

OCCUPATIONAL STRESS AND COPING STRATEGIES AMONG FIVE SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS IN SELANGOR

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ABSTRACT

This study examines special education teachers' reactions to occupational stress and the coping strategies they adopt during and outside school hours. The teaching profession, particularly in the field of special education, requires significant emotional, cognitive, and physical commitment, which often leads to heightened stress levels. Adopting a qualitative phenomenological approach within a case study design, five special education teachers in Selangor, aged between 26 and 51 years old (three females and two males), were selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using in-depth semi-structured interviews, transcribed verbatim, and analysed thematically. The findings reveal that teachers frequently experienced anger, tiredness, frustration, and annoyance, especially in relation to managing students' behavioural challenges, meeting parental expectations, and dealing with administrative workload. During school hours, teachers commonly coped by sharing concerns with colleagues, browsing social media or watching videos during breaks, consuming snacks and drinks, taking short naps, discussing issues with school administrators, and modifying teaching strategies to accommodate student needs. Outside of school, coping strategies included taking vacations, engaging in recreational activities, and seeking emotional support from family members and close friends. The study emphasizes the importance of providing systematic stress management support, emotional resilience training, and collegial support systems to promote healthier working environments. It is recommended that school leadership and policymakers prioritize teacher well-being to sustain motivation, reduce burnout, and enhance quality of special education services.

Keywords: coping strategies, emotional well-being, special education teachers, occupational stress, qualitative research

INTRODUCTION

Teaching is recognized as a demanding profession involving wide-ranging responsibilities such as classroom management, lesson planning, instructional delivery, assessment, and administrative duties. Teachers are also required to maintain communication with students, parents, and school administrators. These demands become more complex in special education settings where teachers work with students who require individualized instructional support, emotional guidance, and behavioural management. As noted by Lazarus (2006), special education teachers experience higher levels of stress compared to mainstream teachers due to the additional time, effort, and resources needed to meet the diverse learning needs of students with disabilities.

In the Malaysian context, the number of students with special educational needs continues to rise. As of June 30, 2019, the Ministry of Education has recorded 87,574 students with SEN nationwide, according to its director-general, Datuk Dr. Amin Senin. Of this number, 2,492 SEN students are enrolled in Special Education Schools (SES), while 68,874 are placed under the Special Education Integrated Programme (SEIP), including 967 in preschool, 38,710 in primary schools, and 29,197 in secondary schools (Kannan, 2019). The number of special education needs (SEN) students at the primary and secondary levels recorded an increase in 2023 at 17.5 per cent and 0.9 per cent respectively to 1,736 pupils and 1,055 pupils (Department of Statistics, 2024). However, this increase has not been matched by sufficient staffing. The Ministry of Education reported 18,702 teaching vacancies in 2021, with special education listed as one of the critical shortage areas (Ashman, 2021). This shortage results in existing special education teachers carrying heavier workloads, managing more students, and assuming multiple roles within the school environment. Previous research in Malaysia has shown that special education teachers often experience emotional exhaustion, stress related to administrative tasks, limited teaching resources, and insufficient institutional support, which contribute to burnout and turnover (Norizan et al., 2013). If these challenges persist, the education system risks losing experienced teachers and compromising the quality of services for students with disabilities.

Studies have investigated stress factors among special education teachers (Adeniyi, 2010; Mohd Zuri et al., 2014; Dejeron, 2025) and the challenges they face when managing workload and student behaviour (Otieno & Anika, 2018; Norizan, 2013). Other research has examined variables related to stress such as teacher efficacy, work engagement, administrative support, social support, and job-related stressors (Cancio et al., 2018; Celik & Kuz, 2023; Eke et al., 2020; Braun-Lewensohn, 2015; Mathews, 2020; Minghui et al., 2018). Studies on coping strategies have also been conducted (Eastwood, 2021; Folostina & Patrascoiu, 2012; Gabule & Baldonado, 2025; Shahzad et al., 2021). However, the majority of these studies are quantitative and conducted outside of Malaysia, including in the United States, China, Nigeria, and the Middle East. While useful, quantitative studies may not fully capture the lived emotional experience, context-specific pressures, and personal meaning attached to coping practices among teachers. There remains a lack of qualitative research in Malaysia exploring how special education teachers personally navigate stress on a day-to-day basis, both during and beyond school hours.

To address this gap, the present study employs a qualitative phenomenological approach to understand how special education teachers in Selangor react to occupational stress and the coping strategies they use. The objectives of the study are;

- i) To explore special education teachers' reactions to occupational stress.
- ii) To identify coping strategies used during school hours.
- iii) To identify coping strategies used outside school hours.

This study is expected to provide practical insights that may support teacher well-being, reduce burnout, and inform policies aimed at strengthening Malaysia's special education system.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Occupational Stress among Teachers

Occupational stress refers to a psychological or physiological response that emerges when job demands exceed an individual's ability to cope, causing strain and a decline in well-being (Jeyaraj, 2013). Stress among teachers may manifest through emotional, cognitive, and behavioural symptoms such as frustration, exhaustion, irritability, anxiety, and reduced motivation. According to Chetia et al. (2018), occupational stress occurs when individuals face high job demands but possess low control over their work situations. Within school contexts, teachers frequently encounter stressors such as student misbehaviour, interpersonal conflict, parental expectations, administrative load, performance evaluations, and time pressure (Gebrekirstos, 2015).

Special education teachers often experience even greater stress compared to mainstream teachers due to the complexity of working with students who have diverse learning, behavioural, and developmental needs. They are required to modify instruction, create individualized learning materials, collaborate closely with parents, and manage challenging behaviours, which increases emotional and cognitive workload. Lazarus (2006) reported that special education teachers exhibit higher stress levels due to the need for additional time, patience, and instructional flexibility when supporting students with disabilities. This suggests that special education teachers are more vulnerable to burnout, fatigue, and job dissatisfaction.

Coping Strategies among Special Education Teachers

A substantial body of research has examined stressors and coping strategies used by special education teachers across various contexts. Cancio et al. (2018) conducted a study involving special educators in several U.S. states and found that stress commonly stemmed from increased workloads, role conflict, performance pressure, and job insecurity. To cope, many participants engaged in active coping strategies, such as exercise, leisure activities, and seeking social-emotional support from family and friends. Notably, maladaptive strategies such as excessive eating, alcohol use, and recreational drug use were less commonly endorsed.

Similarly, Kebbi and Al-Hroub (2018) reported that teachers viewed relaxing activities, taking short breaks, napping, jogging, and exercising as highly effective coping strategies. They also found that discussing challenges with colleagues and family members provided moderate emotional relief, while reliance on medication and changes in appetite were ranked as less effective coping responses. These findings align with the positive benefits of social support and self-care routines in reducing occupational stress (Cancio et al., 2018).

However, Mathews (2020) presented differing results, noting that special education teachers frequently used palliative coping strategies such as eating and prescribed medication. Active coping strategies like exercise and outdoor activities were beneficial but not the most commonly practiced. These contrasting findings suggest that coping strategies vary depending on personal preferences, access to resources, and workplace culture.

Other studies highlight the significance of emotional and social support systems. Cancio et al. (2018) emphasized that developing hobbies, exercising, and engaging in supportive social networks can reduce burnout and maintain psychological resilience. Likewise, Eke et al. (2020) concluded that sharing concerns with colleagues, family, and friends is a widely practiced method among both special and general educators in Nigeria to manage work-related stress. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Anderson (2021) also found that teachers sought emotional support by confiding in others when experiencing stress related to remote teaching and behavioural challenges.

In addition to emotional coping, some teachers rely on instructional strategies to alleviate stress. Otieno and Anika (2018) observed that implementing Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) enabled teachers to provide structured, tailored instruction to students and helped reduce classroom difficulties. Likewise, Shahzad et al. (2021) reported that teachers used IEPs, therapeutic techniques, and relaxation exercises to cope with stress associated with teaching special needs students.

Coping Strategies in Islam

In Islamic perspectives, coping with stress involves spiritual, cognitive, and behavioural dimensions. Al-Munajjid (2006) noted that Muslims are encouraged to recognize the temporary nature of worldly struggles and to rely on God's wisdom and decree. Abdul Malik Mujahid (2006) similarly emphasized acknowledging human limitations and trusting that outcomes are ultimately determined by Allah.

Achour et al. (2015) identified several Islamic-based coping strategies, including *tawakkal* (placing full trust in God), performing prayers, practicing *zikr* (remembrance of God), exercising patience, fostering positive thinking, and seeking social support. Prayer helps redirect attention from worldly stressors, while *zikr* provides emotional grounding and spiritual calmness. Patience and forgiveness contribute to emotional resilience, enabling individuals to view life challenges as opportunities for personal growth. Additionally, Islam places strong emphasis on community support, which can reduce isolation and provide emotional comfort during stressful situations.

Empirical studies in the Malaysian context affirm these practices. Tengku Kasim and Abdul Majid (2020) found that teachers who devoted themselves to religious practices experienced greater emotional control and stress reduction. Similarly, Abdul Majid et al. (2021) noted that engaging in prayer, reciting the Qur'an, and performing Tahajjud enhanced motivation and alleviated anxiety.

Theoretical Framework: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

This study is guided by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, which outlines human motivation across sequential levels of needs: physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization (Maslow, 1970). Higher-order needs such as cognitive, aesthetic, and self-transcendence needs were later incorporated (Ciccarelli & White, 2017; Venter, 2016). According to Maslow, unmet lower-level needs dominate a person's attention and behaviour until satisfied (Zalenski & Raspa, 2006).

For special education teachers, physiological needs (e.g., rest, food, and hydration) and safety needs (e.g., emotional security and stable workloads) must be addressed before higher-order coping strategies can be effective (Griffin, 2014). Love and belonging needs are fulfilled through supportive relationships with colleagues, family, and students (Schultz & Schultz, 2015). Esteem needs relate to recognition, professional competence, and a sense of accomplishment. Cognitive and aesthetic needs are reflected in teachers' desire to innovate instruction and find meaning in their professional roles. Ultimately, through effective coping and emotional resilience, teachers may achieve self-actualization and, for some, spiritual fulfillment through self-transcendence (Venter, 2016).

In summary, Maslow's framework provides a useful lens for analyzing how special education teachers use coping strategies to maintain well-being, manage stress, and pursue professional and personal growth.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design aimed at understanding how special education teachers experience and cope with occupational stress during and outside school hours. Phenomenology is appropriate for this study because it focuses on describing individuals' lived experiences and the meanings they attach to those experiences (Neubauer et al., 2019). Through this approach, the study sought to capture not only what the teachers experienced, but also how they perceived, interpreted, and responded to stress in their professional lives.

Five special education teachers currently serving in government and private schools in Selangor participated in this study. They were selected using purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in teaching students with special educational needs. The sample consisted of three male and two female teachers, with ages ranging from 26 to 51 years old. Each participant had varying years of teaching experience and worked in different school settings, offering diverse perspectives on occupational stress and coping practices. The demographic profiles of all participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic of participants.

| Pseudonym | Age | Education | Location | Years of Teaching | Marital Status |
|-----------|-----|----------------------------------------------------|----------------|----------------------------------------------------|----------------|
| P1 | 33 | - Bachelor's Degree in Islamic Studies (Usuluddin) | Petaling Utama | 8 years (6 years at Sabah and 2 years in Selangor) | Single |

| | | | | | |
|----|----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| P2 | 33 | - DPLI (IPG Kent, Sabah) -Bachelor's Degree in Islamic Studies (Da'wah) | Klang | 8 years (7 years at Sabah and 1 years in Selangor) | Married with 2 children |
| P3 | 37 | - DPLI (IPG Kent, Sabah) -Bachelor's Degree in Arabic Language - Master's Degree in Special Education | Kuala Selangor | 12 years (8 years at Sabah, 4 years in Selangor) | Single |
| P4 | 26 | - DPLI (IPG, Sabah) Bachelor's Degree (Psychology) | Petaling Jaya | 2 years | Married with no children |
| P5 | 51 | Maktab Perguruan (Selangor) | Kuala Kubu Bharu | 25 years (20 years as Islamic Education teacher and 5 years as Special Education teacher) | Married with 5 children |

Sampling and Data Collection

Purposive sampling was used to select the participants, as this method allows researchers to intentionally identify and choose individuals who are able to provide rich and relevant information for the study (Patton, 2002). In this study, participants were selected based on their experience teaching students with special educational needs in school settings. This approach ensured that the data obtained reflected genuine experiences of occupational stress and coping practices in special education contexts.

Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews, which enabled the researcher to explore participants' experiences while also allowing flexibility to probe further when needed. The interview session began with verbal consent from each participant, followed by questions regarding demographic information. The main interview questions were divided into two parts: (1) participants' reactions to occupational stress, and (2) coping strategies used during and outside school hours. All interviews were audio-recorded with permission, and field notes were taken to capture non-verbal cues, emotional expressions, and contextual observations. Each interview lasted approximately 40 minutes.

Data Analysis

The interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis based on Braun & Clarke (2006). The researcher read and reread the transcripts to become familiar with the data, followed by systematic coding to identify meaningful patterns and

categories. The codes were then organized into themes and sub-themes that represented the participants' experiences and coping strategies. This process allowed the researcher to develop an in-depth understanding of how special education teachers perceive, experience, and manage occupational stress.

Ethical Consideration

Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the interviews, and they were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without consequence. Participants were assured that their identities would remain confidential and anonymous. At the beginning of each interview, the researcher provided an explanation of the study's purpose and encouraged participants to share their experiences openly. Efforts were made to build trust and create a comfortable environment, acknowledging the sensitivity of discussing work-related stress. All interviews were audio-recorded with permission, and participants were informed of how the data would be used for research purposes only. To further protect privacy, pseudonyms were assigned to each participant in all transcripts and reporting. Participants were also provided with the researcher's contact information for any follow-up questions or concerns. The researcher expresses appreciation for the participants' time and willingness to contribute to the study.

FINDINGS

This section presents the findings of the study based on the three research questions that guided the investigation. The findings highlight how special education teachers react to occupational stress, as well as the coping strategies they employ during and outside school hours. Table 2 presents the themes generated for each research questions.

Table 2. List of themes generated based on research question.

| Research Question | Themes |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Research Question 1: How do special education teachers react to occupational stress? | Theme 1: Expression of Anger and Fatigue toward Students Theme 2: Frustration toward School Management and Administrative Demands Theme 3: Emotional Reaction toward Parents |
| Research Question 2: What are the coping strategies used by special education teachers when dealing with occupational stress during school hours? | Theme 1: Sharing Problems with Colleagues Theme 2: Using Mobile Devices and Laptop Theme 3: Eating and Drinking Theme 4: Taking Short Naps Theme 5: Discussing with School Management Theme 6: Applying Alternative Teaching Strategies |
| Research Question 3: What are the coping strategies used by special education teachers when dealing with occupational stress outside school hours? | Theme 1: Leisure and Travel Theme 2: Communicating with Family and Friends |

Special Education Teachers' Reaction to Occupational Stress

Theme 1: Expression of Anger and Fatigue Toward Students

All participants reported that stress often originated from managing students who required extra attention. However, the level of stress experienced varied among them. P1 shared that she sometimes raised her voice to maintain order in class, which resulted in feelings of anger and fatigue:

"I do experience stress during classes especially in the class where there is a hyperactive student... I raised my voice a bit to make the students quiet... I do feel angry sometimes when teaching them but only during class." (P1)

P2 noted that her stress occurred only during lessons and would subside immediately afterward:

"I do feel a bit mad but only during class and after the class finish then 'poof', gone!" (P2)

P4, being new to special education, struggled with classroom management, which led to frustration as she was still adjusting to her role. In contrast, P3 and P5 reported that they were better able to control their emotional reactions compared to their earlier years of teaching.

Theme 2: Frustration Toward School Management and Administrative Demands

Some participants expressed dissatisfaction with workload distribution and administrative decisions. P2 highlighted frustration over tasks unrelated to teaching responsibilities:

"...this is nonsense! We were given more and more tasks... not related to our job and totally unnecessary." (P2)

Similarly, P4 explained that her suggestions to improve school procedures were dismissed, and she often had to work overtime:

"Sometimes I have to work until 7 pm to complete the last-minute task given to me, not only that, there were two or three times I tried giving suggestions to the management about the schools but it was rejected, how frustrated I am." (P4)

P5 shared that requests to increase staffing were repeatedly delayed due to bureaucratic procedures, though he acknowledged that school administrators lacked direct authority to approve hiring.

Theme 3: Emotional Reactions Toward Parents

P1 and P3 reported stress arising from interactions with parents who held high expectations or repeated demands. P1 recounted being scolded by a parent after requesting assistance in handling a child's behaviour:

“There was one time when I called the parents to come to school because their child was extremely hyperactive, shouting and throwing tantrums throughout the entire class. When the parents arrived, they scolded me for not being able to control their child, even though I also needed to attend to other students. I called them because they know their child better and I needed their support. I remember feeling very upset and holding back my anger at that moment.” (P1)

P3 expressed annoyance when parents repeatedly asked the same questions regarding teaching methods and school procedures:

“There is a mother who comes to see me almost every month, and sometimes even every week, asking about how we teach her child, the syllabus, and everything related to her child’s education. I understand if she asks once or twice when we first meet, but after so many times, it becomes too much.” (P3)

Coping Strategies Used by Special Education Teachers During School Hours

Theme 1: Sharing Problems with Colleagues

All participants described discussing work-related issues with colleagues during breaks as a key coping strategy:

“During recess, we go to the pantry and chit-chat about anything, including the problems we face at school. It helps us forget the stress for a while.” (P1)

P3 noted he only realized its value during reflection:

“I never realize that this... is worth it.” (P3)

Theme 2: Using Mobile Devices and Laptops

P3 and P4 mentioned that they sometimes watched videos on YouTube, played online games, or browsed social media platforms such as TikTok, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram during short breaks as a way to relieve stress. P4 shared:

“I use my phone to watch videos on YouTube, and I’ll open TikTok, Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram to see what’s interesting that day. It’s not that I’m addicted, but it helps ease my mind from work. Sometimes I also play games like Candy Crush.” (P4)

Theme 3: Eating and Drinking

P2 and P4 believed that eating small snacks and drinking plenty of water helped them to reduce stress and stay energized during work.

“Sometimes I just take whatever I have in my pocket, like chocolates or candies, to eat while doing administrative work.” (P2)

“I always bring my water bottle and drink whenever I need to, because it’s important to stay hydrated. Otherwise, I will feel tired and low on energy.” (P4)

Theme 4: Taking Short Naps

P5 reported taking brief naps during recess to recover:

“I will take a short nap... to rest a bit.” (P5)

Theme 5: Discussing Issues with School Management

If there were issues related to school matters, P3 and P4 reported that they would discuss the concerns with school administrators and propose possible solutions to prevent the problems from recurring in the future. P3 shared:

“Whenever there are problems, whether it is with parents or any serious matter involving my students, I will talk to the Head of Department and discuss how to solve it.” (P3)

Theme 6: Applying Alternative Teaching Strategies

Different and engaging teaching methods that are suitable for students with special needs were seen as necessary to help them understand lesson content. To address challenges with behaviour and learning engagement, P1 and P2 reported creating and experimenting with new instructional approaches. P2 explained:

“I always create new games to assess their fine and gross motor skills in a fun way. At least they learn something from what I’ve been teaching.” (P2)

Coping Strategies Used by Special Education Teachers Outside School Hours

Theme 1: Leisure and Travel

All participants shared that they preferred going on vacations during holidays as a way to reward themselves and engage in relaxing activities. However, the types of vacations they chose varied according to personal interests. For example, P1 mentioned that before the COVID-19 pandemic, she often travelled overseas to observe cultural environments and architectural designs:

“Before COVID-19, I would save money to travel to European countries. I enjoyed sitting on a bench and watching people’s behaviour. I also liked observing school buildings in other countries. Even now, I still prefer places with many people rather than nature.” (P1)

Meanwhile, P2 preferred long-distance drives and scenic greenery:

“One habit I usually do during holidays is drive long-distance. I’m satisfied with my vacation as long as it is far and I am the one driving. Sometimes, I also enjoy greenery, like at Taman Saujana Hijau, Putrajaya.” (P2)

P3 preferred nature-based and quiet environments, often engaging in hiking or camping:

“If I’m not going back to my hometown, I usually hike or go camping, either alone or with groups. I prefer nature views because they are very relaxing and help ease my mind.” (P3)

P4 enjoyed short stays near the beach with her spouse:

“I sometimes book a hotel near the beach and stay at least one night with my husband. It feels like a ‘staycation’ for me.” (P4)

P5, however, enjoyed family-led vacation planning:

“I don’t have any specific place I prefer. I just follow whatever my children plan, and that is enough for me. I do enjoy it.” (P5)

Theme 2: Communicating with Family and Friends

All participants reported that they shared their problems and concerns with family members or friends outside school hours as a way to relieve stress. For those who were married, such as P2, P4, and P5, emotional support often came from their spouses:

“I often share problems with my husband if there is anything that I’m stressed out.” (P4)

P5 added that he also shared personal stories with his children as a way of expressing himself and strengthening family connection. Meanwhile, P1, P2, and P3 preferred to talk to close friends whom they trusted, particularly when they needed emotional release or understanding:

“At night, sometimes I’ll call my best friend to share about my problems at work, and when we are free, we spend time chit-chatting at Mamak.” (P2)

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that special education teachers experienced emotional reactions to occupational stress, primarily in the form of anger, frustration, tiredness, and annoyance. These emotional responses align with Devi et al. (2019), who noted that individuals under stress may exhibit emotional and behavioural reactions even when symptoms such as anxiety or nervousness are not pronounced. Similar to Keller et al. (2014), the teachers in this study reported anger more frequently than anxiety, indicating that their stress responses

manifested outwardly through emotional expression rather than internalized anxiety. This is further supported by Potter (2021), who found that although special education teachers experience higher levels of stress than general teachers, their anxiety levels do not significantly differ. The emotional strain observed here reflects acute occupational stress commonly associated with demanding roles and time pressures (Devi et al., 2019).

The coping strategies identified in this study can be interpreted using Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Some strategies addressed physiological needs, such as eating, staying hydrated, and taking short naps during breaks. As Maslow (1970) emphasizes, basic physical needs are foundational and must be met before individuals are able to effectively manage higher-level stressors. Safety needs were reflected in participants' efforts to stabilize their emotional state, such as by taking breaks or retreating briefly from stressful situations. When teachers shared their experiences with colleagues and family, they fulfilled belongingness and esteem needs, which reinforced social connection and emotional validation (Schultz & Schultz, 2015). Meanwhile, practices such as developing new teaching strategies and discussing issues with school management addressed cognitive needs, reflecting the teachers' desire to understand challenges and find constructive solutions (Saeednia, 2009). Engaging in relaxing activities such as vacations and nature-based leisure experiences met aesthetic needs, which restore emotional balance and personal fulfillment (Ciccarelli & White, 2017). Ultimately, these strategies help teachers sustain motivation and move toward self-actualization, where personal growth and meaning are prioritized (Maslow, 1970; Venter, 2016).

Sharing concerns with colleagues emerged as the most frequently used coping strategy during school hours. This is consistent with findings by Cancio et al. (2018), Kebbi and Al-Hroub (2018), Mathews (2020), Eastwood (2021), Eke et al. (2020), and Anderson (2021), all of whom reported that emotional and social support significantly reduces stress among special education teachers. This study further supports Eke et al. (2020), who noted that seeking emotional stability through interpersonal communication remains one of the most effective coping strategies for educators facing work-related challenges.

The Islamic perspective provides additional affirmation of the role of social and emotional support in coping. Islam emphasizes communal support and belonging as part of spiritual well-being (Achour et al., 2015). The act of sharing emotional burdens with trusted individuals aligns with the Islamic concept of *ukhuwwah* (brotherhood), which reinforces emotional resilience. Moreover, practices such as patience (*sabr*), trust in God (*tawakkul*), prayer, and remembrance of God (*zikr*) function as spiritual coping strategies that can strengthen emotional endurance and promote inner peace (al-Munajjid, 2006; Tengku Kasim & Abdul Majid, 2020; Abdul Majid et al., 2021). These strategies complement and reinforce psychological coping methods by addressing both emotional and spiritual needs simultaneously.

Outside school hours, participants commonly engaged in recreational activities and vacations. This aligns with Berto (2014), who found that exposure to natural and calming environments can restore attention and reduce emotional fatigue. The practice of "leaving work at work," as highlighted by Anderson (2021), further reflects the importance of psychological detachment from workplace stress to prevent burnout.

Overall, the findings emphasize that coping among special education teachers is multifaceted, involving physical, emotional, cognitive, social, and spiritual dimensions. These

strategies not only reduce stress but support sustained professional functioning and personal well-being.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights that special education teachers commonly experience anger, fatigue, frustration, and annoyance as reactions to occupational stress. To cope, they primarily relied on sharing concerns with colleagues during school hours and engaging in leisure activities such as vacations outside of work. These coping strategies reflect both emotional support and restorative self-care practices that help maintain psychological well-being. However, persistent unmanaged stress may negatively impact teachers' health and their ability to effectively support students with special needs. Therefore, teacher well-being must be recognized as central to the quality of special education services.

Future research could include larger and more diverse samples, as well as comparisons between school types or regions. Studies may also explore the role of religious and spiritual coping in greater depth. The findings offer practical implications for school administrators and policymakers. Supportive school environments, opportunities for peer collaboration, reduced administrative burden, and structured stress management programs could strengthen teacher resilience and reduce burnout. Ensuring the well-being of special education teachers is essential for sustaining a positive and effective learning environment.

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