

Stress Level and Coping Mechanisms of Teachers in the Implementation of Inclusive Education among the Diverse Learners in Region V

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Abstract

This study examined the stress levels, coping mechanisms, and influencing factors among teachers implementing inclusive education in Region V, Philippines. Anchored on the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, Ecological Systems Theory, and Adaptive-Responsive Coping Theory for Inclusive Education, the study employed a sequential explanatory mixed-method design integrating descriptive-correlational analysis and narrative inquiry. Data were collected from 184 teachers through a structured questionnaire and from 12 participants through in-depth interviews. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Spearman Rank Correlation, while qualitative data were examined through thematic analysis. Findings revealed that teachers experience moderate to high levels of stress, primarily driven by classroom diversity, insufficient preparation for learners with disabilities, limited administrative support, large class sizes, and resource constraints. Results further showed that personal and professional variables do not significantly influence stress levels, indicating that stress is largely shaped by situational and systemic factors. Teachers employ both problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies, including professional development, instructional adjustments, emotional regulation, collaboration, and intrinsic motivation. Despite these efforts, persistent challenges highlight the need for structured support systems, improved resources, and targeted interventions. The study concludes that strengthening institutional support and enhancing teacher capacity are essential for sustaining inclusive education. It aligns with SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) by promoting inclusive learning environments and supporting teacher well-being. The study contributes to educational, institutional, and socio-economic sustainability by informing policies and practices that enhance teacher resilience and improve inclusive education outcomes.

Keywords: Coping Mechanisms, Inclusive Education, Region V, Stress Factors, Teacher Stress

1. Introduction

Inclusive education promotes equitable access to quality learning by recognizing and accommodating learner diversity in terms of abilities, backgrounds, and needs (UNESCO, 2023; Ainscow, 2020). While global and national policies support inclusive practices, teachers are central to their implementation and often face increased demands that contribute to stress and burnout (UNICEF, 2021; Agyapong et al. 2022). In the Philippine context, particularly in Region V, inclusive programs such as SPED, SNED, ALS, and Madrasa are implemented, yet teachers encounter challenges related to limited resources, training, and institutional support. Understanding teachers' stressors and coping mechanisms is essential to sustain inclusive education and improve teacher well-being and instructional effectiveness.

1.1 Background of the Study on Teacher Stress and Coping in Inclusive Education among Diverse Learners in Region V

Inclusive education ensures equal access to learning opportunities regardless of learners' physical, intellectual, social, or cultural differences (UNESCO, 2023; Ainscow, 2020). Teachers play a crucial role in implementing inclusive practices, requiring them to differentiate instruction, address diverse learner needs, and collaborate with stakeholders (UNICEF, 2021). However, these responsibilities increase occupational stress, potentially leading to burnout and reduced teaching effectiveness (Agyapong et al. 2022). In the Philippines, inclusive education is reinforced through policies such as Republic Act No. 7277, Republic Act No. 11650, and Republic Act No. 10533, as well as DepEd Order No. 21, s. 2019. Programs such as SPED, SNED, ALS, and Madrasa aim to support diverse learners, particularly in Region V. Despite these initiatives, teachers often face inadequate training, limited resources, and insufficient institutional support, which negatively affect their motivation and performance (Jardinez & Natividad, 2024; Materechera, 2020).

1.2 Themes and Insights from Related Literature on Teacher Stress, Coping, and Inclusive Education

Teaching effectiveness involves professional competence, adaptability, and emotional engagement (OECD, 2022). However, stress arises when job demands exceed available coping resources (World Health Organization, 2022). In

inclusive settings, stress is intensified by workload, behavioral challenges, and administrative demands (Zagni et al., 2025; Suttles, 2024). Studies highlight that teacher stress is influenced by both environmental and individual factors such as workload, resource scarcity, age, gender, and teaching experience (Ringwald et al., 2024; Leifler, 2020). High stress levels are linked to burnout, reduced job satisfaction, and attrition (Agyapong et al., 2022). Inclusive education further increases demands due to the need for differentiated instruction and individualized support (Torres et al., 2024). Coping mechanisms include problem-focused and emotion-focused strategies such as collaboration, time management, self-care, and professional development (Abellana et al., 2023; Lacorte, 2025). However, barriers such as limited training, inadequate resources, and weak administrative support hinder effective coping (Wilfred, 2025; Tshiloane and Sefotho, 2025). Empirical studies show varying relationships between stress and coping. For instance, Casungcad et al. (2024) found moderate stress levels with underutilized coping strategies, while Abellana et al. (2023) reported strong coping mechanisms regardless of demographic factors. Training and institutional support consistently emerge as critical in reducing stress and enhancing resilience (Candeias et al. 2020; Gabule and Baldonado, 2025).

1.3 Local, National, and Global Context of Inclusive Education Implementation

Globally, inclusive education is supported by frameworks such as the UNESCO Salamanca Statement (1994) and the UNCERPD, emphasizing equal educational opportunities. The COVID-19 pandemic further intensified challenges due to rapid digital transitions and increased demands on teachers (WHO, 2021; Sahu, 2020; Anderson, 2020). Nationally, the Philippines implements inclusive education through laws and DepEd policies, integrating programs like SPED, ALS, and SNED (DepEd, 2022). In Region V, these programs address diverse learner needs across urban and rural contexts, though challenges persist in resource allocation, teacher training, and accessibility (Lagata, 2021; Bascal & Ormilla, 2021; Pombo et al., 2025). Local implementation reveals issues such as large class sizes, lack of assistive technologies, and limited administrative support, which significantly affect teaching effectiveness and stress levels (Byaruhanga & Byamukama, 2025; Nyavor, 2026; Factor and Saenz, 2025).

1.4 Theoretical or Conceptual Basis on Teacher Stress and Coping in Inclusive Education

This study is anchored in Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (1984), which explains stress as a result of perceived imbalance between demands and coping resources. It highlights cognitive appraisal and coping strategies, including problem-focused and emotion-focused responses. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) further explains that teacher stress is influenced by multiple environmental systems, including classroom conditions, institutional policies, and societal expectations. Additionally, the Adaptive-Responsive Coping Theory for Inclusive Education (ARCTIE) proposes that teachers manage stress through recognition, response, and adjustment phases, emphasizing adaptability and support systems in inclusive settings.

1.5 Research Gaps and Rationale on Teacher Stress and Coping Mechanisms in Region V

Despite extensive research on teacher stress and inclusive education, gaps remain in understanding how personal and professional factors interact with stress levels in specific local contexts. Existing studies highlight stressors and coping strategies but often lack localized analysis in Region V. Furthermore, inconsistencies in findings such as weak or non-significant relationships between stress and coping (Casungcad et al., 2024; Dotimas, 2022; Abaya, 2025) indicate the need for deeper investigation. There is also limited research linking demographic and professional variables to coping effectiveness in inclusive education settings. This study addresses these gaps by examining stress factors, coping mechanisms, and their relationships among teachers in Region V, providing a basis for targeted intervention programs.

1.6 Alignment with Relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

This study aligns with SDG 4 – Quality Education, which promotes inclusive and equitable education for all (UNESCO, 2020). By examining teacher stress and coping mechanisms, the research supports the development of sustainable inclusive education systems. It also aligns with SDG 3 – Good Health and Well-Being, as it addresses teacher mental health, stress management, and overall well-being, which are critical for effective teaching. Additionally, SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth is relevant, as improving teacher working conditions and well-being contributes to a more productive and sustainable education workforce.

1.7 Importance of the Study to Multidisciplinary Sustainability

This study contributes to educational sustainability by improving inclusive teaching practices and ensuring equitable learning opportunities. It supports socio-economic sustainability by strengthening teacher performance, which directly influences student outcomes and community development. It also promotes public health sustainability by addressing teacher stress and mental well-being, reducing burnout and attrition. Furthermore, the study contributes to institutional and policy sustainability by informing education policies, training programs, and support systems. By developing an intervention program, the study enhances community and organizational sustainability, ensuring that inclusive education remains effective, resilient, and responsive to diverse learner needs.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

The study employed a sequential explanatory mixed-method research design that combined descriptive-correlational and narrative inquiry approaches. The quantitative phase used structured survey questionnaires to measure teachers' stress levels and determine the relationship between personal and professional factors and stress. This was followed by a qualitative phase using narrative inquiry through in-depth interviews to explore teachers' lived experiences, coping strategies, and perceptions of inclusive classroom challenges. The integration of both phases allowed for triangulation and a deeper interpretation of results, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2021).

2.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted in selected public elementary and secondary schools in Region V (Bicol Region), Philippines. The selected schools implement inclusive education programs such as Special Needs Education (SNED), Alternative Learning System (ALS), and Madrasah education. The inclusion of multiple city divisions across Albay, Camarines Sur, Masbate, and Sorsogon provided a diverse context in terms of geography, socio-economic conditions, and learner profiles. This diversity enabled the study to capture varied teacher experiences in both urban and rural inclusive education settings.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The respondents consisted of 184 public school teachers actively involved in implementing inclusive education programs in Region V. These included 44 Madrasah receiving teachers, 70 SNED receiving teachers, and 70 ALS teachers. For the qualitative phase, 12 participants were selected, with four representatives from each group, to provide in-depth insights into their experiences. The respondents were drawn from selected city divisions, including Ligao and Tabaco in Albay, Naga City in Camarines Sur, Masbate City, and Sorsogon City. They were chosen because of their direct engagement with diverse learners, such as students with disabilities, out-of-school youth, and learners from cultural minorities. Their participation ensured that the data reflected real experiences of teachers implementing inclusive education across different contexts.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

The study employed purposive sampling to select respondents who were actively involved in inclusive education programs such as SNED, ALS, and Madrasah. Teachers with at least two years of experience in inclusive classrooms were considered eligible to ensure familiarity with the demands of inclusive teaching. For the qualitative phase, participants were selected based on their willingness and the depth of their experience in inclusive education. A total of 12 participants were chosen as key informants to provide detailed insights into coping mechanisms and challenges that could not be fully captured through survey data.

2.5 Research Instrument

The primary data collection tool was a researcher-made structured questionnaire composed of four parts. The first part gathered demographic and professional information, including age, gender, civil status, teaching experience, position, and relevant training. These variables were used to analyze factors influencing stress and coping. The second part measured teachers' stress levels using a four-point Likert scale, assessing the frequency and intensity of stress-related experiences. The third part examined coping mechanisms based on the coping theory of Lazarus and Folkman (1984), incorporating both problem-focused and emotion-focused strategies adapted to inclusive education settings. The fourth part consisted of open-ended questions that allowed respondents to describe their challenges and coping strategies in their own words, providing qualitative insights. The instrument underwent validation by experts, including Public District Supervisors and Master Teachers, to ensure face, content, and construct validity. Their feedback was incorporated to refine the questionnaire. The use of both quantitative and qualitative components strengthened methodological triangulation and enhanced the credibility of the findings. A four-point Likert scale was used in interpreting responses, where higher numerical values corresponded to higher frequency or intensity of stress and coping. The scale ranged from "Never/Minimal" to "Always/Very High," allowing for the computation of weighted mean scores to determine the level of stress and coping mechanisms among teachers.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

The data collection process followed ethical and systematic procedures. Approval was obtained from Schools Division Superintendents and school principals before data collection. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, voluntary participation, and confidentiality of responses, and informed consent was secured. The survey questionnaires were administered through both in-person and digital platforms, depending on accessibility. Respondents were given sufficient time to complete the instrument without pressure. Qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with selected participants. These interviews allowed participants to elaborate on their experiences, coping strategies, and challenges in inclusive classrooms. All collected data were organized, with quantitative responses encoded

for statistical analysis and qualitative responses transcribed for thematic analysis. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained throughout the process.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

The study utilized both quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, and weighted mean to summarize respondent profiles, stress levels, and coping strategies. Weighted mean was used to interpret Likert-scale responses and determine the extent of stress and coping. Inferential analysis using Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient was applied to determine the relationship between teachers' stress levels and contributing personal and professional factors. This non-parametric measure assessed the strength and direction of associations between variables. Qualitative data were analyzed through thematic analysis, which involved transcription, coding, and identification of recurring themes related to teacher stress, coping mechanisms, and challenges. Triangulation was used to integrate quantitative and qualitative findings, ensuring a comprehensive and validated interpretation of the data.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Factors Influencing Teacher Stress in Inclusive Education

3.1.1 Personal Profile of Teachers (Age, Gender, Experience, Marital Status, Education)

The findings show that most teachers belong to the 30–49 age group, indicating a predominantly mid-career workforce. Female teachers comprise the majority, reflecting a feminized teaching profession. In terms of experience, most teachers have 6–15 years of service, while the majority are married. Educationally, most teachers hold a bachelor's degree, with a considerable number pursuing or completing graduate studies. These results suggest that inclusive education in Region V is implemented by experienced and academically prepared teachers who are in active professional stages. However, stress levels remain moderate to high regardless of these demographic characteristics, indicating that personal factors alone do not significantly determine stress. This aligns with findings that demographic variables have limited influence on stress and coping in inclusive education contexts (Abellana et al., 2023; Abaya, 2025). Similarly, research shows that professional experience and qualifications may enhance confidence but do not necessarily reduce stress (Olayvar, 2022; Triviño-Amigo et al., 2022; Wray, Sharma, and Subban, 2022).

3.1.2 Professional Factors (Training, Resources, and Professional Development)

The results indicate that most teachers have attended relevant training such as SNED orientation, IEP preparation, sign language, and classroom management. A large majority perceive school resources as adequate, although only a small portion consider them highly sufficient. Participation in professional development is high, with most teachers actively engaged in training programs. These findings suggest that while teachers are exposed to foundational training and have access to basic resources, gaps remain in specialized training and resource sufficiency. Adequate but not optimal resources may still limit effective implementation of inclusive practices. This supports previous studies emphasizing that professional development improves teacher competence, but limited access to advanced or specialized training affects effectiveness (Masongsong et al., 2023; Cañoso, 2025). Furthermore, resource adequacy influences teacher confidence and instructional effectiveness, particularly in inclusive settings (Cabigas et al., 2025; Idul, 2025).

3.2 Level of Stress in Implementing Inclusive Education

3.2.1 Stress Related to Diverse Learners, Preparation, and Support

The results reveal that teachers experience moderate to high levels of stress, with the highest stress associated with managing diverse learning needs. Teachers also reported high stress related to feeling unprepared to address students with disabilities and lack of administrative support. Other stressors include time constraints, limited resources, and insufficient collaboration with experts. These findings indicate that stress is primarily driven by classroom complexity and systemic limitations rather than individual characteristics. The results are consistent with studies showing that workload, instructional demands, and limited support significantly contribute to teacher stress (Casungcad et al. (2024); Hidalgo-Andrade, Hermosa-Bosano, and Paz (2021)). The Transactional Model explains that stress arises when perceived demands exceed available resources, while Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory highlights the influence of institutional and environmental factors on teacher stress. These frameworks confirm that both personal appraisal and systemic conditions shape teachers' stress experiences.

3.3 Relationship Between Teacher Factors and Stress Levels

3.3.1 Correlation of Personal and Professional Variables with Stress

The results show that there is no statistically significant relationship between stress levels and factors such as age, years in teaching, educational attainment, training, school resources, and professional development. All variables exhibited negligible correlations with stress levels. This indicates that teacher stress in inclusive education is not determined by demographic or professional characteristics but is instead influenced by situational and environmental conditions. These findings align with studies emphasizing that stress is shaped more by workplace demands and systemic challenges than by

individual traits (Candeias et al. (2020); Adigun et al. (2021)). The Transactional Model and Ecological Systems Theory further support this interpretation, emphasizing that stress is a product of dynamic interactions between individuals and their environment rather than fixed personal attributes.

3.4 Challenges Encountered in Inclusive Education

3.4.1 Instructional and Systemic Challenges

The findings reveal that teachers face multiple challenges, including insufficient preparation, overcrowded classrooms, behavioral and emotional demands, limited resources, administrative constraints, and time limitations. Teachers reported difficulty in addressing diverse learner needs, managing behavior, and balancing instructional and administrative tasks. These challenges highlight the complex and interconnected nature of inclusive education. Large class sizes and insufficient preparation reduce teachers' ability to provide individualized support, while systemic limitations increase workload and stress. This is consistent with studies indicating that structural factors such as class size, resource availability, and institutional support significantly affect inclusive education implementation (Gal et al. (2025); Sayman et al. (2025); Campado et al. (2023); Jury et al. (2023) as cited in Nyavor (2026); Tshiloane and Sefotho (2025); Ernawati et al. (2025); Factor and Saenz (2025); Dela Cruz et al. (2025); Belarda and Belena (2025)).

3.5 Coping Mechanisms of Teachers in Inclusive Education

3.5.1 Professional, Emotional, and Social Coping Strategies

The results show that teachers employ various coping mechanisms, including professional development, instructional adjustments, emotional regulation, peer collaboration, intrinsic motivation, parental engagement, and reliance on systemic support. Teachers reported that training enhances confidence, planning reduces stress, emotional regulation maintains resilience, and peer support alleviates isolation. These findings indicate that coping strategies are both problem-focused and emotion-focused. Professional development and instructional adaptation directly address teaching challenges, while emotional regulation and social support help manage psychological stress. This aligns with research highlighting the importance of training, collaboration, and emotional resilience in coping with inclusive education demands (Gabule and Baldonado (2025); Quizana and Espiritu (2023); Lumactod (2024); Mendoza (2023)). The Transactional Model explains that coping involves both cognitive and behavioral strategies, while Ecological Systems Theory emphasizes the role of social and institutional support in shaping coping capacity.

3.6 Integrated Analysis of Stress, Challenges, and Coping Mechanisms

3.6.1 Triangulation of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

The results demonstrate that teacher stress is primarily driven by classroom diversity, insufficient preparation, and limited institutional support, while coping mechanisms moderate its impact. Teachers rely on adaptive strategies such as collaboration, planning, and professional development to manage stress, although systemic challenges persist. This integrated analysis confirms that stress in inclusive education is multidimensional and influenced by both internal and external factors. While teachers demonstrate resilience and adaptability, sustainable inclusive education requires strong institutional support, adequate resources, and continuous professional development. These findings reinforce the need for systemic interventions to support teacher well-being and improve inclusive education outcomes.

3.7 Implications for Intervention and Practice

3.7.1 Development of Teacher Support Systems

The findings highlight the need for structured interventions to reduce teacher stress and strengthen coping mechanisms. Teachers emphasized the importance of training, administrative support, resource provision, and collaborative networks in improving their capacity to implement inclusive education effectively. These results suggest that interventions should focus on systemic and organizational improvements rather than solely on individual factors. Programs that integrate professional development, stress management, mentoring, and stakeholder collaboration can enhance teacher resilience and instructional effectiveness. This supports the conclusion that sustainable inclusive education depends on both teacher competence and institutional support systems.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

The study concludes that stress among inclusive education teachers in Region V is primarily influenced by situational, instructional, and systemic factors rather than personal or professional characteristics. Teachers experience moderate to high stress, particularly in managing diverse learner needs, feeling unprepared to address students with disabilities, and dealing with limited administrative support. Other contributing factors include large class sizes, resource limitations, and time constraints. The findings also reveal that demographic and professional variables do not significantly affect stress levels, emphasizing that stress is shaped more by classroom complexity and institutional conditions. Teachers face multiple interconnected challenges but employ a combination of coping strategies such as professional development, instructional adjustments, emotional regulation, collaboration, and intrinsic motivation. Overall, the study highlights the need for comprehensive support systems to enhance teacher resilience and ensure effective implementation of inclusive education

in Region V.

The study recommends that education authorities and school administrators provide regular, practical, and context-specific training focused on inclusive teaching strategies, classroom management, differentiated instruction, assessment, and stress management. Schools should ensure the availability of adequate instructional materials, assistive technologies, and adaptive tools to reduce workload and reliance on improvised resources. Monitoring mechanisms such as surveys or reflective tools may be implemented to identify and address teacher stress proactively. Interventions should prioritize situational and systemic factors, including classroom complexity, workload, and administrative support, rather than demographic characteristics. Schools may also implement measures to address overcrowding, time constraints, and behavioral challenges while encouraging teachers to apply coping strategies such as lesson adjustment, collaboration, emotional regulation, and stakeholder engagement. Additionally, a structured intervention program may be implemented to strengthen coping mechanisms, support teacher well-being, and sustain effective inclusive education practices.

The study is limited to inclusive education teachers in selected public schools in Region V, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other regions or educational contexts. The reliance on self-reported data may also affect the accuracy of responses due to personal perceptions and biases. Additionally, the study focused on specific personal and professional variables, which may not fully capture all factors influencing teacher stress and coping mechanisms. The scope of the qualitative component was limited to selected participants, which may not represent the full range of experiences among all teachers implementing inclusive education.

Compliance with ethical standards

The authors declare no conflict of interest and confirm that this study received no external funding. The Author expresses their gratitude to the participants and the institution involved for their cooperation and support. Participation in the study was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection using non-invasive methods. All information gathered was treated with strict confidentiality, and no identifying details were disclosed.

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