

Exploring the Coping Mechanisms of Teachers and Their Impact on Teaching Performance

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative phenomenological study explored the coping mechanisms of teachers and their influence on teaching performance during the transition from pandemic-era learning modalities to face-to-face instruction under the MATATAG Curriculum. The inquiry focused on inclusive Grade 1 and Grade 4 classrooms at Colegio San Agustin-Biñan. Six teachers with at least five years of teaching experience were purposively selected. Data were generated through in-depth, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews and analyzed through Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis. The findings showed that teachers experienced abrupt curriculum changes and inadequate preparation, difficulty addressing diverse and special educational needs, and post-pandemic attention and behavior concerns among learners. These challenges contributed to emotional exhaustion,

stress, burnout, and occasional compromise in instructional quality. Teachers responded through peer support and collaboration, adaptive and differentiated practices, modification of lessons and activities, reflective self-regulation, and consultation with internal and external experts. Their strategies included group work, read-aloud activities, action songs, modified physical activities, and the National Reading and National Mathematics Programs. Despite limited preparation and support, teachers demonstrated resilience, commitment, and compassion in sustaining inclusive instruction. The study concludes that coping mechanisms help teachers maintain performance, but individual adaptability cannot substitute for systematic institutional support. A five-part action plan was therefore proposed, emphasizing continuous practical MATATAG and SPED training, intervention guides and resources, peer mentoring and inclusion teams, teacher wellness initiatives, and sustained administrative feedback, workload management, and monitoring.

Keywords: *MATATAG Curriculum, coping mechanisms, teaching performance, inclusive education, teacher well-being, phenomenology*

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic produced an unprecedented shift from classroom instruction to emergency remote and distance-learning modalities. Teachers had to redesign lessons, learn unfamiliar digital platforms, communicate with families, and sustain student engagement while managing uncertainty, health concerns, and increased workloads. Studies of teachers during the early pandemic documented emotional strain, reduced professional control, and the feeling that established teaching routines had suddenly disappeared (Kim & Asbury, 2020; Pressley, 2021). When schools reopened, educators were required to readjust once again to face-to-face instruction while addressing unfinished learning, weakened classroom routines, and changes in learner behavior.

In the Philippines, this post-pandemic transition coincided with the phased implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum. The reform streamlined learning competencies and emphasized foundational literacy, numeracy, learner well-being, and more responsive classroom instruction (Department of Education, 2023). Although the curriculum sought to address long-standing educational difficulties, its implementation required teachers to understand new content structures, prepare revised learning plans, apply updated assessment practices, and

support learners with different abilities. Curriculum reform is most effective when educators receive sustained preparation, opportunities for practice, and coherent institutional guidance rather than isolated orientation sessions (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Fullan, 2007).

The demands were particularly pronounced in inclusive classrooms. Grade 1 and Grade 4 teachers at Colegio San Agustín-Biñan implemented the MATATAG Curriculum while teaching classes that included learners with special educational needs. Inclusive pedagogy requires teachers to respond to differences without separating learners from common classroom experiences, yet it also requires knowledge of differentiation, behavior support, collaboration, and appropriate intervention (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Tomlinson, 2021). When training, resources, and specialized support are limited, teachers may experience uncertainty about how to modify instruction while preserving curriculum objectives.

Teacher coping is therefore closely related to teaching performance. Coping mechanisms such as problem solving, collaboration, reflection, and social support can reduce the effects of occupational stress and help educators remain engaged with learners. Conversely, chronic exhaustion and inadequate support can affect instructional planning, classroom interaction, and teachers' intention to remain in the profession (Madigan & Kim, 2021; Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Teacher well-being is not only an individual concern; it is a condition that influences classroom climate, instructional quality, and the sustainability of educational reform.

Although existing studies have examined remote teaching, teacher burnout, inclusive education, and curriculum implementation, fewer localized studies have explored how teachers simultaneously navigate post-pandemic classroom adjustment, a newly implemented curriculum, and inclusive teaching responsibilities. This study addressed that gap by examining the challenges experienced by six Grade 1 and Grade 4 teachers, the effects of those challenges on teaching performance, the coping mechanisms they used, and the institutional actions needed to support them. The study ultimately sought to develop an action plan grounded in the participants' lived experiences.

Literature Review

Curriculum Transition and Teacher Readiness

Rapid changes in instructional modality can disrupt teachers' established knowledge, routines, and professional confidence. Rapanta et al. (2020) found that emergency remote teaching required educators to reconstruct teacher presence, learning activity, and support mechanisms in a short period. As schools returned to face-to-face instruction, the challenge was not simply to restore previous practices; teachers also had to address learning loss, concentration difficulties, and classroom behaviors shaped by prolonged remote learning (Dorn et al., 2021; Kuhfeld et al., 2020). These conditions made post-pandemic teaching a continuing process of adjustment rather than a return to normal practice.

Curriculum reform adds another layer of complexity. Fullan (2007) explained that educational change becomes meaningful only when teachers understand the reform, develop ownership, and receive support for implementation. Effective professional development is sustained, collaborative, content-focused, and connected to classroom application (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Short seminars may introduce curriculum terminology, but they are insufficient when teachers must translate new standards into lesson plans, assessment practices, and strategies for diverse learners.

The MATATAG Curriculum requires teachers to focus on essential competencies while strengthening foundational skills and learner well-being (Department of Education, 2023). Its successful implementation depends on preparation time, consistent guidance, learning resources, and opportunities to examine classroom problems collectively. In the absence of these supports, teachers may rely on self-directed experimentation, informal peer assistance, and trial-and-error adjustments, increasing workload and uncertainty.

Inclusive Education and Teaching Performance

Inclusive education seeks to ensure meaningful participation and learning for students with varied abilities within common educational settings. Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) described inclusive pedagogy as extending opportunities available to everyone rather than planning only for a presumed average learner and adding separate provisions afterward. This approach requires teachers to consider differences in readiness, language, behavior, attention, and learning profiles while maintaining shared curricular goals.

Differentiated instruction provides practical ways to respond to learner diversity by modifying content, process, product, and the learning environment (Tomlinson, 2021). Teachers may use multimodal materials, flexible grouping, adjusted tasks, visual cues, movement, music, read-aloud activities, and structured routines. Teacher efficacy for inclusive practice is strengthened when educators possess appropriate knowledge, collaboration skills, and confidence in instructional and behavior-management decisions (Sharma et al., 2012).

Inclusive teaching is also a collaborative responsibility. Friend and Cook (2017) emphasized consultation, co-planning, shared problem solving, and communication among teachers, specialists, and families. Teacher communities can provide professional learning, emotional reassurance, and access to practical strategies, particularly during reform and uncertainty (Vangrieken et al., 2017). Where formal support structures are weak, teachers may still create informal networks; however, institutionalized inclusion teams are more likely to sustain consistent support and shared accountability.

Coping, Collaboration, and Teacher Well-Being

Coping mechanisms refer to the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral strategies individuals use to manage demands perceived as stressful. Teachers during the pandemic demonstrated resourcefulness through lesson adaptation, communication, time management, monitoring, and self-funded materials (Agayon et al., 2022). In post-pandemic classrooms, these strategies continue through differentiated instruction, peer consultation, reflective practice, and flexible classroom management. Such approaches help teachers preserve a sense of competence and control despite changing conditions.

Collaboration functions as both instructional and emotional support. Professional communities allow teachers to exchange materials, validate concerns, obtain feedback, and solve learner-specific problems. Vangrieken et al. (2017) found that teacher communities contribute to professional development when they have a clear focus, trust, shared responsibility, and opportunities for sustained interaction. In inclusive classrooms, collaboration with guidance personnel, specialists, parents, and experienced colleagues can reduce uncertainty and improve the fit between interventions and learner needs.

Nevertheless, coping has limits when institutional demands remain excessive. Burnout is characterized by emotional exhaustion, detachment, and diminished professional efficacy, and it is associated with job dissatisfaction and attrition (Madigan & Kim, 2021; Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Structured interventions—including mindfulness, counseling, stress management, and organizational wellness programs—can support teacher mental health (Beames et al., 2023; Corthorn et al., 2024; Roeser et al., 2013). Sustainable teaching performance therefore depends on both personal coping and organizational conditions such as manageable workloads, supportive leadership, clear expectations, and accessible professional assistance.

METHODS

Research Design

The study employed a qualitative phenomenological design to understand the lived experiences of teachers as they transitioned from pandemic-era learning modalities to face-to-face instruction under the MATATAG Curriculum. Phenomenology was appropriate because the inquiry focused on how participants interpreted curriculum change, inclusive teaching demands, coping, and teaching performance. Reflexive thematic analysis

was used to identify patterns of shared meaning across the participants' narratives (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Braun et al., 2023).

Research Locale

The study was conducted at Colegio San Agustin-Biñan during School Year 2025–2026. The institution had implemented the MATATAG Curriculum in Grade 1 and Grade 4 and maintained inclusive classrooms that enrolled learners with varied educational needs, including those requiring additional learning and behavioral support. This setting allowed the study to examine teachers' experiences at the intersection of post-pandemic adjustment, curriculum reform, and inclusive education.

Participants and Sampling Technique

Six teachers were selected through purposive sampling. Participants directly handled Grade 1 or Grade 4 inclusion classes and had at least five years of teaching experience, enabling them to compare established practices with pandemic-era modalities and the reformed curriculum. The group included teachers of Filipino, English, Mathematics, MAPEH, and other elementary subjects, with teaching experience ranging from five to 22 years. Participant labels A to F were used in reporting to protect identity.

Research Instrument

A semi-structured interview guide served as the primary data-generation instrument. Open-ended questions examined the challenges teachers encountered during the transition, the effects of these challenges on their performance, the coping mechanisms they used, the ways they addressed difficulties in inclusive MATATAG classrooms, and the actions they recommended. Follow-up questions allowed participants to clarify experiences and provide concrete examples of classroom adjustments, collaboration, stress, and support needs.

Data Gathering Procedure

After securing the required institutional and ethical permissions, the researcher invited qualified teachers and explained the purpose, procedures, voluntary nature, and confidentiality provisions of the study. Written informed consent was obtained before the interviews. In-depth, face-to-face interviews were conducted in a respectful and private setting. With permission, the conversations were recorded, supplemented with notes, and transcribed for analysis. Transcripts were reviewed repeatedly to preserve the participants' intended meanings and contextual details.

Data Analysis

The interview data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's six-phase reflexive thematic analysis. The researcher first became familiar with the transcripts, generated initial codes, organized related codes into candidate themes, reviewed themes against the complete dataset, defined and named the themes, and produced an integrated narrative report. Both explicit statements and underlying meanings were considered. Participant quotations were retained selectively to demonstrate the connection between the themes and the original narratives.

Ethical Consideration

Participation was voluntary, and teachers were informed that they could decline questions or withdraw without adverse consequences. Names and identifying details were removed from transcripts and reports. Audio files and research records were stored securely and used only for the study. Because discussions involved stress, burnout, and professional difficulties, interviews were conducted with sensitivity; participants were allowed to pause or discontinue the conversation whenever needed. The researcher also maintained reflexive awareness of her role in interpreting the data and reported findings without fabrication or misrepresentation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Challenges During the Transition to Face-to-Face MATATAG Instruction

Table 1. *Challenges encountered by teachers during the educational transition*

Theme	Consolidated Finding	Illustrative Evidence
Abrupt curriculum changes and limited preparation	Teachers described the implementation as sudden and reported inadequate practical training for lesson design and inclusive delivery.	"We were sent to war without weapons." – Participant C
Inclusivity difficulties with diverse learners	Participants experienced uncertainty about appropriate approaches and interventions for learners with ADHD, learning difficulties, and other special educational needs.	"You want to help them, but you don't know how." – Participant F
Post-pandemic attention and behavior concerns	Teachers observed short attention spans, difficulty sustaining participation, and adjustment problems after prolonged online learning.	"Hindi makafocus ang mga bata kahit limang minuto." – Participant C

The first theme concerned abrupt curriculum change and insufficient preparation. Participants felt that the transition required them to learn the curriculum while simultaneously implementing it. Their accounts indicated that introductory seminars focused more on unpacking objectives than on producing lessons, differentiating instruction, or responding to special educational needs. This finding is consistent with research showing that sudden instructional changes create uncertainty when teachers receive limited time, training, and support (Rapanta et al., 2020). Curriculum reform consequently became an additional source of cognitive and emotional load rather than a clearly supported process.

The second theme involved inclusivity difficulties. Teachers were expected to respond to diverse needs but did not always possess SPED-specific knowledge or ready-to-use intervention models. Their concern was not a lack of willingness; participants repeatedly expressed a desire to help but uncertainty about appropriate strategies, referral boundaries, and the roles of guidance personnel. Inclusive pedagogy requires both flexible classroom practice and access to specialized collaboration (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Friend & Cook, 2017). The findings show that inclusive responsibility without adequate preparation can create role conflict and weaken professional confidence.

The third theme concerned learner attention and behavior after remote learning. Participants observed that some children struggled to remain seated, listen, or participate for sustained periods. Similar post-pandemic studies reported unfinished learning, reduced engagement, and difficulty readjusting to structured classroom routines (Barrot et al., 2021; Dorn et al., 2021; Kuhfeld et al., 2020). These learner conditions increased the need for active, multisensory, and highly structured instruction, placing further demands on teachers who were already adjusting to the new curriculum.

Effects of the Challenges on Teaching Performance

Table 2. *Effects of transition challenges on teaching performance*

Theme	Effect on Performance	Illustrative Evidence
Emotional exhaustion, stress, and burnout	Overlapping tasks, unclear expectations, weekend preparation, and inclusive classroom demands produced fatigue and reduced mental space for instruction.	"It's a total burnout." – Participant B
Compromised instructional quality	When teachers felt unprepared or overloaded, they sometimes simplified lessons, omitted planned presentation elements, or moved directly to activities.	"Sometimes I just skip the PowerPoint and go straight to the activity." – Participant D

Teachers linked uncertainty and workload to emotional exhaustion, stress, and burnout. Participants described using weekends to understand the curriculum, feeling overwhelmed by overlapping responsibilities, and experiencing physical and emotional fatigue. Collie (2021) and Pressley (2021) similarly found that change-related stress, workload, and insufficient organizational support intensified teacher burnout during and after pandemic disruption. The finding demonstrates that emotional well-being is directly connected to teachers' ability to plan, decide, and remain responsive during instruction.

Participants also acknowledged moments when instructional quality was compromised. Simplifying or skipping parts of a lesson was not presented as indifference, but as a practical response to limited time, cognitive overload, and uncertainty about inclusive strategies. Teacher efficacy and instructional quality are mutually reinforcing: teachers who feel prepared and capable are more likely to sustain complex instructional practices (Burić & Kim, 2020). Conversely, exhaustion and low perceived competence can reduce the depth of learning experiences. The result underscores the need to address organizational conditions rather than placing full responsibility for adaptation on individual teachers.

Coping Mechanisms Used by Teachers

Table 3. *Coping mechanisms employed during the transition*

Theme	Coping Process	Examples
Peer support and collaboration	Teachers consulted subject teachers, advisers, parents, and trusted colleagues for instructional guidance and emotional support.	Sharing resources, discussing difficult cases, and seeking help from parents and guidance personnel
Adaptive practices	Participants used group work, read-aloud activities, songs, movement, multisensory tasks, flexible pacing, and rest when overwhelmed.	Action songs, collaborative tasks, reading support, and pausing to regain emotional and cognitive readiness

Peer support and collaboration emerged as a central coping mechanism. Teachers exchanged strategies and resources, asked colleagues about curriculum requirements, consulted parents and guidance personnel, and used trusted peers as emotional outlets. Teacher communities are valuable when they combine practical problem solving with professional trust and shared responsibility (Vangrieken et al., 2017). The participants' experiences further show that informal support can compensate temporarily for gaps in formal structures, although sustained inclusion teams would provide a more consistent system.

Adaptive practices reflected teachers' resourcefulness. Participants employed read-aloud sessions, songs, movement, group activities, flexible tasks, and changes in pacing to improve engagement and accommodate learner differences. These practices align with differentiated instruction, in which teachers modify the learning process and environment while maintaining core objectives (Tomlinson, 2021). Some participants also described stopping briefly when overwhelmed and returning to tasks after rest. Such self-regulation supported continued performance but did not remove the need for workload and wellness support.

Strategies for Overcoming Difficulties in Inclusive Classrooms

Table 4. *Strategies used to overcome inclusive MATATAG implementation difficulties*

Theme	How the Difficulty Was Addressed	Concrete Strategies
Modification of teaching strategies	Teachers revised activities, visual supports, physical tasks, and lesson delivery according to immediate learner needs.	National Reading Program, National Mathematics Program, modified physical activities, group reading, multiple-intelligence activities

Seeking internal and external expertise	Teachers pursued SPED study, seminars, guidance consultation, parent collaboration, research, and advice from experienced educators.	Master's coursework, online learning, specialist consultation, guidance referrals, and parent support
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Teachers overcame classroom difficulties by modifying teaching strategies rather than abandoning curriculum objectives. They adjusted activities for physical and learning differences, used visual and multimodal supports, and drew on institutional programs such as the National Reading Program and National Mathematics Program. These practices demonstrate responsive differentiation: the intended competency remained, but the route to participation changed. The finding supports the view that inclusive pedagogy is enacted through flexible decisions grounded in the learner's present needs (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Tomlinson, 2021).

Participants also sought internal and external expertise. Some pursued graduate study or seminars related to special education, while others consulted guidance personnel, subject coordinators, parents, and educational specialists. This help-seeking behavior improved access to possible interventions and reduced professional isolation. Collaboration is especially important when general education teachers face needs beyond their formal preparation (Friend & Cook, 2017). However, participants' accounts suggest that expert support was often initiated individually; formal referral pathways and inclusion teams would make assistance more predictable and equitable.

Proposed Teacher Support Action Plan

Table 5. *Action plan derived from the findings*

Priority Area	Evidence From the Study	Recommended Action
Continuous MATATAG and SPED training	Abrupt change, limited preparation, and uncertainty in inclusive instruction	Provide phased, long-term, practice-based training, coaching, demonstration lessons, and follow-through workshops rather than one-time seminars.
Intervention guides and instructional resources	Trial-and-error responses to learning and behavior needs	Develop disability-sensitive intervention manuals, checklists, visual resources, differentiated activity banks, and clear referral procedures.
Peer mentoring and inclusion teams	Reliance on informal peer help and fragmented expert consultation	Establish mentoring pairs and school inclusion teams involving teachers, guidance personnel, administrators, parents, and specialists.
Teacher wellness and mental health support	Emotional exhaustion, stress, and burnout	Provide counseling access, regular check-ins, mindfulness or stress-management activities, wellness breaks, and confidential support pathways.
Administrative feedback, workload, and monitoring	Compromised instructional quality and limited preparation time	Set realistic assignments, reduce unnecessary non-teaching demands, provide regular constructive feedback, and monitor implementation transparently.

Participants strongly favored continuous training and actual workshops over one-time theoretical seminars. This recommendation aligns with evidence that effective professional learning is sustained, collaborative, practice-focused, and supported by coaching or feedback (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Intervention guides were also proposed to reduce trial and error when responding to disability-related learning and behavior concerns. Such resources should support, rather than replace, professional judgment and specialist consultation.

The action plan also recognizes that teacher performance cannot be sustained without attention to mental health and organizational conditions. Evidence-based teacher interventions include mindfulness, counseling, stress management, and structured wellness support (Beames et al., 2023; Corthorn et al., 2024; Roeser et al.,

2013). Administrative feedback, workload balance, and transparent monitoring are equally important because wellness initiatives will have limited effect if chronic overload and unclear expectations remain unchanged. The plan therefore combines professional, collaborative, emotional, and organizational support.

CONCLUSION

The transition from pandemic-era modalities to face-to-face instruction under the MATATAG Curriculum created interconnected instructional, emotional, and inclusive-education challenges for the six Grade 1 and Grade 4 teachers. Abrupt implementation and limited practical preparation affected teachers' confidence, while insufficient SPED knowledge complicated their response to diverse learners. Post-pandemic attention and behavior concern increased classroom-management demands. These conditions contributed to emotional exhaustion, stress, burnout, and occasional compromise in lesson delivery.

Teachers nevertheless sustained instruction through collaboration, reflection, adaptive practices, differentiated activities, strategy modification, and consultation with colleagues, families, guidance personnel, and other experts. These coping mechanisms supported resilience and inclusive teaching, but the findings demonstrate that individual resourcefulness cannot compensate indefinitely for inadequate institutional preparation. Continuous practical training, intervention resources, formal peer and inclusion teams, wellness support, reasonable workloads, feedback, and monitoring are necessary to sustain teaching quality and successful curriculum implementation. The study contributes a localized understanding of coping as both a personal process and an organizational responsibility.

Recommendation

Colegio San Agustin-Biñan should institutionalize continuous MATATAG and SPED-focused professional development that includes demonstration, guided practice, coaching, and classroom follow-through. The school should create an intervention guide containing practical strategies, checklists, referral pathways, and adaptable resources for common learning and behavior needs. Formal peer mentoring and inclusion teams should be organized to coordinate teachers, guidance personnel, administrators, parents, and specialists. A confidential teacher wellness system should provide regular check-ins, counseling access, stress-management activities, and opportunities for rest and recovery. Administrators should also review workloads and non-teaching assignments, provide timely and constructive feedback, and establish transparent monitoring that supports improvement without increasing unnecessary pressure. Future research may include teachers from other institutions and grade levels, incorporate observations or learner and parent perspectives, and examine how the proposed support actions influence teacher well-being and inclusive teaching practice over time.

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