

Stressors, effects, and coping strategies among Grade 10 students in the Philippines

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ABSTRACT

Student stress is a common concern in secondary education because academic demands and personal circumstances may affect learners' well-being and academic performance. However, limited school-based evidence is available on the specific causes, effects, and coping strategies of Grade 10 students in Ayod Integrated School. This study determined the causes and effects of stress and the coping strategies of Grade 10 students enrolled in Filipino 10 at Ayod Integrated School, Dinapigue, Isabela. Using a descriptive-survey design, the study involved 30 students. Data were gathered through a structured questionnaire, supplemented by an informal interview and documentary analysis of students' grades. Frequency, percentage, weighted mean, and chi-square test were used to analyze the data. Test anxiety, financial concerns, distance from home, excessive homework, and heavy workload emerged as major sources of stress. Stress had moderate physical, mental, emotional, and behavioral effects. The students rated their coping strategies as very effective. The findings provide a basis for strengthening school-based stress-management support for learners.

Keywords: Academic stress, coping strategies, Grade 10 students, student well-being, stressors.

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INTRODUCTION

Stress is a common part of everyday life. Students experience it at home, in school, with friends, and in other social situations. Although stress is a normal response to challenging situations, prolonged or excessive stress may affect a person's physical, emotional, social, and academic well-being. Adolescence is particularly important because young people are still developing their emotional, social, and problem-solving skills. The World Health Organization (2025) notes that supportive family, school, and community environments can help adolescents develop healthy coping and emotional-management skills.

School is one of the major settings where students experience stress. Academic requirements, examinations, deadlines, expectations for good grades, relationships with teachers and classmates, and concerns about the future may create pressure among students. A systematic review by Jagiello et al. (2025) found that academic stress is common among high school students, particularly when students face demanding schoolwork and high-stakes

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assessments. The review also found evidence that school-based programs can help reduce or prevent academic stress.

In the Philippine setting, stress among students has also been documented. Hukom and Madrigal (2020) found that Filipino high school students experienced academic stress and used different coping strategies to manage it. Their findings also showed that demographic factors such as sex and family monthly income were related to academic stress and coping strategies. Similarly, Baligod (2024) reported that senior high school students experienced stress and used proactive coping strategies. Differences in coping strategies were also observed across grade levels and academic strands. These findings suggest that students do not experience or manage stress in the same way.

Recent Philippine research further shows that the sources of student stress extend beyond academic requirements. Fadera et al. (2024) identified teacher-student relationships, relationships with classmates, technology, financial concerns, psychological factors, and cognitive factors as sources of stress among Filipino students. Technology-related concerns were reported as the greatest source of stress in their study.

Other recent research also points to the importance of coping strategies. Balberan and Bengwasan (2024) found a relationship between stress and coping among Filipino students and noted that students used both approach and avoidant coping strategies. This suggests that students respond to stressful experiences differently depending on their situation and their perceived ability to manage it.

Academic pressure deserves particular attention among adolescents. A systematic review by Bowers et al. (2023) found an association between academic pressure and mental-health problems among adolescents. The findings indicate that excessive academic pressure may be linked to depression, anxiety, self-harm, and other mental-health concerns. This makes it important for schools to understand the sources and effects of stress and the ways students cope with it.

Coping is important because students cannot always remove the situations that cause stress. Instead, they may need to develop healthy ways of managing these situations. Coping strategies may include time management, seeking help from parents, teachers, and friends, relaxation, positive thinking, exercise, prayer, and other constructive activities. At the same time, some students may use avoidance or other less helpful responses. Understanding the strategies used by students can help schools identify which forms of support may be appropriate.

Despite the growing body of research on student stress, there is still a need for school-based studies that examine the specific experiences of Grade 10 students in particular communities. Most available Philippine studies have focused on senior high school, college, or students in specific circumstances. The experiences of Grade 10 students in Ayod Integrated School may differ because of their family circumstances, school environment, peer relationships, academic demands, and available support systems. A study focused on this group can provide school-specific evidence that may be useful in planning appropriate interventions.

The researcher, being a secondary school teacher, is interested in understanding the stress experienced by Grade 10 students in Ayod Integrated School. The study seeks to identify the major causes of stress, determine its perceived effects, and examine the coping strategies used by the students. It also examines whether students' academic performance differs according to selected demographic characteristics and whether their stress experiences are related to their profile and academic performance.

The findings of the study may provide useful information for teachers, school administrators, parents, and guidance personnel. More importantly, the results may serve as a basis for developing appropriate school-based activities or interventions that can help students manage stress in healthy and productive ways.

This study is anchored primarily on the Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping of Lazarus and Folkman (1984). The theory explains that stress does not depend only on the stressful event itself. It also depends on how a person interprets the event and evaluates his or her ability to deal with it.

According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), stress develops when a person perceives that the demands of a situation exceed the resources available to manage those demands. The individual first makes a primary appraisal, in which the situation is evaluated as irrelevant, positive, or stressful. A stressful situation may be perceived as a harm or loss, a threat, or a challenge.

The individual then makes a secondary appraisal. At this stage, the person considers what can be done to manage the situation. The person evaluates available resources, such as personal abilities, time, knowledge, family support, friendship, and assistance from teachers. The individual may then use different coping strategies to deal with the stressor.

Coping strategies may be problem-focused or emotion-focused. Problem-focused coping involves actions intended to manage or change the source of stress. Examples include planning, studying, managing time, seeking information, and asking for assistance. Emotion-focused coping aims to manage the emotional response to stress. Examples include relaxation, prayer, positive thinking, emotional expression, and seeking emotional support.

The theory is appropriate for the present study because Grade 10 students encounter different demands in school and at home. The same situation may not produce the same level of stress among all students. For example, an examination may be viewed by one student as a challenge that encourages preparation, while another student may see it as a threat that produces fear and worry. The difference may depend on how the student appraises the situation and on the resources available to cope with it.

The theory therefore provides a useful explanation of the relationship among the causes of stress, perceived effects of stress, and coping strategies of Grade 10 students. It also supports the assumption that students' personal and family circumstances may influence how they experience and manage stressful situations.

The study is also informed by Selye's General Adaptation Syndrome. Selye (1976) described the body's response to prolonged stress in three stages: alarm, resistance, and exhaustion. The alarm stage occurs when the individual first encounters a stressor. The resistance stage occurs when the individual attempts to adapt to the continuing demand. When the stress continues for a long period and the individual's resources are no longer sufficient, exhaustion may occur.

Selye's framework helps explain the possible effects of prolonged stress on students. However, the Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping serves as the main theoretical basis of the study because the present research focuses not only on the presence of stress but also on students' perceptions of stress and the strategies they use to manage it.

Statement of the problem

This study aimed to determine the causes and effects of stress and the coping strategies of Grade 10 students in Ayod Integrated School. It also sought to determine whether students' academic performance differs according to selected profile variables and whether significant relationships exist among their stress experiences, coping strategies, profile characteristics, and academic performance.

Specifically, it sought answers to the following questions:

1. What is the profile of the respondents in terms of age, sex, birth order, father's highest educational attainment, mother's highest educational attainment, father's occupation, mother's occupation, and estimated family monthly income?
2. What is the academic performance of the respondents based on their grade in the identified grading period?
3. What are the perceived causes of stress among the respondents in terms of academic demands, family related concerns, peer and interpersonal relationships, financial concerns, personal concerns, and school environment?
4. What are the perceived effects of stress among the respondents in terms of physical effects, emotional effects, behavioral effects, and academic effects?
5. What coping strategies are used by the respondents to manage stress in terms of problem focused coping, emotion focused coping, and social support seeking?
6. Is there a significant difference in the academic performance of the respondents when grouped according to their profile?
7. Is there a significant relationship between the perceived causes of stress and the perceived effects of stress among the respondents?
8. Is there a significant relationship between the perceived causes of stress and the coping strategies used by the respondents?
9. Is there a significant relationship between the perceived effects of stress and the coping strategies used by the respondents?
10. Is there a significant relationship between the respondents' stress variables and their academic performance?

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a descriptive-survey research design to determine the causes and effects of stress and the coping strategies of students enrolled in Filipino 10 at Ayod Integrated School. The descriptive-survey method was appropriate because it describes existing conditions and characteristics of a group at the time of the study. It may also be used to examine relationships among variables (Andales, 1992; Van Dalen & Meyers, 1999).

The design allowed the researcher to gather information about the respondents' profile, academic performance, sources of stress, perceived effects of stress, and coping strategies. It also provided a basis for determining whether significant differences and relationships existed among the variables included in the study.

The study was conducted at Ayod Integrated School in Dinapigue District, Isabela. The school is accessible by land transportation from different parts of the region.

Dinapigue is a first-class municipality located in the southeastern part of Isabela Province. It is bounded by Palanan to the north, Echague, San Guillermo, and San Mariano to the west, and Aurora Province to the south. The municipality is situated between the Sierra Madre Mountain Range and the Pacific Ocean. It is one of the coastal municipalities of Isabela and has six barangays.

The respondents were students enrolled in Filipino 10 at Ayod Integrated School, Municipality of Dinapigue, Isabela, during the conduct of the study. The total number of respondents was [exact number of respondents].

The respondents provided information regarding their personal profile, academic performance, causes and effects of stress, and coping strategies.

The primary instrument used in the study was a structured questionnaire developed from a review of related literature and studies. It consisted of four parts. The first part gathered the respondents' profile and academic information. The second part determined the causes of

stress. The third part examined the perceived effects of stress. The fourth part identified the coping strategies used by the respondents to manage stress.

The questionnaire was subjected to a try-out among selected students from neighboring schools in the municipality. The respondents were asked to answer the instrument and provide suggestions regarding its clarity and content. The comments and suggestions obtained during the try-out, together with the recommendations of the research adviser and the Dean of the Graduate School, were considered in revising and finalizing the questionnaire.

An informal interview was also conducted during the retrieval of the questionnaires. It was used to obtain additional information related to the students' responses and to clarify certain responses when necessary.

Documentary analysis was used to obtain the students' academic grades. Permission was secured from the school head to access the relevant school records. The students' grades in the identified grading period were used as the measure of academic performance.

Before the conduct of the study, the researcher secured permission from the Office of the Schools Division Superintendent through the proper channels. Permission was also obtained from the school head of Ayod Integrated School.

After the necessary approvals were secured, the researcher distributed the questionnaires to the identified respondents with the assistance of the school personnel. The respondents were informed of the purpose of the study and were encouraged to provide honest responses. The completed questionnaires were retrieved and checked for completeness.

The researcher also conducted informal interviews during the retrieval of the questionnaires. Relevant academic records were obtained with permission from the school administration and were used to determine the respondents' academic performance.

The data gathered from the questionnaires and school records were organized, coded, tabulated, and statistically analyzed.

Frequency and percentage were used to describe the respondents' profile and other categorical data. Percentage was used to determine the proportion of respondents belonging to each category.

Weighted mean was used to determine the level or extent of the respondents' reported causes of stress, perceived effects of stress, and coping strategies.

Chi-square test of independence was used to determine whether significant differences or associations existed between selected categorical variables. The test was evaluated at the 0.05 level of significance.

The statistical procedures were selected based on the nature of the research questions and the types of data gathered.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study involved 30 Grade 10 students enrolled in Filipino 10 at Ayod Integrated School, Dinapigue, Isabela. Their semi-final grades were used as an indicator of academic performance. The largest group of students, 10 or 33.33%, obtained grades within the 86–90 range. Seven students (23.33%) obtained grades of 81–85, while five students each (16.67%) were in the 75–80 and 91–95 brackets. Only three students (10.00%) obtained grades of 96–100. The results indicate that most students performed within the middle to upper-middle grade ranges. However, the distribution also shows that relatively few students reached the highest grade bracket, suggesting room for further academic support.

Causes of stress

The respondents sometimes experienced the identified causes of stress, with an overall weighted mean of 3.50. However, several specific stressors were experienced more frequently. Test anxiety was the most prominent stressor, with a weighted mean of 4.05. This was followed by financial concerns (4.02), distance of the home from school (3.80), too much homework (3.79), and heavy workload (3.75). School requirements and projects (3.63), strict parenting style (3.63), recitations (3.62), difficult subjects (3.52), and adjustment to a new environment (3.45) were also reported as frequent sources of stress.

The findings suggest that stress among the students comes from both academic and nonacademic sources. Academic demands appear to be particularly important, as test anxiety, homework, workload, school requirements, recitations, and difficult subjects all emerged among the more frequently experienced stressors. At the same time, financial concerns and the distance of students' homes from school show that stress is also influenced by circumstances outside the classroom. Thus, student stress cannot be viewed solely as an academic problem. It is affected by the broader conditions in which students study and live.

Family problems, school programs and policies, class participation, and an inconsiderate teacher were experienced only sometimes, while changes in routine were reported least often, with a weighted mean of 2.60.

Effects of stress

The effects of stress were generally moderately affective across the physical, mental, emotional, and behavioral dimensions.

For physical effects, the overall weighted mean was 2.72. Headaches, insomnia, absenteeism, procrastination, and lack of appetite were among the more noticeable effects. Shoulder, neck, or back pain, digestive problems, fatigue, dizziness, and faster heartbeat were also reported.

The results indicate that stress was not limited to students' feelings or thoughts. It was also reflected in physical conditions and school-related behaviors. Headaches, sleep difficulties, absenteeism, and procrastination may interfere with students' ability to participate consistently in learning activities. This suggests that teachers and school personnel should not dismiss physical complaints when they occur alongside academic pressure.

The mental effects of stress obtained an overall weighted mean of 2.69, also interpreted as moderately affective. The most prominent concerns were irritability, anger, impatience, and feeling wound up (2.77), lack of focus (2.75), anxiety and depression (2.72), and feeling overburdened or overwhelmed (2.70). Problems with memory and concentration were likewise reported.

These findings suggest that stress may interfere with students' attention and emotional regulation. When students feel overwhelmed, they may have difficulty concentrating, remembering information, or maintaining interest in school activities. This has direct implications for classroom learning because sustained attention and emotional stability are important for academic engagement.

The emotional effects also reached a moderately affective level, with an overall weighted mean of 2.70. Financial problems ranked highest at 2.79, followed by mood disorders (2.77), low or no energy (2.75), anxiety or fear (2.72), and a sense of dread (2.70). Feelings of loneliness, worthlessness, personality changes, and social withdrawal were also reported.

The results are important because they show that students' emotional responses are closely connected with their everyday circumstances. Financial concerns, in particular, appear in both the causes and effects of stress. This suggests that financial difficulties may create a continuing source of pressure rather than an isolated stressful event.

The behavioral effects were likewise moderately affective. Behavioral problems, overeating, neglect of responsibilities, resistance to authority, and avoidance of certain people or places were among the reported manifestations.

Taken together, the findings show that stress among the respondents was expressed in several interconnected ways. It affected the body, thoughts, emotions, and behavior. The overall pattern suggests that even though the students did not report extremely high levels of stress, their stress was sufficiently present to influence several areas of their daily functioning.

Coping strategies

The respondents generally considered the identified coping strategies very effective, with an overall weighted mean of 4.28. Behavioral coping strategies obtained the highest overall rating at 4.33, followed by physical strategies (4.30), emotional strategies (4.28), and mental strategies (4.24).

the behavioral strategies, building resilience through daily habits ranked highest, with a weighted mean of 4.39. Time management and prioritization (4.37), establishing routines (4.35), maintaining a healthy diet (4.34), and taking breaks from digital devices and social media (4.33) were also highly rated.

For mental coping, positive self-talk was the most highly rated strategy at 4.35, followed by limiting exposure to news and social media (4.33), setting goals and priorities (4.30), focusing on positivity (4.27), having personal time (4.25), and practicing gratitude (4.23). The overall weighted mean for mental coping was 4.24.

For emotional coping, guided imagery meditation obtained the highest rating at 4.35, followed by limiting screen time (4.33), avoiding smoking and vaping and learning to forgive (4.32), and acknowledging personal achievements (4.30). The overall weighted mean was 4.28.

The findings show that students favor active and self-regulatory ways of managing stress. Time management, routines, positive self-talk, meditation, goal setting, and limiting digital exposure all involve some degree of personal control. This is important because the students' major stressors included academic workload and test anxiety. Strategies such as planning, establishing routines, and prioritizing tasks may therefore be particularly relevant to their actual needs.

Academic performance and profile variables

The study also examined whether students' semi-final grades differed significantly according to selected profile variables. For age, the computed chi-square was 4.394, compared with a critical value of 21.026 at 12 degrees of freedom. The result was not significant. Thus, age was not significantly associated with the students' semi-final grades.

The same general pattern was found for the educational attainment of the mothers. The computed chi-square was 5.906, compared with a critical value of 26.296 at 16 degrees of freedom. The result was not significant. Hence, the mother's educational attainment was not significantly associated with students' semi-final grades.

Similarly, the father's occupation did not show a significant association with academic performance. The computed chi-square was 5.716, compared with a critical value of 21.026 at 12 degrees of freedom. The mother's occupation also showed no significant association with grades, with a computed chi-square of 7.046 against a critical value of 21.026 at 12 degrees of freedom.

These findings suggest that the students' academic performance was relatively independent of the selected demographic and family-background variables examined in the study. However, this should not be interpreted to mean that family circumstances have no effect on education in general. Rather, within this particular group of 30 students, the available data did not provide sufficient statistical evidence of an association between these profile variables and Filipino 10 grades.

The findings present a consistent picture. Stress was present but generally experienced at a moderate level. Academic demands, particularly test anxiety, homework, workload, school requirements, and difficult subjects, were among the strongest sources of stress. Financial concerns and transportation-related circumstances also contributed to students' stress.

The effects were likewise moderate but were evident across physical, mental, emotional, and behavioral areas. This means that stress was not merely an occasional feeling. It had observable implications for students' well-being and school functioning.

At the same time, the students reported that their coping strategies were very effective. The strongest strategies centered on resilience, time management, routines, positive self-talk, meditation, goal setting, and healthy daily habits. This suggests that the students already possess useful coping resources. The role of the school, therefore, should not simply be to reduce stressors but also to strengthen healthy coping practices and provide support when students face stressors that they cannot control.

The academic findings add another important point. Although most students were clustered in the 86–90 grade range, none of the profile variables examined in the reported chi-square analyses showed a significant association with academic performance. This suggests that interventions should not be limited to a particular age group or family background. A school-wide approach to stress management may be more appropriate for this group.

CONCLUSION

Stress is a common part of student life. The findings of the study show that the Grade 10 students of Ayod Integrated School experienced stress from both academic and personal circumstances. Among the major causes were test anxiety, financial concerns, the distance of their homes from school, too much homework, and heavy workload. These stressors indicate that students' difficulties are not limited to classroom activities. Their family, financial, and living conditions may also contribute to the pressure they experience.

The findings further show that stress affected the students physically, mentally, emotionally, and behaviorally. Although the effects were generally moderate, they may still interfere with students' well-being and participation in school activities if they continue over time. This highlights the need for teachers and the school to recognize signs of stress and provide timely support.

Despite these challenges, the students rated the identified coping strategies as very effective. This indicates that students already use several helpful ways to manage stress. However, these strategies can be strengthened through appropriate guidance and school-based support.

Based on the findings, students should be encouraged to prepare early for examinations, take practice tests, and ask teachers for clarification to reduce test anxiety. Proper budgeting, reducing unnecessary expenses, and making use of available school or community resources may help students manage financial concerns. For students who live far from school, flexible arrangements may be considered when transportation difficulties significantly affect attendance and punctuality.

Teachers may also help reduce excessive academic pressure by giving purposeful and manageable assignments, avoiding unnecessary repetition, and coordinating major

requirements when possible. Parents, meanwhile, may be encouraged to use calm and supportive communication when setting rules and expectations for their children. Students who experience fear during recitation may benefit from adequate preparation, deep-breathing exercises, and a change in mindset from viewing recitation as a performance to viewing it as an opportunity to participate in a classroom discussion.

On the whole, the findings suggest that managing student stress requires the cooperation of students, teachers, parents, and school administrators. Stress cannot always be removed, but students can be taught healthier ways of responding to it. The school may therefore consider developing a simple stress-management program that focuses on test preparation, time management, emotional support, healthy routines, and effective coping strategies.

Finally, similar studies may be conducted in other schools and among other grade levels using additional variables. Such studies may provide a broader understanding of student stress and help schools develop interventions that respond more closely to the needs and circumstances of their learners.

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