

Emotional Demands and Organizational Strategies in Managing Inclusive Educational Workplaces for Adolescents with asd

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the level of emotional demands experienced by employees working in an inclusive educational setting for adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), as well as to explore the organizational strategies implemented to support their emotional well-being. The research was conducted at London School Beyond Academy (LSBA), a vocational institution in Indonesia that focuses on the development of neurodivergent adolescents. Employing an explanatory sequential mixed method design, the study began with a quantitative survey using the Emotional Demands subscale from the Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire (COPSOQ II), followed by semi-structured interviews with key personnel to explore their lived experiences and perceptions of institutional support. The quantitative results (N=40) revealed a moderate level of emotional demands ($M = 14.42/20$), indicating that emotional challenges were perceived as meaningful rather than overwhelming. Qualitative findings from thematic analysis further underscored this by revealing that emotional demands were often framed as professional calling and relational depth, although formal support systems remained underdeveloped. This study contributes to the literature on emotional labor in inclusive education by focusing specifically on neurodiverse vocational contexts, an area that remains underexplored in Indonesian educational research. The findings suggest that institutional strategies for psychological sustainability are essential not only for employee well-being but also for ensuring the long-term effectiveness of inclusive education models.

Keywords: Emotional Demands, Inclusive Education, Organizational Support



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INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education has become a global imperative to ensure equitable access to learning opportunities for all students, including those with special educational needs such as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). In Indonesia, this movement has grown alongside increased public awareness of the importance of embracing diversity and creating educational systems that empower individuals with disabilities (Matthews dkk., 2025; Novogrudsky dkk., 2025). However, the implementation of inclusive education is far from seamless. One major challenge lies in the emotional toll it takes on educators and institutional staff who engage daily with neurodivergent learners. These professionals are not only expected to perform pedagogical duties but also to navigate emotionally complex and unpredictable classroom environments (Alon, 2025; Zheng dkk., 2025). The London School Beyond Academy (LSBA), a program under the London School of Public Relations (LSPR) Jakarta, stands as a pioneering example of inclusive higher education in Indonesia. Founded in 2013 as a response to the personal experience of its founder, Prita Kemal Gani, whose child was diagnosed with ASD, LSBA aims to provide vocational and life-skills training for adolescents with autism through an adapted curriculum and neurodiverse-sensitive pedagogies (Chaves-Montero dkk., 2025; Ji dkk., 2025). The school focuses on developing competencies in culinary arts, textile crafts, office administration, and social-emotional learning. According to LSPR's internal report (Podolchak dkk., 2025; Schmitt dkk., 2025), LSBA has graduated over 150 students, offering six semesters of structured education supplemented by experiential programs such as musical performances, bazaars, and summer camps.

Despite these commendable efforts, the unique demands of working with adolescents with ASD continue to place substantial emotional and psychological burdens on LSBA staff. The DSM-5-TR describes ASD as involving persistent deficits in social-emotional reciprocity, difficulties in nonverbal communication, and restricted, repetitive behaviors (Arnal-Bernardino & Arnal-Velasco, 2025; Tan dkk., 2025). Educators in this context often deal with emotional outbursts, sensory sensitivities, and atypical responses that demand constant emotional regulation, situational flexibility, and deep empathic engagement. These complexities make the emotional landscape of inclusive teaching distinctly more challenging than that of mainstream educational environments (Barber & Resnick, 2025; X. Wang dkk., 2025).

These demands are further intensified when compounded by inadequate institutional support systems. Emotional demands are conceptualized as the psychological strain resulting from suppressing or managing one's emotional expressions in emotionally charged work scenarios (Przegalinska dkk., 2025; L. Yang dkk., 2025). At LSBA, such demands manifest in various ways, including individualized lesson planning, mediation during social conflicts, coordination of inclusive extracurricular events, and frequent communication with parents and stakeholders (Geidelina-Lugovska & Cekuls, 2025; Jayaraman dkk., 2025). Although these tasks are critical to the success of inclusive education, they simultaneously increase the risk of emotional exhaustion, particularly in the absence of formal psychological support frameworks (Kuo dkk., 2025; Santiago-Torner dkk., 2025; Schieler dkk., 2025).

Research from international and regional contexts confirms that professionals working with individuals with ASD face higher levels of burnout than those working in other disability sectors (McKinney & Gischlar, 2025; F. Yang dkk., 2025). This is largely due to the intense interpersonal demands associated with managing nonverbal behaviors, sensory sensitivities, and emotional volatility. Lloyd and Hastings (2009) highlight that persistent empathic labor, especially when unreciprocated or emotionally taxing, can lead to secondary traumatic stress, compassion fatigue, and even withdrawal from professional engagement. Figley (2011) further notes that caregivers in emotionally intensive roles are especially susceptible to burnout when

organizational responses are reactive rather than preventive. Within the framework of Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) theory, this research is situated at the intersection of high emotional labor and low organizational buffering. According to the JD-R model, job demands such as emotional regulation and individualized pedagogical planning can result in stress and disengagement when not offset by adequate job resources, including supervisory support, emotional mentoring, and mental health services (Costa dkk., 2025; F. Wang, 2025). In tandem, the theory of Perceived Organizational Support (POS) posits that when employees believe their emotional well-being is acknowledged and valued by the institution, their psychological resilience and loyalty improve.

To date, most literature on inclusive education in Indonesia has focused on student-centered approaches or broad policy analyses, often overlooking the emotional and psychosocial experiences of educators themselves (Katsaros, 2025; F. Wang, 2025). While previous studies have addressed teacher burnout in inclusive classrooms more generally (Astuti et al., 2021; Chong & Lee, 2020), very few have examined these issues within ASD-focused vocational settings, where emotional challenges are unique and persistent. This gap is both practical and theoretical, as emotional dynamics are central to the success of neurodiverse educational programs but remain underexplored.

LSBA offers a rare and contextually rich site to explore these phenomena, with its deep institutional history in ASD education and its dual role as both a school and a social advocacy platform (Rott dkk., 2025; Tasci dkk., 2025). Previous literature emphasizes that the quality of adult-student emotional interactions is pivotal to learning outcomes for students with autism (Gareh dkk., 2025; Kamath, Kumar, dkk., 2025). However, when educators are emotionally depleted, the potential for positive, therapeutic interaction diminishes considerably. This makes it imperative to understand how emotional demands are experienced and addressed within such institutions.

Based on the contextual background and theoretical framework, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent do LSBA employees experience emotional demands in their inclusive educational roles with adolescents with ASD?
2. What organizational strategies are implemented by LSBA to support employees in managing emotional demands at work?

This study therefore aims to map the levels of emotional demands experienced by LSBA employees and to investigate what strategies—formal or informal—are used by the organization to manage these demands. Using a mixed method approach that combines quantitative assessment through the Emotional Demands subscale of the Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire (Gareh dkk., 2025; Kamath, Arun Kumar, dkk., 2025) and qualitative exploration via thematic interviews (Kamath, Kumar, dkk., 2025; Rafsanjani dkk., 2025), this research is positioned to contribute to a more holistic understanding of emotional labor in inclusive education. It offers both conceptual depth and empirical insight into how organizational culture, emotional regulation, and institutional design intersect in one of Indonesia's most progressive neurodiverse educational environments.

RESEARCH METHOD

To comprehensively investigate the emotional demands experienced by educators and staff working with adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in an inclusive educational setting, this study adopts a mixed-method approach. The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods enables a more holistic understanding—quantitative data provides measurable patterns, while qualitative insights capture the depth of emotional experience and organizational context (Di Giampaolo dkk., 2025; Rafsanjani dkk., 2025). The following subsections detail the research design, timeline, participant characteristics, instruments, procedures, and data analysis techniques employed in the study.

Research Design

This study employs an explanatory sequential mixed-method design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to explore the emotional demands experienced by employees in an inclusive educational setting and the organizational strategies used to support them. The quantitative phase was conducted first to obtain an overview of emotional demand levels, followed by a qualitative phase to explore in-depth narratives and contextual factors. The mixed-method approach allows for both the generalizability of patterns and the exploration of meaning behind those patterns (Di Giampaolo dkk., 2025; Lynner dkk., 2025). The research was conducted at the London School Beyond Academy (LSBA), a division of LSPR Jakarta, between March and May 2025. LSBA is a vocational institution providing inclusive education for adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) through specialized curricula and individualized support systems. The fieldwork included both distribution of online surveys and in-person/virtual interviews with selected participants.

Research Target/Subject

The quantitative phase targeted the entire employee population of LSBA ($N = 40$), including educators, therapists, and administrative staff who interact directly with ASD students. The sampling technique used was total population sampling, as the community was relatively small and accessible. In the qualitative phase, three key informants were selected using purposive sampling, based on their roles, experience, and perspectives on institutional emotional dynamics: (1) YT, educator and therapist at LSBA, (2) CW, Dean of LSBA, (3) AS, professor at Universitas Negeri Jakarta (UNJ), who participated in the 2025 GSET Forum on inclusive teaching strategies

Research Procedure

The research process began with administrative preparation, including the acquisition of ethical clearance from the institutional review board of Universitas Paramadina. All participants involved in the study provided informed consent, ensuring ethical compliance and data confidentiality throughout the research (Jeong dkk., 2025; Pearce dkk., 2025). In the quantitative phase, data were collected through a digital survey distributed via Google Forms. The survey included demographic items and four core items from the Emotional Demands subscale of the Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire (COPSOQ II), which had been adapted to fit the context of inclusive education for adolescents with ASD.

Upon completion of the survey, the quantitative data were processed and analyzed descriptively to determine the overall levels of emotional demands among employees. These results also served as the basis for selecting key informants for the subsequent qualitative phase, allowing the researcher to purposively identify individuals who could provide rich, contextually relevant narratives. The qualitative phase involved conducting semi-structured

interviews using a guided protocol designed to explore emotional experiences, work-related psychological challenges, and perceived organizational support mechanisms.

Finally, the qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This involved familiarizing with the data, generating initial codes, identifying key patterns, and refining emerging themes that reflected the emotional landscape and institutional dynamics experienced by participants.

Instruments, and Data Collection Techniques

The quantitative instrument used was the Emotional Demands subscale of the Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire II (Kristensen et al., 2005), consisting of four items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). This instrument has demonstrated high reliability in both Western and developing country contexts (Baka et al., 2022). For the qualitative phase, a semi-structured interview guide was developed based on the constructs of emotional labor and perceived organizational support. Open-ended questions encouraged participants to share personal experiences, challenges, coping strategies, and perspectives on institutional support. Interviews were conducted face-to-face and online, depending on participant availability.

Data Analysis Technique

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequency distribution) to determine the level of emotional demands experienced by respondents. The data were presented in tabular and graphical form. Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which involved: (1) Familiarization with transcripts, (2) Initial coding of semantic and latent content, (3) Identifying patterns across data, (4) Developing and refining themes relevant to the research questions

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Quantitative Findings

The quantitative data were obtained from 40 employees at LSBA who completed the Emotional Demands subscale from the Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire II (COPSOQ II). The scale included four items measuring the extent to which their work required emotional regulation, the frequency of emotional exhaustion, the necessity to suppress personal feelings, and the pressure to maintain a positive demeanor.

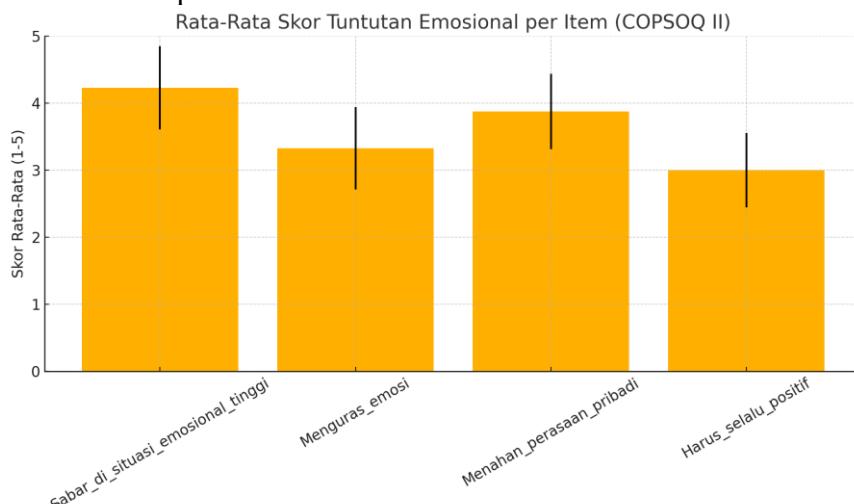


Figure 1. Mean Score Emotional Demands per Item (COPSOQ II)

The analysis revealed a moderate level of emotional demands overall, with a total mean score of 14.42 out of a maximum score of 20, and a standard deviation of ± 1.89 . The highest-scoring item was “My job requires me to remain patient in emotionally intense situations” with a mean of 4.22, indicating that emotional control is a constant and expected part of the work. In contrast, the lowest-scoring item was “I feel pressured to always remain positive in front of students and parents” with a mean of 3.00, suggesting that while emotional display rules exist, they are not perceived as overwhelmingly rigid or inauthentic.

Table 1. Mean Scores and Standard Deviations of Emotional Demands Scale Items

Item Statement	Mean	SD
My job requires me to remain patient in emotionally intense situations	4.22	± 0.62
I often face situations that are emotionally draining	3.32	± 0.62
I have to suppress my personal feelings to avoid affecting my interaction with students	3.88	± 0.56
I feel pressured to always appear positive in front of students and parents	3.00	± 0.55
Total Mean Score (maximum = 20)	14.42	± 1.89

The results show that, in general, the level of emotional demands experienced by LSBA employees falls within the moderate category, with a positive tendency wherein such demands are perceived more as manageable professional challenges rather than as exhausting or threatening stressors.

- The highest score was recorded for the item “*My job requires me to remain patient in emotionally intense situations*” ($M = 4.22$). This reflects a strong awareness among employees regarding the importance of emotional regulation in daily interactions with ASD learners and indicates a healthy level of emotional resilience.
- The items “*I often face situations that are emotionally draining*” and “*I have to suppress my personal feelings to avoid affecting my interaction with students*” also scored relatively high, yet remain within acceptable boundaries for jobs that inherently require emotional involvement.
- The lowest score was observed for the item “*I feel pressured to always appear positive in front of students and parents*” ($M = 3.00$), suggesting that performative emotional expression is not perceived as dominant or burdensome by most respondents. This indicates that LSBA provides a relatively safe emotional space and does not excessively enforce rigid emotional display norms.

From the overall quantitative findings, it can be concluded that LSBA employees perceive emotional demands as challenging but still manageable, and they are not currently experiencing conditions of high stress or acute burnout. This suggests a psychosocially healthy inclusive work environment, where empathy, patience, and self-regulation are integral to the institution’s daily operations. These findings form a solid foundation for further exploration of how the organization supports emotional well-being through adaptive strategies, as discussed in the subsequent qualitative results section.

1. Emotional Demands as Challenges, Not Threats

Based on the COPSOQ II Emotional Demands subscale, the mean emotional demand score among LSBA staff falls within the moderate-to-high category ($M = 14.42$ out of 20), yet still within adaptive limits. The highest item score emphasizes the need for patience in emotionally intense situations, while the lowest relates to the pressure to maintain a positive façade.

This suggests that employees do not perceive emotional demands as inherently pathological stressors. Instead, they approach emotional labor with a constructive and professional outlook, seeing it as part of their meaningful engagement in inclusive education.

2. Relevance of the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Theory

Within the JD-R theoretical framework (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017), emotional demands are a form of job demand—a psychosocial burden that may lead to stress or burnout when not counterbalanced by adequate job resources. However, the JD-R model also emphasizes the existence of *challenge demands*, which, while demanding, can foster motivation and enhance work engagement.

In the case of LSBA, emotional demands appear to align more closely with challenge demands rather than hindrance demands. Employees generally perceive emotional regulation not as a burden, but as part of their professional calling in supporting students with ASD. This framing may contribute to higher job engagement, provided the organization continues to offer sufficient emotional and institutional support.

3. Perceived Organizational Support (POS) as a Balancing Factor

In balancing demands and resources, the Perceived Organizational Support (POS) theory (Eisenberger et al., 2016) becomes relevant. POS posits that when employees perceive that the organization values their emotional well-being, it leads to increased resilience, loyalty, and job performance.

The low score on “*feeling pressured to always appear positive*” ($M = 3.00$) may indicate that employees are not experiencing unrealistic emotional expectations from the institution. This further implies that LSBA allows room for authentic emotional expression, reinforcing the perception that the organization acknowledges and respects employees’ psychological needs. Such findings point to a healthy level of perceived support, which strengthens emotional endurance and inclusive workplace dynamics.

4. Contextual Meaning in ASD-Inclusive Education

In vocational education for neurodiverse learners such as that at LSBA, emotion is not merely a byproduct of work, but a functional component of the teaching process. Emotional perception and regulation are central to establishing therapeutic, respectful relationships with students with ASD.

Therefore, healthy and functional perceptions of emotional demands, as evidenced in the findings, form the core of effective educational interaction. When these demands are framed

through meaning and resilience, emotional balance becomes not only achievable but also a part of the institution's core values.

5. Initial Implications

These findings offer preliminary evidence that balancing emotional demands with organizational support is crucial to cultivating positive work experiences in inclusive education settings. Moving forward, organizational strategies must sustain LSBA's empathic culture while introducing structured emotional supervision, reflective practices, and capacity-building that address the affective dimension of working with neurodiverse students.

Such strategies are essential to ensure that professionals working with ASD learners are not only technically skilled but also affectively supported—a dual competency that is increasingly vital in sustaining long-term inclusive education models.

Qualitative Findings

To complement the quantitative findings and provide contextual depth, a series of semi-structured interviews were conducted with three key informants who play strategic roles in LSBA's inclusive education ecosystem. The participants were YT, a senior educator and therapist with daily interaction with students with ASD; CW, the Dean of LSBA; and AS, a professor from Universitas Negeri Jakarta and speaker at the GSET Forum on inclusive teaching held in May 2025. Thematic analysis using Braun and Clarke's (2006) method yielded three interrelated themes: (1) emotional demands as relational meaning, (2) organizational support as informal culture, and (3) systemic absence of structured emotional strategies.

Theme 1: Emotional Demands as Relational Meaning

The first theme highlights how emotional demands are not viewed merely as burdensome psychological pressure, but rather as manifestations of meaningful relationships and moral commitment to neurodiverse students. YT described the nature of her work as emotionally intense but intrinsically fulfilling:

“It’s exhausting, yes, but not the kind of exhaustion that breaks you. It’s the kind that teaches you something about patience, about seeing someone else’s world at their pace.”

— YT, Educator

This quote reveals that emotional demands are reframed by frontline staff as opportunities for growth and empathy rather than as chronic stressors. YT emphasized the complexity of building emotional reciprocity with ASD students—who may not verbally express affection or engagement—but saw these micro-moments of connection as profoundly rewarding.

CW, as the Dean, supported this notion from an institutional perspective, stating that many staff members “don’t just work here—they stay because they feel called to be here.” This reflects a culture in which emotional investment is normalized and even valued as a core professional attribute, not as a byproduct or unintended consequence.

Theme 2: Organizational Support as Informal Culture

The second theme emerged from a recognition of the absence of formal emotional support systems, which has led staff to rely on informal peer support and community bonds.

YT noted that brief conversations in communal areas often serve as unstructured yet vital emotional decompression spaces:

“Sometimes, a chat in the pantry with another teacher who gets it—that’s the therapy we have.”

— YT, Educator

CW candidly acknowledged the absence of institutionalized emotional support, stating that “while we have strong interpersonal empathy, we still lack a formal infrastructure for reflection, supervision, or emotional recovery.” This cultural reliance on peer solidarity functions as a protective factor in the short term but lacks consistency, equity, and scalability in the long term.

While these informal networks foster a sense of togetherness, they may not provide adequate psychological containment for deeper emotional fatigue or vicarious trauma that some staff might experience, especially during prolonged exposure to behavioral crises or family distress related to students.

Theme 3: Systemic Absence of Structured Emotional Strategies

The third and most critical theme, voiced especially by AS, foregrounds the lack of systematized organizational responses to emotional demands in inclusive education. Drawing from his address at the GSET Forum, AS argued:

“Inclusive teaching is not just about curriculum—it’s also about containment. Teachers are not just facilitators; they are emotional regulators, often without any training or support to do so.”

— AS, Professor

AS further emphasized that emotional labor in inclusive settings is often misrecognized as individual resilience, rather than addressed through structural safeguards such as reflective supervision, emotional skill-building, or clinical support. He warned that such oversight risks perpetuating a culture where burnout becomes normalized.

CW echoed this concern, stating that LSBA has begun exploring possibilities for formally integrating emotional supervision and capacity-building workshops. However, she admitted that these initiatives are still in nascent stages and not yet integrated into the school's operational model.

Synthesis of Themes

Taken together, these three themes portray a nuanced emotional ecology within LSBA. On one hand, the staff demonstrates high emotional resilience and relational depth, drawing personal meaning from their interactions with students. On the other hand, this emotional labor is shouldered individually, and in the absence of formal support structures, the sustainability of such engagement remains uncertain.

The qualitative data also reinforce the quantitative finding that emotional demands are perceived as manageable and meaningful, yet point toward a latent vulnerability: without a formalized institutional system to process and support emotional work, long-term risks such as burnout, disengagement, and compassion fatigue may surface.

These themes collectively underscore the need for structured emotional infrastructure that goes beyond good intentions or informal culture—particularly in inclusive environments that rely heavily on relational labor.

Integrative Discussion

The quantitative and qualitative findings of this study converge to present a comprehensive picture of emotional demands experienced by employees at LSBA. Emotional labor is present and significant, yet not perceived as pathological. Instead, it is internalized as part of a meaningful professional engagement with neurodiverse students. Quantitatively, the average emotional demands score ($M = 14.42/20$) falls within a moderate range. The highest item score related to patience in emotionally intense situations, while the lowest concerned the pressure to always appear positive—suggesting a healthy level of emotional regulation. These findings align with the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model, where LSBA employees appear to interpret emotional demands as challenge demands, which can enhance engagement if organizational support is sufficient (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

Qualitative narratives from YT and CW reinforce this interpretation. Both described emotional exhaustion not as burnout but as relational meaning and professional calling (Vallerand et al., 2003). However, the lack of formal organizational support emerged as a shared concern. CW acknowledged the absence of structured reflection or counseling systems, while YT highlighted reliance on peer-based support. This reflects a need to strengthen perceived organizational support (Eisenberger et al., 2016), as informal networks alone are insufficient for long-term well-being. AS emphasized this gap during the GSET Forum, arguing that inclusive educators must be seen as emotional mediators, and thus require systemic support structures. His perspective aligns with Figley's (2011) concern about compassion fatigue in emotionally intense professions, and Kristensen et al.'s (2005) call for systemic evaluation of psychosocial work environments.

In sum, LSBA has built a strong empathic culture, but sustainability requires formalized emotional support strategies. The current balance between job demands and resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) still leans on interpersonal solidarity rather than institutional policy. Strengthening this foundation through structured intervention is essential for the long-term success of inclusive, neurodiversity-oriented education in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that employees at LSBA experience emotional demands at a moderate yet manageable level, which they interpret more as professional challenges than as harmful stressors. Supported by both quantitative data and qualitative narratives, these emotional demands are deeply tied to the relational and meaningful nature of working with adolescents with ASD. However, the absence of structured institutional support remains a critical gap. While the school fosters a strong culture of empathy, it has yet to formalize mechanisms such as emotional supervision, psychological reflection, or burnout prevention strategies. The findings affirm the relevance of the Job Demands–Resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) and Perceived Organizational Support (Eisenberger et al., 2016) frameworks in understanding how emotional resilience can flourish when matched with institutional care.

To ensure long-term sustainability, LSBA is encouraged to translate its informal support culture into documented organizational strategies. This may include establishing

routine emotional check-ins, offering training in emotional self-regulation, and integrating reflective practices into daily operations. Strengthening institutional support will not only protect the psychological well-being of staff but also reinforce the overall effectiveness of inclusive education for neurodiverse learners. As LSBA continues to serve as a model for ASD-inclusive vocational education in Indonesia, investing in emotional infrastructure will be essential to maintaining both staff engagement and educational quality.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Author 1 (Geofakta Razali): Conceptualization; Data curation; Formal analysis; Methodology; Writing – original draft; Project administration.

Author 2 (Sofia): Supervision; Validation; Writing – review and editing.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest. The funding sponsor had no role in the design of the study; in the collection, analysis, or interpretation of data; in the writing of the manuscript; or in the decision to publish the results.

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