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Spiritual Meaning-Making and Collegial Solidarity in Sustaining Teacher Resilience

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Abstract

Teacher well-being has gained attention in educational research because increasing professional demands and institutional pressures have amplified teachers' experience of work-related stress. This study sought to explore the perceptions of elementary school teachers about occupational stressors, how they experience and manage occupational stressors, and the extent to which these coping mechanisms contribute to their professional resilience. Data were obtained through a qualitative interpretive case study design through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document review of eleven teachers with differing years of experience. Data were analyzed with the aid of Miles and Huberman's interactive model, including the stages of reduction of data, display, and verification through triangulation and member checking. The results showed that teachers' stress is largely due to administrative overload, lack of resources, and performance pressure. Yet, rather than causing burnout, many teachers found resilience in stress as they engaged in spiritual reflection, collegial collaboration and supportive infrastructure. These coping strategies were effective in maintaining emotional stability, professional ethics, and commitment/motivation toward teaching. The study illustrates how faith-based and community-oriented coping is an important culture-embedded coping tool that may aid in teacher wellness and support in challenging environments. The research thus sheds light on how teachers turn stress into professional growth. The results emphasize the significance of supportive school climates and holistic well-being programs, drawing on psychological, spiritual and social domains, for enhancing teacher strength of resilience and performance.

Keywords: Work Stress, Elementary School Teachers, Coping Strategies, Subjective Meaning, Qualitative Approach

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INTRODUCTION

Teaching is increasingly recognized as one of the most emotionally and cognitively demanding professions, characterized by a significant escalation in workplace pressure over the past decade. Data from the OECD (2020) indicates that nearly one-fifth of teachers experience high levels of stress, driven largely by administrative burdens and evolving classroom complexities. These mounting challenges, further intensified by rapid curricular reforms and societal expectations, directly undermine educators' mental health, job motivation, and instructional quality (Han et al., 2020). In the post-pandemic era, the need to simultaneously integrate new technologies and maintain student engagement has only exacerbated this strain (Symeonidis, 2024). Consequently, the study of teacher stress has become a critical focal point within educational psychology and organizational behavior research.

Building upon the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, research illustrates how an imbalance between high classroom demands and insufficient institutional support directly precipitates burnout and emotional

1 exhaustion (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017; Fiorilli et al., 2019). This "health impairment process" suggests that chronic stress functions cumulatively, with longitudinal data confirming that sustained imbalances significantly drive global teacher attrition and professional disengagement (Kim et al., 2019; Han et al., 2020). In response to these challenges, modern frameworks emphasize the dynamic interplay between multifaceted coping strategies including emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions and the development of teacher resilience (Jennings et al., 2017). Rather than viewing resilience as a static personality trait, current evidence suggests it is an adaptive capacity built through active processes like emotional regulation and social connectedness (Beltman et al., 2011; Jentsch et al., 2023). Ultimately, interventions focusing on these resources, such as mindfulness and self-compassion, are essential for reinforcing the cyclical mechanism of resilience and enhancing overall professional satisfaction (Payot and Nebria, 2025).

10 Despite the extensive literature on teacher resilience, several conceptual and empirical gaps persist, particularly regarding the Western-centric nature of current models that often overlook collectivist and spiritual coping resources (Roeser et al., 2013; Chang et al., 2023). While quantitative metrics provide a broad overview of stress, they frequently fail to capture the nuanced, socially embedded meanings and lived experiences that define a teacher's professional identity within specific institutional cultures. Furthermore, there is a critical lack of theoretical investigation into the transformative process of resilience specifically, how educators convert stress into professional progress rather than merely enduring it (Symeonidis, 2024). Historically, educational research has heavily relied on a 'deficit model' when examining teacher stress, predominantly conceptualizing occupational pressures as precursors to burnout and emotional exhaustion. This paradigm inherently positions teachers as passive recipients of systemic failures and overlooks the rich, culturally embedded coping mechanisms they actively employ. Addressing these deficiencies in the literature is essential to initiate a paradigm shift: transitioning from this deficit-oriented view toward a framework that recognizes 'Resilience as a Professional Competence.' In this advanced framework, resilience is not merely bouncing back from adversity, but an active, holistic competence grounded in spiritual meaning-making and collegial solidarity. By examining these proactive coping strategies, this study argues that occupational stressors, such as administrative overload and resource constraints, do not inevitably lead to attrition. Instead, when mediated by faith-based reflection and supportive peer networks, these challenges serve as profound catalysts for pedagogical growth, ultimately reinforcing teachers' emotional stability, professional ethics, and enduring commitment to their vocation. Current research also reveals a scarcity of data on how collective resources, such as spiritual dimensions and collegial solidarity, function within under-resourced educational settings (Nowell et al., 2017). Consequently, this study employs a qualitative interpretive case study to explore how elementary teachers navigate work-related stress within their unique sociocultural contexts, aiming to develop more sustainable, culturally grounded interventions.

6 This study aims to explore the multifaceted nature of teacher stress and resilience through three primary objectives: (1) to uncover the subjective meanings teachers attribute to workplace stress; (2) to examine how teachers utilize spiritual, social, and institutional resources as coping mechanisms; and (3) to understand how these coping processes shape their professional well-being and pedagogical identity. By employing a phenomenological lens, this investigation seeks to propose a context-oriented theoretical model that integrates personal belief systems, professional morality, and institutional support. This methodology ensures a deep alignment between the lived experiences of educators and the development of a grounded theory for resilience.

24 To address these existing gaps, this study investigates teacher well-being through the premise that stress and coping are inherently socially constructed phenomena deeply embedded in cultural norms. While recent scholarship has begun to shift toward sociocultural perspectives (Nowell et al., 2017; Symeonidis, 2024), this research advances the state of the art by providing a granular analysis of how spiritual and collective resources specifically function in low-resource, non-Western contexts an area that remains under-theorized. Practically, the findings offer targeted insights for school leadership and teacher training programs to foster supportive atmospheres where professional performance and emotional resilience are integrated. By moving beyond a purely psychological lens, this paper provides a localized framework for developing culturally grounded interventions to sustain teacher well-being in challenging educational environments.

METHOD

28 Figure 1 illustrates a systematic research methodology designed to investigate teacher stress, coping strategies, and resilience in elementary school settings. The flow begins with problem identification, which establishes the central issue of the study: high levels of teacher stress combined with limited resources in elementary schools. This stage is essential because it defines the practical and contextual relevance of the

research. By locating the problem within the everyday realities of schools, the study is grounded in an issue that is both socially significant and educationally urgent. The identification of this problem also provides the basis for narrowing the research focus toward understanding not only the existence of stress, but also its broader effects and underlying conditions.

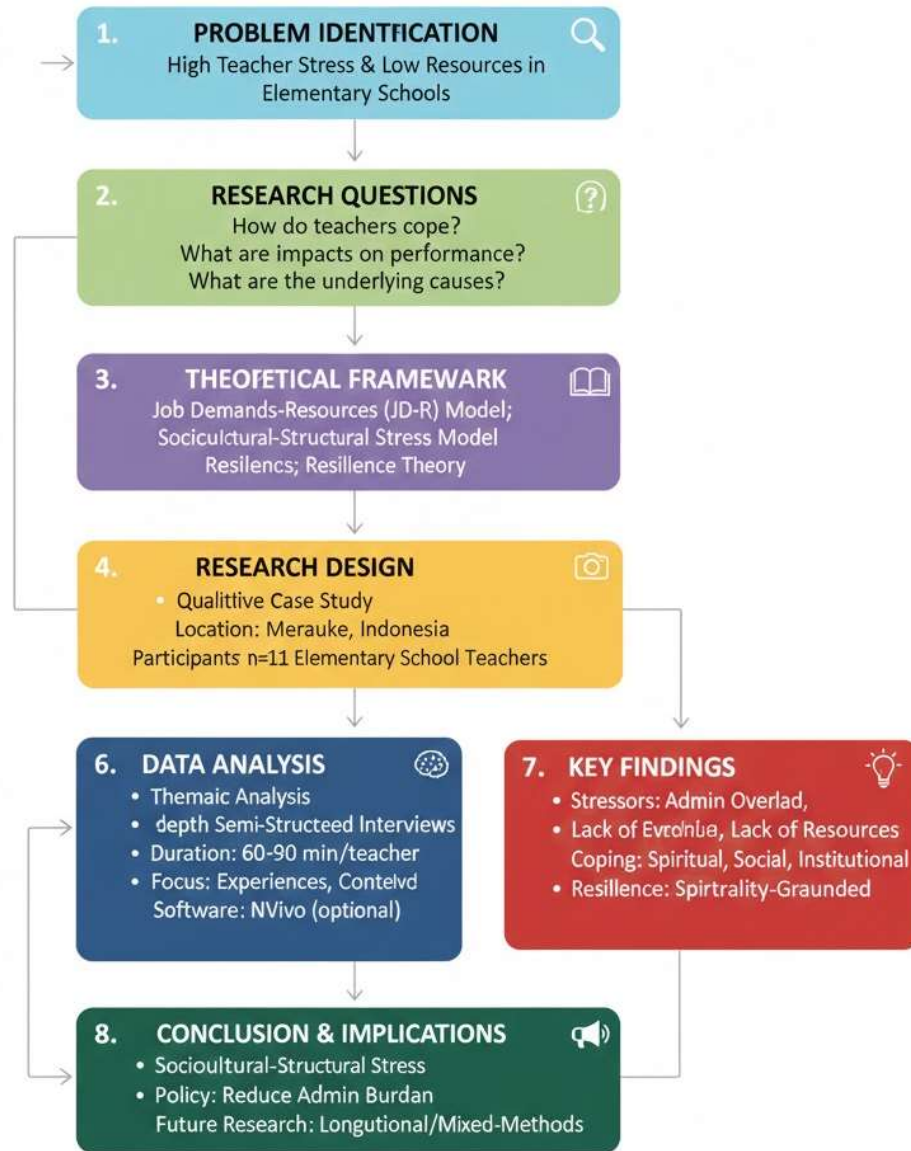


Figure 1. Research Methodology Flowchart

The second stage formulates the research questions, which serve as the conceptual guide for the entire inquiry. As presented in the flowchart, the study asks how teachers cope, what impacts stress has on performance, and what underlying causes shape their experiences. These questions move the research beyond simple description and toward analytical exploration. They ensure that the investigation addresses both process and consequence: the ways teachers respond to stress, the outcomes of such stress for professional functioning, and the structural or situational factors that generate these pressures. In methodological terms, this stage provides direction for data collection and analysis by clarifying what kinds of evidence are needed to answer the study's central concerns.

The theoretical framework constitutes the third stage and provides the interpretive lens through which the phenomenon is examined. The integration of the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) Model, Sociocultural-Structural Stress Model, and Resilience Theory creates a multidimensional foundation for the study. The JD–R Model is useful for explaining how excessive job demands and insufficient resources contribute to occupational strain. The Sociocultural-Structural Stress Model expands this understanding by situating stress

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within broader institutional, social, and contextual conditions. Resilience Theory, meanwhile, offers insight into how individuals sustain adaptation and coping despite adversity. Together, these frameworks strengthen the study by allowing teacher stress to be interpreted not merely as an individual psychological condition, but as an experience shaped by organizational, social, and personal resilience factors. This theoretical positioning ensures that the research remains analytically grounded and capable of generating meaningful interpretation from the findings.

To achieve the study's objectives, this research adopts a qualitative case study design, an approach particularly suited for exploring lived experiences, perceptions, and coping practices in depth rather than quantifying them. Conducted in Merauke, Indonesia, the study involves eleven elementary school teachers. By focusing on this specific, well-defined participant group, the research generates context-rich insights into how occupational stress is experienced within a localized educational environment. Consequently, this design captures subjective social realities and institutional challenges that broader, survey-based methods often overlook.

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Building upon this methodological framework, data was gathered through in-depth, semi-structured interviews lasting approximately 60 to 90 minutes per participant. This technique allowed teachers to articulate their experiences flexibly yet comprehensively, ensuring alignment with the research questions while leaving ample room for unexpected insights to emerge. The collected narratives were then subjected to thematic analysis, optionally aided by NVivo software to systematically manage and code the qualitative data. This rigorous analytical process was central to identifying recurring patterns and transforming raw interview material into coherent, actionable findings.

Emerging from this analysis, the results reveal several major occupational stressors, predominantly administrative overload and a lack of available resources. However, moving beyond mere exploration to explanation, the study highlights how teachers actively navigate these challenges through spiritual, social, and institutional coping mechanisms. Notably, the emergence of spiritually grounded resilience indicates that coping extends beyond practical or interpersonal strategies; it is deeply intertwined with the teachers' internal belief systems and meaning-making processes. Thus, the qualitative design successfully captures the nuanced ways teachers endure and interpret their professional realities.

Ultimately, these findings culminate in broader educational and policy implications. The study synthesizes the results to frame sociocultural-structural stress as a major explanatory theme, reinforcing the critical need to understand teacher well-being within its wider institutional context. Moving beyond theoretical description, the research advocates for actionable policy interventions, particularly the reduction of administrative burdens on educators. Furthermore, it sets the stage for future scholarly inquiry, suggesting that longitudinal or mixed-methods approaches could further illuminate the evolving dynamics of teacher stress and resilience over time, ensuring the research remains highly relevant for both educational practice and academic advancement.

Overall, the methodological flow presented in Figure 1 demonstrates a clear and coherent progression from problem recognition to practical implication. Each stage is logically connected: the identified problem generates focused research questions; the questions are interpreted through relevant theoretical frameworks; the qualitative case study design enables in-depth investigation; thematic analysis produces meaningful findings; and the conclusions translate those findings into implications for policy and future research. This structured sequence supports the research objectives by ensuring that the study remains conceptually grounded, methodologically appropriate, and analytically aligned from beginning to end. As a whole, the flowchart reflects a well-integrated research process capable of producing context-sensitive and theoretically informed insights into teacher stress, coping, and resilience.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study involved 11 elementary school teachers with diverse professional backgrounds. The profile of participants is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic of Participants ($n = 11$)

Variable	Category	Frequency (f)
Gender	Female	9
	Male	2
Employment Status	Civil Servant (ASN)	5
	Contract / PPPK	3
	Foundation / Honorary	3
Teaching Experience	Early Career (≤ 5 years)	3
	Mid-Career (6–14 years)	5
	Experienced (≥ 15 years)	3

As shown in Table 1, the participants are predominantly female, reflecting a gender distribution typical in primary education (Fiorilli et al., 2019). The inclusion of various employment statuses and experience levels provided a broad spectrum of perspectives on work-related stress and resilience.

The study involved eleven educators from public and private primary and junior high schools selected through purposive sampling. Most participants were female ($n=9$), reflecting the predominance of women in basic education. They represented diverse employment statuses, including Civil Servants ($n=5$), Contract/PPPK ($n=3$), Foundation ($n=2$), and Honorary teachers ($n=1$), providing varied perspectives on job security and institutional support in relation to work-related stress. Participants also ranged from early-career teachers to those with more than 15 years of experience, enabling the study to capture differences in coping mechanisms across career stages.

Themes of Findings

1. Types and Sources of Work Stress

Thematic analysis of interviews and field observations identified five recurring sources of work stress, primarily related to structural and systemic challenges. Participants emphasized inadequate school infrastructure as a major obstacle to effective teaching, often requiring them to provide materials independently, which increased daily fatigue. In addition, the transition to digital administration emerged as a significant burden, particularly for senior teachers, as expanded bureaucratic demands reduced their focus on students. Overall, these findings indicate that teacher stress is shaped by the cumulative impact of institutional limitations and increased personal effort.

2. Triggers of Work Stress

Analysis identified several interrelated triggers of work stress, with administrative overload and limited facilities emerging as the most dominant. Other significant stressors included student behavior, parental pressure, performance evaluation, ineffective time management, personal problems, limited professional capacity, and work overload. Table 2 and Figure 2 indicate that administrative workload is the most prevalent trigger of work stress among teachers, reported by 81.8% of participants, followed by facility and resource limitations at 72.7%. Other notable stressors include student behavior, parental pressure, and performance evaluation. These findings suggest that teacher stress is primarily driven by institutional and work-related demands rather than by individual factors alone.

Table 2. Main Stress Triggers among Teachers

Stress Trigger	Frequency	Participants Mentioning (%)	Representative Quote
Administrative overload	9	81.8	"I spend more time filling forms than preparing lessons."
Facility and resource limitations	8	72.7	"We lack adequate materials, which delays activities."
Student behavior	7	63.6	"Handling discipline every day drains my energy."
Parental pressure	6	54.5	"Parents often demand unrealistic academic results."
Performance evaluation	5	45.5	"We are constantly judged, which creates anxiety."

Figure 2 illustrates that limited facilities and infrastructure constitute the most prominent source of teacher stress, followed by work overload. Administrative demands, social or environmental pressures, and

professional expectations appear at a moderate level, while personal stressors are reported least frequently. These findings indicate that teacher stress is shaped by the interaction of structural constraints and individual coping demands, making it a systemic occupational challenge rather than solely a personal psychological issue. Overall, the themes highlight five main categories of stress: administrative workload, limited institutional support, classroom management, parental expectations, and resource constraints.

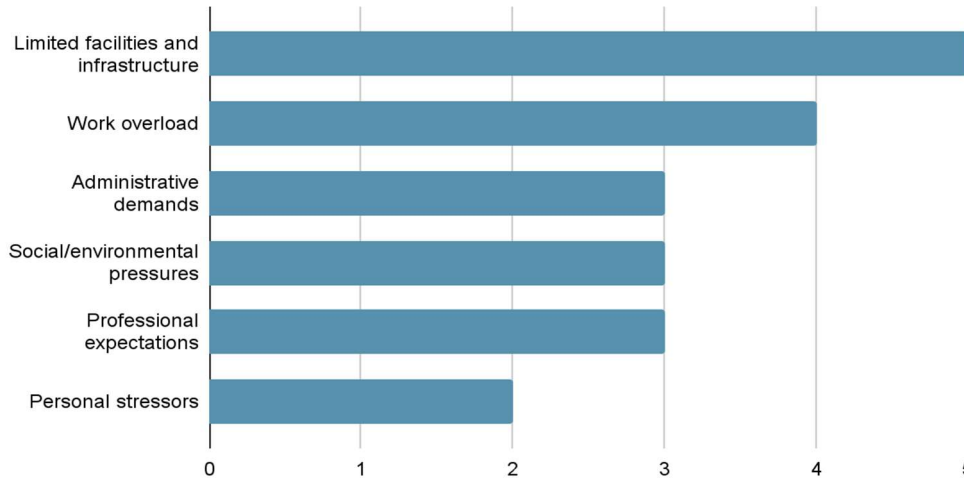


Figure 2. Source of Stress

3. Coping Strategies

Thematic analysis showed that teachers use multiple coping strategies to manage work stress across personal, social, and institutional dimensions. Personal and spiritual resilience emerged as the most prominent approach, with prayer, religious reflection, time management, and self-care frequently mentioned as sources of emotional stability. Social and collegial support also played an important role, as teachers relied on family support and informal discussions with colleagues to reduce emotional burden. At the institutional level, coping involved participation in professional development, coordination with school leaders, and feedback on policy implementation. Overall, the findings indicate that effective stress management depends on the interaction of individual resilience, social support, and institutional responsiveness.

Figure 3 depicts the coping strategies most frequently used by participants, including spirituality, collegial collaboration, and reflective self-regulation.

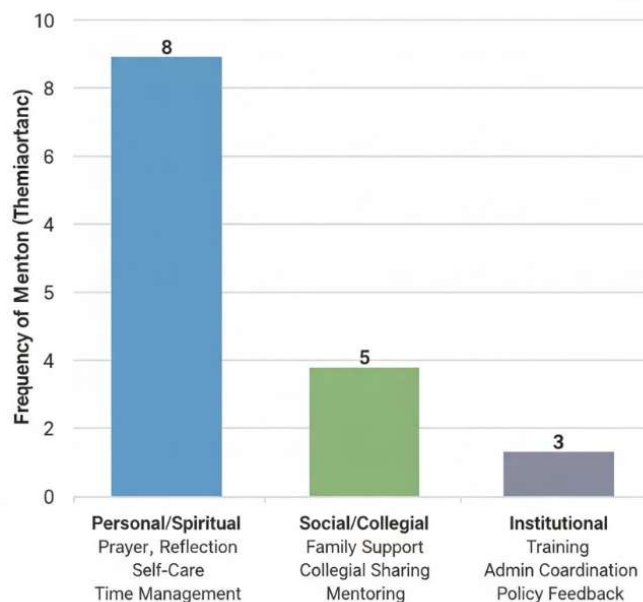


Figure 3. Coping Strategies Used by Teachers

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The reliance on prayer and meditation indicates that when institutional resources (such as facilities and formal support) are absent, teachers turn to transcendental resources to maintain emotional equilibrium. This goes beyond simple "stress relief"; it serves as a form of meaning-making where teaching is reframed as a spiritual calling or "vocation" rather than just a professional contract. As shown in Figure 3, this finding advances the current state of the art by demonstrating that in non-Western or spiritual contexts, the "Social-Spiritual" dimension can effectively compensate for the "Lack of Institutional Resources". This dynamic is often overlooked in standard Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) models (Symeonidis, 2024).

Furthermore, the emphasis on peer collaboration and mentorship (Jennings et al., 2017) reveals a collectivist resilience strategy. In environments with high socio-economic vulnerability, the "teacher's lounge" becomes a critical site for informal emotional de-loading and shared problem-solving. This suggests that teacher well-being is highly dependent on the quality of collegial solidarity, which acts as a protective buffer that absorbs the shocks of administrative and curricular pressures. This suggests that teacher well-being is highly dependent on the quality of collegial solidarity, which acts as a protective buffer absorbing the shocks of administrative and curricular pressures. Conversely, Institutional support recorded the lowest frequency (3), underscoring a systemic gap that necessitates stronger policy feedback and administrative coordination to support educators' mental health more effectively.

4. Work Stress Experiences

The findings show that teachers experience work stress as a multidimensional condition affecting both emotional well-being and professional functioning. Four main, interrelated dimensions were identified. First, administrative workload emerged as the most pervasive stressor, particularly excessive paperwork and reporting demands that diverted attention from instructional preparation, reflecting the bureaucratization of teaching (Chang et al., 2023). Second, inadequate resources and slow procurement processes intensified stress by increasing personal effort and contributing to resource depletion, consistent with the Job Demands-Resources model (Demerouti et al., 2021). Third, role ambiguity between pedagogical responsibilities and administrative duties created psychological tension and reduced professional efficacy, in line with Roeser et al. (2013). Fourth, parental and community expectations generated sustained pressure, requiring teachers to perform considerable emotional labor and maintain a constant public image (Fiorilli et al., 2019).

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5. Perceived Impact of Stress on Work Quality

The findings indicate that stress affected work quality in different ways. Most participants reported negative effects, including reduced creativity, emotional fatigue, and work disengagement, which weakened lesson planning, patience, motivation, and focus. However, some teachers responded through compensatory diligence and adaptive innovation, showing that resilience and coping orientation shaped whether stress functioned as a hindrance or a motivator. Table 3 summarizes these perceived impacts on instructional quality and work performance.

Table 3. Effects of Stress on Work Quality

Impact Domain	Description	Frequency	Participants (%)
Reduced creativity	Less innovation in lesson planning	8	72.7
Emotional fatigue	Decreased patience and enthusiasm	7	63.6
Work disengagement	Decline in motivation and focus	6	54.5
Compensatory diligence	Increased effort to counter stress	4	36.4
Adaptive innovation	Development of new teaching approaches	3	27.3

As shown in Table 3, most teachers reported negative effects of stress, particularly reduced creativity and emotional fatigue, although some transformed stress into motivation through adaptive strategies. This pattern is consistent with the Yerkes–Dodson law, which suggests that moderate stress may enhance performance whereas excessive stress impairs it (Han et al., 2020). The finding that teachers with stronger emotional regulation were more resilient also aligns with Lazarus and Folkman's transactional stress model (1984) and with recent evidence linking self-efficacy to more effective coping (Jentsch et al., 2023). The study further indicates a multi-layered coping pattern combining emotion-focused and support-seeking strategies, with spiritual practices such as prayer, worship, and meditation emerging as the most prominent means of cognitive reframing and emotional regulation.

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Furthermore, seeking social support serves as a critical survival strategy. Teachers rely on a "dual-support system" involving emotional aid from family members and instrumental aid from colleagues. Peer support, in particular, provides a vital "safe space" for emotional de-loading and the sharing of administrative shortcuts, which mitigates the impact of bureaucratic demands. While institutional adaptations such as formal coordination and professional training exist, they are perceived as secondary to these deeply embedded spiritual and social mechanisms.

What else these findings imply: While spiritual and social coping preserves well-being (preventing total burnout), it does not resolve the source of the stress. The maintenance of professionalism through psychological resilience is therefore a form of maladaptive professionalism: teachers remain in the role, but the quality of their instruction (creativity, focus) is demonstrably degraded. This highlights a professional cost to relying heavily on internal, emotion-focused mechanisms.

Structural Constraints and the "Dual-Burden" of Teaching

The thematic analysis of participant narratives reveals that teacher stress in this context is predominantly driven by administrative overload and a persistent lack of available resources. Participants frequently described experiencing a "dual-burden" of managing both rigorous pedagogical responsibilities and excessive clerical duties. These findings demonstrate that teacher stress is not a standalone psychological phenomenon but rather an emergent property of the intersection between structural constraints, professional demands, and socio-cultural pressures.

Contrary to traditional perspectives that often individualize stress as a matter of personal capacity, our data confirms that inadequate infrastructure and administrative burdens function as primary systemic determinants. This directly aligns with the stress profiles identified by Vercambre et al. (2009), who argued that job demands in educational settings are inseparable from the institutional context. Furthermore, this dual-burden has been exacerbated by the residual effects of the pandemic era, which, as synthesized in the Flores et al. (2022), significantly widened the gap between actual workloads and available institutional support. As observed in the data, this systemic pressure forces a transition in professional identity, from "pedagogical expert" to "bureaucratic technician", representing a significant shift that contributes directly to chronic strain.

Spiritual Meaning-Making as an Active Adaptive Mechanism

Despite the severe structural stressors, particularly in geographically isolated or resource-limited schools where educators lack adequate technical support systems, the findings show that teachers do not inevitably succumb to burnout. When faced with these infrastructural deficits, participants heavily engaged in spiritual reflection as a primary coping strategy. These localized conditions validate the arguments of Van Wingerden et al. (2017), who emphasize that in under-resourced environments, high job demands are primarily mediated by workplace spirituality and social resources.

However, our findings extend this thesis by highlighting the nuanced nature of this spirituality. The data demonstrates that spiritual coping is not merely an emotional escape or a passive acceptance of hardship; rather, it is an active adaptive mechanism. By framing their challenges through a lens of spiritual meaning-making, teachers are able to maintain emotional stability, preserve their professional ethics, and sustain their commitment to teaching despite ongoing systemic failures in infrastructure.

Collegial Solidarity and the Imperative for Systemic Reform

Alongside spiritual reflection, collegial collaboration emerged as a crucial, culturally embedded coping tool. The findings illustrate that teachers actively lean on peer support networks to navigate institutional pressures. This study suggests that while individual resilience is vital, it cannot fully compensate for the depletion of psychological resources caused by structural gaps. Therefore, the integration of personal resilience with collective solidarity acts as the ultimate buffer against occupational burnout.

Thus, the "what" of the present findings, multi-dimensional stress originating from infrastructure, workload, and social expectations, countered by collegial and spiritual resilience, resonates with recent evidence that teacher occupational strain is deeply embedded in institutional and community ecologies (Flores et al., 2022; Vercambre et al., 2009). This insight dictates a critical shift in how educational institutions approach teacher wellness. The findings imply that well-being interventions must move beyond isolated, individual stress-management workshops and move toward systemic reforms that address the "administrative managerialism" currently dominating the educational landscape.

Impact of Stress on Work Quality

The study's pattern of differentiated resilience some teachers maintaining or even improving performance while others show cognitive and emotional depletion reflects contemporary findings on heterogeneity in teacher responses to stress. Manina et al. (2023) found that coping profiles in distance teaching predicted job satisfaction differentially, indicating that coping resources determine whether stress translates into impairment or productive adaptation. Similarly, Van Wingerden et al. (2017) report that spirituality and meaning at work buffer negative outcomes of high job demands, supporting our observation that appraisal and internal resources mediate stress effects.

In short, the data suggest that appraisal processes (whether teachers construe stress as challenge versus threat) and available psychosocial resources are decisive for work quality an inference consistent with transactional models of stress but now reinforced by recent empirical studies showing specific buffers (spirituality, collegial support) in the period 2016–2025 (Manina et al., 2023; Van Wingerden et al., 2017).

Coping Mechanisms and Cultural Adaptation

A prominent and novel finding of this study is the dominance of spiritual and communal coping (prayer, reflection, family and peer support) in teachers' repertoires. Recent research corroborates the centrality of spiritual practices and workplace spirituality as protective factors: Van Wingerden et al. (2017) demonstrated spirituality's buffering role for teachers' turnover intentions; Pong (2022) found correlations between spiritual well-being and reduced burnout; and Chirico et al. (2020) documented benefits of prayer and spirituality in reducing teacher stress in an Italian sample. These studies indicate that in many cultural contexts, spiritual meaning-making functions as an accessible and effective coping pathway for educators.

Additionally, work by Sun et al. (2018) and Vercambre et al. (2009) shows that group-based, experiential interventions (e.g., sandplay, peer support) can enhance coping capacity parallel to the observed value of collegial sharing and institutional training in the present sample. Thus, the evidence suggests an indigenous, culturally congruent model of coping in which spiritual practices and close social networks operate alongside, or sometimes instead of, formal Westernized interventions (e.g., CBT, formal counseling).

Stress Effects on Pedagogy and Teacher–Student Interaction

Although most teachers retained lesson-planning routines and a professional facade, several reported diminished creativity and occasional emotional leakage findings aligned with literature on emotional labor and teacher well-being. Contemporary studies stress that while teachers may preserve instructional continuity, the qualitative features of teaching (creativity, responsiveness, emotional availability) are vulnerable to sustained stress (Flores et al., 2022). Importantly, recent evidence shows that interventions strengthening social-emotional competencies (including school-level mindfulness and SEL practices) can mitigate negative impacts on classroom climate (Manina et al., 2023; Vercambre et al., 2009). These findings support the practical implication that structural change (reducing administrative burden, improving infrastructure) should be combined with psychosocial supports to sustain both teacher well-being and pedagogical quality.

Fairness, Ethics, and Professional Commitment

Teachers' sustained commitment to fair evaluation and ethical practice, despite adverse conditions, aligns with recent accounts of teacher moral resilience. Studies in the post-2016 period report that when teachers possess strong meaning frameworks often religious or community-oriented they are more likely to maintain professional standards under stress (Pong, 2022; Van Wingerden et al., 2017). This underscores a critical "what else": moral and spiritual dimensions not only buffer stress but also preserve evaluative integrity, suggesting that ethical professionalism is a resilience resource warranting explicit attention in interventions.

Synthesis and Theoretical Implication

Taken together, the present findings and recent literature (2018–2023) point toward a context-sensitive model of teacher stress and coping in which (a) structural factors set the boundary conditions for stress exposure; (b) subjective appraisal and culturally available resources (spirituality, family, collegiality) determine adaptive versus maladaptive outcomes; and (c) institutional responses (training, workload management) moderate long-term effects on pedagogy and well-being. Recent empirical work supports each link in this chain (Manina et al., 2023; Vercambre et al., 2009; Van Wingerden et al., 2017), suggesting that theoretical models of occupational stress should more explicitly incorporate spiritual and communal resources when applied to non-Western or resource-constrained educational systems.

Implications for Theory and Practice

This study offers nuanced insights into the interplay between structural constraints and individual resilience within the specific context of under-resourced schools. Rather than proposing a universal model, this research provides a context-specific refinement of stress theory in educational psychology. By framing teacher stress as an interaction between structural pressures and cultural mediators, the findings suggest that the standard Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model could be enriched by incorporating "Workplace Spirituality" as a vital cultural resource. This study serves as a conceptual counterpoint to Western-centric models, highlighting how collective faith and spiritual meaning-making can function as significant, yet often overlooked, buffers against systemic institutional gaps in non-Western educational settings.

Practical and Policy Implications

Beyond theoretical contributions, the findings of this study carry significant practical and policy implications, demanding a critical shift in intervention focus from the individual to the institution. To alleviate chronic strain, administrative bodies must prioritize an immediate review and reduction of non-teaching-related documentation requirements. Concurrently, educational institutions should proactively foster peer-support networks and formally acknowledge the role of spiritual resilience. However, this acknowledgment must serve as a complementary component of teacher well-being rather than a substitute for necessary systemic reform. Ultimately, this research underscores that until the structural roots of administrative overload and resource constraints are decisively addressed, the personal toll on teaching quality that is manifested in diminished pedagogical creativity and focus, will persist, irrespective of an educator's spiritual or psychological hardiness.

Contribution to Psychological Practice

In addition to institutional reforms, this study offers substantial contributions to psychological practice within educational settings. By identifying spirituality and social connectedness as pivotal psychological protective factors, the research provides a culturally responsive framework for mental health support. Educational psychologists and school counselors can directly leverage these embedded coping mechanisms to design holistic interventions that deeply respect and integrate teachers' cultural and spiritual identities. Such tailored approaches ensure that psychological support systems are not only clinically sound but also contextually relevant, thereby enhancing their overall effectiveness in sustaining teacher well-being and professional resilience.

This study concludes that teacher stress is not merely an individual psychological phenomenon but a socially and structurally embedded experience. The findings indicate that effective coping emerges from a complex interplay between personal resilience, social support networks, and institutional empathy. By understanding this dynamic holistically, educational stakeholders can cultivate environments that sustain both teacher well-being and instructional quality, particularly in challenging, resource-limited contexts. Ultimately, this research underscores the necessity of moving beyond individualistic stress-management models toward collective and systemic solutions.

While this study offers valuable qualitative insights, several limitations must be acknowledged to guide future investigations. First, the relatively small, context-specific sample of eleven elementary teachers limits the generalizability of the findings to broader educational settings. Second, the cross-sectional nature of the data collection prevented a longitudinal analysis of how coping strategies might evolve over different academic cycles. Future research could address these gaps by employing mixed-methods designs to statistically investigate associations between stress, coping, and measurable performance outcomes. Furthermore, incorporating physiological correlates, such as heart rate variability or sleep quality, could enhance the understanding of how subjective experiences relate to objective health indicators.

The findings of this research carry significant implications for educational policy and teacher development programs. Theoretically, the study enriches the discourse on teacher resilience by offering a context-sensitive model that highlights the protective power of spiritual and communal coping. Practically, it suggests that school leaders should prioritize reducing bureaucratic overload and fostering "spaces of solidarity" rather than focusing solely on top-down administrative mandates. Policy-wise, there is a clear need for comprehensive well-being programs that are sensitive to local cultural values and provide psychosocial-emotional support. By implementing these insights, institutions can strengthen a teacher workforce that remains motivated and healthy despite systemic challenges.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion presented in this study, several key conclusions can be drawn. In conclusion, this study shows that work-related stress among elementary school teachers is a multidimensional issue shaped by institutional constraints, interpersonal relationships, and individual meaning-making processes. The findings indicate that teacher resilience is not merely an individual trait, but is strengthened through spiritual reflection, collegial solidarity, and supportive school environments. Therefore, promoting teacher well-being requires a holistic approach that integrates emotional support, culturally embedded spiritual values, and institutional improvement. However, since this study was conducted as a qualitative case study involving eleven teachers in Merauke, Indonesia, the findings are context-specific and should be interpreted with caution. Future studies are recommended to involve broader geographical and cultural contexts, apply longitudinal or mixed-methods designs, and include the perspectives of school administrators and policymakers to better understand how personal, cultural, and institutional factors contribute to teacher resilience.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Udur Maulina Manjur Pasaribu: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Project Administration, Writing - Original Draft, and Writing - Review & Editing and **Erny:** Formal Analysis, Data Curation, Visualization, and Supervision. All authors have read and approved the final version of this manuscript.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the authors upon reasonable request, subject to ethical approval and institutional regulations.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare no known financial conflicts of interest or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this manuscript.

DECLARATION OF ETHICS

The authors declare that the research and writing of this manuscript adhere to ethical standards of research and publication, in accordance with scientific principles, and are free from plagiarism.

DECLARATION OF ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

The authors declare that generative artificial intelligence (Gen AI) and other AI-assisted tools were used prudently, not excessively, during the research and preparation of this manuscript. Specifically, ChatGPT was used for language refinement, academic phrasing, structural editing, and clarity enhancement and Grammarly was used for grammar checking, grammatical accuracy, and stylistic consistency. All AI-generated material was reviewed and edited for accuracy, completeness, and compliance with ethical and scholarly standards. The authors accept full responsibility for the final content of the manuscript.

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