



Resilience of Teachers in Special Education Schools in Guizhou Province, China through Administration: Ecological Systems Theory Analysis

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Abstract

Background and Aims: This paper aims to investigate that teachers in special education schools have poor teacher resilience, mainly in the form of psychological stress that leads to mental health problems and consequent poor teaching effectiveness.

Methods: Through the quantitative approach, this paper investigates the phenomenon.

Results: The results suggest that special education schools should develop a comprehensive support system for in-service teachers in their administration based on the interaction of the systems within, between, beyond, and the cross system.

Conclusion: It is hoped that through the adaptation of classroom teaching methods and materials to the realities of special education, collaboration between general education teachers and special education teachers, and the establishment of a school culture that respects individual differences, the aim is to enhance the teacher resilience of teachers in special education schools.

Keywords: Teachers' Resilience; Administration; Ecosystem Theory; Special Education; Special Education School

Introduction:

According to China's Compulsory Education Law of the People's Republic of China and the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Minors, all children of school age, including those with special needs, are required to attend school to receive compulsory education; and children with special needs, especially those with varying degrees of impairment, are provided with special education services at school to facilitate the success of these students with special needs in school and later in life. Olsen (2008) argues that teachers in special education schools play many different roles in their work and even in the lives of their students and that this multiplicity of roles is a source of stress and creates tension and feelings of stress and frustration in the role-playing process. Many teachers, when faced with adversity, stress, or even frustration, choose to be positive, seek good solutions, make good use of resources, and adapt themselves, but others, when faced with the same dilemmas, choose to avoid, give up, withdraw or even ignore the problem in a negative way (Platsidou, & Daniilidou, 2021; Crespo, 2003). In other words, while some teachers can generate positive energy from adversity and grow stronger, others cannot recover from adversity's impact and lose enthusiasm for their educational work or even lose their way after the setback.

The development of special education is an important element in promoting educational equity

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and modernizing education, an important means of upholding the people-oriented concept and promoting humanitarianism, and an important task in safeguarding and improving people's livelihood and building a harmonious socialist society (Hou, & Zhang, 2017). Since 2007, the Chinese government has gone from proposing "caring for special education" to asking for "supporting special education"; then to proposing "running good special education" through government working documents; special education development has become more and more important to the Chinese government. "; the development of special education has received increasing attention from the Chinese government. Focusing on the group of teachers in special education schools, we find that although the academic level of teachers in special education schools in China is increasing, there is not only an obvious and serious imbalance between male and female teachers in special education schools in China, but also a predominance of teachers who are not special education majors in schools, and the professional quality of in-service teachers in special education schools are not satisfactory; at the same time, the number of pre-service teachers in special education schools in China is increasing. The number of pre-service training for teachers in special education schools in China is insufficient, and the post-employment special education professional training in special education schools is not well developed (Wang, Xiao, Zhu, Wei, & Li, 2011).

Xu (2019) argues that in China's current changing educational climate, the school-based management and decentralized structure, the rise of teachers' self-awareness, the diverse sources of participation and influence in school affairs, and the need for teachers to not only continue to improve in their professional field of education but also to take on many administrative tasks assigned by the school, have made the educational environment increasingly complex. This, coupled with the multiplicity of roles and the high level of conflict, has led to more adversity and pressure on teachers than ever before. In addition to the preparation and implementation of teaching, teachers also have to deal with student misbehavior and low motivation, school management and administration, parent-teacher communication, teacher evaluation, etc. This often leads to role conflict and confusion, which are the most common sources of work stress for teachers today (Chan, 2006). On the one hand, teachers are initially very enthusiastic about education, but the constant frustration and difficulties they encounter can lead to a great sense of loss and, in severe cases, even trauma, depression, and a range of other mental health problems, which have become a subject that educational researchers have to address. On the other hand, despite the enormous potential pressure and frustration that teachers face, most teachers still try to take responsibility for their jobs and deal with the tedium every day, and even though they are wounded inside, they can get up and move forward, with the strength to recover themselves. This power to recover oneself is the psychological term "resilience."

Starting in 1970, psychologists began to notice that children who grew up in unfavorable environments with crisis factors during their development but who developed well later in life called this positive development in the face of adversity Resilience. Masten and Obradovic (2008) consider personal resilience as a positive adaptive process, capacity, or pattern during or after exposure to adverse experiences that have the potential to disrupt or undermine the successful functioning or development of the individual. Resilience is not a stable personality trait but rather serves as a set of behavioral competencies needed to cope with stress and maintain physical and mental health in a given situation (Friederichs et al., 2019, 2021). Teachers are in urgent need of constant adjustment in the face of student differences, the pressures of curriculum change, and high parental expectations, providing answers to

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vital needs in the changing complexities of teaching and learning contexts. Why, then, do some teachers become less effective and even leave the profession while others 'get stronger and stronger' in the same situation? How can teachers maintain their effectiveness, their motivation, and commitment to their profession in the face of adversity and take care of themselves as well as their students? In recent years, research on the theme of Teacher Resilience has emerged and flourished, contributing significantly to the professional development of teachers and the shaping of quality teaching careers (Xiao, 2015).

This paper aims to investigate that teachers in special education schools have poor teacher resilience, mainly in the form of psychological stress that leads to mental health problems and consequent poor teaching effectiveness. Through the quantitative approach, this paper investigates the phenomenon.

The Resilience of Teachers in special education schools

Increase in the number of teachers in special education schools

From the statistics of China's education in recent years, it can be seen that China's special education schools currently cover 31 provinces across the country; the number of special education school teachers has increased 1.29 times in the last five years, reaching 66,169 in 2021, with the number of teachers maintaining a slow growth trend (Ministry of Education website, 2021).

According to the authors' field visits, special education staff in China are mainly divided into full-time teachers, substitute teachers, and part-time teachers, where full-time teaching positions include full-time teachers, administrative staff, teaching assistants, and staff; the specific ratio values of full-time teachers, substitute teachers, part-time teachers, administrative staff, teaching assistants and staff can be seen in Table 1 for the year 2021. From the data, it can be seen that special education schools are dominated by full-time teachers. Therefore Table 2 shows the number of full-time teachers and the characteristics of changes in special education schools in China over the last five years; from Table 2, we can understand the rate of increase in the number of teachers in special education schools nationwide over the last five years, with an increase of approximately 4-6% per year on average; and for the academic year 2020-2021, due to objective reasons such as the outbreak of the New Coronavirus, the increase in 2021 is expected to decrease compared to 2020, with an estimated increase of 2% (Ministry of Education website, 2021). One of the criteria reflecting the workload of special education teachers is the student-teacher ratio. According to data published by the Chinese Ministry of Education, the student-teacher ratio for special education has increased from 8.84 in 2015 to 12.23 in 2020, i.e., from roughly one full-time special education teacher for every nine students in 2015 to roughly one full-time special education teacher for every 12 students in 2020. The above figures show that the student-teacher ratio in special education in China continues to rise, but teachers in special education schools have a heavy workload.

Table 1 Specific proportions of full-time teachers substitute teachers, part-time teachers, administrative personnel, supporting staff, and workers in 2021

Total	Full-time Teachers	Substitute Teachers	Part-time Teachers	Adm. Personnel	Supporting Staff	Workers
76415	66169	1767	566	3491	2895	3860

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Table 1: Specific proportion of full-time teachers, substitute teachers, part-time teachers, administrative personnel, supporting staff and works in 2021

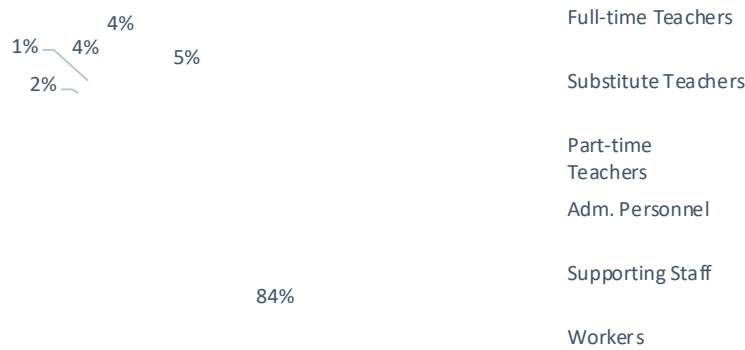


Table 2: In the past five years, the number of full-time teachers in special education schools in the past five years increases

Years	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Number	50334	53213	55979	58656	62358	65044
New year increase	---	5%	5%	4%	6%	4%
Teacher-student ratio	1:8.84	1:9.28	1:10.33	1:11.29	1:12.82	1:13.55

The Resilience of Teachers in special education schools

Research confirms that work stress is significantly and negatively related to well-being (He, 2016). The results of Wu, Xin, Chen, Jian, and Zhong (2017) show that resilience is significantly and positively related to well-being. However, many studies and even news events in recent years have shown us the indisputable fact that the majority of our people's teachers, such as young teachers in universities, secondary vocational schools, primary schools, and early childhood education, do not feel the happiness they should feel in their work as teachers (Ni, Wang, & Liu, 2018; Fan, 2019; Zhang, 2017; Wang, Su, & Zhang, 2017).

In the field of special education, Zhou and Zhang (2019) study not only verified previous researchers' belief that the work stress of teachers in special education schools mainly comes from stress caused by the workload, stress caused by the work treatment, and the reflection of values in work; stress caused by the difficulty in managing students; stress caused by the inability to adapt competency qualities to special education work; stress caused by the school's environment, resources, the In addition to the stress caused by less than ideal educational conditions and the stress caused by interpersonal relationships in schools, it was found that special education teachers experience significant stress in the management of students, with the greatest occupational stress being experienced by special education teachers working in multi-disability education. Because the students they face are different from those in normal schools, teachers in special education schools experience frustration in education and





teaching, the contrast between educational goals and educational outcomes; a significant proportion of the population is prejudiced and discriminatory towards special education, resulting in teachers who have been selfless and dedicated being devastated and not feeling the respect and understanding of the community at large towards the profession of teachers in special education schools; at the same time, the work of special education school The combination of these factors makes it difficult for teachers to experience the inherent happiness of their profession, resulting in a declining sense of job satisfaction and achievement, which in turn leads to a lack of professional happiness (Huang, 2017).

Almost all Chinese teachers have less than optimal perceptions of well-being, especially those working in special education schools, and therefore teachers in special education schools need strong teacher resilience to heal the trauma caused by work stress to ensure that teachers in special education schools can perceive well-being at work. However, based on the feedback from teachers working in special education schools, we can say that Chinese teachers, especially those working in special education, are in a 'worrying' state in terms of their 'teacher resilience.'

On Teachers' Resilience in Special Education Schools from the Perspective of Ecological System Theory

In the past, when discussing the teacher resilience of teachers in special education schools, most of them discussed personal factors such as personality traits and mental health (Xiao, 2015; Zhang, Bai, & Li, 2020), almost all of them discussed the teacher resilience of teachers in special education schools from the personal interaction. Bronfenbrenner (1979; 1995) developed the ecological system theory related to human development (Table 3); He believes that everyone can be regarded as embedded in multiple nested systems with different environmental degrees, and development is the result of the complex interaction between various system factors or components of the interaction between individual and environment. Therefore, to understand human development, one must look at the interaction of its systems within, between, beyond, and across systems, such as family and school. Schools and peers emphasize the impact of multiple environments on human behavior and development.

Table 3. Summary of systems proposed by Bronfenbrenner

Systems	Explanation
Micro	The immediate contexts in which the individual participates and the people in these contexts in direct contact with the individual—for example, the impact of the home environment and school environment on individuals.
Meso	Influences between members of the micro-systems. Such as relationships between families or schools or relationships with teachers and students.
Exo	External influences on the individual from systems not directly related to or external to the micro-system. For example, community support and facilities, etc.
Macro	Broader cultural and social influences. For example, it refers to the influence of cultural traditions, faith, and values on individuals.
Chrono	Changes in all systems and their members across time.

From Bronfenbrenner's integration, human development depends on a complex process of interaction between many different environmental degree systems or contextual factors. It should also





be emphasized that in this theoretical framework, development is defined as "the evolutionary conception of the human being about the social environment and its relationship to the ecological context," thus emphasizing the change and subjective understanding and interpretation of teacher resilience in different contexts or systems by teachers in special education schools.

Micro-system

Teachers in schools are involved in learning activities in different arenas, and different interstitial systems are formed; teacher-student relationships, peer relationships, and home-school relationships consisting of both parents followed by teachers, and sometimes conflicts between these relationships have an impact on teacher resilience of teachers in special education schools. For example, the type of school in which a teacher works in special education school can affect changes in teacher resilience among teachers working in special education schools (Lei & Wang, 2017). It has also been suggested that positive psychological group training may contribute to changes in teacher resilience among teachers working in special education schools (Feng, Chen, Liu, Liu, Qin, & Xu, 2020). Thus, the interaction between colleagues and teacher-student relationships forms the environmental factor of conflict. In addition, the relationship between general and special education teachers or teacher-student interactions is also a factor in the teacher resilience of teachers working in special education schools. If there can be good coordination between the intercultural systems, it will be able to cover the stresses of micro-system conflict and stabilize the relationship between the micro-system and the external system.

Meso-system

If we consider the school as a whole ecosystem, the microsystem component is the traits of teachers in special education schools. Teachers in special education schools are characterized by low teaching effectiveness, emotional exhaustion, and de-individualization, which can also lead to barriers to self-concept development and emotional and behavioral problems (Song, Li, & Huang, 2013), for example, changes in school activities or teachers in special education schools. For example, changes in school activities or deviations in teachers' conceptual understanding of the content of materials in special education schools can easily become a lag in teachers' effectiveness in teaching and learning; anxiety and inappropriate personal emotional behavior when interacting with peers, thus making teachers working in special education schools vulnerable to changes in teacher resilience.

Exo-system

The most influential external systems for teachers working in special education schools are the school administration and the system of special education law or related rights and regulations. Although the external system does not directly affect teachers, the administration or the laws and regulations that are in place indirectly affect the resilience of teachers working in special education schools. For example, many teachers in special education schools have not received systematic professional training in the education of children with special needs before entering special education schools, and some have never had close contact with children with different types and levels of impairment before entering special education schools. Upon entering the teaching profession in special education schools, teachers in special education schools often feel depressed in the work process because of their lack of adaptation to the environment, their lack of understanding of the students, and their lack of professional background in special education. However, there is no support for these problems in the administrative organization of special education schools or the special education law, or the legal system on rights and interests. This individual pessimism of teachers working in special

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education schools often leads to even lower levels of teacher resilience among teachers working in special education schools, resulting in a direct impact between the microsystem and the external system, destabilizing the ecosystem structure and making teacher resilience problems more evident among teachers working in special education schools.

Macro-system

Macro systems can be seen in the school ecosystem as ideologies or values such as school culture and the school's view of barriers. Although the macro-system does not directly affect teachers working in special education schools, the climate it creates gradually permeates the microsystem through the external and interpersonal systems. Thus, the creation of a friendly school environment creates a tacit knowledge that is a natural support for the resilience of teachers working in special education schools in the course of their school work.

Chrono-system

As teachers live and work in the school ecology for long periods, there are bound to be physical, psychological, or environmental changes in the course of their journey. Cheng (2018) suggests that a significant proportion of teachers working in special education do not have the support of their families, the care of their school leaders, or the understanding of the community, resulting in unimaginably high levels of stress, low levels of self-esteem, and subjective experiences of reduced personal achievement and Subjective experiences such as reduced personal achievement and well-being.

Ecosystem theory provides an understanding of the nuanced interactions between these systems, the situation of teachers working in special education schools within the ecosystem, the ability to enhance their resilience as teachers from a microsystem perspective, the importance of stability and harmony in the interstitial system, and the importance of school culture in accommodating differences and the dilemmas faced by teachers working in special education schools about career issues.

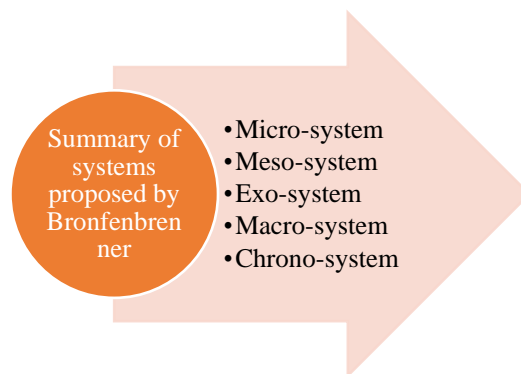


Figure 1: Summary of systems proposed by Bronfenbrenner

Campus Support System Based on Ecosystem View

The ecosystem perspective is based on the conceptual framework of the nature of the interaction between the human and environmental interface to understand how the complex network in which an individual is embedded interacts with the individual and the field in which they operate and the resilience that affects their growth and wellbeing. An exosystemic view of school support systems, therefore, emphasizes how the relationship between people and contextual contexts provides for the empowerment of individuals while also taking into account the ecological adjustments that promote

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teacher resilience for teachers working in special education schools.

Micro-system—Use administration to improve the teaching effectiveness of teachers working in special education schools and to repair problems of emotional exhaustion

Gao, Xu, Guo, Liu, Chen, and Dai (2017) concluded that teacher effectiveness can be a reflection of teacher resilience in the work of teachers. The study found that teacher resilience was underrepresented in many special education schools and that teacher resilience studies of working teachers can be attributed to the failure of educational authorities and schools to set appropriate teaching goals for teachers based solely on the abilities of students with special needs. In addition, special education materials should be adapted and developed based on the concepts of individual differences, curriculum adaptation, and differentiated instruction (Lu, 2011), with the ultimate goal of enhancing the effectiveness of special education teachers to achieve good performance in teacher resilience among working teachers in special education schools. In terms of emotional exhaustion, special education schools should focus on the emotional and psychological well-being of teachers to enhance the resilience of teachers working in special education schools.

To harmonize the relationship between individual and collective teaching objectives for students with special needs in the classroom and to strengthen teachers' awareness of the goal of promoting the growth of all students, Chinese researchers have explored a set of operationalized and simplified teaching objectives adjustments in the subject classroom based on assessment and curriculum orientation. The basic process and practices are as follows: setting the teaching objectives for the semester, assessing the current situation of students with special needs, predicting the extent and difficulty of students with special needs to achieve the teaching objectives, adjusting the teaching objectives according to the needs, systematically adjusting the teaching objectives for the semester, unit and classroom, finding ways to adjust the objectives and making adjustments, assessing the content and personnel of the attainment tests and the post-attainment tests (Lei, & Wang, 2017; Zhu, Chen, & Zhu, 2020). Liu and Fang (2015) found that in addition to the government's focus on special education and increased funding, schools can also optimize the working environment for teachers through administrative measures and increase the salaries of teachers in special education schools. It can improve the emotional exhaustion of teachers working in special studies schools. Teachers in special education schools should enhance teaching effectiveness and strengthen teacher resilience of teachers working in special education schools to promote balance in microsystem attitudes.

Meso-system—Special education schools and ordinary schools provide support for teachers' exchange and cooperation in the administrative system

In China, the general direction for students with special needs is to promote and advocate for students with special needs to be enrolled in regular schools as much as possible (Peng, 2011). The interactions of the residential system are a key factor in the resilience of teachers working in special education schools, with the partnership between regular and special education teachers being particularly important. The role of special education teachers is currently more passive, waiting for students to attend special education schools, and less proactive in understanding the difficulties that students in special education schools experience in the general environment, making it less likely that teachers in general schools will feel supported by teachers with special education backgrounds; at the same time, because teachers working in special education schools face more complex issues than teachers working in general schools with special education backgrounds Zhang (2012) mentions that in

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the past, the services provided by special education teachers tended to be in the passive remedial teaching mode and the content tended to be single-subject tutoring. However, under the influence of the new century trend of integrated education in special education, the teaching model of special education teachers should gradually change to one in which the proportion of active services is adjusted according to the needs of students, and the content of teaching for students with special needs should gradually change to one in which interventions and support are provided to develop students' strengths and strengthen their weaknesses according to their specific circumstances. The role of the special education teacher should change from a passive role in providing teaching and learning services for students with special needs in special education schools to an active role in understanding the needs of students with special needs in the regular classroom and in providing strategies and practical actions for the regular classroom teachers in the areas of environment, curriculum, teaching, assessment, and behavioral management through collaboration with the regular classroom teachers.

Exo-system——Forward policy support system

In 2018 the State Council of the Central Committee of the Communist promulgated the Opinions on Comprehensively Deepening the Reform of the Teacher Workforce Construction in the New Era (hereinafter referred to as the Opinions), which raised the work of teachers to a political height and required "Party committees and governments at all levels to take a strategic The Opinions raise the work of teachers to a political level, requiring "Party committees and governments at all levels to fully understand the extreme importance of teachers' work from a strategic and overall perspective, and to make the comprehensive strengthening of the teaching force a major political task and a fundamental livelihood project". The Ministry of Education and seven other ministries Jointly published the Phase II special education promotion plan (2017-2020) in 2017, which clearly states "by 2020, the level of universal access to all levels and types of special education will be comprehensively improved" and "the quality of education will be comprehensively enhanced". As the education targets themselves are disadvantaged groups in society, higher requirements are placed on the teacher ethics of special education teachers, who not only need to meet the basic requirements of teacher ethics in the new era but also need to have a humanitarian spirit, respect differences and be willing to give. To run special education well, improve the quality of special education and truly meet the needs of children with special needs, we can use the general idea of "training composite special education teachers as a teaching force," "innovate training mechanisms and strengthen the training of special education professionals in universities," and "establish a teaching staff establishment for special education schools." In addition to the basic teaching and learning skills of teachers, it is also possible to create teachers who can assess and identify special educational needs, individualize their teaching design and use assistive technology. In addition to the basic pedagogical skills of a teacher, a team of special education teachers with the skills of assessment and identification, individualized teaching design, and the use of assistive technology will be created. In addition, a highly qualified and professional special education teaching force should have a reasonable management system, which is reflected in the continuous improvement of the special education teacher admission system, the assessment and recruitment system, the establishment standards, and the remuneration guarantee system.

Macro-system——Create a diverse and inclusive campus

Ecological diversity is a concept that has been emphasized in recent years in ecology, and the same concept is applied to school culture, where a diverse and inclusive school culture is a healthy and

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beautiful school. Special education teachers often have amazing talents, and if schools can create opportunities for these teachers to showcase their strengths by adopting a strengths-based perspective and through ongoing special education advocacy and in-service training for teachers, the concept of special education can be transformed from a negative troublemaker to an essential asset in the school.

Chrono-system—Pay attention to the issue of transfer title and career development

With China's 14th five-year plan on the horizon, teachers in special education schools need more attention in terms of their psychological transition, the pressures of the new domestic environment, and their future career development. Special education schools should incorporate issues related to teachers' self-exploration and career development into their administration so that teachers working in special education schools can understand their future career development early on, improve their resilience in the workplace and prepare themselves to provide high-quality teaching to students in special education schools.

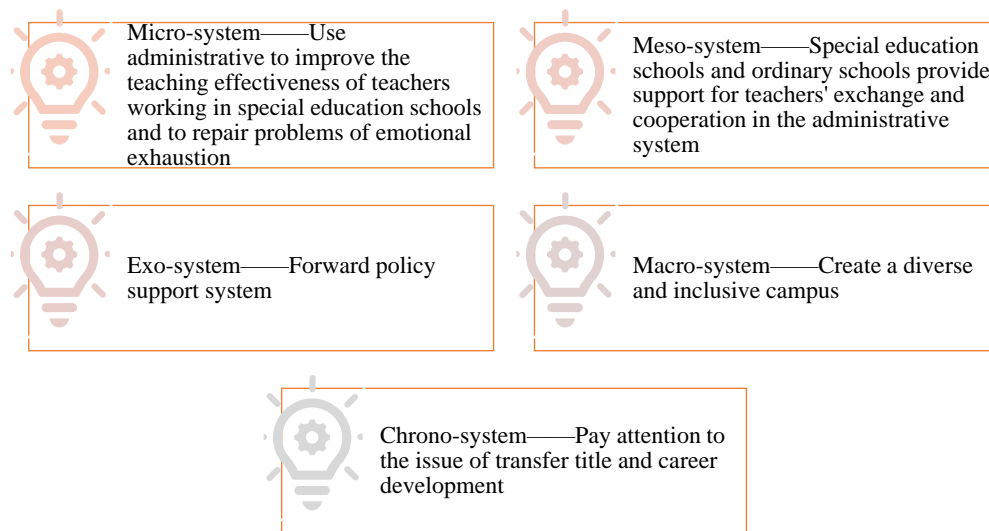


Figure 2: Campus Support System Based on Ecosystem View

Conclusions

The resilience of teachers in special education schools is an issue of concern to education authorities. Through the concept of ecosystem theory, we hope to provide different perspectives to analyze the resilience of teachers in special education schools and to explore the support system needed by teachers in special education schools from intra-system, inter-system, and cross-system interactions. It is hoped that in the future, teachers in special education schools will be able to face the pressure of teaching life from all sides with good teacher resilience through continuous policy support and optimized school administration and be able to understand, care, respect, and trust students in the education of children with special needs peacefully; at the same time, teachers in special education schools should also strive to find and innovate suitable education methods for students with different special needs. In addition to their normal teaching duties and communication with students and parents, teachers in special education schools are expected to actively participate in the construction and management of the school campus and to create a campus culture suitable for students' growth and learning.





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