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Parental Coping in Facilitating Modular Learning for Young Learners with Special Needs During an Earthquake Crisis: The Role of School and Teacher Support

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Abstract

This study explored how parents coped with facilitating modular learning for learners with special educational needs during earthquake-related disruptions in Mandaue City, Cebu, with particular attention to school and teacher support. Using a qualitative phenomenological design, the study gathered data through face-to-face semi-structured interviews with seven purposively selected parents. Thematic analysis revealed four major themes: dual role strain, limited resources and support systems, adaptive strategies for managing emotional demands, and perceptions and challenges of modular learning. The findings showed that parents struggled to balance caregiving and teaching responsibilities while addressing their children's educational and emotional needs. Limited learning materials, inadequate teacher guidance, and insufficient access to therapy and external support increased parental stress, fatigue, and uncertainty. To cope, parents established flexible routines, practiced patience and emotional regulation, and adapted learning activities to their children's individual needs. However, maintaining learner attention, participation, and educational continuity remained challenging. The findings indicate that parental coping is closely linked to the availability of responsive support systems and effective school-home collaboration. The study recommends strengthening parental training, improving school communication, and expanding access to appropriate learning resources and support services to promote inclusive and disaster-responsive education for learners with special educational needs.

Keywords: Earthquake Crisis, Learners with Special Educational Needs, Modular Learning, Parental Coping, Phenomenological Study, School and Teacher Support

Introduction

Natural disasters, particularly earthquakes, significantly disrupt education systems worldwide, with learners with special educational needs (LSENs) facing additional challenges because they require consistent support, structured routines, and individualized instruction (UNESCO, 2023) [39]. The Philippines is highly vulnerable to earthquakes due to its location along the Pacific Ring of Fire, and Cebu and Central Visayas are exposed to seismic activity associated with the Cebu Fault System and offshore fault lines (PHIVOLCS, 2025). The destructive 7.2-magnitude Bohol earthquake in 2013 and the 6.9-magnitude Northern Cebu earthquake on September 30, 2025, illustrate the continuing threat earthquakes pose to communities and educational institutions (PHIVOLCS, 2025; PPDO Bohol, 2013 [26]). Following the 2025 earthquake, hundreds of classrooms were destroyed, thousands sustained varying degrees of damage, and more than 50,000 learners and over 1,400 school personnel were affected across Cebu Province (Department of Education Region VII, 2025) [10]. In Mandaue City, 16 of 48 public schools sustained partial damage, while some school buildings were declared unsafe, leading to the suspension of face-to-face classes and disrupting learners' access to regular instruction (Department of Education Region VII, 2025) [10].

To maintain educational continuity during these disruptions, schools adopted alternative learning modalities, including modular learning, and implemented temporary learning spaces and "EduKahon" learning kits in coordination with local government units and the Office of Civil Defense (Department of Education Region VII, 2025) [10]. Although these interventions helped learners continue their education, modular learning increased parents' responsibilities, particularly those caring for LSENs who need individualized guidance, emotional reassurance, and consistent routines. Parents often had to facilitate lessons, communicate with teachers, and support their children's learning while balancing employment, household duties, and disaster-related stress (Dangle & Sumaoang, 2020 [8]; Garbe *et al*., 2022). Previous studies have examined parental involvement and the challenges of modular learning, including difficulties understanding self-learning modules and motivating children to complete learning activities (DepEd, 2020 [9]; Tria, 2021 [37]; Abdulrahman, 2024; Alicabo & Cacharo, 2025). However, much of the existing literature focuses on general education learners, academic outcomes, or pandemic-related disruptions, leaving limited understanding of how parents of LSENs experience and cope with earthquake-related educational interruptions, particularly in Cebu and Mandaue City (Rafliana, 2020; World Bank & GFDRR, 2021 [46]; UNICEF, 2023 [41]).

This research gap highlights the need to understand not only the educational responsibilities assumed by parents during earthquakes but also their emotional experiences, available support systems, and strategies for sustaining their children's learning. Epstein's Framework of Parental Involvement (1995) [12], Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978) [44], and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) [5] provide the theoretical foundation for examining these experiences. Collectively, these perspectives emphasize the importance of family participation, guided learning, and supportive relationships among the home, school, and community in children's development. The study is also informed by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) [42] and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (2015), which promote inclusive and equitable education, as well as Philippine laws and policies, including Republic Act No. 7277, Republic Act No. 11650, and DepEd Order No. 022, s. 2024, which support the educational rights of learners with disabilities and learning continuity during emergencies. These theoretical and policy foundations underscore the shared responsibility of families, schools, and the government in ensuring that LSENs continue to receive appropriate educational support despite disaster-related disruptions.

In response to this gap, the present phenomenological study explores the lived experiences of parents facilitating modular learning for their children with special educational needs during earthquake-related disruptions in Mandaue City. Specifically, it seeks to understand how parents describe their instructional and caregiving roles, the challenges they encounter with learning resources and support systems, the emotional demands they experience, and their perceptions of modular learning during emergencies. It also examines the coping strategies parents employ to sustain their children's education and well-being despite limited preparation, resources, and support. By giving voice to parents' experiences, the study may help schools, educational institutions, and policymakers develop more inclusive, responsive, and disaster-resilient learning support systems that address the needs of families of LSENs. Aligned with the Education and Social Development Research Agenda, the study also contributes to the goals of SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) by supporting efforts to promote accessible, inclusive, and resilient education during emergencies.

Materials and Methods

Design

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences, challenges, emotional responses, and coping strategies of parents facilitating modular learning for learners with special educational needs (LSENs) during earthquake-related disruptions in Mandaue City. The Input-Process-Output (IPO) model guided the flow of the study, with the input consisting of purposively selected parents or primary caregivers of LSENs enrolled at Mandaue City Central School SPED Center and a modified open-ended questionnaire. The process involved semi-structured, face-to-face interviews lasting 20 to 30 minutes, followed by thematic analysis using Braun and Clarke's (2006) [4] approach to identify and interpret meaningful patterns in participants' accounts. The output focused on understanding parental roles, challenges in accessing educational resources and support, emotional demands, coping strategies, and the influence of school and teacher support during earthquake-related learning disruptions. The findings provide insights into how parents manage their children's educational and emotional needs while balancing caregiving and learning responsibilities during crises. These insights may inform inclusive, disaster-responsive educational strategies, strengthen school–family communication and coordination with therapists, local government units, and community organizations, and guide policies that support learning continuity for LSENs during future emergencies.

Population and Setting

The study was conducted at Mandaue City Central School (MCCS) SPED Center in Mandaue City, under the Department of Education (DepEd), Region VII–Central Visayas, Schools Division of Mandaue City. The participants were seven (7) parents or primary caregivers of learners with special educational needs (LSENs) enrolled at the school who had firsthand experience facilitating their children's modular learning during earthquake-related disruptions. They were selected through purposive sampling based on specific inclusion criteria: being at least 18 years old, residing in Mandaue City, and having directly supported their children's learning during or after earthquake-related disruptions. The participants were chosen because their experiences could provide meaningful insights into the challenges, emotional responses, and coping strategies involved in sustaining their children's education during emergencies.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to examine the interview data and identify recurring patterns in parents' experiences of facilitating modular learning for learners with special educational needs (LSENs) during earthquake-related

disruptions. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) [4] six-phase approach, the researcher familiarized herself with the transcribed interviews, generated initial codes, developed and reviewed themes, and defined and named the final themes. Related codes were clustered into themes reflecting parents' challenges, emotional responses, coping strategies, and experiences of school and teacher support. Representative quotations were selected to support and illustrate the identified themes. Data collection continued until no new themes or meaningful insights emerged, indicating data saturation. The findings provided an in-depth understanding of parental coping and served as a basis for recommendations to strengthen school–family collaboration and promote inclusive, disaster-responsive educational practices.

Interview Questionnaire

Part I. Demographic Profile

1.1 Age: _____

1.2 Relationship to the child: _____
Mother/Father/Guardian

1.3 Age of the child: _____

1.4 Type of special need (optional): _____

1.5 Number of children being supported in modular learning

1.6 Length of time facilitating modular learning for the child

Part II. Interview Questions

1. What are the overall experiences of parents in facilitating modular learning for their LSEN children during earthquakes?
2. How do parents describe and make sense of the roles and responsibilities they assume in facilitating modular learning during earthquakes?
3. What challenges do parents encounter, and how do they perceive the adequacy of learning resources, school support, and other support systems during this time?
4. How do parents experience and manage the emotional demands of balancing caregiving and modular learning facilitation during earthquakes?
5. How do parents support and make sense of modular learning as an educational approach for their LSEN children during earthquakes?

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical principles to protect participants' rights, privacy, and well-being. Necessary approvals were secured, and written informed consent was obtained after explaining the study's purpose, procedures, voluntary nature, and participants' right to withdraw or skip questions. Honesty, academic integrity, and transparency were maintained throughout the research, and potential conflicts of interest were avoided or disclosed. Participants' identities and personal information were kept confidential, while physical documents were securely stored and disposed of according to institutional guidelines. Interviews were conducted with sensitivity, recognizing that discussing earthquake-related experiences could cause emotional discomfort; participants could pause or stop at any time. Although no financial compensation was provided, small tokens of appreciation, such as refreshments, were offered, and the findings aimed to support more inclusive and disaster-responsive educational practices for learners with special educational needs (LSENs).

Results and Discussion

The thematic analysis of the interviews with seven parent participants yielded four major themes that captured their experiences in facilitating modular learning for learners with special educational needs during earthquake-related disruptions. These themes were: (1) Dual Role Strain: Parents as Teachers and Caregivers, (2) Limited Resources and Support Systems, (3) Adaptive Strategies for Managing Emotional Demands, and (4) Perceptions and Challenges of Modular Learning. Across the participants' accounts, modular learning required parents to take on expanded instructional and caregiving responsibilities while simultaneously responding to the safety and emotional needs of their children. Their experiences also revealed differences in the availability of learning resources, school and professional support, and the extent to which modular activities could be adapted to their children's individual needs. Together, the themes portray parental coping as a continuing process of managing responsibilities, adjusting learning practices, regulating emotional demands, and sustaining their children's participation in learning during a period of disruption.

The first theme, Dual Role Strain: Parents as Teachers and Caregivers, showed that parents experienced an expansion of their usual responsibilities as they became primary facilitators of learning at home. They explained instructions, read questions aloud, demonstrated tasks, assisted their children in writing, and modified activities while continuing to attend to household, work, and caregiving responsibilities. The earthquake context further intensified these demands because parents had to interrupt learning whenever aftershocks, fear, or behavioral reactions required immediate attention to safety and emotional reassurance. In response, parents adapted their support by simplifying activities, incorporating play, using rewards, allowing breaks, and choosing learning periods when their children were more receptive. These accounts indicate that facilitating modular learning involved not only completing academic tasks but also continuously balancing instruction, caregiving, safety, and the child's readiness to participate. The findings show that facilitating modular learning during earthquake-related disruptions substantially expanded the role of parents of learners with special educational needs, requiring them to function simultaneously as caregivers, learning facilitators, and sources of emotional and physical security. This experience extends beyond ordinary parental involvement because parents were required to assume instructional responsibilities typically performed by teachers while also responding to the instability brought about by the earthquake. From the perspective of Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978) [44], the parents effectively became the more knowledgeable others who provided scaffolding by explaining instructions, simplifying tasks, demonstrating activities, and guiding their children through learning experiences that could not be completed independently. Their experience also reflects Epstein's framework of parental involvement (1995) [12], particularly the dimension of learning at home, although the present findings suggest that crisis conditions may intensify this involvement to a level that places considerable demands on families. Previous studies similarly found that home-based learning increased parental workload and required families to assume greater instructional responsibility, particularly when direct teacher support was limited (Bhamani *et al*., 2020; Dong *et al*., 2020; Dangle & Sumaoang, 2020) [3, 11, 8]. The present findings therefore suggest that disaster-responsive learning systems should recognize parents as important partners in education without transferring disproportionate instructional responsibility to them.

The second theme, Limited Resources and Support Systems, reflected the difficulties parents encountered in accessing appropriate instructional materials, professional guidance, therapeutic services, and other forms of assistance needed by their children. Several parents relied largely on their own initiative, using available household materials and personally developed strategies when specialized resources were unavailable. They also expressed the need for clearer guidance in managing behaviors, short attention spans, communication difficulties, and other learning needs that became more difficult to address during home-based instruction. At the same time, participants identified accessible teacher communication and flexible school arrangements, such as convenient module distribution, as helpful forms of support when these were available. Overall, the findings showed that the adequacy of support varied across families, leaving some parents to assume educational and behavior-management responsibilities with limited preparation and external assistance. The limited availability of learning resources, therapeutic services, parental training, and other forms of external assistance further shaped how families experienced modular learning. Parents' reliance on personal initiative and improvised strategies indicates that coping was influenced not only by individual capacity but also by the availability and accessibility of surrounding support systems. This finding can be understood through Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) [5], which emphasizes that children's development and learning are influenced by interactions among the family, school, community, and broader institutional environment. When communication with teachers, flexible module distribution, or other school-based assistance was available, parents described these forms of support as helpful, suggesting that stronger connections between the home and school may reduce the burden placed on families. This is consistent with literature emphasizing coordinated educational, health, and social support for learners with disabilities during emergencies (UNICEF, 2021; Global Education Cluster & UNICEF, 2023) [40, 14]. The findings thus indicate that parental coping should not be viewed solely as a personal characteristic, because it is also shaped by the responsiveness of the systems surrounding the family.

The third theme, Adaptive Strategies for Managing Emotional Demands, demonstrated how parents adjusted their routines and responses to cope with the emotional pressures associated with facilitating learning during the crisis. Parents established short and flexible learning schedules, adjusted activities according to their child's mood and readiness, and shared responsibilities with spouses or extended family members when possible. They also described the importance of patience, waiting for tantrums or emotional distress to subside, and accepting that some learning activities could not be completed on particularly difficult days. An important part of their coping involved knowing their child's behavioral patterns, preferences, triggers, and motivators, which helped them decide when and how to introduce learning tasks. These strategies allowed parents to manage both their own emotional limits and their children's responses while maintaining some degree of continuity in home-based learning. The adaptive strategies used by parents illustrate how coping developed through everyday familiarity with their children's individual needs, behavior, and emotional responses. Flexible routines, patience, delayed task completion, reward systems, and shared caregiving responsibilities enabled parents to adjust learning expectations to the child's readiness rather than rigidly following the prescribed module schedule. These strategies suggest that parents possessed valuable experiential knowledge of their children, particularly regarding triggers, motivators, attention patterns, and emotional thresholds. Such knowledge became an important resource during crisis conditions because it allowed parents to make immediate decisions about whether to continue, modify, or temporarily suspend learning activities. At the same time, participants' accounts of exhaustion, frustration, and occasions when learning could not continue demonstrate that adaptation did not eliminate the emotional burden of caregiving and instruction. This supports previous research showing that parents of children with disabilities may experience elevated stress and burnout, particularly when professional and respite support are limited (Hayes & Watson, 2013; Miodrag & Hodapp, 2010; Singer, 2006) [16, 20, 33]. Rather than interpreting these responses only as evidence of resilience, the findings are better understood as adaptive efforts developed under constrained and demanding circumstances.

The fourth theme, Perceptions and Challenges of Modular Learning, revealed mixed views regarding the usefulness of modular learning for learners with special educational needs. Some parents valued the modules because they provided structure, refreshed previously learned skills, and maintained a connection with schooling during periods when face-to-face classes were disrupted. However, many participants reported difficulty using modules that relied heavily on written instructions, written responses, sustained attention, and independent task completion, particularly for children who were non-verbal or had communication, motor, behavioral, or attention-related needs. Parents frequently had to read instructions, simplify content, demonstrate activities, guide responses, or substantially assist their children in completing the required tasks. The findings therefore showed that while modular learning provided a means of maintaining educational continuity, its usefulness differed considerably depending on the learner's individual abilities, the degree of parental assistance required, and the availability of appropriate support. The mixed perceptions of modular learning highlight an important distinction between educational continuity and educational accessibility. Although some parents valued the modules because they helped preserve routine, maintain connection with schooling, and review previously learned content, others found the format poorly suited to the communication, motor, behavioral, and attentional needs of their children. The reliance on written instructions, written responses, sustained concentration, and relatively standardized task structures meant that some learners could participate only through substantial parental mediation. This finding is consistent with inclusive education literature emphasizing that emergency learning approaches must be flexible, differentiated, and responsive to the diverse functional needs of learners with disabilities (Miles & Singal, 2010; UNESCO, 2020) [19, 38]. It also reflects the principles underlying the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Republic Act No. 11650, both of which emphasize inclusive education and the provision of appropriate support and accommodations for learners with disabilities. The results therefore suggest that providing modules alone does not necessarily ensure meaningful

access to learning unless the materials and expected responses are adapted to the learner's abilities and support needs.

A particularly significant implication of the findings concerns the extent to which completed modules can accurately represent learner performance when parents provide substantial assistance or complete tasks on behalf of the child. When learners are unable to respond independently because of communication, motor, or behavioral limitations, the resulting output may reflect the level of parental support as much as the learner's own knowledge or skills. This raises an important issue of assessment validity, since completion of a written module may not always provide an accurate measure of learning for some LSENs. The findings therefore support the use of alternative and more flexible ways of demonstrating learning, including oral responses, performance-based tasks, visual activities, demonstrations, and other modes aligned with the learner's functional abilities. Such approaches would be consistent with the study's broader implication that crisis-responsive education must account for individual differences rather than apply uniform expectations to all learners. The experiences of the participating parents ultimately show that meaningful learning continuity for LSENs requires not only the availability of instructional materials but also accessible design, responsive teacher support, strong home-school collaboration, and coordinated professional assistance.

Implementation Table

Enhanced Parent Support Framework for Modular Learning of LSENs during Crisis

Area of Concern	Objectives	Strategies	Persons Involved	Budget (PHP)	Source of Budget	Time Frame	Expected Outcome	Accomplishment	Remarks
Dual Role Strain of Parents	Help parents balance caregiving and teaching roles	Provide structured schedules and guides	Teachers, Parents	2,000	School Funds	1–2 months	Improved time management		
Limited Teaching Skills	Improve parents' instructional ability	Conduct training sessions and workshops	Teachers, SPED Teachers	3,000	School / PTA	Quarterly	Increased teaching confidence		
Behavioral Challenges of LSENs	Equip parents with behavior management strategies	Lectures from therapists on handling breakdowns and behaviors	Developmental Pediatricians, OT, SLP, PT, SPED Teachers	8,000	Research / Therapy Centers	Quarterly	Better behavior management at home		
Emotional Stress of Parents	Support emotional well-being	Counseling sessions and support groups	Guidance Counselor, Teachers	2,500	School / LGU	Ongoing	Reduced stress and burnout		
Lack of Resources	Ensure access to materials	Ensure learning kits and printed modules	School Admin, LGU	5,000	LGU / Donations	Monthly	Improved access to materials		
Learner Participation Issues	Improve participation and focus	Use differentiated and interactive activities	Teachers, Parents	2,000	School Funds	Ongoing	Increased engagement		
Communication Gaps	Strengthen collaboration	Regular check-ins and communication channels	Teachers, Parents	1,000	School Funds	Weekly	Improved coordination		
Lack of Professional Support	Provide expert guidance	Partner with therapy centers in Cebu for lectures	Researchers, Therapy Centers	5,000	Research / External Partners	Quarterly	Parents gain professional insights		

Conclusion

The study concludes that facilitating modular learning during earthquake-related disruptions placed substantial instructional, caregiving, and emotional demands on parents of learners with special educational needs (LSENs). Parents assumed expanded responsibilities as learning facilitators while simultaneously ensuring their children's safety, managing behavioral and emotional concerns, and attending to family and household responsibilities, often with limited resources, professional guidance, and therapeutic support. Despite these difficulties, they developed adaptive strategies such as establishing flexible routines, modifying learning activities, practicing patience and emotional control, using rewards, sharing caregiving responsibilities, and responding to their children's individual needs and readiness to participate. The findings also show that while modular learning helped maintain educational continuity, its reliance on written responses, standardized instructions, and sustained independent participation created difficulties for some LSENs, particularly those with communication, motor, behavioral, and attention-related needs. These findings are important to special and inclusive education because they demonstrate that continuity of learning during crises must be accompanied by accessible learning approaches, adequate parental support, and responsive school-home collaboration to make education meaningful for LSENs. The study therefore provides useful evidence for schools, teachers, curriculum planners, policymakers, and support service providers in strengthening family-centered and disability-responsive approaches to education during emergency situations.

Based on the findings, schools and education stakeholders are encouraged to strengthen structured parental support, maintain accessible and consistent teacher-parent communication, provide appropriate learning resources, and develop flexible and differentiated modular activities that consider the individual abilities and needs of LSENs. Parent-friendly instructional guides, practical training in

basic instructional and behavior-management strategies, flexible learning arrangements, and greater access to therapeutic and professional support may further help parents sustain their children's learning while managing the demands associated with crisis situations. Future studies may extend the present research by involving larger and more diverse groups of participants from different educational and geographic contexts and by incorporating the perspectives of teachers, school administrators, therapists, policymakers, and other stakeholders to provide a broader understanding of learning continuity for LSENs during disasters. Further research may also examine the long-term effects of disaster-related educational disruptions on LSENs, evaluate the effectiveness of parent training and disability-responsive learning interventions, and explore the experiences of learners themselves in home-based or alternative learning environments. Such investigations can further contribute to the development of inclusive, responsive, and disaster-resilient educational practices that remain centered on the learning and support needs of LSENs and their families.

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