



# LIVED EXPERIENCES OF OCCUPATIONAL STRESS, TEACHING PERFORMANCE CHALLENGES, AND COPING STRATEGIES AMONG ELEMENTARY TEACHERS IN THE CITY OF ILAGAN: BASIS FOR A CONTEXTUALIZED GUIDANCE INTERVENTION PROGRAM

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## ABSTRACT

*Occupational stress among teachers has become a significant concern in contemporary education due to increasing instructional demands, administrative responsibilities, learner diversity, and institutional expectations. This qualitative phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of occupational stress, teaching performance challenges, and coping strategies among elementary teachers in the City of Ilagan, Philippines. Specifically, the study sought to understand how teachers experience work-related stress, the challenges they encounter in fulfilling instructional and professional responsibilities, and the coping mechanisms they employ to sustain teaching performance and emotional well-being. Data were gathered through in-depth semi-structured interviews with twelve purposively selected elementary teachers from public schools in the City of Ilagan. Thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's framework was utilized in analyzing the data. Findings revealed that teachers experienced occupational stress due to excessive workload demands, time pressure, administrative tasks, learner behavioral concerns, emotional exhaustion, and role multiplicity. Participants also described challenges related to instructional preparation, classroom management, documentation requirements, and balancing personal and professional responsibilities. Despite these challenges, teachers demonstrated resilience through emotional regulation, peer support, spiritual practices, family support systems, time management strategies, and positive professional commitment. The findings underscore the need for institutional mental health support, workload management initiatives, and teacher-centered wellness programs. Based on the findings, a Contextualized Guidance Intervention Program was proposed to strengthen teachers' emotional well-being, stress management skills, and professional resilience within the local educational context.*

**Keywords:** *occupational stress, teaching challenges, coping strategies, teacher well-being, phenomenology, elementary teachers, guidance intervention program*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Teaching is widely recognized as one of the most demanding professions due to its multifaceted responsibilities involving instruction, classroom management, learner assessment, administrative compliance, and community engagement. Teachers are expected to address diverse learner needs while simultaneously meeting institutional expectations, curriculum standards, and professional responsibilities. In recent years, occupational stress among teachers has become an increasingly significant concern due to expanding workloads, educational reforms, documentation requirements, and emotional demands associated with teaching.

Occupational stress refers to the physical, emotional, and psychological strain experienced by individuals when workplace demands exceed their coping capacities and available resources. In educational settings, prolonged occupational stress may negatively affect teachers' emotional well-being, instructional effectiveness, professional satisfaction, and overall teaching performance. Excessive stress may also contribute to burnout, emotional exhaustion, decreased motivation, and reduced classroom engagement, ultimately affecting both teacher welfare and learner outcomes.

Elementary school teachers are particularly vulnerable to occupational stress because they handle foundational learning, classroom discipline, learner development, and extensive instructional preparation while responding to the emotional and academic needs of young learners. In the Philippine educational context, teachers additionally encounter administrative paperwork, co-curricular responsibilities, performance evaluation requirements, and community-related obligations that intensify workplace pressures. Educational reforms and increasing institutional accountability further contribute to teachers' professional stress experiences.

Despite these occupational challenges, teachers continue to demonstrate resilience and commitment through various coping strategies that help them manage workplace stress and sustain teaching performance. Coping mechanisms may include emotional regulation, peer collaboration, spiritual practices, family support, recreational activities, and adaptive time management

strategies. Understanding how teachers experience and navigate occupational stress is essential in developing institutional interventions that support teacher well-being and professional sustainability.

Existing literature commonly examines teacher stress through quantitative measures focusing on burnout levels, workload indicators, and organizational factors. However, limited qualitative studies have explored the lived experiences of occupational stress among elementary teachers within localized Philippine educational settings. The City of Ilagan presents a relevant context for examining teachers' stress experiences due to evolving educational demands and diverse instructional realities within public elementary schools.

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of occupational stress, teaching performance challenges, and coping strategies among elementary teachers in the City of Ilagan. Specifically, the study sought to understand the sources of stress experienced by teachers, the instructional and professional challenges they encounter, and the coping mechanisms they employ in managing occupational demands. The findings served as the basis for developing a Contextualized Guidance Intervention Program aimed at strengthening teacher well-being, resilience, and professional support systems.

### Review of Related Literature

#### Electoral Attitudes and Democratic Participation Occupational Stress Among Teachers

Occupational stress has become a major concern in the teaching profession due to increasing educational demands and institutional responsibilities. Kyriacou (2021) defined teacher stress as the negative emotional experience resulting from aspects of teaching perceived as threatening, demanding, or difficult to manage. Teachers commonly experience stress due to excessive workload, classroom management difficulties, time constraints, learner behavioral concerns, and administrative pressures.

In the Philippine educational context, teacher stress is intensified by curriculum reforms, documentation requirements, large class sizes, and multiple ancillary functions. According to Garcia and Robles (2022), Filipino teachers often experience emotional exhaustion and professional strain due to balancing instructional duties with



institutional compliance and community expectations.

according to local educational realities, institutional culture, and community contexts.

### Teaching Performance Challenges

Teaching performance is closely linked to teachers' emotional well-being, motivation, and workplace conditions. Teachers experiencing prolonged stress may encounter challenges related to lesson preparation, instructional delivery, classroom discipline, learner engagement, and professional productivity. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2020) emphasized that stress negatively affects teachers' instructional confidence and professional satisfaction.

Elementary teachers particularly encounter complex challenges because they manage young learners with varying developmental, behavioral, and academic needs. These challenges may become more difficult when combined with administrative demands and limited institutional support.

### Coping Strategies and Teacher Resilience

Teachers utilize various coping strategies to manage occupational stress and maintain professional functioning. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) explained that coping mechanisms involve cognitive and behavioral efforts used to manage stressful situations. Positive coping strategies include emotional regulation, social support, spirituality, problem-solving, and adaptive time management.

Research by Day and Gu (2020) emphasized the importance of resilience among teachers in sustaining professional commitment despite workplace challenges. Teachers who possess strong coping capacities are more likely to maintain emotional stability, teaching effectiveness, and professional motivation.

### Guidance and Mental Health Support in Educational Institutions

Teacher well-being significantly influences educational quality and organizational effectiveness. Educational institutions are increasingly encouraged to implement wellness and guidance programs that support teachers' mental health and occupational functioning. According to Jennings et al. (2019), institutional support systems such as counseling services, stress management programs, and peer-support initiatives contribute to healthier educational environments and improved teacher retention.

Contextualized intervention programs are particularly important because occupational stress experiences vary

### Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored on Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping (1984), which explains that stress results from individuals' appraisal of environmental demands and their perceived ability to cope with those demands. The theory emphasizes that coping mechanisms influence how individuals manage occupational stress and emotional strain.

The study was also anchored on Maslach's Burnout Theory (1982), which explains how prolonged occupational stress contributes to emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced professional accomplishment. The theory highlights the importance of emotional support and institutional interventions in preventing teacher burnout.

These theories guided the exploration of teachers' lived experiences of occupational stress, professional challenges, and coping processes.

## II. METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of occupational stress, teaching performance challenges, and coping strategies among elementary teachers in the City of Ilagan. Phenomenology was appropriate because it enabled the researcher to understand how teachers interpreted and gave meaning to their workplace experiences, emotional struggles, and coping processes within their professional environment.

The study was conducted in selected public elementary schools in the City of Ilagan, Isabela, Philippines. The locale was selected because of its diverse teaching contexts and active implementation of educational responsibilities among elementary teachers within public school settings.

The participants of the study consisted of twelve public elementary school teachers selected through purposive sampling. The inclusion criteria required participants to: (1) currently teach in public elementary schools in the City of Ilagan; (2) possess at least three years of teaching experience; and (3) be willing to share their lived experiences related to occupational stress and teaching challenges. The participants represented varied teaching assignments, grade levels, and years of professional



experience to ensure richer perspectives and diverse narratives.

Data were gathered through semi-structured in-depth interviews. Interview questions focused on teachers' experiences of occupational stress, instructional and professional challenges, emotional struggles, and coping mechanisms. The interviews allowed participants to openly describe their workplace realities, emotional responses, and personal strategies for managing stress. Ethical considerations such as informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation were strictly observed throughout the study.

The data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework. Interview transcripts were transcribed, coded, and categorized to identify recurring themes, meanings, and patterns related to teachers' stress experiences and coping strategies. To establish trustworthiness, the study employed member checking, triangulation, audit trails, and thick description to ensure credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of the findings.

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### Theme 1: Experiencing Emotional Exhaustion from Excessive Workload Demands

Participants consistently described occupational stress arising from excessive paperwork, multiple ancillary assignments, lesson preparation, and administrative responsibilities. Teachers expressed feelings of physical exhaustion, emotional fatigue, and pressure in meeting institutional deadlines.

One participant shared:

“Minsan kahit pag-uwi mo sa bahay, trabaho pa rin ang iniisip mo dahil sa dami ng reports at requirements.”

Another participant stated:

“Nakakapagod emotionally kasi gusto mong maayos ang pagtuturo mo pero sabay-sabay ang responsibilities.”

The findings indicate that workload intensification significantly contributes to occupational stress among elementary teachers.

#### Theme 2: Struggling with Instructional and Classroom Management Challenges

Teachers described difficulties related to learner behavior management, differentiated instruction, learner motivation, and classroom discipline. Participants emphasized that addressing diverse learner needs while maintaining instructional quality was emotionally demanding.

A participant explained:

“May mga bata na kailangan talaga ng extra attention kaya minsan nahahati ang focus mo sa klase.”

The findings suggest that instructional complexity and classroom management demands contribute to teachers' emotional and professional strain.

#### Theme 3: Balancing Professional Responsibilities and Personal Well-Being

Participants revealed struggles in balancing professional duties with family responsibilities, rest, and personal well-being. Many teachers described limited personal time due to school-related obligations extending beyond working hours.

One teacher mentioned:

“Minsan kulang na ang oras para sa sarili at pamilya dahil inuuwi mo pa ang trabaho.”

The findings highlight how occupational stress affects teachers' work-life balance and emotional health.

#### Theme 4: Seeking Emotional Strength Through Social and Spiritual Support

Teachers identified peer relationships, family support, and spiritual practices as important coping mechanisms. Emotional support from colleagues and loved ones helped participants manage stress and maintain motivation.

A participant shared:

“Malaking tulong iyong may napagsasabihan kang kapwa teacher kasi naiintindihan nila ang pinagdadaan mo.”

Another participant expressed:

“Dasal talaga at faith ang nagbibigay sa akin ng lakas kapag sobrang stressed na.”

The findings demonstrate the importance of interpersonal and spiritual coping resources among teachers.

#### Theme 5: Developing Personal Resilience and Adaptive Coping Strategies

Participants described employing positive coping strategies



such as time management, positive thinking, recreational activities, emotional regulation, and self-motivation. Teachers emphasized their commitment to continue teaching despite occupational difficulties.

One participant stated:

“Iniisip ko na lang na may purpose ang ginagawa ko kaya kailangan maging matatag.”

The findings suggest that resilience and adaptive coping help teachers sustain professional functioning despite workplace stressors.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The study revealed that elementary teachers in the City of Ilagan experience occupational stress due to excessive workload demands, instructional pressures, classroom management difficulties, emotional exhaustion, and work-life imbalance. These stressors significantly affect teachers' emotional well-being and professional functioning.

Despite these challenges, teachers demonstrated resilience through adaptive coping mechanisms including peer support, spirituality, emotional regulation, family support, and positive professional commitment. The findings underscore the importance of institutional support systems that address teachers' emotional health, workload management, and occupational well-being.

The study further highlights the need for localized mental health and guidance interventions that are responsive to teachers' lived experiences and workplace realities.

#### Proposed Contextualized Guidance Intervention Program

Based on the findings of the study, a Contextualized Guidance Intervention Program may be developed focusing on:

- Stress management workshops;
- Teacher wellness and mental health sessions;

- Peer support and mentoring programs;
- Emotional resilience training;
- Time management and self-care seminars;
- Counseling and psychological support services;
- Spiritual and psychosocial wellness activities.

The proposed intervention program aims to strengthen teachers' emotional well-being, professional resilience, coping capacities, and workplace support systems.

#### Implications of the Study

The findings may guide school administrators, guidance counselors, and educational policymakers in strengthening teacher wellness programs and institutional mental health initiatives. Educational institutions may develop supportive work environments that reduce occupational strain and promote teacher well-being.

The study also emphasizes the importance of providing emotional and psychosocial support systems for teachers to sustain instructional effectiveness and professional satisfaction. Future studies may further examine teacher stress experiences across different educational levels and institutional contexts in the Philippines.

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