

Assessment of Elementary Teachers' Stress Factors and Adaptive Coping Strategies

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Abstract. This research aimed to assess teachers' stress factors and coping mechanisms in central elementary schools for the school year 2023-2024. Findings revealed moderate stress among teachers in central schools in terms of the following indicator variables of pupils' behavior, teachers' workload, time resources, interpersonal relationships, recognition, and well-being was moderate, which means that the teachers sometimes manifested the level of stress. The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient indicated a significant relationship between teachers' stress levels and their adaptive coping strategies. Most teachers are females, aged 36 to 45 years old, married, with a Teacher III designation, and handle many pupils in the classroom. The stress level among teachers in central schools regarding pupils' behavior and teachers' workload is high. Still, it is moderated regarding time resources, interpersonal relationships, recognition, and well-being. Central school teachers utilized coping strategies to cope with the stresses they encountered. It was recommended that the school heads in the Digos City Division provide technical assistance on enhancing stress resiliency in every teaching-learning process as they relate to the manifestations of the new strategies and pedagogical techniques of teaching. The central school teachers may teach co-teachers how to implement the pedagogical method in the workplace while reducing stress and developing adaptive coping strategies. Individual schools may continue to prioritize the mental health of every teacher. In addition, stress information advocacy workshops may be included in the priority improvement areas as they are included in the School Improvement Plan.

Keywords: Adaptive coping strategies; Elementary teachers; Stress factors.

1.0 Introduction

It was generally agreed that the stresses brought on by one's surroundings threaten one's capacity to live. In addition, it was common for the human body to react in some way when confronted with the intense demands of its surroundings. Job stress was described as the detrimental emotional responses that occur when the job requirements do not meet the worker's capabilities, resources, or demands. Job stress can harm one's health by causing psychological and physiological symptoms such as sadness, anxiety, and irregular sleeping habits (Murphy et al., 2021). It is well-known that teachers have been under tremendous stress from March 2020 until now. Instructors experienced a significant rise in stress due to the pandemic, and there is a correlation between high stress levels and poor results for instructors (Nasr, 2020).

Stress has caused pay disparities between teachers in the United States and other industrialized nations (Schleicher, 2020). In New Zealand, teaching is seen as a very stressful job, and other media investigations have highlighted New Zealand teachers' high levels of stress (Frank et al., 2019). In 2018, elementary school teachers went on strike twice in an attempt to push action on issues they had been voicing for years. "They are calling for

assistance for children with special needs, a career framework, time to educate and time to lead, and a wage raise for everyone" or these demands hint at increased workload and stress in the classroom, as well as lower remuneration and value placed on the profession (Khasawneh, 2023).

Furthermore, in Thailand, Mercado (2021) stated that most educational content available online adheres to traditional pedagogy, which was based on top-down rote learning. Teachers are already challenged by sitting in front of a camera without real students; yet, if they do not alter their methodology to leverage technology to let students interact, the lectures will become stagnant and less successful. As a result, it generated mental and psychological stress among teachers.

Public school teachers in the Philippines were recognized for their severe labor demands, eventually leading to occupational burnout. Teachers have expressed concerns regarding modular remote learning because of the abrupt transition to the new standard learning setup. Because they have become the educational front lines during this pandemic, they have been tasked with printing, sorting, distributing, and restocking the self-learning modules, which adds to their already demanding workload. These responsibilities underscore the critical need for adequate school preparation and support in learning delivery (Villarejo et al., 2022).

The position of an educator was demanding, and those demands are known to cause stress even in the best of circumstances. Today, teachers are confronted with the day-to-day burden of teaching and stressors (Livio, 2021). Stress-reduction interventions were expected to reduce tension and increase teacher well-being, benefitting students in those instructors' classes (Trust & Whalen, 2020). As argued by Collie et al. (2020), teachers' work stress cannot be eliminated; teachers can use a few ways to ease some of the current stress. More importantly, these authors argue that school administrators must work hard to enhance teachers' working environment to reduce stressors and raise teacher job satisfaction.

Given these circumstances, this study aimed to assess stress levels and coping strategies among elementary school teachers. The researchers sought to understand how educators manage stressful situations and support colleagues facing tight deadlines or high workloads. The researcher wanted to explore the stress related to professional factors, including working conditions, professional responsibilities, student-teacher situations, student discipline, and how stress levels vary across demographic profiles. Hence, there is a scarcity of studies that look into these concerns on stress among teachers in a local setting. There was an immediate need for insight into the adaptive coping mechanisms employed by educators, as these may contribute to the growth of leadership capacities.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study employed the descriptive survey research design to determine the stress level and adaptive coping strategies among public elementary school teachers. The descriptive-survey method is appropriate for studies aiming to collect quantifiable data from a defined population. It allows the researcher to describe, analyze, and interpret the existing conditions based on participants' responses. This approach was suitable for identifying and understanding teachers' stress factors and coping strategies in their natural work environment (Creswell, 1994). The questionnaire provided a structured framework for respondents to select from various options. This structure made it easier to compute totals, averages, and overall mean scores to derive meaningful interpretations.

2.2 Research Locale

Digos, officially the City of Digos (Cebuano: Dakbayan sa Digos; Tagalog: Lungsod ng Digos), was the capital of the Philippine province of Davao del Sur. It has a population of 169,393 people according to the 2015 census. The city is situated on Mindanao's island, on the Davao Gulf's western shores and the southern foothills of Mount Apo. It is strategically located between Mindanao's three major cities, Davao City in the north, General Santos City in the south, and Cotabato City in the west. It was included in the Metropolitan Davao region. It was known for its sweet-juicy 'carabao variety mango,' sold locally and exported internationally, earning it the moniker "Mango Capital City of the Philippines." It is also known as the "Southern Gate City." Digos was incorporated as a city on September 8, 2000. This study was conducted in the public elementary schools in Digos City Division. The selected large-sized elementary schools, namely: Ramon Magsaysay Central Elementary School, Digos City Central Elementary School, G. Reusora Central Elementary School, and Rizal Central Elementary School, for the school year 2023-2024.

2.3 Research Participants

This study's participants were 163 public elementary school teachers from Digos City Division. The sample was determined using Slovin's formula with a 5% margin of error to ensure an adequate and representative number of respondents. A simple random sampling technique, specifically the fishbowl method, was used to select participants, ensuring that every teacher had an equal chance of being included. A stratified random sampling procedure was also applied to determine participants from each selected school proportionally. These respondents were chosen based on their experience in the education sector, particularly during the shift to the new normal brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.4 Research Instrument

The questionnaires were formulated based on the data required by this study and adapted from Dumas et al. (2022) on stress and Abas (2021) for coping strategies, which were modified to fit into the study and subjected to the validation of the experts. The measurements were examined and improved after extensive discussions with the expert. The research adviser received the research instruments' initial draft and provided feedback, recommendations, and suggestions for adjusting and polishing their presentation. The final revisions, including the adviser's errors, comments, and suggestions, were made before they were prepared for distribution and administration. It was supported by experts such as members of the panel committees, supervisors, and master teachers. The following 5-point Likert Scale was utilized in the interpretation of the levels of stress of elementary teachers.

2.5 Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher utilized the following techniques to gather data. First, approval was sought from the appropriate authorities for the study to be conducted. The researcher sent a letter to the office of the Schools Division Superintendent, Melanie P. Estacio, CESO IV, and to the Senior Education Program Specialist on Planning and Research, Mr. Marjun Rebosquillo, asking permission to conduct a study in selected public elementary schools in Digos City Division. Second, the researcher asked permission from the school heads to allow the researcher to conduct a study at their respective schools and get a certification from the Graduate School Research Ethics Committee (REC). Third, the survey was conducted with the teacher respondents to ensure the confidentiality of the data gathered from them. Fourth, the teachers were oriented to answer the survey questionnaire before the study. Finally, the respondents were informed that their responses were kept private and that the data gathered were tallied, tabulated, and subjected to statistical analysis.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

Some ethical questions and considerations were observed during this research. The researcher verified the credibility and plans to assess the level of risk and the efficacy of countermeasures against all potential threats. Those involved in recruiting, especially the researcher, did their best to ensure that all data collected was kept confidential and used in the study. Respondents could file a complaint and request an investigation into the possible misuse of data and information.

3.0 Results and Discussion

The data in Table 1 show that the vast majority of teachers in central schools are female (97.5%) and predominantly aged between 36 and 45 (38.7%), indicating a mid-career teaching workforce. Most teachers are also married (80.4%). This demographic distribution aligns with findings from Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2017), suggesting that female, mid-career educators often dominate the public teaching workforce and may face unique stressors tied to professional and family responsibilities. As shown in Table 2, a significant portion of respondents hold the rank of Teacher III (42.3%), indicating career advancement within the department. The small number of Master Teachers may reflect either limited positions or challenging promotion requirements. Macaraeg et al. (2021) noted that higher-ranking teachers often bear additional workloads such as mentoring and administrative tasks, which can increase stress levels. Most teachers (69.3%) manage between 41 and 50 students, reflecting large class sizes, as seen in Table 3. This suggests significant demands on classroom management, instructional delivery, and individual student attention. De Villa and Manalo (2020) state that such conditions—especially in modular or hybrid learning setups—contribute to teacher burnout and instructional inefficiency. Larger class sizes also reduce the likelihood of personalized instruction, potentially increasing professional stress.

Table 1. Socio-Demographic Profile of Teachers in Central Schools: Gender, Age, and Civil Status

	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Male	4	2.5
Female	159	97.5
Age		
35 And Below	51	31.3
36-45 Y.O	63	38.7
46 -50 Y.O	27	16.6
51 - 65 Y.O	22	13.5
Civil Status		
Single	26	16
Married	131	80.4
Widow	6	3.7

Table 2. Socio-Demographic Profile of Teachers in Central Schools in terms of the Number of Designations

Number Designations	Frequency	Percent
Teacher I	43	26.4
Teacher II	48	29.4
Teacher III	69	42.3
Master Teacher I	2	1.2
Master Teacher II	1	0.6

Table 3. Socio-Demographic Profile of Teachers in Central Schools in terms of Students Handled

Students Handled	Frequency	Percent
25-30	4	2.40
31-35	5	6.00
36-40	23	20.9
41-45	79	37.40
46-50	52	31.90

Data in Table 4 shows that the highest stressors were related to teacher workload and pupil behavior, rated as “High.” Other factors, such as recognition, interpersonal relationships, and well-being, were rated “Moderate.” This suggests that while the core stress is operational (workload, behavior), institutional support and acknowledgment remain suboptimal. Harmsen et al. (2018) similarly concluded that pupil misbehavior and excessive job expectations are the most stressful aspects of teaching, especially in public schools where resources are often limited. The results in Table 5 indicate that teachers in central schools highly utilized approach coping strategies ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 0.58$), while avoidant coping strategies were used at a low level ($M = 2.15$, $SD = 1.16$). This suggests that when confronted with stress, most teachers actively addressed problems by seeking support, planning, or using positive reframing, rather than avoiding or denying stressors. This aligns with findings from Quansah et al. (2022), who observed that teachers experiencing anxiety—especially during high-pressure instructional settings—were more likely to rely on active coping strategies to maintain psychological stability. Furthermore, Harmsen et al. (2018) emphasized that approach-based coping mechanisms such as seeking peer support, problem-solving, and self-reflection contribute significantly to teacher resilience, well-being, and reduced burnout. The low reliance on avoidant coping is a positive indicator, as such strategies (e.g., denial, disengagement) are often linked to long-term adverse outcomes, including emotional exhaustion and lower job satisfaction.

Table 4. Level of Stress Among Teachers in Central Schools

	Mean	SD	Descriptive Equivalent
Pupils Behavior	3.56	0.79	High
Teachers Workload	3.81	0.62	High
Time Resources	3.15	0.74	Moderate
Interpersonal Relationship	2.94	0.78	Moderate
Recognition	2.75	0.81	Moderate
Wellbeing	2.86	0.82	Moderate
Overall Mean	3.17	0.76	Moderate

Table 5. *Level of Adaptive Coping Strategies among Teachers in Central Schools*

	Mean	SD	Descriptive Equivalent
Approach Coping Strategy	3.93	0.58	High
Avoidant Coping Strategy	2.15	1.16	Low

The statistical analysis using t-tests and ANOVA in Table 6 shows no significant differences in teachers' stress levels when analyzed by gender, age, number of designations, or number of subjects handled, as all p-values exceeded the 0.05 threshold for significance.

Table 6. *Difference in Teacher Stress when Analyzed according to Profile*

Stress Level	P-Value	Remarks
Gender	0.051	Not significant
Age	0.238	Not Significant
Number of Designations	0.162	Not Significant
Number of Subjects Handled	0.226	Not Significant

This indicates that teachers across all demographic groups experience stress at relatively similar levels, regardless of their position, age group, gender, or workload distribution regarding subject load. The uniformity in stress levels may reflect systemic issues common to all teachers, such as administrative demands, large class sizes, and instructional pressures. These findings support Ansley (2021), who pointed out that teacher stress is widespread and influenced more by environmental and systemic challenges than individual demographic factors. Similarly, Kwaah et al. (2022) concluded that stress is often rooted in external factors like lack of resources, demanding workloads, and shifting educational policies rather than personal attributes or teaching roles. This result suggests the need for institution-wide stress-reduction interventions rather than targeted ones based solely on demographic differences.

Table 7 shows statistically significant differences in teachers' adaptive coping strategies when analyzed according to their civil status, age, and number of designations, with p-values of 0.0289, 0.033, and 0.024, respectively. These values are below the 0.05 significance level, indicating that demographic factors such as marital status, professional maturity, and rank influence how teachers cope with stress. Married teachers may develop more structured coping routines due to added familial responsibilities, while single or widowed teachers may rely more on social or avoidant mechanisms. Younger teachers might demonstrate greater emotional flexibility or technological adaptability, while older teachers may rely on traditional coping strategies or exhibit more stress resistance from experience. Likewise, higher-ranked teachers, such as Teacher III, may have more stress exposure and refined coping mechanisms developed through experience and professional training.

Table 7. *Significant Difference in Teachers' Adaptive Coping Strategies by Respondents Age, Number of Designations, Number of Subjects Handled*

	P-value	Remarks
Gender	0.994	Not Significant
Civil Status	.0289	Significant
Age	0.033	Significant
Number of designations	0.024	Significant
Number of Subjects Handled	0.141	Not Significant

On the other hand, gender and the number of subjects handled did not significantly affect adaptive coping strategies. This suggests that while workload matters, it is not necessarily the number of subjects taught, but rather the complexity of roles and individual life circumstances that shape coping responses. These findings align with Quansah et al. (2022), who emphasized that demographic context—especially age and role—can influence teachers' coping mechanisms. Similarly, Harmsen et al. (2018) found that experienced teachers often engage in more proactive coping techniques compared to those newer in the profession.

The post hoc analysis in Table 8 explained which group age differs from the other age regarding their adoptive coping strategies. From the table, ages 35 and below have a significantly higher mean (3.1705) compared to the age group of 51- 65. Post hoc analyses are not performed for several designations because at least one group has fewer than two cases. A p-value less than 0.05 is typically considered statistically significant, so the null hypothesis

should be rejected. A p-value greater than 0.05 means that the deviation from the null hypothesis is not statistically significant, and the null hypothesis is not rejected.

Table 8. *Post Hoc Analysis Table for the Age of the Respondents*

Tukey B ^{a,b}			
Age	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05	
		1	2
51 - 65 y.o	22	2.75	
46 -50 y.o	27	2.89	2.89
36-45 y.o	63	3.09	3.09
35 and below	51		3.17

This finding implies that younger teachers tend to use more proactive and constructive coping mechanisms, possibly due to greater exposure to digital tools, mental health awareness, or recent training in resilience and well-being. In contrast, older teachers may rely on more traditional or passive coping mechanisms, possibly due to accumulated fatigue, decreased adaptability to change, or generational norms around emotional expression. These results support Caratiquit (2022), who emphasized that younger teachers, while still challenged, show high enthusiasm and adaptability in navigating the demands of the "new normal" education system. Moreover, Harmsen et al. (2018) found that younger educators often employ more flexible strategies, while older teachers may feel constrained by structural limitations or emotional exhaustion.

The results in Table 9 show a significant moderate positive correlation between teachers' level of stress and their use of adaptive coping strategies ($r = 0.60$, $p < 0.001$). This means that as teachers experience higher stress levels, they tend to increase their use of coping strategies—particularly adaptive ones—to manage that stress. This finding suggests that teachers are not passive in the face of stress; instead, they respond by actively engaging in behaviors to mitigate its effects. This is a positive indicator of resilience, especially in high-stress environments like large public schools with high student loads and limited resources.

Table 9. *Significant Relationship between the Level of Stress and the Adaptive Coping Strategies of Teachers in Central Schools*

	Pearson - r	Relationship	P-value	Remarks
Level of Stress vs. Adaptive Coping	.60**	Moderate positive relationship	< 0.001	Significant

This result is supported by Telles et al. (2018), who emphasized the link between high stress and adaptive mechanisms such as increased self-awareness, problem-solving, and peer support. Their study found that individuals who feel recognized and supported within their work environment are more likely to manage stress effectively, leading to better performance and well-being. Moreover, this aligns with the findings of Collie et al. (2020), who argued that while teacher stress cannot be eliminated, promoting adaptive coping can reduce its negative impact and improve job satisfaction and mental health outcomes.

4.0 Conclusion

Based on the study's findings, several meaningful conclusions can be drawn. Most teachers in central elementary schools are female, aged 36 to 45, married, and hold the designation of Teacher III, handling large class sizes. This demographic pattern suggests a workforce composed of mid-career educators who may be balancing both professional and personal responsibilities, potentially intensifying their experience of work-related stress. The stress level among teachers was found to be high in terms of pupils' behavior and workload. At the same time, it was moderate in areas such as time resources, interpersonal relationships, recognition, and well-being. This implies that the operational demands of teaching, especially managing classroom behavior and excessive workloads, are the primary sources of stress. Institutional support, time management resources, and teacher recognition may need to be improved to alleviate stress in other areas.

Teachers were found to positively utilize coping strategies, such as seeking support, problem-solving, and reframing challenges. This indicates that despite experiencing considerable stress, teachers actively engage in a healthy and constructive approach to manage their emotional and professional well-being. The study further revealed that civil status, age, and number of designations significantly influenced how teachers cope with stress. This suggests that personal life circumstances and professional experience shape coping behavior, highlighting the need for targeted wellness programs considering individual teacher profiles. Lastly, there is a significant

positive correlation between the level of stress and the use of adaptive coping strategies. This means that the more stress teachers experience, the more likely they are to apply coping strategies, particularly proactive ones. This finding underscores the importance of providing continued support, training, and mental health resources to help teachers strengthen their coping mechanisms in response to occupational demands.

5.0 Contributions of Authors

This study is a collaborative effort between the authors. Ires M. Bacamante was primarily responsible for conceptualizing the study, collecting data, and drafting the manuscript. Marilou C. Sabud guided the research design, statistical analysis, and critical revision of the manuscript for academic rigor and clarity. Both authors actively participated in multiple rounds of review, editing, and final approval of the work.

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7.0 Conflict of Interests

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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