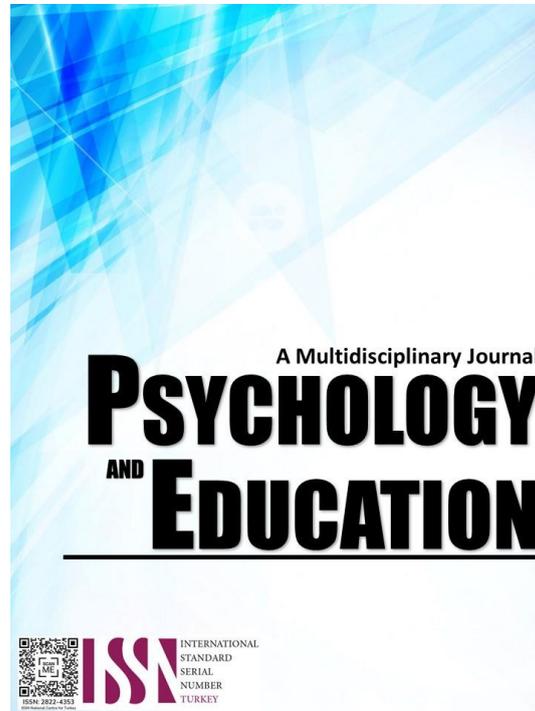


# ACADEMIC STRESS AND COPING MECHANISM OF STUDENTS IN FLEXIBLE LEARNING



## PSYCHOLOGY AND EDUCATION: A MULTIDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL

2023

Volume: 7

Pages: 984-989

Document ID: 2023PEMJ616

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.7777700

Manuscript Accepted: 2023-25-3



## Academic Stress and Coping Mechanism of Students in Flexible Learning

Elaine H. Anzures\*

*For affiliations and correspondence, see the last page.*

### Abstract

This study was conducted among the college students of Iloilo State College of Fisheries-Dingle Campus, Second Semester of AY 2020-2021. Specifically, the first to third year college students who are exposed to Flexible Learning Approach. The study utilized the correlational method of research and the data needed for the study were gathered using the online platform through the use of google forms from the adapted and researcher-made questionnaires and was conducted from March 3-18, 2021. Two hundred eight-two students (282) selected randomly from first year to third year students from 4 colleges served as respondents of the study. The data gathered were subjected to the following statistical tools: frequency count, percentage, mean, Simple, Pearson's  $r$  and Independent Sample T-test. The findings of the study revealed that the level of stress in flexible learning as perceived by the College students of Iloilo State College of Fisheries-Dingle Campus is moderate. To cope up with stress, students seek themselves in praying and meditating when they are under stressed, seek out with their friends for conversation and support and use social media and entertainment media such as television for relaxation. Furthermore, a strong negative correlation between stress and coping mechanism of the students was noted. Thus, the researcher recommends that professors and subject teachers should adjust their instruction and requirements to lessen the possible stress that students carry in their shoulders. Webinar talks and conferences about Academic Stress and Coping Strategies for students must also strengthened.

**Keywords:** *academic stress, coping mechanism, flexible learning, college students*

### Introduction

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is a health crisis that has completely change the lives and perspectives of all people. COVID-19 was first identified in December 2019 in Wuhan, the capital of China's Hubei province. Since then, it has spread globally resulting in the coronavirus pandemic (Hui et al., 2020, as seen in Ilmiyah & Setiawan, 2020). The government around the world has closed all educational institutions, to control the spread of disease, considering the safety of students, educators and all associated people. Home education has brought a lot of shocks not only to students but also to their parents' productivity (Burgess and Sievertsen, 2020). E-learning, online learning, web-based learning, internet-based learning or computer-assisted learning are interchangeably used for this type of learning (Ruiz et al., 2006). The rapid expansion and use of the Internet and easily available platforms have made educational institution reaching out and delivering education to students spread geographically. Online learning, distance education and remote learning is nothing new to us. The only difference is now it has taken the only source of education due to social distancing and nationwide lockdown amidst COVID-19 pandemic.

Academic stress emerges out from experiencing stress due to factors such as scholarship requirements, family-related pressures, competition in the class and course-related stress and financial burdens, (Mirsa &

Castillo, 2004). For some students, it can also be due to migrating at different places, learning different cultural values and language in addition to getting adjusted to academic requirements (Mori, 2000; Essandoh, 1995). Student always live under the pressure to perform better than their peers. They are continuously compared with siblings and other children/kids of their age by their parents, teachers, friends, etc. This always leads to a situation making these children confused and under constant pressure to perform better, achieve better grades, and excel well in extracurricular activities, take-up hobby classes and what not. Many times, it has been observed that parents put these undue pressures to satisfy their unmet needs which they were not able to fulfill due to personal reasons. As a student experiencing a high level of stress arising from unprecedented academic pressure, most of them report experiencing low self-esteem, poor coping mechanism and a poor concentration that has its impact in their academic performance. The perception of academic stress is creating a very negative impact on their well-being, their decision to choose career options, sleeping difficulties, psychosomatic complaints, worrying about future, comorbid conditions like anxiety and depression, inability to manage course workload, etc. (Bedewy & Gabriel, 2015; Acharya, 2003; Iqbal et al., 2015).

The Iloilo State College of Fisheries in response also to the challenges brought about by the worldwide pandemic focuses on the transition from the traditional



teaching and learning to flexible learning approaches both for faculty and students as they adjust and adapt to the rapid changes in various teaching and learning styles and contexts (Ligasan, 2020). With the adoption of the new mode of learning because of the pandemic, it is but necessary to determine the academic stress level that College students feel and how they cope up with. Thus, this research study was conceptualized.

### Research Questions

The study aims to determine the relationship between stress and coping mechanisms in flexible learning students of Iloilo State College of Fisheries-Dingle Campus, AY 2020-2021. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the stress level in flexible learning as a whole and when classified as to course, year level, and sex?
2. What are the students' coping mechanisms against the stress they felt?
3. Are there significant differences in the level of stress in flexible learning of the respondents when classified as to course, year level and sex?
4. Is there a significant relationship between stress and coping mechanisms in the flexible learning of the students?

### Literature Review

#### Academic Stress

The start of pandemic last 2020 and the shifting of traditional form of teaching to blended, online-offline forms of learning increases students' stress level. According to the latest survey, emotional and academic stress brought about by this pandemic is one of the factors faces by the millennial today. One of the most prevalent illnesses affecting people today is stress, which can be brought on by situations like pressure at work or school or by emotional states like worry or sadness (Lupien, et al, 2009). When it comes to academic stress, this framework of high tension can be seen everywhere from preschool to university life. Here, learning intervals are impacted by the expectations placed on students by the numerous educational cycles. There are also a number of recurring psychosocial stressors in this area, with concerns about academic success, exam management, relationships with classmates and teachers, and the teaching style or workload of particular teachers standing out. The World Health Organization (WHO) proclaimed the COVID19 virus a global pandemic on

March 11, 2020. The effects of this issue on health, the economy, and education have been significant. In the latter, the stress created in the academic, teaching, and family communities has been evident given the unpredictability caused by the suppression of face-to-face instruction, the fear of contagion, and the adoption of a distance learning methodology such as modular instruction, synchronous and asynchronous learning approach.

Learning and teaching-related academic hurdles (also known as academic stress) affect one's emotionality toward academic work. Numerous recent studies have shown that achievement emotions are a strong predictor of academic well-being and of how satisfied students are with their university education (Garett et al., 2017; Frenzel et al., 2018). It is acceptable to assume that good emotions, such as enjoyment, pride, and satisfaction, present during the process when this emotionality is positive. Negative feelings, such as boredom, rage, worry, or despair, signal the opposite: that there are learning-related adjustment problems. The student's stress level is considered a key indicator of their motivational condition of burnout or engagement (Salanova et al., 2010). The subject's dispositional characteristics, such as self-efficacy and emotional intelligence, sociodemographic variables (sex and age), and educational variables (teaching techniques and guidance), among others, may influence differences in motivational state. The motivational condition of academic engagement burnout has also been studied, and it was discovered that engagement is closely correlated with students' levels of self-regulation and a regulatory teaching environment. Greater degrees of self-regulation and coping mechanisms are associated with less burnout and a stronger motivating state of engagement (de la Fuente et al., 2017).

#### Coping Mechanism

In order to cope, you typically have to accept or tolerate unpleasant situations or truths while attempting to maintain a healthy sense of self and emotional balance. Coping happens when there are believed to be stressful life adjustments. Losing a loved one or a job are two examples of unpleasant life changes that are frequently linked to psychological stress. But every shift necessitates some form of adaptation. Even good things like getting married or having kids can cause stress.

The need to adapt and adjust to changes makes them stressful. Too many changes in a short period of time can give us the impression that we are powerless over

what happens. Low self-esteem results from this perspective, which may also play a role in the emergence of anxiety or depression (Al-Dubai et al., 2011). In the current situation, COVID 19 pandemic spread widely in our country that cause lockdown wherein the face to face classes suspended and learning approach change into modular, online, digital and other learning modalities. Through this, the mental health of college students was affected according to the recent statistical data. According to Dennon (2021), over 95% of college students experienced negative mental health symptoms due to pandemic. The reason was the students have found difficulty to participate in online classes and complete their homework. The most reported college students are the first year because they are more likely than the upper level students to report COVID-19 mental health issues.

According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), stress is an interaction process between an individual and their environment in which coping determines how stressful events affect an individual's physical and psychological well-being. As a result of this generally recognized transactional perspective, coping has come to be seen as the cognitive and behavioral responses made in response to demands that an individual perceives as threats to their wellbeing, whether they come from inside or outside of them. Approach methods use cognitive and behavioral techniques to actively react to the stressor, directly alter the issue (primary control), or the distressing feelings connected to it (secondary control). This category includes tactics such as planning, taking specific action, requesting help (instrumental and emotional), positive evaluation of the circumstance, or acceptance. Evasive strategies are cognitive and behavioral techniques including wishful thinking, denial, and distraction that are employed to avoid the stressful circumstance. Based on this classification, there is general agreement that approach tactics are linked to positive academic, physical, and psychological adjustment while evasive strategies typically result in kids experiencing unfavorable outcomes (Friere et al., 2020).

## Methodology

This research study employed the correlational research design to determine the stress and coping mechanisms in flexible learning of the students. Correlation research determine the possible relations between two or more variables (Frankael and Wallen, 2016).

## Participants

The research participants were the 282 college students of Iloilo State College of Fisheries-Dingle Campus taken randomly from the 4 colleges using the simple and purposive random sampling. Fourth-year college students were not part in the conduct of the study because they are in their On the Job-Training.

## Instruments of the Study

The students' stress level was determined using the adapted questionnaire from the study of Daza (2020). The responses range from Never to Always. On the other hand, to determine the coping mechanism of the students, the researcher-made 10-item questionnaire that underwent content validation from the 3 panel of experts were made and was subjected to reliability testing among 30 students who were not included as respondents of the study. Responses on each item ranges from Never to Always.

## Procedures

The Campus Administrator and Dean of the 4 Colleges secured permission to conduct the study. The researcher also informed the participants that their participation in this study would not affect their grades in school. The researcher administers the instrument via google forms. After scores were determined, all data was coded and entered into SPSS and statistical analyses was conducted using the mean and t-test for dependent samples as statistical tools. All data was computed set at 0.05 alpha level of significance.

## Results

### Descriptive Data Analysis

#### Level of Stress

Table 1 shows the level of stress in flexible learning as perceived by the College students of Iloilo State College of Fisheries-Dingle Campus. The data shows that the level of stress as a whole is "moderate" with a mean of 2.03. When classified as to sex, both male and female respondents have a high level of knowledge in organic farming with a mean of 2.63 and 2.64, respectively. Same results were revealed when the respondents were classified as to course and year level.



Table 1. *Level of Stress as to Different Variables*

Category	N	Mean	SD	Description
As a Whole	282	2.03	0.352	Moderate
<i>Sex</i>				
Male	108	2.09	0.401	Moderate
Female	174	2.00	0.314	Moderate
<i>Course</i>				
Info. Tech	56	2.09	0.387	Moderate
Education	76	2.10	0.368	Moderate
Agriculture	96	1.96	0.345	Moderate
Hospitality Mngt	54	1.99	0.277	Moderate
<i>Year Level</i>				
First Year	164	2.02	0.357	Moderate
Second Year	63	2.14	0.330	Moderate
Third Year	55	1.95	0.337	Moderate

**Coping Mechanisms of the College Students**

Table 2 shows the results of the coping mechanism of the students with regards to the flexible learning. The result shows that to cope up with stress, students seek themselves in praying and meditating when they are under stressed, seek out with their friends for conversation and support and use social media and entertainment media such as television for relaxation.

Table 2 *Coping Mechanism of College Students*

Coping Mechanisms	Mean	Rank
1. Do you use internet, T.V. or music to relax yourself?	2.48	3
2. Do you seek out friends for conversation and support?	2.59	2
3. Do you ignore the problem and hope it will go away?	1.99	8
4. Do you try to focus on things you can control and accept the things you can't?	2.21	6
5. Do you ignore your own needs and just work harder and faster?	2.05	7
6. Do you Learn to live with the situation, and accepting it?	2.28	4
7. Do you learn to Do something about the situation such as looking for any activity to divert your attention?	2.17	5
8. Do you try to Get help and advice from subject professors/instructors when anything goes wrong?	1.95	9
9. Do you divert your attention in using alcoholic beverages/tobacco to feel you better?	1.16	10
10. Do you seek yourself in praying and meditating when you are under stressed?	2.61	1

**Inferential Statistics**

**Difference in the Stress Level as to Different Variables**

Table 3 shows that there is a significant difference in the stress level of the respondents when classified as to sex with a p-value of .037 which is less than .05 level of significance. In the same vein, there are also significant differences in their stress level when classified as to course and year level as shown by Table 4. Furthermore, Post Hoc Analysis shows that there is significant difference in the stress level of Education students and Agriculture. On the other hand, significant differences were also noted between second year students and the first year and third year students.

Table 3 *Difference in the Stress Level as to Sex*

Category	Mean	SD	Df	t-value	Sig. (2-tailed)
Male	2.09	0.401	280	2.098*	.037
Female	1.99	0.313			

Table 4 *Differences in the Stress Level as to Course and Year Level*

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
Course	Between Groups	1.059	3	.353	2.909*	.035
	Within Groups	33.750	278	.121		
	Total	34.809	281			
Year Level	Between Groups	1.118	2	.559	4.629*	.011
	Within Groups	33.691	279	.121		
	Total	34.809	281			

**Relationship between Stress and Coping Mechanism**

The data in Table 5 that there is a strong negative correlation between stress and coping mechanism of the students with a p-vale of 0.014 which is less than 0.01 level of significance. The result implies that the higher the stress of the students, the lower their coping mechanism and vice versa.

Table 5 *Relationship between Stress and Coping Mechanism*

		Coping	Stress
Coping	Pearson Correlation	1	0.820*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		-.014.
	N	282	282
Stress	Pearson Correlation	0.820*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	-.014.	
	N	282	282

## Discussion

This study was conducted among the college students of Iloilo State College of Fisheries-Dingle Campus, Second Semester of AY 2020-2021. Specifically, the first to third year college students who are exposed to Flexible Learning Approach. The result of the study will be of beneficial to the faculty, administration and other stakeholders in moderating the stressful environment brought about by pandemic. In addition, students suffering from academic stress should be given proper attention.

## Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were made: (1) The Flexible Learning which is adopted by Iloilo State College of Fisheries is moderately stressful to the students. (2) The College students have their own coping mechanisms to combat stress they felt and relatively rely other people such as their peers and friends for it. (3) The stress level of the students varies in their sex, course and year level. Male college students are more stressful than female. Students enrolled in the College of Education are more stressful compared to other courses and students in their second-year level also experienced more stressed compared to other year levels. (4) The higher the stressed the students experienced, the lower their coping mechanism is.

Based on the conclusions established in the study, the following recommendations are made: (1) Since the College of Education students perceived that they are more stressful when it comes to Flexible Mode of Learning, professors and subject teachers should adjust their instruction and requirements to lessen the possible stress that Education students carry in their shoulders. In the same manner, all professors in Iloilo State College of Fisheries should be kinder and more sensitive enough to the emotional needs of the students. (2) Since there is a strong negative correlation between stress and coping mechanism, the Guidance Counselor should conduct various webinar talks and conferences about Academic Stress and Coping Strategies for students to be more aware of it. (3) The conduct of “Kamustahan” as one of the activities of the Office of Student Affairs in partnerships with the Office of Guidance and Counselling to hear the sentiments of the students should be more strengthened. (4) Since most College

students prefer to talk with their peers and friends in their moment of stress, family support must be strengthened.

## References

- Al-Dubai, S. A., Al-Naggar, R. A., Alshagga, M. A., & Rampal, K. G. (2011). Stress and coping strategies of students in a medical faculty in malaysia. *The Malaysian journal of medical sciences : MJMS*, 18(3)[https://www.academia.edu/27644086/Stress\\_and\\_coping\\_strategies\\_of\\_students\\_in\\_a\\_medical\\_faculty\\_in\\_malaysia](https://www.academia.edu/27644086/Stress_and_coping_strategies_of_students_in_a_medical_faculty_in_malaysia)
- Bedewy, D. and Adel, G. (2015). *Examining perceptions of academic stress and its sources among university students: The Perception of Academic Stress Scale*. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/2055102915596714>
- Burges, S. and Sievertsen, H. (2020). Schools, skills, and learning: The impact of COVID-19 on education. <https://voxeu.org/article/impact-covid-19-education>
- Daza, K., et al (2020). *Level of Stress, Anxiety, Depression and Coping mechanism of Radiologic Technology Students of Iloilo Doctors' College in facing the COVID-19 Pandemic*. Unpublished Undergraduate Thesis. Iloilo Doctors College.
- de la Fuente, J., Sander, P., Martínez-Vicente, J. M., Vera, M., Garzón, A., and Fadda, S. (2017). Combined effect of levels in personal self-regulation and regulatory teaching on meta-cognitive, on meta-motivational, and on academic achievement variables in undergraduate students. *Front. Psychol.* 8:232. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2017.00232
- Freire, C., Ferradás, M. D., Regueiro, B., Rodríguez, S., Valle, A., & Núñez, J. C. (2020). Coping Strategies and Self-Efficacy in University Students: A Person-Centered Approach. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.00841>
- Frenzel, A. C., Becker-Kurz, B., Pekrun, R., Goetz, T., and Lüdtke, O. (2018). Emotion transmission in the classroom revisited: a reciprocal effects model of teacher and student enjoyment. *J. Educ. Psychol.* 110, 628–639. doi: 10.1037/edu0000228
- Garett, R., Liu, S., and Young, S. D. (2017). A longitudinal analysis of stress among incoming college freshmen. *J. Am. Coll. Health* 65, 331–338. doi: 10.1080/07448481.2017.1312413
- Kowal, M., Coll-Martín, T., Ikizer, G., Rasmussen, J., Eichel, K., Studzinska, A., et al. (2020). Who is the most stressed during COVID-19 isolation? Data from 27 countries. <https://doi.org/10.1111/aphw.12234>
- Licayan, R. J., Chierife C, F. M., P, L. G., & Kim, C. R. (2021). Academic Stress Level Determination among College Students in Times of Covid-19 Pandemic: Basis for an Intervention Scheme. *International Journal of Asian Education*, 2(3), 313–326. <https://doi.org/10.46966/ijae.v2i3.119>
- Lupien S.J., McEwen B.S., Gunnar M.R., Heim C. (2009). Effects of Stress throughout the Lifespan on the Brain, Behaviour and Cognition. *Nat. Rev. Neurosci.* ;10:434–445. doi: 10.1038/nrn2639.
- Misra, R., & Castillo, L. G. (2004). Academic Stress Among College Students: Comparison of American and International Students. *International Journal of Stress Management*, 11(2), 132–148. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1072-5245.11.2.132>



Ramos-Lira, L., Rafful, C., Flores-Celis, K., Mora-Ríos, J., García-Andrade, C., Rascón- Gasca, M. L., et al. (2020). Emotional responses and coping strategies in adult Mexican population during the first lockdown of the COVID-19 pandemic: an exploratory study by sex. *Salud Mental* 43, 243–251. doi: 10.17711/SM.0185-3325.2020.034

Salanova, M., Schaufeli, W. B., Martinez, I., and Bresó, E. (2010). How obstacles and facilitators predict academic performance: the mediating role of study burnout and engagement. *Anx. Stress Coping* 23, 53–70. doi: 10.1080/10615800802609965

## **Affiliations and Corresponding Information**

**Elaine H. Anzures**

Iloilo State College of Fisheries - Philippines