

Examining the mental health challenges of SPED teachers and their coping mechanisms

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the mental health challenges faced by Special Education (SPED) teachers and the coping mechanisms they employ to manage stress and burnout, aiming to inform the development of enhanced support programs. Grounded in the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and the Job Demands-Resources Theory (Demerouti et al., 2001), as well as Republic Act No. 11036 and Republic Act No. 4670, the study employed a descriptive-correlational design involving 20 SPED teachers from the Zapatera SPED Center. Data were collected via an adapted quantitative survey questionnaire. The findings showed that respondents were predominantly female, aged 31–40, with master’s degree qualifications, and all had attended relevant training, particularly in Assistive Technology and INSET. Teachers reported low levels of mental health challenges in emotional well-being and work-related stressors, while institutional support was moderate. Coping mechanisms were moderately utilized, with problem-solving, cognitive restructuring, emotional expression, and social support being the most common, and avoidance being the least employed. Correlation analysis revealed a negligible, non-significant relationship between mental health challenges and coping strategies. The study concluded that although SPED teachers demonstrate moderate coping abilities, institutional support is crucial to sustaining their well-being. Recommendations include implementing structured mental health programs, resilience training, peer support initiatives, and workload management strategies. These findings informed the design of an Enhanced SPED Teacher Well-Being Program, which aims to foster psychological resilience and promote the overall mental health of SPED educators.

Keywords: Special Education teachers, mental health challenges, coping mechanisms, stress management, burnout, institutional support, teacher well-being, resilience, professional development.

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INTRODUCTION

Special education (SPED) teachers play a crucial role in fostering inclusive education and providing individualized support to students with diverse learning needs. However, the demanding nature of their profession exposes them to unique mental health challenges, including emotional exhaustion, high-stress levels, and burnout. Unlike their general education counterparts, SPED teachers often face additional pressures, such as handling behavioral issues, adapting curriculum to various disabilities, managing individualized education plans (IEPs), and collaborating with multidisciplinary teams. These stressors can negatively impact their overall well-being, job satisfaction, and, eventually, the quality of education provided to students with special needs. Given the increasing global emphasis on inclusive education, there is a pressing need to examine the mental health challenges of SPED teachers and the coping mechanisms they employ to navigate these difficulties.

Special education has witnessed significant developments worldwide, with policies promoting inclusive education and equitable access for students with disabilities. However, while much attention has been given to student outcomes, the well-being of SPED teachers remains a less explored area. Studies have shown teacher burnout is a leading cause of attrition in the education sector, particularly among SPED teachers who experience additional workplace stressors. Despite global and national policies advocating for teacher support and mental health awareness, gaps persist in understanding the specific challenges SPED teachers face and the effectiveness of their coping strategies.

Special Education (SPED) teachers worldwide face significant challenges that impact their mental health and job satisfaction. Globally, studies have highlighted that SPED teachers frequently experience emotional fatigue due to the intensive nature of their work. Research indicates that teachers encounter inadequate institutional support in the Philippines, leading to heightened stress and job dissatisfaction. However, there is a notable lack of in-depth analysis concerning how SPED teachers in Cebu cope with these challenges and the adequacy of existing school support systems. This discussion aims to bridge these gaps by providing empirical evidence on the mental health struggles of SPED teachers and assessing the coping strategies they utilize to maintain resilience.

Internationally, SPED teachers are recognized for their dedication to students with diverse learning needs. However, this commitment often comes at a personal cost. A study by Schwab et al. (2021) found that SPED teachers frequently experience emotional fatigue due to the intensive nature of their work. Factors contributing to this include managing challenging student behaviors, extensive paperwork, and the need to adapt teaching methods to individual student needs. These demands can lead to burnout, characterized by exhaustion, cynicism, and a sense of reduced professional efficacy. Burnout not only affects teachers' well-being but also impacts student outcomes, as teacher effectiveness diminishes when they are overwhelmed.

In the Philippines, the educational landscape presents unique challenges. Research by David and Constantino (2023) indicates that teachers face inadequate institutional support, leading to heightened stress and job dissatisfaction. For SPED teachers, these challenges are compounded by a lack of resources, insufficient training, and large class sizes. A study by Dotimas (2022) revealed that SPED teachers often feel ill-equipped to handle the diverse needs of their students due to limited access to specialized instructional materials and professional development

opportunities. Additionally, societal stigma surrounding disabilities can result in a lack of support from parents and the community, further isolating SPED teachers.

While national studies provide a broad overview, it's essential to understand the specific experiences of SPED teachers in Cebu. A qualitative study by Cuadra (2023) explored the challenges encountered by SPED teachers who belong to the "sandwich generation," responsible for caring for both their children and elderly parents while fulfilling professional obligations. The study found that these teachers experience physical and mental demands, excessive responsibilities, and obstacles that hinder their self-fulfillment. Despite these challenges, they demonstrate resilience through adaptive coping mechanisms, including effective time management, prioritizing quality time with loved ones, and engaging in religious practices.

Another study focusing on SPED teachers in Cebu City highlighted the importance of skill-based learning approaches. Teachers emphasized the need for practical skills to manage classroom challenges effectively. They also reported that collaboration with colleagues and continuous professional development was vital in enhancing their teaching practices and coping with stress. However, limited resources and lack of parental involvement remained significant hurdles.

The effectiveness of school support systems plays a crucial role in mitigating the challenges faced by SPED teachers. Studies suggest that while some schools offer support through professional development and counseling services, these are often insufficient or not tailored to the specific needs of SPED teachers. For instance, a study by Lumactod (2024) recommended the design of intervention programs to address the emerging problems and felt needs of SPED teachers, emphasizing the importance of targeted support to ensure the realization of quality education for learners with special educational needs.

SPED teachers in Cebu, like their counterparts globally and nationally, face significant challenges that impact their mental health and job satisfaction. While they employ various coping strategies to maintain resilience, there is a pressing need for more comprehensive and tailored support systems within schools. Addressing these needs through targeted interventions and increased institutional support is essential to enhance the well-being and effectiveness of SPED teachers, ultimately benefiting the students they serve.

Statement of the problem

This study examined the mental health challenges faced by Special Education (SPED) teachers and the coping mechanisms they employ in managing stress and burnout. The findings served as the basis for developing enhanced support systems and well-being programs tailored to the specific needs of SPED educators.

1. What is the demographic profile of the SPED teacher-respondents in terms of age and gender, highest educational attainment, and relevant training and seminars attended?
2. What is the level of mental health challenges experienced by the teacher-respondents in terms of emotional well-being, work-related stressors, and institutional support?
3. Is there a significant relationship between the demographic profile and the level of mental health challenges faced by the SPED teacher-respondents?
4. What coping mechanisms do SPED teachers utilize in managing their mental health challenges?
5. What enhanced support programs and interventions could be proposed based on the findings of the study?

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive correlational research design to investigate the mental health challenges faced by Special Education (SPED) teachers and their corresponding coping mechanisms. This approach enabled a systematic investigation of the relationships between various factors influencing teachers' mental well-being, without manipulating variables, making it well-suited for real-life educational settings.

The study was grounded in the principles of Peirce's (1878) pragmatism. This research design emphasizes structured observation, categorization, and logical analysis to derive meaningful insights. By documenting and analyzing the psychological challenges experienced by SPED teachers and the coping strategies they employ, the study provided a holistic understanding of the patterns and correlations within these experiences.

The descriptive component of the study facilitated a thorough examination of the stressors faced by teachers, including workload, emotional strain, and institutional support. At the same time, the correlational aspect explored the potential relationships between teachers' demographic characteristics, work conditions, and mental health outcomes. The study systematically identified trends in stress levels and resilience strategies through this methodological approach, contributing valuable data to inform mental health support systems and policy recommendations for SPED educators.

By employing a descriptive correlational research design, this study provided empirical evidence of the impact of mental health challenges on SPED teachers. It highlighted strategies that could be reinforced through institutional interventions.

Selecting appropriate participants is crucial to obtaining meaningful insights into the mental health challenges faced by SPED teachers and their coping mechanisms. For this study, the researcher specifically targeted SPED teachers who are actively engaged in teaching learners with diverse needs. These teachers often work in self-contained or inclusive classrooms, providing individualized instruction, behavioral support, and emotional guidance to students with disabilities. SPED teachers face unique stressors stemming from the demanding nature of their responsibilities. These include managing students with behavioral challenges, adapting instructional materials, collaborating with parents and other educators, meeting documentation requirements, and coping with emotional exhaustion. Given these intense professional demands, they are at a higher risk of experiencing mental health struggles, such as stress, anxiety, and burnout.

By selecting SPED teachers as the primary participants, this study provided in-depth insights into their mental well-being, the specific stressors they face, and the coping mechanisms they employ to manage these challenges. Understanding their experiences will not only shed light on the psychological burden associated with their profession but also highlight the need for improved institutional support systems, such as mental health programs, stress management training, and peer support initiatives.

Moreover, by examining their coping strategies, this research identified best practices and resilience-building techniques that can serve as a model for future interventions aimed at enhancing the mental well-being of SPED educators. The findings will contribute to policy recommendations that address teacher mental health, ensuring SPED teachers receive the necessary resources, emotional support, and professional development opportunities to sustain their roles effectively while maintaining their well-being and job satisfaction.

The researcher employed quantitative research methods to analyze the data collected from SPED teacher-respondents systematically. The study began with a descriptive analysis of the respondents' demographic profile, including age, gender, highest educational attainment, and relevant training or seminars attended. Frequency and percentage distributions were computed to clearly represent the respondents' backgrounds.

The researcher conducted a structured data collection process to assess SPED teachers' mental health challenges and coping mechanisms. This approach involved pre- and post-assessment phases to evaluate stress patterns, coping strategies, and institutional support systematically.

To initiate the study, the researcher formally sought approval from the school principal through a transmittal letter, ensuring institutional consent for teacher participation. Once permission was granted, the researcher distributed survey questionnaires to SPED teachers, explaining the study's objectives, methodology, and ethical considerations. Teachers were given ample time to complete the surveys, after which the researcher collected and analyzed the responses. Copies of the signed transmittal letters can be found in Appendix A.

Also, the researcher must obtain informed consent forms from all participating teachers, guaranteeing their voluntary participation and ensuring adherence to ethical research standards. The consent process will also emphasize confidentiality and anonymity, reinforcing the protection of participants' identities and responses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Age and gender

This section presents the distribution of SPED teacher-respondents by age and gender. Understanding these demographic characteristics helps provide context to the analysis of mental health challenges and coping mechanisms, as age and gender may influence how teachers experience and manage stress and burnout.

Table 2
 Age and Gender of the Respondents

Age (in years)	Female		Male		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
51-60	1	5.00	0	0.00	1	5.00
41-50	4	20.00	2	10.00	6	30.00
31-40	8	40.00	1	5.00	9	45.00
21-30	3	15.00	1	5.00	4	20.00
Total	16	80.00	4	20.00	20	100.00

Table 2 presents the age and gender distribution of the SPED teacher-respondents. The data reveal that the majority of the respondents are female (80%), while male teachers comprise only 20% of the sample. In terms of age, the largest proportion falls within the 31–40 age group (45%), followed by 41–50 (30%), 21–30 (20%), and a small fraction aged 51–60 (5%). These figures

suggest that most SPED teachers in this study are mid-career educators, primarily women in their thirties and forties.

The predominance of female respondents aligns with global trends in the teaching profession, where women continue to represent the majority, particularly in basic and special education settings. Recent studies have found that female teachers are more prone to experiencing emotional exhaustion and stress due to higher expectations for nurturing behavior and multitasking roles both inside and outside the classroom (McDaniel, 2024; Agyapong, 2022).

Moreover, the age concentration between 31 and 50 years indicates a mid-career stage, a period characterized by increased job responsibilities, family obligations, and professional demands that may heighten stress levels and the risk of burnout (Jeon et al., 2021). Mid-career SPED teachers often juggle complex instructional tasks and behavioral management challenges associated with students with special needs, further amplifying emotional fatigue and work strain (Aziku & Zhang, 2024).

These findings underscore the need for differentiated mental health support that considers gender and career stage. As Nwoko et al. (2024) emphasize, effective well-being interventions must be responsive to demographic contexts to promote resilience and prevent burnout among educators in specialized teaching environments.

The results indicate that the majority of SPED teachers in the study are female and within the mid-career age range. This demographic pattern is significant, as it aligns with literature showing that women and mid-career educators are more susceptible to stress and emotional exhaustion due to compounded work and personal pressures. The findings suggest that demographic factors such as age and gender play a crucial role in shaping the mental health experiences of SPED teachers. Therefore, support mechanisms must be designed to address these specific vulnerabilities within the teaching population

In light of the findings, it is recommended that educational institutions and school administrators develop gender-sensitive and career-stage-appropriate well-being programs. These may include stress management workshops tailored for female educators, peer support or mentoring programs for mid-career teachers, and institutional policies promoting work-life balance and emotional support. Moreover, school leaders should ensure regular mental health assessments and provide professional development on self-care and resilience-building strategies. Such initiatives are crucial for sustaining teacher motivation, reducing burnout, and enhancing the overall mental health and productivity of SPED educators.

Highest educational attainment

This section presents the highest educational attainment of the SPED teacher-respondents. Knowing their level of education helps in understanding their professional qualifications and preparedness to handle the diverse needs of learners with disabilities. It also provides a basis for examining how educational attainment may influence their experiences with mental health challenges and the coping strategies they employ in their profession.

Table 3 shows the data.

Table 3

Highest Educational Attainment of the Respondents		
Educational Attainment	f	%

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Ph.D./Ed.D.	1	5.00
With Ph.D./Ed.D.Units	0	0.00
MA/MS	1	5.00
With MA/MS Units	18	90.00
Total	20	100.00

Table 3 indicates that the majority of the SPED teacher-respondents (90%, n = 18) reported having MA/MS units (graduate coursework not yet completed), while only 5% (n = 1) hold an MA/MS and 5% (n = 1) hold a Ph.D./Ed.D.. This distribution shows a workforce largely engaged in postgraduate study but with relatively few completed advanced degrees.

The predominance of graduate coursework (MA/MS units) suggests a teacher cohort actively pursuing professional development while maintaining full-time employment. Empirical and policy literature indicates that graduate study can strengthen instructional knowledge, pedagogical skills, and specialization in evidence-based practices advantages that are particularly valuable in special education contexts (RAND Corporation, 2023). However, several recent studies also highlight that combining ongoing graduate education with full professional responsibilities may increase cumulative workload and time pressure for teachers, which can contribute to elevated stress and reduce retention if institutional supports are lacking (Cavallari et al., 2024; EdWeek, 2024). Research on special education staffing further indicates that workload, paperwork, and insufficient planning time are central drivers of attrition; therefore, the drive for further qualifications must be balanced with measures that mitigate the additional burdens graduate study places on already strained educators (NASEN Journal, 2024; Brunsting et al., 2023).

The educational attainment profile demonstrates a motivated SPED teaching sample committed to graduate-level learning. While such engagement likely enhances professional competence and the capacity to implement specialized interventions, it may also act as an additional stressor when added to teaching duties. Thus, graduate coursework should be recognized both as an asset for instructional quality and as a potential contributor to workload that warrants organizational attention.

To harness the professional benefits of graduate engagement without exacerbating teacher stress, educational authorities and school leaders should adopt supportive policies such as flexible scheduling or reduced non-instructional duties for staff enrolled in graduate programs, tuition assistance or formal partnerships with higher education providers, and targeted workload relief (e.g., clerical support, co-teaching arrangements). Additionally, schools should incorporate wellbeing resources and time-management training into staff development offerings and monitor the wellbeing of teachers pursuing advanced study to ensure that professional advancement does not undermine retention or mental health.

Relevant trainings attended by the respondents

This section presents the relevant professional trainings and seminars attended by the SPED teacher-respondents. Understanding the types of training they have participated in provides insights into their exposure to updated instructional strategies and tools, particularly in addressing the diverse learning needs of students with disabilities. It also helps establish how professional development initiatives contribute to teachers' competence, confidence, and overall mental wellbeing in their instructional roles.

Table 4 reveals that all SPED teacher-respondents (100%) have attended Assistive Technology Training, ranking it first among the professional development programs. Meanwhile,

INSET (In-Service Training) ranks second, with 15 respondents (75%) reporting participation. These findings indicate that most SPED teachers have undergone specialized training in technological tools and inclusive teaching strategies that support learners with disabilities, as well as participation in general pedagogical enhancement programs through INSET. This suggests a strong institutional emphasis on capacity-building initiatives to improve instructional effectiveness in special education settings.

The full participation in assistive technology training underscores the growing importance of technology integration in special education. According to Chiu and Woo (2023), digital tools and assistive technologies significantly enhance student engagement, accessibility, and individualized learning outcomes for students with disabilities. Exposure to such training also empowers teachers by improving instructional adaptability and reducing stress associated with meeting diverse learner needs (Kim et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the high rate of participation in INSET programs reflects alignment with continuous professional development (CPD) frameworks that promote lifelong learning among teachers. Luo et al. (2024) found that regular in-service training fosters professional efficacy, job satisfaction, and emotional resilience among educators. However, despite these benefits, studies emphasize that the quality, duration, and contextual relevance of trainings are critical to ensuring their positive impact on teacher performance and well-being (García & Weiss, 2023).

Lastly, while such training participation demonstrates professional commitment, balancing these developmental activities with teaching responsibilities can still pose challenges. De la Cruz et al. (2021) note that heavy training requirements and insufficient follow-up support may inadvertently contribute to teacher fatigue, especially in specialized fields like SPED. Therefore, institutions should ensure that professional development is meaningful, adequately supported, and aligned with teachers' specific needs and workload capacities.

The data indicate that SPED teachers are highly involved in professional development, particularly in assistive technology and in-service trainings. This pattern suggests that the respondents are both committed to enhancing their instructional competence and responsive to the evolving demands of inclusive education. However, while such engagement promotes skill enrichment and adaptability, it also necessitates institutional attention to training quality and workload balance to prevent overextension and burnout.

Educational leaders and policymakers should continue to promote regular, well-structured training programs in assistive technology and inclusive teaching. It is recommended that schools establish systematic professional development plans that provide accessible, hands-on, and context-specific training modules. Additionally, integrating follow-up mentoring or coaching sessions can help sustain learning outcomes and reinforce practical application in classroom settings. To protect teachers' mental health, institutions should also consider distributing training schedules evenly throughout the school year and providing sufficient time for reflection and implementation. Collaboration with higher education institutions and experts in special education technology may further enhance the relevance and effectiveness of such programs.

Level of mental health challenges experienced by the teacher-respondents in terms of emotional well-being

This section presents the level of mental health challenges experienced by SPED teacher-respondents in terms of their emotional well-being. It aims to determine the extent to which

teachers experience emotional strain, anxiety, and exhaustion resulting from their professional responsibilities. Understanding their emotional well-being is essential in assessing how effectively they manage the psychological demands of teaching and how these factors influence their overall mental health and job performance.

Table 5 illustrates the data

Table 5
 Level of mental health challenges experienced by the teacher-respondents in terms of emotional well-being

S/N	Indicators	WM	SD	Verbal Description
1	I often feel emotionally drained due to my teaching responsibilities.	2.45	0.60	Low
2	I experience feelings of anxiety or sadness related to my work as a teacher.	2.45	0.51	Low
3	I find it difficult to maintain a positive outlook due to work-related pressures.	2.30	0.47	Low
4	I feel emotionally supported by my colleagues when facing challenges.	2.40	0.50	Low
5	My emotional well-being has been significantly affected by my teaching workload.	2.40	0.50	Low
	Aggregate Mean	2.40		Low
	Aggregate Standard Deviation		0.52	Low

Legend: 4.21-5.00-Very High; 3.41-4.20-High; 2.61-3.40-Moderate; 1.81-2.60-Low; 1.00-1.80-Very Low

Table 5 presents the level of mental health challenges experienced by SPED teacher-respondents in terms of emotional well-being. The data reveal an aggregate mean of 2.40 with a standard deviation of 0.52, interpreted as Low based on the given scale. This implies that the respondents generally experience low levels of emotional strain, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion related to their teaching profession. Indicators such as emotional drain (WM = 2.45) and anxiety or sadness (WM = 2.45) received slightly higher mean scores, while difficulty maintaining a positive outlook had the lowest mean (WM = 2.30). Overall, the findings suggest that SPED teachers maintain a relatively stable emotional state despite the inherent challenges of their work.

The results indicate that SPED teachers in the study demonstrate effective emotional regulation and resilience attributes that are crucial in managing stress in demanding educational contexts. Herman et al. (2021) found that teachers with strong emotional well-being show greater classroom effectiveness and lower burnout rates due to adaptive coping and self-regulation strategies. Similarly, Jennings and Greenberg (2022) highlighted that emotionally competent teachers can foster positive relationships with students, thereby improving both their own mental health and classroom climate.

The low emotional distress observed in this study may also reflect the presence of collegial and institutional support systems. According to Bennett et al. (2023), supportive professional communities and mentoring relationships significantly enhance teachers' emotional resilience and

job satisfaction. Moreover, Garcia and Weiss (2021) noted that when educators feel emotionally supported by their peers and administrators, their likelihood of developing stress-related symptoms decreases markedly.

Nevertheless, the findings must be interpreted with caution. A low mean does not necessarily imply the absence of emotional challenges but may indicate teachers' ability to normalize stress as part of their professional role. Cocker and Joss (2021) emphasized that many teachers underreport emotional strain due to cultural expectations of resilience, potentially masking underlying fatigue. Therefore, while the teachers' current emotional well-being appears stable, continuous institutional monitoring and support are needed to prevent long-term emotional exhaustion.

The overall low level of emotional well-being challenges suggests that SPED teacher-respondents generally possess adequate coping skills and emotional stability in their professional environment. This finding highlights the potential effectiveness of existing collegial networks, institutional support, and individual resilience. However, the emotional demands of special education teaching remain significant; thus, sustaining emotional health requires consistent support systems, professional development focused on well-being, and an environment that values teachers' mental health as part of organizational culture.

Educational leaders and administrators are encouraged to maintain and strengthen initiatives that promote emotional well-being among SPED teachers. Regular well-being assessments, counseling services, and mindfulness-based programs can be institutionalized to help teachers manage emotional strain effectively. Additionally, promoting peer mentoring, emotional intelligence training, and recognition of teachers' emotional labor can further enhance their sense of belonging and job satisfaction. Finally, school systems should prioritize policies that ensure balanced workloads and supportive supervision to sustain teachers' emotional resilience and prevent burnout over time.

Level of mental health challenges experienced by the teacher-respondents in terms of work-related stressors

This section presents the level of mental health challenges experienced by SPED teacher-respondents in terms of work-related stressors. It seeks to assess the extent to which workload expectations, administrative demands, classroom management, and performance pressures contribute to their stress levels. Understanding these stressors provides a basis for identifying workplace factors that affect teachers' well-being and for designing targeted interventions to support their professional and emotional health.

Table 6 shows the data.

As shown in Table 6, the overall aggregate mean of 2.31 (SD = 0.47) indicates a low level of work-related stress among SPED teacher-respondents. All indicators received weighted means between 2.25 and 2.40, reflecting low perceived stress across different aspects of their professional responsibilities. Respondents reported minimal stress related to high workload expectations

Table 6
Level of mental health challenges experienced by the teacher-respondents in terms of work-related stressors

S/N	Indicators	WM	SD	Verbal Description
1	I frequently experience overwhelming stress due to high workload expectations.	2.30	0.47	Low
2	Managing classroom behavior significantly contributes to my work-related stress.	2.35	0.49	Low
3	The pressure of meeting administrative demands negatively impacts my well-being.	2.25	0.44	Low
4	I feel that work-related stress affects my ability to maintain work-life balance.	2.40	0.50	Low
5	The expectations for student performance add significant stress to my job.	2.25	0.44	Low
	Aggregate Mean	2.31		Low
	Aggregate Standard Deviation		0.47	

(WM = 2.30), classroom management (WM = 2.35), and administrative tasks (WM = 2.25). Likewise, stress from maintaining work-life balance (WM = 2.40) and student performance expectations (WM = 2.25) were also low. These results suggest that, overall, SPED teachers experience manageable levels of occupational stress and are able to cope effectively with the demands of their teaching roles.

The findings indicate that the SPED teachers surveyed demonstrate resilience and adaptive coping in managing professional stressors. According to Fernandez et al. (2023), low levels of reported occupational stress among educators are often associated with supportive work environments, effective time management, and strong collegial relationships. Similarly, Prado and Gonzales (2022) found that teachers who receive adequate administrative support and have access to mental health resources report significantly lower levels of work-related stress.

However, even low reported stress should not be overlooked. Lee and Kim (2021) emphasized that chronic exposure to moderate job demands can lead to cumulative fatigue and eventual burnout if preventive strategies are not maintained. For SPED teachers, the emotional labor involved in individualized instruction and behavioral management can exacerbate stress over time (Santos & Villar, 2024). Furthermore, Johnson and McKinney (2022) highlighted that while teachers may perceive stress as manageable, consistent administrative and performance pressures can still diminish motivation and job satisfaction in the long term.

These studies underscore the importance of sustainable workload policies and proactive mental health initiatives to prevent escalation of work-related stress. Regular monitoring of teachers' well-being and ongoing professional development in stress management can strengthen resilience and promote a healthier, more supportive school culture.

The results indicate that SPED teacher-respondents experience a low level of work-related stress, suggesting effective coping mechanisms and a supportive work environment. Despite the multifaceted demands of special education, the teachers appear capable of managing their responsibilities without significant strain. Nonetheless, given the inherent challenges of SPED teaching, ongoing support, workload balance, and wellness-focused initiatives are necessary to sustain low stress levels and prevent potential burnout.

It is recommended that school administrators continue to promote positive work environments by maintaining reasonable workload distribution and providing accessible support

services. Regular stress management seminars, wellness programs, and mentoring sessions can help reinforce teachers' resilience. Additionally, schools should implement structured administrative systems that minimize bureaucratic pressures, allowing teachers to focus more on instructional and emotional engagement with learners. Establishing open communication between teachers and management will also ensure early detection and resolution of stress-related issues, fostering a culture of care and mental well-being.

Level of mental health challenges experienced by the teacher-respondents in terms of institutional support

This section presents the level of mental health challenges experienced by SPED teacher-respondents in terms of institutional support. It examines how teachers perceive the adequacy of their school's mental health initiatives, administrative support, and professional development opportunities. Evaluating institutional support provides insight into the organizational factors that influence teachers' well-being, job satisfaction, and ability to manage stress effectively.

Table 7 shows the data

Table 7
 Level of mental health challenges experienced by the teacher-respondents in terms of institutional support

S/N	Indicators	WM	SD	Verbal Description
1	My school provides adequate mental health resources to support teachers.	2.80	0.41	Moderate
2	I feel comfortable seeking emotional support from my school administration.	2.80	0.52	Moderate
3	The institution offers sufficient professional development opportunities to manage stress.	2.75	0.55	Moderate
4	My school actively implements programs to promote teachers' mental well-being.	2.90	0.55	Moderate
5	I believe my institution prioritizes teacher mental health in its policies and programs.	2.90	0.45	Moderate
	Aggregate Mean	2.83		
	Aggregate Standard Deviation		0.50	Moderate

As shown in Table 7, the respondents obtained an aggregate mean of 2.83 with a standard deviation of 0.50, interpreted as Moderate. This indicates that the respondents perceive a moderate level of institutional support for their mental health and well-being. Specifically, teachers rated moderately the adequacy of mental health resources (WM = 2.80) and comfort in seeking emotional support from administrators (WM = 2.80). The highest mean scores were observed in institutional prioritization of teacher mental health (WM = 2.90) and implementation of wellness programs (WM = 2.90). These findings suggest that while schools have implemented some supportive practices, there remains room for improvement in fully integrating mental health support into institutional policies and professional development frameworks.

The moderate level of institutional support highlights a developing yet insufficient commitment to teacher well-being within educational systems. Pattillo and Lamm (2022) emphasized that institutional support—such as access to counseling, workload adjustments, and wellness programs—plays a crucial role in mitigating teacher stress and enhancing job satisfaction. When schools provide structured and accessible mental health resources, educators report lower burnout levels and improved emotional stability.

Furthermore, Alvarez et al. (2023) found that teachers who perceive strong administrative and organizational support experience greater psychological resilience and are more likely to remain in the profession. Similarly, Dela Rosa and Santos (2024) observed that professional development programs focusing on stress management and well-being significantly enhance teachers' coping mechanisms and productivity. However, Turner and Davis (2021) noted that many institutions still lack a comprehensive policy framework for teacher mental health, often offering sporadic or reactive support measures rather than sustained programs.

Moderate institutional support may also reflect systemic challenges, such as limited funding, inadequate prioritization of teacher wellness, and the stigma associated with seeking mental health assistance. Knight and O'Connell (2023) argued that educational institutions must normalize open dialogue around teacher mental health and integrate well-being initiatives into organizational culture rather than treating them as peripheral activities. This aligns with global trends emphasizing teacher well-being as a core element of sustainable education systems.

The findings reveal that SPED teachers perceive a moderate level of institutional support for their mental health needs. While schools have made progress in implementing programs and demonstrating concern for teacher well-being, these initiatives may not yet be comprehensive or consistent enough to fully address educators' psychological and emotional challenges. Strengthening institutional support systems is therefore critical in promoting a healthier, more resilient teaching workforce, particularly in the demanding field of special education.

Educational institutions should strengthen and institutionalize mental health and well-being programs by establishing clear policies, dedicated support units, and sustained professional development focused on stress management and emotional wellness. Administrators must actively promote an open and empathetic culture that encourages teachers to seek help without stigma. Additionally, schools should allocate resources for regular wellness activities, counseling services, and mentorship programs.

Summary on the level of mental health challenges experienced by the teacher-respondents

This section summarizes the overall level of mental health challenges experienced by SPED teacher-respondents across three major components: emotional well-being, work-related stressors, and institutional support. The summary presents an integrated view of the psychological, professional, and organizational factors that influence the mental health status of teachers, thereby providing a foundation for designing comprehensive support programs to enhance their well-being.

Table 8 illustrates the data

Table 8

Summary on the level of mental health challenges experienced by the teacher-respondents

Components	WM	SD	Verbal Description
Emotional Well-Being	2.40	0.52	Low
Work-Related Stressors	2.31	0.47	Low
Institutional Support	2.83	0.50	Moderate
Grand Mean	2.51		
Grand Standard Deviation		0.50	Low

As reflected in Table 8, the respondents obtained a grand mean of 2.51 and a grand standard deviation of 0.50, which corresponds to a Low level of mental health challenges. Among the components, institutional support registered the highest mean (WM = 2.83, Moderate), followed by emotional well-being (WM = 2.40, Low) and work-related stressors (WM = 2.31, Low). This indicates that SPED teachers generally manage their emotional and professional stress effectively, though they perceive only a moderate level of institutional assistance in maintaining their mental health. The results suggest that while teachers exhibit personal resilience and adaptive coping, institutional mechanisms for mental health support can still be improved.

The overall low level of mental health challenges among SPED teachers may signify their resilience and emotional competence in navigating complex teaching environments. Day and Gu (2021) asserted that teacher resilience is strengthened by a combination of intrinsic motivation, professional identity, and social connectedness, enabling educators to sustain well-being even amid workplace pressures. Similarly, Flores and Thompson (2022) found that teachers with strong self-efficacy and emotional regulation skills tend to report lower stress and higher job satisfaction.

However, the moderate rating for institutional support reveals a crucial organizational gap. Pappa et al. (2023) highlighted that the lack of comprehensive mental health policies and administrative initiatives often leaves teachers to rely primarily on personal coping rather than systemic support. This finding aligns with Ramos and Villanueva (2024), who emphasized that school-level mental health frameworks are critical for preventing teacher burnout, especially among those in specialized education contexts. Furthermore, Harris and Mendoza (2023) observed that consistent institutional commitment—through mental health programs, peer mentoring, and supportive leadership—directly contributes to educators’ sustained emotional well-being and professional engagement.

Thus, while the teachers in this study demonstrate commendable personal resilience, the results underscore the need for more structured institutional interventions to ensure sustainable mental wellness across all components of teaching life.

The findings reveal that SPED teacher-respondents experience an overall low level of mental health challenges, signifying strong personal coping mechanisms and moderate institutional efforts to support teacher well-being. Despite these positive indicators, the moderate level of institutional support suggests that existing school programs may not be sufficient to address long-term mental health concerns. Hence, fostering both individual resilience and systemic wellness initiatives is essential to maintaining teachers’ mental health, productivity, and commitment to inclusive education.

It is recommended that educational institutions strengthen their mental health frameworks by institutionalizing comprehensive wellness policies, providing regular mental health assessments, and offering accessible counseling services. Continuous professional development

on stress management, emotional intelligence, and self-care should be incorporated into teacher training programs. Administrators must also create safe spaces for open dialogue about mental health and ensure that support programs are sustained rather than event-based.

Extent to which the respondents utilize the coping mechanisms to manage their mental health challenges in terms of problem-solving

This section presents the extent to which SPED teacher-respondents utilize problem-solving coping mechanisms in managing their mental health challenges. Problem-solving involves identifying the root cause of an issue, generating solutions, and evaluating their effectiveness. Examining this aspect of coping behavior helps determine how effectively teachers apply cognitive and behavioral strategies to address work-related stressors and maintain their psychological well-being.

Table 9 shows the data

Table 9
 Extent to which the respondents utilize the coping mechanisms to manage their mental health challenges in terms of problem-solving

S/N	Indicators	WM	SD	Verbal Description
1	I actively seek solutions to challenges I face in the classroom.	3.40	0.50	Moderate
2	I develop action plans to address work-related issues.	3.20	0.41	Moderate
3	I gather information to better understand and resolve problems.	3.45	0.51	High
4	I brainstorm multiple approaches to handle difficult situations.	3.35	0.49	Moderate
5	I evaluate the effectiveness of the solutions I implement.	3.30	0.47	Moderate
	Aggregate Mean	3.34		
	Aggregate Standard Deviation		0.48	Moderate

Legend: 4.21-5.00-Very High; 3.41-4.20-High; 2.61-3.40-Moderate; 1.81-2.60-Low; 1.00-1.80-Very Low

As shown in Table 9, the respondents obtained an aggregate mean of 3.34 with a standard deviation of 0.48, interpreted as Moderate. This suggests that SPED teachers moderately engage in problem-solving strategies to cope with their mental health challenges. Among the indicators, the highest-rated item was “I gather information to better understand and resolve problems” (WM = 3.45, High), indicating that respondents actively seek knowledge and insights to manage issues effectively. Other indicators such as seeking solutions (WM = 3.40), brainstorming approaches (WM = 3.35), and evaluating solutions (WM = 3.30)—were rated as moderate, reflecting consistent but not intensive use of structured problem-solving approaches. These findings imply that while SPED teachers demonstrate a proactive stance in addressing problems, there remains potential for strengthening their systematic coping and reflective practices.

The findings highlight the importance of problem-solving as a key component of adaptive coping among teachers. Fiorilli et al. (2023) emphasized that teachers who employ active problem-solving strategies exhibit higher emotional stability and lower burnout rates compared to those relying on avoidance-based coping. Similarly, O'Neill and Hastings (2021) found that special education teachers who engage in reflective problem-solving are better equipped to manage classroom behavioral challenges and maintain a sense of professional efficacy.

The high mean in information gathering also reflects teachers' continuous effort to adapt and learn—an essential aspect of professional resilience. Van Droogenbroeck et al. (2022) highlighted that educators who engage in solution-oriented learning behaviors, such as seeking advice and collaborating with peers, tend to experience greater psychological empowerment and job satisfaction. Meanwhile, Tan and Lee (2024) asserted that institutional training programs focusing on structured problem-solving frameworks enhance teachers' ability to manage complex stressors and foster collective well-being.

However, the moderate overall mean suggests that some teachers may lack consistent access to problem-solving resources or may rely on intuitive, rather than systematic, approaches to stress management. Campos and Rivera (2023) argued that without institutional reinforcement, individual coping mechanisms may not be sustained long-term, potentially leading to emotional fatigue. This highlights the importance of embedding problem-solving training and peer-collaboration opportunities within professional development programs to ensure that teachers can consistently apply effective coping strategies in demanding contexts such as special education.

The findings indicate that SPED teacher-respondents moderately utilize problem-solving coping mechanisms to manage their mental health challenges. Teachers actively seek information, plan solutions, and evaluate outcomes, reflecting a proactive but not yet optimal approach to coping. These practices demonstrate a foundation of resilience and reflective practice among SPED teachers; however, consistent institutional support and professional development are needed to strengthen their problem-solving capacity and sustain psychological well-being.

It is recommended that educational institutions provide structured training programs focused on evidence-based problem-solving and cognitive-behavioral coping techniques. Mentorship and peer collaboration initiatives can be implemented to encourage shared reflection and collective problem-solving among SPED teachers. Schools should also promote continuous professional learning communities (PLCs) where teachers can discuss challenges, brainstorm solutions, and evaluate outcomes collaboratively. Integrating problem-solving workshops into in-service training programs and linking them with emotional intelligence development may further enhance teachers' coping efficacy and resilience.

Extent to which the respondents utilize the coping mechanisms to manage their mental health challenges in terms of cognitive restructuring

This section presents the extent to which SPED teacher-respondents utilize cognitive restructuring as a coping mechanism in managing mental health challenges. Cognitive restructuring refers to the ability to modify negative or unhelpful thought patterns by reframing situations in a more positive and adaptive way. This coping approach is essential for teachers who face emotionally demanding roles, as it helps them sustain optimism, professional motivation, and resilience amid stress and burnout.

Table 10 displays the data

Table 10
 Extent to which the respondents utilize the coping mechanisms to manage their mental health challenges in terms of cognitive restructuring

S/N	Indicators	WM	SD	Verbal Description
1	I try to view challenging situations from a different perspective.	3.35	0.49	Moderate
2	I remind myself of my strengths when faced with difficulties.	3.20	0.41	Moderate
3	I focus on positive aspects of stressful situations.	3.15	0.37	Moderate
4	I reframe negative thoughts into more positive ones.	3.15	0.37	Moderate
5	I consider challenges as opportunities for personal growth.	3.45	0.51	High
	Aggregate Mean	3.26		
	Aggregate Standard Deviation		0.43	Moderate

As reflected in Table 10, the teacher-respondents obtained an aggregate mean of 3.26 with a standard deviation of 0.43, interpreted as Moderate. This indicates that SPED teachers moderately use cognitive restructuring strategies to manage their mental health challenges. The highest-rated indicator was “I consider challenges as opportunities for personal growth” (WM = 3.45, High), suggesting that most teachers perceive adversities as catalysts for learning and professional development. Meanwhile, the lowest indicators— “I focus on positive aspects of stressful situations” (WM = 3.15) and “I reframe negative thoughts into more positive ones” (WM = 3.15)—show that while teachers try to maintain a positive mindset, they may still struggle with consistently applying positive reframing under stress.

The moderate overall rating reflects that SPED teachers possess a balanced but developing capacity to challenge negative cognitions and reinterpret stressful experiences in constructive ways. This finding underscores the adaptive but situational nature of cognitive restructuring among educators handling high emotional demands.

The results align with recent studies emphasizing the importance of cognitive coping strategies in sustaining teacher well-being. Garcia and Rojas (2021) reported that teachers who regularly practice cognitive reframing are more capable of maintaining emotional balance and preventing burnout. Likewise, Moccia et al. (2023) highlighted that cognitive restructuring plays a protective role in managing occupational stress by enhancing emotional regulation and promoting resilience.

For SPED teachers, cognitive restructuring is particularly vital, as their work often involves complex emotional challenges and behavioral management demands. Zee and de Jong (2022) found that special educators who reframe stressful classroom situations tend to demonstrate stronger self-efficacy and job satisfaction. Moreover, Park and Choi (2024) observed that teachers who adopt positive cognitive reinterpretation techniques experience lower rates of depressive symptoms and better professional engagement.

However, the moderate mean suggests that while SPED teachers understand the importance of positive thinking, they may lack formal training in cognitive-behavioral strategies.

Heppner et al. (2023) noted that the absence of structured cognitive training programs within schools' limits teachers' capacity to sustain positive reframing, especially under chronic stress. Thus, institutions must provide targeted interventions that enhance teachers' ability to apply cognitive restructuring techniques more consistently and effectively.

The findings reveal that SPED teacher-respondents moderately utilize cognitive restructuring as a coping mechanism. While teachers demonstrate an awareness of the importance of maintaining positive perspectives and viewing challenges as opportunities for growth, there remains room for improvement in consistently applying these strategies in daily professional contexts. This highlights the need for institutional and psychological support that fosters a stronger mindset of optimism, resilience, and adaptive thinking among educators.

It is recommended that schools implement cognitive-behavioral training workshops to equip SPED teachers with structured techniques for reframing negative thoughts and fostering emotional resilience. Integrating mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) and reflective practice sessions into professional development programs can enhance teachers' cognitive flexibility and stress tolerance. Additionally, administrators should promote a culture that normalizes open discussions about mental health, encouraging teachers to view cognitive restructuring as both a professional skill and a self-care strategy.

Extent to which the respondents utilize the coping mechanisms to manage their mental health challenges in terms of social support

This section presents the extent to which SPED teacher-respondents utilize social support as a coping mechanism to manage their mental health challenges. Social support involves seeking emotional, informational, and practical assistance from colleagues, family, and friends. For SPED teachers, who often experience emotionally taxing work environments, social support serves as a protective factor that mitigates stress, enhances resilience, and fosters a sense of belonging and psychological safety within the workplace.

Table 11 shows the data

Table 11
 Extent to which the respondents utilize the coping mechanisms to manage their mental health challenges in terms of social support

S/N	Indicators	WM	SD	Verbal Description
1	I discuss my work-related stress with colleagues.	3.40	0.50	Moderate
2	I seek advice from friends or family when I'm stressed.	3.25	0.44	Moderate
3	I participate in support groups for teachers.	3.00	0.46	Moderate
4	I share my feelings with someone I trust.	3.30	0.47	Moderate
5	I reach out to others for help when needed.	3.10	0.31	Moderate
	Aggregate Mean	3.21		
	Aggregate Standard Deviation		0.44	Moderate

As reflected in Table 11, the respondents obtained an aggregate mean of 3.21 with a standard deviation of 0.44, interpreted as Moderate. This indicates that SPED teachers moderately

utilize social support mechanisms in coping with stress and mental health challenges. The highest-rated indicator was “I discuss my work-related stress with colleagues” (WM = 3.40, Moderate), suggesting that teachers find collegial relationships a valuable source of empathy and shared understanding. The lowest-rated indicator was “I reach out to others for help when needed” (WM = 3.10, Moderate), implying that while teachers recognize the importance of social support, some may be hesitant to seek help due to stigma, perceived professional expectations, or lack of accessible networks.

Overall, the moderate level indicates that social support plays an important, though not maximized, role in the teachers’ coping strategies. While peer and familial relationships are moderately strong, formalized or institutionalized support systems may still be underdeveloped.

The findings correspond with recent literature emphasizing the importance of social connectedness in reducing teacher stress and burnout. Doyle and Kim (2022) found that social support from colleagues and administrators significantly reduces emotional exhaustion among special educators. Likewise, Wei and Li (2023) demonstrated that teachers with strong interpersonal networks report higher life satisfaction and better emotional regulation, particularly during periods of professional strain.

Moreover, Tran and Pham (2024) identified that teachers who participate in peer support or mentorship groups exhibit greater resilience and professional motivation. Such findings affirm that fostering positive workplace relationships is critical for sustaining mental well-being among educators. Additionally, Katsantonis (2021) argued that institutional cultures that prioritize collaboration and open communication contribute to lower stress levels and higher job satisfaction.

However, the moderate mean in this study suggests a need for more structured and consistent social support interventions. Rahman and Mendoza (2023) noted that while informal peer support helps alleviate stress, formalized well-being programs, such as counseling and peer-coaching systems, have a stronger impact on long-term teacher resilience. This underscores the importance of institutional commitment to nurturing a supportive and empathetic work environment in the SPED setting.

The findings reveal that SPED teacher-respondents moderately utilize social support mechanisms to cope with mental health challenges. Teachers commonly seek comfort and advice from colleagues, family, and friends but may not always access or fully engage in structured support systems. While interpersonal connections play a vital role in alleviating emotional strain, institutional reinforcement through professional support networks remains necessary to ensure sustained psychological well-being and professional satisfaction.

It is recommended that schools and educational divisions establish formal peer support and mentoring programs to provide SPED teachers with consistent emotional and professional assistance. Institutions should also organize team-building and mental health awareness initiatives to promote open communication and reduce stigma around help-seeking. Encouraging collaboration through professional learning communities (PLCs) and integrating psychosocial counseling services can further strengthen teachers’ resilience and sense of belonging. Lastly, partnerships with external mental health professionals can ensure teachers have access to expert support beyond the school environment.

Extent to which the respondents utilize the coping mechanisms to manage their mental health challenges in terms of expressing emotions

This section presents the extent to which SPED teacher-respondents utilize emotional expression as a coping mechanism in managing their mental health challenges. Expressing emotions involves communicating, releasing, or channeling feelings in healthy ways such as talking, writing, or engaging in creative activities. For SPED teachers, who often deal with emotionally demanding situations, emotional expression serves as an essential strategy for reducing psychological tension, fostering emotional awareness, and preventing burnout.

Table 12 illustrates the data.

Table 12
 Extent to which the respondents utilize the coping mechanisms to manage the their mental health challenges in terms of expressing emotions

S/N	Indicators	WM	SD	Verbal Description
1	I openly express my feelings about work situations.	3.15	0.37	Moderate
2	I write about my experiences to process my emotions.	3.45	0.51	High
3	I use creative outlets to express my feelings.	3.25	0.44	Moderate
4	I communicate my frustrations in a constructive manner.	3.15	0.37	Moderate
5	I allow myself to cry or express sadness when needed.	3.25	0.44	Moderate
	Aggregate Mean	3.25		
	Aggregate Standard Deviation		0.43	Moderate

As shown in Table 12, the teacher-respondents obtained an aggregate mean of 3.25 with a standard deviation of 0.43, interpreted as Moderate. This indicates that SPED teachers moderately express their emotions as a means of coping with mental health challenges. The highest-rated indicator was “I write about my experiences to process my emotions” (WM = 3.45, High), suggesting that expressive writing serves as an effective emotional outlet for many teachers. Meanwhile, the lowest indicators—“I openly express my feelings about work situations” (WM = 3.15) and “I communicate my frustrations in a constructive manner” (WM = 3.15)—show that while teachers acknowledge the importance of expressing emotions, some may prefer controlled or private forms of expression rather than open confrontation or verbal release.

The findings imply that while emotional expression is valued, cultural, professional, or institutional norms may influence how openly teachers express their emotions, leading to a balanced but restrained use of this coping approach.

The results correspond with recent studies highlighting the significance of emotional expression in promoting mental health and resilience among educators. Rodriguez and Castillo (2022) emphasized that teachers who engage in constructive emotional expression—through journaling or creative activities—exhibit lower levels of anxiety and emotional exhaustion. Similarly, Hernandez and Li (2023) found that emotional disclosure helps teachers manage stress and develop greater self-awareness, particularly in high-stress teaching environments such as special education.

Moreover, Kumar and Fernandez (2024) observed that expressive coping strategies, including writing and artistic activities, significantly enhance psychological well-being and prevent burnout in education professionals. In a related study, Santos and Villanueva (2021) reported that teachers who are encouraged to communicate feelings in supportive work environments demonstrate stronger emotional regulation and job satisfaction. These findings align with the present study's results, which suggest that SPED teachers benefit from emotional outlets but may require more structured opportunities and safe spaces for open expression.

However, the moderate mean also reflects potential barriers such as limited emotional literacy, fear of judgment, or lack of institutional mechanisms for emotional support. Nguyen and Park (2023) noted that without training in emotional communication and self-awareness, educators may suppress feelings, increasing the risk of chronic stress. This implies a need for schools to foster emotionally supportive environments and integrate mental health education into professional development initiatives.

The findings reveal that SPED teacher-respondents moderately utilize emotional expression as a coping mechanism in managing their mental health challenges. While teachers engage in reflective and creative outlets, open emotional communication remains limited. This suggests that while teachers recognize the value of expressing emotions, structural and cultural factors may constrain full emotional release. Strengthening teachers' emotional expression skills and providing supportive environments can enhance their emotional resilience and overall well-being.

It is recommended that schools implement emotional literacy and expressive writing workshops to help teachers articulate and process their emotions constructively. Establishing safe spaces for emotional sharing, such as peer reflection circles or counseling sessions, can promote openness and reduce emotional suppression. Incorporating creative arts-based coping programs (e.g., art therapy, storytelling, music, or journaling activities) may also foster psychological well-being. Finally, administrators should model empathy and encourage a school culture that normalizes healthy emotional expression as part of professional growth and mental wellness.

Extent to which the respondents utilize the coping mechanisms to manage their mental health challenges in terms of avoidance

This section presents the extent to which SPED teacher-respondents utilize avoidance coping mechanisms in managing their mental health challenges. Avoidance coping refers to strategies that involve withdrawing from or ignoring stressors rather than addressing them directly.

Table 13 shows the data

Table 13
 Extent to which the respondents utilize the coping mechanisms to manage their mental health challenges in terms of avoidance

S/N	Indicators	WM	SD	Verbal Description
1	I take breaks to distance myself from stressful situations.	2.10	0.45	Low
2	I avoid certain tasks when I feel overwhelmed.	1.95	0.51	Low

3	I distract myself with other activities to avoid thinking about work stress.	1.90	0.64	Low
4	I postpone dealing with stressful situations until I feel ready.	1.80	0.41	Very Low
5	I ignore problems in the hope that they will resolve themselves.	1.65	0.49	Very Low
	Aggregate Mean	1.88		
	Aggregate Standard Deviation		0.50	Low

As shown in Table 13, the teacher-respondents obtained an aggregate mean of 1.88 with a standard deviation of 0.50, interpreted as Low. This indicates that SPED teachers seldom employ avoidance coping mechanisms to manage mental health challenges. The highest-rated indicator, “I take breaks to distance myself from stressful situations” (WM = 2.10, Low), suggests that teachers occasionally use short-term withdrawal as a way to recover from stress. However, the lowest indicators— “I postpone dealing with stressful situations until I feel ready” (WM = 1.80) and “I ignore problems in the hope that they will resolve themselves” (WM = 1.65)—reflect very low engagement in passive coping approaches.

The findings imply that SPED teachers prefer more active and constructive coping strategies, such as problem-solving or social support, over avoidance. This is a positive indicator of psychological adaptability and resilience among respondents, reflecting a professional culture that values engagement rather than evasion of challenges.

The results are consistent with studies that highlight avoidance coping as a less effective strategy for maintaining mental health in education settings. McLean and Connor (2022) found that teachers who frequently rely on avoidance behaviors experience higher levels of anxiety and burnout compared to those who use active coping mechanisms. Similarly, Perez and Dominguez (2023) observed that avoidance reduces professional efficacy and emotional regulation, particularly among special education teachers who face continuous behavioral and emotional demands.

Moreover, Bauer et al. (2024) noted that educators who consciously limit avoidance behaviors and instead engage in reflective problem-solving show better long-term psychological outcomes. These findings reinforce that while short breaks can be healthy, chronic avoidance leads to disengagement and diminished job satisfaction.

In addition, Kim and Johnson (2021) emphasized that avoidance often stems from emotional exhaustion and institutional stress, suggesting that supportive school environments can prevent teachers from resorting to withdrawal-based coping. Lopez and Tan (2024) further asserted that proactive organizational cultures promoting open dialogue and mental health awareness reduce avoidance tendencies and encourage teachers to confront challenges collaboratively.

Thus, the low reliance on avoidance among respondents signifies a positive psychological orientation, reflecting both individual resilience and possibly supportive work conditions that foster active engagement with stressors.

The findings reveal that SPED teacher-respondents seldom utilize avoidance coping mechanisms in managing their mental health challenges, as evidenced by a low aggregate mean of 1.88. Teachers demonstrate a preference for active coping approaches, which suggests a healthy tendency to confront and resolve stressors rather than evade them. This behavior is indicative of

psychological resilience and professional maturity, crucial attributes in the emotionally demanding context of special education.

It is recommended that schools continue to reinforce positive coping mechanisms through stress management and resilience training programs that discourage maladaptive behaviors such as avoidance. Administrators should encourage teachers to use brief, restorative breaks as healthy coping measures without allowing them to evolve into avoidance patterns. Providing access to counseling, mindfulness-based workshops, and peer support sessions can further empower teachers to address emotional challenges proactively. Moreover, fostering a culture of open communication where teachers feel safe to discuss stress-related concerns can minimize tendencies toward withdrawal and enhance collective emotional well-being.

Summary on the extent to which the respondents utilize the coping mechanisms to manage their mental health challenges

This section summarizes the extent to which SPED teacher-respondents employ various coping mechanisms to manage their mental health challenges. Coping mechanisms are adaptive strategies that help individuals manage stress and emotional strain in demanding professional environments. In the teaching profession particularly within special education coping plays a crucial role in maintaining psychological resilience, sustaining motivation, and promoting occupational well-being. The five dimensions examined in this study problem-solving, cognitive restructuring, social support, expressing emotions, and avoidance represent both adaptive and maladaptive strategies that shape teachers' capacity to handle work-related pressures effectively.

Table 14
 Summary on the extent to which the respondents utilize the coping mechanisms to manage their mental health challenges

Components	WM	SD	Verbal Description
Problem-Solving	3.34	0.48	Moderate
Cognitive Restructuring	3.26	0.43	Moderate
Social Support	3.21	0.44	Moderate
Expressing Emotions	3.25	0.43	Moderate
Avoidance	1.88	0.50	Moderate
Grand Mean	2.99		
Grand Standard Deviation		0.46	Moderate

As presented in Table 14, the teacher-respondents obtained a grand mean of 2.99 with a standard deviation of 0.46, interpreted as Moderate. This indicates that SPED teachers moderately utilize coping mechanisms in managing their mental health challenges. Among the dimensions, problem-solving (WM = 3.34) ranked the highest, followed closely by cognitive restructuring (WM = 3.26), expressing emotions (WM = 3.25), and social support (WM = 3.21)—all within the moderate range, implying active engagement in positive coping behaviors. However, avoidance (WM = 1.88) ranked the lowest, showing limited reliance on passive strategies.

These findings reveal that while SPED teachers use coping mechanisms moderately, they lean more toward constructive strategies, such as identifying solutions, reframing thoughts, and seeking support, rather than disengagement. The results reflect a balanced coping approach, where teachers manage stressors through both emotional expression and cognitive adaptation while consciously avoiding maladaptive behaviors like avoidance or withdrawal.

The moderate overall utilization of coping mechanisms aligns with recent research indicating that teachers tend to adopt mixed coping strategies in response to occupational stress. Garcia and Santos (2023) found that educators often balance problem-focused and emotion-focused coping, which contributes to sustained job satisfaction and psychological well-being. Similarly, Patel et al. (2021) emphasized that moderate use of adaptive coping strategies—particularly problem-solving and emotional regulation—enhances resilience and mitigates the risk of burnout among educators.

The relatively strong use of problem-solving and cognitive restructuring supports the findings of Huang et al. (2022), who reported that cognitive flexibility and proactive coping significantly reduce perceived stress and emotional exhaustion among teachers. Furthermore, Torres and Villanueva (2024) revealed that teachers who engage in constructive self-reflection and problem-solving are better equipped to handle classroom challenges, leading to improved mental health outcomes.

The moderate use of social support and emotional expression also reflects current literature emphasizing the importance of interpersonal relationships and emotional communication in promoting mental wellness. According to Mendoza and Cruz (2023), peer collaboration and open emotional expression enhance workplace belongingness, which, in turn, fosters resilience and reduces anxiety levels among teachers.

The low use of avoidance further reinforces a positive psychological profile among the respondents. Liang and Chen (2025) found that teachers who minimize avoidance behaviors demonstrate higher professional engagement and lower levels of emotional fatigue, suggesting that the respondents' limited reliance on avoidance may contribute to healthier coping patterns and better long-term well-being.

The findings reveal that SPED teacher-respondents moderately utilize coping mechanisms in managing their mental health challenges, with a grand mean of 2.99. Teachers primarily employ problem-solving and cognitive restructuring strategies, indicating a tendency toward active and adaptive coping approaches. The moderate use of social support and emotional expression further reflects a healthy balance between personal resilience and interpersonal connection. Conversely, the low engagement in avoidance coping demonstrates a positive rejection of maladaptive stress management behaviors. Collectively, these findings depict SPED teachers as moderately resilient professionals who actively strive to maintain emotional stability amid the demands of their profession.

It is recommended that educational institutions strengthen coping competencies among SPED teachers through professional development workshops on stress management, cognitive reframing, and emotional regulation. Schools should promote a supportive work culture that encourages peer collaboration and open communication to enhance social support networks. Furthermore, mental health programs should include training on adaptive coping and mindfulness-based interventions to help teachers maintain equilibrium during high-stress periods. .

Test of relationship between the mental health challenges and coping mechanisms of the respondents

This section presents the statistical test of the relationship between the mental health challenges and coping mechanisms of SPED teacher-respondents. It aims to determine whether there is a significant correlation between the level of mental health difficulties experienced by the respondents and the coping strategies they employ. Understanding this relationship provides valuable insight into how effectively teachers' coping mechanisms influence their psychological resilience and emotional well-being in the context of special education, where occupational stress and emotional demands are typically high.

Table 15 shows the data

Table 15
 Test of relationship between the mental health challenges and coping mechanisms of the respondents

Variables	r-value	Strength of Correlation	p-value	Decision	Remarks
Mental Health Challenges and Coping Mechanisms	0.212	Negligible Positive	0.369	Do not reject Ho	Not Significant

*Significant at $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed)

As shown in Table 15, the computed r-value of 0.212 indicates a negligible positive correlation between mental health challenges and coping mechanisms among SPED teacher-respondents. The p-value of 0.369 exceeds the 0.05 level of significance, leading to the decision to not reject the null hypothesis. This result implies that there is no statistically significant relationship between the mental health challenges experienced by the respondents and the coping mechanisms they employ.

In other words, the coping strategies of the SPED teachers do not have a strong or significant association with their reported levels of mental health challenges. While teachers may use various coping mechanisms, these strategies may not be sufficiently robust or consistently effective in reducing their mental health concerns, possibly due to contextual factors such as workload, institutional support, or individual resilience differences.

The negligible and non-significant relationship found in this study suggests that coping mechanisms alone may not fully mitigate the mental health challenges faced by SPED teachers. This finding aligns with Kim and Park (2021), who reported that while teachers adopt coping strategies, their effectiveness is often limited without strong organizational and systemic support. Similarly, López and García (2023) found that coping mechanisms have a modest impact on teacher stress unless supported by institutional interventions such as counseling services and administrative empathy.

Nguyen et al. (2022) emphasized that teachers' mental well-being is shaped by multifactorial influences, including workload, emotional labor, and policy constraints, which may diminish the protective effect of individual coping. Moreover, Rahman and Tan (2024) noted that teachers with strong coping skills still experience high stress levels when faced with poor work environments and inadequate administrative assistance, indicating that personal coping strategies must be complemented by structural reforms.

In a study by Khalid and Ramos (2025), educators' coping behaviors were shown to reduce short-term emotional distress but failed to create lasting mental health improvements without systemic wellness programs. Thus, the current study's findings underscore the need for comprehensive institutional approaches that extend beyond individual coping strategies to address the root causes of teacher stress and burnout.

The results reveal a negligible positive correlation ($r = 0.212$) and a non-significant relationship ($p = 0.369$) between the mental health challenges and coping mechanisms of SPED teacher-respondents. This suggests that while teachers utilize coping strategies, these mechanisms do not significantly influence or alleviate their mental health difficulties. The lack of a strong correlation indicates that coping strategies, as currently practiced, may be insufficient in addressing the deeper systemic and occupational factors affecting teacher well-being. Therefore, the study concludes that addressing mental health challenges among SPED educators requires a more holistic approach that integrates individual resilience with institutional and policy-level support system.

It is recommended that educational institutions and policymakers implement comprehensive mental health programs that go beyond individual coping interventions. These programs should include regular psychological wellness assessments, stress management workshops, and institutional reforms that reduce workload and enhance administrative support. Moreover, collaborative mental health initiatives, such as peer counseling and mentoring systems, should be established to foster a supportive professional community. Teacher training programs should also integrate modules on evidence-based coping frameworks and self-care strategies to enhance long-term resilience. Future research may explore mediating variables, such as emotional intelligence, job satisfaction, and organizational culture, to better understand the complex relationship between coping mechanisms and mental health among SPED educators.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, it is concluded that SPED teachers possess moderate adaptive coping abilities and generally experience low levels of mental health challenges. However, their coping strategies alone are insufficient to significantly alleviate stress and emotional strain, highlighting the need for stronger institutional support. While teachers demonstrate professional resilience and proactive problem-solving behaviors, the lack of a significant correlation between coping mechanisms and mental health outcomes suggests that systemic and organizational factors, such as workload management, emotional support, and access to mental health resources, play a more critical role in sustaining well-being. Therefore, teacher mental health must be addressed holistically, combining individual resilience training with institutional policies that promote psychological safety and work-life balance.

It is recommended that educational institutions implement structured mental health support systems that focus on both preventive and responsive measures to address the challenges faced by

SPED teachers. Schools should establish regular mental wellness programs aimed at reducing stress, preventing burnout, and promoting emotional balance among educators. Additionally, coping and resilience training should be integrated into professional development activities to equip teachers with practical strategies for managing stress and maintaining their psychological well-being. Strengthening institutional support mechanisms, such as mentoring programs, peer counseling sessions, and access to qualified mental health professionals, is also essential in fostering a culture of care and support within the school environment. Moreover, reducing workload pressure through collaborative planning, flexible scheduling, and administrative consideration can help teachers maintain a healthy work-life balance.

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