Original Article

Teaching Learning Disabilities Without Support: Experiences of SPED Trained Teachers in Remote Communities

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Abstract

Teaching learners with learning disabilities in remote schools without formal support strains SPED-trained teachers. With this, we explored the challenges, coping mechanisms, and insights gained by SPED-trained teachers assigned in remote communities. We used single case study design, selected SPED-trained teachers assigned in remote public schools in Caraga, Davao Oriental as our participants, and examined their classroom realities as our bounded case. Using Transactional Model of Stress and Coping as our lens, we found that teachers in remote schools faced not just instructional demands for learning disabilities, but resource scarcity, specialist support gaps, isolation, and system barriers as well; however, this burden was managed not just through available supports and practical strategies but through renewed appraisal of meaning, limits, and progress. Coping was not relied on materials and instructional adjustment alone but by peer support, prayer, and acceptance of personal limits. This realization drove us to consider further study on the role of coping between stressors and teacher well-being as an important future research task.

Keywords: coping mechanisms, learning disabilities, remote schools, SPED trained teachers, stressors

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1. Introduction

In remote communities, we observed a persistent problem among special education (SPED) teachers who are handling learners with learning disabilities. These teachers carried the full weight of teaching and classroom management while working with thin resources, limited support, and inconsistent school level systems. When materials, assistive resources, and coordinated guidance are scarce, they relied on personal initiative and improvised strategies, yet these efforts still leave gaps in sustained learning support and equitable access for learners who need structured, specialized teaching (Allam & Martin, 2021).

This problem appears in many countries. In the United States, we found that SPED teachers in remote communities reported high turnover due to role overload and limited support structures (Horn, Douglas, Karadimou, Bobzien & Layden, 2024). We observed the same concern in South Africa where SPED teachers assigned in remote mainstream settings received little to no support from the government which has consequently impacted the quality of instruction delivered to learners (Sepadi, 2025). In Malaysia, a qualitative study on SPED teachers working with learners with learning disabilities documented limited training exposure and persistent classroom challenges, which then pushes teachers to depend on self-developed practices and informal support channels (Cheng & Toran, 2022).

Within the Philippines, we found several local studies which show the same pattern of constrained support at the school level. In Ilagan City, teachers who handle learners with learning disabilities reported weak learning environments, limited instructional resources, and minimal stakeholder support, which undermines effective SPED delivery beyond placement alone (Allam & Martin, 2021). In Legazpi City, a study showed how SPED teachers describe daily instructional barriers and the practical strategies they use to keep instruction workable under local constraints (Pocaan, 2022). In Cebu City, SPED teachers reported uneven competence and resource related concerns tied to inclusive education demands, which helps explain why classroom level implementation varies across schools and settings (Tenerife et al., 2022).

Despite several studies on the problems experienced by SPED teachers in remote settings, we still observed a clear gap. The literature gave strong signals about barriers and teacher strain, yet it rarely centers SPED trained teachers who teach learning disabilities in remote communities as a distinct group with distinct demands, and it seldom draws together their challenges, coping, and field-based insights in one coherent qualitative account that reflects everyday realities.

To contribute to the body of knowledge, this study aimed to describe the experiences of SPED trained teachers in remote communities. Specifically, it aimed to ask the following questions: 1) What challenges do SPED trained teachers in remote communities experience when they teach learners with learning disabilities without adequate support?, 2) How do these teachers cope with these challenges?, and 3) What

insights do they offer to improve SPED implementation instruction in remote communities?

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

We used a single case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of how SPED trained teachers in remote communities made sense of teaching learners with learning disabilities when formal support was non-existent. This design fit our purpose because it examined experience and meaning in context, with close attention to the bounded case and to the participants' accounts within their real-life setting (Robinson & Williams, 2024). Our focus was not on counting how common each challenge was. We aimed to understand how teachers interpreted daily demands, how they appraised what those demands required, and how they described coping and insight within the realities of remote schools (Willis & Harvey, 2025).

We collected rich accounts through semi-structured interviews, and we followed a case-oriented analytic process. We began with detailed analysis of the case and then identified central patterns within it while keeping each teacher's context visible (Robinson & Williams, 2024). A single case study also supported our study because it had strong use in teacher experience research where emotional load, role complexity, and meaning making were central (Frearson & Duncan, 2024).

We connected this design with the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping as our theoretical lens to interpret differences across teachers who faced similar constraints yet differed in appraisal and coping options. We treated the model as an interpretive guide rather than a coding template. The single case study remained anchored in participants' words, while the lens helped us explain how challenges linked to coping and to the insights teachers offered for feasible support in remote settings (Robinson & Williams, 2024).

2.2 Sample and Sampling

In terms of sampling, we used purposive sampling to select SPED trained teachers who had direct and sustained experience teaching learners with learning disabilities in remote public schools in Caraga, Davao Oriental. We intentionally sought a fairly homogenous group because a single case study benefited from participants who shared a closely defined experience within the bounded case, allowing careful interpretation of the phenomenon in its real-life context (Nizza et al., 2021; Robinson & Williams, 2024). We included teachers who (a) completed formal SPED training through coursework, certificate, or documented SPED-focused in-service training, (b) taught learners with learning disabilities or persistent learning difficulties that required structured instructional adaptation, and (c) served in a remote

school context where access to specialists and instructional support was non-existent. We set a minimum teaching exposure of one school year in the current assignment to ensure depth of experience, and we prioritized teachers whose work spanned the last two years so that accounts reflected present school realities (Cena et al., 2024).

We recruited eight teachers. We treated the target size as a guide rather than a fixed quota, since qualitative sample adequacy depended on the richness of accounts, the specificity of the study aim, and the depth of analysis required in case study research (Cena et al., 2024). We stopped recruitment when additional interviews no longer added meaningful depth to the experience patterns that linked challenges, coping, and insights in our dataset. Recent discussions on qualitative saturation supported this flexible stance, especially for approaches that required detailed analysis of contextualized experience before broader pattern identification within the case (Ahmed, 2024).

We selected participants who faced the condition that defined the study, which was the reality of teaching learning disabilities without adequate support in remote communities. We did this because the study sought more than description of barriers. It aimed to understand how teachers interpreted the demands they faced, how they responded through coping choices, and what practical insights they formed that could guide feasible support for remote settings. This sampling logic matched qualitative quality markers that emphasized strong alignment between the research question, the sample, and the analytic depth required to produce a credible interpretative account (Nizza et al., 2021).

2.3 Data Gathering Technique

We gathered data primarily through semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with SPED trained teachers assigned in remote communities. A semi-structured format fit a single case study because it supported depth and flexibility while allowing us to examine the phenomenon within its real-life context. It allowed us to keep focus on the research questions while giving participants space to describe what teaching learners with learning disabilities without adequate support meant in their own terms (Kelly et al., 2023; Willis & Harvey, 2025). We used an interview guide that prompted accounts of daily challenges, appraisal of demands and resources, coping choices, and insights for feasible support. We also used probes that elicited concrete episodes, such as a difficult instructional day, a referral attempt, or a moment when a coping strategy worked or failed, because the study depended on specific detail rather than general opinion (Robinson & Williams, 2024).

To strengthen contextual understanding, we also compiled brief field notes after each interview that captured setting cues, interruptions, and initial analytic reflections. Where feasible and with consent, we invited participants to share non-identifying, teacher-generated artifacts that reflected practice, such as adapted activities, lesson notes, or resource lists. We treated these materials as supportive context rather than as a parallel dataset, since the single case study remained anchored

in the participant accounts and in our interpretation of meaning within context (Willis & Harvey, 2025). We did not request student records, and we avoided any document that could reveal learner identity.

We applied case study procedures during data collection and analysis by maintaining a case-oriented stance. We focused first on each teacher's account in depth before identifying broader patterns within the bounded case that aligned with the three research questions on challenges, coping, and insights (Robinson & Williams, 2024). We also maintained a reflexive log as two authors to track our assumptions, role positions, and interpretive decisions, since contemporary qualitative guidance stressed transparency and ethical reflexivity in the research process (Willis & Harvey, 2025).

2.4 Data Analysis

We analyzed the data using thematic analysis. This approach fit our aim because it allowed a systematic yet flexible examination of how participants described and interpreted their experiences, while also helping us identify meaningful patterns across accounts within the bounded case (Robinson & Williams, 2024; Willis & Harvey, 2025). We began with verbatim transcription and repeated reading of each interview to develop familiarity with the dataset. We then produced initial notes and codes that attended to descriptive content, language use, and underlying meaning. From these codes, we developed initial themes that captured how each teacher understood and experienced teaching learners with learning disabilities without adequate support in remote settings (Robinson & Williams, 2024). At this stage, we remained closely grounded in each participant's account before moving toward broader thematic interpretation across the dataset (Willis & Harvey, 2025).

After generating initial themes, we examined connections among them and organized them into a coherent thematic structure that reflected participants' meaning-making within the case. We then reviewed and refined the themes by looking for convergence, divergence, and nuance across teacher accounts while keeping a clear trace back to each individual narrative. This step allowed us to identify shared experiential patterns linked to the three research questions on challenges, coping, and insights, while also preserving what was distinctive about particular contexts and personal histories (Darley et al., 2025; Willis & Harvey, 2025).

2.5 Ethical Considerations

To ensure the ethical integrity of the study, we properly informed all participants about the purpose of the research, the procedures followed, the potential risks, and their rights, including the freedom to withdraw at any time without consequence. We assured them that participation was entirely voluntary. We obtained their informed consent prior to data collection. To uphold anonymity and confidentiality, we assigned pseudonyms to all participants, and we omitted details

that could trace their identity, school, or community background. We also maintained an audit trail throughout the research process to document key decisions, data handling, and analytic steps, which supported transparency, accountability, and the integrity of the findings. Finally, prior to implementation of the study, we secured ethical approval from the official ethics review committee of HCDC, the Society of Moral Integrity and Legal Ethics (SMILE), to confirm that the study met established ethical standards for responsible social research.

3. Results

3.1 Children Who Stayed in the Margins of the Classroom

It was not easy for us to understand at once what these teachers meant when they said that learners with learning disabilities were often *"naa ra pero dili jud makuyogan" (present but rarely carried along)*. At first, we thought this only referred to slow academic progress. But as we listened to the participants, we realized they were speaking of something deeper. They were not merely describing poor grades or weak reading skills. They were describing children who were physically present in class but often left at the edges of instruction because the teachers, despite training and willingness, had no specialist to consult, no diagnostic support to rely on, and no formal structure to catch the child before he or she fell further behind.

One participant, whom we refer to as Teacher Salve, recalled one of her pupils in a multigrade class. She said (TSC-P1-04-L12-20):

> *"Maklaro jud nako nga lahi iyang pacing sa uban. Kung magbasa mi, magtan-aw lang siya sa libro pero murag wala jud kasunod. Dili man pud ko kaingon dayon unsa gyud iyang kondisyon kay wala man mi psychologist, wala mi SPED center, wala pud mi klarong referral nga duol. Usahay ako nalang maghimo og lain nga activity para niya, pero dili gihapon pirmi kay daghan man pud kog giatiman nga uban."*
>
> *("I could clearly see that his pacing was different from the others. When we read, he would just look at the book but it seemed he was not really following. But I could not immediately say what his condition really was because we had no psychologist, no SPED center, and no accessible referral system nearby. Sometimes I would prepare a different activity for him, but not all the time because I also had many other learners to attend to.")*

What struck us in this response was not only the teacher's observation of difficulty, but the hesitation that followed it. She noticed the child's struggle, but she

was left to carry uncertainty alone. The problem was not simple lack of care. Rather, it was a condition where care was present but structurally unsupported.

Another participant, Teacher Nemia, described the same kind of uncertainty, but in a more painful way. She shared (TSC-P3-06-L03-11):

> *"Naay bata nga ako jud gi-focusan kay sige siyag kalibog sa instructions. Usahay masuko ang ginikanan nganong dili daw mo-improve bisag sige nakog tabang. Pero unsaon man nako nga ako ra isa, unya general teacher pa gyud ko sa daghang subjects. Kabalo ko nga naay deeper nga need ang bata, pero kutob ra jud ko sa akong kaya."*
>
> *("There was one child whom I really focused on because he kept getting confused with instructions. Sometimes the parent got upset and asked why the child was not improving even if I had been helping. But what could I do when I was alone, and I was also a general teacher handling many subjects. I knew the child had a deeper need, but I could only go as far as what I was capable of.")*

Her words showed a form of professional grief. She knew enough to recognize that the child needed more than ordinary classroom adjustment, yet she did not have the system required to respond properly. In this case, the burden of recognition became part of the burden of helplessness. Knowing the learner's need did not automatically mean she had the means to meet it.

We also noticed that participants did not always describe their work using clinical terms. Most of them spoke through classroom signs: unfinished seatwork, repeated confusion, frequent withdrawal, copying without understanding, emotional outbursts, and silence mistaken for laziness. Their language remained grounded in daily observation because that was the level at which they lived the problem. One teacher, Teacher Eda, explained (TSC-P5-08-L01-09):

> *"Dili man pirmi nga disruptive ang bata. Usahay hilum ra kaayo. Mao pud na ang lisod kay abi sa uban okay ra. Pero kami nga teacher, kabalo mi nga dili na normal nga kahilum. Murag naa siyay kalibog, kahadlok, o kakulang nga dili lang dayon makita."*
>
> *("The child is not always disruptive. Sometimes the child is just very quiet. That is also difficult because others think that means everything is fine. But we teachers know that this kind of silence is not normal. It seems there is confusion, fear, or a difficulty that is not immediately visible.")*

This response was important because it challenged the assumption that difficulty is always noisy or obvious. For these teachers, some of the most serious struggles were hidden behind stillness. Their work, therefore, was not simply instructional. It also involved constant interpretation of behaviors that had no formal assessment to confirm them.

Across the accounts, we came to understand that one of the first and most recurring realities in remote schools was not simply the presence of learning disability, but the absence of a functioning support pathway around it. The teachers were left to notice, to adjust, to explain, and to endure the emotional consequences of limited progress. The child's struggle was real, but the teacher's lonely position inside that struggle was equally real.

3.2 Teaching by Adjustment, Guesswork, and Small Inventions

When we asked the participants what made teaching most difficult in their actual classroom practice, they did not begin by saying "lack of training," because most of them had some form of SPED preparation. What they emphasized instead was the mismatch between what they knew should be done and what the school context actually allowed them to do. Their struggle was not purely ignorance. It was more often the exhausting act of adjusting every day without enough time, tools, or institutional backup.

Teacher Lorie explained this clearly when she said (TSC-P2-05-L14-24):

> *"Sa training, tudluan man mi unsaon pag-differentiate, unsaon pag-modify sa tasks, unsaon pagtan-aw sa needs sa bata. Pero sa actual nga classroom diri sa bukid, lisod kaayo i-apply tanan. Dako ang klase, kulang ang oras, usahay wala pay kopya sa modules para sa tanan. Mao nga ang mahitabo, mag-adjust nalang ka sa makaya nimo karong adlawa."*
>
> *("In training, we were taught how to differentiate, how to modify tasks, and how to look at the child's needs. But in the actual classroom here in the mountain area, it is very difficult to apply everything. The class is large, time is limited, and sometimes there are not even enough copies of the modules for everyone. So what happens is that you just adjust based on what you can manage on that particular day.")*

This statement reflected a very specific tension. The issue was not whether she understood inclusive strategies. The issue was whether those strategies could survive the realities of a remote classroom. Her practice became less about full implementation and more about partial rescue. She adjusted not because the system was designed for inclusion, but because the system forced her to improvise.

Teacher Joan described how such improvisation became habitual. She narrated (TSC-P4-07-L07-18):

> *"Naabot ko sa point nga maghimo ko og sarili nakong visual aids gikan sa karton, lumang manila paper, ug usahay ginunting nga packaging sa grocery. Dili siya ideal, pero mao ray naa. Kung ang bata dili kasabot sa usa ka paagi, mangita kog lain. Usahay drawing, usahay color coding, usahay one-on-one sa recess. Murag tanan buhaton nalang nimo aron dili siya mapabilin."*
>
> *("I reached the point where I made my own visual aids from carton, old manila paper, and sometimes cut pieces of grocery packaging. It was not ideal, but that was what I had. If the child could not understand through one approach, I looked for another. Sometimes drawing, sometimes color coding, sometimes one-on-one during recess. It felt like you would do everything just so the child would not be left behind.")*

We found this response very concrete. It did not romanticize the teacher's effort. In fact, it showed the wear of repeated improvisation. She was not speaking of innovation in the celebratory sense. She was speaking of substitution under constraint. The materials she used were not chosen because they were best, but because they were available.

Another participant, Teacher Hane, pointed to the emotional cost of this constant adjustment. She revealed (TSC-P6-09-L10-19):

> *"Kapoy ang tinuod nga adjustment kay dili man siya one time. Kada adlaw ka maghunahuna unsaon ni nga bata, unsaon pag-apil niya, unsaon nga dili siya ma-frustrate. Nya usahay bisan unsaon nimo, gamay ra gihapon ang progreso. Mao nang usahay mouli ko nga murag naa koy kulang nga nabuhat bisan kabalo ko nga gikapoy na kaayo ko."*
>
> *("Real adjustment is exhausting because it is not a one-time thing. Every day you think about how to reach the child, how to include the child, how to prevent frustration. Then sometimes no matter what you do, progress is still very limited. That is why there are days when I go home feeling I failed to do enough even when I know I am already very tired.")*

In her account, the challenge was not only pedagogic but moral. She measured herself not only by what she accomplished, but by what remained undone. This made

the work heavier. Even genuine effort did not always protect her from the feeling of inadequacy.

From these accounts, it became clear that the teachers' instructional work rested on repeated small inventions. They shortened tasks, repeated directions, adjusted expectations, created handmade supports, found brief moments for one-on-one guidance, and relied on intuition when formal intervention was absent. Yet these adjustments were not stable solutions. They were temporary bridges built daily over the same structural gaps. What looked like resilience from the outside often felt like guesswork mixed with responsibility from the inside.

3.3 Carrying the Work Beyond the Classroom Door

Another finding that emerged strongly in the narratives was that the challenge did not end when the class ended. The participants carried the work mentally and emotionally beyond school hours. Some brought home unfinished preparation. Others carried worry about a particular learner. Still others struggled with how to explain a child's condition to parents who expected quick results or who themselves did not fully understand the learner's difficulty. Teacher Salve shared this in a very direct way (TSC-P1-04-L28-36):

> *"Dili jud siya mahuman sa eskwelahan lang. Maski naa nako sa balay, mahuna-hunaan gihapon nako tong bata nga sige lang og lingkod pero wala kasabot. Maghuna-huna ko unsa pa kaha lain nako mahimo ugma. Usahay maapektuhan akong tulog kay murag gidala nako ang problema pauli."*
>
> *("It really does not end in school. Even when I am already at home, I still think about that child who keeps sitting there but does not understand. I keep asking what else I can do tomorrow. Sometimes even my sleep is affected because it feels like I bring the problem home with me.")*

This was not simply overwork. It was emotional carryover. The learner's unfinished struggle remained with the teacher after class, not because she was unable to detach professionally, but because the conditions gave her no closure. There was rarely a specialist to refer to, no school-based team to consult, and no guarantee that tomorrow would be different.

Teacher Nemia described another layer of difficulty, this time involving parents. She said (TSC-P3-06-L20-31):

> *"Usahay lisod pud kaayo estoryahon ang ginikanan. Naay uban nga mudawat, pero naa pud uban nga masakitan dayon o mudepensa. Kung sultihan nimo nga ang bata basin kinahanglan*

> *og lain nga support, usahay abi nila gi-label nimo ilang anak. Mao nga mag-amping pud ka sa words, pero ikaw man pud ang gusto motabang."*
>
> *("Sometimes it is also very difficult to talk to parents. Some are receptive, but others get hurt immediately or become defensive. If you say that the child may need a different kind of support, sometimes they think you are labeling their child. So you have to be very careful with your words, even though you are only trying to help.")*

Her statement revealed that communication itself became part of the stress. It was not enough to identify learner difficulty. The teacher also had to negotiate parental emotion, stigma, and misunderstanding. This made support work even more delicate. In remote settings where professional language is not always shared, even a well-meant conversation could be misread.

One participant also described how the absence of formal support widened her sense of accountability. Teacher Eda said (TSC-P5-08-L14-22):

> *"Kung walay ma-referan, murag sa imo tanan mubalik. Kung walay improvement, ikaw ang una ma-question. Bisan kabalo ka nga dili ni kaya sa classroom intervention lang, murag ikaw gihapon ang murag adunay sala kay ikaw man ang teacher."*
>
> *("If there is no one to refer to, it feels like everything goes back to you. If there is no improvement, you are the first one to be questioned. Even if you know this cannot be addressed by classroom intervention alone, it still feels like you are the one seen at fault because you are the teacher.")*

We found this especially important because it showed how structural absence became personal burden. The school lacked a support mechanism, yet the consequences of that lack settled on the teacher. She did not only teach. She absorbed the pressure created by the missing system.

Thus, the findings suggest that the challenge of teaching learners with learning disabilities in remote schools was not confined to instructional adaptation alone. It extended into relationships with parents, private emotional labor, after-hours worry, and a persistent feeling of carrying more responsibility than the role could realistically hold.

3.4 Quiet Ways of Enduring the Work

When we turned to the second research question and asked how the participants coped, their responses were noticeably modest. They did not describe dramatic breakthroughs. Most of them spoke of small, repeatable practices that helped them endure rather than completely solve the situation. Their coping was quiet, practical, and often deeply personal.

Teacher Joan shared that she survived many difficult days by breaking her work into smaller parts. She explained (TSC-P4-07-L24-33):

> *"Kung tan-awon nimo tanan problema sabay-sabay, murag mabug-atan jud ka. Mao nga ako, ginagmay nako tan-awon. Karon sa buntag, kani lang usa nga bata akong unahon. Karon nga hapon, kani nga activity akong i-adjust. Dili nako pugson nga masulbad tanan dayon kay mas mudako lang akong kakapoy."*
>
> *("If you look at all the problems at once, you really become overwhelmed. So for me, I deal with them in smaller pieces. This morning, I will focus first on this one child. This afternoon, I will adjust this one activity. I do not force myself to solve everything at once because that only makes my exhaustion worse.")*

Her way of coping did not remove the problem, but it made the work bearable. By narrowing attention to what could be acted upon at the moment, she protected herself from emotional flooding. This was not avoidance. It was a practical discipline of staying functional in an overloaded environment.

Teacher Hane found support in peer conversation. She said (TSC-P6-09-L23-31):

> *"Dako kaayo og tabang nga naa koy mastorya sa school. Dili man kinahanglan pirmi advice. Usahay enough na nga naay makadungog nga kapoy ka, nga nalibog ka, nga nasakitan ka para sa bata. Kana lang bitaw nga naa kay kauban nga kasabot sa tinuod nga nahitabo sa classroom."*
>
> *("It helped a lot that I had someone to talk to in school. It did not always have to be advice. Sometimes it was enough that someone heard that you were tired, confused, or hurting for the child. Just having a companion who understood what was really happening in the classroom mattered.")*

This response suggested that coping was relational. What sustained her was not formal intervention but emotional recognition from a colleague. In a context where

specialist systems were absent, ordinary collegial understanding became an informal support structure.

Teacher Salve, on the other hand, described coping through acceptance of limitation. She said (TSC-P1-04-L39-48):

> *"Naabot ko sa point nga giingnan nako akong kaugalingon nga dili nako kaya tanan, ug okay ra nga naa koy limit. Sauna sakit kaayo dawaton kay murag teacher ka gud, dapat kabalo ka. Pero kadugayan nasabtan nako nga dili pasabot nga wa koy care kung naa koy mga butang nga dili nako mahatag sa bata."*
>
> *("I reached a point where I told myself that I cannot do everything, and it is okay that I have limits. Before, it was painful to accept because you are a teacher, so you feel you should know everything. But over time I understood that having things I cannot provide to the child does not mean I do not care.")*

This was a striking shift. Her coping did not come from mastery, but from a gentler way of viewing her own limits. Instead of measuring herself against an impossible ideal, she began to separate compassion from total control. This seemed to reduce self-blame.

One more participant, Teacher Eda, spoke of prayer and silence as part of how she carried on. She revealed (TSC-P5-08-L27-34):

> *"Sa tinuod lang, naay mga adlaw nga wala koy lain mabuhat kundi mohilom ug mag-ampo. Dili man ni dayon mawala ang problema, pero murag didto ko makapangayo og kusog. Kay kung tan-awon nimo sa logical lang, usahay kulang na jud kaayo ang resources ug pamaagi."*
>
> *("Honestly, there are days when there is nothing else I can do except stay quiet and pray. The problem does not disappear right away, but it feels like that is where I ask for strength. Because if you look at it logically, the resources and methods are really no longer enough.")*

This response did not sound passive. Rather, it reflected how some teachers preserved inner steadiness when external resources were depleted. Prayer, for her, became a private way of restoring the strength needed to return to work the next day.

Taken together, the coping narratives showed that these teachers did not rely on one grand strategy. They survived through small pacing decisions, trusted colleagues, boundary-setting with the self, moments of quiet, and a gradual acceptance

that commitment does not erase limitation. Their coping was not dramatic, but it was deeply human.

3.5 What the Teachers Came to Know

When we asked the participants what insights they had learned from teaching learners with learning disabilities in remote communities without formal support, their responses became more reflective. They did not only talk about methods. They talked about how the experience changed their understanding of teaching, of children, and of themselves.

Teacher Nemia said this with clarity (TSC-P3-06-L35-44):

> *"Nakat-on ko nga dili tanan progress makita dayon sa papel. Naay bata nga murag gamay ra kaayo og improvement kung scores lang tan-awon, pero dako na diay kaayo nga butang nga ni-stay siya sa activity, nga wala siya nihilak, o nga nisulay siya mutubag. Sauna murag grades jud akong first tan-awon. Karon lahi na akong sukdanan usahay."*
>
> *("I learned that not all progress is immediately visible on paper. There are children who seem to improve very little if you look only at scores, but it is already a big thing that they stayed in the activity, did not cry, or tried to answer. Before, grades were the first thing I looked at. Now my measure is sometimes different.")*

This insight was important because it showed a shift in professional vision. She no longer judged learner growth only through formal output. She began to recognize smaller signs of participation and regulation as meaningful progress. In other words, the experience taught her to see learning more patiently.

Teacher Joan offered a related but slightly different reflection. She said (TSC-P4-07-L36-45):

> *"Nakasabot ko nga ang inclusion dili diay mahuman sa pagpasulod lang sa bata sa classroom. Sayon isulti nga inclusive ta, pero kung walay support, ang teacher ug bata pareho ra pud usahay mapasagdan. Mao nga para sa akoa, kinahanglan jud nga seryosohon ang support, dili kay slogan lang."*
>
> *("I came to understand that inclusion does not end with simply letting the child enter the classroom. It is easy to say we are inclusive, but if there is no support, both the teacher and the child are still neglected in some way. So for me, support must really be taken seriously, not treated as a slogan.")*

Her statement carried a quiet critique. She had moved from personal adjustment to structural awareness. She now saw that inclusion without support can become symbolic rather than lived. This insight was not abstract. It was built from the daily experience of trying to include a learner with too little institutional help.

Teacher Salve's insight was more personal. She shared (TSC-P1-04-L50-58):

> *"Siguro usa sa pinakadako nakong nakat-onan kay ang teacher dili lang diay tig-tudlo. Tig-obserbar pud, tigpaminaw, tig-adjust, ug usahay tigdala sa kabug-at nga walay lain makakita. Pero nakat-on pud ko nga dili ko dapat maubos tanan. Kay kung mahurot ko, unsaon nalang nako pagtabang sa uban."*
>
> *("Maybe one of the biggest things I learned is that a teacher is not only someone who teaches. A teacher also observes, listens, adjusts, and sometimes carries burdens that no one else sees. But I also learned that I should not let myself be consumed completely. Because if I am fully drained, how can I still help others?")*

We found this especially powerful because it held two truths at once. She affirmed the hidden weight of teaching, but she also recognized the need for self-preservation. Her insight was not self-centered. It was ethical. Protecting herself was part of sustaining care for others.

Lastly, Teacher Eda pointed to hope, though in a restrained way. She said (TSC-P5-08-L37-44):

> *"Bisan lisod, nakita nako nga naay mahitabo basta naay teacher nga dili dayon mohunong og sabot sa bata. Dili man pirmi dako ang result, pero naa jud na. Mao nga para sa akoa, importante kaayo ang pasensya ug consistency bisan walay klarong support system."*
>
> *("Even if it is difficult, I saw that something still happens when a teacher does not give up trying to understand the child. The result is not always big, but it is there. So for me, patience and consistency are very important even when there is no clear support system.")*

Her statement did not deny the hardship. Yet it also resisted despair. She recognized that meaningful change was still possible, though often small and slow. The hope she described was not idealistic. It was grounded in repeated, modest acts of persistence.

These insights show that the teachers did not come out of their experience with simplified answers. Instead, they formed a more layered understanding of progress, inclusion, responsibility, and care. Their reflections were shaped not by theory alone, but by the daily discipline of continuing in classrooms where formal support was absent and yet learner need remained present.

4. Discussion

In this study, we highlighted major thoughts related to stressor condition, coping mechanisms, and insights gained by SPED-trained teachers who were handling learners with learning disabilities in remote schools without adequate formal support. What stayed with us across the results was that the teachers did not describe stress in abstract language. They described it through unfinished seatwork, unclear referral pathways, handmade materials, parental misunderstanding, silent children, and the feeling of bringing the learner's difficulty home after class. These accounts fit the basic logic of the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, where stress does not come from demand alone, but from the teacher's appraisal that the demand is larger than the resources presently available. In that sense, the teachers' narratives did not merely show "hard work." They showed repeated appraisal of instructional, emotional, and systemic overload.

Going through the difficulties encountered by the participants, we were reminded that the stressor in this study was not only the learner's disability-related need. The stressor was also the absence of a functioning support ecology around that need. The participants knew how to notice instructional difficulty, but they did not always have access to a psychologist, SPED center, specialist, or even a workable referral channel. That is why one teacher could recognize that a child needed more than classroom adjustment yet still speak with hesitation. For us, that hesitation mattered. It showed that professional awareness without institutional support can become another layer of burden rather than relief.

This finding is consistent with recent work showing that teacher exhaustion rises where role demands remain high while autonomy, support, and relational resources are weakened. Wang et al. (2024) found that positive teacher-student relationships and perceived autonomy were negatively associated with emotional exhaustion, which means that stress becomes heavier when teachers feel less supported in how they respond to classroom realities. In the present study, the problem was not simply "student diversity" in general. It was the very specific combination of learner need, uncertain documentation, distance from specialists, and the teacher's felt responsibility to act even when the system could not fully back that action.

We also want to emphasize that the stressors described here were concrete and layered. The teachers talked about large classes, scarce materials, multigrade settings, after-hours thinking, and difficult conversations with parents who sometimes interpreted concern as labeling. These findings sit well with the broader teacher-stress literature, where workload, organizational conditions, and school-context pressures

have repeatedly been identified as correlates of burnout, stress, anxiety, and depression among teachers. Agyapong et al. (2022) noted that work-related and school-related factors such as class size and organizational conditions were among the correlates repeatedly linked with poor mental health outcomes among teachers. Still, we think the present findings add something more particular. In this study, the burden was not just “heavy workload.” It was the felt impossibility of giving specialized help inside a setting structurally arranged for general instruction.

What also stood out to us was the hiddenness of some learner difficulties. One participant spoke of children who were not disruptive, but unusually quiet, and therefore easily read by others as “fine.” That detail should not be missed. It suggests that in remote classrooms, the teacher’s stress is not limited to managing visible disruption. It also includes the strain of interpreting subtle signs without assessment confirmation. In this way, the teacher is not only instructor but watcher, interpreter, and first-line responder. This is close to what Aas et al. (2024) found in inclusive settings, where teachers’ ideas for adaptation developed in relation to concrete classroom situations rather than abstract inclusion ideals alone. Their work suggests that teachers often respond to learner difficulty through situated adjustment, not through perfectly resourced implementation.

Another point that we find important is that the SPED preparation of the participants did not remove the stressor. In fact, training sometimes sharpened it. Because they knew what ought to be done, they felt more keenly what could not be done under current conditions. This is why the teachers did not complain primarily about ignorance. They complained about the gap between trained intention and practical possibility. Recent evidence on inclusive education supports that point. Donath et al. (2025) argued that teachers require adequate support if training is to transfer into actual inclusive classroom practice; training alone does not guarantee enactment. We think this explains why the participants’ stress should not be reduced to personal weakness or lack of competence. Their stress emerged where professional responsibility met an under-supported setting.

The results also suggest that responsibility in remote schools becomes personalized very quickly. If there is no specialist, no school-based team, and no nearby referral route, then the teacher becomes the default point where concern returns. One participant captured this sharply when she said that when there is no one to refer to, everything comes back to the teacher. This resembles findings in special education burnout literature showing that special educators are exposed to very high levels of stress and burnout, especially where risks accumulate across both general and teacher-specific domains. McGrew et al. (2023) reported very high burnout indicators among special educators and stressed that teacher-specific risk factors matter in understanding their strain. In the present study, that teacher-specific burden was visible in the lonely accountability of recognizing need without being able to mobilize a complete support response.

Taken together, these findings support the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping of Lazarus and Folkman (1984) by showing that stress among SPED-trained

teachers in remote communities emerged not simply from the presence of learners with learning disabilities, but from how teachers appraised these demands in relation to the limited resources, support systems, and institutional responses available to them. The participants' accounts reflected a primary appraisal of their work as highly demanding and emotionally weighty, alongside a secondary appraisal in which they recognized that their capacity to respond was often constrained by scarce materials, lack of specialists, weak referral systems, and insufficient school support. In this sense, stress was produced through the ongoing transaction between the teacher and the environment, where professional responsibility repeatedly exceeded practical support. Thus, the study affirms the framework's core argument that stress is not located in the situation alone, but in the teacher's continuous evaluation of whether the demands of inclusive teaching can be managed under the realities of remote-school conditions.

When it comes to the coping element in the Transactional Model, we interpret the teachers' coping not as dramatic stress reduction, but as modest, repeatable efforts that kept them functional inside a difficult environment. They did not describe one major intervention that solved their problem. Instead, they described coping through narrowed attention, handmade adjustments, quiet peer conversation, acceptance of personal limits, prayer, and one-task-at-a-time decisions. We find this very important because it keeps the discussion close to what the teachers actually said. Their coping was not heroic mastery. It was sustained management of what could still be done.

Some of the coping strategies reported by the teachers was clearly problem-focused. They changed activities, broke lessons into simpler parts, used color coding, made low-cost visual materials, repeated directions, and gave one-on-one support during brief windows like recess. These are not grand innovations. They are local strategies of containment. They help the teacher prevent the day from collapsing. In this sense, the findings are close to the Transactional Model's view that coping includes concrete responses aimed at managing the stressor itself. They also align with Aas et al. (2024), whose work on inclusive teaching showed that teachers' adaptive responses often take shape as classroom-level modifications built around immediate student need.

At the same time, the teachers' coping was not only problem-focused. It was also relational and emotional. One participant said she needed someone at school who could simply hear that she was tired and confused. Another said she had to learn that she could not do everything, and that having limits did not mean she did not care. I interpret these as important forms of secondary appraisal. The teachers were not only asking, "What can I do?" They were also asking, "What must I stop expecting from myself under these conditions?" This is where coping became gentler and more inward.

Recent studies support the importance of these interpersonal and internal resources. Einav et al. (2024) found that social support had a negative association with teacher burnout and operated together with hope and loneliness in explaining burnout differences. In a different line of work, Maratos et al. (2024) showed that self-compassion was meaningfully connected to teacher well-being and burnout-related

processes, suggesting that a less punitive inner stance can matter in how teachers endure occupational strain. When we place these studies beside the present findings, we do not take them to mean that peer talk or self-kindness removes structural problems. Rather, we see them as explaining why some teachers are able to keep going without immediately collapsing into self-blame.

One aspect of coping in this study that we do not want to overstate, but also do not want to ignore, is the role of prayer and silence. One teacher said that there were days when there was nothing left to do but remain quiet and pray for strength. We are careful here not to romanticize this. Prayer, in the findings, was not offered as a replacement for institutional support. It appeared instead as a personal way of staying steady when practical options had narrowed. In terms of the transactional model, this seems close to reappraisal and emotion-focused coping. It helped preserve the teacher's capacity to return to the classroom the next day, even if the underlying stressor remained.

Another thing we noticed is that coping in this study often involved scaling the work down. One participant said she deliberately refused to look at all the problems at once because that would only intensify her exhaustion. We find that a very realistic strategy. It does not deny the existence of the larger problem, but it protects the teacher from being swallowed by it all at once. This kind of pacing has some affinity with what recent teacher well-being studies identify as the value of supportive conditions, manageable control, and regulation of emotional load in relation to exhaustion. Wang et al. (2024) linked better well-being with positive relational and motivational conditions, while Maratos et al. (2024) pointed to self-compassion as a relevant buffer in burnout-related processes. The present findings make that relationship look more ordinary and more human. Coping, here, was not abstract resilience. It was the decision to face only the next manageable piece of the day.

These findings also support the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping of Lazarus and Folkman (1984) by showing that the teachers' responses to stress were shaped by how they continuously evaluated and managed the demands of their work within a resource-limited context. Their accounts reflected both problem-focused coping, such as modifying lessons, simplifying tasks, and creating improvised instructional materials, and emotion-focused coping, such as seeking peer support, accepting personal limits, praying, and deliberately narrowing attention to manageable tasks. These coping efforts show that the teachers were not passive recipients of stress, but active agents who adjusted both their practices and their emotional responses in order to remain functional in challenging conditions. Thus, the study reinforces the framework's view that coping is a dynamic and ongoing process through which individuals attempt to regulate both the stressor itself and the emotional strain it produces, especially when the demands of the environment cannot be fully removed.

As we listened to the participants speak about what they had learned from this experience, we found that their insights were less about polished professional philosophy and more about changed ways of seeing. One teacher said that progress is not always visible in scores. Another said inclusion is not accomplished by merely

placing the learner in the classroom. Another recognized that a teacher is not only one who teaches, but one who listens, observes, adjusts, and carries burdens that others do not always see. These are not decorative statements. They are conclusions produced by repeated exposure to unsolved classroom difficulty.

We were particularly struck by the way the teachers redefined progress. In the findings, improvement did not always mean test performance. Sometimes it meant that the child stayed with an activity, did not cry, or attempted an answer. We think this is an important insight because it reflects changed appraisal. The teachers began to assign meaning not only to academic output, but also to engagement, regulation, and participation. In the language of the Transactional Model, this looks like reappraisal. The teacher's understanding of what counts as success becomes more realistic and more context-sensitive. This does not lower standards in a careless way. Rather, it shifts the standard closer to what learning difficulty and limited support actually look like in practice.

We also find that the teachers' insights moved from the personal to the structural. One participant said very plainly that inclusion without support becomes close to a slogan. That statement deserves attention. It echoes recent inclusive-education research showing that implementation depends not only on teacher commitment but also on actual support structures that allow training and intention to transfer into practice. Donath et al. (2025) emphasized that teacher training needs supportive conditions if it is to translate into inclusive classroom enactment. The present findings therefore suggest that teachers do not merely need more exhortation to be inclusive. They need referral channels, instructional support, and systems that prevent inclusion from becoming an individual burden disguised as policy success.

The insights also contained a moral adjustment in how teachers saw themselves. One participant realized that she should not allow herself to be completely used up, because exhaustion would eventually damage her ability to help others. We think this matters because it shows that limit-setting was not selfish withdrawal. It was part of sustainable care. This is one place where the present findings connect carefully with self-compassion literature. Maratos et al. (2024) linked self-compassion with teacher well-being and argued that harsh self-criticism is implicated in burnout-related strain. In the present study, self-compassion did not appear through formal psychological vocabulary. It appeared through ordinary statements such as "I have limits," "I cannot do everything," and "this does not mean I do not care." For us, that is one of the most real parts of the data.

Lastly, we noticed that hope in this study was very restrained. The teachers did not claim transformation in a sweeping sense. They simply said that something can still happen when a teacher keeps trying to understand the child, even if the progress is small. We appreciate this kind of hope because it remains close to the classroom. It does not erase the hardship. It only says that the work is not empty. In that way, the teachers' insights fit the final element of the transactional model: appraisal does not only interpret threat, but also interprets meaning and available control. Their insights did not remove the stressors, but they changed how those stressors were carried.

These findings support the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping of Lazarus and Folkman (1984) by showing that the teachers' insights were shaped through ongoing reappraisal of their experiences in teaching learners with learning disabilities in remote communities. As they encountered repeated challenges, the participants gradually redefined what counted as progress, success, and effective inclusion, moving from narrow academic expectations toward more context-sensitive understandings of learner participation, emotional regulation, and small but meaningful gains. Their reflections also revealed how they reassessed their own roles, limits, and responsibilities within an under-supported system, showing that appraisal was not static but continuously revised through lived experience. In this way, the study affirms the framework's view that coping does not end with immediate stress management, but also involves deeper cognitive and emotional reinterpretations that help individuals assign meaning, sustain purpose, and continue functioning despite unresolved environmental demands.

5. Conclusion

SPED trained teachers in remote communities faced persistent instructional, emotional, and systemic challenges while teaching learners with learning disabilities without adequate support. They coped through practical adjustments, peer support, personal acceptance, and quiet resilience, while their experiences led them to see that meaningful inclusion requires more than teacher effort alone. The study shows that effective SPED implementation in remote schools depends on stronger institutional support, accessible referral systems, and sustained resources that can help both teachers and learners thrive.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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