



## Coping Strategy: A Study on Professional Quality of Life (ProQOL) Among Special Education Teachers

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### Abstract

Professional quality of life (ProQOL) is a critical indicator of psychological well-being among special education teachers, particularly given the emotional and instructional demands of teaching students with special needs. Coping strategies represent an important mechanism for managing occupational stress; however, empirical evidence examining how distinct coping strategies relate to multiple dimensions of ProQOL among special education teachers—especially in non-Western educational contexts—remains limited. To address this gap, this study aimed to examine the differential effects of problem-focused, emotion-focused, and avoidant coping strategies on compassion satisfaction, burnout, and secondary traumatic stress among Indonesian special education teachers. This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional design with 147 teachers working in special schools in the Bekasi area. Coping strategies were assessed using the 28-item Brief COPE Inventory, while professional quality of life was measured using the 30-item Professional Quality of Life Scale (ProQOL-5). Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to establish construct validity, and multivariate regression analysis using Mplus 7 was performed to test the proposed relationships. The results indicated that problem-focused and emotion-focused coping were positively associated with compassion satisfaction and negatively associated with burnout, whereas avoidant coping was positively associated with secondary traumatic stress. These findings demonstrate that coping strategies exert differentiated effects across ProQOL dimensions rather than uniform influences, highlighting the importance of adaptive coping in sustaining teachers' professional well-being. By extending ProQOL research beyond healthcare professions and situating it within the context of special education in Indonesia, this study offers context-specific empirical evidence that may inform targeted interventions aimed at enhancing compassion satisfaction and reducing burnout and trauma-related stress among special education teachers.

## INTRODUCTION

The teaching profession for students with special needs is widely recognized as particularly demanding, as teachers are not only required to communicate information effectively but also must demonstrate heightened levels of patience, emotional regulation, and adaptability compared to teachers in general education settings. Therefore, it is essential to prioritize the psychological well-being of special school teachers, as their well-being directly influences instructional quality, classroom climate, and student outcomes. Research findings indicate that approximately 72% of teachers working with students with special needs experience moderate to high levels of secondary traumatic stress, and around 77% report moderate to high levels of fatigue (Darawsheh et al., 2023). Special needs teachers who experience chronic stress may struggle to provide optimal instruction and are at increased risk of professional attrition, thereby threatening continuity of care and educational quality for students with disabilities (Lianna & Sahrani, 2024). From a structural perspective, national statistical data further reveal a persistent imbalance between the number of students with special needs and the availability of qualified teachers, exacerbating workload pressures and emotional demands (Putra, 2024). Given the demanding nature of this profession, teachers require adequate institutional resources and psychosocial support. However, empirical evidence examining how such demands and supports relate to teachers' professional quality of life remains limited. Addressing this gap, the present study investigates how coping strategies in response to occupational demands contribute to the professional quality of life of teachers working with students with special needs.

A high quality of life for both students and teachers is a fundamental prerequisite for establishing educational environments that are responsive to the needs of individuals with disabilities and that provide inclusive and appropriate instruction. The quality of school life for students is closely reflected in the quality of interpersonal interactions among students, families, and schools, underscoring the relational nature of educational well-being (Rismawati & Latifa, 2024). Stamm (2010) conceptualizes professional quality of life as the combination of positive and negative emotional experiences derived from one's role as a helper. This framework comprises three interrelated components: compassion satisfaction, which refers to the pleasure and fulfillment derived from helping others; burnout, characterized by emotional exhaustion and diminished capacity to manage work demands; and secondary traumatic stress, which emerges from indirect exposure to others' trauma and manifests in symptoms such as fear, tension, and psychological distress. Together, these dimensions illustrate how helping professionals simultaneously experience reward and strain within their occupational roles.

Assessing teachers' professional quality of life is particularly important because reduced well-being may lead to disengagement, diminished empathy, and eventual withdrawal from the profession, depriving students of stable instructional support (Ormiston et al., 2022). Previous research has demonstrated that high levels of burnout

among special education teachers are associated with multiple factors, including personal stressors, classroom challenges, and institutional responsibilities (Park & Shin, 2020). Other studies further indicate that teachers who display high levels of empathy and emotional involvement are especially vulnerable to prolonged secondary traumatic stress, placing them at risk of compassion fatigue over time (Purnamasari et al., 2020).

One psychological factor that may influence vulnerability to compassion fatigue is how individuals cognitively appraise and respond to stressful experiences (Niluminda et al., 2025; Patrick & Bensley, 2024). According to the transactional theory of stress and coping (Biggs et al., 2017; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), individuals continuously evaluate environmental demands and their perceived ability to manage them. Emotional distress arises when a situation is appraised as threatening or overwhelming, prompting the use of coping strategies to regulate emotional responses or address the stressor itself (Biggs et al., 2017; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Coping strategies are generally categorized into problem-focused coping, aimed at modifying the source of stress, and emotion-focused coping, which seeks to regulate emotional reactions to stressors (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In addition, avoidant coping represents a maladaptive strategy in which individuals disengage from stress-inducing cues; although avoidance may temporarily reduce anxiety, it often prevents adaptive learning and long-term stress resolution (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Although coping strategies have been widely associated with professional quality of life among helping professionals, empirical research examining these relationships within the context of Indonesian special education teachers remains scarce. Specifically, no prior studies have systematically examined how coping strategies relate to compassion satisfaction, burnout, and secondary traumatic stress among this population. Therefore, this study seeks to identify which coping strategies are most strongly associated with professional quality-of-life outcomes among special education teachers. Previous research conducted primarily among healthcare workers and therapists has shown that emotion-focused and avoidant coping are often linked to higher levels of compassion fatigue, whereas problem-focused coping tends to function as a protective factor (Ondrejková & Halamová, 2022; Zhang et al., 2022). However, studies on Professional Quality of Life (ProQOL) have largely overlooked special education teachers, despite the unique emotional, behavioral, and relational demands inherent in their professional roles. This gap is critical, as these demands may distinctly shape experiences of compassion satisfaction, burnout, and secondary traumatic stress.

The findings of this study are expected to contribute to increased awareness among families, schools, and broader social systems regarding the psychological challenges faced by special education teachers, with the overarching aim of improving professional quality of life in special school settings. Early identification of burnout and secondary traumatic stress symptoms is essential so that preventive and remedial interventions can be implemented effectively. By highlighting the role of coping

strategies, this research seeks to support teachers' mental health and sustain their professional and personal well-being. Such support is crucial, as insufficient institutional backing has been shown to significantly increase teachers' intentions to leave the profession. Notably, Ertürk (2022) reported that the teacher job quality dimension accounts for 83% of the variance in turnover intention, underscoring the importance of workplace conditions in retaining educators.

Despite growing scholarly attention to professional quality of life among helping professionals, existing research has predominantly concentrated on healthcare workers and social service providers, with comparatively limited empirical focus on special education teachers. Although several studies have documented elevated levels of burnout, compassion fatigue, and secondary traumatic stress in this population, far fewer have examined the psychological mechanisms that may buffer or exacerbate these outcomes. In particular, empirical investigations that systematically link specific coping strategies to distinct dimensions of professional quality of life—namely compassion satisfaction, burnout, and secondary traumatic stress—remain scarce, especially within non-Western educational contexts.

Moreover, the limited body of research involving special education teachers has largely relied on descriptive or correlational approaches without explicitly differentiating the functional roles of problem-focused, emotion-focused, and avoidant coping strategies. This limitation constrains our understanding of how teachers actively manage occupational stressors and how these coping patterns may differentially shape positive and negative professional outcomes. In the Indonesian context, where structural challenges such as teacher shortages and high student needs persist, empirical evidence addressing these relationships is particularly sparse. The absence of context-specific data restricts the development of evidence-based interventions tailored to the lived realities of special education teachers in this setting.

Accordingly, there is a clear need for empirically grounded research that examines how distinct coping strategies are associated with multiple dimensions of professional quality of life among special education teachers. Addressing this gap, the present study offers a timely contribution by investigating the predictive role of problem-focused, emotion-focused, and avoidant coping strategies in shaping compassion satisfaction, burnout, and secondary traumatic stress among Indonesian special education teachers. By situating coping strategies within a multidimensional ProQOL framework, this study seeks to extend existing literature and provide contextually relevant insights to inform teacher support and well-being initiatives.

Therefore, efforts to cultivate a positive professional environment for special education teachers must be grounded in a deeper understanding of how distinct coping strategies shape multiple dimensions of professional quality of life within this specific educational context. Drawing on the transactional theory of stress and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). and prior findings among helping professionals, the present study

examines whether problem-focused, emotion-focused, and avoidant coping strategies differentially predict compassion satisfaction, burnout, and secondary traumatic stress among Indonesian special education teachers. It is expected that problem-focused and emotion-focused coping will be positively associated with compassion satisfaction and negatively associated with burnout, reflecting their adaptive role in managing occupational demands. In contrast, avoidant coping is expected to show a positive association with secondary traumatic stress, given its tendency to impede long-term emotional processing and recovery. By testing these theoretically informed relationships within a multidimensional Professional Quality of Life framework, this study seeks to extend existing ProQOL research beyond healthcare settings and provide context-specific empirical evidence relevant to special education teachers in non-Western educational environments.

## **METHOD**

This study employed a quantitative research design, and because the variables of coping strategies and professional quality of life (ProQOL) are conceptually multidimensional, multivariate regression analysis was selected as the primary analytical approach. In this study, professional quality of life was operationalized using the Professional Quality of Life Scale (ProQOL-5), which consists of three subscales: compassion satisfaction, burnout, and secondary traumatic stress. Each dimension was measured through respondents' self-reported agreement with 30 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating stronger levels of the respective construct. Coping strategies were operationalized using the Brief COPE Inventory, which was categorized into three overarching dimensions: problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, and avoidant coping. These coping dimensions were assessed through 28 self-report items using a 5-point Likert scale, with higher scores reflecting more frequent use of the corresponding coping strategy. Instrument testing included both reliability and validity assessments. Hypotheses were tested using t-tests and F-tests within the multivariate regression framework.

Data analysis was conducted using Mplus version 7. Data were collected using questionnaires that had undergone prior validity and reliability testing. Ethical approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Psychology at UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, Indonesia (Approval No. 085/KEP-FPsi/UINJKT/VII/2025). All participants provided informed consent prior to participation, and the study was conducted in accordance with established ethical guidelines. Institutional permission was also granted by school principals at the participating schools. The study population consisted of 232 special education teachers, from which a sample of 147 participants was determined using the Isaac and Michael formula. Non-probability purposive sampling was employed because the study required participants who met specific professional criteria, namely, teachers currently working with students with special needs. Given the specialized nature and limited accessibility of this population, probability sampling was

not feasible, making purposive sampling an appropriate strategy to ensure participant relevance. The inclusion criteria required that participants be special education teachers in the Bekasi area with a minimum of one year of teaching experience. Data collection was conducted either in person at schools or via an online platform, contingent upon institutional permission and voluntary participation. All 147 completed responses were included in the analysis. The demographic characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1***Overview of Study Respondents*

		Frequency N=147	%
Gender	Male	25	17
	Female	122	83
Type of School	Public	60	41
	Private	87	59
Age	20 – 29 Years old	35	24
	30 – 39 Years old	44	30
	40 – 49 Years old	37	25
	50 – 59 Years old	27	18
	Over 60 Years old	4	3
	Bachelor's Degree	135	92
Teacher Education Level	Master's Degree	5	3
	High School	7	5
	0 – 5 Years	49	33
Years of Experience	6 – 10 Years	31	21
	Over 10 Years	67	46
	Elementary School	72	49
Work Unit	High School	36	24
	Junior High School	39	27
	Civil Servant (PNS & PPPK)	43	29
Employment Status	Permanent Teacher (Not Certified) Sertifikasi)	59	40
	Permanent Teacher (Certified)	29	20
	Non-Permanent Teacher	16	11

Professional quality of life was measured using the Professional Quality of Life Scale (ProQOL-5) developed by Stamm (2010) and psychometrically tested by Hemsworth et al. (2018). In this study, the scale was adapted linguistically and contextually to ensure suitability for special education teachers. The instrument consists of 30 items measuring compassion satisfaction, burnout, and secondary traumatic stress, each rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). An example item is "I feel satisfied because I can accompany children with special needs." Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted separately for each ProQOL dimension to evaluate construct validity.

The CFA results for the compassion satisfaction dimension indicated good model fit, with Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = .047, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = .99, Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI) = .99, and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) = .039. The internal consistency of this subscale was high (Cronbach's  $\alpha$  = .852).

For the burnout dimension, CFA results also demonstrated adequate model fit (RMSEA = .038, CFI = .99, TLI = .98, SRMR = .042). However, items 8 and 26 were excluded from subsequent analyses due to t-values below the acceptable threshold of 1.96. The burnout subscale demonstrated acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha$  = .738).

The CFA results for the secondary traumatic stress dimension indicated satisfactory construct validity, with RMSEA = .043, CFI = .99, TLI = .99, and SRMR = .040. The internal consistency of this subscale was good (Cronbach's  $\alpha$  = .773).

Coping strategies were measured using the Brief COPE Inventory (Carver, 1997) with psychometric support from Stapleton et al. (2020). The instrument was translated and culturally adapted into Indonesian for the purposes of this study. The scale consists of 28 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) and measures problem-focused, emotion-focused, and avoidant coping. An example item is “I receive emotional support from others.” CFA was conducted for each coping dimension to assess construct validity.

The CFA results for problem-focused coping demonstrated good model fit (RMSEA = .048, CFI = 1.00, TLI = .99, SRMR = .026), with high internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha$  = .846). For emotion-focused coping, CFA results indicated satisfactory fit (RMSEA = .041, CFI = .99, TLI = .99, SRMR = .049), with Cronbach's  $\alpha$  = .836. The avoidant coping dimension also demonstrated acceptable model fit (RMSEA = .045, CFI = .97, TLI = .96, SRMR = .065); however, item 18 was excluded from further analysis due to a t-value below 1.96. This subscale showed good reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha$  = .834).

## RESULTS

In this study, descriptive statistical analyses were conducted to summarize the distribution of scores for each research variable. Measures including range, minimum and maximum values, mean, median, and standard deviation were calculated to provide an overview of teachers' levels of compassion satisfaction, burnout, secondary traumatic stress, and coping strategies. The descriptive statistics for each variable are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2**  
*Descriptive Analysis Results*

Variabel	N	Range	Min	Max	Mean	Median	Std. Dev
Compassion satisfaction	147	53.58	13.87	67.45	50.0000	48.977	9.291
Burnout	147	50.12	33.45	83.57	50.0000	51.083	8.830
Secondary traumatic stress	147	40.69	40.59	81.29	50.0000	47.077	9.336
Problem-focused coping	147	52.49	14.71	67.21	50.0000	49.708	9.413
Emotional-focused coping	147	58.02	9.03	67.05	50.0000	47.706	9.289
Avoidant coping	147	65.57	45.34	110.91	50.0000	47.499	9.683

Based on data from 147 participants, the descriptive statistics indicate that all three components of professional quality of life fall within the moderate range. Compassion satisfaction shows a median score of 48.98 with a wide range (13.87–67.45), suggesting that most teachers experience a moderate level of fulfillment in their professional roles, with considerable individual variability. Burnout demonstrates a median of 51.08 and moderate variability ( $SD = 8.83$ ), indicating that emotional exhaustion is moderately prevalent among participants. Similarly, secondary traumatic stress also falls within the moderate range (median = 47.08), with comparable variability ( $SD = 9.34$ ).

Regarding coping strategies, problem-focused coping has a median score of 49.71, indicating a moderate tendency to use active, task-oriented strategies. Emotion-focused coping shows a slightly lower median (47.71), reflecting a comparable but somewhat less frequent use of emotion-regulation strategies. Avoidant coping exhibits the widest score range (45.34–110.91), with a median of 47.50, indicating greater variability in the extent to which teachers rely on avoidance-based coping strategies.

**Table 3**  
*Research Variable Categorization*

Variable	Frequency			
	Low	%	High	%
Compassion satisfaction	79	53.7	68	46.3
Burnout	63	42.9	84	57.1
Secondary trauma stress	95	64.6	52	35.4
Problem-focused coping	99	67.3	48	32.7
Emotion-focused coping	87	59.2	60	40.8
Avoidant coping	122	83	25	17

Of the total 147 special school teachers, professional quality of life variables were categorized into high and low levels, as presented in Table 3. Compassion satisfaction was classified as low for 79 respondents (53.7%), indicating that more than half of the participants reported relatively low levels of professional fulfillment. In contrast, burnout was classified as high for 84 teachers (57.1%), suggesting that a substantial proportion of participants experienced elevated burnout levels. For secondary traumatic stress, 52

teachers (35.4%) were categorized at a high level, while 95 teachers (64.6%) reported low levels, indicating that most participants had not yet reached a high level of secondary traumatic stress.

With respect to coping strategies, problem-focused coping was categorized as low for 99 teachers (67.3%), indicating limited use of active problem-solving strategies. Similarly, emotion-focused coping was low for 87 teachers (59.2%), suggesting that many participants reported limited engagement in emotion-regulation strategies. Avoidant coping was also predominantly classified as low, with 122 teachers (83%) falling into this category. Overall, these distributions suggest that most special education teachers reported relatively low utilization of coping strategies across all three dimensions.

**Table 4***Multivariate Regression Test Results*

	<b>β</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>t-value</b>	<b>p-value</b>
PFC → CS	0.287	0.084	3.416	0.001
EFC → CS	0.510	0.082	6.244	0.000
AC → CS	0.020	0.055	0.364	0.716
PFC → BO	-0.233	0.094	-2.481	0.013
EFC → BO	-0.482	0.091	-5.315	0.000
AC → BO	-0.058	0.062	-0.943	0.346
PFC → STS	-0.109	0.112	-0.979	0.328
EFC → STS	-0.075	0.113	-0.664	0.507
AC → STS	0.452	0.066	6.904	0.000

Description: Compassion Satisfaction (CS), Burnout (BO), Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS), Problem Focused Coping (PFC), Emotional Focused Coping (EFC), Avoidant Coping (AC)

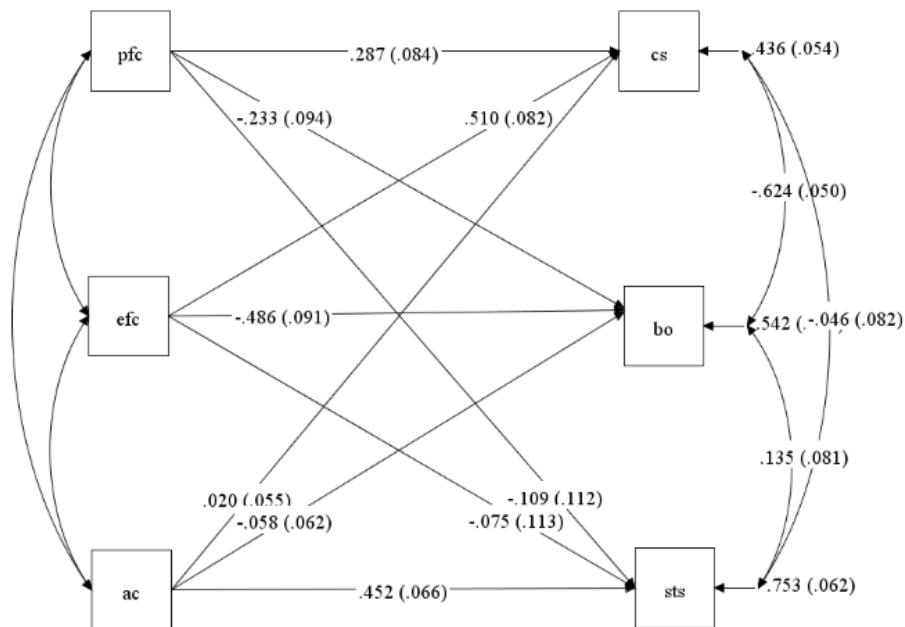
Multivariate regression analysis was conducted to examine the effects of coping strategies on professional quality of life outcomes. The standardized regression coefficients, standard errors, t-values, and p-values are presented in Table 4. Problem-focused coping had a significant positive effect on compassion satisfaction ( $\beta = .287$ ,  $t = 3.416$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Emotion-focused coping also demonstrated a significant positive effect on compassion satisfaction ( $\beta = .510$ ,  $t = 6.244$ ,  $p < .05$ ). In contrast, avoidant coping did not show a significant effect on compassion satisfaction ( $\beta = .020$ ,  $t = .364$ ,  $p > .05$ ).

With respect to burnout, problem-focused coping exhibited a significant negative effect ( $\beta = -.233$ ,  $t = -2.481$ ,  $p < .05$ ), indicating that higher use of this coping strategy was associated with lower burnout levels. Emotion-focused coping likewise showed a significant negative effect on burnout ( $\beta = -.482$ ,  $t = -5.315$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Avoidant coping did not have a statistically significant effect on burnout ( $\beta = -.058$ ,  $t = -.943$ ,  $p > .05$ ).

For secondary traumatic stress, problem-focused coping did not demonstrate a significant effect ( $\beta = -.109$ ,  $t = -.979$ ,  $p > .05$ ), nor did emotion-focused coping ( $\beta = -.075$ ,  $t = -.664$ ,  $p > .05$ ). In contrast, avoidant coping showed a significant positive effect

on secondary traumatic stress ( $\beta = .452$ ,  $t = 6.904$ ,  $p < .05$ ), indicating that greater reliance on avoidance-based coping was associated with higher levels of trauma-related stress symptoms.

**Figure 1**  
*Path Analysis Test Result*



The overall structural model demonstrated excellent fit with the empirical data, as indicated by RMSEA = .000, CFI = 1.000, TLI = 1.000, and SRMR = .000, as illustrated in Figure 1. The model explained 56.4% of the variance in compassion satisfaction, 45.8% of the variance in burnout, and 24.7% of the variance in secondary traumatic stress, indicating moderate to strong explanatory power across professional quality-of-life dimensions. These results suggest that coping strategies play a substantial role in shaping professional quality of life among special education teachers, with differentiated effects across outcome domains.

## DISCUSSION

Research conducted with 147 special education teachers indicates that coping strategies play differentiated roles in shaping multiple dimensions of professional quality of life within the context of special education teaching. The results demonstrate that problem-focused and emotion-focused coping are positively associated with compassion satisfaction and negatively associated with burnout, whereas avoidant coping is positively associated with secondary traumatic stress. These findings directly address the limited empirical evidence on Professional Quality of Life (ProQOL) among special education teachers, a group that has been underrepresented in prior ProQOL research dominated by healthcare and social service professions. Based on the descriptive results, special

education teachers in this study reported moderate to high levels of burnout but relatively low levels of secondary traumatic stress, suggesting that occupational stress may arise more from ongoing job demands than from repeated exposure to others' traumatic experiences. This pattern aligns with Wong et al. (2018), who found that teacher stress affects instructional quality, student engagement, and retention within the profession. Taken together, these findings underscore the importance of understanding how internal coping resources interact with structural demands in special education settings.

Compassion satisfaction was found to be positively associated with problem-focused coping, indicating that teachers who actively address work-related challenges are more likely to derive fulfillment from their professional roles. This finding supports the transactional theory of stress and coping, which posits that adaptive cognitive appraisal and problem-solving can mitigate stress and promote psychological well-being (Biggs et al., 2017; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The present results are consistent with Patrick and Bensley (2024), who reported that teachers employing problem-focused coping experience higher professional satisfaction. Within the context of special education, where instructional demands are complex and persistent, problem-focused coping may enable teachers to maintain a sense of efficacy and purpose despite ongoing challenges (Elshaer, 2023).

Emotion-focused coping was also positively associated with compassion satisfaction, suggesting that effective emotional regulation contributes to professional fulfillment. This finding is consistent with Halamova et al. (2025), who demonstrated that emotion-focused interventions can enhance self-compassion and compassion satisfaction among helping professionals. Similarly, Abellana et al. (2023) reported that special education teachers benefit from emotion-focused coping strategies that reduce emotional reactivity to stress. These findings highlight the importance of emotional awareness and regulation in sustaining professional motivation among teachers working in emotionally demanding educational environments. Avoidant coping, by contrast, did not demonstrate a significant association with compassion satisfaction, corroborating earlier findings that avoidance-based strategies are less effective in fostering positive professional outcomes (Patrick & Bensley, 2024; Bonganciso & Bonganciso, 2022). This may reflect the tendency of avoidant coping to reduce immediate distress without contributing to meaning-making or long-term professional fulfillment (Wang et al., 2022).

With respect to burnout, both problem-focused and emotion-focused coping exhibited significant negative associations, indicating their protective role against emotional exhaustion. This finding aligns with Spaan et al. (2023), who reported that problem-focused coping is associated with reduced burnout and cognitive impairment among professionals. This interpretation is also consistent with findings by Gurvich et al. (2021), who demonstrated that adaptive coping styles are associated with better mental health outcomes, whereas maladaptive coping patterns are linked to increased psychological distress under prolonged stress conditions. In special education contexts,

where teachers frequently face role overload and ambiguity, adaptive coping strategies may buffer the cumulative effects of chronic stressors (Brunsting et al., 2014). Emotion-focused coping also demonstrated a negative association with burnout, although previous studies have reported mixed findings regarding its effectiveness (Buettner et al., 2016; Brittle, 2020). The present findings suggest that when emotion-focused coping involves constructive regulation rather than disengagement, it may help teachers sustain emotional balance and reduce burnout risk. In contrast, avoidant coping was not significantly associated with burnout, consistent with Mustafa et al. (2022), who found no meaningful relationship between avoidance strategies and burnout among professional helpers. This suggests that avoidance may neither alleviate nor exacerbate emotional exhaustion in the short term, particularly when its use remains limited.

Regarding secondary traumatic stress, avoidant coping emerged as the only coping strategy with a significant positive association, indicating that teachers who rely on avoidance are more vulnerable to trauma-related stress symptoms. This finding is consistent with Al Barmawi et al. (2019), who reported similar patterns among counselors. Avoidant coping strategies—such as denial, emotional disengagement, and reliance on external factors—may inhibit adaptive processing of distressing experiences (Marković & Živanović, 2022). In the context of special education, avoidance may prevent teachers from addressing emotionally demanding situations effectively, thereby increasing susceptibility to secondary traumatic stress over time. In contrast, problem-focused and emotion-focused coping were not significantly associated with secondary traumatic stress, suggesting that trauma-related stress may be shaped more by maladaptive coping patterns than by the absence of adaptive strategies.

Overall, this study extends the Professional Quality of Life literature by demonstrating that coping strategies exert selective, rather than uniform, effects on distinct ProQOL dimensions among special education teachers in a non-Western context. Unlike much of the existing ProQOL research centered on healthcare professionals, the present findings emphasize the unique emotional dynamics of teaching students with special needs, where sustained workload pressures and relational demands shape professional well-being in specific ways. By highlighting differentiated coping–outcome pathways, this study contributes contextually grounded evidence that may inform targeted interventions aimed at enhancing compassion satisfaction and reducing burnout and secondary traumatic stress among special education teachers.

## CONCLUSION

In general, the findings of this study indicate that special education teachers primarily rely on problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies to manage the demands associated with teaching students with special needs, whereas teachers who tend to avoid work-related challenges are more vulnerable to experiencing secondary traumatic stress. These results suggest that teachers who are able to actively confront

occupational demands and regulate their emotional responses are better positioned to navigate stressful situations effectively. As a consequence, such teachers may continue to experience a sense of professional fulfillment despite physical and emotional fatigue, while simultaneously reducing their risk of burnout. In other words, coping strategies oriented toward problem solving and emotional regulation contribute to higher compassion satisfaction and lower burnout among special education teachers, whereas avoidant coping appears to heighten vulnerability to trauma-related stress.

Based on these findings, the implementation of structured coping-skills training programs represents a promising approach to enhancing the professional quality of life of special education teachers. Interventions that emphasize problem-solving skills, emotion regulation, and mindfulness practices may be particularly effective in strengthening compassion satisfaction and mitigating burnout. One example is the Consciousness-Based Professional Development (CARE for Teachers) program, developed by Jennings et al. (2017), which is designed to enhance teachers' social and emotional competencies and improve classroom interactions. This program consists of 30 hours of face-to-face training combined with follow-up coaching, and prior research has demonstrated its effectiveness in improving emotional regulation, self-awareness, and psychological well-being among teachers. Such programs may offer valuable frameworks for supporting special education teachers who face sustained emotional and instructional demands.

Despite its contributions, this study is subject to several methodological limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the study employed a cross-sectional design, which limits the ability to draw causal conclusions regarding the relationships between coping strategies and professional quality of life. Second, the exclusive reliance on self-report measures may have introduced social desirability bias, potentially affecting the accuracy of participants' responses. In addition, this study did not examine other contextual or occupational factors—such as employment status, organizational support, or workload—that may also influence professional quality of life. Future research is therefore encouraged to incorporate longitudinal designs, mixed-method approaches, and additional explanatory variables to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors shaping special education teachers' professional well-being.

Furthermore, the integration of qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews or focus group discussions, is recommended to complement quantitative findings. Qualitative inquiry may offer richer insights into how teachers apply coping strategies in their daily professional lives and help clarify why avoidant coping is associated with elevated levels of secondary traumatic stress. By capturing teachers' subjective experiences and contextual nuances, future studies can deepen understanding of coping processes that cannot be fully explained through survey data alone.

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