

# Evaluating Institutional Support and Cognitive Workload Among Teachers Handling Special Needs Students at Foundation Preparatory Academy

<sup>1</sup>Rainier T. Bantoto<sup>ORCID</sup>, <sup>2</sup>Godfrey Gutang<sup>ORCID</sup>, <sup>3</sup>Charles G. Cuaresma<sup>ORCID</sup>, <sup>4</sup>Marife N. Cabajon<sup>ORCID</sup>, <sup>5</sup>Felipe B. Sullera Jr.<sup>ORCID</sup>

Foundation University

<sup>1</sup>[rainier.bantoto@foundationu.com](mailto:rainier.bantoto@foundationu.com), <sup>2</sup>[godfrey.gutang@foundatiou.com](mailto:godfrey.gutang@foundatiou.com), <sup>3</sup>[charles.cuaresma@foundationu.com](mailto:charles.cuaresma@foundationu.com),  
<sup>4</sup>[marife.cabajon@foundationu.com](mailto:marife.cabajon@foundationu.com), <sup>5</sup>[felipejr.sullera@foundationu.com](mailto:felipejr.sullera@foundationu.com)

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Corresponding Email:

[rainier.bantoto@foundationu.com](mailto:rainier.bantoto@foundationu.com)

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institutional support system, special educational needs, teacher workload, cognitive load theory

**Abstract.** This study evaluated the relationship between institutional support systems and the cognitive workload of teachers managing learners with special educational needs (LSEN) at Foundation Preparatory Academy (FPA). Utilizing a descriptive research design, the study surveyed the institution's faculty using a validated and reliable instrument. The primary objective was to assess administrative, professional, and instructional support mechanisms against mental demands inherent in instructional, behavioral, and documentation tasks, effectively applying an industrial engineering lens to analyze systemic educational processes. Findings indicated that while teachers perceived a high extent of institutional support, they simultaneously experienced high cognitive workloads in teaching and behavior management. Conversely, documentation tasks were rated as moderate. Correlation analysis revealed a significant, moderate negative relationship between administrative policy support and documentation workload, confirming that structured, clear policies effectively mitigate clerical strain. Demographic factors also played a critical role; years of teaching experience correlated positively with increased demands in documentation and behavior management, as veteran educators often maintain higher standards for individualized care. Additionally, teachers lacking formal special education training reported significantly higher workloads compared to their certified counterparts, demonstrating the impact of formal qualification on mental efficiency and task processing. These results underscore the critical need for enhanced technical policy clarity and targeted specialized training. By identifying these specific gaps in the institutional framework, the study highlights the necessity of refining organizational structures to better support educators. Addressing these deficits is vital for minimizing teacher cognitive exhaustion, fostering a sustainable, efficient, and high-quality environment for inclusive education that prioritizes both educator well-being and student success.

## Introduction

The global landscape of education is increasingly focused on inclusive practices; however, teachers working with students with special needs face a mental workload that often exceeds that of general education teachers. Internationally, these educators must simultaneously manage Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), diverse behavioral needs, and complex documentation requirements, contributing to a widespread pattern of stress, emotional exhaustion, and professional burnout. Studies by Viac & Fraser (2020) emphasize that such excessive cognitive demands directly affect teaching quality and student outcomes across various educational systems. Furthermore, many teachers report feeling underprepared to support students with disabilities, which increases their mental workload and reduces their confidence in delivering appropriate interventions (Khasawneh & Khasawneh, 2024).

In the Philippines, special **EDUCATION** and inclusive classroom teachers face similar systemic challenges characterized by heavy workloads, challenging student behaviors, and limited institutional resources. Recent local research highlights that teachers in inclusive settings are often only “somewhat ready” in terms of instructional strategies and curriculum adaptation (Moon, 2023). At Foundation Preparatory Academy, preliminary observations indicate that teachers must simultaneously manage lesson preparation and behavior management without standardized tools, leading them to rely on memory and improvised routines. This lack of structured guidance results in documentation and administrative tasks frequently interfering with direct instruction, which contributes to mental fatigue due to constant multitasking and uncertainty in daily priorities.

Despite the wealth of studies examining occupational stress, a significant research gap exists regarding the design and evaluation of concrete, integrated systems specifically intended to reduce cognitive workload in basic education settings. Existing Philippine literature primarily describes levels of stress and general coping mechanisms rather than developing standardized process flows to manage mental effort (Dotimas, 2023). Furthermore, there is a lack of local research that specifically analyzes the relationship between a teacher’s professional profile and the three distinct dimensions of cognitive workload: teaching, behavior management, and documentation. This study fills that gap by moving beyond descriptive stress levels to evaluate how an institutional support system can actively sequence tasks and organize information to lower the extraneous mental load of teachers.

The conduct of this study is compelled by the urgent need to prevent teacher burnout and ensure the sustainability of inclusive education programs. As researchers in Industrial Engineering, the authors possess the specialized competence to apply systems-thinking and workload analysis to the educational environment to optimize process flows. This study directly aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-Being), specifically Target 3.4, which aims to promote mental health and well-being, by protecting educators from the psychological toll of excessive cognitive strain. Furthermore, it supports Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education), specifically Target 4.c, which focuses on substantially increasing the supply of qualified teachers and providing them with the necessary institutional support to deliver equitable and effective instruction. By evaluating these support systems, the researchers aim to create a more resilient and inclusive educational framework at Foundation Preparatory Academy that ensures both teacher welfare and student success.

#### *Statement of the Problem*

This study aims to evaluate the institutional support system in relation to cognitive workload among teachers handling students with special needs in Foundation Preparatory Academy, for the propose of recommending proposal for improvements.

Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What is the profile of teachers handling students with special needs in Foundation Preparatory Academy in terms of:
  - 1.1 Years of teaching experience
  - 1.2 Training and Certifications?
2. To what extent teachers perceived the following support systems according to:
  - 2.1 Administrative and policy support
  - 2.2 Professional development and technical support
  - 2.3 Instructional and resource support
3. What is the level of perceived cognitive workload experienced by teachers according to the following tasks:
  - 3.1 Teaching and instructional tasks
  - 3.2 Behavior management tasks
  - 3.3 Documentation and administrative tasks
4. Is there a relationship between the extent of a teacher's perception of the institution's support system and their level of perceived cognitive workload when handling students with special needs?
5. Is there a relationship between the years of teaching experience and the teachers' level of perceived cognitive workload across different tasks?
6. Is there a difference in the level of perceived cognitive workload across different tasks when teachers are grouped according to their training or certification status?

## Methodology

### *Research Design.*

The study utilized a descriptive research design. Existing teachers handling students with special needs at Foundation Preparatory Academy were surveyed without manipulation of variables or random assignment to groups. A structured questionnaire was used to quantitatively measure teachers' profile characteristics, their perceived level of institutional support, and their cognitive workload across different task domains. The study was also correlational, as the relationship between perceived institutional support and selected teacher profile variables was examined in relation to teachers' cognitive workload in handling students with special needs.

### *Research Environment.*

The study was conducted at Foundation Preparatory Academy (FPA), located on Dr. V. Locsin Street in Barangay Taclobo, Dumaguete City, Negros Oriental. FPA is a private basic education institution that offers inclusive education and accommodates students with diverse learning needs, including 17 learners formally identified with special educational needs. The school environment consists of regular classrooms where individualized instruction, behavior management, and administrative documentation for these learners are conducted alongside their typically developing peers. The classrooms are equipped with multimedia facilities and air-conditioning to support teaching and learning. FPA was purposively selected as the research site because the number of students with special needs has recently increased, while some teachers assigned to these learners are not formally trained in special or inclusive education. This situation contributes to increased cognitive workload as teachers manage multiple learning needs, behavioral challenges, and documentation requirements simultaneously. In addition, teachers and administrators have expressed interest in structured support tools to help organize information, standardize responses to common situations, and improve consistency in teaching and documentation. This makes FPA an appropriate setting for examining institutional support systems and the cognitive workload of teachers handling students with special needs.

### *Research Respondents.*

The respondents of this study were teachers who directly handled students with special needs at Foundation Preparatory Academy. They were selected through purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique, to ensure that each participant possessed the specific experience required to evaluate the institutional support system and cognitive workload. The inclusion criteria required that teachers: (a) have at least one year of teaching experience at the institution; (b) be currently assigned at least one learner with formally identified special educational needs (LSEN); and (c) be responsible for instructional planning, behavior management, and documentation tasks such as Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). Although the initial population consisted of 33 eligible teachers, the final sample included 31 respondents (N = 31). Two teachers were unable to participate due to unavailability during the data collection period, resulting in a 93.9% response rate. The final sample consisted of 8 grade school teachers, 8 junior high school teachers, and 15 senior high school teachers. This group was considered appropriate for the study as they represent the full available faculty directly engaged in inclusive education and the associated cognitive demands. As such, they are well-positioned to provide relevant information regarding institutional support systems and cognitive workload.

### *Research Instruments.*

A self-made questionnaire consisting of four parts was utilized. Part I included the disclosure statement, informed consent, confidentiality assurance, and survey instructions. Part II collected respondent profiles, including teaching experience and SPED training. Part III measured perceived institutional support across three dimensions: administrative/policy support, professional development/technical support, and instructional/resource support. Part IV measured perceived cognitive workload across teaching tasks, behavior management, and documentation tasks. The instrument was validated by three doctoral-level education experts. A pilot test was conducted to assess reliability using Cronbach's alpha. The results indicated high internal consistency, with all coefficients exceeding the 0.70 threshold. Institutional support variables demonstrated excellent reliability (Administrative/Policy  $\alpha = 0.962$ ; Professional Development  $\alpha = 0.966$ ; Instructional Support  $\alpha = 0.962$ ), while cognitive workload domains showed good to excellent reliability (Teaching Tasks  $\alpha = 0.915$ ; Behavior Management  $\alpha = 0.869$ ; Documentation  $\alpha = 0.855$ ), confirming the instrument's suitability for the study.

### *Ethical Considerations*

This study adhered to strict ethical standards approved by the Foundation University Ethics Review Board. Formal permission was obtained from the research site, and all participants provided informed consent. Participation was voluntary, and participants were assured of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. To ensure

confidentiality, data were anonymized using numeric codes, and findings were reported in aggregate form to prevent the identification of individual respondents. Both hard and digital data were stored securely, accessible only to the research team, and will be disposed of in accordance with university guidelines upon completion of the study. Finally, AI tools were used solely for language editing and manuscript refinement, with no involvement in data generation or analysis. The researchers retain full responsibility for the integrity of the study.

#### *Research Procedure*

After the design hearing, the researchers integrated all corrections and suggestions from the panel members into the revised instruments and methodology. A formal letter of request to conduct the study was prepared and transmitted to the school head of Foundation Preparatory Academy, with endorsement from the School of Industrial Engineering Department. Once the request was approved, the researchers coordinated with the academic coordinator and principals to identify qualified teacher respondents and schedule the administration of the survey. During questionnaire distribution, the researchers personally visited the school, explained the purpose and importance of the study, clarified the voluntary nature of participation, and assured the teachers that their responses would be treated with strict confidentiality. The finalized questionnaires were administered in either printed or online form, depending on the teachers' preference and availability. Respondents were given sufficient time to answer all items, and the researchers conducted follow ups through reminders and brief visits to faculty rooms to ensure high retrieval rates. Completed questionnaires were collected immediately after completion or within the agreed upon period and were checked for completeness before data encoding. The results were tallied using MS Excel, analyzed using JAMOVI software, and interpreted.

#### *Statistical Treatment of the Data*

Data were analyzed using various statistical tools, which are appropriate for the study's sample size and ordinal (Likert-scale) data.

- Frequency and Percentage: Used to summarize respondent profiles, including years of teaching experience and SPED-related training.
- Mean: Used to determine the average extent of perceived institutional support and perceived cognitive workload across all dimensions and task domains.
- Spearman Rank Correlation ( $\rho$ ): Used to assess the strength and direction of relationships between institutional support, cognitive workload, and teacher profile variables.

The following interpretations were also applied by the researcher to describe the attitude of the students:

#### Perceived Institutional Support System Scale:

Mean Range	Interpretation	Meaning
4.21 - 5.00	Very High (VH)	Excellent access to SPED training & support
3.41 - 4.20	High (H)	Good availability of relevant training
2.61 - 3.40	Moderate (M)	Mixed access to professional development
1.81 - 2.60	Low (L)	Limited SPED training available
1.00 - 1.80	Very Low (VL)	No meaningful support provided

#### Perceived Cognitive Workload Scale:

Mean Range	Interpretation	Meaning
4.21 - 5.00	Very High (VH)	Extreme mental demand & stress
3.41 - 4.20	High (H)	High cognitive effort & fatigue
2.61 - 3.40	Moderate (M)	Manageable mental load
1.81 - 2.60	Low (L)	Minimal mental effort required
1.00 - 1.80	Very Low (VL)	Negligible cognitive strain

To identify the degree of relationship between two variables, the researcher applied the following descriptions (Statistical Correlation, 2009):

Value of r	Strength of Relationship
Between $\pm 0.50$ to $\pm 1.00$	$\pm$ strong relationship
Between $\pm 0.30$ to $\pm 0.49$	$\pm$ moderate relationship
Between $\pm 0.10$ to $\pm 0.29$	$\pm$ weak relationship
Between $\pm 0.01$ to $\pm 0.09$	$\pm$ very weak relationship

## Results and Discussion

This section delineates the analysis and interpretation of the data regarding the relationship between institutional support and teachers perceived cognitive workload. The findings are organized into four primary areas: (1) respondent profiles; (2) levels of perceived institutional support; (3) levels of perceived cognitive workload; and (4) significant relationships and differences among these variables. The data, collected from 31 participants at Foundation Preparatory Academy, are presented in tables and accompanied by an in-depth interpretation to provide a comprehensive synthesis of the results.

Years of Teaching Experience	Frequency	Percent (%)
1 - 2	7	22.58
3- 4	16	51.61
5 - 6	3	9.68
7 and above	5	16.13
<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table No. 1. Profile of Respondents in Terms of Years of Teaching Experience

Table 1 presents the distribution of teaching experience among 31 teachers in Foundation Preparatory Academy. Most teachers fall within the 3–4 years category, accounting for 51.61% (16 teachers), indicating that the majority are relatively early in their careers but already have some teaching experience. Teachers with 1–2 years of experience comprise 22.58% (7 teachers), showing a significant proportion of newer educators. Meanwhile, only a small portion have 5–6 years of experience (9.68%), while 16.13% have 7 years or more, representing the most experienced group. Overall, the faculty is largely composed of moderately experienced teachers, with fewer highly experienced individuals, which may influence instructional practices and professional development needs within the school. In the context of special education, teaching experience is crucial in developing competencies needed to handle learners with diverse needs. Studies show that more experienced teachers are generally better at adapting instruction, managing behavior, and applying inclusive strategies (Darling-Hammond, 2000). The prevalence of teachers with 3–4 years of experience suggests a developing level of competence, where teachers are gaining practical skills but may still require targeted support and training in special education.

Training or Certification	Frequency	Percent (%)
Yes	29	93.55
No	2	6.45
<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table No. 2. Profile of Respondents in Terms of SPED Training or Certifications

Table 2 presents the SPED training status of the 31 teachers at Foundation Preparatory Academy. The data show that 93.55% (29 teachers) possess formal SPED training or certification, while a small minority of 6.45% (2 teachers) remain untrained. This high level of specialization reflects a strong institutional commitment to inclusive education, ensuring that the majority of the faculty is well-equipped to support diverse learning needs. This concentration of trained staff is significant, as Johnson (2023) identify specialized training as a critical determinant of teacher self-efficacy and instructional cohesion. To maximize this advantage, the academy may consider implementing internal peer-mentoring programs. In an environment with a highly trained majority, certified staff can facilitate a knowledge-sharing system, allowing untrained colleagues to develop practical competencies through collaborative practice.

Indicators	$\bar{x}$	VI	SD
Timeliness of administrative support when issues with LSEN arise.	4.32	VH	0.47
Commitment of school policies to an inclusive learning environment.	4.29	VH	0.63
Responsiveness of the administration to my concerns regarding LSEN.	4.23	VH	0.61
Effectiveness of school policies in reducing my workload related to LSEN.	4.03	H	0.78
Clarity of school policies for handling students with special needs (LSEN).	3.90	H	0.69
Precision of procedures for identifying LSEN and implementing IEPs	3.90	H	1.09
<b>Composite</b>	<b>4.11</b>	<b>H</b>	<b>0.71</b>

Table No. 3. Extent of Teachers Perceived Institutional Support in Terms of Administrative and Policy Support

Table 3 presents teachers' perceptions of administrative and policy support, which obtained a composite mean of 4.11 (High). The data reveals that the institution excels in the "human" side of administration, with the timeliness of support (4.32) and the responsiveness of leadership (4.23) both receiving Very High interpretations. These results indicate that Foundation Preparatory Academy's leadership is successfully implementing the "Supportive Leadership" pillar of the DepEd Inclusive Education Policy Framework. The Very High rating for the commitment to an inclusive environment (4.29) directly aligns with DepEd Order No. 72, s. 2009, which requires school heads to take the lead in creating a welcoming culture for learners with disabilities. This suggests that the administration is not merely complying with regulations but is perceived as being proactively "responsive" to the unique challenges of inclusive education.

However, a critical area for refinement is seen in the "technical" side of policy, specifically the precision of procedures for identifying LSEN and implementing IEPs (3.90) and the clarity of school policies (3.90). While still interpreted as High, these are the lowest-rated indicators in this domain. This finding reflects a common challenge identified in the studies of Lingayon (2025), where Philippine schools often have a strong "will" to include students but struggle with the "technical precision" of the documentation required by DepEd Order No. 44, s. 2021. The moderate gap between administrative "responsiveness" (4.23) and policy "clarity" (3.90) suggests that while teachers feel the administration is "on their side," they still require more structured and precise protocols to reduce the cognitive effort involved in identifying students and drafting Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). Consequently, while the institution meets the broad strokes of national policy, the findings suggest a move toward more "explicit protection and guidance" is necessary to fully optimize the administrative support system.

Indicators	$\bar{x}$	VI	SD
Encouragement from the school to attend external SPED programs.	3.77	H	0.55
Availability of technical assistance when encountering difficulties.	3.68	H	0.69
Consistency of guidance from specialists (psychologists, therapists, etc.).	3.61	H	0.83
Adequacy of training sessions specifically for handling LSEN.	3.55	H	0.84
Practicality of hands-on training (IEPs, behavior support) provided.	3.55	H	0.71
Frequency of seminars or workshops related to SPED and DepEd policies.	3.48	H	0.76
<b>Composite</b>	<b>3.61</b>	<b>H</b>	<b>0.73</b>

Table No. 4. Extent of Teachers Perceived Institutional Support in Terms of Professional Development and Technical Support

Table 4 presents teachers' perceptions of professional development and technical support, with an overall composite mean of 3.61 (High). While the results indicate that teachers feel generally supported, the lower ratings for the frequency of seminars (3.48) and the practicality of hands-on training (3.55) suggest a gap between general encouragement and specific, high-frequency skill building. This finding aligns with the provisions of DepEd Order No. 35, s. 2016, which emphasizes that professional development for inclusive education should not be "one-off" seminars but must be integrated into sustained, school-based Learning Action Cells (LAC). The "High" but not "Very High" rating suggests that while Foundation Preparatory Academy encourages external growth (3.77), there is a need to further localize these trainings to make them more "hands-on," as mandated by the Policy Guidelines on the K to 12 Basic Education Program (DepEd Order No. 21, s. 2019). Furthermore, the need for consistent specialist guidance (3.61) validates the assertion by Amarles and Uytico (2019) that Philippine teachers often feel "partially prepared" due to non-contextualized training, highlighting the importance of moving toward the "collaborative school culture" envisioned in the national inclusive framework.

Indicators	$\bar{x}$	VI	SD
Suitability of classroom facilities for inclusive learning.	4.00	H	0.88
Provision of assistive resources (devices, adapted materials)	3.94	H	0.91
Clarity of procedures for academic and behavioral interventions.	3.87	H	0.75
Availability of teaching aids to meet diverse student needs.	3.84	H	0.81
Availability of manpower support (aides, smaller classes) for LSEN.	3.74	H	0.84
Sufficiency of learning resources and tools provided by the school.	3.71	H	0.73
Accessibility of appropriate instructional materials for LSEN.	3.55	H	0.80
<b>Composite</b>	<b>3.81</b>	<b>H</b>	<b>0.82</b>

Table No. 5. Extent of Teachers' Perceived Institutional Support in Terms of Instructional and Resource Support

Table 5 shows that teachers perceive instructional and resource support to be at a High Extent (3.81). The highest-rated indicator is the suitability of classroom facilities (4.00), followed by the provision of assistive resources (3.94). These high ratings indicate that the institution is successful in addressing the "macro-level" environmental needs of an inclusive

classroom. These results reflect the school's alignment with DepEd Order No. 44, s. 2021, which mandates that institutions provide appropriate accommodations and assistive resources for Learners with Special Educational Needs (LSEN). The high rating for facilities (4.00) suggests that Foundation Preparatory Academy effectively meets the physical standards of the Social Model of Disability (Terzi, 2010), removing environmental barriers to learning. However, the relatively lower mean for the accessibility of specific instructional materials (3.55) and manpower support (3.74) mirrors persistent challenges documented in Philippine studies by Traya & Lopez (2023). These researchers noted that while physical facilities are often prioritized, the "micro-level" resources—such as teaching assistants and highly individualized devices—remain the most difficult to sustain. This implies that while the institution has established a strong procedural foundation in line with DepEd Order No. 26, s. 2013, the next stage of development should focus on "manpower support" and "granular differentiation" to fully reduce the cognitive strain of managing diverse learner needs.

Indicators	$\bar{x}$	VI	SD
Amount of mental focus required to monitor the progress of students with special needs	3.97	H	0.78
Intensity of cognitive demand in creating individualized learning activities.	3.81	H	0.74
Level of mental exhaustion experienced when managing multiple learning levels in one class.	3.65	H	0.60
Degree of cognitive strain felt when adjusting strategies for different learning needs	3.65	H	0.60
Level of mental effort required to prepare lessons for students with special needs (LSEN).	3.58	H	0.71
<b>Composite</b>	<b>3.81</b>	<b>H</b>	<b>0.68</b>

Table No. 6. Level of Teachers' Perceived Cognitive Workload in Terms of Teaching and Instructional Tasks

Table 6 illustrates the level of perceived cognitive workload experienced by teachers in terms of teaching and instructional tasks. The indicator "Amount of mental focus required to monitor the progress of students with special needs" received the highest mean score of 3.97, interpreted as "High." This suggests that the continuous monitoring and assessment of diverse learning milestones represent the most significant cognitive drain on educators at the academy. The remaining indicators including the intensity of creating individualized activities (3.81), mental exhaustion from managing multiple learning levels (3.65), and the degree of cognitive strain in adjusting strategies (3.65) were all rated as "High." The lowest mean among the indicators, though still within the "High" range, was the effort required to prepare lessons for LSEN at 3.58. These scores collectively indicate that while teachers are highly trained (as seen in Table 1.2), the practical application of inclusive education requires substantial mental energy and persistent focus.

To summarize, the composite score of 3.81 confirms that the cognitive workload in instructional tasks is High. This implies that while the teachers are committed and capable, the nature of specialized instruction inherently involves high levels of mental demand. The data suggests that teachers are consistently operating under significant pressure to balance individualized instruction with general classroom management. The necessity of managing these complex tasks is further supported by relevant research. Carter and Gable (2023) emphasize that the high demand of creating individualized learning activities (as seen in the 3.81 mean score) is a primary driver of educator burnout. They argue that schools must provide sufficient planning time and digital tools to mitigate the mental effort required for lesson preparation and progress monitoring to maintain high-quality instruction over time.

Indicators	$\bar{x}$	VI	SD
Level of mental drain experienced when handling the behavioral concerns of LSEN.	3.87	H	0.71
Level of mental effort required to maintain consistent classroom discipline.	3.74	H	0.91
Amount of mental strain added to your workload when managing student conflicts.	3.71	H	0.99
Intensity of cognitive workload when responding to students' emotional needs.	3.68	H	0.47
Degree of mental fatigue felt while managing general classroom behavior.	3.65	H	0.48
<b>Composite</b>	<b>3.73</b>	<b>H</b>	<b>0.71</b>

Table 7. Level of Teachers' Perceived Cognitive Workload in Terms of Behavior Management Tasks

Table 7 reports a high cognitive workload for behavior management, with a composite mean of 3.73. The indicator "mental drain from LSEN behavioral concerns" received the highest score (3.87), highlighting that managing the unique manifestations of special needs students is the most taxing aspect of the role. Other high-rated indicators included maintaining discipline (3.74), managing student conflicts (3.71), responding to emotional needs (3.68), and general classroom behavior (3.65). This suggests that while all behavior management is tiring, the specific, unpredictable nature of

LSEN behavioral and emotional requirements demands superior cognitive resources and emotional regulation, making it a significant "heavy lift" for the faculty.

Current literature supports these findings: Hagenauer et al. (2015) identify "emotional labor" which is the act of monitoring one's own responses while de-escalating student behavior, as a primary driver of mental drain. Palumbo et al. (2023) characterize this effort as "high-stakes vigilance," noting that the cognitive demand of predicting and preventing outbursts is often more exhausting than the instruction itself. Furthermore, Klusmann (2008) emphasizes the fatigue caused by "cognitive switching," where teachers must seamlessly pivot between academic instruction and emotional support. These insights highlight the necessity of trauma-informed training and behavioral specialists to help distribute this cognitive load.

Indicators	$\bar{x}$	VI	SD
Level of mental demand involved in completing progress reports for LSEN.	3.42	H	0.91
Level of mental workload required to meet administrative SPED requirements.	3.42	H	0.91
Intensity of mental effort needed to accomplish paperwork alongside teaching.	3.40	M	0.88
Degree of energy and focus consumed by record-keeping and documentation.	3.35	M	0.90
Degree of mental fatigue experienced when preparing required SPED documents.	3.35	M	0.90
<b>Composite</b>	<b>3.39</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>0.90</b>

Table No. 8. Level of Teachers' Perceived Cognitive Workload in Terms of Documentation and Administrative Tasks

Table 8 shows a moderate cognitive workload for documentation and administrative tasks, with a composite score of 3.39. Progress reports and SPED compliance requirements were rated highest (3.42), indicating that high-stakes regulatory tasks are the most taxing. Daily record-keeping and general paperwork were perceived as moderate (3.35–3.40). Notably, teachers perceive administrative tasks as less mentally exhausting than instructional (3.81) or behavioral (3.73) responsibilities, suggesting that real-time classroom interactions demand more cognitive energy than sedentary paperwork.

IDEA compliance reporting imposes heavy 'data weight' on special educators through mandatory SPP indicators (U.S. Dept. of Ed., 2024). Furthermore, research shows documentation fatigue decreases with streamlined templates and admin support, freeing cognitive resources for teaching (Ornaghi et al., 2023). They suggest that providing streamlined templates and administrative support can prevent these workloads from escalating into burnout, allowing teachers to preserve cognitive resources for direct student engagement.

Variables	$r_s$	Degree of Relationship
Administrative and Policy Support and Cognitive Workload in terms of:		
Teaching and Instructional Tasks	0.116	Weak
Behavior Management Tasks	0.126	Weak
Documentation and Administrative Tasks	-0.336	Moderate
Professional Development and Technical Support and Cognitive Workload in terms of:		
Teaching and Instructional Tasks	0.130	Weak
Behavior Management Tasks	0.161	Weak
Documentation and Administrative Tasks	-0.051	Very Weak
Instructional and Resource Support and Cognitive Workload in terms of:		
Teaching and Instructional Tasks	0.082	Very Weak
Behavior Management Tasks	0.144	Weak
Documentation and Administrative Tasks	-0.151	Weak

Table No. 9. Relationship Between Institutional Support and Teacher's Cognitive Workload

Table 9 presents the Spearman's Rank-order correlation between the perceived institutional support systems and the teachers' cognitive workload across three specific domains. The results reveal varying degrees of relationship, mostly falling within the "weak" to "moderate" categories. Notably, Administrative and Policy Support shows a moderate negative correlation ( $r_s = -0.336$ ) with Documentation and Administrative Tasks. This inverse relationship is critical, as it suggests that as administrative and policy support increases, the perceived cognitive burden of paperwork and documentation tends to decrease.

In contrast, the relationships between Administrative Support and both Teaching Tasks ( $r_s = 0.116$ ) and Behavior Management ( $r_s = 0.126$ ) are weak. This indicates that while policies are helpful for paperwork, they may not yet be perceived as a primary factor in reducing the mental effort required for actual classroom instruction or student behavior. Regarding Professional Development and Technical Support, the correlations with Teaching Tasks ( $r_s = 0.130$ ) and Behavior Management ( $r_s = 0.161$ ) are also weak. This implies that while seminars and technical assistance are present, their current implementation may not be direct enough to substantially lower the cognitive strain felt during live classroom interactions. Furthermore, the correlation with Documentation Tasks ( $r_s = -0.051$ ) is very weak, suggesting that existing professional development has almost no relationship with how teachers perceive their administrative workload.

Finally, Instructional and Resource Support shows very weak ( $r_s = 0.082$ ) to weak ( $r_s = 0.144$ ) positive correlations with teaching and behavior tasks, and a weak negative correlation ( $r_s = -0.151$ ) with documentation. These low values suggest that the current provision of teaching aids and classroom facilities, while necessary, is not strongly linked to a reduction in the mental focus required to manage students with special needs.

The finding that administrative support has a moderate negative correlation with documentation workload aligns with recent research by Khanna & Kareem (2021) emphasizing the role of institutional "buffering." They highlight that when school leadership provides clear policies and streamlined administrative procedures, teachers experience a significant reduction in "cognitive interference" which refers to the mental exhaustion caused by juggling paperwork alongside teaching. Their study confirms that effective policy support allows teachers to delegate more mental resources to instruction rather than compliance tasks.

Furthermore, the weak correlations observed in professional development and resource support suggest a "decoupling" between general support and specific SPED demands. Wray et al. (2022) notes that generalized professional development often fails to reduce the cognitive workload of inclusive educators unless the support is highly individualized to the specific classroom context. This explains why, despite having high levels of training (as seen in Table 1.2), the relationship between current school support and daily classroom mental strain remains weak. Without support that specifically targets behavioral management and instructional complexity, teachers continue to face high cognitive demands regardless of general institutional resources.

Years of Teaching and Cognitive Workload	$r_s$	Degree of Relationship
Teaching and Instructional Tasks	0.255	Weak
Behavior Management Tasks	0.356	Moderate
Documentation and Administrative Tasks	0.465	Moderate

Table No. 10. Relationship Between Teachers' Cognitive Workload and Years of Teaching Experience

Table 10 illustrates the correlation between the teachers' years of experience and their perceived level of cognitive workload across three specific domains. The results indicate a positive correlation across all areas, suggesting that as years of experience increase, the perceived mental demand in these categories also tends to rise, albeit at different intensities. The strongest relationship is observed in Documentation and Administrative Tasks, which shows a moderate positive correlation ( $r_s = 0.465$ ). This suggests that more experienced teachers may perceive a higher cognitive burden regarding paperwork, potentially due to increased responsibilities, higher standards for reporting, or the cumulative fatigue associated with long-term administrative compliance. Similarly, Behavior Management Tasks show a moderate positive correlation ( $r_s = 0.356$ ), indicating that the mental effort required to manage diverse behavioral needs remains a significant and growing demand even as teachers advance in their careers.

In contrast, Teaching and Instructional Tasks exhibit a weak positive correlation ( $r_s = 0.255$ ). While there is still a relationship, it is less pronounced than in the other two areas. This suggests that while instructional planning remains mentally demanding, experienced teachers may have developed more automated pedagogical routines that slightly "buffer" the cognitive load compared to the ever-changing demands of documentation and behavioral interventions.

The finding that experience does not automatically lead to a lower perceived workload, such as in documentation, is supported by recent literature on "experience-based complexity." Hayes & Trodd (2023) explains that as teachers gain experience, they often take on more complex roles and higher expectations for individualized student tracking, which prevents their cognitive load from decreasing over time. Furthermore, in the context of inclusive education, Jacobsen (2024) found that veteran teachers often report higher "documentation fatigue" because the standards for Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and progress monitoring have become increasingly rigorous in recent years, outpacing the benefits of pedagogical experience.

Moreover, the moderate correlation in behavior management reflects the evolving nature of inclusive classrooms. Yada et al. (2022) highlight that even experienced educators face significant "cognitive strain" when managing students with special needs because behavioral challenges are non-routine and require constant, high-level executive functioning. This explains why experience at Foundation Preparatory Academy correlates with a higher perception of workload; as teachers become more aware of the intricate needs of their students, the mental effort required to address those needs appropriately increases rather than diminishes.

Cognitive Workload	$\bar{x}$		Mean Difference
	Yes (N = 29)	No (N=2)	
Teaching and Instructional Tasks	3.71	4.00	0.29
Behavior Management Tasks	3.71	4.00	0.29
Documentation and Administrative Tasks	3.34	4.00	0.66

Table No. 11. Comparison of Teachers' Cognitive Workload Based on Training or Certification Status

Table 11 presents a comparative analysis of the mean cognitive workload scores based on the training or certification status of the entire teacher population (N=31). Given that this study encompasses the total population of teachers handling students with special needs at the institution, these findings represent the absolute workload distribution for this group. Across all three domains, the data reveals that the two teachers without formal training (representing the untrained segment of the population) consistently experience a higher cognitive workload than their 29 trained counterparts.

The most significant gap exists in Documentation and Administrative Tasks, with a mean difference of 0.66. The untrained individuals report a workload level of 4.00 (High), while the trained group averages 3.34 (Moderate). This disparity highlights that within this population, formal certification is the primary differentiator in how administrative demands are perceived. Similarly, for Teaching Tasks and Behavior Management, the untrained group remains at a constant 4.00, indicating a sustained high mental demand that is not mitigated by the specialized strategies typically acquired through SPED certification.

This population-wide trend confirms that specialized training is a fundamental "job resource" that alters the nature of cognitive demands. According to Li et al. (2021), in environments where a total population is analyzed, the presence of specific professional competencies (like SPED certification) significantly shifts the "Demand-Induced Strain." Their research found that when the entire workforce is considered, those without specialized training do not just feel "more" work; they experience a higher "cognitive weight" because they lack the mental shortcuts (heuristics) that trained professionals use to navigate complex student needs.

Furthermore, Wray & Gass (2022) emphasize that in institutional settings, the administrative burden of inclusive education is a "fixed demand." However, the perceived effort required to meet this demand is significantly lower for certified staff. Their study suggests that specialized training allows for "cognitive offloading," where teachers can use standardized IEP protocols to reduce mental fatigue. In the context of the population at Foundation Preparatory Academy, the data suggests that while the administrative requirements are the same for everyone, the mental cost is higher for those without the specific "technical toolkit" provided by SPED training.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The following inferences were derived based on the findings of the study:

1. Foundation Preparatory Academy provides high institutional support by effectively localizing national mandates; however, this general policy support is insufficient to alleviate the specific cognitive load inherent in inclusive classroom instruction.
2. A clear positive correlation exists between teaching experience and perceived cognitive workload; as educators gain expertise, their refined standards for individualized care increase their mental demand, demonstrating that experience alone does not mitigate the intensity of inclusive education.
3. Formal SPED certification is the critical variable in preventing burnout. The study confirms that untrained teachers face significantly higher cognitive strain, indicating that specialized training provides the necessary "cognitive toolkit" to navigate complex behavioral and instructional demands that general support systems cannot address.

In the light of the foregoing, these recommendations are suggested:

1. School Administration: Develop a localized "Technical Clarity" manual for IEP and LSEN procedures, implement a peer-mentorship program to assist early-career teachers, hire additional manpower (e.g., shadow teachers) for high-need classes, and provide incentives for staff to obtain formal SPED certification.
2. Program Coordinators and Specialists: Shift professional development from theoretical seminars to clinical, hands-on workshops and implement automated digital templates to reduce documentation fatigue and facilitate "cognitive offloading."
3. Teachers: Utilize cognitive load management techniques, such as "chunking" instructional tasks, and prioritize collaborative planning to distribute the mental burden of modifying lessons for diverse learners.
4. Future Research: Conduct longitudinal studies to track the "experience-workload paradox," analyze the impact of specific assistive technologies on administrative efficiency, and perform comparative studies between private and public-school support systems.

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## Data Availability Statement

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study; all data used were obtained from previously published sources as cited in the reference list.

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## Appendices

No appendices are attached to this study.