

Teachers' Assessment on Their Occupational and Technological Stress in the New Normal: Basis for Wellness Intervention Programs

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ABSTRACT

Emerging facts have been revealed that the pandemic negatively affect people's lives due to the newness of the nature of job and its processes. In this study, occupational and technological stress level of teachers are assessed to better understand them and respond their sentiments and hopes based on their needs as they face the force remote education system. Out of 270 teachers of Agusan del Sur National High School, 159 were randomly chosen as the respondents to the google-form administered survey questionnaire. Results revealed that majority of the teachers have work-life imbalance, are worn out physically, mentally and emotionally and having a hard time of relaxation that lead them the feeling of irritability and frequent headaches due to the workload and nature of job and responsibilities. The teachers' overall weighted mean (WM) on occupational stress level is *average* ($WM=3.16$) which means that teachers are *moderately stress* in handling the new normal distance teaching-learning process while the overall weighted mean on technological stress level is *high* ($WA= 3.46$). Furthermore, there is a strong significant relationship between occupational and techno-stress levels which tells that both factors moderately associate from each other. Moreover, teachers aired their requests on upgrading of internet connection, the reinforcement through seminars on TPCCK in the normal, the improvement of printed modules process flow, having destressing activities and relaxation, and the love and care of the school towards them. It is then recommended that the school would make a strategic plan in response to the teachers' suggested intervention programs.

KEYWORDS: *Teachers' Self-Assessment, Occupational Stress, Technology Stress, New Normal, Intervention Programs*

INTRODUCTION

With the changing face of educational systems and processes, and school being held virtually as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers' stress is certainly a key topic. Green & Bettini (2020) reported that changes in school structure and available resources will likely impact teacher stress and well-being. Moreover, Talidong and Toquero (2020) reported that new normal can posit worries to the teachers since they have not been trained for emergency online teaching. As a result, stress that may have already been present is exacerbated (Smith, 2020). As COVID-19 brings uncertainty, its high time to solicit how high their stress is as basis for the

school being the frontline to foster mechanisms and support for teachers in their stress management (Murzello, 2020).

The JD-R model of Bakker & Demerouti (2006) states that if job demands are high and resources are low, the team members are more likely to experience greater levels of stress. Ketchell (2020) stated that teachers who are burned out are less effective as teachers, have less supportive relationships with students and, in turn, the students they teach have lower academic and social outcomes. In addition, Cox, Solomon, Parris (2018) posited that teacher health status has been linked not only to teachers'

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physical health, but also to stability in schools and to teaching effectiveness and student achievement.

In the study conducted by Etxebarria, Santxo, Mondragon, and Santamaría, M. (2021) results revealed that a high percentage of teachers showed anxiety, depression and stress symptoms. Specifically, 50.6% of the teachers indicated that they were suffering from stress, with 4.5% reporting extremely severe stress and 14.1% severe stress. About 49.5% of the teachers reported suffering from anxiety, 8.1% of which reported extremely severe symptoms and 7.6% severe symptoms. Finally, 32.2% of the teachers reported suffering from depression, of which 3.2% reported extremely severe symptoms and 4.3% severe symptoms.

The Department of Education (DepEd) continues to extend assistance to its constituents amidst the COVID-19 situation as at least 600 personnel nationwide were able to learn more about Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Services (MHPSS) and Psychological First Aid (PFA) after a three-day Webinar last April 16, 17, and 21. In order to further strengthen the role of teachers as the education frontline, the Department of Education (DepEd) is conducting a series of Psychosocial Support and Training for teachers, school heads and identified DepEd region and division non-teaching personnel in preparation for the opening of School Year 2020-2021.

In the Division of Agusan del Sur, Agusan del Sur National High School has a total of 270 teachers who facilitated the distance learning to 7,650 students for School Year 2020-2021. As one of the leading schools of academic excellence in the division,

teacher's competence in handling the distance learning is to be developed. However, along the way, stress is inevitable. With this, the researcher finds it interested to assess the occupational and technological stress level of teachers in both occupational and technological related-aspects while facing the forced remote learning instruction.

METHODOLOGY

The study used a combination of descriptive correlation and qualitative approach. A total of 159 were randomly chosen out of 270 teachers of Agusan del Sur National High School through the use of Online Raosoft Calculator. Then the specific respondents were selected through a simple random sampling technique. The validated research instrument used consists of Part I: 10-item stress questionnaire adopted Question from Pro (n.d); Part II: 10-item researcher made instrument to determine the level of Occupational Stress in the new normal; Part III: 16-item adopted from Springer Nature (2017) and modified by the researcher to measure the teachers' Technological Stress and one open ended question to what wellness activities they want to recommend. With the help of the school administrator, the online data collection of the survey questionnaire through google form was done on December 8-14, 2020. Frequency and percentage; Weighted Mean, Pearson Correlation were used to analyze the quantitative data and Manual Coding to analyze the qualitative question. Scoring procedures were adopted from Bocar (2009) and Hambali, et al (2015) Ethical considerations such as principle of beneficence, respect and privacy were considered before the conduct of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 Factors affecting Occupational Stress among Teachers

	Frequency	Percent
Healthy Work Balance (HWB)		
with HWB	70	44%
without HWB	43	27%
doubtful	46	29%
Physical, Mental and Emotional Exhaustion		
almost never	8	5%
almost everyday	14	9%
once or twice a week	59	37%
four or five times a week	12	8%
once or few times per month	66	42%
Hard Time of Feeling Relaxed		
Never	2	1%
Seldom	29	18%
Sometimes	95	60%
Oftentimes	26	16%
Always	7	4%

Stressful Aspect of the Job		
Nature of the job and its responsibilities	73	46%
Personal Health Issues	38	24%
Physical work environment	29	18%
Volume of work loads	86	54%
Health Issues Encounter due to Stress		
Frequent Headache	71	45%
Anxiety	33	21%
Depression	20	13%
Insomnia	58	37%
Irritability	77	48%
loss of appetite	12	23%
Oversensitivity	37	2%
Prolonged Fatigue	30	19%
Other Symptoms	19	12%

Frequency Description (Bocar, 2009). 120-159 (Most) 80-119 (Majority) 40-79 (Some) 40-79; Few (0-39)

Some teachers have healthy work balance while few are doubtful and few don't have healthy work balance; On the other hand, some teachers are physically, mentally and emotional exhausted (PMEE) once and twice per month; the alarming rate is that some are exhausted once or twice a week; worst case is the few teachers who feel it almost every day. Majority of the teachers sometimes have a hard time to relax; and few teachers experience it seldom and few feel it oftentimes. This further means that majority of the teachers work-life imbalance and who have a hard feeling of relaxation in different degrees. Furthermore, majority of the teachers are stress due to the volume of the workloads; and the nature of the job and its responsibilities Few teachers have personal health issues; and few teachers have stress on their physical work environment. This leads to teachers to have irritability and frequent headaches;

Studies revealed that people who balance work-life stability have greater productivity than people who do not. Having a wholesome work-life stability facilitates personnel in appearing her/his consigned responsibilities in more competent and effective manner (Sheppard, 2016). On the other hand, once or few times a month of feeling of exhaustion (66=42%) is considerable, however once or twice a week feeling of exhaustion of 59=37% is an alarming rate. In addition, ninety-four teachers (95=60%) sometimes have hard time of relaxation. This is in relation to the workload of the teachers in the new normal. Phillips and Cain (2020) reported that teachers handling early childhood to higher education experienced a significant increase in their workload during the new normal which result to irritability as a symptom of the underlying stress and anxiety reported by Roberts (2019) to persons who have prolonged stress or burnout. Furthermore, Klapproth (2020) reported that mastering distance teaching imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic was challenging for many teachers. When teachers don't have the resources they need, and especially when sustained job demands are high, teachers experience chronic stress — and eventually burnout. This must be a concern of the top management because accordingly, 9 teachers who are burned out are less effective as teachers. In turn, have less supportive relationships with students and the students they teach have lower academic outcomes. Therefore, it is essential that administrators need to take care the needs of the teachers (Sokal, Babb, Trudel, 2020) Mclean & Clouse (1991) posited that a successful management of stress and burnout is seen to be a key element in continuing survival and work-life balance.

Table 2 The Level of Teachers' Occupational Stress (OS)

Indicator	Weighted Mean	Level
OS1. I am forced to adjust to the new normal way of teaching	3.20	Average in Stress
OS2. I feel the burden to face the responsibility of being a distance learning teacher	3.30	Average in Stress
OS3. I struggle of getting to school due to limited vehicles as means of transportation	2.77	Average in Stress
OS4. I feel tired of classroom routines such as cleaning of classroom, preparation of modules, and teaching the students remotely	3.51	High in Stress
OS5. I struggle in distance learning by attending virtual meeting, training and seminars	3.18	Average in Stress

OS6. I feel tired with the extra effort of preparing modules and learning activity sheets	3.69	High in Stress
OS7. I am sad with the school environment without students or pupils to meet face to face.	3.06	Average in Stress
OS8. I feel the dull moment of being alone at the workplace	2.62	Average in Stress
OS9. I have sleepless nights due to work overtime	3.20	Average in Stress
Overall Weighted Mean	3.17	Average in Stress

Stress Index (Hambali et al., 2015): 1.00-1.80 (Very Low in Stress); 1.81-2.60 (Low in Stress); 2.61-3.40 (Average in Stress); 3.41-4.20 (High in Stress); and, 4.21-5:00(Very High in Stress).

On the level of teachers' occupational stress in the new normal, the overall weighted mean is 3.17 which means that teachers have average or moderate stress while facing the new learning delivery modality. Specifically, teachers have high level of stress in the preparation of modules and on the contextualization and localization of learning activity sheets with weighted mean of 3.69 followed by a high stress level (WA=3.51) in the classroom routine such hands on in the maintenance of classroom cleanliness and sanitation They are moderately stress (average in stress) because of being forced as distance learning teacher (3.30); sleepless nights due to working overtime (3.20) attending virtual training and seminars due to poor internet connection (3.18) travelling to school with limited transportation (2.77) and being alone in the school environment without students (2.62)

Table 3 the Level of Teachers' Technological Stress (TS)

Indicator	Weighted Mean	Level
TS1. I am forced by this technology to do more work than I can handle.	3.23	Average in Stress
TS2. I am forced by this technology to work with very tight time schedules.	3.13	Average in Stress
TS3. I am forced to change my habits to adapt to new technologies.	3.43	High in Stress
TS4. I have a higher workload because of increased complexity of this technology.	3.20	Average in Stress
TS5. Techno-invasion, I have to be always available due to this technology.	3.76	High in Stress
TS6. I have to sacrifice time to keep current on new technologies.	3.57	High in Stress
TS7. I feel my personal life is being invaded by this technology	3.40	Average in Stress
TS8. Techno-complexity, I do not know enough about this technology to handle it satisfactorily.	2.94	Average in Stress
TS9. I need a long time to understand and use new technologies.	3.06	Average in Stress
TS10. I do not find enough time to study and upgrade my technology skills.	2.91	Average in Stress
TS11. I find others know more about this technology than I do.	3.43	High in Stress
TS12. I often find it too complex for me to understand and use new technology	2.87	Average in Stress
TS13. The time spent in using technology for preparation, explanation, installation or/and fixing problems during class instruction and virtual activities	3.06	Average in Stress
TS14. The feeling that I need to learn the new normal technologies and applications for teaching.	3.18	Average in Stress
TS15. The poor internet connectivity at home and at school.	3.60	High in Stress
TS16. The conflicting ideas and information disseminated through the use of online text and chat messaging.	3.10	Average in Stress
TS17. The use of low-tech or low-quality gadgets that creates trouble while at work.	3.43	High in Stress
Overall Weighted Mean	3.46	Average in Stress

Stress Index (Hambali et al., 2015): 1.00-1.80 (Very Low in Stress); 1.81-2.60 (Low in Stress); 2.61-3.40 (Average in Stress); 3.41-4.20 (High in Stress); and, 4.21-5:00(Very High in Stress).

On the level of teachers' technological stress, teachers feel *high stress* on 6 technological stress indicators out of These are the following in descending order: TS5=3.76 “*Techno-invasion, I have to be always available due to this technology*”; TS14=3.60 “*The poor internet connectivity at home and at school*”; TS6=3.57 “*I have to sacrifice time to keep current on new technologies*”; TS3, TS11, TS16 = 3.43, “*I am forced to change my habits to adapt to new technologies*”; *I find others know more about this technology than I do*” and “*The use of low-tech or low-quality gadgets that creates trouble while at work*”, respectively. The stress level on the remaining 10 indicators is *average*, which means teachers *moderately stress* because they are forced by this new normal technology to do more work that they can handle; working on tight schedules; the complexity of the new online learning technologies and learning platforms; the feeling of sacrificing time to learn the virtual method of teaching; and the conflicting ideas due to online distance communication.

Table 4 The Significant Relationship between Teachers' Occupational and Technological Stress

Null	r-value	p-value	Decision
There is no significant relationship between teachers' Occupational and Technological Stress	0.568	0.000	<i>Reject</i>

Level of Significance (α)= 0.01

The r- value=0.568 shows strong positive correlation between the stress level in occupational stress and technological stress. This means that occupational stress is strongly influence by technological stress. The relationship is significant as shown in the p-value of 0.000 ($\alpha=0.05$) which tells that the findings can be used to generalize the whole teaching personnel of Agusan del Sur National High School.

Furthermore, teachers were asked to suggests programs and activities that could somehow alleviate the stress at work. Emerging themes are as follows: Upgrade school internet connection; institutionalize the conduct of online trainings and seminar-workshop on the Positive Use of ICT, Moral Recovery Program, Destressing Activities, Health and Fitness Activities; Provision of e- instructional materials like laptops and internet load; Module printing management; Personnel Management that foster love, care, respect and empathy; and System of Information Dissemination.

To quote some narration of teachers are the following when asked about three things they would like the school to do differently to help them cope with occupational and technological stress

“*School must understand the limited teachers' skills in using technology for online class. Teacher must be trained of the new normal modality class instruction. Sometimes teachers need unwind or outdoor activities to overcome occupational stress*” Another teacher said “*Provide enough printers for modules, good internet connection, give teachers enough materials for modules*”. “*Health and fitness, conduct seminar related on how to cope up occupational and technological stress,*” added by another teacher. And by another “*Provide strong internet connection and give teachers considerable time in making/editing and preparing the modules not rushing them and force them to meet a deadline*”.

CONCLUSION

Due to the emerging educational system and increasing work demands and responsibilities, more than half of the teachers cannot balance between work and personal life thus having a extreme feeling of worn-out physically, mentally and emotionally and having a hard time of relaxation that negatively affect their personal well being and their behavioral responses. In addition, teachers have *average* stress level on occupational-related aspect and *high* stress level in technological-related aspect due to the force adoption and adaptation of the implementation of the learning continuity plan of the department of education in pandemic times. Furthermore, there is a strong positive influence between the level of occupational stress and technological stress due to the fact that technology is a critical component in the teaching efforts in the new educational system as it mean integration of technology for effective learning. The high stress level of teachers in technological - related aspect calls for immediate attention. Moreover, teachers believed that they will be relieved from their stress by providing them their basic instructional e-learning materials and by addressing the problems on module preparation and distribution as well as by giving them health wellness intervention programs through destressing activities such as health and fitness activities and team building programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the school has to take care in the provision of technology infrastructure and resources and reinforce the teachers on the technological, pedagogical and content knowledge (TPACK) by conducting seminars and institutionalization of Learning Action Cell (LAC Session), revisit the system of the preparation of printed modules, and further strenghten the recognition of mental health and well-being of

teachers by conducting mental health and psychosocial support services (MHPSS).

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