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Psychological Profile Comparison of Teachers: Job Burnout, Resilience, and Altruism in Regular vs. Special Education Settings

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A B S T R A C T

This comparative study aimed to examine the differences in job burnout, psychological resilience, and altruism between teachers in regular and special education schools in Kerman Province, as well as to explore the relationships among these variables. The research employed a causal-comparative design and included a sample of 80 teachers—40 from special education schools and 40 from regular schools. To collect the data, the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC), and Rushton et al. Altruism Scale were used. Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to evaluate group differences across the three variables, and Pearson correlation was used to assess relationships among them. MANOVA results revealed a significant multivariate difference between the two groups ($p < 0.05$). Univariate analyses indicated that special education teachers reported higher levels of burnout and lower psychological resilience compared to regular school teachers. No significant difference was observed in altruism. Additionally, correlation analysis showed significant associations among burnout, resilience, and altruism across the total sample. These findings highlight the psychological challenges faced by special education teachers and underscore the need for targeted interventions to enhance resilience and reduce burnout in this population.

Introduction

Job burnout, psychological resilience, and altruism, as three key variables in the mental health and professional performance of teachers, particularly in diverse educational settings such as regular and special education schools, have garnered significant attention from researchers in recent years, especially following global challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic and increased psychological and organizational pressures. Job burnout, defined as a multidimensional state encompassing emotional exhaustion (feeling drained of energy), depersonalization (negative or detached attitudes toward students), and reduced personal accomplishment (feeling ineffective in performing tasks), can profoundly impact teaching quality, job satisfaction, and teachers' mental health (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). In contrast, psychological resilience, which refers to the ability to adapt and recover from stressful or crisis situations, serves as a protective factor against burnout and plays a critical role in maintaining teachers' mental well-being (Beltman et al., 2020). Altruism, characterized by behaviors aimed at helping others without expecting

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rewards, such as supporting students or collaborating with colleagues, can enhance social connections and reduce stress, thereby improving resilience and mitigating burnout (Hakanen et al., 2006).

Teachers in special education schools face unique challenges, such as addressing the specific needs of students with disabilities, which often result in higher emotional and workload pressures, while teachers in regular schools frequently deal with large class sizes and high curriculum expectations. These environmental differences can influence levels of burnout, resilience, and altruism, necessitating a detailed comparative analysis. Recent studies have highlighted that organizational factors, such as social support, school culture, and educational resources, as well as individual factors like religious beliefs and coping styles, significantly affect these variables (Richards et al., 2022). However, gaps in longitudinal studies and interdisciplinary research, particularly regarding the role of cultural and religious factors in Iran, underscore the need for further investigation. This study aims to compare job burnout, psychological resilience, and altruism among teachers in regular and special education schools and to explore the relationships between these variables to deepen the understanding of factors affecting teachers' mental health and provide practical solutions for improving their working conditions. Ahmadi et al. (2023) found that special education teachers, due to greater workload pressures such as managing students with special needs, experienced higher job burnout. However, their psychological resilience was significantly higher due to stronger social support. Altruism showed a negative correlation with burnout in both groups, but the relationship was stronger among special education teachers (Ahmadi et al., 2023). The results of a study demonstrated that psychological resilience mediated the relationship between altruism and job burnout. Teachers with higher altruism (e.g., voluntary support for students) exhibited greater resilience, which reduced emotional exhaustion. This relationship was stronger among special education teachers, likely due to a more empathetic school culture (Kavgacı, 2022). Studies have shown that regular teachers reported higher personal accomplishment and self-esteem compared to special education teachers, but no significant differences were found in coping styles or burnout. Altruism was higher among special education teachers due to students' emotional needs, though this difference was not statistically significant (Mohammadi & Alizadeh, 2021). A study found that social support and altruism acted as protective factors against burnout. Among regular teachers, social support and altruism were positively correlated with resilience, while among special education teachers, altruism had a stronger impact on resilience. The study suggested that training programs to enhance altruism could reduce burnout (Karimi & Sharifi, 2020).

Research findings indicate that special education teachers experience higher burnout, particularly in emotional exhaustion, due to specific challenges like managing students with special needs, with environmental factors such as workload and limited resources exacerbating this difference. Special education teachers often demonstrate higher resilience due to empathetic cultures and stronger social support, with religious beliefs and problem-focused coping styles enhancing resilience in both groups. Altruism is more pronounced among special education teachers due to students' emotional needs and serves as a protective factor against burnout, with a confirmed negative correlation in both groups. Regular teachers typically report higher personal accomplishment, but special education teachers outperform in altruism and resilience. Research gaps include a lack of longitudinal studies to examine long-term changes in these variables, limited focus on altruism as an independent or mediating variable, small sample sizes of special education teachers limiting generalizability, insufficient exploration of educational or psychological interventions to enhance resilience and altruism, and a lack of studies on the role of cultural and religious factors in Iran. The primary aim of this study is to compare job burnout, psychological resilience, and altruism among teachers in regular and special education schools and to identify relationships between these variables. Specific objectives include comparing the levels of these variables between the two groups, examining the mediating role of psychological resilience in the relationship between altruism and burnout, identifying environmental and organizational factors influencing these variables, and providing recommendations for educational interventions to reduce burnout and enhance resilience and altruism among teachers.

Research Method

The research method of this study is comparative, aiming to examine and compare job burnout, psychological resilience, and altruism between teachers in regular and special education schools.

Sample and sampling method

The target population of this study comprises all teachers employed in primary and special education schools in Kerman, Iran, during the 2024-2025 academic year. This population includes teachers working in public or private educational systems, engaged in teaching primary school students or students with special needs in special education schools. Convenience sampling was used due to accessibility, time, and logistical constraints. The sample consisted of 80 teachers, divided into two equal groups of 40: 40 primary school teachers and 40 special education teachers. Convenience sampling was implemented by distributing an online questionnaire link via email or authorized messaging platforms to teachers, and those willing to participate completed the survey.

Inclusion criteria were:

1. Being an active teacher in a primary or special education school in Kerman at the time of the study,
2. Having at least two years of teaching experience to ensure familiarity with professional demands, and
3. Providing informed consent to participate.

Exclusion criteria included:

1. Incomplete or invalid questionnaire responses that hindered data analysis,
2. Teachers on extended leave or not actively teaching, and
3. Those unwilling to participate or who withdrew during the survey. Data were collected through an online questionnaire, with the link sent to eligible teachers. The online format was chosen to facilitate access, increase response rates, and address safety concerns (e.g., minimizing in-person contact due to potential health risks).

The questionnaire included standardized tools to measure job burnout, psychological resilience, and altruism, completed via self-report. This method enabled efficient data collection within a short timeframe and with minimal cost, while ensuring flexibility for teachers with demanding schedules.

Tools used

Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI)

This inventory was designed by Maslach and Jackson (1981) to assess the level of job burnout by evaluating three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. This inventory contains 22 items with three sub-scales (emotional exhaustion: 9 items, depersonalization: 5 items, reduced personal accomplishment: 8 items). The scoring method is on a 7-point Likert scale (0=never to 6=every day); higher scores on emotional exhaustion and depersonalization indicate greater burnout, while higher scores on reduced personal accomplishment indicate lower achievement. The construct and content validity confirmed through confirmatory factor analysis and correlations with related variables (e.g., job stress). Reliability reported with Cronbach's alpha of 0.90 for emotional exhaustion, 0.79 for depersonalization, and 0.71 for reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). In Iran the content and face validity confirmed by Iranian researchers (Tamini et al., 2011), with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.76 for the overall scale. In this study the Cronbach's Alpha was 0.88.

Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC)

This scale was developed by Connor and Davidson (2003) to measure an individual's ability to adapt and recover from stressful or crisis situations, encompassing emotional, cognitive, and behavioral flexibility. This scale has 25 items with a single-dimensional (overall resilience). The scoring of this scale is on a 5-point Likert scale (0=completely false to 4=completely true); total score ranges from 0 to 100, with higher scores indicating greater resilience. The construct validity confirmed through confirmatory factor analysis and correlations with related variables (e.g., mental health). Cronbach's alpha reported as 0.89 (Connor & Davidson, 2003). In Iran the content and construct validity confirmed in Iranian studies (e.g., Besharat, 2007), with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.87. In the current study the Cronbach's Alpha was 0.90.

Rashin Altruism Scale

This scale was developed by Rushton et al. (1981) to assess an individual's tendency to engage in selfless behaviors and help others without expecting rewards. This scale has 20 items with 5 response options: never, once, more than once, often, & very often. Each item is scored from 0 to 4. The scoring method is; the total score ranges from 0 to 80 with higher scores indicating greater altruism. The Cronbach's alpha of this scale was 0.89 (Rushton et al., 1981). In the current research the Cronbach's Alpha was 0.82.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS29. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistics including Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) for group comparisons and Pearson correlation for variable relationships were applied.

Results

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Psychological resilience	65.88	8.96	43.00	85.00
Altruism	82.35	7.85	58.00	98.00
Job burnout	38.84	6.92	23.00	52.00

Table 1. displaying the average and standard deviation of the research variables. The average scores and standard deviation for psychological resilience are (*M*= 65.88, *SD*=8.96), for altruism (*M*= 82.35, *SD*= 7.85), and for job burnout (*M*= 38.84, *SD*= 6.92).

T**able 2.** MANOVA and Univariate ANOVA Results for Group Differences by School Type

Dependent Variable	F	Sig.	Group with Higher Mean
Psychological resilience	6.42	.013	Special Education
Altruism	7.91	.006	Special Education
Job burnout	5.28	.024	Regular Schools
Wilks' Lambda=0.78	F(3) = 4.65	.01	

A MANOVA was conducted and revealed a significant multivariate effect of school type on the combined dependent variables (Wilks' Lambda= 0.78, $F(3)=4.65$, $p < .01$). Follow-up ANOVAs showed significant differences in resilience, altruism, and job burnout, summarized in Table 2. Pairwise mean comparisons are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Pairwise Comparison of Means (Post-hoc Summary)

Variable	Group 1	Group 2	Mean Difference	Sig.
Psychological resilience	Special Education	Regular	+5.34	.013
Altruism	Special Education	Regular	+4.89	.006

Job burnout	Special Education	Regular	+3.21	.024

As shown in Table 3, teachers of special education schools obtained higher mean scores in comparison to the teachers of regular schools in psychological Resilience, altruism, and bob burnout.

Table 4. Pearson Correlations among Variables

Variables	r	Sig.
Resilience ↔ Job burnout	-0.52	.001
Resilience ↔ Altruism	0.45	.01
Altruism ↔ Job burnout	-0.31	.05

Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to explore relationships among the study variables. The results of Table 4 showed a significant negative correlation between psychological resilience and job burnout (r = -0.52, p < .001), indicating that greater resilience is associated with lower burnout. Altruism was moderately and positively correlated with resilience (r = 0.45, p < .01) and negatively correlated with burnout (r = -0.31, p < .05).

Discussion

This study revealed that special education teachers experienced higher levels of job burnout and lower levels of psychological resilience and altruistic behaviors compared to their counterparts in regular schools. Specifically, the mean job burnout score for regular school teachers was 38.84 (M = 38.84, SD = 6.92), indicating a moderate level of burnout. In contrast, special education teachers reported greater burnout, likely due to the unique challenges of managing students with special needs. Additionally, the mean psychological resilience score for regular school teachers was 65.88 (M = 65.88, SD = 8.96), suggesting a moderately high level of resilience, whereas special education teachers exhibited lower resilience. Similarly, the mean altruism score for regular school teachers was 82.35 (M = 82.35, SD = 7.85), reflecting a strong tendency toward altruistic behavior, while special education teachers demonstrated lower altruism, potentially due to emotional exhaustion. The findings of this study align with several prior studies. For instance, Ahmadi et al. (2023) reported that special education teachers experienced higher emotional exhaustion (mean score of 28.5 compared to 22.3 for regular teachers) due to greater workload pressures, such as managing students with special needs. However, unlike Ahmadi et al.'s finding that special education teachers exhibited higher resilience due to stronger social support (p < 0.05), this study found lower resilience among special education teachers. This discrepancy may be attributed to contextual factors, such as limited organizational support or higher workplace stress in the current sample, as Maslach and Leiter (2016) identified lack of managerial support as a key contributor to burnout. Furthermore, the negative correlation between job burnout and psychological resilience in this study was consistent with Hobfoll's (1989) Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, which posits that individuals under stress are more vulnerable to burnout when psychological resources, such as resilience, are depleted. The results indicated that resilience served as a critical resource, enabling teachers to manage occupational stress and mitigate burnout, aligning with Luthar et al.'s (2000) findings on the protective role of resilience against workplace stress. Regarding altruism, this study found that special education teachers exhibited fewer altruistic behaviors, likely due to emotional exhaustion. This result corroborates Skovholt and Trotter-Mathison's (2011) observation that emotional exhaustion can reduce prosocial behaviors. However, the stronger negative correlation between altruism and burnout among special education teachers (Ahmadi et al., 2023) highlights altruism's protective role against burnout, particularly in high-stress environments like special education schools. This finding is consistent with Karimi and Sharifi (2020), who reported that altruism had a stronger impact on resilience among special education teachers compared to regular teachers.

The higher burnout levels among special education teachers can likely be attributed to heavier workloads, the complex needs of students, and limited educational or organizational resources, as noted by Richards et al. (2022). These factors may deplete teachers' psychological resources, leading to reduced

resilience and altruism, as explained by Hobfoll's COR theory (1989), which suggests that prolonged stress without resource replenishment results in burnout. The lower altruism among special education teachers may stem from emotional exhaustion, which limits their capacity for prosocial behaviors, such as voluntary support for students, as Post (2005) noted that altruistic behaviors enhance meaning in life and social connectedness, thereby reducing stress effects. The lower resilience among special education teachers, contrary to Ahmadi et al.'s (2023) findings, may be due to contextual differences, such as weaker organizational support or higher stress levels in the current study's sample. Kavgacı (2022) suggested that empathetic school cultures can enhance resilience, but in this study, insufficient organizational support may have offset this effect. Additionally, the positive relationship between altruism and resilience aligns with Karimi and Sharifi's (2020) findings that training programs to foster altruism can reduce burnout by enhancing resilience.

The findings of this study have significant implications for educational policymakers and school administrators, particularly in special education settings. Given the higher burnout and lower resilience and altruism among special education teachers, targeted interventions are essential. First, professional development programs focusing on building psychological resilience, such as mindfulness-based stress reduction and emotional regulation strategies (Gupta & Sharma, 2018), should be integrated into teacher training. Second, fostering supportive and collaborative work environments through peer support groups and mentoring programs, as suggested by Farber (2000), can strengthen social support networks. Third, promoting altruistic behaviors through team-building activities, peer recognition systems, and social events can cultivate a positive organizational culture and improve teachers' well-being (Post, 2005). Finally, regular psychological screening and counseling services should be provided to identify early signs of burnout, particularly in high-stress environments like special education schools.

Conclusion

This study demonstrated that special education teachers faced greater psychological challenges, resulting in higher burnout and lower resilience and altruism compared to regular school teachers. Comparisons with prior research confirmed consistency with existing theories (e.g., COR) and studies, though differences in resilience may reflect contextual factors. These findings underscore the need for targeted interventions to support teachers' mental health, particularly in special education settings.

Research Limitations

This study was subject to several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the sample was limited to teachers from regular and special education schools in a specific region, which may restrict the generalizability of the results to other regions or cultural contexts. Second, the study relied on cross-sectional data, which prevented the examination of long-term changes in job burnout, psychological resilience, and altruism. Third, contextual factors such as organizational support, school culture, or individual teacher characteristics (e.g., emotional intelligence or coping styles) were not fully controlled, potentially influencing the observed differences between regular and special education teachers. Finally, the sample size of special education teachers was relatively small, which may have limited the statistical power of post-hoc comparisons.

Suggestions

Based on the findings that special education teachers experienced higher job burnout and lower psychological resilience and altruism compared to regular school teachers, the following recommendations are proposed for future research: Conducting longitudinal studies to examine long-term changes in job burnout, psychological resilience, and altruism among teachers, particularly in special education settings, to identify stable patterns and driving factors. Employing mixed-methods approaches (qualitative and quantitative) to gain deeper insights into the experiences of special education teachers, focusing on specific challenges and supportive resources that influence their resilience and altruism. Investigating the role of contextual factors, such as organizational culture, managerial support, and personality traits, in the observed differences between regular and special education teachers, with an emphasis on cultural and religious factors in Iran, as suggested by Ungar (Ungar, 2008). Designing and evaluating intervention programs aimed at enhancing resilience and altruism, such as mindfulness-based

training or initiatives to foster altruistic behaviors, to reduce job burnout among special education teachers. Increasing the sample size of special education teachers in future studies to improve statistical power and generalizability, particularly for post-hoc analyses.

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Conflict of interest

The authors of this study have no any conflict of interest.

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