

Exploring the Lived Experience of Occupational Stress Among Special Education Teachers: A Proposed Stress Management Strategy Plan

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Abstract: Special educators have more challenging duties than general education teachers. They serve students with developmental challenges, behavioral difficulties, and other needs. The study used thematic analysis to identify stressors, their effects on instructional efficacy, teachers' coping methods, and their support systems. Nine public school SPED teachers were interviewed about their experiences with intellectually disabled students. Findings show that SPED teachers experience occupational stress from learner-related and administrative issues. In the early months of teaching, tantrums, meltdowns, and repetitious activities caused teachers' emotional and physical stress. The study also stressed the importance of social and institutional support systems in stress reduction. Emotional resilience and professional sustainability were consistently promoted by peer and co-teacher support, family encouragement, and school leader recognition. In conclusion, student behaviours, administrative expectations, and interpersonal dynamics contribute to occupational stress among SPED teachers, which can lower teaching performance and confidence. Teachers use a variety of coping mechanisms and strong support structures to stay productive and healthy. To reduce stress and boost teacher resilience, the study suggests schools use peer mentoring, recognition, professional development, and family engagement programs.

Keywords: Occupational Stress; SPED Teachers; Stress Management; Strategy Plan; Teaching Performance; Professional Confidence; Emotional Resilience; Professional Sustainability; Thematic Analysis.

Received on: 06/07/2025, **Revised on:** 17/09/2025, **Accepted on:** 03/10/2025, **Published on:** 03/03/2026

Journal Homepage: <https://www.fmdbpub.com/user/journals/details/FTSPS>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.69888/FTSPS.2026.000656>

Cite as: F. C. Felebrico, "Exploring the Lived Experience of Occupational Stress Among Special Education Teachers: A Proposed Stress Management Strategy Plan," *FMDB Transactions on Sustainable Psychology Sequence*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 19–30, 2026.

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1. Introduction

Special education teachers play a vital role in supporting learners with diverse and complex needs [1]. Their responsibilities now extend beyond traditional teaching, including creating Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), managing behaviour, collaborating with specialists, and engaging with families [6]; [17]. These growing demands, combined with limited resources, contribute to high stress levels that affect their well-being and effectiveness [7]; [18]. Studies consistently show that SPED teachers experience higher stress and burnout than general education teachers due to heavy workloads, emotional demands, and limited institutional support [8]; [19]. These factors often lead to emotional exhaustion, lower job satisfaction, and increased

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turnover in the profession [5]; [22]. In the Philippines, SPED teachers continue to face systemic challenges, including overcrowded classrooms, limited access to assistive technologies, inadequate funding, and insufficient training in evidence-based practices [9]; [20]; [24]. These issues heighten occupational stress and hinder the delivery of effective interventions [11]; [26]. Research also shows a persistent gap in understanding their lived experiences and coping strategies in resource-constrained contexts [46]; [21]. This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of SPED teachers as they navigate occupational stress and to examine how such stress impacts their performance and competencies [12]; [15]. The insights gained will help guide the development of targeted interventions that support SPED teachers' well-being and professional effectiveness within the field [13]; [14]; [16].

1.1. Research Questions

The goal of this study was to determine the impact of occupational stress on the job performance of SPED teachers. Specifically, this study was aimed at:

- How did special education teachers describe their experiences with occupational stress in their teaching practice?
- What factors did special education teachers identify as primary sources of occupational stress?
- How did occupational stress affect their perceived teaching performance and professional competence?
- What coping strategies did special education teachers use to manage occupational stress?
- What support systems or interventions did special education teachers believe would help reduce stress and enhance their professional well-being?

2. Methodology

This study used a descriptive phenomenological design to explore the lived experiences of special education teachers dealing with occupational stress [27]; [28]. This design allowed the researcher to capture the essence of their experiences without imposing preconceived assumptions [29]; [30]. Total enumeration was employed, including all SPED teachers in the Schools Division of Cauayan City, Isabela [31]; [32]. This ensured full population representation and provided a comprehensive understanding of how occupational stress affected their job performance [33]; [34]. A sample of 8–12 participants was deemed sufficient to achieve data saturation, in line with common practices in phenomenological research [35]; [36]. This number enabled the researcher to gather rich, detailed accounts while avoiding redundant or repetitive data [37]; [38]. Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews guided by open-ended questions based on the research objectives [39]; [40]. Interviews were conducted in person, recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim to ensure accurate representation of participants' experiences [41]; [43].

A semi-structured interview guide served as the primary instrument. It was developed from the research questions and validated by experts to ensure clarity and relevance [44]; [45]. The guide allowed for deeper probing into participants' experiences and coping strategies. Trustworthiness was ensured using the criteria of Benigno et al. [3]. Credibility was established through member checking, transferability through detailed contextual descriptions, dependability through an audit trail, and confirmability through bracketing and peer debriefing [47]; [48].

Alexaki et al. [4] used a phenomenological method to analyze the transcribed data. This included familiarizing with the narratives, extracting significant statements, formulating meanings, clustering themes, crafting an exhaustive description, identifying the fundamental structure, and validating the findings with participants [50]. Ethical standards were strictly observed throughout the study. Participants provided informed consent, their identities were kept anonymous, and participation remained voluntary. All data were stored securely and disposed of properly after the study, ensuring full confidentiality and protection of participant information [51].

3. Results and Discussion

Table 1 reveals that special education teachers experienced occupational stress from multiple classroom-related sources, particularly those involving challenging and unpredictable student behaviours. Teachers frequently described stress triggered by sudden or unorganized student arrivals and by managing unpredictable tantrums that disrupted the learning environment.

Statements such as “Many children come to class all at the same time without following their schedule” and “When my students have tantrums because their behaviours are unpredictable” highlight how behavioural instability and lack of routine heighten teachers' emotional strain.

Table 1: Describing the experiences of special education teachers with occupational stress in their teaching practice

Question	Teacher	Verbal Statement	Initial Codes	Emerging Theme
How do special education teachers describe their experiences with occupational stress in their teaching practice?	1	“Maybe when many children come to class all at the same time, without following their schedule.”	Stress from unorganized student arrivals.	Challenging Behaviors
	2	“When my students have tantrums, it's because their behaviours are unpredictable.”	Challenges of unpredictable student behaviors	
	3	“It was overwhelming in the class because of the variety of cases and also the different topics I needed to teach.”	Stress from diverse teaching demands	
	4	“As I observed, the first three months of teaching—especially with new children entering—you need to teach daily routines, craft IEPs, communication, and the daily routine of the children.”	Challenges in establishing initial routines	
	5	“I feel stressed when, no matter what I do, they do not stop. Their tantrums—you really can’t prevent them.”	Stress from uncontrollable student tantrums	
	6	“When a student who was already showing progress suddenly regresses because the parent stopped their therapy. Therapy should be continuous, because once it stops, the child often goes back to zero.”	Stress from learner regression without therapy	
	7	“They’re like babies—it’s really difficult because they run around, throw tantrums, and cry.”	Challenges in managing childlike learner behaviours	
	8	“My preparation and teaching mood shift to negative.”	Stress affects teaching preparation and mood.	
	9	“I really felt stressed because I didn’t yet know the children assigned to me—their attitudes, behaviours. That was the hardest part in the beginning.”	Stress from unfamiliar student behaviors	

These findings support earlier research indicating that behavioural challenges are among the strongest predictors of stress and burnout among special education teachers [23]; [7]. The data further show that stress extended beyond daily classroom management to include the emotional burden of learner regression and dependency. Teachers reported frustration and distress when progress stalled, particularly when therapy was discontinued at home, causing learners to “go back to zero.” Managing childlike behaviours such as crying, running around, and frequent tantrums added to the physical and emotional exhaustion inherent in the role. Additionally, teachers described how stress affected their preparation, mood, and confidence, especially when working with new students whose behaviours were still unfamiliar. Table 2 shows that special education teachers identified multiple factors as primary sources of occupational stress, with student behaviour emerging as the most prominent. Teachers repeatedly emphasized challenges posed by unpredictable, diverse, and sometimes aggressive behaviors, describing them as the “number one cause of stress.”

Table 2: Identification of special education teachers to various factors as primary sources of occupational stress

Question	Teacher	Verbal Statement	Initial Codes	Emerging Theme
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What factors do special education teachers identify as primary sources of occupational stress?	1	First, the children's behaviour. And then the many reports that are required from us.”	Stress from student behaviour and paperwork	Paperwork, student behaviours, and uncooperative parents
	2	“Challenging students’ behaviour.”	Stress from managing challenging behaviours	
	3	“Sometimes, the paperwork is overwhelming when there are too many requirements given to the teacher. And then student behaviour.”	Stress from paperwork and student behaviour	
	4	“Because I am now the grade chairman of SPED. So all the memos or concerns are directed to me.”	Stress from administrative responsibilities	
	5	“Mostly the behaviours of the children. That is really the number one cause of stress.”	Stress primarily from student behaviours.	
	6	“Mostly the parents who don’t cooperate.”	Stress from uncooperative parents	
	7	“Learner’s behaviour and parent interaction. They cry, throw tantrums, and sometimes hurt others.”	Stress from learner behaviour and parents	
	8	“In parent interaction, too, because it’s hard to work together if the parent hasn’t fully accepted their child’s disability.”	Stress from challenging parent interactions	
	9	“It’s the students’ behaviour that has different behaviours.”	Stress from diverse student behaviours	

Statements such as “Challenging students’ behaviour” and “It’s the students’ behaviour that has different behaviours” underscore how behavioural difficulties disrupt instruction and increase emotional strain. These findings parallel previous research showing that managing complex learner behaviours remains one of the most significant stressors for SPED teachers [5]; [23]; [7]. Teachers also highlighted the emotional toll of dealing with students who cry, throw tantrums, or hurt others, further demonstrating how behavioral demands shape their day-to-day stress. Beyond student behaviour, teachers also identified administrative workload, particularly excessive paperwork and leadership duties, as major contributors to stress. *Statements like “The paperwork is overwhelming when there are too many requirements” and “All the memos or concerns are directed to me” reflect the burden of documentation and administrative responsibilities that extend beyond instructional tasks.* This aligns with studies noting that heavy paperwork and accountability pressures intensify burnout among special education teachers. Additionally, parent-related challenges were highlighted as significant stressors, especially when parents are uncooperative or struggle to accept their child’s disability.

Table 3: Occupational stress affects special education teachers' perceived teaching performance and professional competence

Question	Teacher	Verbal Statement	Initial Codes	Emerging Theme
How does occupational stress affect their perceived teaching performance and professional competence?	1	“If I cannot meet what they need or what should be taught to them.”	Stress from unmet learner needs	Teaching Performance and Competence
	2	“Stress impacts my teaching confidence because it drains my energy.”	Energy depletion reduces teaching confidence.	
	3	“I cannot give my best in teaching because I also get weak.”	Physical weakness limits teaching effectiveness.	

	4	“My self-confidence decreases.”	Decline in professional self-confidence	
	5	“When the same scenario happens every day in the classroom.”	Stress from repetitive classroom scenarios	
	6	“When parents keep on reminding us, teachers in our group chat.”	Stress from constant parent reminders	
	7	“If the child keeps crying for several days.”	Stress from prolonged student distress	
	8	“Because you cannot function or be productive if you allow stress to consume you.”	Stress hinders productivity and functioning.	
	9	“When I see a child not changing, when the behaviour is still the same.”	Stress from stagnant student behaviors	

Table 3 depicts that occupational stress significantly affects special education teachers' perceived teaching performance and professional competence.

Teachers reported feeling pressure when they were unable to meet the individual needs of their learners, as reflected in statements like *“If I cannot meet what they need or what should be taught to them,”* highlighting stress from unmet learner needs. Closely related were declines in teaching confidence and professional self-assurance, evident in statements such as *“Stress impacts my teaching confidence because it drains my energy”* and *“My self-confidence decreases.”* These responses suggest that stress undermines teachers' self-efficacy and instructional confidence, corroborating previous studies that link occupational stress to reduced teacher performance and diminished professional competence [5]; [25]; [23]; [7]. Physical and emotional strain also emerged as key factors affecting teaching effectiveness. Teachers noted that exhaustion limited their ability to give their best, as seen in statements like *“I cannot give my best in teaching because I also get weak,”* while repetitive classroom scenarios and prolonged student distress further heightened stress, illustrated by remarks such as *“When the same scenario happens every day in the classroom”* and *“If the child keeps crying for several days.”*

Table 4: Special education teachers use various coping strategies to manage occupational stress

Question	Teacher	Verbal Statement	Initial Codes	Emerging Theme
What coping strategies do special education teachers use to manage occupational stress?	1	“I just sleep, or I use my cellphone to watch videos, and of course, I pray.”	Coping through rest, leisure, and prayer	Self-Care Leisure Family
	2	“Prioritize self-care.”	Coping by prioritizing personal self-care	
	3	“I do many things—I chat with others, use my cellphone.”	Coping through socializing and distractions	
	4	“I go out with my children—we eat out—or I go out with my friends so I can unwind a bit.”	Coping through social outings and relaxation	
	5	“I practice leaving problems at home in the house, and stress from work at school.”	Separating work stress from personal life	
	6	“Going out, eating out, having 'me time', bonding with friends. Chitchatting.”	Coping through leisure and social bonding	

	7	“Sometimes I just watch something so my attention is diverted. Sometimes I run.”	Coping through distraction and physical activity	
	8	“When I make customized cakes, it removes stress and tiredness.”	Coping through creative activities	
	9	“Sometimes, I want to be alone. But other times, I talk with my co-teachers.”	Coping through a balance of solitude and socializing	

External pressures, including constant parent reminders, added to their burden, reducing productivity and overall functioning. Stress from stagnant student behaviours when learners failed to show progress over time also contributed to emotional fatigue. Collectively, these experiences underscore that occupational stress compromises SPED teachers’ energy, resilience, confidence, and instructional effectiveness, highlighting the need for targeted support, coping strategies, and professional development to maintain teacher well-being and competence. Table 4 illustrates that special education teachers employ a variety of coping strategies to manage occupational stress, emphasizing both personal and social approaches. Teachers frequently highlighted self-care, rest, leisure, and spiritual activities as essential for recharging and maintaining well-being. *Statements such as “I just sleep, or I use my cellphone to watch videos, and of course, praying,” and “Prioritize self-care” illustrate how personal time and restorative practices help alleviate stress.* Social interactions and relaxation also played a key role, as teachers described unwinding through conversations with friends or family, eating out, and spending quality time with loved ones. These strategies reflect the importance of connecting with others and engaging in enjoyable activities to relieve stress, supporting previous research on teacher resilience and stress management [10]; [25]. Overall, these findings reveal that SPED teachers adaptively combine multiple coping strategies, personal, social, creative, and boundary-setting, to sustain their resilience, emotional well-being, and professional effectiveness in high-stress teaching environments [2]; [42]; [49].

Table 5: Support systems and interventions for reducing stress and enhancing well-being in SPED teaching

Question	Teacher	Verbal Statement	Initial Codes	Emerging Theme
What support systems or interventions do special education teachers believe would help reduce stress and enhance their professional well-being?	1	“My friends and co-teachers help me relieve stress.”	Peer support alleviates occupational stress	Support from family, peers, and school heads
	2	“School leaders acknowledge the unique efforts and achievements of SPED teachers.”	Recognition from school leaders enhances well-being.	
	3	“There are people who help support our well-being, like fellow teachers.”	Colleagues provide support for well-being.	
	4	“Family, number one. And then my co-workers here, my co-teachers, they help especially when I ask them.”	Family and colleagues provide primary support.	
	5	“Yes, my friends, my colleagues here.”	Friends and colleagues offer emotional support.	
	6	“The ones that understand you, too.”	Support from understanding peers	
	7	“For school leaders, they are at the top, so even if teachers want to do something, if it’s not approved, nothing happens.”	School leadership influences teacher support effectiveness.	
	8	“Support from colleagues and school leaders.”	Colleagues and leaders provide professional support.	
	9	“My co-teachers. We understand each other, and whatever happens here at school, they are always there.”	Mutual support among co-teachers	

Table 5 emphasizes that the special education teachers highlight the importance of various support systems and interventions in reducing occupational stress and enhancing professional well-being. Peer support emerged as a key factor, with teachers consistently emphasizing that colleagues and co-teachers help relieve stress, provide emotional support, and foster mutual understanding, as reflected in statements such as “*My friends and co-teachers help me relieve stress*” and “*My co-teachers*.” Recognition and support from school leaders also play a crucial role in enhancing teacher well-being; teachers noted that acknowledgment of their efforts and advocacy for SPED programs increases morale, though bureaucratic limitations sometimes hinder effectiveness, as in “For school leaders, they are at the top, so even if teachers want to do something, if it’s not approved, nothing happens.” Overall, these findings demonstrate that social, familial, and administrative support systems are crucial in helping special education teachers cope with stress, maintain resilience, and sustain their professional competence, consistent with qualitative research that emphasizes the role of collaborative networks and institutional support in teacher well-being.

3.1. Proposed Intervention Plan: Stress Management Strategies for Special Education Teachers

3.1.1. Rationale

Special Education (SPED) teachers face unique occupational stressors, including heavy workloads, emotional demands, classroom management of learners with diverse needs, limited resources, and high expectations from stakeholders. These stressors often lead to burnout, decreased job satisfaction, and reduced teaching effectiveness. To support teachers' well-being and ensure high-quality education for learners with special needs, a structured stress management intervention program is proposed.

3.1.2. Goals and Objectives

General Goal: To reduce occupational stress and promote resilience, emotional well-being, and professional growth among SPED teachers.

3.1.3. Specific Objectives

- Identify everyday stressors experienced by SPED teachers.
- Equip teachers with practical stress management techniques.
- Strengthen teachers’ coping mechanisms and emotional resilience.
- Promote peer support and collaborative practices and enhance overall well-being and teaching performance.

3.2. Components of the Intervention Program

3.2.1. Awareness and Psychoeducation

- Stress awareness seminars/workshops
- Discussions on the nature, sources, and effects of occupational stress.
- Understanding stress symptoms (physical, emotional, cognitive, behavioural)

3.2.2. Skills Training on Stress Reduction Techniques

- Mindfulness and Relaxation Exercises (deep breathing, meditation, progressive muscle relaxation)
- Time Management and Workload Prioritization Strategies.
- Cognitive-Behavioural Approaches to Reframing Negative Thoughts.
- Self-care practices (healthy routines, hobbies, exercise)

3.2.3. Peer Support and Mentoring

- Formation of Peer Support Circles for sharing experiences and coping strategies.
- Mentorship program pairing novice and experienced SPED teachers.
- Group reflection activities

3.2.4. Professional Development and Empowerment

- Training on classroom management for diverse learners.
- Workshops on adapted teaching strategies to reduce workload stress.

- Sessions on work-life balance and boundary-setting

3.2.5. Administrative and Institutional Support

- Regular mental health check-ins by school guidance counsellors/psychologists.
- Advocacy for reduced paperwork and reasonable workload distribution.
- Provision of teacher wellness spaces (quiet rooms, relaxation corners).

3.2.6. Monitoring and Evaluation

- Pre- and post-program stress assessment (using teacher stress scale or self-report tools).
- Feedback sessions from participants
- Continuous refinement of strategies based on teacher input.

3.3. Implementation Plan

Table 6 Implementation Phases of a Teacher Stress Management and Peer Support Program Preparation Training Peer Support Professional Development Evaluation Activities. It also defines the time for each step and the personnel participating, including researchers, psychologists, SPED specialists, teachers, and coordinators.

Table 6: Implementation plan for teacher stress management and peer support program

Phase	Activities	Duration	Responsible Persons
Preparation	Needs assessment survey, orientation, and resource preparation	2 weeks	Researcher, School Admin
Program Launch	Stress awareness seminar	1 day	Researcher, Psychologist
Skills Training	Workshops on stress management techniques	4 sessions (weekly)	Experts, SPED Teachers
Peer Support	Establishment of peer circles & mentoring	Ongoing	Teachers, Coordinators
Professional Development	Training sessions on classroom management & work-life balance	2 sessions	SPED Experts
Evaluation	Post-assessment, feedback, and recommendations	1 week	Researcher, Participants

3.4. Expected Outcomes

- Reduced stress levels among SPED teachers.
- Improved coping strategies and emotional resilience.
- Stronger sense of peer and institutional support.
- Enhanced teacher satisfaction and effectiveness.
- Sustainable culture of wellness and care in the workplace.

The proposed intervention framework is grounded on the understanding that occupational stress among Special Education (SPED) teachers arises from multiple factors- emotional demands, workload pressures, resource limitations, and classroom challenges unique to diverse learners. To address these stressors comprehensively, the framework integrates support at the individual, peer, and institutional levels, ensuring a holistic approach to stress management.

Individual Level (Personal Coping and Resilience): At the core of the framework are strategies that strengthen individual teachers’ resilience and coping skills. This includes mindfulness, relaxation techniques, time management, and self-care practices. By equipping teachers with these skills, they gain immediate tools to alleviate stress symptoms and develop long-term strategies to enhance their resilience. This component is based on the principle that stress management begins with self-awareness and personal coping mechanisms.

Peer Level (Collaboration and Support Systems): The framework recognizes that SPED teachers often feel isolated due to the specialized nature of their work. Thus, peer support circles and mentoring programs are established to provide emotional and professional support. These groups allow teachers to share experiences, exchange coping strategies, and build a sense of community. This collaborative environment promotes psychological safety, reduces feelings of burnout, and enhances teachers’ sense of belonging.

Institutional Level (Administrative and Systemic Support): Teachers' stress is not solely an individual burden; it is also shaped by organizational factors such as workload distribution, resource availability, and administrative expectations. To address these, the framework includes administrative initiatives such as wellness spaces, mental health check-ins, and advocacy for reduced paperwork. These measures ensure that institutional structures actively support teacher well-being rather than adding to stress.

Professional Development and Empowerment: Another essential element of the framework is empowering teachers with skills in classroom management, adaptive instructional strategies, and work-life balance. By enhancing their professional competence, teachers are better equipped to manage classroom challenges effectively, thereby reducing the stress associated with professional demands. This also boosts self-efficacy, which is closely associated with lower occupational stress levels.

3.5. Monitoring and Evaluation

Sustainability of the intervention is ensured through continuous monitoring and evaluation. Pre- and post-assessments of stress levels, along with feedback sessions, provide measurable data to refine the program. This cycle ensures the program remains relevant, effective, and responsive to the evolving needs of SPED teachers. The intervention framework is holistic, multi-level, and sustainable. It empowers teachers personally, fosters collaborative peer networks, and strengthens institutional support systems. Through this layered approach, the program not only aims to reduce stress temporarily but also to build long-term resilience, well-being, and professional growth among SPED teachers. Focus on reactive issue resolution rather than on strategic workforce initiatives such as employee well-being, pay equity, and skill advancement. The system's adaptability ensures continuous compliance even amid evolving legal frameworks, supporting business continuity while reinforcing data integrity and workforce trust. This transition from manual compliance oversight to automated intelligence establishes a foundation for long-term operational resilience and governance transparency. On an organizational and ethical level, intelligent compliance automation contributes to establishing fair, accountable, and transparent workplace governance. By incorporating explainable AI and human-in-the-loop validation, SAP SuccessFactors ensures that automated compliance decisions remain interpretable, auditable, and aligned with ethical and cultural standards.

These safeguards mitigate the risks of algorithmic bias and reinforce equitable policy enforcement across geographies and workforce demographics. The resulting governance structure strengthens corporate responsibility by embedding fairness and inclusivity into HR decision-making processes. Moreover, transparent decision trails enhance stakeholder confidence by demonstrating how AI-derived insights align with human judgment, thus bridging the gap between technological precision and ethical accountability in global HR operations. From a societal perspective, the widespread adoption of intelligent compliance automation promotes sustainable workforce ecosystems that integrate technological innovation with human capital development. Predictive monitoring allows organizations and regulators to identify emerging labour risks, anticipate shortages, and uphold fair employment standards without resorting to intrusive oversight. Automating compliance validations enables HR professionals to redirect their expertise toward transformative initiatives such as reskilling, promoting diversity, and innovating the employee experience. This symbiotic relationship between automation and human oversight ensures that digital transformation amplifies rather than replaces human contribution. Over time, AI-enhanced compliance systems, such as those embedded in SAP SuccessFactors, can foster globally consistent labor practices that balance regulatory efficiency with social well-being, driving both economic competitiveness and ethical progress.

4. Conclusion

Drawing on the study's results, several conclusions were formulated to address the research objectives. These conclusions reflect the lived experiences, coping mechanisms, and professional needs of SPED teachers in the Division of Cauayan City. Specifically, the study concludes that:

- The findings revealed that special education teachers experience both manageable and overwhelming stress in their teaching practice. While some stress is tolerable, significant challenges arise from unpredictable student behaviours, varied teaching demands, a lack of skills in behaviour management, and unfamiliarity with learners' attitudes and needs.
- Occupational stress significantly affects special education teachers' teaching performance and professional competence, leading to fatigue, disrupted instruction, and mental strain, though some demonstrate resilience by finding motivation despite challenges.
- Occupational stress significantly affects SPED teachers' teaching effectiveness and professional competence, leading to reduced confidence, physical fatigue, and self-doubt. However, teachers demonstrate resilience through adaptive strategies to maintain their well-being and instructional performance.
- Special education teachers cope with occupational stress primarily through support from peers, family, and school leaders, which helps them maintain emotional resilience and sustain teaching effectiveness; and

- Special education teachers experience occupational stress from multiple sources, including unpredictable student behaviours, diverse teaching demands, and unfamiliar learners, which affect their emotional well-being, teaching performance, and professional competence.

4.1. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to support SPED teachers in managing occupational stress and promoting their well-being, professional effectiveness, and commitment:

- It is recommended that schools and education authorities provide continuous professional development on behaviour management and inclusive practices, while also ensuring adequate institutional support, including manageable workloads, sufficient resources, and sustained therapy programs to prevent regression.
- It is recommended that schools provide structured support systems, including stress management programs, professional development in behavior management, and reduced workload strategies, to help special education teachers effectively cope with occupational stress while maintaining their teaching performance and competence.
- It is recommended that schools provide targeted professional development, stress management programs, workload support, and mentorship to help SPED teachers cope with occupational stress while sustaining their teaching effectiveness and professional competence.
- It is recommended that schools foster collaborative work environments, encourage peer mentoring, and promote family engagement to strengthen support systems that help SPED teachers manage stress and maintain professional competence.
- It is recommended that schools provide targeted professional development, behavioural management training, and structured support systems, including mentoring and peer collaboration, to help SPED teachers manage stress effectively and enhance their teaching effectiveness; and
- Based on the study's findings, it is strongly recommended that schools adopt the proposed Stress Management Strategies for Special Education Teachers to reduce occupational Stress, enhance resilience, and promote teacher well-being. Implementing these strategies with continuous monitoring will foster a supportive environment, improve teaching performance, and sustain professional growth.

Acknowledgment: N/A

Data Availability Statement: The datasets and supporting materials related to this study are retained by the authors and may be shared by the corresponding author upon reasonable and justified request, subject to applicable institutional and ethical regulations.

Funding Statement: The authors collectively confirm that this research was carried out without receiving any external financial assistance, sponsorship, or grant support.

Conflicts of Interest Statement: All authors declare that they have no known financial, personal, or professional conflicts of interest related to this research work, and all referenced sources have been appropriately acknowledged.

Ethics and Consent Statement: The authors affirm that the study was conducted in accordance with recognized ethical principles, and informed consent was obtained from all participants before their involvement in the research.

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