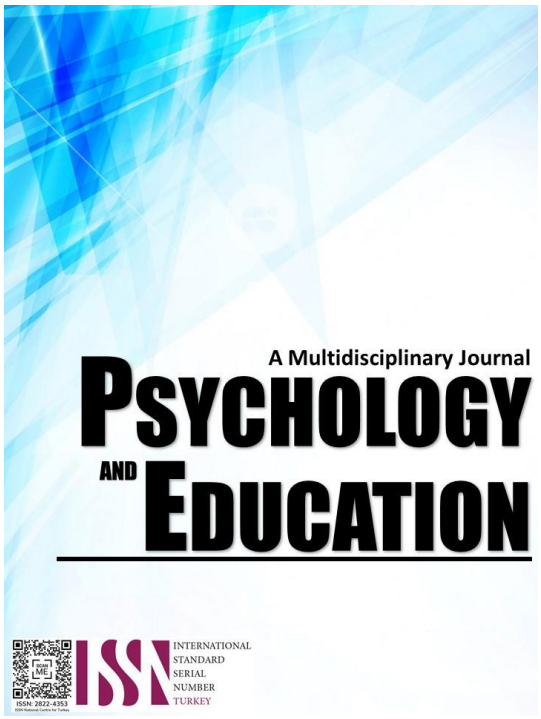
STRESS LEVEL AND COPING MECHANISM IN RELIEVING ACADEMIC STRESS OF SPECIAL SCIENCE CURRICULUM STUDENTS OF MORONG NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL



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Research Article

Stress Level and Coping Mechanism in Relieving Academic Stress of Special Science Curriculum Students of Morong National High School

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Abstract

This study determined the academic stress level and coping mechanism of the special science curriculum students; the study also identify if there is a significant relationship between these two variables.This study used a Qualitative Design (Grounded Theory Design) using an expert-validated questionnaire. Additionally, descriptive, correlational design using surveys were also used to determine if there is a significant relationship between academic stress and coping mechanisms. This study was conducted at Morong National High School, and the Special Science Curriculum students at the said school acted as the respondents of the study. Total Enumeration Sampling Design was initiated to use in this study to facilitate accuracy in selecting the respondents.With an academic stress level of 1.68 it was confirmed that Special Science Curriculum students are experiencing moderate stress. Additionally with 27.37% of SSC students, "Religious coping" is found the most commonly used Coping Mechanism, and "Substance use" is the least used Coping mechanism having 0% of SSC students using it. Lastly, it has been identified that some coping mechanisms have a significant relationship with the level of academic stress while some are identified as not significant.The Special Science Curriculum Students are confirmed experiencing moderate stress in their schoolwork and activities. It has also been found that "Religious coping" is the most used coping mechanism and "Substance used" is the least used coping mechanism. Lastly, it's been identified that some of the coping mechanisms have a significant relationship with the level of academic stress while some are identified as not significant.

Keywords: *academic stress level, coping mechanisms, correlation*

Introduction

The state of well-being plays a vital role in a student's academic life to achieve success in the future. It is important to be mentally fit in attaining their goals in life. According to World Health Organization, (2022), "Mental Health is a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and can make a contribution to his or her community". Today, technology and education are performing on a fast range of students should go through. This leads to circumstances that they experience difficulties in coping with. In this sense, students are struggling with their mental health due to significant challenges in their education and feel like giving up, leading to academic stress.

Research has found that excessive academic stress levels can increase the prevalence of psychological and physical problems like depression, anxiety, nervousness, and stress-related disorders, which in turn can adversely affect academic results, pacific teen treatment, (2023). Academic stress is the most common emotional or mental state that students experience during their studies Ramli, (2018). The coping mechanism plays a significant part to overcome or reduce the stress experienced by individuals. Students use different types of coping strategies to overcome stress Ganesan Y. et al, (2018).

According to the Implementing Rules and Regulations of Republic Act No. 11036 Section 24. Integration of Mental Health into the educational system states that:

"Age-appropriate content about mental health shall be integrated into the curriculum at all educational levels, and within two years after the effectivity of the IRR, age-appropriate content for the promotion of mental health conditions shall be made available and accessible to all educational institutions at all levels, from preschool to post-graduate school, including alternative learning systems and schools for a population with special needs. Various strategies deemed appropriate for the population may be used, from integration into current curricula to special course offerings."

"The materials for use in the curricula and offerings shall be developed by the Department of Education (DepEd), the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), in coordination with mental health experts."

The statements above undeniably show the importance of the promotion and prevention of mental health in making it available and accessible to all educational institutions at all levels.

It is also stated in the Implementing Rules and Regulations of Republic Act No. 11036 Section 29. Research and Development that:

"Research and development shall be undertaken, in collaboration with academic institutions, psychiatric, neurologic, and related associations, and nongovernment organizations to produce the information, data, and evidence necessary to formulate and develop a culturally relevant national mental health program incorporating indigenous concepts and practices related to mental health."

The provision stated above clearly signifies that high ethical standards in mental health research shall be prompted to ensure that research is conducted only with the free and informed consent of the persons involved, researchers do not receive any privileges, compensation, or remuneration in exchange for encouraging or recruiting participants. Potentially harmful or dangerous research is not undertaken, and all research is approved by an independent ethics committee, under applicable law.

Moreover, DepEd Memorandum No.58 s.2022 known as the Implementation of Mental Health and Psychological Support Services states that:

"The Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Service (DRRMS), under the leadership of the Office of the Undersecretary for Administration and in coordination with various DepEd Central office units, is conducting Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Services (MHPSS) for teaching and non-teaching personnel and learners from July to August, in preparation for the opening of classes, as part of the Brigada Eskwala activities"

With the issuance of DepEd Memorandum No.58 s.2022 stating the orientation of the Mental Health and Psychological Support Services, Morong National High School continue to strengthen the mental health of learners which will lead to a positive outlook and willingness in accomplishing school-related tasks. In this matter, Morong National High School support and take in the memorandum to strengthen the learners' mental health to help the students cope with their academic stress.

A lot of studies about academic stress and coping mechanism has been conducted by many researchers, and studies about this are not too uncommon to find. As years passed, many hypotheses and discoveries about academic stress and coping mechanisms have already been proven. For this reason, a lot of people are now able to perceive and understand what Academic stress and coping mechanism are, but as many people were able to understand this, a lot of questions arise that is needed to be answered. In noticing this, the student researchers of Morong National High School decided to implement a study about this to identify the academic stress level and coping mechanism of the school's Special Science Curriculum students.

According to PS Prabu, (2015), the definition of academic stress is the anxiety and stress that comes from schooling and education. There is often a lot of pressure that comes along with pursuing a degree and one's education. There is studying, homework, tests, labs, reading, and quizzes. There is also the stress of doing all the work, balancing the time, and finding time for extra-curricular activities. For these reasons, academic stress is especially hard on school students who are often living away from home for the first time. Similarly, according to N. Joseph et al., (2020), that academic stress in the present study was the least among participants who were staying with their parents, siblings, or relatives. It is also said in their studies that Academic stress of moderate to severe level was reported among 83% of the participants. That is to say that academic stress is found to be common and was of moderate level in more than three-fourths of the respondents that participated, and thus worrying about the future and poor self-esteem were independently associated with academic stress among students.

In the study reported by Mostafavian et al., (2018) It was found that there was no association between academic stress and the gender of participants. Comparing this, the result contradicts the statements of Adiele et al., (2018) where it is said that several other university student studies reported that females have significantly greater academic stress than males. In addition, Mostafavian et al., (2018) also observed that academic stress was significantly more among those living at their houses compared to those in dormitories. But the result found in their study contradicts the findings that are observed by N. Joseph et al., (2020) where it is reported that academic stress in the present study was the least among participants who were staying with their parents, siblings, or relatives.

Coping can be understood as a process that is key to managing stress. In this process, the individual makes a cognitive and behavioral effort to manage both

external and internal sources of stress as stated by Väisänen et al., (2018). This supports the statements made by Algurani, and Gupta, (2022), which defined coping as the thoughts and behaviors mobilized to manage internal and external stressful situations. Considering it as a term used distinctively for conscious and voluntary mobilization of acts, different from 'defense mechanisms' that are subconscious or unconscious adaptive responses, both of which aim to reduce or tolerate stress.

According to Gustems and Calderon, (2020), people who engage in coping focus tend to approach the problem at hand and make a cognitive and behavioral effort to control or eradicate stressors, while avoidance copers tend to focus on the emotions and make the same kinds of effort to avoid thinking about the source of stress and its consequences. Now considering the present study by N. Joseph et al., (2020), where coping with stress was found to be average among 95% of the participants from their study, and also said that female students experienced more stress and adopted coping mechanisms to a larger extent than male, and male and female students demonstrated equal self-efficacy, then the statements above can be considered true. However, according to P. Chandrapakash, (2020), coping mechanisms and self-efficacy were insufficient to manage academic stress.

In this regard, through surveys and questions, some students from the Special Science Curriculum of Morong National High School said that they experience academic stress in their studies, especially on taking the numerous subjects daily, the tasks that should be submitted on time, and the assessment given to them in each subject. In this case, this research study intended to identify the level of academic stress and the most common coping mechanisms used by the Special Science Curriculum students, which would be the first step for our school in addressing the academic stress that students experience. Also, the current study of Hukom and Madrigal, (2020) didn't show any significant relationship between Coping Strategies and the level of Academic Stress which the researchers of this study want to prove whether it's true or not.

Research Questions

The study aimed to identify the level of academic stress and the most common coping mechanisms used by the Special Science Curriculum students in Morong National High School. Specifically, it aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What is the Level of Academic Stress of the Special Science Curriculum students of Morong National High School?
2. What Coping Mechanisms are commonly used by Morong National High School's Special Science Curriculum students to relieve Academic Stress?
3. Is there a significant relationship between the Coping Mechanisms and the Level of Academic Stress of the respondents?

Methodology

Research Design

This study used a Qualitative Design (Grounded Theory Design) using an expert-validated questionnaire. Additionally, descriptive, correlational design using surveys were also used to determine if there is a significant relationship between academic stress and coping mechanisms.

Population and Sampling

This study was conducted at Morong National High School and the Special Science Curriculum students at the said school acted as the respondents of the study. The purpose was to identify the level of academic stress and the most used coping mechanisms of the Special Science Curriculum students. This study also aimed to find out whether there is a significant relationship between these two variables. The study was conducted in the School Year 2022 - 2023, where it takes place at the school of Morong National High School. One of the reasons this study was conducted is due to seeing a lot of students being stressed by their academic activities. The researchers judge this as a problem that may lead to experiencing academic stress that may impede their academic performance, in this regard, the researcher wanted to find out the way they deal with this stressful situation. The researchers used an expert-validated questionnaire as an instrument namely, the Academic stress scale along with the COPE inventory, and distributed it to the respondents using Google Forms online.

Instrument

The researchers in the study used two instruments for collecting data. To identify the level of academic stress of the students, the academic stress scale was used. The academic stress scale is 40 item rating scale that was originally developed by Kim, (1970) and was

reused and re-validated in the present study by V. Ramaprabou, (2018). In addition, to find the most used coping mechanisms of the students, the COPE inventory was used, the original author of this instrument is Carver, C. S., (2013), and was reused and re-validated in the present study by Halamova et al., (2022).

Data Collection

The researchers in the study used three tools for collecting data and these are the Academic stress scale, COPE inventory, and Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r). To identify the level of academic stress of the students, the academic stress scale was used. The academic stress scale is 40 item rating scale that was originally developed by Kim, (1970) and was reused and re-validated in the present study by V. Ramaprabou, (2018), each item had five alternatives varying from the response 'No Stress' to 'Extreme Stress'. Each response carries a score of '0', '1', '2', '3' and '4' respectively. The items are classified into five areas that contained 8 items each and those are Personal Inadequacy, Fear of Failure, Interpersonal difficulties with teachers, Teacher-pupil relationship / Teaching methods, and Inadequate study facilities. In addition, to find the most used coping mechanisms of the students, the COPE inventory was used, the original author of this instrument is Carver, C. S., (2013), and was reused and re-validated in the present study by Halamova et al., (2022). The questionnaire asked the respondent to indicate what they generally do and feel when they experience stressful events. Then they will have to respond to each of the given items by using the numbers assigned depending on the level of stress the respondent is feeling, where the lowest number means that the respondent does not do it usually and the highest number means that the respondent usually does it a lot. Lastly, the Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r) was used to identify the significant relationship between these two variables, Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r) is a descriptive statistic, meaning that it summarizes the characteristics of a data set. Specifically, it describes the strength and direction of the linear relationship between two quantitative variables. The Pearson correlation coefficient also tells you whether the slope of the line of best fit is negative or positive.

Data Analysis

Various data analysis methods were utilized to analyze the questions raised in the study. To begin with, by analyzing the stress level of the respondents, the researchers implemented quantitative methods. The researchers used the descriptive analysis method to find absolute numbers to summarize individual variables and find patterns where we calculated the mean/numerical average of the data. In addition, to identify the coping mechanism, used by the respondents, the researchers also implement a quantitative method, The researchers will use the Frequency, Percentage, and Rank Distribution. Frequency, Percentage, and Rank Distribution is referred to the statistical measure that can be used to analyze the different distributions of our data. The Frequency will be a tally of how many respondents has the same Coping Mechanism. The Percentage is the proportion of the dataset that will be based on the frequency distribution, this will be calculated using the formula of (frequency value/total value) x 100. The Rank distribution is the ranking of the data so that appeared in Frequency and Percentage from highest to lowest and assigning each value a rank number. Lastly, the researchers intend to use the Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r) to analyze the relationship between these two variables. The Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r) is a descriptive statistic, meaning that it summarizes the characteristics of a dataset. Specifically, it describes the strength and direction of the linear relationship between two quantitative variables. The Pearson correlation coefficient also tells you whether the slope of the line of best fit is negative or positive.

Results and Discussion

Table 1. *Academic Stress Level of Special Science Curriculum Students*

Grade Level	*Mean*	*Verbal Interpretation*
7 Australia	1.38	Slight Stress (SS)
9 Atom	1.60	Slight Stress (SS)
10 Brilliant	2.05	Moderate stress (MS)
Overall Mean	1.68	Moderate Stress (MS)

Level of Academic Stress of Special Science Curriculum Students.

The table shows the Stress Level of the Special Science Curriculum students of Morong National High School. The data indicated that the stress level of the Special Science Curriculum students is Moderate Stress having scored 1.68 on the Academic Stress Scale. The data also indicates the Stress Level of the

Special Science Curriculum Students in each Grade Levels, showing first the Stress Level of Grade 7 Australia while having a score of 1.38 interpreted as Slight Stress, displaying next the Stress Level of Grade 9 Atom while having the scored of 1.60 that interpreted as Slight Stress, lastly showing the Stress Level of Grade 10 Brilliant while having scored of 2.05 that interpreted as Moderate stress, in the researchers perspective the difference in difficulty between grade level is might be one of the reasons in getting this result. According to P.S. Prabu, (2015), this suggests that being in touch with daily lessons and regularly attending and concentrating on lectures is a good idea to avoid experiencing academic stress. Last-minute studying should be avoided and remember that a regular seven hours of sleep is mandatory for the body to function well. One should identify the best time and place for studying and this varies with everyone. Additionally taking regular short breaks while working helps one relax and concentrate for longer. Also, one should always set 'realistic' goals in life and never let negative thoughts get into one's mind. Lastly, On the day of the exams, one should remain calm and stop being nervous.The result is found identical to the result found in the study of N. Joseph, (2020), where the result they get from their respondents varies from mild, moderate, and severe levels. Additionally, P.S. Prabu, (2015), that higher secondary students are having a moderate level of academic stress, and irrespective of sub-samples higher secondary students are having moderate levels of academic stress.

Table 2. *Most Used Coping Mechanisms of Special Science Curriculum Students.*

Coping Mechanisms	*Frequency*	*Percentage*	*Rank Distribution*
Positive Reinterpretation and Growth	24	13.41%	2
Mental Disengagement	15	8.38%	5
Focus on and venting emotions	17	9.50%	4
Use of instrumental social support	8	4.47%	8.5
Active Coping	6	3.35%	10
Denial	3	1.68%	12
Religious Coping	49	27.37%	1
Humor	8	4.47%	8.5
Behavioral Disengagement	1	0.56%	14
Restraint	3	1.68%	12
Use of emotional social support	9	5.03%	7
Substance use	0	0%	15
Acceptance	10	5.59%	6
Suppression of Competing Activities	3	1.68%	12
Planning	23	12.85%	3
Total	179	100.02%	

Coping Mechanisms Commonly Used by Special Science Curriculum Students to Relieve Academic Stress.

The table shows the Coping Mechanisms of the Special Science Curriculum of Morong National High School. The data exhibit the ranking of the least to most used Coping Mechanisms of the Special Science Curriculum Students. “Religious coping” is the most commonly used Coping Mechanism having a 27.37% of SSC students using it and “Substance use” is the least used Coping mechanism having 0% of SSC students using it. It is suggested that brief interventions that include stress management, details about specific behavioral impairments, and principles of behavior management within a set of components are beneficial in improving coping strategies.Comparatively, the results identified in the study of Syeda Shaista Waheed, (2022), is identical, where it said that different type of coping strategies was used by students to overcome academic stress, it is also said that religious coping was seen as most used followed by social support and humor in alleviating stress. Additionally, this result indicated the student`s awareness of academic stress and the need for psychological support for them. Furthermore, this suggests that parents must receive help through family-centered supportive services that offer counseling, to decrease their stress levels by using appropriate coping strategies and other resources.

Table 3. *The Significant Relationship Between Academic Stress Level and Coping Mechanisms of the Special Science Curriculum Students*

Aspects	*R-Values*	*P-Values*	*Ho*	*Verbal interpretation*
Positive Reinterpretation and Growth	-0.309	0.799	FR	Not Significant
Mental Disengagement	0.927	0.245	FR	Not Significant
Focus on and venting emotions	-0.424	0.721	FR	Not Significant
Use of instrumental social support	-0.998	0.044	Rejected	Significant
Active Coping	-0.975	0.142	FR	Not Significant
Denial	0.568	0.615	FR	Not Significant
Religious Coping	-0.837	0.368	FR	Not Significant
Humor	0.798	0.412	FR	Not Significant
Behavioral Disengagement	-0.600	0.590	FR	Not Significant
Restraint	-0.803	0.406	FR	Not Significant
Use of emotional social support	-0.9993	0.028	Rejected	Significant
Substance use	-0.568	0.615	FR	Not Significant
Acceptance	-0.9997	0.015	Rejected	Significant
Suppression of Competing Activities	-0.996	0.057	FR	Not Significant
Planning	-0.965	0.169	FR	Not Significant

Significant Relationship Between Academic Stress Level and Coping Mechanisms of Special Science Curriculum Students.

The table shows the Significant Relationship between Academic Stress Levels and Coping Mechanisms of the Special Science Curriculum students of Morong National High School. The data presented that the relationship between Academic Stress Level and Coping Mechanisms namely Positive Reinterpretation and Growth with an R-value of -0.309 and P-value of 0.799, Mental Disengagement with an R-value of 0.927 and P-value of 0.245, Focus on and Venting Emotions with an R-value of -0,424 and P-value of 0.721, Active Coping with an R-value of -0.975 and P-value of 0.142, Denial with an R-value of 0.568 and P-value of 0.615, Religious Coping with an R-value of -0.837 and P-value of 0.368, Humor with an R-value of 0.798 and P-value of 0.412, Behavioral Disengagement with an R-value of -0.600 and P-value of 0.590, Restraint with an R-value of -0.803 and P-value of 0.406, Substance use with an R-value -0.568 of and P-value of 0.615, Suppression of Competing Activities with an R-value of -0.996 and P-value of 0.057, and Planning with an R-value -0.965 of and P-value of 0.169 is failed to reject the null hypothesis, this means that our sample did not provide sufficient evidence to conclude that the effect exist and therefore considered as not significant.

On the other hand, the Use of instrumental social support with an R-value of -0.998 and P-value of 0.044, the Use of emotional social support with an R-value of -0.9993 and P-value of 0.028, and Acceptance with an R-value of -0.9997 and P-value of 0.015 reject the null hypothesis, this means that an exact significance level is computed to describe the likelihood of observing the sample data assuming that the null hypothesis is true and therefore consider having a significant relationship with Academic Stress Level.

In this case, Hukom and Madrigal, (2020), implicate that teachers' role is prime movers that can help develop, build, and enrich students' academic-related tasks. Also, parents' active participation in any school-related activities and monitoring students' status is considered to add to the successes that the students may experience, especially in attaining holistic transformation.But aside from the Use of instrumental social support, Use of emotional social support, and Acceptance, the results presented contradict the findings of the study of Hukom and Madrigal, (2020), where they found that there has no significant relationship between Academic Stress Levels and Coping strategies with an R-value of -0.209 and a P-value of 0.818, therefore, rejecting the null hypothesis and indicated that it is not significant.

Conclusion

A lot of studies about academic stress and coping mechanism has been conducted by many researchers, and studies about this are not too uncommon to find. As years passed, many hypotheses and discoveries about academic stress and coping mechanisms have already been proven. For this reason, a lot of people are now able to perceive and understand what Academic stress and Coping mechanism are, but as many people were able to understand this, a lot of questions arise that is needed to be answered.

This study found that the Academic Stress Level of the Special Science Curriculum Students of Morong National High School is experiencing Moderate Stress in their schoolwork and activities. Additionally, under the findings of the study, it was found that "Religious Coping" is the most used Coping Mechanism, which obtained a 27.37% of the Special Science Curriculum Students using it. It's also been found that "Substance use" is the least used Coping Mechanism having a 0% of the Special Science Curriculum Students using it. Furthermore, following the result, it was found that the relationship between Academic Stress Level and Coping Mechanisms namely, Positive Reinterpretation and Growth, Mental Disengagement, Focus on and Venting Emotions, Active Coping, Denial, Religious Coping, Humor, Behavioral Disengagement, Restraint, Substance use, Suppression of Competing Activities, and Planning is not significant. On the other hand, the Use of instrumental social support, Use of emotional social support, and Acceptance has a significant relationship with Academic Stress Level.

Considering all the matters into account the researchers highly recommended that schools initiate a program that helps the students better perceive and understand the Level of Academic Stress of many students being experienced. Additionally, it is also suggested for schools, teachers, and other school staff teach the students more about proper coping strategies to help minimize the students' academic stress concerning their school activities and increase their academic performance. Moreover, considering that other coping mechanisms have a significant relationship with Academic Stress Levels, the researchers recommend that parents help their children in developing their Coping Strategies with Academic Stress whenever they occur. Lastly, it is recommended

that future researchers who will take this study explore the things that may help improve the students' Coping Strategies in relieving Academic Stress, along with identifying the factors of Academic Stress and Coping Mechanisms.

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