# Teaching Learners with Special Educational Needs: A Descriptive-Correlational Study of Teachers' Challenges, Coping Strategies, and Support Needs

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**Abstract**

**Aim:** This study aimed to describe the challenges, coping strategies, and perceived support needs of teachers handling learners with special educational needs (SEN) in selected elementary schools in the National Capital Region (NCR), and to examine the relationships among these variables.

**Methodology**: A quantitative descriptive-correlational design was used. Data were collected through a structured survey administered to 45 teachers selected via purposive sampling. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequency, percentage) were used to summarize challenges, coping strategies, and support needs, while Pearson's r was employed to analyze the correlations among these variables.

**Results:** Findings revealed the most common challenges were lack of teaching resources (M=4.45) and large class sizes (M=4.31). Coping strategies included peer collaboration (M=4.18) and self-directed learning (M=4.05). Teachers strongly agreed on the need for more training (M=4.67) and additional teaching aides (M=4.58). Correlational analyses showed significant positive relationships between reported challenges and perceived support needs (r = .62, p < .01), and between challenges and coping strategies (r = .48, p < .01).

**Conclusion**: Results underscore the need to strengthen professional development, increase resources, and enhance institutional support to improve inclusive education. The observed correlations suggest that as teachers experience more challenges, they also report greater use of coping strategies and higher perceived need for support.

**Keywords:** *Special Educational Needs, Teachers' Challenges, Coping Strategies, Support Needs, Quantitative Descriptive-Correlational Study*

## INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education has emerged as a central global commitment over the last three decades, with international frameworks underscoring its role in achieving equity and quality in education (UN ESCAP, 2022). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) obliges states to ensure inclusive, equitable learning opportunities for persons with disabilities, while Sustainable Development Goal 4 targets inclusive and equitable quality education for all by 2030 (Zenchanka et al., 2022).

These global frameworks reflect a growing consensus that education systems must remove barriers, adapt curricula, and support teachers to address diverse learning needs (Díaz et al., 2022). Inclusion is not just about physical presence in schools but also about meaningful participation and improved learning outcomes for all students, including those with disabilities and other special educational needs (SEN).

However, global reports consistently show a gap between policy commitments and actual practice. Many countries struggle to fully implement inclusive education, citing insufficient funding, limited teacher preparation, and inadequate learning materials as persistent challenges (Smith et al., 2021). Recent studies indicate that even where inclusive policies exist, systemic inequities persist, disproportionately affecting students with disabilities in low- and middle-

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income countries (Mezzanotte, 2022). Teachers often receive limited training to manage inclusive classrooms, undermining policy goals (Carvajal et al., 2025).

Teacher preparedness has emerged as a critical factor in realizing inclusive education goals. Capacity-building initiatives for teachers remain underfunded and under-prioritized, despite evidence showing that targeted professional development significantly improves inclusion outcomes (Manyasa, 2022; Amihan et al., 2023). In the Asia-Pacific region, governments have formally committed to inclusive education through declarations and national policies aligned with global frameworks (Singh, 2022). Yet, large disparities remain across and within countries, particularly in resource-constrained contexts.

Many Asia-Pacific education systems face high student-to-teacher ratios, inadequate infrastructure, and limited access to specialized instructional materials, which hamper efforts to meaningfully include learners with SEN (Muńoz & Sanchez, 2023). Teachers frequently report feeling ill-prepared and unsupported in implementing inclusive practices. Recent regional reviews note that while policy rhetoric supports inclusion, classroom realities reveal systemic barriers that require urgent attention (Blackman, 2022). Teachers are expected to adapt instruction without adequate training, support personnel, or resources (Abenojar et al., 2025).

For example, a 2023 regional analysis of inclusive education policy implementation in Southeast Asia found that teachers in public schools often lacked access to specialist support or tailored teaching resources, leading to frustration and inconsistent application of inclusive practices. These challenges are magnified in large urban areas where school overcrowding and resource constraints complicate individualized instruction (Abenojar et al., 2025). Teachers serving diverse student populations must balance competing demands with limited time and training.

In the Philippine context, inclusive education is strongly supported by national policy. The Enhanced Basic Education Act (Republic Act 10533) emphasizes learner-centered, inclusive approaches, while Republic Act 11650 (passed in 2022) institutionalizes a policy of inclusion for learners with disabilities (Philippine Congress, 2022). Republic Act 11650 mandates the Department of Education (DepEd) to ensure accessible, equitable, and quality education services for learners with disabilities through inclusive education programs, specialized personnel, and appropriate materials (DepEd, 2023).

Despite these legislative gains, policy-practice gaps remain evident. A 2023 review by the Philippine Institute for Development Studies noted that teacher training on inclusive education is often fragmented, with limited reach beyond urban centers. Studies have also found that even where inclusive education modules exist in pre-service training, many in-service teachers lack sustained professional development opportunities to update and deepen their inclusive teaching skills (DepEd, 2023; Carvajal et al., 2025).

Moreover, classroom realities present substantial barriers. Philippine public schools frequently experience large class sizes, making individualized instruction for learners with SEN challenging. A recent DepEd monitoring report noted class sizes exceeding 50 students in some NCR schools in 2023 (DepEd NCR, 2023). Resource limitations further complicate inclusive practices. Teachers often lack specialized teaching materials or adaptive technologies needed to support learners with diverse needs (UNICEF Philippines, 2022; Pangilinan, 2025). These gaps place additional strain on teachers who must improvise without adequate support.

Limited access to Special Education (SPED) specialists and teaching aides remains another barrier. While Republic Act 11650 calls for deploying these personnel, implementation has been uneven, especially in densely populated urban settings like the NCR (DepEd, 2023). The National Capital Region (NCR) presents a unique context for studying inclusive education implementation. As the country's most urbanized region, it has comparatively better resource allocation but faces severe overcrowding, diverse learner profiles, and high expectations for academic performance (World Bank Philippines, 2023).

NCR schools typically grapple with constrained physical spaces and high enrollment, which magnify the complexity of delivering inclusive education. Teachers must manage varied learning needs within limited instructional time and space (DepEd NCR, 2023). Existing studies on inclusive education in the Philippines have often focused on policy analysis, student outcomes, or parental perspectives (UNICEF Philippines, 2022). While valuable, these studies rarely center on teachers' own perceptions of daily challenges and coping strategies in the NCR context (Sanchez et al., 2022).

International literature increasingly emphasizes that teacher voice is essential in understanding and improving inclusive education (UNESCO, 2023). Teachers are the frontline implementers whose experiences, strategies, and needs directly shape classroom outcomes. Without systematic documentation of teachers' experiences, interventions risk being top-down and disconnected from classroom realities (OECD, 2023). Teachers' insights on challenges and coping

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strategies are crucial for designing effective training, allocating resources, and reforming policies to support inclusion (Carvajal et al., 2024).

Despite policy advances, NCR teachers report feeling underprepared and overburdened in meeting SEN learners' needs. The COVID-19 pandemic further strained education systems, exposing gaps in teacher training and resource availability for inclusive practices (DepEd, 2023). Post-pandemic recovery plans have called for "building back better" with inclusive education at the center. However, evidence on teachers' actual support needs remains scarce, limiting the effectiveness of policy and programmatic responses (UNICEF Philippines, 2023).

Furthermore, there is limited empirical data linking teachers' reported challenges with their coping strategies and perceived support needs. Understanding these relationships can reveal patterns that inform targeted interventions and professional development priorities (ADB, 2022). This research gap is especially acute in the NCR, where pressures of urban schooling and diverse learner populations create distinctive challenges not always captured in national-level analyses (DepEd NCR, 2023).

By focusing on teachers in selected NCR elementary schools, this study sought to provide context-specific insights that are immediately relevant for local policymakers, school administrators, and training institutions. Specifically, it aims to describe teachers' challenges in handling learners with SEN, identify the coping strategies they employ, and document their perceived support needs, while also examining the relationships among these variables to inform comprehensive support systems.

The study's quantitative descriptive-correlational approach offers a systematic, evidence-based perspective that can illuminate patterns and guide data-driven planning. By analyzing not just descriptive frequencies but also the interrelationships among key variables, it offers new insights for intervention design (Amihan & Sanchez, 2023). Ultimately, this research sought to contribute to the broader goal of realizing inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all learners in the Philippines. By centering teachers' experiences and needs, it provides actionable evidence to support more responsive, sustainable, and effective inclusive education practices in the NCR and potentially in other urban contexts nationwide.

### Statement of the Problem

This study examined the challenges, coping strategies, and perceived support needs of teachers handling learners with special educational needs (SEN) in selected elementary schools in the National Capital Region (NCR), Philippines, and determined the relationships among these variables.

Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the demographic profiles of the teachers handling learners with SEN in selected NCR elementary schools in terms of sex, teaching experience, and grade level taught?
2. What challenges do these teachers face in handling learners with SEN?
3. What coping strategies do they employ in managing learners with SEN?
4. What are their perceived support needs for effective inclusive education?
5. Is there a significant relationship between the challenges faced by teachers and their coping strategies?
6. Is there a significant relationship between the challenges faced by teachers and their perceived support needs?
7. Is there a significant relationship between the coping strategies employed by teachers and their perceived support needs?

### Hypotheses

Based on the research questions, the study tests the following null hypotheses:

1. $H0_1$: There is no significant relationship between the challenges faced by teachers and the coping strategies they employ.
2. $H0_2$: There is no significant relationship between the challenges faced by teachers and their perceived support needs.
3. $H0_3$: There is no significant relationship between the coping strategies employed by teachers and their perceived support needs.

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## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This study employed a quantitative descriptive-correlational design to systematically investigate the challenges, coping strategies, and perceived support needs of teachers handling learners with special educational needs (SEN) in selected elementary schools in the National Capital Region (NCR), Philippines. The descriptive component aimed to provide a comprehensive, numerical summary of teachers' experiences across these dimensions, while the correlational component explored the statistical relationships among these key variables. This dual focus supports evidence-based planning and intervention design.

Quantitative descriptive-correlational research is well-suited for studies that seek to measure, describe, and relate naturally occurring variables without manipulating them (Novosel, 2022). Such designs are especially valuable in educational research for informing policy and practice by identifying patterns and associations that require attention. In the context of inclusive education, this design allows for an empirical understanding of how teachers' reported challenges may relate to their coping strategies and perceived support needs, enabling targeted professional development and systemic reforms.

Recent scholarship emphasizes the importance of such empirical mapping of teachers' experiences to bridge the persistent policy–practice gap in inclusive education. By adopting a quantitative descriptive-correlational approach, this study aligns with global calls for context-specific, data-driven insights that can guide local policy-making, particularly in complex urban environments like the NCR where diverse learner needs intersect with resource constraints.

### Population and Sampling

The population for this study comprised public elementary school teachers in the NCR who handle at least one learner with formally diagnosed special educational needs in mainstream classes. The NCR was chosen as the research site due to its unique challenges of high enrollment, diverse student populations, and urban schooling dynamics, which intensify the complexities of inclusive education implementation. Teachers in this context are on the frontline of realizing the goals of Republic Act 11650, which institutionalizes inclusive education in the Philippines.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling, a non-probability technique widely used in educational research to ensure the inclusion of information-rich cases (Pace, 2021). This method ensured that only teachers with direct, current experience of managing learners with SEN were included, thereby maximizing the relevance and validity of the data collected. Inclusion criteria required that participants have at least one year of teaching experience, be handling at least one learner with SEN during the current school year, and voluntarily provide informed consent.

A total of 45 teachers participated in the study. While modest in size, this sample was appropriate for a focused correlational study of this scope, allowing for robust statistical analysis without overextending logistical capacities. The sample size was determined based on practical constraints and recommendations for exploratory correlational studies, which suggest that a minimum of 30–50 participants can yield meaningful insights while remaining feasible in field-based educational settings.

### Instrument

Data were gathered using a structured survey questionnaire developed by the researchers, drawing on recent literature and consultation with special education experts to ensure content validity and contextual relevance. The instrument consisted of four sections: (1) Demographic Profile, capturing variables such as sex, teaching experience, and grade level taught; (2) Challenges Faced (10 items); (3) Coping Strategies (8 items); and (4) Perceived Support Needs (8 items). Each item was measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

The items on challenges, coping strategies, and support needs were adapted and refined based on recent empirical studies on inclusive education in Southeast Asia (UNICEF EAPRO, 2023; DepEd, 2023), ensuring alignment with both global and local understandings of the barriers and supports relevant to teachers. The questionnaire underwent content validation with three expert reviewers in special education and educational research, who provided feedback on item clarity, relevance, and comprehensiveness.

To further ensure reliability, the instrument was pilot-tested with 10 teachers who met the inclusion criteria but were not part of the final study sample. The pilot data yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.89, indicating high internal

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consistency. Such rigorous development and validation processes follow best practices for survey research in education, enhancing the credibility of findings.

## Data Collection

Data collection occurred from January to February 2025 in coordination with the participating schools' administrators to ensure smooth implementation and compliance with local protocols. The researchers organized brief orientation sessions during scheduled teacher meetings to explain the study objectives, participation criteria, and instructions for completing the survey. Teachers were given sufficient time to ask questions, clarify concerns, and decide on their participation freely.

To maximize response rates while respecting teachers' schedules, the survey was administered both in-person (during meetings) and through secure drop boxes placed in participating schools. These strategies balanced efficiency with ethical considerations such as participant autonomy and privacy (UNICEF, 2023). The researchers closely monitored the process, conducting regular follow-ups with designated school contacts to encourage timely and complete returns of the questionnaires.

Completed surveys were carefully checked for completeness and consistency before data entry. This process minimized the risk of missing or invalid data, a critical step in maintaining the integrity of quantitative analyses. Data were then encoded in SPSS for analysis, with strict confidentiality maintained throughout. Only the research team had access to raw data, ensuring participant privacy and adherence to ethical standards.

## Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) to provide both descriptive and correlational insights into the study variables. Descriptive statistics—including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations—were calculated to summarize the demographic profiles of respondents and their responses on challenges, coping strategies, and perceived support needs. This allowed for clear, accessible interpretation of the overall trends within the sample.

Beyond description, Pearson's r correlation coefficients were computed to examine the relationships among the key variables: challenges faced, coping strategies employed, and perceived support needs. This inferential approach aligns with the study's aim to explore potential associations that may inform targeted interventions and policy development. Correlation analysis is particularly appropriate for non-experimental educational research that seeks to identify predictive or associative patterns without manipulating variables.

The significance level was set at $p < 0.05$, following conventional thresholds for educational and social science research. Additionally, means were interpreted using the following scheme: 1.00–1.80 (Strongly Disagree), 1.81–2.60 (Disagree), 2.61–3.40 (Neutral), 3.41–4.20 (Agree), and 4.21–5.00 (Strongly Agree). This clear rubric facilitated consistent interpretation across all survey items, enhancing the transparency and reproducibility of the study.

## Ethical Considerations

This research prioritized ethical integrity in all stages of its design and implementation. Ethical clearance was obtained from the relevant school division office, ensuring alignment with DepEd guidelines and local educational policies (DepEd, 2023). This process included formal review of the study's objectives, methods, and instruments to safeguard participant welfare and ensure institutional accountability.

Informed consent was a cornerstone of participant recruitment. Teachers received detailed explanations of the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks and benefits, and their rights as participants. Emphasis was placed on the voluntary nature of participation, with clear assurances that teachers could decline or withdraw at any time without penalty or consequence. Written informed consent was secured prior to survey distribution, aligning with best practices in human subjects research (UNESCO, 2023).

Anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained throughout. No personally identifying information was collected beyond aggregate demographic variables, and all completed surveys were stored securely. Only authorized members of the research team had access to raw data, which was used exclusively for academic purposes. Data management and storage followed local and institutional guidelines, ensuring that all participant information remained protected in compliance with ethical and legal standards.

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**RESULTS and DISCUSSION**

**Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 45)**

| Variable | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| **Sex** | | |
| Male | 12 | 26.67 |
| Female | 33 | 73.33 |
| **Teaching Experience** | | |
| 1–5 years | 18 | 40.00 |
| 6–10 years | 16 | 35.56 |
| 11 years and above | 11 | 24.44 |
| **Grade Level Taught** | | |
| Kindergarten–Grade 3 | 21 | 46.67 |
| Grades 4–6 | 24 | 53.33 |

The demographic data reveal that the teaching workforce in this study is predominantly female (73.33%), reflecting national patterns in the Philippine elementary education sector where women comprise the majority of public school teachers (UNESCO, 2022). This gender composition is important to consider, as research suggests that female teachers often shoulder disproportionate emotional labor in inclusive education settings (Shtob & Petrucci, 2021), influencing their coping strategies and support needs.

In terms of experience, the majority of respondents have more than five years of teaching experience (60%), suggesting they possess substantial familiarity with classroom management and pedagogical adaptation. This aligns with studies indicating that teaching experience correlates with greater readiness to adopt inclusive practices, although training remains essential. However, even experienced teachers require continuous professional development to address evolving needs in inclusive education (Vadivel, et al., 2021).

The distribution across grade levels (46.67% in Kindergarten–Grade 3 and 53.33% in Grades 4–6) ensures diverse perspectives, as teachers in lower grades may prioritize early identification of SEN while upper-grade teachers face challenges with curriculum differentiation. This division is significant because differentiated instructional demands often require targeted strategies and resources (Department of Education, 2023).

Such demographic variability enriches the data by capturing a wide range of experiences with SEN learners in urban NCR schools. Urban contexts like NCR are characterized by large class sizes and diverse student populations, posing unique challenges to inclusive teaching (UNICEF Philippines, 2024). Therefore, understanding this profile is critical for contextualizing the results and tailoring recommendations to local realities.

Finally, the demographic findings suggest that interventions should be sensitive to teacher characteristics, including gendered expectations, years of experience, and grade level taught. Targeted training and resources must recognize these differences to be effective and equitable (ADB, 2023).

**Table 2. Teachers' Challenges in Handling Learners with SEN**

| Item | Mean | Interpretation |
|---|---|---|
| Lack of teaching resources | 4.45 | Strongly Agree |
| Large class sizes | 4.31 | Strongly Agree |
| Limited training in special education | 4.20 | Agree |
| Difficulty individualizing instruction | 4.16 | Agree |
| Behavioral management issues | 4.13 | Agree |

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| Item | Mean | Interpretation |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Time constraints | 4.08 | Agree |
| Limited parental support | 3.95 | Agree |
| Physical classroom limitations | 3.89 | Agree |
| Stress and burnout | 3.87 | Agree |
| Lack of clear policies/guidelines | 3.82 | Agree |

First, the very high mean ratings for lack of teaching resources (4.45) and large class sizes (4.31) highlight structural barriers that significantly impede inclusive education. Recent studies in Southeast Asia emphasize that resource scarcity and overcrowding are persistent challenges, undermining efforts to implement differentiated instruction (ASEAN Secretariat, 2023). In the NCR, where school enrollment remains high, these issues are especially acute, making it difficult for teachers to address individual learning needs of SEN students effectively.

Second, limited training in special education (4.20) emerged as a critical concern, confirming the gap between policy and practice. Despite the Philippines enacting Republic Act 11650 in 2022 to strengthen inclusive education, professional development opportunities remain limited and unevenly distributed (DepEd Philippines, 2023). Without adequate training, teachers are left to navigate complex needs on their own, increasing the risk of inappropriate or ineffective instructional strategies (Crispel & Kasperski, 2021).

Third, challenges such as difficulty individualizing instruction (4.16) and behavioral management issues (4.13) underscore the day-to-day pedagogical demands faced by teachers. These findings align with global literature documenting how lack of support and preparation often leave teachers feeling overwhelmed in inclusive settings (UNESCO, 2022). In the Philippines, the absence of sufficient SPED specialists exacerbates this problem, limiting teachers' access to expert guidance (Allam & Martin, 2021).

Fourth, respondents also reported significant challenges related to time constraints (4.08) and stress and burnout (3.87). These results echo recent Philippine-based findings that inclusive education significantly increases teacher workload, often without corresponding institutional support. Such pressures contribute to teacher attrition and reduced instructional quality, underlining the need for systemic workload management strategies.

Lastly, limited parental support (3.95) and lack of clear policies/guidelines (3.82) point to gaps beyond the classroom. Inclusion is a whole-school and community endeavor, and the absence of strong home–school partnerships and clear policy frameworks can undermine even the best teacher efforts (UNICEF Philippines, 2024). Addressing these systemic issues requires coordinated, multi-level interventions rather than piecemeal solutions.

**Table 3. Coping Strategies Employed by Teachers**

| Item | Mean | Interpretation |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Peer collaboration and support | 4.18 | Agree |
| Self-directed learning about SEN | 4.05 | Agree |
| Classroom management techniques | 3.98 | Agree |
| Use of visual aids and simplified materials | 3.95 | Agree |
| Adjusting lesson pacing | 3.87 | Agree |
| Consultation with SPED specialists | 3.80 | Agree |
| Communicating with parents | 3.69 | Agree |
| Personal stress management | 3.58 | Agree |

First, peer collaboration (4.18) emerged as the most common coping strategy, underscoring the importance of collegial support in overcoming inclusive education challenges. Collaborative learning communities have been recognized as critical for professional growth and sharing effective practices (Admiraal, et al. 2021). In resource-constrained contexts, peer learning offers a cost-effective means to enhance teacher capacity and morale

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Second, self-directed learning about SEN (4.05) shows that teachers take initiative to fill training gaps on their own. While commendable, this finding highlights a systemic failure to provide structured, high-quality training (DepEd Philippines, 2023). Without formal guidance, self-directed efforts may vary in quality and effectiveness, potentially leading to inconsistent instructional approaches.

Third, classroom management techniques (3.98) and use of visual aids (3.95) reflect teachers' practical strategies to address diverse learning needs. Such adaptations are essential for SEN inclusion and are recommended in inclusive education frameworks globally (UNESCO, 2022). However, effective use of these strategies requires access to appropriate resources, which respondents identified as lacking.

Fourth, consultation with SPED specialists (3.80) and communicating with parents (3.69) scored lower, suggesting barriers to collaboration with external stakeholders. Limited availability of SPED professionals in public schools remains a known constraint (ADB, 2023), and building strong home–school partnerships requires structured programs and time investment that many teachers lack.

Finally, personal stress management (3.58) had the lowest mean, indicating that while teachers recognize its importance, they may lack time or institutional support to prioritize self-care. Recent evidence from the Philippines highlights increasing teacher burnout linked to inclusion demands, underscoring the need for systemic strategies to protect teacher well-being (Roos & Borkoski, 2021).

**Table 4. Perceived Support Needs**

| Item | Mean | Interpretation |
|---|---|---|
| More training in special education | 4.67 | Strongly Agree |
| Additional teaching aides | 4.58 | Strongly Agree |
| Improved administrative support | 4.51 | Strongly Agree |
| Access to SPED specialists | 4.49 | Strongly Agree |
| More appropriate teaching materials | 4.44 | Strongly Agree |
| Smaller class sizes | 4.40 | Strongly Agree |
| Clearer inclusion policies | 4.36 | Strongly Agree |
| Parent education programs | 4.29 | Agree |

First, more training in special education (4.67) topped the list of needs, reflecting the critical role of teacher capacity-building in successful inclusion. Recent DepEd programs have acknowledged this gap but remain insufficient in scope (DepEd Philippines, 2023). Systematic, high-quality, and accessible professional development is essential to ensure all teachers are equipped to meet diverse needs.

Second, additional teaching aides (4.58) and improved administrative support (4.51) received high ratings, underscoring the need for systemic, school-level resources. Teaching aides have been shown to improve instructional differentiation and reduce teacher stress (ASEAN Secretariat, 2023). Strengthening school leadership support is equally vital for sustaining inclusive practices.

Third, access to SPED specialists (4.49) and more appropriate teaching materials (4.44) highlight the importance of specialized expertise and resources. The 2022 passage of Republic Act 11650 mandates these supports but their implementation remains uneven (UNICEF Philippines, 2024). Providing accessible, high-quality materials and expert consultation can significantly improve inclusion outcomes.

Fourth, smaller class sizes (4.40) and clearer inclusion policies (4.36) reflect structural challenges in the NCR's urban education landscape. Overcrowding limits individualized instruction, while policy ambiguity leaves teachers unsure how to implement inclusion effectively (Department of Education, 2023). Policy reforms should address both issues simultaneously.

Finally, parent education programs (4.29) indicate the need for stronger family–school partnerships. Educating and engaging parents of SEN learners can enhance home–school alignment and student outcomes. Such programs should be integrated into school plans to ensure sustainable, community-based inclusion.

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**Table 5. Correlations among Challenges, Coping Strategies, and Support Needs (N = 45)**

| Variables | 1 | 2 | 3 |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Challenges | 1 | | |
| 2. Coping Strategies | .48 | 1 | |
| 3. Perceived Support Needs | .62 | .44 | 1 |

**Note:** $p < .01$

First, the moderate positive correlation between Challenges and Coping Strategies ($r = .48$, $p < .01$) suggests that as challenges increase, teachers employ more coping strategies. This aligns with transactional models of stress and coping that view coping as a response to perceived demands. Effective policy should recognize that addressing root challenges can reduce the coping burden on teachers.

Second, the strong positive correlation between Challenges and Perceived Support Needs ($r = .62$, $p < .01$) indicates that teachers who face greater challenges also identify greater needs for systemic support. This finding emphasizes the structural nature of inclusive education barriers, reinforcing calls for system-wide reforms rather than teacher-level fixes alone (ASEAN Secretariat, 2023).

Third, the positive correlation between Coping Strategies and Perceived Support Needs ($r = .44$, $p < .01$) suggests that even as teachers adopt coping strategies, they remain aware of systemic gaps. This challenges narratives that individual teacher effort can substitute for institutional change. Sustainable inclusion requires coordinated, multi-level support.

Fourth, these correlations validate the study's descriptive findings, confirming that challenges, coping, and support needs are deeply interrelated dimensions of inclusive teaching. Such evidence underscores the value of integrated policy approaches that simultaneously enhance teacher capacity, resources, and institutional frameworks (DepEd Philippines, 2023).

Finally, the results highlight an urgent research and policy agenda: understanding not just what teachers do to cope, but how systems can be transformed to reduce reliance on coping strategies alone. This calls for inclusive education planning that foregrounds teacher voices and systematically addresses identified needs (UNICEF Philippines, 2024).

**Conclusion**

This study employed a quantitative descriptive-correlational design to systematically examine the challenges, coping strategies, and perceived support needs of teachers handling learners with special educational needs (SEN) in public elementary schools in the National Capital Region (NCR), Philippines. Results revealed that teachers face substantial structural barriers such as lack of teaching resources, large class sizes, limited training, and inadequate policy guidance, confirming persistent gaps between inclusive education policy intentions and classroom realities (DepEd Philippines, 2023). These findings highlight that the success of inclusive education depends on addressing systemic issues rather than relying solely on individual teacher effort.

The analysis of coping strategies showed that teachers primarily depend on peer collaboration and self-directed learning to manage inclusive classroom demands. While these approaches demonstrate commendable professional agency, they also underscore systemic gaps in formal training and institutional support. Teachers reported relatively lower levels of collaboration with SPED specialists and parental engagement, reflecting barriers in accessing external expertise and building robust school–community partnerships. These findings illustrate that inclusive education requires coordinated, multi-level supports that extend beyond classroom-level adaptations.

High mean ratings for perceived support needs point to urgent systemic reforms. Teachers overwhelmingly expressed strong agreement on the need for more training in special education, additional teaching aides, improved administrative support, and access to SPED specialists. These needs align with the provisions of Republic Act 11650 but highlight significant implementation gaps at the school level (UNICEF Philippines, 2024). The study's correlational

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analysis revealed that greater challenges are significantly associated with higher coping efforts and increased demand for support, validating the need for holistic, system-wide interventions.

Importantly, the study fills a crucial research gap by systematically documenting NCR teachers' own perspectives using empirical, quantitative methods. Prior studies have focused more on policy analysis or parental perspectives, leaving the daily realities of teachers underexplored (ASEAN Secretariat, 2023). By foregrounding teachers' voices, this research provides actionable, evidence-based insights that can guide policy-makers, school administrators, and development partners in designing targeted, context-sensitive responses.

Ultimately, these findings call for a paradigm shift in how inclusive education is planned and implemented. Rather than framing inclusion as the responsibility of individual teachers to "cope" with challenges, education systems must take responsibility for equipping schools with the necessary resources, expertise, and structural supports. This approach is essential for realizing the commitments under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Sustainable Development Goal 4, ensuring equitable, quality education for all learners, including those with SEN (UNESCO, 2022).

## Recommendations

First, enhance teacher training through sustained, structured, and accessible professional development in inclusive education. National and local education agencies should implement regular training programs focused on evidence-based inclusive pedagogies, differentiation strategies, and classroom management for diverse learners. Such training must be embedded in continuous professional development systems rather than one-off workshops, ensuring all teachers—novice and experienced—are equipped to implement inclusive practices effectively (DepEd Philippines, 2023).

Second, increase resource allocation by providing teaching aides and appropriate materials tailored to SEN inclusion. Education budgets at the national and local levels should prioritize funding for teaching assistants who can help manage diverse classroom needs and support individualized instruction. Additionally, the development and distribution of high-quality, culturally relevant SEN teaching materials are essential to reduce teacher workload and improve learning outcomes (ASEAN Secretariat, 2023). Resource allocation should be needs-based and data-driven to ensure equity across regions and school types.

Third, strengthen institutional and administrative support by establishing clear, consistent inclusion policies and fostering school leadership capacity. Education policy-makers should collaborate with schools to operationalize Republic Act 11650 through clear guidelines that balance flexibility with accountability. School leaders must receive training in inclusive education management to support teachers effectively, promote a culture of inclusion, and facilitate partnerships with SPED specialists (UNICEF Philippines, 2024). This recommendation also includes formalizing school-level inclusion committees to ensure coordinated planning and monitoring.

Fourth, promote stakeholder engagement through structured parent education programs and strong school–community partnerships. Schools should design regular workshops and resources for parents of SEN learners to build understanding of inclusive practices and strengthen home–school alignment. Additionally, partnerships with local governments, NGOs, and academic institutions can expand support networks and resource availability. Stakeholder engagement must be recognized as a core component of inclusive education planning and adequately funded.

Finally, prioritize system-wide reforms that reduce reliance on individual coping strategies and address root causes of challenges. Policy-makers should invest in reducing class sizes, improving school infrastructure, and ensuring equitable deployment of SPED specialists nationwide. Education planning must be evidence-based, responsive to local contexts, and inclusive of teacher voices to ensure sustainable, transformative change (DepEd Philippines, 2023; ASEAN Secretariat, 2023). Only through integrated, multi-level strategies can the Philippines deliver on its commitments to truly inclusive, quality education for all learners.

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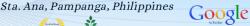
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