



Predictors of Professional Well-Being and Job Performance Among Special Education Teachers in Pakistan: The Mediating Role of Emotional Intelligence

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Abstract

Background: Special education teachers frequently encounter structural constraints and emotionally demanding work environments that may compromise their professional functioning. In Pakistan, these challenges are exacerbated by systemic inefficiencies, limited institutional resources, and gaps in policy implementation. **Aim:** The present study examined the predictive roles of pedagogical barriers and workplace stress in shaping professional well-being and job performance among special education teachers in Pakistan. Additionally, the mediating function of emotional intelligence was investigated to better understand the underlying psychological mechanisms. **Methods:** Data were collected using standardized and psychometrically validated instruments measuring pedagogical barriers, workplace stress, emotional intelligence, professional well-being, and job performance. Structural equation modeling (SEM) and hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to test direct and indirect relationships among the study variables. **Results:** Results indicated that pedagogical barriers and workplace stress significantly predicted professional well-being. While workplace stress was negatively associated with professional well-being, it was positively related to job performance. Emotional intelligence partially mediated the effects of both pedagogical barriers and workplace stress on professional outcomes, highlighting its protective and adaptive role in high-demand educational contexts. **Discussion:** These findings highlight the dualistic role of workplace stress and underscore the importance of reducing structural barriers while strengthening emotional intelligence competencies among special education teachers. Policy reforms, institutional support mechanisms, and targeted professional development initiatives are recommended to enhance educator well-being and sustain optimal job performance in resource-constrained settings.

Keywords: Pedagogical Barriers, Workplace Stress, Emotional Intelligence, Special Education, Job Performance, Well-Being



Introduction

Special education teachers play a vital role in supporting students with diverse learning needs. Their work is inherently complex, requiring the management of behavioral, cognitive, and socio-emotional challenges while adapting instruction to individualized education plans (IEPs). In Pakistan, these responsibilities are further complicated by systemic inefficiencies, limited funding, insufficient infrastructure, and prevailing societal stigmas surrounding disability (Naz, 2019). These structural and cultural constraints can adversely affect teachers' professional well-being and job performance, underscoring the need to understand the factors that influence teacher effectiveness and resilience in low-resource educational contexts.

Pedagogical Barriers

Pedagogical barriers are systemic and instructional challenges that impede effective teaching and learning. Special education teachers must navigate diverse student needs within a single classroom, often requiring differentiated instructional strategies and individualized attention (Kilgore et al., 2003). Limited resources, including shortages of specialized teaching materials, assistive technologies, and support personnel, further exacerbate these challenges. In Pakistan, large class sizes, outdated curriculum frameworks, and a scarcity of trained special educators amplify these barriers (Jafree et al., 2022; Fazil et al., 2023).

The cumulative impact of pedagogical barriers may reduce teacher efficacy, increase psychological strain, and hinder the delivery of high-quality education. Furthermore, behavior management, collaboration with general education colleagues, and inclusive classroom practices require additional skills and emotional labor, adding complexity to teachers' daily responsibilities (Adewumi & Mosito, 2019; Anshory & Amelia, 2020). Collectively, these structural and instructional challenges are hypothesized to predict reductions in professional well-being and job performance among special educators.

Workplace Stress

Workplace stress in education arises from excessive workload, role ambiguity, lack of recognition, and organizational inefficiencies (Kyriacou, 2001). In special education, stressors are intensified by behavioral management demands, complex student needs, and limited administrative support. Chronic stress can lead to burnout, characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished personal accomplishment (Maslach & Leiter, 2016).

Paradoxically, moderate stress may enhance job performance by promoting alertness, effort, and adaptive problem-solving (LePine et al., 2005). In the Pakistani context, societal expectations and collectivist cultural norms may encourage teachers to perform under pressure despite personal strain. These dynamics suggest that workplace stress may simultaneously predict both reduced well-being and, in certain circumstances, increased job performance, highlighting the need for nuanced investigation.

Emotional Intelligence as a Mediator

Emotional intelligence (EI), the ability to perceive, understand, and regulate emotions in oneself and others (Salovey & Mayer, 1990) plays a crucial role in occupational adaptation. Teachers with higher EI demonstrate improved stress management, interpersonal relationships, and professional commitment (Cherniss, 2010; Brackett et al., 2010).

In special education, emotional demands are particularly high, requiring teachers to manage challenging student behaviors, resolve conflicts, and maintain classroom



inclusivity. EI may therefore mediate the relationship between structural and psychological stressors (pedagogical barriers and workplace stress) and professional outcomes, buffering adverse effects on well-being and facilitating effective job performance. Despite its relevance, this mediating mechanism has been underexplored in non-Western educational contexts, particularly in Pakistan.

Professional Well-Being and Job Performance

Professional well-being encompasses psychological, emotional, and occupational health, influencing teachers' engagement, satisfaction, and longevity in the profession. Job performance in special education involves both task-related outcomes (e.g., implementing IEPs, differentiated instruction) and discretionary efforts (e.g., collaboration, creativity, advocacy for resources) (Samundeeswari, 2024; Fazil et al., 2023).

Evaluating teacher performance requires attention to:

1. Effective implementation of IEPs and individualized instructional strategies.
2. Collaboration with colleagues, parents, and support staff.
3. Management of behavioral challenges and promotion of inclusive classroom environments.
4. Commitment to continuous professional development.
5. Advocacy for resources and support critical to student success.

These criteria underscore the multidimensional nature of teacher performance and the influence of both structural barriers and psychological capacities, such as EI, on professional effectiveness.

Literature Review

Pedagogical Barriers and Teaching Outcomes

Pedagogical barriers are systemic and instructional challenges that disrupt the teaching-learning process. These barriers may stem from underdeveloped curriculum frameworks, inadequate professional development, limited access to instructional materials, and poor infrastructure (Khan et al., 2021). In special education, these issues are further complicated by the need for individualized approaches, making the lack of specialized training a significant obstacle (Johnstone & Chapman, 2009). Teachers facing high pedagogical barriers often report reduced job satisfaction and a decline in perceived teaching efficacy.

In Pakistan, the education system struggles with large class sizes, outdated instructional methods, and limited special education expertise, all of which contribute to pedagogical inefficiencies. These challenges disproportionately affect special education teachers who must simultaneously manage diverse disabilities, scarce resources, and the social stigma surrounding disability education (Jafree et al., 2022). Research has shown that such persistent barriers negatively impact teacher morale and performance (Fazil et al., 2023).

Workplace Stress and Its Implications

Workplace stress in education has been widely documented, with contributors including excessive workload, unclear expectations, lack of recognition, and organizational politics (Kyriacou, 2001). In special education, stress levels are often amplified due to behavioral management demands, communication difficulties, and limited administrative support. Prolonged exposure to stress can lead to burnout, characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment (Maslach & Leiter, 2016).



Despite its negative implications, some studies suggest that moderate levels of stress can enhance job performance by increasing alertness and motivation (LePine et al., 2005). However, the threshold between adaptive and maladaptive stress is delicate. When coping mechanisms are insufficient, stress may impair cognitive functioning, decision-making, and interpersonal relations, key components of effective teaching (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

Emotional Intelligence as a Mediator

Emotional intelligence (EI) is defined as the ability to perceive, understand, and manage emotions in oneself and others (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). In occupational settings, higher EI is associated with improved job satisfaction, better leadership, and enhanced stress management (Cherniss, 2010). For teachers, EI can buffer the negative effects of stress, promote positive relationships with students and colleagues, and contribute to greater professional commitment (Brackett et al., 2010).

In special education, where emotional demands are especially high, EI plays a critical role in managing student behavior, resolving conflicts, and maintaining psychological balance. It also fosters adaptive coping strategies and emotional regulation, thereby reducing the adverse effects of workplace challenges. Despite its relevance, the mediating role of EI in the relationship between pedagogical barriers, stress, and teaching outcomes remains under-investigated in non-Western contexts.

Job Demand and Resource Model

The Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) provides a useful framework for understanding how workplace factors influence professional outcomes among special education teachers. In this context, pedagogical barriers, such as administrative inefficiencies, limited resources, and cognitive or communicative challenges- act as job demands that require sustained effort and can deplete teachers' psychological and occupational resources, reducing professional well-being. Conversely, personal resources like emotional intelligence can buffer the negative effects of these demands, enabling teachers to manage stress effectively, maintain job performance, and sustain well-being. Empirical evidence suggests that when job demands are high, teachers with stronger emotional intelligence are better equipped to cope, highlighting its protective and adaptive function in high-demand educational settings (Cherniss, 2010; Brackett et al., 2010). Applying the JD–R model to special education teachers emphasizes that addressing structural barriers while enhancing personal resources is critical for promoting both teacher well-being and effective job performance.

Research Gap and Study Objectives

Existing literature consistently demonstrates that pedagogical barriers and workplace stress independently exert significant negative effects on teacher performance and professional well-being (Johnstone & Chapman, 2009; Khan et al., 2021; Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Pedagogical barriers, including insufficient training, limited instructional resources, and structural constraints, have been shown to reduce teaching efficacy and job satisfaction among special education teachers (Fazil et al., 2023; Jafree et al., 2022; Brackett et al., 2011). Similarly, workplace stress arising from workload, behavioral management challenges, and organizational inefficiencies can erode psychological health, increase burnout risk, and impair instructional effectiveness (Kyriacou, 2001; LePine et al., 2005; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).



Despite these established individual effects, empirical research examining the combined impact of pedagogical barriers and workplace stress remains scarce, particularly in low-resource educational contexts such as Pakistan, where systemic inefficiencies and societal expectations amplify these challenges (Naz, 2019; Adewumi & Mosito, 2019). Moreover, the potential mediating role of emotional intelligence (EI), a critical psychological resource enabling teachers to perceive, regulate, and utilize emotions adaptively, has been largely neglected in non-Western settings (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Brackett et al., 2010; Cherniss, 2010; Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Evidence from Western contexts suggests that EI can buffer stress and improve professional outcomes (Brackett et al., 2011; Jennings et al., 2009), yet its application and relevance within the Pakistani special education system remain underexplored.

Addressing this gap, the present study investigates how pedagogical barriers and workplace stress predict professional well-being and job performance among Pakistani special education teachers, while examining whether emotional intelligence mediates these relationships. The findings are expected to inform culturally and contextually sensitive strategies to enhance teacher support, reduce attrition, and improve educational outcomes for students with special needs (Fazil et al., 2023; Jafree et al., 2022; Samundeeswari, 2024).

Methodology

Study Design and Participants

The study employed a cross-sectional quantitative design to examine the predictive relationships among pedagogical barriers, workplace stress, emotional intelligence, professional well-being, and job performance.

A total of 355 special education teachers (females and males) from public and private institutions across Pakistan participated in the study. Stratified convenience sampling was used to ensure representation across institutional sectors. Teaching experience ranged from 1 to over 10 years. Inclusion criteria required participants to be actively engaged in classroom instruction.

Instruments

Pedagogical Barriers Scale (PBS) - Indigenous Scale

The Pedagogical Barriers Scale (PBS) is an indigenous instrument developed in Study 1 of the current research project to assess structural and instructional challenges faced by special education teachers in Pakistan. The scale consists of 60 items distributed equally across six subscales: Administrative Barriers (10 items), Competency Barriers (10 items), Cognitive Barriers (10 items), Communicative Barriers (10 items), Emotional Barriers (10 items), and Contextual Barriers (10 items).

Responses are recorded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with higher scores indicating greater perceived pedagogical barriers. The scale development process included item generation through literature review and qualitative interviews with special education teachers, followed by expert panel evaluation to establish content validity.

Individual Work Performance Questionnaire (IWPQ)

Job performance was measured using the 18-item Individual Work Performance Questionnaire (IWPQ) developed by Koopmans et al. (2013). The scale measures three dimensions: task performance, contextual performance, and counterproductive work behavior.



Responses for task and contextual performance range from 0 (seldom) to 4 (always), whereas counterproductive work behavior ranges from 0 (never) to 4 (often). Higher scores indicate better overall work performance (after reverse-scoring counterproductive items). Previous research has demonstrated satisfactory reliability (α values ranging from .74 to .85) and construct validity. In the present study, the overall reliability was $\alpha = .87$, with subscale alphas ranging from .78 to .85.

Professional Well-being Scale (PWS)

Professional well-being was assessed using the 12-item scale developed by Yildirim (2014). The instrument measures job satisfaction, work engagement, and professional fulfillment. Responses are recorded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with higher scores indicating greater professional well-being. The original study reported satisfactory internal consistency ($\alpha > .85$).

Work Stress Questionnaire (WSQ)

Work-related stress was measured using the 21-item Work Stress Questionnaire (WSQ) developed by Holmgren, Hensing, et al. (2009). The instrument assesses four dimensions: indistinct organization and conflict, individual demands and commitment, influence at work, and work-leisure time interference. The first two dimensions use response options "yes," "partly," and "no," followed by stress intensity ratings. The latter two dimensions use frequency-based responses ("yes, always," "yes, often," "no, rarely," "no, never"). Higher scores indicate greater levels of occupational stress. The WSQ has demonstrated strong test-retest reliability using non-parametric evaluation methods, indicating stability over time (Holmgren, Dahlin-Ivanoff, et al., 2009). In the present study, internal consistency was satisfactory ($\alpha = .88$).

Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS)

Emotional intelligence was assessed using the 16-item Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS) developed by Wong and Law (2002). The instrument measures four dimensions: self-emotion appraisal, others' emotion appraisal, use of emotion, and regulation of emotion. Responses are recorded on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), with higher scores reflecting higher emotional intelligence. Previous studies have reported strong internal consistency (α ranging from .83 to .90).

Procedure

Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Ethics Review Committee. Institutional permissions were secured before data collection. Participants received detailed study information and provided informed consent. Data were collected over eight weeks using both online and paper-based formats. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS and AMOS. Preliminary analyses included screening for missing values, normality, outliers, and multicollinearity. Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation coefficients were computed. Multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine predictive relationships. Mediation analysis was performed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). Model fit was evaluated using multiple indices, including Chi-square (χ^2), CFI, TLI, RMSEA, and SRMR. Bootstrapping (5,000 samples) was applied to assess indirect effects. Statistical significance was set at $p < .05$.



Results

Correlation Analysis

A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine relationships among the study variables ($N = 350$). As shown in Table 1, the six barrier subtypes, administrative, competency, cognitive, communicative, emotional, and contextual, were highly intercorrelated, with correlations ranging from $r = -.95$ to $.99$, all significant at $p < .01$ or $p < .001$. Individual work performance (Variable 7) showed a small but significant positive correlation with contextual barriers ($r = .33$, $p < .05$) and with job stress ($r = .18$, $p < .05$), whereas correlations with other barriers were negligible and non-significant. Professional well-being (Variable 8) displayed weak and mostly non-significant correlations with all barrier subtypes (e.g., $r = -.07$ to $-.23$, $p > .05$) except for a small positive correlation with communicative barriers ($r = .11$, $p < .05$).

Table 1: Pearson Correlation for Study Variables ($N = 350$)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	--									
2	.95**	--								
3	-.95**	-.87***	--							
4	-.95**	.99***	.87***	--						
5	-.95**	-.89***	.79***	.76***	--					
6	-.95**	-.88***	.82***	.85***	.77***	--				
7	.06	.06	-.06	-.05	-.06	.33*	--			
8	-.07	-.10	.10	.11*	.10	-.23	-.17	--		
9	.11	.11	-.11	-.12*	-.13	-.12	.18*	.13	--	
10	.03	.02	-.03	-.03*	-.02	.02	-.09	.02	-	--
										.04

Note. 1 = Administrative barriers; 2= Competency barriers; 3= Cognitive Barriers; 4= Communicative barriers; 5= Emotional barriers; 6= Contextual barriers, 7 = The Individual Work Performance questionnaire; 8= Professional Well-being Scale; 9= Job Stress Inventory; 10= Emotional Intelligence scale.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Job stress (Variable 9) was weakly negatively correlated with communicative barriers ($r = -.12$, $p < .05$) and showed a small positive correlation with individual work performance ($r = .18$, $p < .05$), while correlations with professional well-being ($r = .13$) and emotional intelligence ($r = -.04$) were non-significant.

Emotional intelligence (Variable 10) exhibited no significant associations with professional well-being, job stress, or barriers. Overall, the findings suggest that although barrier subtypes are strongly interrelated, their associations with professional well-being, work performance, job stress, and emotional intelligence are generally weak, with few reaching statistical significance.

Regression Analysis

A multiple regression was conducted to examine whether pedagogical barriers, workplace stress, emotional intelligence, and job performance predicted professional well-being. The overall model accounted for a modest proportion of variance, $R^2 = .06$, indicating that 6% of the variance in professional well-being was explained by the predictors.

**Table 2: Regression Analysis for Predicting Professional Well-being**

Variables	B	SE	T	Professional Well-being	
				p	95%CI
Constant	32.28	6.28	5.13	.000	[19.80, 44.76]
Pedagogical Barriers	-.01	.02	-.66	.045	[-.03, .25]
Workplace Stress	-.22	.15	1.48	.089	[-.07, .53]
Emotional Intelligence	.03	.03	-.98	.023	[-.10, .03]
Job Performance	.11	.07	1.59	.014	[-.02, .26]

Note. B = unstandardized beta; SE = standard error; CI = confidence interval.

Results showed that pedagogical barriers ($B = -.01, p = .045$), emotional intelligence ($B = .03, p = .023$), and job performance ($B = .11, p = .014$) were statistically significant predictors, though the effects were small, while workplace stress ($B = -.22, p = .089$) was not a significant predictor. These findings suggest that professional well-being is modestly influenced by pedagogical barriers, emotional intelligence, and job performance.

Table 3: Regression Analysis for Predicting Job Performance from Pedagogical barriers scale, Professional Well-being Scale, Job Stress Inventory, and Emotional Intelligence scale (N= 350)

Variables	B	SE	T	Job Performance	
				p	95%CI
Constant	29.73	9.37	3.17	.002	[19.80, 44.76]
Pedagogical Barriers	-.04	.03	1.38	.031	[-.01, .01]
Workplace Stress	-.26	.21	1.22	.034	[-.16, .69]
Emotional Intelligence	.02	.04	.43	.308	[-.07, .11]
Professional Well-being	.22	.14	1.59	.023	[-.05, .50]

Note. B = unstandardized beta; SE = standard error; CI = confidence interval.

Results showed that pedagogical barriers ($B = -.04, p = .031$), workplace stress ($B = -.26, p = .034$), and professional well-being ($B = .22, p = .023$) were statistically significant predictors of job performance, while emotional intelligence ($B = .02, p = .308$) was not significant. These findings suggest that higher pedagogical barriers and workplace stress are associated with lower job performance, whereas higher professional well-being is associated with better job performance.

Mediation Analysis

Mediation analysis confirmed that emotional intelligence partially mediated the effects of both pedagogical barriers and workplace stress on professional well-being and job performance.

Table 4: Impact of pedagogical barrier and workplace stress on professional well-being and job performance

Variables	PWB			JP		
	B	S.E.	β	B	S.E.	B
PB	-.49	.05	-.48***			
WPS	-.20.75	2.20	-.46***	5.81	.31	.69***

Note. PB=Pedagogical Barriers, WPS= Workplace stress, PWB= Professional Well-being, JB=



Job Performance

Table 4 shows that Pedagogical Barriers were significantly negatively predicting Professional Well-being ($\beta = -.48, p < .001$) among teachers. Moreover, Workplace stress was negatively predicting professional well-being ($\beta = -.46, p < .001$) and positively predicting Job Performance ($\beta = .69, p < .001$) among Teachers.

Mediation analyses were conducted to examine whether emotional intelligence partially mediated the effects of pedagogical barriers and workplace stress on professional well-being and job performance. As shown in Table 4, pedagogical barriers significantly negatively predicted professional well-being ($\beta = -.48, p < .001$), while workplace stress negatively predicted professional well-being ($\beta = -.46, p < .001$) and positively predicted job performance ($\beta = .69, p < .001$).

Figure 1: Schematic Presentation of mediating role of Emotional Intelligence between Pedagogical Barriers and Professional Well-being

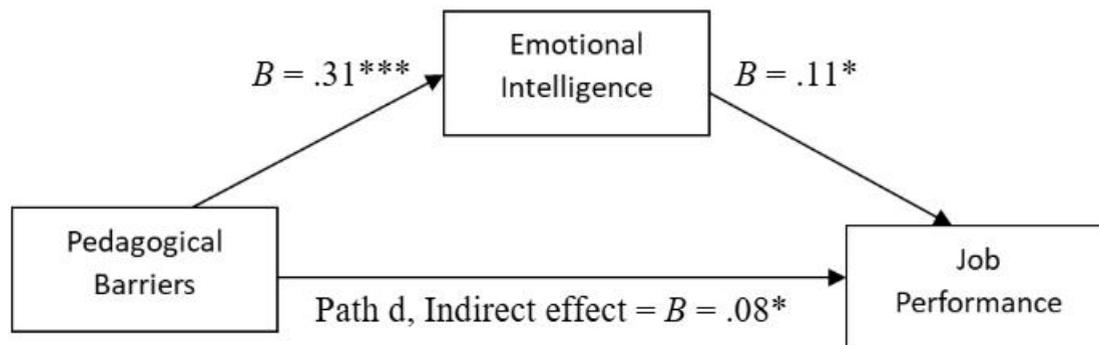
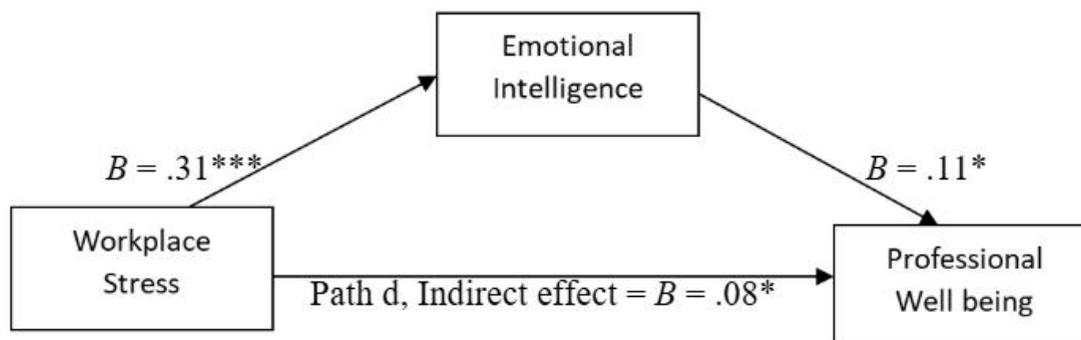


Figure 2: Schematic Presentation of the mediating role of Emotional Intelligence between Workplace stress and Professional Well-being



Figures 1 and 2 illustrate that emotional intelligence partially mediated these relationships, attenuating the negative impact of workplace stress on well-being and enhancing the relationship between pedagogical barriers and job performance.



Model Fit

Table 5: *Model fit indices for prediction of professional well-being and job performance*

	X ²	Df	X ² /df	CFI	IFI	TLI	RMSEA	RMSEA90% CI
Model	4.59	2	4.59(2)	.99	.99	.98	.05	.00

Note. χ^2 = chi-square; df = degree of freedom; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; IFI = incremental fit index; CFI=comparative fit index; TLI =Tucker-Lewis's index, ECVI=Expected Cross Validation Index

Model fit indices (Table 5) indicated an excellent fit for the mediation model predicting professional well-being and job performance, $\chi^2 (2) = 4.59$, CFI = .99, IFI = .99, TLI = .98, RMSEA = .05, RMSEA 90% CI = .00, supporting the validity of the proposed mediation model. Overall, these findings suggest that emotional intelligence serves as a protective factor that partially buffers the negative effects of barriers and stress on teachers' professional outcomes.

Discussion

The present study investigated the predictive role of pedagogical barriers and workplace stress on professional well-being and job performance among special education teachers in Pakistan, and examined emotional intelligence as a mediating mechanism. The findings provide a nuanced understanding of how structural and psychological factors jointly influence teacher outcomes in a context characterized by systemic inefficiencies and collectivist cultural norms.

Predictive Role of Pedagogical Barriers

As hypothesized, pedagogical barriers significantly predicted lower levels of professional well-being ($\beta = -.48$, $p < .001$), consistent with regression and mediation analyses. Teachers experiencing higher administrative, cognitive, communicative, emotional, and contextual barriers reported reduced psychological and occupational well-being. This finding underscores that structural constraints function as strong negative predictors of professional well-being in the Pakistani special education context, which is consistent in the literature (Fazil et al., 2023; Jafree et al., 2022).

The cumulative nature of these barriers suggests that interventions targeting only one dimension (e.g., administrative inefficiency) may be insufficient; a holistic approach addressing multiple pedagogical challenges is necessary. These results align with the burnout framework, which posits that chronic organizational constraints deplete psychological resources, reducing engagement and satisfaction (Maslach & Leiter, 2016).

Predictive Role of Workplace Stress

Workplace stress also significantly predicted lower professional well-being ($\beta = -.46$, $p < .001$). Interestingly, it positively predicted job performance ($\beta = .69$, $p < .001$), reflecting a dual effect. In line with the challenge-hindrane stressor framework, teachers may mobilize additional effort under stress to meet professional expectations, reflecting a short-term compensatory mechanism (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). In Pakistan's collectivist context, where teaching is highly valued, this compensatory performance may be particularly salient. However, the negative association with well-being highlights a tension: while stress may temporarily enhance performance, sustained stress without structural support could erode psychological health, leading to burnout, reduced job satisfaction, and higher attrition (LePine et al., 2005).



Mediation by Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence partially mediated the effects of both pedagogical barriers and workplace stress on professional well-being and job performance. Teachers with higher emotional intelligence were better able to manage stress and navigate barriers, thereby mitigating negative outcomes. These findings confirm the hypothesized mediating role of emotional intelligence, emphasizing its function as a protective psychological resource (Cherniss, 2010; Brackett et al., 2010). Figures 1 and 2 illustrate that emotional intelligence attenuated the negative impact of workplace stress on well-being and enhanced the relationship between pedagogical barriers and job performance. The mediation model demonstrated excellent fit indices ($\chi^2(2) = 4.59$, CFI = .99, IFI = .99, TLI = .98, RMSEA = .05), supporting the validity of the proposed model.

Contextual and Cultural Considerations

Several cultural and systemic factors likely influenced the observed predictive and mediating relationships. First, gender norms in Pakistan may amplify stress and performance expectations, as most special education teachers are female and balance professional and domestic responsibilities. Second, hierarchical school structures and urban-rural resource disparities intensify pedagogical barriers and impact teacher well-being (Rehman, 2021; Rehman & Bin Tahir, 2024; Rehman, Ghazali, & Elklit, 2025). Third, collectivist cultural values emphasizing social duty and relational harmony may partially explain the positive predictive effect of stress on job performance.

Conclusion

The present study provides empirical evidence on the predictive effects of pedagogical barriers and workplace stress on professional well-being and job performance among special education teachers in Pakistan, while examining the mediating role of emotional intelligence. The findings reveal that higher pedagogical barriers and workplace stress significantly predict lower professional well-being, whereas workplace stress can simultaneously predict higher job performance, suggesting a short-term compensatory response.

Emotional intelligence was shown to partially mediate these relationships, highlighting its protective and adaptive role in buffering stress and structural constraints. Overall, the study emphasizes that teacher outcomes are shaped by the interaction of structural, psychological, and cultural factors. In the Pakistani context, where systemic inefficiencies, high social expectations, and gendered responsibilities prevail, both institutional reform and individual-level psychological support are critical for sustaining teacher well-being and performance.

Limitations

Despite its contributions, the study has several limitations:

1. The study's design limits causal inference. While predictive relationships were observed, longitudinal studies are needed to determine whether stress-related performance gains are sustainable or eventually lead to burnout.
2. Data were collected via self-report instruments, which may introduce common method bias or social desirability effects. Teachers may underreport stress or overreport performance due to cultural expectations of resilience.
3. The study focused on special education teachers from selected public and private institutions in Pakistan, which may limit generalizability to other regions, educational sectors, or cultural contexts.



4. Other potentially relevant factors, such as leadership support, organizational climate, workload distribution, and community expectations, were not included and may further influence professional well-being and performance.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, several recommendations are proposed for practice, policy, and teacher development in Pakistan:

1. Educational authorities should address structural pedagogical barriers, including administrative inefficiencies, lack of teaching resources, and role ambiguity, to improve teacher well-being.
2. Teacher professional development programs should include emotional intelligence skill-building, focusing on emotional regulation, empathy, and interpersonal communication.
3. Schools should implement culturally sensitive stress reduction strategies, including mindfulness, peer support groups, and counseling services.
4. Considering the predominance of female teachers in special education, interventions should address work–family balance and the additional emotional labor associated with teaching in collectivist cultural settings.
5. Administrators should provide recognition, constructive feedback, and participatory leadership structures to sustain teacher motivation without exacerbating stress.

9. Future Implications

The study opens several avenues for future research:

1. Future research should track teachers over time to examine the long-term effects of stress and pedagogical barriers on performance and well-being.
2. Comparative studies could investigate whether the predictive and mediating relationships observed in Pakistan generalize to other collectivist or resource-constrained educational contexts.
3. Incorporating qualitative methods may provide deeper insight into how teachers navigate barriers, perceive stress, and leverage emotional intelligence in culturally specific ways.
4. Future studies could integrate additional organizational, social, and cultural variables, such as leadership style, parental involvement, and teacher autonomy, to build a more comprehensive predictive model.
5. Experimental or quasi-experimental research could evaluate the effectiveness of emotional intelligence and stress management programs in improving both teacher well-being and job performance.

Data Availability Statement

The datasets used during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

8. Ethics Statement

This study was approved by the Department of Behavioral Sciences, Faculty of Social Sciences, Fatima Jinnah Women University, Rawalpindi, Pakistan. Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

9. Author Contributions

Tanzeela Javed designed the study, conducted data analysis, and wrote the manuscript.

10. Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.



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