in the parents who recognize how teachers adjust

their strategies, explore new approaches, and refine their teaching to support learners better. The researcher feels the tension between feeling unprepared and choosing to continue, where teachers move forward not because they are fully confident, but because they are committed to learning. And the researcher realized that self-perceived competence is not defined by how much teachers initially know, but by how willing they are to adapt, reflect, and improve through experience, until this evolving sense of capability begins to shape the creative and adaptive ways they respond to the challenges of supporting learners with disabilities.

Adaptive Coping Strategies in Managing Professional Demands

Creative & Adaptive Teaching

Adapting instruction becomes an essential response when teachers are faced with diverse learner needs without sufficient formal training, requiring them to rely on creativity and observation to guide their teaching practices. Participant 1 described how she experiments with different instructional strategies to determine what works best for her learners.

“I experiment with different teaching methods. For example, I use more visual materials and hands-on activities. I observe what works and what does not.”-IDI_ST1-PAGE6-L249-251

Participant 4 shared how she developed communication strategies for a learner with speech delay despite lacking formal training.

“I had to research online and try different communication tools—like visual cards and gestures. It was overwhelming, but it pushed me to be creative.”-IDI_ST4-PAGE1-L33-34

Parents also provided insights that resonate with the teachers' experiences. The participants' claims were supported by Parent 1, who shared that teachers adjust their teaching methods to meet the child's learning needs.

“Napansin ko po na kapag nahihirapan ang anak ko sa lesson, ang teacher ay gumagamit ng ibang paraan ng pagtuturo. Minsan gumagamit siya ng visual materials at activities para mas maintindihan ng bata ang lesson.” IDI_P1-p5-L226-228

(I noticed that whenever my child struggles with the lesson, the teacher uses different teaching approaches. Sometimes, the teacher uses visual materials and activities so that the child can better understand the lesson.)

Likewise, Parent 4 emphasized that teachers sometimes incorporate the learner's interests in order to encourage participation.

“Napansin ko gid nga ginahimo sang teacher nga interesting ang lesson para sa bata. Ginagamit niya ang hilig sang bata sa activity para mas ma-engganyo siya mag-participate sa klase.” IDI_P4-p6-L238-240

(I truly noticed that the teacher makes the lesson interesting for the child. The teacher uses the child's interests in the activities to encourage greater participation in class.)

As the researcher closely examined the experiences shared by teachers and parents, the researcher repeatedly heard that teaching in SPED is a continuous process of trying, adjusting, and discovering what works for each learner. The researcher sees this in the actions of Participant 4, who developed communication strategies through independent research and experimentation, and in the parents who recognized how teachers modify their approaches, use engaging materials, and align lessons with learners' interests. The researcher feels the determination and persistence behind these efforts, where teachers do not rely on certainty but on their willingness to adapt to make learning meaningful. And the researcher realized that creative and adaptive teaching is not simply a strategy but a response to uncertainty, where teachers turn limitations into opportunities to better support their learners, until this needs to adjust extends beyond instruction and into the creation of the very resources they use in the classroom.

Resource Improvisation

Responding to limited access to specialized materials and assistive tools requires teachers to extend their roles beyond instruction, often compelling them to create, modify, and source their own learning resources to meet the needs of learners with disabilities. Participant 8 explained how she independently researched and adapted reading interventions in the absence of formal training.

"I didn't have specialized training in multisensory reading interventions, so I had to research strategies online and adapt classroom activities."-IDI_ST8-P2-L58-59

Participant 10 described learning technology integration through self-directed exploration.

"We were expected to integrate technology-assisted learning... Wala kaming formal training... so we had to learn through trial-and-error."-IDI_ST10-PAGE2-L71-72

The narratives of the teachers are further complemented by the perspectives of parents. These claims of the participants of the study were supported by Parent 1, who shared that teachers sometimes prepare their own instructional materials to help learners better understand the lessons.

"Napansin ko po na may mga pagkakataon na ang teacher mismo ang gumagawa ng materials para sa mga bata, tulad ng visual aids o activity sheets. Nakikita ko po na ginagawa niya ito para mas maintindihan ng anak ko ang lesson." IDI_P1-p6-L245-247

(I noticed that there are times when the teacher personally creates materials for the children, such as visual aids or activity sheets. I can see that the teacher does this so that my child can better understand the lesson.)

Finally, Parent 4 emphasized that teachers show effort in providing support even when resources are limited.

“Bilang magulang, nakikita ko po na kahit kulang ang materials sa school, ginapangitaan gid sang teacher sang paraan para matulungan ang mga bata. Nag-e-effort siya na gumawa o maghanap ng ibang resources para sa learning ng mga estudyante.” IDI_P4-p6-L257-259

(As a parent, I can see that even when the school lacks materials, the teacher still finds ways to help the children. The teacher makes an effort to create or look for other resources to support the students' learning.)

As the researcher looked more closely at the experiences shared by teachers and parents, the researcher constantly heard how teaching in SPED becomes an act of creation, where teachers do not wait for resources but actively find ways to make learning possible. The researcher sees this in the actions of Participant 8, who adapted strategies through independent research, and in the parents who recognized how teachers create and modify materials to support their children's understanding. The researcher feels the added weight of this responsibility, where teachers are not only delivering lessons but also designing the very tools needed for learning. And the researcher realized that resource improvisation is not merely a response to scarcity, but a reflection of teachers' commitment to bridge gaps so learners can continue to learn, until this effort to adapt extends beyond materials and begins to influence how teachers manage behavior and support learners within the classroom.

Behavioral Support Strategies

Addressing learner behavior in the absence of structured behavioral training requires teachers to develop practical and responsive strategies grounded in observation, peer guidance, and continuous experimentation. Participant 2 recalled how she relied on shared strategies to manage aggressive behavior.

“I remembered strategies shared by senior teachers... I tried to redirect the behavior with a calm voice and visual cues. It helped, kahit medyo nervous ako.”- IDI_ST2-PAGE6-L257-258

Participant 6 implemented structured reinforcement systems.

“I used a token system... and incorporated his interests... After weeks, he gradually engaged.”-IDI_ST26-PAGE1-L44-48

The parents' reflections provide additional evidence supporting the teachers' narratives. These claims of the participants of the study were supported by Parent 1, who shared that teachers patiently guide learners when behavioral difficulties arise.

“Napansin ko po na kapag nagiging restless o nahihirapan mag-focus ang anak ko sa klase, ang teacher ay mahinahon siyang ginagabayan. Hindi siya agad napapagalitan, kundi tinutulungan siyang bumalik sa activity.” IDI_P1-p6-L264-266

(I noticed that whenever my child becomes restless or has difficulty focusing in class, the teacher calmly guides the child. The child is not immediately scolded, but instead is helped to return to the activity.)

Moreover, Parent 3 expressed that teachers guide learners in interacting with their classmates and participating in group activities.

“Sinasabi ng teacher na tinutulungan niya ang anak ko na makisama sa ibang bata sa klase. Minsan pinartner siya sa kaklase para mas maging comfortable siya sa mga activities.” IDI_P3-p6-L272-273

(The teacher says that they are helping my child interact with the other children in class. Sometimes, my child is paired with classmates so that the child can feel more comfortable during activities.)

As the researcher observed the experiences shared by teachers and parents, the researcher constantly heard how managing behavior is not about control but about consistent guidance, patience, and understanding. The researcher sees this in the actions of Participant 6, who implemented structured reinforcement strategies to support learner engagement, and in the parents who recognized how teachers calmly guide, encourage, and redirect learners during difficult moments. The researcher feels the complexity of these situations, where teachers must balance firmness with empathy while maintaining a safe and supportive classroom environment. And the researcher realized that behavioral support strategies are not merely techniques, but intentional efforts to help learners regulate themselves and participate meaningfully—until these efforts naturally extend beyond individual practice and into shared responsibility with others who support the learner.

Collaboration

Working with others becomes an essential support system for teachers when navigating the demands of SPED teaching, especially in the absence of sufficient formal training and structured professional development. Participant 1 shared how she relies on various sources of support to guide her practice.

“I rely on my fellow SPED teachers, online groups, and even parents who share their experiences.”-IDI_ST1-PAGE7-L290-291

Participant 7 emphasized the importance of home-school collaboration.

“When we communicate consistently... learners respond better.”-IDI_ST7-PAGE5-L116-117

These parental insights further validate the teachers' accounts. These claims of the participants of the study were supported by Parent 2, who shared that teachers regularly communicate with parents to discuss the progress of the learner.

“Makita gid namon nga ginapangayo sang teacher ang cooperation sang mga magulang para mas mabuligan ang bata. Ginasugid niya kung ano ang strategies nga ginahimo sa classroom kag kung paano namon ini masupport sa balay.” IDI_P2-p7-L286-288

(We can truly see that the teacher seeks the cooperation of the parents in order to better help the child. The teacher explains the strategies being used in the classroom and how we can support them at home.)

Concluding the parents' perspectives, Parent 4 emphasized that collaboration between teachers and parents helps the learner progress more effectively.

“Kapag may communication sa pagitan ng teacher at ng magulang, mas nakakatulong ito sa bata. Kapag may sinasabi ang teacher tungkol sa strategy, sinusubukan din namin itong gawin sa bahay.” IDI_P4-p7-L294-296

(When there is communication between the teacher and the parents, it becomes more helpful for the child. Whenever the teacher shares strategies, we also try to apply them at home.)

As the researcher took a deeper look into the lived realities of teachers and parents, the researcher constantly heard how teaching in SPED becomes a shared journey, where support is built through communication, cooperation, and collective effort. The researcher sees this in the actions of Participant 7, who consistently coordinated with parents to align strategies, and in the parents who actively participated by applying these strategies at home and maintaining open communication with the teacher. The researcher feels the reassurance that comes from not facing challenges alone, where collaboration transforms pressure into shared responsibility. And the researcher realized that collaboration is not only a way to improve instruction, but also a source of strength that sustains teachers in difficult situations, until this shared support encourages them to independently seek knowledge and strategies to further enhance their practice.

Self-Directed Learning

Seeking knowledge independently becomes a necessary response when formal training opportunities are limited, prompting teachers to take initiative in strengthening their instructional practices through available resources. Participant 1 described how she engages in self-study to improve her teaching.

“I read articles, watch videos, and sometimes attend free webinars.”-IDI_ST1-PAGE6-L248-249

Participant 6 expanded learning through research engagement. *“I join webinars, read research papers, and connect with online SPED communities.”-IDI_ST6-PAGE7-L310-311*

The parents' perspectives reveal a shared understanding of the teachers' accounts. These claims of the participants of the study were supported by Parent 1, who shared that teachers continuously seek ways to improve their knowledge in helping learners with special needs.

“Napansin ko po na ang teacher ng anak ko ay palaging naghahanap ng paraan para mas matulungan ang bata. Minsan sinasabi niya na may mga bagong strategies siyang natutunan na gusto niyang subukan sa klase.” IDI_P1-p7-L301-303

(I noticed that my child's teacher is always looking for ways to better help the child. Sometimes, the teacher says that they have learned new strategies that they want to try in class.)

As a final observation from the parent, Parent 4 emphasized that teachers remain committed to learning even beyond their classroom responsibilities.

"Bilang magulang, nakikita ko po na hindi tumitigil ang teacher sa paghahanap ng paraan para matulungan ang mga bata. Kahit minsan mahirap ang situation, patuloy siyang nag-aaral ng mga bagong strategy para sa kanila." IDI_P4-p7-L313-315

(As a parent, I can see that the teacher never stops looking for ways to help the children. Even when situations become difficult, the teacher continues learning new strategies for them.)

As the researcher delved further into the experiences shared by teachers and parents, the researchers constantly heard how learning becomes a personal responsibility that teachers willingly carry beyond formal training. The researcher sees this in the actions of Participant 6, who actively engages in webinars and research to expand her knowledge, and in the parents who recognized how teachers continuously explore and apply new strategies to support learners. The researcher feels the dedication behind these efforts, where teachers persist in improving themselves despite limited opportunities for structured development. And the researcher realized that self-directed learning is not simply a response to professional gaps, but a reflection of teachers' commitment to grow for the sake of their learners, until this continuous effort to improve also calls for ways to sustain themselves emotionally in the face of ongoing demands.

Emotional Support

Sustaining one's well-being becomes essential when teachers face continuous demands that cannot always be resolved through instructional strategies alone, leading them to rely on personal and social forms of emotional support. Participant 1 highlighted how family serves as a source of strength and reassurance.

"I talk to my family about my problems... It reminds me why I chose this profession."-IDI_ST1-PAGE7-L292-293

Participant 3 described emotional release.

"Sometimes I cry in private... I also meditate, pray, or take short breaks."-IDI_ST5-PAGE6-L262-263

The parents' experiences also reveal similar observations regarding this matter. These claims of the participants of the study were supported by Parent 2, who shared that teachers demonstrate patience and emotional understanding when guiding learners with special needs.

"Makita gid namon nga ginahatagan sang teacher sang emotional support ang mga bata. Kung may nahihirapan ukon naga-emotional ang bata, ginakausap niya ini kag ginahatagan sang encouragement." IDI_P2-p7-L324-326

(We can truly see that the teacher provides emotional support to the children. When a child is struggling or becomes emotional, the teacher talks to the child and gives encouragement.)

In the same way, Parent 3 expressed that teachers remain calm and supportive when learners experience difficulties.

“Bilang magulang, nakikita ko po na kahit may challenges ang anak ko sa behavior o sa pag-aaral, ang teacher ay nananatiling understanding at supportive sa kanya.”
IDI_P3-p7-L328-329

(As a parent, I can see that even though my child faces challenges in behavior or learning, the teacher remains understanding and supportive toward the child.)

As the researcher took a deeper view of the experiences shared by teachers and parents, the researcher constantly heard how sustaining oneself emotionally is essential in continuing the work of teaching, especially in demanding SPED contexts. The researcher sees this in the actions of Participant 3, who processes stress through journaling and reflection, and in the parents who recognized how teachers remain patient, calm, and emotionally supportive even when learners struggle. The researcher feels the quiet resilience behind these efforts, where teachers continue to show compassion despite their own emotional exhaustion. And the researcher realized that emotional support is not simply a way to cope, but a foundation that allows teachers to remain present and committed until these sustained efforts begin to shape their personal growth as educators.

Professional Growth and Commitment in Special Education Practice

Personal Growth

Developing as a teacher is a gradual, reflective process shaped by daily classroom experiences, particularly when formal training is limited, and learning occurs through practice, observation, and adaptation. Participant 3 reflected on how her experiences revealed strengths she had not initially recognized.

“Challenging pero rewarding. I feel I’m constantly learning on the job... I’ve learned patience, creativity, and humility.”-IDI_ST3-PAGE8-L349-350

Participant 6 emphasized how continuous adaptation shaped her growth mindset. *“It’s a journey of continuous learning... I document what works and what doesn’t, reflect on each session, and ask myself, ‘How can I improve tomorrow?’”*-IDI_ST6-P1-46-48

To further validate the teacher participants' claims, perspectives from parents of learners with special needs were also gathered. The participants' claims were supported by Parent 1, who shared that teachers become more patient and understanding as they continue supporting learners with special needs.

“Napansin ko po na habang tumatagal, mas nagiging patient at mas understanding ang teacher sa pag-handle ng anak ko. Makikita mo po na natututo rin siya sa bawat experience niya sa pagtuturo.” IDI_P1-p8-L341-343

(I noticed that as time goes by, the teacher becomes more patient and understanding in handling my child. You can also see that the teacher learns from every teaching experience.)

Another, parent 4 shared and emphasized that teachers continue to grow professionally as they interact with different learners.

“Makita gid namon nga ang teacher naga-grow gid sa iya profession. Kada encounter niya sa mga bata nga may lain-lain nga needs, mas nagadugang ang iya experience kag kaalam kung paano sila mabuligan.” IDI_P4-p8-L353-355

(We can truly see that the teacher is continuously growing in the profession. With every encounter with children who have different needs, the teacher gains more experience and knowledge on how to help them.)

As the researcher took a closer look at the experiences shared by teachers and parents, the researcher kept hearing that growth is something teachers slowly build through experience, reflection, and persistence rather than immediate mastery. The researcher sees this in the actions of Participant 3, who continues to learn and adapt through daily classroom encounters, and in the parents who recognized how teachers become more patient, confident, and effective over time. The researcher feels the quiet transformation that unfolds in these experiences, as challenges gradually shape teachers into more capable, self-aware professionals. And the researcher realized that personal growth in SPED teaching is not simply about gaining knowledge, but about becoming—where teachers evolve through the very difficulties they face—until this growth begins to strengthen not only their skills, but also their emotional endurance in sustaining their roles.

Emotional Strength

Enduring the demands of SPED teaching gradually builds teachers' capacity to regulate their emotions and remain composed in challenging situations, even when they initially experience stress, doubt, and exhaustion. Participant 5 acknowledged both the emotional toll and the strength gained through persistence.

“It’s challenging, emotionally taxing, but meaningful. I learn patience, resilience, and humility every day... Limited PD is tough, but it teaches adaptability and reliance on community.”-IDI_ST5-PAGE8-L355-358

Participant 6 described how emotional regulation became part of her professional development.

“I realized that teaching SPED is emotionally demanding; you need patience, empathy, and self-awareness... I had to learn self-regulation too.”-IDI_ST6-PAGE3-L105-106

To strengthen the credibility of the findings and provide additional perspectives on the teachers' experiences, parents of learners with special needs were also interviewed. The participants' claims were supported by Parent 1, who shared that teachers show patience and emotional strength when guiding learners with special needs.

“Napansin ko po na kahit may mga pagkakataon na nahihirapan ang anak ko sa behavior o sa lesson, nananatiling patient ang teacher sa pag-guide sa kanya. Makikita mo po na may malaking pasensya siya sa pag-handle ng mga bata.”
IDI_P1-p8-L360-362

(I noticed that even when my child struggles with behavior or lessons, the teacher remains patient in guiding the child. You can truly see that the teacher has great patience in handling the children.)

Finally, supporting this view, Parent 3 expressed that teachers continue supporting the learners despite difficulties.

“Bilang magulang, nakikita ko po na hindi madaling magturo sa mga batang may special needs. Pero ang teacher ay nananatiling supportive at hindi agad sumusuko sa mga bata kahit mahirap ang sitwasyon.” IDI_P3-p8-L368-370

(As a parent, I can see that teaching children with special needs is not easy. However, the teacher remains supportive and does not easily give up on the children even when the situation is difficult.)

As the researcher looked more deeply into the experiences shared by teachers and parents, the researcher constantly heard how strength is not formed in ease but in repeated moments of difficulty that teachers learn to endure. The researcher sees this in the actions of Participant 5, who acknowledged the emotional weight of teaching yet persevered, and in the parents who recognized how teachers remain patient, calm, and committed even in challenging situations. The researcher feels the quiet resilience that develops over time, where emotional struggles are not avoided but gradually managed with greater control and understanding. And the researcher realized that emotional strength is not the absence of stress, but the ability to remain steady and present despite it, until this growing resilience begins to drive teachers to further strengthen their practice through continuous professional development.

Professional Development

Strengthening one's professional capacity continues even in the absence of formal training, as teachers actively seek opportunities to improve their knowledge and instructional practices through independent and collaborative efforts. Participant 2 described how she relies on self-study and peer support to enhance her teaching.

“I rely on self-study, watching tutorial videos, and asking senior SPED teachers for advice.”-IDI_ST2-PAGE6-L253

Participant 6 explained her proactive approach to professional learning.

“I join webinars, read research papers, and connect with online SPED communities... Informal learning is essential.”

To strengthen the credibility of these findings, insights from parents were also considered. The participants' claims were supported by Parent 1, who shared that teachers continuously strive to improve their strategies for supporting learners with special needs.

“Napansin ko po na habang tumatagal ay mas nagiging maayos ang paraan ng teacher sa pagtuturo sa anak ko. Minsan sinasabi niya na may bagong strategy siyang natutunan na gusto niyang subukan sa klase.” IDI_P1-p8-L379-381

(I noticed that as time goes by, the teacher’s way of teaching my child becomes more effective. Sometimes, the teacher says that they have learned a new strategy that they want to try in class.)

As the researcher examined the experiences shared by teachers and parents, the researcher constantly heard how growth continues even without formal structures, driven by teachers' willingness to learn and improve. The researcher sees this in the actions of Participant 6, who actively engages in webinars and research to strengthen her practice, and in the parents who recognize that teachers continuously adjust and refine their strategies to better support learners. The researcher feels the persistence behind these efforts, where teachers do not remain limited by the absence of training but choose to keep developing themselves for the sake of their students. And the researcher realized that professional development in SPED teaching is not solely dependent on formal programs, but is sustained by teachers' initiative and commitment to continuous growth, which deepens their dedication to the learners they serve.

Commitment to Learners

Sustaining effort in SPED teaching often stems from a deep sense of purpose rooted in learners' progress and well-being, even when teachers face stress, fatigue, and uncertainty. Participant 8 shared how witnessing learner growth reinforces her motivation.

“Seeing my learners progress, even in small steps, makes it worthwhile.”-IDI_ST8-PAGE8-L374-375

Participant 9 described how small progress reaffirmed her purpose.

“Kahit maliit na improvement, nakikita mo, parang big win na for the learner. Nakaka-motivate po siya to keep trying.”-IDI_ST9-PAGE8-9-L380-381

(Even small improvements feel like a big win for the learner. It becomes motivating and encourages me to keep trying.)

Parents of learners with special needs also provided observations that align with the teachers' experiences. The participants' claims were supported by Parent 1, who shared that teachers remain committed to helping learners improve despite the challenges they encounter.

“Napansin ko po na kahit nahhirapan ang anak ko sa ibang lessons, hindi siya pinababayaan ng teacher. Patuloy niya itong ginagabayan hanggang sa may makita kaming improvement sa bata.” IDI_P1-p9-L398-400

(I noticed that even when my child struggles with some lessons, the teacher does not neglect the child. The teacher continues to guide the child until we begin to see improvement.)

Consistent with this observation, Parent 3 expressed that teachers celebrate even small improvements made by the learners.

“Sinasabi ng teacher na kahit maliit na improvement ng bata ay malaking bagay na. Nakikita ko po na talagang masaya siya kapag may progress ang mga estudyante.” IDI_P3-p9-L406-407

(The teacher says that even small improvements in the child are already a big achievement. I can see that the teacher is truly happy whenever the students show progress.)

As the researcher explored deeper into the experiences shared by teachers and parents, the researcher consistently heard that commitment is sustained by the meaning teachers find in their learners' growth, even during challenges. The researcher sees this in the actions of Participant 8, who remains motivated by small learner progress, and in the parents who recognized how teachers continuously guide, encourage, and celebrate their children's improvements. The researcher feels the depth of purpose behind these efforts, where fatigue and uncertainty are overshadowed by the impact teachers see in their learners. And the researcher realized that commitment to learners is not merely a duty, but a sustaining force that keeps teachers moving forward—until this sense of purpose sharpens their ability to respond thoughtfully and develop solutions to the complex situations they encounter in their classrooms.

Problem-Solving Skills

Navigating complex learner needs over time strengthens teachers' ability to think critically, reflect on their practices, and develop effective solutions tailored to each learner. Participant 4 illustrated how observation and experimentation led to meaningful breakthroughs.

“I tried breaking it into smaller steps with rewards... Then I asked his parents about his interests and incorporated a game he likes. Suddenly, he participated actively.”-IDI_ST4-PAGE5-L203-204

Participant 6 highlighted iterative improvement. *“I document what works and what doesn't... How can I improve tomorrow?”-IDI_ST6-PAGE4-L159-160*

The experiences shared by the participants regarding the development of problem-solving skills were also reflected in the parents' perspectives, strengthening their understanding. Parent 1 explained that teachers actively look for ways to help learners overcome difficulties.

“Kapag nahihirapan ang anak ko sa activity, sinasabi ng teacher na hinahati niya ang task sa mas maliliit na steps para mas madaling gawin ng bata.” IDI_P1-p9-L416-417

(When my child struggles with an activity, the teacher says that the task is divided into smaller steps to make it easier for the child to accomplish.)

In addition, Parent 3 noted that teachers carefully observe the learners before deciding how to guide them.

“Ayon sa teacher ng anak ko, inoobserbahan niya muna kung paano natututo ang bata bago siya mag-adjust ng paraan ng pagtuturo.” IDI_P3-p9-L422-423

(According to my child's teacher, the teacher first observes how the child learns before adjusting the teaching approach.)

As the researcher explored more deeply the experiences shared by teachers and parents, the researcher constantly heard how challenges gradually transform into opportunities for thinking, adjusting, and improving practice. The researcher sees this in the actions of Participant 4, who experimented with different strategies until she found what worked for the learner, and in the parents who recognized how teachers carefully observe, modify, and refine their approaches to better support their children. The researcher feels the growing confidence that emerges from these repeated efforts, where uncertainty is slowly replaced by clarity and purpose. And the researcher realized that problem-solving in SPED teaching is not simply about finding immediate answers, but about developing the ability to respond thoughtfully and effectively over time—until this continuous refinement begins to enhance the overall effectiveness of classroom instruction.

Enhanced Instructional Effectiveness

Strengthening instructional practices is a gradual process shaped by continuous interaction with learners, in which teachers refine their approaches through observation, experimentation, and reflection rather than relying solely on formal training. Participant 2 described how improvisation helped her develop differentiated instruction.

“Without formal training, I had to experiment with materials and approaches. I tried visual supports, sensory breaks, and repetition strategies. It was exhausting at first, but it helped me understand how to adjust instruction based on learners’ responses.”-IDI_ST2-PAGE1-L23-24

Participant 4 similarly shared how instructional creativity enhanced her teaching effectiveness.

“I had a learner with severe speech delay, and I didn’t have specialized training. I tried visual cards, gestures, and different communication tools. At first, I felt unsure, but when I saw the learner responding, it boosted my confidence. I learned to observe closely and adapt instruction depending on what works.”-IDI_ST4-PAGE1-32-34

The participants' accounts of the development of enhanced instructional effectiveness were also reflected in the observations shared by the parents. Parent 1 described how teachers adjust their teaching approaches to help learners understand the lessons more clearly.

“Sa experience namin bilang magulang, kapag nahihirapan ang anak ko sa lesson, ang teacher ay nag-iiba ng paraan ng pagtuturo para mas maintindihan ng bata.” IDI_P1-p10-L431-432

(In our experience as parents, whenever my child struggles with the lesson, the teacher changes the teaching approach so that the child can better understand.)

Similarly, Parent 2 noted that teachers carefully observe the learners in order to determine which strategies work best for them.

“Ayon sa teacher ng anak ko, inoobserbahan niya muna kung paano natututo ang bata bago siya mag-adjust ng activity o strategy para mas maging effective ang pagtuturo.” IDI_P2-p10-L434-435

(According to my child’s teacher, the teacher first observes how the child learns before adjusting the activity or strategy to make the teaching more effective.)

As the researcher looked more deeply into the experiences shared by teachers and parents, the researcher constantly heard how effectiveness is gradually built through continuous effort, adjustment, and reflection rather than immediate mastery. The researcher sees this in the actions of Participant 4, who refined her strategies until the learner responded, and in the parents who recognized how teachers consistently modify their approaches, observe learners closely, and improve their methods over time. The researcher feels the quiet progression behind these efforts, where uncertainty is slowly transformed into confidence through repeated practice and persistence. And the researcher realized that enhanced instructional effectiveness is not simply achieved through training, but through sustained engagement and adaptability—until this growing competence also strengthens teachers’ ability to remain emotionally and professionally resilient in the face of ongoing challenges.

Emotional and Professional Resilience

Sustaining commitment in SPED teaching requires teachers to endure emotional and professional challenges while continuing to fulfill their responsibilities with patience and purpose. Participant 3 described how emotional exhaustion coexists with a strong sense of meaning in her work.

“There are moments where I wanted to give up... I even cried when planning IEPs because I felt unprepared. But I remind myself why I started teaching SPED. Even small learner progress motivates me to continue.”-IDI_ST3-PAGE9-L400-404

Participant 10 reflected on resilience built through years of experience.

“Even after many years, the challenges are still there. But you learn how to manage stress better. You reflect on past successes and use them as motivation to keep going.”-IDI_ST10-PAGE11-L482-484

To strengthen the credibility of these findings, insights from parents were also considered. The participants’ experiences of emotional and professional resilience were also reflected in the parents’ perspectives. Parent 1 explained that teachers remain patient and supportive even when learners encounter difficulties in class.

“Bilang magulang, nakikita ko po na kahit nahihirapan ang anak ko sa ibang activities, nananatiling patient ang teacher sa pag-guide sa kanya. Hindi siya agad sumusuko sa bata.” IDI_P1-p10-L451-452

(As a parent, I can see that even when my child struggles with certain activities, the teacher remains patient in guiding the child. The teacher does not easily give up on the child.)

Moreover, Parent 5 expressed that teachers' dedication and patience help learners gradually gain confidence in the classroom.

"Makita gid namon nga ang teacher naga-effort gid para suportahan ang mga bata bisan may mga challenges sa ila pagtuon. Tungod sa iya pag-encourage, nagkaka-confidence ang bata sa pag-participate sa klase." IDI_P5-p10-L466-468
(We can truly see that the teacher makes a great effort to support the children despite the challenges in their learning. Because of the teacher's encouragement, the child gains confidence in participating in class.)

As the researcher reflected more deeply on the experiences shared by teachers and parents, the researcher kept hearing that resilience is sustained by the decision to continue despite emotional strain and professional challenges. The researcher sees this in the actions of Participant 1, who remains committed even when mentally exhausted, and in the parents who recognized how teachers continue to guide, encourage, and support learners with patience and care. The researcher feels the enduring strength behind these efforts, where difficulties are not avoided but carried with purpose. And the researcher realized that emotional and professional resilience is not simply about enduring stress, but about remaining present and dedicated in the midst of it—until this sustained resilience is reflected in the consistent support teachers provide to their learners over time.

Sustained Support for Learners

In line with this theme, Sustained Support for Learners Participant 8 described balancing administrative and instructional roles while sustaining learner advocacy.

"Managing IEPs, paperwork, and teaching is overwhelming, but I try to make both roles complement each other. Sometimes I use my administrative role to advocate for SPED learners — requesting materials or additional support. Seeing their progress makes the workload worth it."-IDI_ST8-PAGE10-L471-475

Participant 10 reflected on long-term learner commitment.

"I've seen many learners grow over the years. Kahit limited ang training, you continue supporting them because you see their potential. Their progress reminds you why you stay."-IDI_ST10-PAGE11-L495497

The participants' accounts regarding sustained support for learners were also reflected in the experiences shared by the parents. Parent 3 stated that teachers remain committed to guiding learners despite the challenges learners face in learning.

"May mga pagkakataon na kinakausap kami ng teacher tungkol sa progress ng anak ko at kung ano pa ang puwedeng gawin sa bahay para mas matulungan siya." IDI_P3-p11-L482-483

(There are times when the teacher talks to us about my child's progress and about what else can be done at home to better help the child.)

Moreover, Parent 5 emphasized that teachers' dedication helps learners gain confidence and continue learning.

“Makita gid namon nga ang teacher naga-effort gid sa pagbulig sa mga bata bisan may challenges sa ila pagtuon. Tungod sa iya pag-support, nagkaka-confidence ang bata sa pag-participate sa klase.” IDI_P5-p11-L489-491

(We can truly see that the teacher makes a great effort in helping the children despite the challenges in their learning. Because of the teacher’s support, the child gains confidence in participating in class.)

As the researcher listened to the participants and parents, the researcher constantly heard stories of persistence, teachers choosing to stay, to try again, and to continue guiding learners despite exhaustion and uncertainty. The researcher sees a quiet but powerful commitment, where advocacy goes beyond the classroom and extends into coordination, patience, and everyday effort, as reflected in Participant 8's effort to balance administrative responsibilities while still advocating for SPED learners' needs. The researcher feels the weight of their responsibilities, yet at the same time, the depth of their care, as small learner improvements become enough to keep them moving forward. And the researcher realized that sustained support for learners is not driven by perfect preparation, but by an enduring belief in each child's potential, one that compels teachers to remain present, supportive, and hopeful, even when the journey is slow and challenging.

DISCUSSION

External Challenges of SNED Teachers

In the study, the researcher found out that special needs education (SNED) teachers encountered multiple and interconnected external demands in supporting learners with disabilities in the context of limited access to structured professional development, including high parental expectations, workload, and time pressure, diverse learner needs, behavioral and emotional demands, administrative and system gaps, and limited resources and materials. The findings of the study affirm those of Allam and Martin (2021), which revealed that SPED teachers experience significant challenges related to insufficient training, diverse learner needs, and a lack of resources, leading to feelings of unpreparedness in instructional practice. Similarly, the findings support Maguate (2024), who identified workload, student behavior concerns, and limited administrative support as major sources of teacher stress.

However, the findings contrast with those of Pantao (2024), whose study found that workload-related factors and administrative tasks were not significantly associated with teachers' self-efficacy. This contrast highlights that, while teachers in the present study experienced these challenges profoundly, their effects may vary depending on context, coping mechanisms, and adaptive practices.

Teachers' Appraisal of Professional Demands

Through this study, the researcher found that special needs education (SNED) teachers appraise professional demands through perceived challenges, emotional responses, sense of responsibility, and self-perceived competence, showing that they actively interpret and respond to these demands despite limited professional development. The study's findings affirm the work of Lazarus and Folkman (1984), which explains that individuals cognitively appraise stressful situations through processes of evaluation and coping, particularly through perceptions of threat, emotional reactions, and available resources. This supports how teachers in study interpret demands not only cognitively but also emotionally and behaviorally. Similarly, the researcher's findings affirm the study of Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2020), which revealed that teachers' perceptions of workload, competence, and emotional strain influence their motivation, stress levels, and professional engagement, aligning with how participants in the study expressed self-doubt, responsibility, and emotional responses in handling classroom challenges.

However, the findings contradict the study of Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2021), which suggested that teachers with stronger self-efficacy tend to experience lower stress and more stable perceptions of competence, as the participants continued to demonstrate commitment and active engagement despite fluctuating self-perceived competence and limited professional preparation. This contrast highlights that, even in the presence of uncertainty and emotional strain, teachers in the researcher's study remain actively engaged in interpreting and responding to professional demands, reflecting a dynamic, resilient appraisal process.

Adaptive Coping Strategies of Teachers

Grounded in the findings of this study, the researcher found that special needs education (SNED) teachers employed various adaptive coping strategies in managing professional demands, including creative and adaptive teaching, resource improvisation, behavioral support strategies, collaboration, self-directed learning, and emotional support, which enabled them to respond to instructional challenges despite limited professional development effectively. The study's findings affirm the work of Lazarus and Folkman (1984), which explains that individuals utilize both problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies to manage stressors, reflecting how teachers in the study actively addressed classroom challenges while also regulating their emotional well-being. Similarly, the findings affirm the study of Brunsting et al (2019), which revealed that teachers working with learners with disabilities rely on a combination of instructional adaptations, collaboration, and emotional coping mechanisms to sustain their effectiveness in demanding environments.

However, the findings of the researcher contradict the study of Kyriaco (2021), which suggested that teacher coping is often limited to managing stress rather than transforming instructional practices. In contrast, the participants in the study demonstrated proactive and adaptive coping strategies that not only reduced stress but

also enhanced their teaching approaches. This contrast highlights that SNED teachers in the study do not merely cope with professional demands but actively transform challenges into opportunities for instructional innovation and professional growth.

Professional Growth and Resilience

In the researcher's study, the researcher found out that special needs education (SNED) teachers demonstrated adaptive professional growth and commitment despite limited access to structured professional development, reflected in personal growth, emotional strength, professional development, commitment to learners, and problem-solving skills, which enabled them to continuously improve their teaching practices and sustain their dedication to supporting learners with disabilities. Surprisingly, an overarching theme of resilience outcomes also emerged, manifested in enhanced instructional effectiveness, emotional and professional resilience, and sustained support for learners. The study's findings affirm the work of Day and Gu (2018), which emphasizes that teachers develop resilience, commitment, and professional identity through continuous engagement with challenging teaching contexts, thereby sustaining effectiveness despite adversity. Similarly, the findings affirm the study of Mansfield et al (2020), which highlighted that teacher resilience is developed through ongoing adaptation, reflection, and coping, leading to improved instructional practices and sustained motivation.

However, the findings contradict the study of Opfer and Pedder (2021), which suggested that teacher professional growth is largely dependent on structured professional development systems, as the participants in the study demonstrated that meaningful growth and commitment can still emerge through experiential learning, self-directed efforts, and adaptive practices even in the absence of formal training opportunities. This contrast highlights that while structured professional development remains important, teachers in the study were able to construct their own pathways of growth and resilience, transforming challenges into opportunities for sustained professional commitment and effective learner support.

Conclusions

Based on the findings, it was concluded that SNED teachers encountered multiple professional challenges, including workload demands, diverse learner needs, limited resources, and administrative gaps, which imply that insufficient professional development intensifies the complexity of inclusive education practice. Furthermore, teachers interpreted these demands through their sense of responsibility, emotional responses, and perceived competence, indicating that professional appraisal shapes their capacity to remain committed despite challenges. Consequently, SNED teachers employed adaptive coping strategies, such as creative instruction, collaboration, and self-directed learning, which demonstrates that adaptability and initiative are essential in managing professional demands effectively. Lastly, the researcher found that SNED teachers exhibited continuous professional growth, commitment, and resilience, suggesting that sustained dedication and adaptive practices strengthen instructional

effectiveness and support for learners with disabilities despite limited professional development opportunities.



Figure 2. *Modified Paradigm of Stress and Coping Theory*

Recommendations

Based on the findings, Special Needs Education (SNED) teachers may continue to engage in context-responsive, practical professional practices despite limited access to structured professional development. These practices include behavior management, differentiated instruction, IEP development, collaboration, mentoring, and self-directed learning to better support learners with disabilities within inclusive classrooms. Through these practices, SNED teachers may strengthen their instructional competence, emotional resilience, and professional confidence, leading to more effective, adaptive, and sustainable inclusive education practices. Furthermore, the researcher recommends that the study will be extended into a quantitative framework by operationalizing each aspect into measurable variables. The researcher suggests that future researchers employ Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) to develop questionnaires, validate the underlying factor structure of these constructs, and ensure construct validity across contexts. Moreover, paradigm lends itself to mediation analysis, where teachers' appraisal and coping strategies can be tested as mediating variables that explain how external stressors influence behavioral expectations and outcomes. Additionally, through designs such as correlational or structural equation modeling, scholars can empirically examine the strength, direction, and indirect effects among variables, thereby refining the model's explanatory power. This quantitative extension will not only strengthen the generalizability of the findings but also provide a more robust basis for developing

evidence-based interventions that support teachers' adaptive capacities and professional well-being.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

In the conduct of this study, the researcher ensured that ethical standards and research integrity were strictly observed throughout the entire research process. Prior to the conduct of the study, informed consent was properly secured from all participants after clearly explaining the purpose of the research, the procedures involved, and the nature of their participation. The participants were informed that their involvement in the study was entirely voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any point without any form of consequence or pressure. To protect their privacy and confidentiality, pseudonyms and codes were utilized in place of their real identities, and all gathered information was handled with strict confidentiality in accordance with the provisions of the Data Privacy Act of 2012. In addition, the well-being of the participants was carefully safeguarded by ensuring that the interviews were conducted respectfully, sensitively, and free from any form of coercion, harm, or intimidation.

Moreover, the researcher ensured that no conflict of interest existed in the conduct of the study. Plagiarism was strictly avoided through proper acknowledgment and citation of all scholarly works and references used in the study. Furthermore, for purposes of language refinement, grammar checking, and organization of ideas, artificial intelligence (AI) tools such as ChatGPT and Grammarly were utilized only as supplementary writing assistance tools. Nevertheless, all interpretations, analyses, conclusions, and final judgments presented in this study remained entirely the researcher's own work and academic responsibility as the researcher.

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