

Coping Strategies of Shadow Teachers Experiencing Burnout in an Inclusive Indonesian Elementary School: A Phenomenological Study

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ABSTRACT

The crucial role of shadow teachers is often fraught with significant challenges. High workloads, constant demands to adapt to the diverse needs of children with special needs, lack of adequate training, and limited institutional support can trigger burnout. Therefore, concrete strategies are needed to address this issue. The aim of this study is to describe strategies for overcoming burnout in substitute teachers in inclusive elementary schools in Indonesia. Participants in this study were shadow teachers with a minimum of 3 years of work experience, considering that they would provide insight into dealing with children with special needs in inclusive classes during the daily teaching process. This study used a qualitative approach with a phenomenological research type. Broadly speaking, there are three main techniques in data collection: interviews, observation, and documentation. The results of the study show various strategies used by teachers in handling student tantrums, namely Seeking Social Support, Acceptance and Positive Values (Emotionally Focused Coping), Managing Break Time and Self-Calming, Self-Development and Introspection, and Conducting Diversion Activities (Escape Avoidance). The findings suggest that mentor teachers do not rely on a single strategy but instead build a coping ecosystem that connects the professional realm (team discussions, self-evaluation) with the domestic/personal realm (family, diversional activities). The implications of this research suggest that inclusive teacher resilience is formed when the boundaries between work support and family support converge positively.

Keywords: burnout, shadow teacher, strategies, student with special needs

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INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is increasingly becoming a key focus in global and national education policies, aiming to ensure that all children, including those with special needs (ABK), have equal access to education in a regular learning environment. The implementation of inclusive education is reinforced by Law Number 8 of 2016 concerning Persons with Disabilities, which affirms that every person with disabilities has the right to receive quality and equal education at all levels. This policy is strengthened by Regulation of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia Number 48 of 2023 concerning Inclusive Education Services, which requires every institution to provide education that supports all students without exception, including providing appropriately qualified accompanying teachers for students with special needs (Kemendikbudristek, 2023).

Children with special needs are those who have characteristics that differ from children in general without always showing weaknesses in emotional, physical, or mental. In line with Fakhiratunnisa, dkk (2022), children with special needs are defined as children who require special education and services to develop their human potential optimally. Every child with special needs requires special attention related to the problems they constantly experience. In carrying out the learning process, children with special needs require different activity patterns compared to normal children, adjusted to existing diversity. Consequently, many public elementary schools now function as inclusive schools, which require additional support for children with special needs (Angraini et al., 2024; Artistia et al., 2024).

One of the key roles in dealing with children with special needs is that of a shadow teacher. A shadow teacher is a teacher responsible for assisting children with special needs in schools that implement inclusive education and possess the skills to manage students with special needs (Adawiyah et al., 2022; Khasanah et al., 2025). The shadow teacher's role is to provide individual support to children with special needs in participating in the learning process in regular classes, facilitate curriculum adaptation, and assist with students' social and emotional aspects. The role of the shadow teacher in inclusive education is crucial, not only as a companion in the learning process but also as a facilitator who helps children with special needs understand teacher instructions, supports social adaptation to the school environment, and facilitates the child's academic and emotional development.

This vital role of the shadow teacher's is often accompanied by significant challenges. High workloads, constant demands to adapt to the diverse needs of children with special needs, lack of adequate training, and limited institutional support can trigger burnout in dealing with tantrum-prone children. Maslach & Jackson (1981) identified burnout as a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a decreased sense of personal accomplishment, which often occurs in professions that involve intense human interaction. In line with this, Wijaya & Prastuti, (2021) stated that teachers who experience burnout are those who experience exhaustion in their work.

Burnout among educators has become a global issue, but specific research on burnout among shadow teachers, particularly in the context of inclusive elementary schools in Indonesia, remains relatively limited. This situation becomes increasingly relevant given the increasing number of children with special needs integrated into regular schools, which directly correlates with the need for qualified and resilient shadow teachers (Agyapong et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2022; Maslach & Leiter, 2021). Rahmawati et al., (2024) revealed that shadow teachers often face heavy workloads, long working hours, and high expectations from both schools and parents. This burden is often not balanced with adequate support, whether in terms of training, resources, or rewards, resulting in significant psychological stress. Zhong et al., (2024) revealed that burnout and depression often occur together and are interrelated, negatively impacting teachers' psychological well-being. Furthermore, the findings of Yang & Zhou (2025) emphasize the importance of creating an inclusive and supportive school environment for educators to reduce burnout and improve teaching effectiveness.

Although the presence of shadow teachers is a key pillar in the successful implementation of inclusive education in elementary schools, there is a significant gap between the demands of their

professional role and the available support systems. On the one hand, shadow teachers are required to have a high level of emotional regulation, the ability to adapt to complex curricula, and the significant responsibility of assisting children with special needs to navigate learning and behavioral barriers in regular classrooms. However, on the other hand, their position is often vulnerable, both structurally, due to the lack of ongoing formal training, and to compensation that is disproportionate to the workload they handle. This gap between high-performance expectations and low levels of appreciation and job protection is a major trigger for the emergence of massive burnout (emotional and physical exhaustion). Meanwhile, previous literature has focused more on the effectiveness of special needs learning methods or the pedagogical competence of regular classroom teachers and has rarely explored in depth the psychological dynamics and coping mechanisms developed by shadow teachers themselves in dealing with these pressures. This gap in literature and empirical evidence underpins the importance of this phenomenological study, which aims to uncover authentic strategies for managing burnout from the perspective of those directly involved in the field.

Based on observations at SDN 28/IV in Jambi City, it was apparent that shadow teachers were making strategic efforts to address burnout in dealing with students with special needs in an inclusive elementary school. This is crucial considering the challenges faced, including the need to address burnout related to tantrums that frequently occur in children with special needs. Little research has explored how teachers shift from self-soothing to seeking help from colleagues. Based on the background and gaps outlined, this study aimed to answer the main question: What are the lived experiences of shadow teachers in inclusive elementary schools regarding burnout, and what are their strategies for coping with burnout?

METHODS

Research design

This study used a qualitative approach with a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology was chosen as a qualitative strategy, focusing on identifying the essence of human lived experiences, then describing their meaning from concepts or phenomena related to mentor teachers dealing with student tantrums in inclusive classrooms.

Phenomenological research was designed to understand the meaning and essence of shadow teachers lived experiences in implementing two-tiered coping mechanisms. In this case, phenomenology yielded comprehensive data (Stake, 2010). Furthermore, phenomenology is a qualitative design that aims to identify the essence of human experience regarding a phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Patton, (2015) stated that phenomenology focuses on the essence of lived experiences regarding a phenomenon, aiming to understand the structure of consciousness within human experience and the meaning of that experience. The result is the identification of the essence and shared meaning of a particular experience among a group of people.

Research setting

This research was conducted at SDN 28/IV in Jambi City, considering that this elementary school is an inclusive school recommended by the Jambi City Education Office, under letter number 500.6.18/7850/DISIK/2025. Good access to the research location was crucial as it would influence how data was collected from participants. The researcher established a positive and trusting relationship with the school, including staff and administrators, prior to the study. This created a conducive environment for data collection and assisted in obtaining permission and cooperation from the school.

Furthermore, SDN 28/IV in Jambi City was selected as the research setting for several reasons. First, this school is an inclusive public elementary school facing challenges in implementing inclusive education for children with special needs, particularly regarding burnout among shadow tech workers. Second, this school granted permission and met the participant selection criteria, based on predetermined purposive sampling. Third, this study was selected because there had been no previous research specifically exploring the same topic in an inclusive public elementary school. Therefore, this research is expected to provide a valuable contribution to understanding

the implementation of admission policies and the implementation of inclusive education for students with special needs at the school.

Finally, the availability of adequate access to data and information from SDN 28/IV Jambi City was a crucial consideration. The researcher had easy access to the data necessary for this study, including school documents and other relevant information. This enabled the researcher to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the context and implementation of inclusive education policies at the school.

Participants

In this study, the researcher used purposive sampling as proposed by Creswell (2015). The researcher selected participants and research locations for a study because they could provide information to answer the research questions. This study involved four shadow teachers, identified as P4, P5, P6, and P7 (see Table 1), with a minimum of three years of teaching experience. Participants were also selected based on their experience with various training and the type of student needs that align with their educational background. Coding began with P4 because of the nine shadow testers, only P4 to P7 met the predetermined criteria. This was done with the consideration that they would provide insight into strategies for coping with burnout experienced during the learning process. Busby et al., (2012), Extensive research has shown that individual characteristics, especially length of teaching experience, gender, professional expertise, and competence in inclusive practices, significantly contribute to this phenomenon.

Table 1. Brief profile of research participants (P4–P7)

Code	Age	Last Education	Years of Service
P4	26	Bachelor of Special Education/Exceptional Education	3
P5	21	Bachelor of Psychology	5
P6	24	Bachelor of Elementary School Teacher Education	4
P7	29	Bachelor of Elementary School Teacher Education	6

Data Collection and Analysis Techniques

Data collection techniques are the most strategic stage in conducting research. This is because the fundamental goal of research activities is to obtain relevant empirical data (Sugiyono, 2019). In qualitative research, the data collection process is carried out in a natural setting. Primary data sources and data collection methods are dominated by in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation studies. Broadly speaking, there are three main techniques in data collection: interviews, observation, and documentation.

According to Miles & Huberman (2014), interviews are a data collection technique that involves direct interaction between researchers and participants. Interviews are used to obtain in-depth information about the views, attitudes, beliefs, or experiences of research participants. This approach provides researchers with the opportunity to explore the context in greater detail, understand nuances, and gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

Interviews are defined as a data collection method that involves face-to-face interaction with informants. Interviews are implemented in this research for various purposes. For qualitative researchers, the main objectives of using this method include: 1) Obtaining specific and unique information or interpretations held by informants; 2) Collecting numerical aggregates of data from many individuals; and 3) Exploring data on phenomena that cannot be directly observed by researchers (Stake, 2010). Then researchers also use semi-structured interviews, Creswell (2015) argues that semi-structured interviews are an approach that combines elements of structure and flexibility in the interview process.

Observation is recognized as one of the most crucial data collection methods. Its implementation requires the researcher's physical presence in a context or situation to record subjective impressions of the events taking place. In the context of observation, the researcher acts as the primary instrument, consciously collecting sensory data through the senses of sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch (Somekh & Lewin, 2005). Through participant observation, the data collected becomes more comprehensive and accurate. This approach allows researchers to gain a deeper understanding of the meaning behind each observed behavioral manifestation. This activity aims to provide a realistic picture of events or occurrences relevant to the research topic (Sugiyono, 2019; Bahri & Hanabun, 2018).

Documents in the research context are written materials or recordings that include various information relevant to the research topic. According to Patton, (2006), document techniques are one method of data collection in qualitative research. This method involves collecting documents or written records from various sources relevant to the research. These documents can be archives, reports, diaries, official documents, or any other type of written text that can provide insight into the context or situation being studied. The use of document techniques allows researchers to gain a deeper understanding of events, occurrences, or phenomena that occur in the relevant context. Furthermore, the documentary technique also allows researchers to examine written evidence that may be relevant to the research objectives, thereby supporting the overall analysis and findings.

To gain a deep and comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of the two-tiered coping mechanisms used by mentor teachers in dealing with student tantrums in inclusive classrooms, this study employed multi-source data collection techniques (technical triangulation, method triangulation, and theory triangulation).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Seeking Social Support

The results of the study indicate that P4 participants employed coping strategies that emphasized team support and emotional regulation to maintain their performance. P4 participants relied on interactions with colleagues as a primary coping mechanism for coping with work fatigue. P4 regularly shared stories and sought help from fellow mentor teachers when feeling fatigued.

The process of sharing within the mentor teacher team was considered very helpful, especially in resolving instructional issues in the classroom. Participants emphasized that these discussions had a significant positive impact on reducing their perceived workload.

The results showed that P5 participants employed a variety of coping mechanisms, ranging from interpersonal support to cognitive regulation, to maintain their professional stability. P5 participants emphasized interpersonal communication as a means of releasing psychological burdens. When experiencing intense fatigue, P5 shared stories with fellow teachers and family at home to gain a sense of relief. P5 did not isolate herself when facing obstacles, but instead actively communicated with the school, fellow mentor teachers, and even parents. Through these conversations, participants received input, advice, and emotional reinforcement, making them feel stronger and less alone in facing work challenges.

“When I encounter difficulties, I usually don't just keep them to myself. I try to communicate with the school, talk to fellow teacher advisors, or ask parents. Through these conversations, I often receive input, advice, or simply support that makes me feel stronger and less overwhelmed in carrying out my duties. (Participant 5)”

P6 utilized social support from the school ecosystem as a primary strategy to mitigate emotional exhaustion. When experiencing burnout, P6 engaged in reflective discussions with fellow mentor teachers and class teachers to exchange coping strategies and obtain professional support.

“When I experience burnout in assisting students, I usually share stories and discuss with fellow Special Mentor Teachers (GPK) and the classroom teachers involved in the learning process. Through these discussions, I can reflect on my experiences, exchange coping strategies, and obtain professional support. (Participant 6)”

Furthermore, institutional and family support, such as the school, provided a coordination space to find appropriate mentoring strategies, while parents contributed through open communication regarding their children's development. Furthermore, discussions with colleagues were deemed extremely helpful in providing emotional support, allowing P6 to feel more professionally supported and reduce work pressure.

Participant P7 relied on social interactions within the school environment to reduce psychological stress. P7 regularly shared stories with other teachers, especially fellow mentor teachers or class teachers, which helped the participant feel less burdened by work pressures.

"I usually share my experiences with other teachers at school, especially fellow teachers or my classmates. Sharing helps me feel less burdened. (Participant 7)"

The school provided concrete support through the involvement of class teachers in reassured students and providing technical advice on childcare. Parents contributed by sharing information about their children's habits at home, enabling P7 to develop a more comprehensive understanding of student characteristics at school.

Acceptance and Positive Values (Emotional-Focused Coping)

This strategy is implemented to maintain psychological stability when dealing with challenging student behavior. P4 strives to remain calm when student behavior is difficult to control, believing that equanimity is key to emotional control. This is done to ensure students remain comfortable during learning activities with the participants.

Participants believe that the challenges they face are part of the student's development process. The main motivating factors that keep P4 going are dedication to their students' success and financial motivation to support their family.

"I try to remain calm, because with a calm heart we can control our emotions, and our children feel comfortable while engaging in learning activities with us. What I maintain is how I can survive for the sake of my family's survival and the success of my students. (Participant 4)"

Furthermore, to maintain cognitive composure and long-term motivation, P5 strives to remain patient, believing that each student has a unique learning process and that any difficulties encountered are an integral part of their development. Furthermore, the participant maintains her work ethic by reminding herself of the primary reason for choosing this profession: to support children's development. She views even the smallest progress achieved by students as evidence that her efforts are worthwhile.

"I try to view difficult situations as part of the students' learning process. This way of thinking helps me stay calm and not give up easily. I also try to remember the reason I chose this job, which is to help children develop, so I maintain enthusiasm in carrying out my daily work. (Participant 5)"

P6 uses cognitive strategies to maintain motivation and patience amidst work challenges. P6 reassures herself that difficult student behavior is part of their development process, which helps her view difficulties as opportunities to discover new approaches. P6 views every small student's progress as a significant achievement that brings personal satisfaction. The belief that her role positively impacts students' futures is a key source of motivation for her to persist in the profession.

"I try to remain calm and patient and try to understand the causes of student behavior. I use appropriate coping strategies, reflect on the approaches used, and discuss with the classroom teacher or fellow teachers to find more effective ways to manage student behavior (Participant 6)"

This strategy is used to maintain cognitive stability and motivation amidst the dynamics of student behavior. P7 instills the understanding that each child's development is a long and unique process. Participants reassure themselves that current difficulties are part of the student's learning process of self-control.

"When I'm having a tough day, I usually try to be more patient and calm down. I remind myself that these kids are a process that takes time. Sometimes I even pause to catch my breath so I don't get emotional when dealing with students. (Participant 7)"

P7's work ethic is maintained by observing even the smallest positive changes in students, such as their willingness to participate in school activities. These small successes demonstrate that the mentoring efforts are worthwhile.

Managing Breaks and Calming Down

P4 used simple techniques to reduce stress levels momentarily in the workplace. First, using the calming technique, participants chose to pause for a moment when the classroom situation became particularly tense to restore their composure. Second, using time separation, participants managed their break schedules, maximizing their days off to focus fully on their families to mentally refresh themselves.

Meanwhile, P5 implemented simple relaxation techniques to reduce tension in the classroom. When the classroom situation became tense, participants practiced slow breathing techniques or sat quietly for a moment to regain their composure. P5 also used available breaks, even short ones, to drink water, take a leisurely walk, or simply be still to regain their energy before returning to assisting students.

"When a class situation feels tense, I usually try to calm myself by taking slow breaths or sitting down for a moment to calm my mind. If I have a break, I use it to get a drink, take a short walk, or otherwise calm my mind before returning to assisting the students. (Participant 5)"

P6 implemented practical relaxation techniques to maintain emotional stability in a dynamic classroom environment. When tense situations occurred, participants practiced slow breathing techniques, calmed their minds, or took a moment to distance themselves from the situation to respond professionally. Amidst a busy schedule, P6 used breaks, such as class changes or student breaks, to engage in brief relaxation to refocus and maintain energy.

"Amidst my busy mentoring schedule, I try to take advantage of any available breaks, such as during class changes or student breaks, to calm down. During these times, I usually do a short relaxation session or simply take time to refocus so I'm ready to continue mentoring."

P7 implemented practical calming techniques to manage emotional tension instantly. When class situations become tense, participants practice deep breathing techniques and take a moment to step away from the situation to prevent themselves from getting carried away by emotions before returning to assist students. P7 also uses school breaks to sit quietly, calm her mind, and engage in light interactions with other teachers to reduce nervous tension.

"I usually use my school break to sit down for a while and calm my mind. Sometimes I also chat briefly with another teacher to de-escalate. Even if it's not for long, it helps me calm down. I usually take deep breaths to calm myself down (Participant 7)"

Self-Development and Introspection

Although not conducting a formal self-evaluation, P4 acknowledged the importance of new strategies. Participants stated that they did not conduct self-evaluations or seek new training specifically for their duties. However, P4 acknowledged that learning new strategies for dealing with children with special needs (ABK) boosted their confidence. To reduce fatigue, participants preferred to take short breaks.

"I always try to take a break, like leaving the classroom for a moment to get some air, this helps me reduce fatigue in dealing with students (Participant 4)"

Furthermore, P5 viewed increased competency as a resource for better preparedness in facing classroom challenges. P5 evaluated her mentoring methods and was open to learning from the experiences of colleagues and other sources. Furthermore, with self-efficacy gained through a deeper understanding of student characteristics and needs, P5 felt more confident and prepared to determine appropriate mentoring strategies, resulting in a more effective work process.

"I strive to gain a deeper understanding of my students' characteristics and needs to determine more appropriate mentoring methods. Furthermore, I'm open to learning from experience, both from colleagues and from the information I gather. By gaining more knowledge and experience, I feel better prepared to face various challenges in my work. (Participant 5)"

Competency improvement was seen as a key instrument for increasing self-efficacy and reducing frustration. P6 regularly reflected on the mentoring process to identify the effectiveness of the approach used. Furthermore, P6 actively participated in training and learned new strategies related to ABK. A deeper understanding of students' conditions enabled P6 to view student behavior more objectively, resulting in more manageable emotional exhaustion as participants felt more prepared and confident in facing classroom challenges.

“Yes, I strive to conduct independent evaluations of my mentoring process, especially when I encounter difficulties in addressing student behavior or learning needs. Through this reflection, I can identify approaches that are effective and those that need improvement. (Participant 6)”

P7 viewed improving competency as a strategy to increase self-efficacy and reduce stress levels. P7 independently evaluated the appropriateness of the mentoring methods used and actively sought information on handling children with special needs (ABK) online. A deeper understanding of the conditions and reasons behind students' behaviors made P7 more patient, less prone to stress, and more confident because she had a variety of alternative coping strategies.

“Yes, sometimes I try to evaluate myself, for example, by rethinking the methods I use when assisting students to see if they're appropriate. When I have the opportunity, I also search online for information on how to handle children with special needs so I can better understand them. (Participant 7)”

Engaging in Diversionary Activities (Escape Avoidance)

P4 engages in recreational activities outside of work hours to restore mental energy. This includes engaging in hobbies and recreation. The main activity participants engage in to refresh their minds is traveling with their families. Additionally, P4 regularly engages in sports hobbies such as gymnastics or jogging to feel more relaxed.

Furthermore, P4 admitted that she doesn't often intentionally avoid thinking about work while at home, but physical activity and family recreation remain her primary mental refreshers.

P5 restores mental energy by separating work from personal life outside of school hours. Diversionary activities include watching movies, listening to music, and spending quality time with family to relax the mind. Participants intentionally avoid work-related thoughts while at home to get optimal rest and return to work with a more refreshed mental state the next day.

“To maintain a balance between work and personal life, I usually do activities that are different from school. For example, I take a break, pursue a hobby, or spend time with my family. This way, my mind can be refreshed, and I can return to work in a better state. (Participant 5)”

Mental energy is restored by separating work from personal life outside of school hours. P6's main activities to refresh the mind include spending time with family, watching entertainment, or engaging in leisure activities that they enjoy relieving tension. P6 deliberately sets a time limit for not thinking about work while at home to maintain work-life balance and restore physical and mental health for the next day.

“Yes, I have several simple activities that help me refresh my mind after work. I usually spend time with my family, watch entertainment, or do something relaxing that I enjoy. These activities help me reduce stress and restore my energy so I can return to my mentoring duties in better condition (Participant 6)”

Outside of work hours, P7 engages in recreational activities such as watching movies, listening to music, playing games, and taking short trips or eating together to refresh her mind. P7 tries to limit thoughts of work while at home by focusing on rest and spending time with her family, ensuring energy recovery for the next day.

“I usually try not to think too much about work when I'm home. I focus more on resting and spending time with my family. I do sometimes think about it, especially if there's a problem at school, but I try not to dwell on it too much. (Participant 7)”

The following table summarizes the coping strategies or efforts of participants P4, P5, P6, and P7 at SDN 28/IV, Jambi City.

Tabel 2. Comparison of coping strategies of participants P4 to P7

Strategy Dimensions	P4	P5	P6	P7
Social Support	Rely heavily on regular discussions and sharing within the team with fellow mentor teachers.	Share stories with colleagues, family, and actively communicate with students' parents.	Conduct reflective discussions with other shadow teachers and classroom teachers to exchange professional coping strategies.	Share stories with class teachers and fellow shadow teachers; utilize information about children's habits from parents.
Self-Regulation in the Classroom	Choose to be silent for a moment to restore peace of mind and emotions.	Use slow breathing techniques and sit for a while to stabilize the mind.	Regulate your breath, maintain a calm attitude, and take a moment to distance yourself from the tense situation.	Take a deep breath and sometimes step away from the conflict situation for a moment.
Acceptance and Positive Values	Choose to be silent for a moment to restore peace of mind and emotions.	Remembering the initial reasons for choosing a profession and feeling satisfied when seeing even the smallest progress.	Seeing challenges as opportunities to find new approaches; focusing on the positive impact on students' futures.	Reassure yourself that your child is learning self-control and appreciate small changes in your child's behavior.
Self-development	Didn't do a formal evaluation but felt more confident if there was a new strategy.	Conduct self-evaluation and learn from the experiences of colleagues or other sources of information.	Routinely conduct self-evaluations, reflect on approaches, and actively participate in training for children with special needs.	Evaluate the accuracy of the method independently and search for information on handling children with special needs via the internet..
Diversion Activity	Traveling with family and regular exercise (gymnastics/jogging).	Watching, listening to music, and spending quality time with family at home.	Watching entertainment, relaxing, and spending time with family to relieve stress.	Watching movies, playing games, taking a walk, or eating with family as a form of relaxation.

Based on the research data in [Table 2](#), a consistent pattern is evident among the four participants (P4, P5, P6, and P7) in implementing coping strategies to address work stress (burnout). In general, the special needs teachers did not rely solely on a single strategy, but rather combined problem-focused and emotion-focused coping approaches. This phenomenon aligns with Lazarus and Folkman's coping theory, which states that individuals will utilize various

available coping resources to reduce psychological stress resulting from environmental demands that exceed their own capacity.

The dimension of social support plays a crucial role for all participants in maintaining their resilience at school. P4 and P6 specifically emphasized the importance of regular discussions, sharing, and reflection with fellow special needs teachers and classroom teachers. This professional collaboration within the school environment creates a safe space for teachers to exchange strategies for dealing with children with special needs. Previous research has shown that emotional and informational support from colleagues significantly reduces burnout rates among educators in inclusive schools (Jugović et al., 2025; Senturk & Melnitchouk, 2019; Suleymanov, 2020).

In addition to internal school support, P5 and P7 actively involve parents as part of their social support system. This two-way communication pattern serves not only as a means of sharing stories but also as an instrument for gathering information about children's habits and characteristics at home. Integrating parenting at home with school management significantly assists teachers in developing consistent intervention programs. International literature confirms that synergy and positive communication between teachers and parents are key predictors of successful inclusive education implementation and provide psychological protection for teachers against burnout (Aktepe & Sümer Dodur, 2025; Boujut et al., 2017).

When faced with tense situations or tantrums in class, the four participants demonstrated similar strategies in the self-regulation dimension. P4 chose to remain silent for a moment, P5 used breathing techniques, P6 regulated her breathing and maintained distance, and P7 employed deep breathing and briefly removed herself from the conflict area. This temporary time-out was not an act of neglect, but rather a preventative emotional regulation strategy to prevent teachers from impulsively responding to negative stimulus.

Theoretically, the deep breathing technique practiced by P5, P6, and P7 activates the parasympathetic nervous system, which can lower heart rate and instantly relieve physical tension. This cognitive strategy of remaining calm and maintaining distance is highly adaptive in inclusive classroom management. Teachers with strong self-regulation skills are able to create a more stable and safer learning environment for children with special needs (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). In Indonesia, research by Lestari & Sugito, (2021) also confirmed that the ability to manage fleeting emotions in the classroom is positively correlated with the self-efficacy of the accompanying teacher.

In the dimensions of acceptance and positive values, there was interesting variation in motivation among the participants. P4 combined an orientation toward student success with economic motivation for family survival. Meanwhile, P5 chose to engage in cognitive reframing by recalling the initial calling of choosing this profession and celebrating even the smallest progress the student demonstrated. This memory of the initial commitment to the profession acted as a strong anchor for intrinsic motivation when work demands increased (Fathi et al., 2021).

On the other hand, P6 viewed the behavioral challenges of children with special needs as a stimulating opportunity to discover new pedagogical approaches or methods, which were expected to have a positive impact on the students' future. P7 also implemented a pattern of acceptance by assuring herself that her child was indeed in the process of learning self-control and appreciating every dynamic, no matter how small behavioral change. Unconditional acceptance and positive interpretation of a child's minor development are indicators of meaning-focused coping that effectively increases teacher job satisfaction (Pakdee et al., 2025; Wardani & Kurniawati, 2024).

Analysis of the self-development dimension revealed a gradation in the levels of formality and proactivity among participants. P4 admitted not conducting formal evaluations but immediately felt a boost in self-confidence when successfully discovering or implementing new strategies in the classroom. P4's approach tended to be intuitive and based on direct experience (experiential learning). This contrasted with P5, who consciously conducted self-evaluation while combining it with active learning from the experiences of colleagues and a variety of external sources of information.

The most systematic characteristics of self-development were demonstrated by P6 and P7. P6 regularly conducts self-evaluations, critically reflects on the approaches taken, and actively participates in formal training on children with special needs. Meanwhile, P7 independently evaluates the appropriateness of her methods and utilizes advances in information technology by self-studying online for guidance on handling children with special needs. P6 and P7's proactive behavior in updating their specialized pedagogical knowledge is crucial, given the highly heterogeneous characteristics of children with special needs (Florian, 2014).

P6 and P7's active pursuit of new knowledge aligns with the concept of Continuous Professional Development (CPD). Teachers who engage in CPD based on self-reflection and the use of digital technology have a more adaptive level of professional competence in addressing complex behavioral problems in inclusive classrooms. Various global studies confirm that teachers' inability to access information and training specifically for children with special needs is a major trigger for work stress, leading to high rates of teacher resignation (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Emam & Farrell, 2019).

The final dimension, diversional activities, was filled by all participants with recreational and recovery activities outside of work hours. P4 chose to travel with her family and engage in regular exercise such as gymnastics or jogging. The structured physical activities P4 chose had a dual impact: physical fitness and the release of endorphins, which effectively reduced accumulated psychological stress (Saloviita & Pakarinen, 2021).

In contrast to P4, who tends to be active outdoors, P5 and P6 prefer home-based relaxation. P5 fills her time watching movies, listening to music, and spending quality time with her family. P6 also relies on watching entertainment, taking physical breaks, and spending time with her family to relieve work stress. This style of distraction focuses on domestic comfort and restoring energy through calming audio-visual stimulation (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015).

P7 exhibits the widest variety of distraction activities, ranging from technology-based activities (playing games) to enjoying visual media (watching movies), outdoor activities (going for walks), to fulfilling culinary recreational needs (eating with family). P7's diverse range of distraction options demonstrates good coping flexibility. Individuals who employ a variety of stress-de-escalation strategies tend to be more resilient in the face of fluctuating work pressure (Cheng et al., 2014).

One strong point of intersection between the diversion activity dimensions across all participants (P4–P7) was the involvement of family elements. The presence of family serves as a primary support system in facilitating the process of psychological detachment, a state in which individuals are able to mentally detach from work matters while at home. This ability to achieve detachment is internationally recognized as an essential protective factor preventing chronic emotional exhaustion in professions with high levels of interpersonal stress, such as special education teachers (Purba & Siregar, 2023; Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015).

Comparatively, it can be synthesized that the four participants have formed an ecosystem of integrative coping strategies. They balance direct problem-solving in the classroom (through self-regulation and developing teaching methods) with psychological capacity recovery outside the classroom (through social support, value reflection, and family recreation). Successful integration of these multidimensional coping strategies is key for special education teachers in inclusive schools to maintain their mental health and professional performance amidst the high dynamics and challenges of teaching children with special needs.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals various strategies used by mentor teachers to overcome burnout in working with students with special needs in inclusive elementary schools. The various strategies used by teachers to handle student tantrums include Seeking Social Support, Acceptance and Positive Values (Emotion-Based Coping), Managing Breaks and Calming Down, Self-Development and Introspection, and Engaging in Diversionary Activities (Escape Avoidance). These findings indicate that mentor teachers do not rely solely on a single strategy but instead build a coping ecosystem that connects the professional realm (team discussions, self-evaluation) with the

domestic/personal realm (family, diversionary activities). The limitations of this research lie in the regional context and school governance where the research was conducted. The burnout dynamics found may be heavily influenced by internal school policies and local support systems and therefore may not fully represent the variety of challenges faced by shadow teachers in rural areas or regions with more limited access to resources. The uniqueness of this study demonstrates that resilience in inclusive teachers is formed when the boundaries between work support and family support are positively aligned. This study focused on an in-depth exploration of coping strategies among a limited number of participants (grades 4 to 7) at the elementary school level. Therefore, generalizing the research results to the entire population of guidance teachers in different regions or educational levels requires caution.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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