



Stress management strategies in the educational environment: teachers' experience

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Abstract. This study focuses on identifying the stress factors that teachers face in the educational environment and analyzing possible approaches to effectively support them. The main sources of stress include administrative workload, interactions with parents, working with special needs students, and the need to adapt to modern educational demands. Surveys and interviews were used as research methodologies, providing more detailed data on teachers' perceptions of stress factors. The results showed that high expectations for professional performance, lack of resources, and insufficient systemic support from the administration increase stress levels and decrease job satisfaction. The scientific significance of the work lies in the development of structural changes aimed at improving teachers' working conditions, including the introduction of assistants to reduce administrative workload, training in inclusive practices, and creating stress management programs. The practical significance of the work lies in recommendations that can be used to create a favorable educational environment and enhance teachers' stress resilience. The implementation of such measures not only promotes teachers' professional and emotional well-being but also positively impacts the overall quality of the educational process.

Keywords: stress factors, educational environment, stress resilience, stress management programs, professional well-being.

Introduction

Occupational stress among schoolteachers is widely recognized as a global issue due to its adverse impact on teacher well-being, retention, and the overall quality of education (GEM Report UNESCO, 2023; Unravelling the Layers of Teachers' Work-Related Stress, 2023). In many countries, educators report high levels of emotional exhaustion, administrative pressure, and limited institutional support, which contribute to burnout and disengagement (Agyapong et al., 2022; Madigan et al., 2023a). Despite the growing international literature on teacher stress,

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there remains a lack of localized, empirical research exploring how these challenges manifest in Kazakhstan.

The academic discourse on teacher stress began in the late 20th century, notably with the work of Lazarus and Folkman, who proposed the transactional model of stress and coping. This framework, still widely used, focuses on individual appraisal of stressful events and the selection of coping strategies ("Stress," 2013). Later, Maslach and Leiter emphasized emotional exhaustion and professional burnout as key risks in education, linking them to declining well-being and teacher attrition (Maslach et al., 2001).

Large-scale reports such as OECD and UNESCO have since documented systemic stressors in schools, including excessive workload, low autonomy, and student misbehavior (OECD, 2021).

Empirical studies in countries such as the USA, China, Finland, and Italy and Switzerland reveal both universal and culturally specific stressors affecting educators (Eddy et al., 2019; Fiorilli et al., 2015). However, most of this research is quantitative and rarely considers the lived experiences of teachers in Eurasian countries with transitional education systems.

In Kazakhstan, research remains limited. Existing works tend to focus on job dissatisfaction and administrative burden, with little attention to coping strategies (al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Almaty, Kazakhstan, et al., 2021). A recent study by Askarkyzy has explored emotional burnout among Kazakhstani teachers, but lacks an in-depth analysis of stress management mechanisms. Therefore, there is a need for context-specific, qualitative studies that reflect the realities of Kazakhstani educators (Kazakh National University of Arts et al., 2023).

This study seeks to identify the primary sources of occupational stress among schoolteachers in Kazakhstan and to analyze the coping strategies they use. Unlike most international research that relies on standardized questionnaires, this paper employs a qualitative approach, allowing educators to describe their experiences in their own words. The research aims to contribute to the broader academic literature by providing localized data and insights into the institutional, cultural, and emotional challenges faced by teachers in Kazakhstan.

In addition to individual coping mechanisms – such as emotional self-regulation, peer support, and physical activity – the study highlights the urgent need for institutional responses (González-Valero et al., 2023). Teachers often cite the lack of support from school administrations and the emotional burden of interacting with students and parents as key sources of stress (Papadakis, 2022). While teachers employ informal strategies such as socializing with colleagues or engaging in sports, professional burnout remains a real risk (Madigan et al., 2023b).

Thus, this research not only fills an important empirical gap but also offers practical insights for educational policymakers and school administrators. It emphasizes the importance of developing targeted support programs to reduce stress, improve teacher well-being, and enhance the overall effectiveness of education in Kazakhstan.

Methods

This study used a qualitative methodology based on semi-structured interviews. The main research questions were: what factors influence teachers' resilience to stress, what strategies do they use to cope with stress in their professional activities, and what is the need for support programs to manage stress? The research hypothesis was that the presence of structured support and the use of specific stress coping strategies contribute to the improvement of teachers' resilience and psychological well-being.

This methodological approach was chosen to directly address the research objective – to explore the primary sources of occupational stress among Kazakhstani schoolteachers and analyze their coping strategies. By allowing participants to describe their experiences in their own words, the qualitative design ensured that context-specific nuances were captured. The use of thematic content analysis enabled the identification of recurring stressors and coping responses, thus providing a grounded, empirically supported solution to the research problem and informing practical recommendations to enhance teacher well-being in Kazakhstan's school system.

The novelty of this approach lies in the comprehensive exploration of both individual coping mechanisms and institutional support factors within the underrepresented context of Kazakhstan. Notably, the study highlights the current absence of structured support programs, as reported by the majority of respondents, thereby underscoring the urgency of targeted intervention.

The study was conducted in several stages:

Preparatory stage: development of a semi-structured interview consisting of three key thematic blocks – (1) psychological and pedagogical conditions and stress resistance, (2) available resources and support, (3) personal stress management strategies.

Data collection stage: 14 offline interviews with schoolteachers (13 women and 1 man) from public and private schools. Two public schools – 8 respondents; one private school – 6 respondents. Teaching experience ranged from 3 to 30 years. Participants represented various subject areas and roles. All respondents gave informed consent for recording.

Transcription and coding: Interviews were transcribed and processed through content analysis.

Thematic analysis: Key themes were identified, including stress levels, aggravating and mitigating factors, and coping strategies used by respondents.

Results and Discussion

1. Understanding Stress Tolerance

This section presents thematic findings derived from the qualitative analysis of interviews with 14 schoolteachers. The analysis is structured around the most frequently cited stressors, associated coping strategies, and a critical assessment of their perceived effectiveness.

Teachers generally view stress tolerance as a vital professional competence that enables them to maintain emotional stability, adapt to changing conditions, and remain focused under pressure. While some respondents found it difficult to define the term precisely, common interpretations included the ability to remain calm under workload, adjust to institutional changes, and suppress emotional responses in challenging situations. As one teacher noted:

"If you love your job, stress is less noticeable. But still, exhaustion builds up, and that doesn't mean you're not resilient."

This aligns with previous findings suggesting that emotional regulation is central to effective coping in the teaching profession (Richards, 2012).

2. Key Stress Factors

Based on the interviews, several stressors were repeatedly mentioned. Figure 1 summarizes their relative impact according to respondents' narratives.

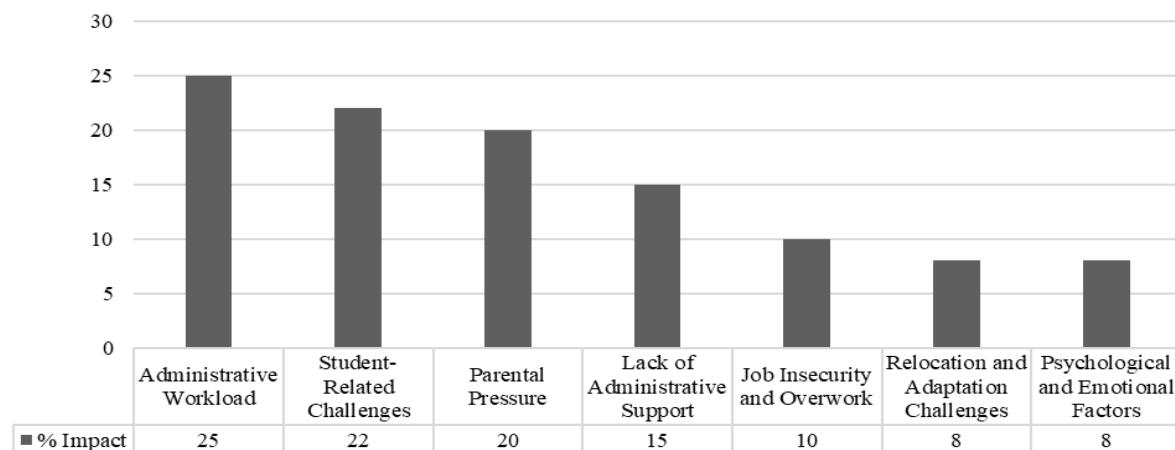


Figure 1. Relative impact according to respondents' narratives

Administrative workload and bureaucracy were cited as the most pressing issues. Teachers reported that excessive paperwork diverted time from core instructional activities. Unexpected reporting demands during busy teaching schedules further aggravated this burden, leading to frustration and diminished instructional quality.

Teachers also reported material constraints, such as the lack of classroom space and equipment (e.g., printers), which disrupted lesson preparation and delivery. These issues were particularly acute in overcrowded schools operating in multiple shifts.

Interpersonal stressors included critical discussions in school chats, a lack of constructive feedback from leadership, and frequent rule changes. In public schools, teachers highlighted inconsistent directives from administrators as a major concern. In contrast, private school teachers experienced heightened pressure from parents, often driven by unrealistic expectations.

Relocation-related stress emerged among teachers who moved to a new city. Feelings of social isolation and lack of institutional support intensified their adaptation difficulties. As one respondent stated, "I moved to the capital and didn't know anyone. There was no one to turn to. I felt completely lost."

These findings reinforce evidence that collegial support mitigates relocation stress (Li et al., 2022).

Parental over-involvement was also noted as a prominent stressor, particularly in private institutions. Some parents equated financial investment with the right to dictate educational approaches. One teacher remarked: "They think because they pay, they can demand anything, even the impossible."

This confirms literature indicating that demanding parents increase occupational stress (Prakke & Van Peet, 2023).

Changing classroom dynamics due to new student generations (e.g., Gen Z, digital natives) presented further challenges. Teachers reported decreased respect, increased assertiveness, and a need to constantly revise teaching methods. Prensky's theory of digital learners was frequently referenced, supporting the claim that traditional methods no longer suffice (Prensky, 2001).

Inclusive education also contributed to stress, with teachers expressing concerns about maintaining discipline and emotional safety in mixed-ability classrooms.

3. Coping Strategies

Although many teachers did not consciously employ structured coping techniques, various adaptive strategies emerged. Informal peer support (e.g., Friday tea gatherings -konildi bosatu) was widely regarded as therapeutic. Teachers shared experiences and exchanged practical

advice, fostering a sense of solidarity. Peer collaboration is known to protect against burnout and enhance emotional resilience (Avanzi et al., 2018).

The identified coping strategies can be systematized into four main categories: cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and institutional. Table 1 summarizes these categories with examples based on respondents' narratives.

Table 1. Systematization of Coping Strategies

Type	Examples from Interviews
Cognitive	Mental reframing, daily motivational self-talk
Emotional	Peer gatherings ("konildi bosatu"), emotional support from family
Behavioral	Physical exercise, temporary disengagement after work
Institutional Needs	Desire for rest areas, emotional resilience workshops

Based on respondent feedback, informal peer support appears to be the most consistently effective strategy, particularly for mid-career teachers. In contrast, temporary disengagement was described as a stop-gap measure, offering only momentary relief.

Personal strategies included mental reframing, morning motivational routines, and post-work disengagement. Some teachers emphasized the importance of maintaining appearance for self-confidence, while others relied on physical activity or family support for emotional relief.

Experience and professional maturity were cited as natural buffers. Teachers reported that stress affected them more acutely at the beginning of their careers. With time, they developed better emotional control and situational judgment.

4. Organizational Support Needs

Teachers expressed a clear need for institutional support mechanisms:

- Designated rest areas within schools
- Regular emotional resilience training
- Time management and stress reduction workshops
- Reduction of bureaucratic load to reallocate energy toward pedagogy

Several respondents emphasized that the attitude of the school administration plays a critical role in shaping the psychological climate. As one noted: "If the administration took our psychological needs seriously, things would be easier." Mentorship from experienced colleagues was also highlighted as essential, especially for novice teachers navigating institutional and emotional challenges.

Conclusion

This study examined the primary sources of occupational stress among schoolteachers in Kazakhstan and identified key coping strategies used to manage these challenges. The findings reveal that excessive bureaucratic workload, administrative pressure, and lack of support for inclusive education are major contributors to emotional fatigue and job dissatisfaction. Teachers reported relying on informal peer support, emotional self-regulation, and temporary disengagement as coping mechanisms. While these strategies provide short-term relief, they are insufficient in the absence of institutional and systemic reforms.

The results suggest an urgent need for structural changes in the educational environment. Reducing administrative burdens through the implementation of support staff – such as

administrative assistants – could significantly alleviate teacher overload and allow educators to focus on lesson preparation and student engagement. Moreover, the lack of specialized resources and training for inclusive education highlights the importance of providing ongoing professional development and access to expert consultation.

Support from school leadership and a collaborative atmosphere were consistently identified as key protective factors. When teachers feel emotionally supported by colleagues and administration, their ability to manage stress improves, positively affecting both teaching quality and workplace satisfaction. Policy efforts should therefore prioritize building collegial, psychologically safe school environments.

Importantly, the study demonstrates that different types of schools – public, private, and specialized – present distinct stressors. Thus, context-sensitive and flexible approaches are necessary when developing targeted interventions or reforms. Attention should also be given to helping teachers adapt to ongoing changes in education systems, reducing the likelihood of burnout and improving retention in the profession.

The scientific novelty of this research lies in its localized, qualitative approach to understanding occupational stress within an underrepresented national context. Unlike many previous studies based on quantitative methods and standardized surveys, this study draws on teachers' lived experiences and subjective reflections. It also highlights culturally embedded coping strategies, such as peer-based emotional support and collective practices like konildi bosatu, which have received little attention in international academic literature. These insights contribute new empirical evidence that enhances existing theoretical frameworks of teacher stress and resilience with context-specific depth.

Limitations and Future Research

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the sample size was relatively small (14 participants), and the findings may not fully represent the diversity of experiences among schoolteachers across Kazakhstan. Second, the qualitative nature of the research, while providing rich insights, limits generalizability. Third, most participants were female, which reflects the gender distribution in the profession but may underrepresent male perspectives on stress.

Future studies should consider expanding the participant pool to include more schools from different regions and socioeconomic contexts. A mixed-methods approach combining qualitative interviews with quantitative measures could strengthen the validity of findings and explore correlations between specific stressors and outcomes such as job satisfaction or attrition. Additionally, longitudinal research would allow for examination of how stress and coping strategies evolve over time.

It is also recommended to investigate the effectiveness of targeted interventions – such as mentorship programs, administrative support systems, or mental health training – and to assess their long-term impact on teacher well-being. Exploring student-related outcomes in relation to teacher stress levels may offer further implications for educational quality and equity.

Contribution of the authors

Toleubekova G.T. – served as the principal researcher and author of the study. She developed the research concept and design, formulated the objectives and research questions, conducted interviews, analyzed qualitative data, and prepared the initial draft of the manuscript.

Aubakirova S.D. – supervised the research at the national level and provided continuous methodological and academic guidance. She contributed to refining the research design, improving the structure of the semi-structured interview protocol, and ensuring the relevance of the study within the context of Kazakhstan's educational system.

Zhang W. – contributed to the theoretical and comparative framework of the study. He provided expertise on international perspectives in teacher occupational stress, offered methodological recommendations for qualitative data analysis, and ensured that the research adhered to global academic standards.

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Unravelling the layers of teachers' work-related stress (Teaching in Focus). (2023). Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD). <https://doi.org/10.1787/bca86c20-en>

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Білім беру ортасындағы стресті басқару стратегиялары: мұғалімдердің тәжірибелесі

Аннотация. Бұл зерттеу мұғалімдердің білім беру ортасында кездесетін стресс факторларын анықтауға және оларды тиімді қолдаудың ықтимал тәсілдерін талдауға арналған. Стрестің негізгі көздеріне әкімшілік жүктеме, ата-аналармен қарым-қатынас, ерекше балалармен жұмыс және білім беру процесінің заманауи талаптарына бейімделу қажеттілігі жатады. Зерттеу әдістемесі ретінде сауалнамалар мен сұхбаттар қолданылды, бұл мұғалімдердің стрестік факторларды қабылдауы туралы егжей-тегжейлі мәліметтер алуға мүмкіндік берді. Нәтижелер кәсіби қызметке деген жоғары үміт, ресурстардың жетіспеушілігі және әкімшіліктің жүйелі қолдауының болмауы стресс деңгейін жоғарылатып, жұмысқа қанағаттануды төмендететінін көрсетті. Жұмыстың ғылыми маңыздылығы мұғалімдердің еңбек жағдайларын жақсартуға бағытталған құрылымдық өзгерістерді, соның ішінде әкімшілік жүктемені азайту үшін көмекшілерді енгізуді, инклузивті тәжірибелерді оқытууды және стресті басқару бағдарламаларын құруды қамтиды. Жұмыстың практикалық маңыздылығы қолайлы білім беру ортасын құру және мұғалімдердің стреске тәзімділігін арттыру үшін пайдалануға болатын ұсыныстарда жатыр. Мұндай шараларды енгізу мұғалімдердің кәсіби және эмоционалды әл-ауқатына ықпал етіп қана қоймай, жалпы білім беру процесінің сапасына оң әсер етеді.

Түйін сөздер: стресс факторлары, білім беру ортасы, стреске тәзімділігі, стресті басқару бағдарламалары, кәсіби әл-ауқат.

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Стратегии управления стрессом в образовательной среде: опыт учителей

Аннотация. Данное исследование посвящено выявлению факторов стресса, с которыми сталкиваются учителя в образовательной среде, и анализу возможных подходов для их

эффективной поддержки. Основные источники стресса включают в себя административную нагрузку, взаимодействие с родителями, работу с особыми детьми и необходимость адаптации к современным требованиям образовательного процесса. В качестве методологии исследования были использованы опросы и интервью, что позволило получить более детализированные данные о восприятии стрессовых факторов учителями. Результаты показали, что высокие ожидания к профессиональной деятельности, нехватка ресурсов и недостаток системной поддержки со стороны администрации увеличивают уровень стресса и снижают удовлетворенность работой. Научная значимость работы заключается в разработке структурных изменений, направленных на улучшение условий труда педагогов, включая введение ассистентов для снижения административной нагрузки, обучение инклюзивным практикам и создание программ для управления стрессом. Практическая значимость работы заключается в рекомендациях, которые могут быть использованы для создания благоприятной образовательной среды и повышения стрессоустойчивости учителей. Внедрение таких мер не только способствует профессиональному и эмоциональному благополучию педагогов, но и положительно сказывается на качестве образовательного процесса в целом.

Ключевые слова: факторы стресса, образовательная среда, стрессоустойчивость педагогов, управление стрессом, профессиональное благополучие.

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