



Research Article

Workload and job stress among special assistant teachers in inclusive schools: Examining the moderating role of work competence

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Article Info

Received: 9 April 2026

Accepted: 25 May 2026

Online: 30 June 2026

Keywords

Inclusive education
Job stress
Moderation analysis
Special assistant teachers
Work competence
Workload

Abstract

This study aims to analyze the effect of workload on job stress and examine the role of work competence as a moderating variable. Inclusive education requires qualified educational personnel who are capable of addressing the diverse needs of students with special educational needs (SEN). Among these professionals, Special Assistant Teachers (SATs) play a critical role in supporting students' academic, behavioral, and social development. However, the multifaceted responsibilities associated with this role often increase workload and may contribute to elevated levels of job stress. While previous studies have identified workload as a significant predictor of occupational stress, limited research has examined the moderating role of work competence among SATs in inclusive educational settings. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the effect of workload on job stress and examine whether work competence moderates this relationship. A quantitative correlational design was employed involving 40 Special Assistant Teachers working in inclusive schools. Participants were selected using purposive sampling. Data were collected through standardized questionnaires measuring workload, job stress, and work competence. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, reliability and validity testing, simple linear regression, and Moderated Regression Analysis (MRA). The results revealed that workload had a positive and significant effect on job stress ($\beta = .621$, $t = 4.292$, $p < .001$), explaining 32.7% of the variance in job stress. Furthermore, the moderation analysis demonstrated that work competence significantly moderated the relationship between workload and job stress ($\beta = -.045$, $t = -3.210$, $p = .003$). The negative interaction coefficient indicates that higher levels of work competence weaken the positive effect of workload on job stress. These findings suggest that work competence functions as an important personal resource that buffers the adverse psychological consequences of excessive workload. Strengthening professional competence through continuous training and professional development programs may therefore contribute to reducing job stress and enhancing the effectiveness of inclusive education services.

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To cite this article

Prabandaru, F.C., Ni'matuzahroh, N., and Karmiyati, D. (2026). Workload and job stress among special assistant teachers in inclusive schools: Examining the moderating role of work competence. *Journal for the Child Development, Exceptionality and Education*, 7(1), 17-27. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20999784>

Introduction

Inclusive education has emerged as a global educational movement that promotes equal access to quality education for all learners, regardless of their physical, cognitive, social, emotional, or cultural differences (UNESCO, 2020). The fundamental principle of inclusive education is to create learning environments that accommodate diversity by adapting teaching methods, curricula, learning resources, and assessment practices to meet the needs of all students. As

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emphasized by UNESCO and various international educational policies, inclusive education is not merely an educational approach but also a manifestation of social justice and educational equity (UNESCO, 2020; De Schauwer, 2023). Consequently, educational institutions worldwide are increasingly expected to provide effective support systems that facilitate the successful inclusion of students with special educational needs (SEN) (Fernández-Batanero et al., 2022).

The successful implementation of inclusive education depends largely on the availability of qualified educational personnel who possess the knowledge, skills, and professional competencies necessary to support diverse learners (Fernández-Batanero et al., 2022). Among these professionals, Special Assistant Teachers (SATs) play a crucial role in ensuring that students with special educational needs receive appropriate academic, behavioral, and social support. In the Indonesian educational context, Special Assistant Teachers are responsible for assisting, guiding, teaching, and assessing students with special educational needs across different educational settings (Movkebaieva et al., 2013). Their role extends beyond instructional support and includes collaboration with classroom teachers, communication with parents, and the implementation of individualized learning programs (De Schauwer, 2023).

Despite the increasing commitment to inclusive education, numerous challenges continue to hinder its effective implementation. One of the most significant challenges is the limited availability of qualified Special Assistant Teachers and the uneven distribution of professional development opportunities. Recent reports indicate that the number of teachers who have received specialized training in inclusive education remains insufficient compared to the growing demand for inclusive educational services (Fernández-Batanero et al., 2022). Furthermore, Special Assistant Teachers frequently encounter multiple instructional, administrative, and emotional demands, which may increase occupational pressure and negatively affect their psychological well-being (Almutairi et al., 2024).

Previous studies have identified workload as one of the most influential factors affecting teachers' psychological well-being (Koca, 2024; Lesener et al., 2020). Workload refers to the overall quantity, complexity, and intensity of tasks that employees are required to perform within a given period (Longo et al., 2022). Excessive workload has been consistently associated with occupational stress across various professional contexts because it requires sustained physical, cognitive, and emotional effort (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). In educational settings, high workload has been linked to emotional exhaustion, reduced job satisfaction, burnout, and decreased professional effectiveness (Almutairi et al., 2024; Saleh et al., 2024).

One factor that may help explain individual differences in teachers' responses to workload is work competence. Work competence refers to the combination of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and professional capabilities that enable individuals to perform their occupational responsibilities effectively (Movkebaieva et al., 2013). Teachers possessing higher levels of competence are generally better prepared to cope with professional demands, solve instructional problems, and maintain effective performance under stressful conditions (Fernández-Batanero et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2023). Consequently, competence may serve as an important personal resource that protects teachers from the negative psychological consequences of excessive workload.

The potential protective role of competence can be explained through the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Theory and the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory. The JD-R Theory proposes that occupational well-being is determined by the balance between job demands and available resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Job demands require sustained effort and are associated with physiological and psychological costs, whereas resources facilitate goal achievement, reduce strain, and promote professional growth (Lesener et al., 2020). Similarly, the Conservation of Resources Theory argues that individuals who possess sufficient personal resources are better able to cope with stressful situations and maintain psychological well-being (Hobfoll, 1989). Within these theoretical frameworks, work competence can be conceptualized as an important personal resource that enables teachers to manage demanding work environments more effectively.

Although previous studies have demonstrated that workload contributes to occupational stress and that competence promotes employee well-being, relatively limited research has examined the moderating role of work competence among Special Assistant Teachers working in inclusive educational settings (Guglielmi et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2023). Most

existing studies have focused on general teaching populations or employees in non-educational sectors. Consequently, empirical evidence regarding the psychological experiences of Special Assistant Teachers remains limited, particularly in developing-country contexts such as Indonesia.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the effect of workload on job stress among Special Assistant Teachers working in inclusive schools and to investigate the moderating role of work competence in this relationship. By integrating concepts from the Job Demands–Resources Theory and the Conservation of Resources Theory, this study contributes to the growing literature on occupational stress in inclusive education and extends current understanding of the role of personal resources in reducing the negative effects of job demands.

Based on the theoretical framework and previous empirical findings, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Workload has a positive and significant effect on job stress among Special Assistant Teachers in inclusive schools.

H2: Work competence moderates the relationship between workload and job stress, such that the positive effect of workload on job stress becomes weaker among teachers with higher levels of work competence.

Job Stress among Special Assistant Teachers

Job stress is a psychological, emotional, and physiological response that emerges when employees perceive that job demands exceed their available resources, capabilities, or coping capacity (Beehr & Newman, 1978; Hobfoll, 1989). In occupational psychology, job stress is commonly understood as a condition of imbalance between work demands and individual resources. When this imbalance persists over time, individuals may experience emotional exhaustion, anxiety, reduced motivation, decreased concentration, and lower work performance (Guglielmi et al., 2023).

In educational settings, job stress has become a major concern because teachers' psychological well-being is closely related to instructional quality, classroom management, and student outcomes (Saleh et al., 2024). Teachers who experience prolonged stress may show reduced professional engagement, increased absenteeism, lower job satisfaction, and a greater intention to leave the profession (Almutairi et al., 2024). For Special Assistant Teachers in inclusive schools, job stress may be even more complex because their responsibilities involve not only instructional activities but also emotional support, behavioral assistance, communication with parents, and collaboration with classroom teachers (De Schauwer, 2023).

Special Assistant Teachers work directly with students with special educational needs, whose characteristics and learning needs vary considerably. These teachers are expected to provide individualized support, adapt instructional strategies, monitor student progress, and assist students in both academic and social participation (Fernández-Batanero et al., 2022). Such responsibilities require continuous emotional regulation, patience, flexibility, and professional sensitivity. Therefore, job stress among Special Assistant Teachers should be understood as a multidimensional phenomenon involving physical, psychological, and behavioral symptoms (Beehr & Newman, 1978).

Workload

Workload refers to the overall demands that individuals must fulfill in performing their occupational responsibilities. It includes the quantity of tasks, task complexity, time pressure, work intensity, and the cognitive and emotional effort required to complete job-related duties (Koca, 2024). Workload can be understood from both objective and subjective perspectives. Objective workload includes measurable aspects such as the number of tasks, working hours, deadlines, and administrative responsibilities, whereas subjective workload refers to how individuals perceive the difficulty, pressure, and burden associated with their work (Longo et al., 2022).

In the context of inclusive education, workload is particularly relevant because Special Assistant Teachers often perform multiple roles simultaneously. Their workload may include assisting students with special educational needs, preparing individualized learning plans, documenting student development, coordinating with classroom teachers, communicating with parents, and adapting learning materials (De Schauwer, 2023). In addition, they often face emotional demands when dealing with students' behavioral, social, or communication challenges.

A high workload may increase psychological strain when teachers feel that job demands exceed their capacity. Excessive workload may lead to fatigue, emotional exhaustion, reduced concentration, and decreased professional effectiveness (Almutairi et al., 2024). Therefore, workload is frequently identified as a key predictor of job stress in

educational and organizational research (Lesener et al., 2020).

Work Competence

Work competence refers to the integration of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and professional behaviors that enable individuals to perform their duties effectively (Movkebaieva et al., 2013). Competence is not limited to technical ability but also includes cognitive, social, emotional, and adaptive capacities. In contemporary work environments, competence is increasingly viewed as a dynamic resource that develops through education, professional training, experience, reflection, and organizational support (Fernández-Batanero et al., 2022).

For Special Assistant Teachers, work competence includes the ability to understand the characteristics of students with special educational needs, design individualized learning strategies, implement adaptive teaching methods, communicate effectively with stakeholders, and collaborate with other professionals (De Schauwer, 2023). Competence also includes emotional regulation, problem-solving, classroom management, and the ability to respond flexibly to students' diverse needs.

Teachers with higher levels of competence tend to have stronger confidence in managing their responsibilities. They are more capable of organizing tasks, setting priorities, solving instructional problems, and responding to challenging situations. As a result, competence may help reduce the psychological burden associated with high workload (Zhang et al., 2023). Conversely, teachers with limited competence may perceive similar job demands as more threatening, stressful, and difficult to manage (Guglielmi et al., 2023).

Job Demands–Resources Theory

The Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Theory provides a useful framework for explaining the relationship between workload, competence, and job stress (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). According to the JD-R Theory, every occupation contains job demands and job resources. Job demands refer to physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of work that require sustained effort and are therefore associated with physiological or psychological costs. Examples include workload, time pressure, emotional demands, role ambiguity, and administrative burden (Lesener et al., 2020). Job resources, on the other hand, refer to aspects of work that help individuals achieve work goals, reduce job demands, and stimulate personal growth and development. Resources may be organizational, social, or personal. Personal resources include self-efficacy, resilience, optimism, professional competence, and coping ability (Hobfoll, 1989).

In this study, workload is conceptualized as a job demand because it requires sustained physical, cognitive, and emotional effort. Work competence is conceptualized as a personal resource because it enables teachers to manage their duties more effectively and reduce the negative psychological consequences of excessive demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). When teachers possess strong competence, they are more likely to perceive workload as manageable and less likely to experience severe job stress.

Workload and Job Stress

Workload has been widely recognized as one of the most important predictors of job stress (Koca, 2024). When employees are required to complete many tasks within limited time and under complex conditions, psychological pressure tends to increase. In teaching professions, workload may arise from instructional duties, administrative tasks, curriculum demands, documentation, communication with parents, and emotional labor (Almutairi et al., 2024).

For Special Assistant Teachers, workload may be more demanding because they work with students who require individualized support. They must adapt learning strategies, monitor student development, manage behavioral challenges, and collaborate with various stakeholders. These responsibilities may increase emotional exhaustion and psychological strain, particularly when institutional support is limited (De Schauwer, 2023).

According to the JD-R Theory, high workload may lead to stress when job demands are not balanced by sufficient resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Lesener et al., 2020). Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that Special Assistant Teachers who experience higher workload will also experience higher levels of job stress.

H1: Workload has a positive and significant effect on job stress among Special Assistant Teachers in inclusive schools.

The Moderating Role of Work Competence

Although workload can increase job stress, the strength of this relationship may depend on teachers' level of competence.

Competence enables teachers to understand work demands, organize responsibilities, select appropriate strategies, and respond adaptively to challenging situations (Movkebaieva et al., 2013). Teachers with higher competence may be more capable of managing workload without experiencing excessive psychological pressure.

In inclusive education, competence allows Special Assistant Teachers to design individualized learning programs, manage students' diverse needs, communicate effectively with parents, and collaborate with classroom teachers (Fernández-Batanero et al., 2022). These abilities may reduce uncertainty and help teachers perceive demanding tasks as manageable rather than threatening. Thus, competence may weaken the positive relationship between workload and job stress.

From the perspective of JD-R Theory, competence functions as a personal resource that buffers the negative effects of job demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). When competence is high, the impact of workload on stress is expected to be lower. Conversely, when competence is low, workload may have a stronger effect on job stress because teachers may feel less capable of handling their responsibilities (Zhang et al., 2023).

Therefore, this study proposes that work competence moderates the relationship between workload and job stress.

H2: Work competence moderates the relationship between workload and job stress, such that the positive effect of workload on job stress becomes weaker among teachers with higher levels of work competence.

Method

This study employed a quantitative correlational research design to examine the relationship between workload and job stress and to investigate the moderating role of work competence among Special Assistant Teachers working in inclusive schools. Quantitative research is considered appropriate because it allows researchers to test hypotheses and evaluate relationships among variables using statistical procedures (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The study was designed to determine whether work competence influences the strength of the relationship between workload and job stress.

Participants

The target population consisted of Special Assistant Teachers (SATs) employed in inclusive schools. These teachers were selected because they are directly involved in supporting students with special educational needs and frequently encounter complex instructional, administrative, and emotional demands. Participants were recruited using purposive sampling. This sampling technique was employed to ensure that respondents met specific inclusion criteria relevant to the objectives of the study (Etikan et al., 2016).

The inclusion criteria were as follows: Currently employed as a Special Assistant Teacher in an inclusive school. Having at least one year of professional experience. Actively involved in supporting students with special educational needs. Willing to participate voluntarily in the study.

Data were collected through a survey administered both online and offline. Prior to participation, respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and assured that all information would remain confidential and be used exclusively for research purposes.

Data Collection Tools

This study included three variables: workload as the independent variable, job stress as the dependent variable, and work competence as the moderating variable.

Workload refers to the overall demands imposed on Special Assistant Teachers within a specific period of time, including task quantity, task complexity, and time pressure associated with supporting students in inclusive educational settings. Workload is conceptualized as a job demand that requires sustained physical, cognitive, and emotional effort (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). The workload scale was adapted from Nurhasanah et al. (2022) and consisted of three dimensions: Work targets, Operational conditions and Work standards. Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Job stress refers to the physiological, psychological, and behavioral responses experienced by Special Assistant Teachers when perceived work demands exceed available resources and coping capacities. The measurement was based on the framework proposed by Beehr and Newman (1978), consisting of three dimensions: 1. Physiological symptoms,

2 Psychological symptoms, and 3. Behavioral symptoms ..

Beehr and Newman (1978) defined job stress as a condition arising from interactions between employees and their work environment that disrupt psychological and physiological functioning. Participants responded using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Work competence refers to the knowledge, skills, motivation, and professional abilities required to effectively support students with special educational needs in inclusive educational settings. Competence is regarded as a personal resource that enhances an individual's ability to cope with occupational demands and maintain effective performance (Hobfoll, 1989; Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). The competence scale was adapted from Movkebaieva Zulfija et al. (2013) and included the following dimensions: 1. Motivational orientation, 2. Informational competence, and 3. Operational competence. Responses were assessed using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Prior to the main data collection, the instruments were subjected to validity and reliability testing to ensure their psychometric adequacy. Item validity was assessed using item-total correlation analysis, while reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Instruments were considered reliable when Cronbach's alpha exceeded the recommended threshold of .70 (Hair et al., 2019).

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted through structured questionnaires distributed directly to respondents and through online platforms. Respondents completed the questionnaire voluntarily after receiving information regarding the objectives of the study, confidentiality procedures, and ethical considerations. Participation was anonymous, and no personally identifiable information was collected. Ethical principles concerning voluntary participation, confidentiality, and informed consent were maintained throughout the study (American Psychological Association, 2020).

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics were first conducted to summarize participant responses and variable characteristics. Subsequently, validity and reliability analyses were performed to evaluate the quality of the measurement instruments (Field, 2018).

To test the proposed hypotheses, Moderated Regression Analysis (MRA) was employed. MRA was selected because it allows researchers to examine both the direct effect of workload on job stress and the moderating effect of work competence on this relationship (Hayes, 2022). The moderation model was estimated using the following regression equation:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X + \beta_2 M + \beta_3 (X \times M) + \varepsilon$$

where:

- Y = Job Stress
- X = Workload
- M = Work Competence
- X × M = Interaction term between workload and work competence
- ε = Error term

A significant interaction coefficient (β_3) indicates the presence of a moderating effect. Positive coefficients indicate a strengthening effect, whereas negative coefficients indicate a weakening effect of the relationship between workload and job stress (Hayes, 2022).

Results

Validity Test

Prior to the main analysis, the validity of the research instruments was examined to ensure that each questionnaire item accurately represented the intended construct. Item validity was assessed using Pearson Product-Moment correlation by comparing each item score with the corresponding total variable score. An item was considered valid when the obtained correlation coefficient exceeded the critical value of $r = .312$ ($n = 40$, $\alpha = .05$) and the significance level was

below .05.

The workload scale consisted of 12 items representing work targets, operational conditions, and work standards. The item–total correlation coefficients ranged from .880 to .934, with all significance values below .001, indicating that all workload items were valid and suitable for further analysis.

Similarly, the job stress scale comprised 14 items reflecting physiological, psychological, and behavioral symptoms. The correlation coefficients ranged from .731 to .900, and all items demonstrated statistically significant relationships with the total score ($p < .001$). These findings indicate that all items adequately represented the construct of job stress and met the validity criteria.

For the work competence scale, nine items were evaluated. The item–total correlation coefficients ranged from .893 to .942, exceeding the required threshold and demonstrating strong relationships with the total competence score. Therefore, all items were retained for subsequent analyses.

Reliability Test

Reliability analysis was conducted using Cronbach's alpha coefficient to evaluate the internal consistency of the instruments. The job stress scale achieved a Cronbach's alpha value of .968, indicating excellent reliability. The workload scale demonstrated a Cronbach's alpha of .980, while the work competence scale yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .979. All values substantially exceeded the recommended threshold of .70, confirming that the instruments possessed very high levels of internal consistency and were suitable for further statistical analysis. The test results showed that all variables had Cronbach's Alpha values greater than 0.70, indicating that the instruments were reliable.

Normality Test

The normality assumption was examined using both the Kolmogorov–Smirnov and Shapiro–Wilk tests based on the unstandardized residuals of the regression model. The Kolmogorov–Smirnov test produced a significance value of .200, while the Shapiro–Wilk test yielded a significance value of .549. Both values exceeded the criterion of .05, indicating that the residuals were normally distributed. Consequently, the normality assumption was satisfied, allowing the regression analysis to proceed.

Simple Linear Regression Analysis

Simple linear regression analysis was performed to examine the effect of workload on job stress among Special Assistant Teachers.

The resulting regression equation was:

$$\text{Job Stress} = 19.651 + 0.621(\text{Workload})$$

The regression coefficient for workload was positive ($\beta = .621$), indicating that increases in workload were associated with higher levels of job stress. The model produced an R value of .571 and an R² value of .327, suggesting that workload explained 32.7% of the variance in job stress. The remaining 67.3% of variance was attributable to factors not included in the model.

The ANOVA results indicated that the regression model was statistically significant, $F(1, 38) = 18.425$, $p < .001$. Furthermore, workload significantly predicted job stress ($\beta = .621$, $t = 4.292$, $p < .001$), supporting the hypothesis that workload positively affects job stress among Special Assistant Teachers.

Moderated Regression Analysis

Model 2: Direct Effects of Workload and Work Competence

In the second stage of analysis, workload and work competence were entered simultaneously into the regression model after mean-centering both variables to reduce potential multicollinearity.

The model yielded an R value of .580 and an R² value of .337, indicating that workload and competence jointly explained 33.7% of the variance in job stress. The model was statistically significant, $F_{(2, 37)} = 9.395$, $p = .001$.

The regression coefficients revealed that workload remained a significant predictor of job stress ($\beta = .712$, $t = 4.309$, $p < .001$), whereas work competence did not demonstrate a significant direct effect at this stage ($\beta = .168$, $t = 0.757$, $p = .454$).

Model 3: Moderation Analysis

The final model included the interaction term between workload and work competence to test the moderating effect of competence.

The inclusion of the interaction term substantially improved the explanatory power of the model. The R^2 value increased from .337 to .484, indicating an additional 14.7% of explained variance. The overall model was statistically significant, $F_{(3, 36)} = 11.273$, $p < .001$.

The results demonstrated that work competence significantly predicted job stress ($\beta = 1.517$, $t = 3.264$, $p = .002$). More importantly, the interaction between workload and competence was statistically significant ($\beta = -.045$, $t = -3.210$, $p = .003$). The negative interaction coefficient indicates that work competence weakened the positive relationship between workload and job stress.

These findings suggest that work competence functions as a quasi-moderator because it exerts both a direct effect on job stress and a moderating effect on the relationship between workload and job stress.

Discussion

The Relationship between Workload and Job Stress

The findings revealed that workload had a positive and significant effect on job stress among Special Assistant Teachers. This result indicates that higher levels of workload are associated with increased psychological strain, emotional pressure, and occupational stress. In inclusive educational settings, Special Assistant Teachers are required to manage a wide range of responsibilities, including instructional support, administrative duties, behavioral interventions, individualized learning plans, and communication with parents and school personnel. These multiple demands require considerable cognitive, emotional, and physical effort. As workload increases, teachers are more likely to experience fatigue, emotional exhaustion, and psychological distress.

These findings are consistent with previous studies demonstrating that excessive workload contributes to emotional exhaustion, reduced concentration, anxiety, and decreased work performance (Almutairi et al., 2024; Koca, 2024). Similar findings have been reported in educational settings, where increasing job demands are associated with higher levels of occupational stress and lower levels of psychological well-being among teachers (Saleh et al., 2024).

The results also support the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) Theory, which posits that excessive job demands increase psychological strain when adequate resources are unavailable (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Lesener et al., 2020). Within the JD–R framework, workload is considered a job demand that requires sustained physical and psychological effort. When these demands remain high over a prolonged period, individuals become more vulnerable to psychological strain, emotional exhaustion, and reduced well-being.

In the context of inclusive schools, this situation may become more challenging because Special Assistant Teachers are expected not only to provide academic support but also to assist students' social and behavioral development, collaborate with classroom teachers, communicate with parents, and prepare individualized educational programs. The accumulation of these responsibilities may increase occupational stress when adequate organizational support and personal resources are unavailable.

Overall, the findings suggest that workload represents a significant predictor of job stress among Special Assistant Teachers. As job demands increase, teachers become more vulnerable to emotional exhaustion and psychological strain, highlighting the importance of workload management strategies within inclusive educational settings.

The Moderating Role of Work Competence

The moderation analysis demonstrated that work competence significantly weakened the relationship between workload and job stress. This finding indicates that competence functions as a protective factor that enables teachers to manage occupational demands more effectively. Furthermore, work competence was found to exert a direct effect on

job stress while simultaneously moderating the relationship between workload and stress, suggesting that competence functions as a quasi-moderator.

According to the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) Theory, competence can be conceptualized as a personal resource that enhances an individual's ability to cope with workplace challenges (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Similarly, the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory argues that individuals who possess adequate personal resources are better able to withstand stressful situations and maintain psychological well-being (Hobfoll, 1989).

Teachers possessing higher levels of competence are generally more capable of understanding students' needs, implementing appropriate instructional strategies, managing classroom challenges, and maintaining effective communication with relevant stakeholders (Fernández-Batanero et al., 2022; De Schauwer, 2023). These competencies enable teachers to approach work demands with greater confidence and effectiveness, thereby reducing the likelihood that workload will be perceived as overwhelming or threatening.

The negative interaction coefficient found in this study indicates that the positive relationship between workload and job stress becomes weaker as competence increases. In other words, competent teachers are better able to maintain psychological stability despite experiencing substantial job demands. This finding suggests that competence serves as a buffering mechanism that protects teachers from the adverse effects of excessive workload.

The findings are consistent with previous studies showing that professional competence reduces emotional exhaustion and enhances occupational resilience among educators (Alhumaid et al., 2024; Guglielmi et al., 2023). Likewise, Zhang et al. (2023) reported that personal resources such as competence and self-efficacy reduce the negative impact of work-related stressors on employee well-being. Within inclusive educational settings, competence may enable teachers to perceive demanding situations as manageable challenges rather than threatening obstacles.

These findings are particularly important because they demonstrate that competence is not merely a technical capability but also a psychological resource that contributes to occupational well-being. Therefore, professional development programs aimed at enhancing teachers' pedagogical, social, and professional competencies may help reduce the negative consequences of excessive workload.

Overall, the results indicate that workload remains an important predictor of job stress; however, its adverse effects can be mitigated through higher levels of professional competence. Strengthening teachers' competencies through continuous professional development, pedagogical training, mentoring programs, and emotional regulation interventions may therefore represent an effective strategy for promoting psychological well-being and improving the quality of inclusive education services.

Conclusion

This study showed that workload has a positive and significant effect on job stress among Special Assistant Teachers in inclusive schools. The higher the job demands received, whether in the form of teaching duties, administrative tasks, or emotional demands, the higher the level of job stress experienced by teachers. This condition indicates that the complexity of tasks carried out by Special Assistant Teachers has the potential to create psychological pressure if it is not balanced with adequate support and work management.

The results also revealed that work competence plays an important role in the relationship between workload and job stress. Competence not only has a direct effect on job stress but also functions as a moderating variable that weakens the effect of workload on job stress. Thus, competence can be categorized as a quasi-moderator. The higher the competence possessed by Special Assistant Teachers, the better their ability to manage job demands, thereby reducing the negative impact of workload on job stress.

Overall, this study emphasizes that workload management and the strengthening of professional competence should become important concerns in the implementation of inclusive education. Efforts such as training, skill development, and institutional support are expected to help Special Assistant Teachers maintain psychological well-being while improving the quality of inclusive education services.

Biodata of Author

Ni'matuzahroh was born on April 12, 2000, in the city of Kediri, which is well known for its yellow tofu specialty. Specifically, the author resides at Permata Hijau Housing Complex Block P-4, RT 45 RW 10, Singonegaran, Kediri City. The author is the first daughter of Mr. Danan Prabandaru and Mrs. Dhien Juningtyas Setyowati, who gave her the full name Fathima Ciptaning Prabandaru. The author began her educational journey at TK Plus Rahmat in 2004, then continued her studies in 2006 at SD Plus Rahmat, an Islamic Full Day School, and graduated in 2012. She then pursued her education at SMP Negeri 2 Kota Kediri until 2015, before continuing to SMA Negeri 6 Kota Kediri. After graduating from senior high school, the author continued her studies at the State Islamic Institute (IAIN) Kediri in 2018 to pursue a Bachelor's degree. At the time of writing this thesis, the author is still registered as an active undergraduate student in the Islamic Psychology study program.

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