

*Understanding Teacher Stress:
Factors, Impact, and Coping Strategies*

**فهم ضغوط الأساتذة:
العوامل، التأثير واستراتيجيات المواجهة**

Louiza AHMID

University of Ali Lounici Blida (2), Algeria.

lahmid@univ-blida2.dz

Said MAHMOUD

University of Abou El Kacem Saad Allah, Algiers(2), Algeria.

said.mahmoud@univ-alger2.dz

Date of receipt: 25/05/2024 Date of acceptance: 26/10/2024 Date of publication: 31/03/2025

Author Correspondence: Louiza AHMID, lahmid@univ-blida2.dz

الملخص:

تُعد الضغوط التي يعاني منها الأساتذة مشكلة شائعة تتأثر بععبء العمل، سلوك المتعلمين، والمتطلبات الإدارية، إضافة إلى نقص الدعم. تؤثر هذه الضغوط سلباً على رفاهية الأساتذة وفعالية التدريس في الصف، ولإدارة الضغوط، يتم استخدام استراتيجيات المواجهة، بما في ذلك الأساليب المعرفية والعاطفية والسلوكية. يُعد التعامل مع ضغوط الأساتذة أمراً حيوياً لتعزيز رفاهيتهم وتحسين نتائج المتعلمين من خلال تعزيز ثقافة الرفاهية وتوفير الموارد اللازمة لإدارة الضغوط.

يهدف هذا المقال إلى استكشاف العوامل المختلفة التي تسهم في ضغوط الأساتذة، وتأثيرها عليهم، واستراتيجيات المواجهة الفعالة للتخفيف من آثارها

الكلمات المفتاحية:

الضغوط؛ ضغوط الأساتذة؛ التكيف؛ استراتيجيات المواجهة.

Abstract:

Teacher stress is a prevalent issue influenced by workload, student behavior, administrative demands, and lack of support. This stress negatively impacts teachers' well-being and classroom effectiveness. Coping strategies, including cognitive, emotional, and behavioral approaches, are employed to manage stress. Schools can support teachers by fostering a culture of well-being and providing resources for stress management. Addressing teacher stress is crucial for promoting teacher flourishing and improving student outcomes.

This article aims to explore the various factors contributing to teacher stress, its impact on teachers, and effective coping strategies to mitigate its effects.

Keywords:

Adaptation ; Coping Strategies ; Stress; Teacher stress.

1. INTRODUCTION

Considered by Charles Péguy in 1913 as 'the most beautiful profession in the world,' teaching is a challenging exercise, a source of stress, and sometimes exhaustion. Physiological and psychological reaction to a difficult situation described since the mid-20th century, stress is associated with numerous professions, especially those dedicated to teaching.

Recent studies have shown that the stress associated with teaching can be more profound than that linked to other professions (Travers & Cooper, 1996; Clipa, 2016), making it the profession with the highest level of occupational stress. Recent European reports indicate that teaching, as a profession involving interaction with individuals in formation, is highly sought after in the job market. Despite the societal values and regenerative potential it offers (The Teaching Profession in Europe: Practices, Perceptions and Policies, Eurydice Report, 2015; Assuring Quality in Education: Policies and Approaches to School Evaluation in Europe, 2015) & Kitchen et al., (2017), the number of individuals choosing a career in teaching remains relatively low, which could pose future challenges in educational systems, potentially leading to a forthcoming teacher crisis.

Recent studies have revealed that teaching is becoming one of the occupations with higher stress levels (Engelbrecht, Oswald, Swart & Eloff, 2003). A study in Malaysia by Ghani, Ahmad and Ibrahim (2014), found that the workload and other sources of pressure caused moderate stress for the study participants.

Teacher stress is a prevalent and significant issue in educational systems worldwide. Etymologically, the term 'stress' comes from the Latin 'stringere' and means 'to be pulled tight, to be tight'. The concept of stress has been defined in various ways by several authors. Stress theories stemming from the work of Selye consider stress as the body's response to the aggression of an internal or external causal agent in order to resist, adapt, and restore its internal balance

Stress is a 'particular transaction between an individual and a situation in which the situation is perceived as exceeding the individual's resources and endangering their well-being' (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984b, p. 19).

Stress is an emotional state that can be experienced by individuals in almost every occupation. It is a universal emotion that arises when the limits of the body are exceeded. Stress manifests itself through a broad range of physical and mental symptoms, resulting from maladaptive conditions that push the boundaries of the individual.

The individual does not passively undergo acute and chronic life events. They try to 'cope.' Coping refers to the responses, reactions that the individual will develop to control, reduce, or simply tolerate the aversive situation. This term, initially translated as 'adjustment strategy,' has been accepted into the French vocabulary since 1999. Coping can take various forms. It can involve cognitions (evaluation of the stressful situation, assessment of one's resources, information-seeking, etc.), affects (expression or repression of fear, anger, distress, etc.), and behaviors (problem-solving, seeking help, etc.).

The term "teacher stress" has been coined and can be defined as "the experience by a teacher of unpleasant and negative emotions, such as anger, anxiety, tension, frustration, or depression, resulting from certain aspects of their work as a teacher" (Kyriacou, 2001, pp. 28). Burnout, as defined by Maslach and Jackson (1981), occurs when teachers experience prolonged stress and begin to feel emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a loss of personal accomplishment.

Teacher stress and retention rates are major concerns in several countries (Galton & McBeath, 2008; Johnson et al., 2005; Stoel & Thant, 2002). Teacher well-being in this literature is often described in terms of the impact of stress on teacher burnout and retention issues (Roffey, 2012).

Teacher stress is typically defined as the physical and psychological negative responses, such as anger or depression, to events in a teacher's job, resulting from an imbalance between risk and protective factors.

2. Factors Contributing to Teacher Stress

Teacher stress can stem from a multitude of factors, including heavy workloads, challenging student behavior, administrative pressures, lack of resources, and insufficient support from colleagues or administrators. These stressors can vary in intensity and frequency, but collectively contribute to heightened levels of stress among teachers.

In a study on secondary school teachers' stress regarding the integration of students with behavioral disorders into their classes, the effect of students' behavior on the teaching process and the loss of satisfaction with their teaching are recognized as significant sources of teacher stress. This research was conducted with 231 secondary school teachers in Quebec. (Massé, L., Bégin, J.-Y., Couture, C., Plouffe-Leboeuf, T., Beaulieu-Lessard, M. et Tremblay, J., 2015) In another study on various stress factors recognized by young secondary school teachers as potentially leading to premature abandonment of the profession, Rojo and Minier found that teachers face significant challenges that generate stress, leading to dissatisfaction, feelings of incompetence, and psychological discomfort. In this study, respondents included current teachers who had considered leaving the profession and teachers who had left their careers.

This research helped rank the challenges responsible for teacher stress in three categories: (Rojo, S. et Minier, P., 2015)

Organizational and institutional : which concerns the work of education executives and managers of regional and local education structures.

Educational governance should, for example, include measures for preventing and supporting stressed personnel.

Relational : which takes into account the motives and emotions that support a favorable climate for classroom interventions.

For example, integrating classroom management into the initial teacher training program instead of making it a training module during professional practice.

Motivational: which justifies persistence in action .

For instance, school system managers can provide an attractive salary scale and social benefits for new recruits and experienced teachers."

Kyriacou (2001) identified ten key sources of stress for teachers. These include teaching students who lack motivation, which can undermine classroom engagement, and maintaining discipline, a constant challenge in creating a productive learning environment. Teachers also face significant pressure due to time constraints and heavy workloads, often exacerbated by coping with changes in curriculum or policies. Additionally, being evaluated by others, whether through formal assessments or informal scrutiny, contributes to stress, as do complex relationships with colleagues. Issues related to self-esteem and professional status further heighten stress levels, particularly when coupled with the burdens of administrative and management duties. Teachers also navigate role conflict and ambiguity, often unclear about their responsibilities or caught between conflicting demands. Finally, poor working conditions, including inadequate resources or overcrowded classrooms, create an environment that adds to the strain teachers experience in their professional lives.

3. Impact of Teacher Stress

In academic literature, teaching-related stress is often described in several ways. It can be seen as "the teacher experiencing negative emotions such as tension, frustration, anxiety, anger, and depression, resulting from certain aspects of teaching" (Sandilos et al., 2018). Alternatively, it is defined as "any other characteristic of the school environment that poses a threat to the teacher" (Albu, 2013; Popa, Laurian & Fitzgerald, 2015; Sutton, 1984). It can also be considered as a phenomenon of burnout resulting from the execution of difficult tasks over an extended period (Cozolino, 2017; Fengler, 2016).

Major sources of stress in teaching include chronic stress, lack of support from management, student behavior, high class sizes, excessive workload, and difficulties in communication with colleagues or parents (Blasé, 1986). Other factors include lack of social recognition, role conflict and its ambiguity, time pressure, as well as students' lack of motivation and discipline (Aldrup et al., 2017).

The impacts of stress on teachers are varied and can manifest in various ways. Physically, stress can lead to fatigue, headaches, and sleep disturbances. Mentally and emotionally, teachers may experience symptoms of burnout, anxiety, and depression, affecting their overall well-being and job satisfaction. Additionally, prolonged exposure to stress can compromise teaching effectiveness and professional performance, which can impact student outcomes.

Individual characteristics of teachers include their unique personality traits, gender, living environment, ability to establish and maintain relationships, and their capacity to cope with the demands of their profession (Nasser, 2015; Guglielmi & Tatrow, 1998). This category also encompasses aspects such as alignment between personal and professional values, ambition, competitiveness, and perfectionism (Bachkirova, 2005).

3-1. Burnout and Its Components

Psychologists understand the risks facing teachers who remain confronted with stress for extended periods without adequate coping mechanisms: burnout, or professional exhaustion, which more broadly affects all service-oriented professionals: teachers, healthcare workers, educators, therapists, etc. Burnout is defined by four components (Maslach and Jackson, 1981):

- **Emotional exhaustion:** feeling "drained" at the end of the day, fatigue upon waking up, reluctance to go to work, significant frustrations related to work activities, feeling of "*working too hard*," being "*at the end of one's rope*";
- **Depersonalization:** lack of individualized contact, suppression of emotions, hardening of relationships, indifference, perception of hostile feelings;
- **Disengagement:** lack of consideration for the needs of others, detachment, possibly accompanied by discomfort regarding one's own reactions in certain situations;
- **Low sense of personal efficacy:** poor communication with others, feeling of not providing them with sufficient assistance, dissatisfaction with the quality of one's work, demotivation.

4. Coping Strategies for Teachers

Historically, the notion of coping is affiliated with that of defense mechanisms, developed since the late 19th century by psychoanalysis, and adaptation, developed since the second half of the 19th century and common to biology, ethology, and animal psychology (and particularly to Darwin's evolutionary perspective).

The concept of coping also originates from theories related to species adaptation and evolution. The individual would have a repertoire of responses (innate and acquired) allowing them to survive various life-threatening situations: to fight or to flee, especially when confronted with an opponent or a dangerous situation. Coping and stress are considered by some authors to be integral parts of the adaptation processes to life's challenges.

According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984a, pp 283-284), it is important to clearly distinguish coping from adaptation. Adaptation is an extremely broad concept, which encompasses all of psychology, and even biology. Adaptation includes all modes of reaction of living organisms interacting with changing environmental conditions (such as perception, emotion, motivation, learning, etc., in humans). In contrast, coping is a much more specific concept.

Adaptation involves repetitive and automatic adjustment reactions, whereas coping includes conscious, changing, specific, and sometimes novel cognitive and behavioral efforts for both the individual and the species.

Effective coping strategies are essential for teachers to manage stress and maintain their well-being. These may include mindfulness practices, relaxation techniques, regular physical exercise, seeking social support from colleagues or mentors, and setting boundaries to achieve a healthy work-life balance. Additionally, professional development opportunities focusing on stress management and resilience-building can empower teachers with the skills and resources needed to navigate challenging situations more effectively.

Studies on adaptation often differentiate between strategies aimed at reducing discomfort that a person feels after experiencing a difficult or stressful situation (**emotion-focused adaptation**) and strategies that attempt to improve or change a given situation (**action-focused adaptation**). (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

4.1. Emotion-focused adaptive strategies encompass everything a person undertakes to feel better or less stressed. These strategies do not change the reality of a situation and are used to avoid certain feelings or to help the person feel better. Emotion-focused strategies include, for example: expressing feelings to a supportive friend, developing addictions, going to the cinema, shopping, jogging, practicing transcendental meditation, taking medication to reduce anxiety, or other strategy aimed at relieving distress.

4.2. Action-focused adaptive strategies include everything we do to try to change or improve a situation. They include: seeking help or advice from a friend, engaging in new activities or relationships, and actively trying to resolve the conflict or problem (for example, by compromising, suggesting arbitration, trying to persuade the other party, giving a gift, or receiving assistance from someone).

The term **Coping** refers to the set of processes that an individual employs to adjust to various difficult situations (Lazarus, 1966). When faced with a challenging situation, different defense mechanisms (projection, hypochondria, delirium, denial, intellectualization, altruism, reaction formation, fantasy, acting out, humor, anticipation, dissociation, withdrawal, avoidance) come into play (Chabrol, 2005). Confronted with stress, the individual must deal with the situation while considering the resources available to them. It appears that if they believe they can change something, they will want to take action. Conversely, if they know there is nothing to be done, they will tend to focus on their feelings (Bruchon-Schweitzer, 2008).

Coping is *"the constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts deployed (by a person) to manage internal and/or external demands perceived as consuming or exceeding their resources."*

Coping is a specific, flexible, and fluctuating process (as it is partly determined by the characteristics of the stressful situation). To designate the coping strategies generally used by an individual when facing a wide variety of adverse situations, it is appropriate to refer to *"coping style."*

The notion of coping is closely linked to the notion of adaptation. This dynamic process of change concerns all living beings. Schematically, it involves the ability to react to external and/or internal stimuli, constraints, and conflicts, seeking to reduce or eliminate their unfavorable consequences through various adjustments. The ultimate goal is survival and the creation of a new balance compatible with this survival.

In response to the pressures they face, teachers often adopt various coping mechanisms to manage their workloads and emotional demands. These adaptations might include developing more time- and energy-efficient teaching methods, reverting to more traditional pedagogical approaches, or, in some cases, becoming resigned to the challenges posed by struggling students. Such strategies, while helping teachers "survive" in the short term, may also reflect deeper issues related to stress management and the need for more sustainable support systems within educational environments.

According to Lazarus and his colleagues, coping has two main functions: it can allow the modification of the problem that is causing the stress, and it can allow the regulation of the emotional responses associated with this problem (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984b; Lazarus & Launier, 1978).

- **Problem-focused coping:** This strategy aims to reduce the demands of the situation and/or increase one's own resources to better cope with it.
- **Emotion-focused coping:** This strategy aims to manage the emotional responses induced by the situation. Emotion regulation can occur in various ways (emotional, physiological, cognitive, behavioral).

Coping can be classified as active and/or avoidant according to the strategies used to cope. Some authors, such as Folkman, S., & Lazarus, R. S. (1985), have proposed four basic categories of coping strategies that individuals use when faced with stress. The first category, active/cognitive coping, involves logical analysis and positive reframing of the situation. The second, active/behavioral coping, focuses on seeking support and taking direct action to address the problem. In contrast, avoidant/cognitive coping is characterized by cognitive avoidance and resigned acceptance of the stressor, while avoidant/behavioral coping involves seeking distractions through other activities and emotional release. These categories highlight the diverse ways in which individuals approach and manage stressful situations, each with its own implications for long-term well-being.

CONCLUSION

Teacher stress is a complex issue with far-reaching consequences for both educators and students. The coping strategies that teachers adopt can result in either pathogenic or salutogenic attitudes and behaviors. For instance, emotion-focused and avoidant coping are often associated with risky behaviors such as ignoring symptoms, delaying consultations, substance abuse, and non-compliance with treatment. On the other hand, problem-focused and vigilant coping generally leads to healthier behaviors, including seeking medical information, monitoring symptoms, and adhering to treatment.

However, it is important to acknowledge that even problem-focused strategies can become dysfunctional on an emotional level, particularly when individuals face serious, uncontrollable, or chronic illnesses (Cohen and Herbert, 1996). The nature of the coping strategies employed can provide insight into why stress or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) affects individuals differently. Beyond understanding these strategies, it is essential to develop ways to alleviate the negative impacts of stress.

To manage stress effectively, methods such as emotion regulation, physical activity, meditation, cardiac coherence, and breath control techniques can be employed. By understanding the factors that contribute to teacher stress, recognizing its impact, and implementing appropriate management strategies, educational institutions can create supportive environments that foster teacher well-being and enhance educational outcomes for all.

Bibliography List

1. Books

- Bruchon-Schweitzer, M. (2008). La psychologie de la santé. Dunod, Paris , France
- Chabrol, H. (2005). Les mécanismes de défenses. Recherche en Soins Infirmiers, 3(82), 31-42
- Kyriacou, C. (2001). Teacher stress: Directions for future research. Educational Review, 53, 28-35.
- Lazarus, R.S. et Folkman, S. (1984a). Coping and adaptation. In W.D. GENTRY (Ed.), Handbook of behavior medicine, New York : Guilford, pp. 282-325.
- Lazarus, R.S. et Folkman, S. (1984b). Stress, appraisal, and coping, New York : Springer.
- Lazarus, R.S. et Launier, R. (1978). Stress-related transactions between person and environment. In L.A. PERVIN et M. LEWIS (Eds.), Perspectives in interactional psychology. New York : Plenum, pp. 287-327.
- Massé, L., Bégin, J.-Y., Couture, C., Plouffe-Leboeuf, T., Beaulieu-Lessard, M. et Tremblay, J.,(2015), Stress des enseignants envers l'intégration des élèves présentant des troubles du comportement. Éducation et francophonie 43, n° 2, 2015
- Rojo, S. et Minier, P. (2015), Les facteurs de stress reconnus comme sources de l'abandon de la profession enseignante au secondaire au Québec, Éducation et francophonie 43, n° 2

Review EL'BAHITH - ENS - Bouzareah - Algiers, Algeria					
ISSN : 9577-1112	EISSN : 2602-5388	Volume: (17)	Number : (01)	year: 2025	Pages: 71 - 80

2. Website

- *Behav. Sci.* 2024, 14(1), 59; <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs14010059>
- <https://doi.org/10.18662/lumproc.icsed2017.14>
- <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1184086.pdf>
- https://www.raiimr.com/ijrhs/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/IJRHS_2021_vol09_issue_8_Eng_06.pdf
- https://www.researchgate.net/publication/354204203_Le_stress_professionnel_des_enseignants_un_risque_pour_les_eleves_un_enjeu_pour_le_psychologue_de_l%27education