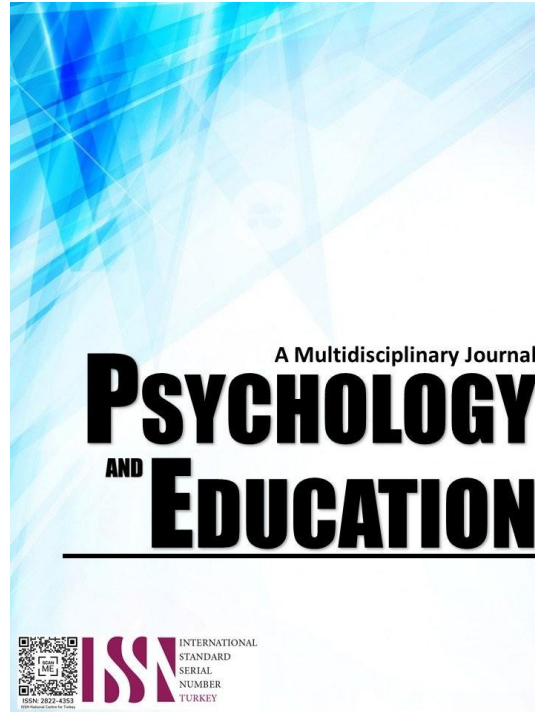


# INVESTIGATING SPED TEACHERS' STRESS AND JOB SATISFACTION TO STRENGTHEN WORKPLACE SUPPORT



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## Investigating SPED Teachers' Stress and Job Satisfaction to Strengthen Workplace Support

Marlon A. Misa,\* Jessica Y. Cejudo, Amalia A. Potot, Agnes R. Lozada, Jackie R. Ponce, Lilibeth Pinili  
For affiliations and correspondence, see the last page.

### Abstract

This study examines the stress levels and job satisfaction of Special Education (SPED) teachers at Sa PED school in Mandaue City, Cebu, during the 2024–2025 academic year. School year Guided by the Job Demand-Control Model, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, and Self-Determination Theory, the study aimed to determine the relationship between occupational stress and job satisfaction, and to propose workplace support strategies. A quantitative descriptive-correlational design was employed with complete enumeration of 37 SPED teachers. Data were collected using the Teacher Stress Inventory (TSI) and the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ), and analyzed through descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation, t-tests, and ANOVA. Results revealed that teachers experienced moderate overall stress (grand mean = 2.69), particularly in work-related stressors ( $M = 3.26$ ), time management ( $M = 3.03$ ), and professional distress ( $M = 2.84$ ). In contrast, stress manifestations related to emotions, behavior, and physiology were generally low. Despite these stressors, teachers reported high job satisfaction (grand mean = 3.82), especially in task enrichment ( $M = 3.86$ ) and empowerment and leadership ( $M = 3.77$ ). Correlation analysis showed a negligible, non-significant association between stress and job satisfaction ( $r = 0.089$ ,  $p = .601$ ), indicating that satisfaction may be maintained despite moderate stress levels. Findings underscore the need for balanced interventions, such as workload management, leadership support, and recognition systems, to sustain teacher well-being and retention in SPED contexts.

**Keywords:** *special education, SPED teachers, teacher stress, job satisfaction, inclusive education, teacher retention, Philippine education*

### Introduction

Special Education (SPED) teachers are central to promoting inclusive education by providing individualized instruction, emotional support, and behavioral interventions for learners with exceptionalities. However, their role is often characterized by heavy workloads, complex classroom demands, and limited institutional resources, which heighten occupational stress (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019). Prolonged exposure to stress can erode job satisfaction, leading to burnout, attrition, and diminished instructional quality (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2019). These challenges raise pressing questions about how SPED teachers sustain professional well-being, particularly in under-resourced contexts such as the Philippines.

Existing scholarship has established strong links between workload, administrative pressures, and stress among SPED teachers across various contexts (Ayala, 2020; Hester et al., 2020; McGrew et al., 2023). Studies in developing countries further emphasize constraints such as limited training, scarce materials, and inadequate recognition, which exacerbate dissatisfaction (Aziz et al., 2025; Balading et al., 2023). Yet, many of these studies are cross-sectional, offering only snapshots of teacher stress and satisfaction without exploring how systemic conditions interact with individual resilience over time (Fore et al., 2020; Golubtchik, 2024). Moreover, while positive school climate and leadership support are recognized as buffers against stress (Pressley, 2021; Woods et al., 2023), findings remain fragmented, with limited synthesis across cultural contexts. This leaves gaps in understanding how Philippine SPED teachers, working under policy inconsistencies, resource shortages, and cultural stigma around disability (Gomez-Lange, 2024; Salas & López, 2019), uniquely navigate stress and satisfaction compared with counterparts in other regions (Popova et al., 2022; UNESCO, 2024).

Although international studies provide valuable insights, most reflect Western settings where institutional support is more robust. These contexts may not adequately represent the Philippine experience, where systemic and sociocultural challenges compound teacher stress (Barros & Dalonos, 2025; De Guzman & Dumantay, 2019). The absence of localized empirical evidence on the relationship between stress and job satisfaction among Filipino SPED teachers creates a critical research gap. Without context-specific data, policymakers and administrators lack the foundation to design effective interventions to sustain SPED teacher well-being and retention.

This study aims to examine the stress levels and job satisfaction of SPED teachers at a SPED school in Mandaue City, Cebu for School Year 2024–2025. Specifically, it seeks to: (a) describe teachers' demographic profile; (b) assess stress levels across professional, emotional, behavioral, and physiological domains; (c) determine job satisfaction in terms of task enrichment, empowerment, and leadership; and (d) test the relationship between stress and job satisfaction. Guided by these objectives, the central question of this study is: What is the relationship between occupational stress and job satisfaction among Filipino SPED teachers, and how can findings inform workplace support?

By situating localized findings within broader global and regional trends, this study contributes empirical evidence to an underexplored Philippine context. It extends prior literature by identifying how stress manifests differently in SPED teaching and by clarifying whether stress undermines satisfaction under conditions of limited resources and systemic constraints. The results offer practical insights for policymakers, administrators, and training institutions in designing context-sensitive interventions, such as professional development,

workload management, and mental health support, to strengthen teacher resilience and retention. Ultimately, this study aims to promote sustainable, inclusive education by ensuring that the well-being of SPED teachers remains a policy and institutional priority.

## Research Questions

This study aimed to assess the stress levels and job satisfaction of Special Education (SPED) teachers at a SPED school in Mandaue City, Cebu. The findings served as the basis for an action plan to enhance their well-being and retention in the teaching profession. Specifically, it sought answers to the following questions:

1. What are the demographic characteristics of the respondents in terms of age, gender, educational attainment, and length of service?
  - 1.1. sex;
  - 1.2. age;
  - 1.3. highest educational attainment;
  - 1.4. number of child/children;
  - 1.5. degree of being Batak member in terms of
2. What are the levels of occupational stress among SPED teachers across the following domains:
  - 2.1. professional investment;
  - 2.2. behavioural manifestations;
  - 2.3. time management;
  - 2.4. discipline and motivation;
  - 2.5. emotional manifestations;
  - 2.6. work-related stressors;
  - 2.7. gastronomical manifestations;
  - 2.8. cardiovascular manifestations;
  - 2.9. fatigue manifestations; and
  - 2.10. professional distress?
3. What are the levels of job satisfaction among SPED teachers?
4. Is there a significant relationship between stress levels and job satisfaction among special education teachers?

## Literature Review

### *Occupational Stress Among SPED Teachers*

Stress among Special Education (SPED) teachers remains a widely documented concern, particularly due to high workloads, behavioral demands, and limited institutional resources. International studies consistently report that excessive paperwork, time pressure, and challenging student needs increase occupational stress (Jomud et al., 2021; Carroll et al., 2022). In SPED contexts, these burdens are compounded by emotional labor and individualized instruction, leading to greater vulnerability compared to general education teachers (Ayala, 2020; Hester et al., 2020; McGrew et al., 2023). Some studies link these stressors to negative physical and psychological effects, including fatigue and health risks (Kamardeen, 2022; Suleman et al., 2021). However, findings vary: while certain studies identify workload as the strongest predictor of stress (Maas et al., 2021), others emphasize systemic issues such as inadequate recognition and unclear administrative policies (Farmer, 2020). These inconsistencies suggest that stress is shaped by both institutional structures and individual coping resources.

### *Job Satisfaction and Retention Factors*

Job satisfaction has been shown to mitigate the negative effects of occupational stress. Consistent evidence highlights the role of intrinsic motivators, such as autonomy, meaningful work, and achievement, in sustaining teacher morale (Judge et al., 2020; Prodanova & Kocarev, 2022). At the same time, extrinsic conditions, including career progression, recognition, and fair compensation, are vital to teacher retention (Owusu, 2021; Shuls & Flores, 2020). Recent studies indicate that leadership support, professional development, and a positive school climate significantly enhance satisfaction (Pressley, 2021; Woods et al., 2023). Nonetheless, contradictions remain: while some studies report that higher educational attainment reduces stress and increases satisfaction (Ma & Bennett, 2021; Hulme & Wood, 2022), others find that demographic characteristics such as gender and career stage exert stronger influence (Anastasiou & Belios, 2020; Admiraal et al., 2023). These mixed findings justify further testing of whether stress and satisfaction differ across demographic factors, as stated in H1.

### *Cultural and Contextual Dimensions*

SPED teachers in developing countries often operate in challenging conditions characterized by resource shortages, limited training, and persistent stigma toward disability (Popova et al., 2022; UNESCO, 2024). In the Philippines, factors such as policy inconsistencies, inadequate administrative support, and limited community awareness exacerbate stress and erode job satisfaction (Barros & Dalonos, 2025; De Guzman & Dumantay, 2019; Gomez-Lange, 2024; Salas & López, 2019). Comparative studies from countries such as Indonesia, Vietnam, and India reveal similar challenges, underscoring the importance of context-specific studies (Balading et al., 2023).

However, empirical studies directly examining Filipino SPED teachers remain scarce, leaving a gap in evidence that local administrators and policymakers can draw on when developing workplace support systems.

### ***Stress–Satisfaction Relationship and Coping Factors***

The relationship between stress and job satisfaction has been widely studied but remains inconclusive. Some studies identify a significant negative correlation, with higher stress reducing satisfaction and increasing attrition risks (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2019). Other studies, however, note negligible or inconsistent associations, suggesting that intrinsic motivation or coping strategies may moderate the link (Swen, 2020; Jaafar et al., 2021; Aziz et al., 2025). For example, supportive leadership and collaborative school climates have been shown to buffer stress while maintaining satisfaction (Woods et al., 2023; Golubtchik, 2024). As reflected in H1, these contradictions justify testing whether a significant relationship exists between stress and satisfaction among Filipino SPED teachers.

### ***Synthesis and Research Gap***

Taken together, the literature shows strong evidence that SPED teachers face unique stressors and that job satisfaction plays a critical role in retention. However, inconsistencies remain regarding the influence of demographic characteristics, the strength of the stress–satisfaction relationship, and the role of contextual factors. Much of the existing evidence is drawn from Western or cross-sectional studies, limiting its applicability to the Philippine setting. This study addresses that gap by providing localized, empirical evidence on the levels of stress and job satisfaction among SPED teachers, their variation across demographics, and the extent to which stress predicts satisfaction (H1). By clarifying this relationship, the study contributes to both theory and practice in sustaining an inclusive and resilient SPED workforce.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

This study employed a quantitative descriptive–correlational design. As Creswell and Creswell (2018) explain, quantitative designs are appropriate when the objective is to measure variables numerically and examine relationships statistically. The descriptive component was used to present the demographic characteristics of Special Education (SPED) teachers and to describe their levels of stress and job satisfaction. The correlational component examined the degree of association between these two constructs. This design was considered suitable because it enabled the researcher to determine existing patterns and relationships without manipulating variables, thus maintaining objectivity and supporting generalizability within the study context (Fraenkel et al., 2019).

### **Respondents**

The study population comprised all 37 SPED teachers employed at a SPED school in Mandaue City, Cebu, during School Year 2024–2025. A complete enumeration (census) sampling technique was adopted to include the entire population of interest. This approach eliminated sampling bias and ensured comprehensive data coverage. As Cohen et al. (2018) emphasize, census sampling is particularly appropriate when dealing with small and accessible populations, as it enhances representativeness and accuracy.

Demographic information such as age, gender, educational attainment, length of service, field of specialization, and relevant training was collected through a structured questionnaire. These variables allowed subgroup analysis and provided a richer context for interpreting the findings.

### **Instrument**

Two standardized instruments were used to measure the main variables: the Teacher Stress Inventory (TSI; Fimian & Fastenau, 1990) and the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ; Weiss et al., 1967). The TSI captures stress across ten domains, including workload, classroom discipline, and professional distress, while the MSQ measures intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions of job satisfaction such as autonomy, leadership support, and recognition.

Both tools underwent content validation by three experts in educational psychology and SPED to confirm cultural and contextual appropriateness for Philippine teachers. A pilot test with 10 non-participating teachers was conducted to check clarity and reliability. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were .81 for the TSI and .78 for the MSQ, both exceeding the .70 threshold for acceptable internal consistency in social science research (Taber, 2018).

### **Procedure**

Prior to data collection, the researcher secured approval from the institution's Ethics Review Committee and obtained formal permission from the school head to conduct the study. After approval, coordination with the school administration was carried out to schedule the survey administration at a time that would not disrupt teaching responsibilities.

Before the survey was distributed, the researcher provided an orientation to the respondents, explaining the purpose of the study, procedures, voluntary nature of participation, and confidentiality measures. Participants were then given an informed consent form to read and sign, ensuring that they fully understood their rights.

During the survey, respondents were asked to complete the instruments during non-teaching hours in a designated quiet space within the school premises to minimize distractions. Each teacher was allotted approximately 30–45 minutes to finish the survey.

The researcher remained on-site to address clarifications but refrained from influencing responses. Completed surveys were collected immediately after completion to avoid missing data and ensure a 100% retrieval rate. All responses were checked for completeness, coded anonymously, and securely stored. The data were then encoded into a digital matrix for statistical analysis.

### Data Analysis

The data collected from the respondents were encoded into a data matrix, systematically tabulated, and analyzed using appropriate statistical methods to ensure accuracy and reliability in interpreting the results.

To describe the demographic profile of the Special Education (SPED) teachers, including age, gender, educational attainment, length of service, field of specialization, and relevant trainings, frequency and percentage were used. Frequency indicated how many respondents shared specific characteristics, while percentage showed the proportion of each group relative to the total number of participants. To assess the levels of stress and job satisfaction, the study utilized the weighted mean and standard deviation. The weighted mean identified the average response for each item in the stress and satisfaction scales, providing a clear picture of general trends. The standard deviation measured the spread of the responses, indicating whether teachers' experiences were consistent or varied widely across the group.

For inferential analysis, Pearson's  $r$  correlation coefficient was employed to assess the strength and direction of the linear relationship between stress and job satisfaction. The significance of results was determined using a  $p$ -value threshold of 0.05. Findings were interpreted in light of Cohen's (1988) guidelines for correlation effect sizes. This statistical approach directly aligned with the study's objective of exploring whether higher stress levels were significantly associated with lower job satisfaction among SPED teachers.

### Ethical Considerations

This study upheld strict ethical standards to ensure fairness, transparency, and respect for participants' rights and well-being. The study protocol was submitted for review by the institution's Ethics Review Committee to ensure compliance with institutional guidelines. Participation was entirely voluntary, with both written and verbal informed consent obtained after explaining the study's purpose, procedures, and confidentiality measures.

The researcher declared no conflict of interest, and the privacy of all participants was strictly protected. No personally identifiable information was collected, and responses remained anonymous. Since the respondents were licensed professionals, they were not considered part of a vulnerable population and participated willingly. The recruitment process used complete enumeration sampling to ensure inclusivity and fairness.

No physical, psychological, or legal risks were involved, as participation was limited to answering a survey. Respondents retained the right to withdraw from the study at any point without penalty. This ethical approach ensured the integrity of the study and the protection of all participants.

### Results and Discussion

This section presents the analyzed data in line with the focus of the study. It begins with an overview of the respondents' profiles, followed by an examination of their levels of stress and job satisfaction. A correlation analysis between stress and job satisfaction is then reported. The results are subsequently interpreted, with their implications discussed in detail.

#### Profile of the Respondents

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the 37 SPED teachers who participated in the study. The majority were female (73%), reflecting the gendered nature of teaching professions, particularly in special education. Most respondents fell within the 27–36 age bracket (46%), indicating that the workforce is relatively young, already being in mid-career. In terms of educational attainment, over two-thirds had pursued graduate studies, with 22% holding a master's degree and 14% enrolled in doctoral programs. Length of service data indicate a concentration of teachers in the 6–10 years range (32%), with only one respondent reporting less than one year of experience.

The demographic profile reveals that the majority of respondents were female (73%), which aligns with the broader gendered distribution of the teaching profession, particularly in the Philippines, where teaching remains a female-dominated field (De Guzman & Dumantay, 2019). The predominance of women in SPED may influence perceptions of workload and coping strategies, as prior studies suggest that female teachers report higher levels of emotional exhaustion compared to their male counterparts (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019).

In terms of age, nearly half of the teachers were between 27 and 36 years old (46%), indicating that the workforce is largely composed of mid-career professionals. This finding is noteworthy because younger SPED teachers often enter the profession with strong enthusiasm but may be more vulnerable to stress due to limited experience (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2019). Conversely, the presence of



teachers aged 47 and above (38%) suggests that the institution benefits from experienced educators who can provide continuity and mentoring for newer staff.

Table 1. *Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 37)*

Variable	Categories	n	%
Gender	Female	27	72.97
	Male	10	27.03
Age (years)	27–36	17	45.95
	37–46	6	16.22
	47–56	11	29.73
	57+	3	8.11
Highest Attainment	Bachelor's	3	8.11
	Master's (w/ units)	20	54.05
	Master's graduate	8	21.62
	Doctorate (w/ units)	5	13.51
	Doctorate graduate	1	2.70
Length of Service	<1 year	1	2.70
	1–5 years	6	16.22
	6–10 years	12	32.43
	11–15 years	6	16.22
	16–20 years	3	8.11
	21–25 years	9	24.32

\*Note. Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

Educational attainment data revealed that a significant proportion of teachers had pursued graduate studies (approximately 68%), with 22% holding completed master's degrees. This demonstrates a strong commitment to professional development, consistent with UNESCO's (2024) call for advanced qualifications to improve the quality of inclusive education. However, as Barros and Dalonos (2025) argue, higher academic qualifications do not always translate into reduced stress if systemic support and resources are lacking.

Length of service results showed that most teachers had 6–10 years of experience (32%), while nearly one-fourth had served over 20 years (24%). This distribution indicates both stability and institutional loyalty, but it also raises retention concerns, as mid-career teachers often experience "plateaus" that can affect motivation and satisfaction (Gomez-Lange, 2024). The small proportion of early-career teachers (<1 year = 3%) suggests challenges in attracting new entrants to the field, a trend mirrored in global SPED teacher shortages (McGrew et al., 2023; Billingsley & Bettini, 2019).

The demographic profile highlights a workforce that is academically qualified and moderately experienced but potentially vulnerable to stress due to heavy workloads and retention challenges. These patterns provide important context for interpreting subsequent findings on stress and job satisfaction.

### **Level of Stress Experienced by Special Education Teachers**

The levels of stress experienced by Special Education (SPED) teachers vary across multiple domains, each influencing their professional performance and overall well-being. Identifying these key stress indicators is crucial for targeting areas that require the most support.

Table 2 presents the consolidated stress levels of SPED teachers across ten domains of the Teacher Stress Inventory. The overall mean stress level was 2.69 (SD = 0.54), which falls within the moderate range. This indicates that, while teachers do experience stress in their professional roles, it is not at an extreme level.

Table 2. *Stress Levels of SPED Teachers (N = 37)*

Stress Domain	M	SD	Level
Time Management	3.03	0.83	Moderate
Work-Related Stressors	3.26	0.88	Moderate
Professional Distress	2.84	0.91	Moderate
Discipline and Motivation	2.65	0.79	Moderate
Professional Investment	2.77	0.82	Moderate
Emotional Manifestations	2.46	1.06	Low
Behavioral Manifestations	2.34	1.03	Low
Gastronomical Manifestations	2.52	0.95	Low
Cardiovascular Manifestations	2.41	0.87	Low
Fatigue Manifestations	2.55	0.92	Low
Overall Stress Level	2.69	0.54	Moderate

\*Note. Stress levels interpreted as 1.00–2.49 = Low; 2.50–3.49 = Moderate; 3.50–5.00 = High.

Among the ten domains, the highest source of stress was Work-Related Stressors with a mean score of 3.26 (SD = 0.88). This suggests that demands such as administrative tasks, workload expectations, and the diverse needs of SPED learners were the most pressing

stressors for teachers. Time Management followed with a mean of 3.03 (SD = 0.83), pointing to challenges in balancing teaching responsibilities, paperwork, and other professional duties. Professional Distress (M = 2.84, SD = 0.91), Professional Investment (M = 2.77, SD = 0.82), and Discipline and Motivation (M = 2.65, SD = 0.79) also registered at the moderate level, reflecting stress tied to role expectations, commitment, and classroom management.

On the other hand, five domains registered low stress levels, particularly Behavioral Manifestations (M = 2.34, SD = 1.03) and Cardiovascular Manifestations (M = 2.41, SD = 0.87), which were the lowest indicators. Emotional Manifestations (M = 2.46, SD = 1.06), Gastronomical Manifestations (M = 2.52, SD = 0.95), and Fatigue Manifestations (M = 2.55, SD = 0.92) also remained within the low category. These values suggest that while teachers encounter stress from institutional and professional demands, they report fewer psychosomatic and behavioral symptoms.

The data show a clear pattern: external and professional demands (workload, time management, professional distress) contribute more significantly to stress than internal or physiological responses. The highest stress point, Work-Related Stressors (3.26), underscores the strain of administrative and teaching responsibilities, while the lowest, Behavioral Manifestations (2.34), suggests that stress has not translated heavily into observable negative behaviors. The grand mean of 2.69 confirms that, overall, SPED teachers experience a moderate level of stress, concentrated more on professional roles and responsibilities rather than physical or emotional health effects.

### ***Professional Investment***

Professional investment refers to the time, energy, and personal resources that SPED teachers devote to their responsibilities. In this study, the domain registered a moderate level of stress (M = 2.77, SD = 0.82). The relatively low mean compared to other stressors suggests that issues such as autonomy, intellectual engagement, and professional development are not perceived as major stress triggers. The low variability of responses also indicates that teachers share similar views on this dimension. This finding implies that the current school environment may already provide sufficient opportunities for professional input and growth, thereby reducing stress in this area. Consistent with Worth and Van den Brande (2020), professional autonomy and involvement in decision-making are associated with higher job satisfaction and lower stress. Similarly, Skaalvik (2020) warns that when teachers lack professional development opportunities, stress and disengagement rise. Maintaining the current supportive structures while introducing periodic needs assessments and feedback mechanisms could further strengthen teacher agency and prevent burnout.

### ***Behavioral Manifestations***

Behavioral manifestations scored the lowest among all domains (M = 2.34, SD = 1.03), indicating that SPED teachers rarely engage in maladaptive coping behaviors such as absenteeism, procrastination, or avoidance. The narrow spread of scores suggests a consistent pattern of professional discipline and effective coping across the group. This is a positive finding, as it reflects teachers' ability to manage stress without compromising classroom performance or health. As Mahfouz (2020) notes, not all teachers respond to stress in ways that harm well-being; rather, coping skills and support systems play an essential role. Gabriel and Aguinis (2022) further highlight that emotionally supportive environments can reduce reliance on unhealthy behaviors. To sustain this favorable trend, schools should continue offering wellness initiatives, stress management workshops, and mental health education.

### ***Time Management***

Time management emerged as one of the higher stressors (M = 3.03, SD = 0.83), falling in the moderate category. This indicates that while teachers are not overwhelmed, they do experience notable challenges in balancing instructional duties, administrative tasks, and personal responsibilities. The consistent responses across the sample point to a shared perception that multitasking and limited time are ongoing sources of stress. Sudha (2024) emphasizes that time pressure is one of the strongest predictors of teacher stress, with negative effects on job satisfaction if left unaddressed. Likewise, Auer (2023) found that SPED teachers face particular time management challenges because of the individualized nature of their work. To mitigate these pressures, schools could streamline paperwork, provide time management training, and protect dedicated planning periods.

### ***Discipline and Motivation***

The domain of discipline and motivation also registered a moderate stress level (M = 2.65, SD = 0.79). While classroom management and student motivation are recognized concerns, they are not overwhelming stressors for most respondents. The results suggest that systemic factors—such as unclear discipline policies and students' academic underperformance—contribute more to stress than disruptive behavior itself. This distinction reflects teachers' adaptability in handling classroom-level issues but points to structural frustrations that remain unresolved. Farmer (2020) stresses that teachers experience greater stress when they lack institutional support in managing behavior, while Calkins et al. (2024) show that teacher efficacy is tied closely to the ability to motivate students and enforce discipline. Addressing policy clarity, providing targeted professional development, and encouraging stronger collaboration between teachers and administrators could reduce these stress levels further.

### ***Emotional Manifestations***

Emotional manifestations, which capture psychological symptoms such as anxiety and vulnerability, were rated at a low stress level (M = 2.46, SD = 1.06). On average, SPED teachers did not report high emotional strain, though some variability suggests that a subset

of teachers still feels vulnerable or unsupported. This outcome may reflect the presence of coping skills or collegial support networks, but it also signals the need for proactive measures to ensure that emotional well-being remains stable. As Tayfur et al. (2021) observe, feelings of insecurity and vulnerability are among the most common indicators of stress in teaching, and they can undermine both performance and satisfaction. Newby (2024) also notes that teachers in high-demand environments such as special education are particularly prone to emotional strain. Schools can reinforce resilience through counseling services, peer support groups, and emotional well-being programs to safeguard against escalation.

### ***Work-related Stressors***

Work-related stressors recorded the highest mean score among all domains ( $M = 3.26$ ,  $SD = 0.88$ ), indicating that excessive workloads, administrative demands, and unclear expectations are the most pressing stressors for SPED teachers. While no item reached a "very high" level, the consistently moderate-to-high ratings suggest that the cumulative impact of workload pressures could negatively affect teacher performance and well-being. These findings align with Jomoad et al. (2021), who identified administrative burdens and paperwork as leading contributors to burnout and attrition in the teaching profession. The results imply that many SPED teachers struggle to balance professional demands with personal responsibilities, raising concerns about long-term sustainability. To address these challenges, administrators could reduce non-instructional load, provide additional preparation time, or implement co-teaching models. Such systemic reforms are critical for lowering stress levels and supporting teacher retention.

### ***Gastronomical Manifestations***

Stress-related digestive symptoms were relatively low ( $M = 2.52$ ,  $SD = 0.95$ ), suggesting that while a small number of teachers report mild issues such as stomach discomfort or reflux, these are not widespread among the respondents. The values indicate that stress in this sample is more likely to surface in professional or emotional forms rather than physical ones. Nonetheless, gastro-intestinal stress symptoms are important to monitor, as prolonged exposure to occupational stress may eventually manifest physiologically. Suleman et al. (2021) emphasized that chronic stress can adversely affect digestive health, potentially intensifying over time if left unmanaged. Preventive initiatives such as promoting healthy eating habits, ensuring adequate breaks, and offering relaxation activities can help reduce the risk of escalation.

### ***Cardiovascular Manifestations***

Cardiovascular stress indicators also remained low ( $M = 2.41$ ,  $SD = 0.87$ ), indicating that teachers rarely experience symptoms such as heart palpitations or elevated blood pressure in response to stress. This may reflect effective coping strategies or the possibility that stress in this group manifests more prominently in psychological and professional dimensions rather than in physiological responses. However, even low-level but persistent stress can increase cardiovascular risks over time. Kamardeen (2022) notes that prolonged exposure to occupational stress may contribute to hypertension and heart disease if unaddressed. Encouraging regular health screenings, physical activity, and stress-reduction programs could help SPED teachers maintain cardiovascular health and prevent long-term complications.

### ***Fatigue Manifestations***

Fatigue manifestations were reported at a moderate level ( $M = 2.55$ ,  $SD = 0.92$ ), reflecting that exhaustion and reduced stamina are noticeable stress responses among SPED teachers. Compared to other physical manifestations, fatigue stands out as more common, likely due to long hours, heavy workloads, and the emotional demands of working with learners with special needs. The higher variability in scores indicates differences in how teachers personally experience and cope with fatigue, with some more affected than others. Sprouls (2023) identifies fatigue and emotional exhaustion as core components of teacher burnout, warning that without intervention, prolonged fatigue can lead to disengagement and turnover. Interventions such as promoting work-life balance, scheduling sufficient rest periods, and offering wellness programs could alleviate fatigue and enhance resilience among teachers.

### ***Professional Distress***

Professional distress was also rated at a moderate level ( $M = 2.84$ ,  $SD = 0.91$ ), indicating that frustrations related to recognition, career advancement, and long-term professional growth are persistent concerns among SPED teachers. The relatively higher standard deviation suggests variability in experiences, likely shaped by differences in school context, administrative support, and career expectations. Owusu (2021) stressed that lack of recognition and limited growth opportunities contribute directly to teacher stress and dissatisfaction. Similarly, Shuls and Flores (2020) argue that compensation and career pathways strongly influence teacher morale and retention. Addressing professional distress may therefore require transparent promotion systems, consistent recognition of teacher contributions, and improved compensation packages to strengthen motivation and reduce attrition.

### ***Overall Interpretation of Stress Levels***

The results indicate that SPED teachers experience moderate stress mainly from institutional demands, particularly Work-Related Stressors ( $M = 3.26$ ,  $SD = 0.88$ ), Time Management ( $M = 3.03$ ,  $SD = 0.83$ ), and Professional Distress ( $M = 2.84$ ,  $SD = 0.91$ ). By contrast, domains reflecting psychosomatic and emotional symptoms—such as Behavioral ( $M = 2.34$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ), Cardiovascular ( $M = 2.41$ ,  $SD = 0.87$ ), and Emotional Manifestations ( $M = 2.46$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ )—were consistently low. This pattern suggests that stress



stems more from external work conditions than from personal coping deficits.

The overall mean stress level ( $M = 2.69$ ,  $SD = 0.54$ ) shows that teachers are not overwhelmed but face ongoing pressures balancing instruction, paperwork, and professional expectations. Variation in scores also suggests differences in resilience and institutional support. These findings align with Jomud et al. (2021), who cited workload and administrative demands as leading causes of burnout, and with Sprouls (2023), who noted fatigue and emotional exhaustion as precursors to disengagement.

Scholars consistently point to institutional drivers of stress: workload and time pressure (Maas et al., 2021), systemic demands rather than personal shortcomings (Carroll, 2022), and role overload (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2019). Billingsley and Bettini (2019) also stressed that paperwork and administrative tasks predict teacher stress more than individual limitations. Meanwhile, low emotional and physiological scores may reflect coping mechanisms or collegial support (McGrew et al., 2023). Yet, high ratings for work-related domains confirm the strain of individualized instruction and administrative load (Barros & Dalonos, 2025; Gomez-Lange, 2024).

Policy implications are clear: reducing administrative burdens, redistributing workloads, and protecting preparation time are critical, alongside recognition systems, professional development, and leadership support. These measures echo UNESCO's (2024) call to safeguard teacher well-being in inclusive education.

Finally, these findings set the stage for the discussion on job satisfaction, suggesting that satisfaction may persist despite moderate stress when institutional supports are in place.

### **Level of Job Satisfaction Among Special Education Teachers**

To understand the overall job satisfaction of SPED teachers, the results were consolidated to highlight the two key components: Task Enrichment and Empowerment and Leadership, along with the computed grand mean and standard deviation. This summary provides a clear view of the general satisfaction levels, allowing for easier comparison across components and a more concise interpretation of teachers' perceptions. The results are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3. Job Satisfaction Levels Among Special Education Teachers ( $N = 37$ )**

<i>Component</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Level</i>
Task Enrichment	3.77	0.71	High
Empowerment and Leadership	3.86	0.61	High
Overall Job Satisfaction	3.82	0.66	High

*Note.* Interpretation based on scale: 1.00–1.49 = Very Low; 1.50–2.49 = Low; 2.50–3.49 = Moderate; 3.50–4.49 = High; 4.50–5.00 = Very High.

Table 3 shows that SPED teachers reported high levels of job satisfaction across both components measured. Task Enrichment obtained a mean score of 3.77 ( $SD = 0.71$ ), while Empowerment and Leadership recorded a slightly higher mean of 3.86 ( $SD = 0.61$ ). The overall job satisfaction, reflected in the grand mean of 3.82 ( $SD = 0.66$ ), also falls within the high category, indicating that teachers generally feel fulfilled in their roles and perceive supportive leadership within their institutions.

In contrast, the earlier analysis on stress highlighted moderate challenges, particularly in areas related to workload, time management, and professional distress. These findings are consistent with Maas et al. (2021), Carroll (2022), and Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2019), who emphasized the central role of institutional demands in shaping teacher stress. Stress remained most evident in relation to administrative workload and individualized instruction (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Barros & Dalonos, 2025; Gomez-Lange, 2024), while relatively low scores in emotional and physiological domains suggest that teachers may be drawing on adaptive coping strategies or collegial support (McGrew et al., 2023). UNESCO (2024) likewise underscored the need for systemic reforms, including workload redistribution, protection of preparation time, and strengthened leadership support, to safeguard teacher well-being.

Against this backdrop, the high job satisfaction scores present an encouraging counterbalance. Despite moderate stress levels, SPED teachers report a strong sense of professional fulfillment and supportive leadership, underscoring the importance of institutional climate in shaping positive work experiences.

Specifically, task enrichment reflects the degree to which teachers find their work meaningful, engaging, and aligned with their professional skills. The high ratings suggest that SPED teachers experience achievement, autonomy, and recognition in their roles, factors that reinforce motivation and help buffer against stress. These findings align with Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, which highlights intrinsic motivators such as achievement and recognition as key drivers of satisfaction (Prodanova & Kocarev, 2022), and with Ortan (2021), who observed that autonomy and competence utilization enhance resilience against burnout.

Empowerment and leadership similarly emerged as a strong source of satisfaction. Teachers reported confidence in their supervisors' competence, inclusivity, and ethical leadership, indicating that they feel valued and empowered within their school communities. These results are consistent with Sumampong (2024), who showed that transformational leadership significantly improves teacher motivation and satisfaction, and with Zhang et al. (2021), who highlighted the role of administrative support and autonomy in sustaining teacher engagement and retention.

Taken together, the high satisfaction scores in both domains reflect a work environment where SPED teachers feel both professionally enriched and institutionally supported. This finding resonates with Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory, which emphasizes

autonomy, competence, and relatedness as central to motivation and well-being (Nunes et al., 2024), and with Ertürk (2021), who found that supportive leadership and meaningful job roles enhance professional fulfillment and resilience. Thus, while stress remains a persistent concern, particularly in relation to workload and time demands, the high levels of job satisfaction suggest that empowering leadership and enriching tasks serve as protective factors that sustain morale, motivation, and teaching effectiveness.

**Relationship Between Stress Levels and Job Satisfaction Among Special Education Teachers**

To further understand the link between occupational stress and professional fulfillment, a Pearson's r correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between SPED teachers' stress levels and their job satisfaction. The results of this analysis are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Correlation Between Stress Levels and Job Satisfaction Among Special Education Teachers			
Variable	r	p	Remarks
Stress Levels and Job Satisfaction	-0.085	0.601	Not Significant

Table 4 shows that the Pearson correlation between stress levels and job satisfaction among SPED teachers was negligible ( $r = -0.089$ ,  $p = .601$ ), indicating no statistically significant relationship. This suggests that while teachers experience moderate stress in areas such as workload and time management, these pressures do not necessarily diminish their overall job satisfaction.

This finding contrasts with studies like Jaafar et al. (2021), which reported a strong inverse relationship between stress and satisfaction, but aligns more closely with Swen (2020), who emphasized the role of professional calling and internal fulfillment in sustaining satisfaction despite stress. The divergence highlights that contextual factors, such as supportive leadership and autonomy, may buffer the negative impact of stress on satisfaction (Sumampong, 2024; Zhang et al., 2021).

The implication is that reducing stress alone may not guarantee improved satisfaction. Instead, school leaders should adopt a dual approach: managing workload and administrative demands while simultaneously enhancing motivators such as recognition, empowerment, and professional growth. This supports Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, which emphasizes intrinsic factors as key drivers of satisfaction (Prodanova & Kocarev, 2022). Future studies should examine mediating variables such as resilience, coping strategies, or organizational support (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2019; McGrew et al., 2023) to better explain why stress and satisfaction may not always move in tandem.

**Conclusions**

This study provides a nuanced understanding of the well-being of SPED teachers by examining the interplay between occupational stress and job satisfaction. Findings reveal that while teachers experience moderate stress levels—particularly in workload and time management—they also report high satisfaction in areas of task enrichment and empowerment. Interestingly, the correlation between stress and satisfaction was negligible, suggesting that job satisfaction can be sustained through intrinsic motivation, supportive leadership, and professional autonomy, even under stressful conditions.

The study contributes to the literature by showing that stress and satisfaction are not always directly or inversely related; rather, contextual and institutional factors can buffer negative outcomes. This underscores the critical role of school leadership and organizational practices in shaping teacher experiences beyond stress management alone. Practically, administrators are encouraged to complement stress-reduction strategies with initiatives that strengthen professional growth, recognition, and empowerment. Balanced workloads, mentoring and wellness programs, and sustained teacher participation in decision-making are recommended to improve retention and morale.

Nonetheless, several limitations should be noted. The cross-sectional design limits causal inference, and self-reported measures may introduce bias. The relatively small, localized sample also restricts generalizability, while the absence of qualitative data and unexamined factors such as resilience and coping strategies limit deeper insights. Future research should address these gaps through longitudinal, mixed-method studies with broader samples to clarify mechanisms linking stress and job satisfaction.

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### **Affiliations and Corresponding Information**

**Marlon A. Misa**

Technical Education and Skills Development Authority – Philippines

**Jessica Y. Cejudo**

Balud Elementary School

Department of Education – Philippines

**Amalia A. Potot**

Buyong High School

Department of Education – Philippines

**Agnes R. Lozada**

Pardo Elementary School

Department of Education – Philippines

**Jackie R. Ponce**

Mactan National High School

Department of Education – Philippines

**Dr. Lilibeth Pinili**

Cebu Technological University

Main Campus – Philippines