

Exploring the Quality of Life and Stress of Teachers' Experiences

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ABSTRACT

This research utilized a phenomenological research design to assess the lived experiences of teachers in terms of their quality of life and stress from the pandemic period. The results of the study generate three (3) major themes and two (2) subthemes for teachers and school heads such as: (1) pandemic experiences and communication, a) challenges of pandemic to teachers and b) school head valuing teachers' importance; (2) teachers and school heads' adjustments during pandemic, a) different faces of pandemic adjustment and b) empowering the teaching community; and (3) work and leadership behavior, a) stress of extra workload of teachers and b) empathy, sensitivity, and conducive workplace. These findings underscore the urgent need for leadership development programs that equip school heads with the skills to not only manage tasks but to genuinely support the human beings in their charge, thereby transforming schools into environments that foster resilience and well-being for all.

INTRODUCTION

Pandemic pressures fundamentally reshaped Philippine teachers' realities, especially in Bulacan, where public elementary educators endured remote modular/online shifts, reporting 37% poor performance from techno-overload and paperwork (Asio, 2021a; Oducado & Estoque, 2021; Rabacal et al., 2021; Mendoza et al., 2022). Nationally, 2020-2022 DepEd data showed 68% of teachers facing high stress (Paguio et al., 2021), with workloads spiking 52+ hours/week amid 75:1 ALS ratios persisting post-crisis (DepEd ALS stats, 2023). School heads' leadership proved pivotal: transformational styles cut burnout by 25-30% (Cabalida et al., 2022; Jeolongos, 2025), buffering familial conflicts and policy flux, while laissez-faire exacerbated overload (Klapproth et al., 2022; De Castro & Jimenez, 2022; Jimenez, 2021a; Asio & Bayucca, 2020; Asio & Jimenez, 2021a). HRM factors like retention incentives further amplified satisfaction (Mondejar & Asio, 2022).

In one province in the Philippines, 41% of teachers post-2022 exhibited elevated depression/anxiety (DASS-21 scores; Rabacal et al., 2021), with PSS-10 stress metrics 20% above norms due to unaddressed needs (Jimenez, 2021b). DepEd's MATATAG Agenda (2023) mandates wellness, yet only 15% of divisions implemented peer support by 2024, per CHED audits – leaving gaps in QoL (WHOQOL-BREF declines of 18% noted; Pantao et al., 2023). Positive outliers exist: 65% maintained routines like weekend religious tasks (Asio & Jimenez, 2021b), and healthy lifestyles correlated with 22% higher professional QoL (Orte et al., 2024).

While global studies link participative leadership to 25% exhaustion reduction (e.g., meta-analyses), Philippine evidence lacks causal depth on school heads' behaviors (directive vs. empathetic) against validated metrics during peaks, with untested interventions like stress inoculation despite DepEd calls (Cabalida et al., 2022). ALS contexts amplify this, with 70% facilitators unqualified and minimal PD (DepEd, 2024).

This phenomenological study among 15 Bulacan elementary teachers addresses these via: (1) lived QoL/stress experiences; (2) leadership influences; (3) wellness viability – informing DepEd-scaled programs to retain 80%+ teachers, aligning with SDG 4 and national education recovery.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Behavioral Leadership Theory

This study is grounded in the Behavioral Leadership Theory, a framework that shifted the focus of leadership research from who leaders are (their innate traits) to what leaders do (their observable actions). Pioneered by Dr. Rensis Likert, this theory posits that effective leadership is not defined by inherent personality but by a specific set of learned and replicable behaviors (Mulholland, 2019).

The fundamental premise of Behavioral Leadership Theory is that a leader's effectiveness is determined by their actions and management style. Instead of focusing on fixed traits, it identifies and categorizes leader behaviors into two primary, overarching dimensions of *Task-Oriented (Initiating Structure)*, which focuses on the work itself. Leaders high in this dimension prioritize goal achievement, clear role definition, establishing standard procedures, and closely

supervising performance to ensure tasks are completed efficiently, and *People-Oriented (Consideration)* which focuses on the well-being of the team. Leaders high in this dimension prioritize building trust, fostering mutual respect, showing concern for their subordinates' personal needs, and creating a supportive and inclusive work environment.

These two dimensions are not mutually exclusive and are often used to create a leadership grid, where different combinations result in distinct leadership styles. For example, a leader could be high in both task and people orientation, while another might be low in one and high in the other. This framework, as noted by Mulholland (2019), implies that effective leadership behaviors can be observed, taught, and developed.

The Behavioral Leadership Theory provides a powerful lens through which to examine the quality of life (QoL) and stress experienced by teachers. It moves beyond simply describing a principal's personality and instead allows us to analyze how their daily, observable behaviors directly shape the school's work environment—the very environment in which teachers either thrive or struggle.

Therefore, by applying the Behavioral Leadership Theory, this research can conduct an in-depth assessment of teachers' needs. It suggests that the challenges teachers face—their reported stress and diminished QoL—are not random occurrences but are systematically linked to the leadership behaviors of their school heads. Consequently, the findings will provide a clear rationale for the proposed wellness program. By identifying the specific leadership behaviors that contribute to teacher burden, the program can be designed not only to support teachers directly but also to inform and develop more supportive and effective leadership practices within the school, creating a more sustainable and healthy work environment.

Conceptual Framework

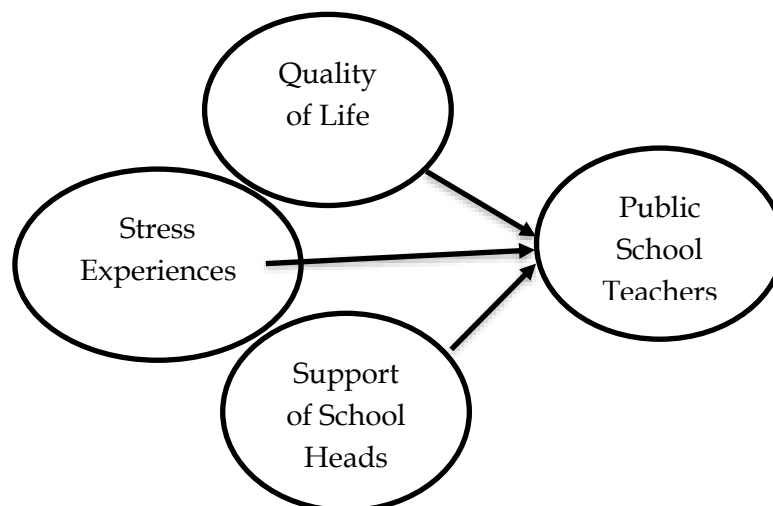


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a phenomenological research design to deeply explore and interpret the lived experiences, views, beliefs, motivations, and challenges of public secondary teachers concerning their quality of life and stress they experienced. It is a qualitative research method that involves a deeper understanding towards a phenomenon (Asio, 2021b). Phenomenology was strategically selected as it prioritizes understanding the essence of participants' subjective realities—capturing how teachers perceive leadership influences, workload overloads, and performance pressures—providing rich, contextual insights into the phenomenon that quantitative approaches alone cannot reveal. This design aligns perfectly with the study's aim to uncover nuanced barriers compromising quality of teachers' life and the stress they experienced, such as clerical task delegation and workload assignments.

RESULTS

The researcher explored the quality of life and stress experiences of teachers during the pandemic period. The respondents revealed that they experienced significant stress, a finding consistent with global literature documenting the pandemic's disproportionate impact on educators (Jimenez, 2021a; Klapproth et al., 2022). The study revealed three major themes: pandemic experiences and communication, teachers and school heads' adjustments during the pandemic, and work and leadership behavior. Each theme is discussed below in relation to previously published research.

Theme 1: Pandemic Experiences and Communication

The first theme captured the profound disruption caused by COVID-19 and the critical role of communication between school heads and teachers in navigating this crisis. The subtheme **Challenges of Pandemic to Teachers** revealed that educators faced unprecedented burdens, including adapting to new teaching modalities, work overload, and diminished quality of life. Participants described the pandemic period as affecting "the work of teachers and give burden to their work" (CBES/T1), requiring adaptation to "the new normal ways of teaching" (SAAES/T1). One teacher explicitly stated, "The pandemic truly affects my lifestyle. I had a lower quality of life and a higher level of stress from the pandemic that affected my health and wellness" (CES/T1).

These findings align with Rabacal et al. (2020), who documented that Filipino teachers experienced significantly diminished quality of life during COVID-19, with only 41% reporting normal depression and anxiety levels. Similarly, Oducado and Estoque (2021) found that 37% of teachers reported poor performance due to techno-overload and excessive paperwork. The present study's findings extend this literature by providing rich, phenomenological accounts of how these statistical trends manifested in teachers' daily lived experiences. The participants' descriptions of "endless additional tasks" and the need to "give quality education to all learners who were stuck in their houses for more than 2 years" (PIS/T1) corroborate Mendoza et al.'s (2022) findings regarding the overwhelming nature of modular and blended delivery systems.

Table 1. Thematic Analysis for the First Theme

Sub-theme	Significant Statements
1) Challenges of Pandemic to Teachers	<p><i>"Pandemic period affects the work of teachers and give burden to their work as well. This experience required as teachers to adapt and adjust in the new way of teaching."- CBES/T1</i></p> <p><i>"It made me hard to adopt to the new normal ways of teaching."- SAAES/T1</i></p> <p><i>"Life isn't normal when pandemic came and so the learners are having difficulties nowadays. It is a challenge to all teachers to give quality education to all learners who were stuck in their houses for more than 2 years. 21st century teachers need to address some changes of techniques and strategies to mold individuals after pandemic."- PIS/T1</i></p> <p><i>"Very challenging during pandemic in terms of engaging and empowering young people to put ideas into action."- RdCES/T2</i></p> <p><i>"The pandemic truly affects my lifestyle. I had a lower quality of life and a higher level of stress from the pandemic that affected my health and wellness Yes due to some work overload. This situation became a great challenge to my work as a teacher."- CES/T1</i></p>
2) School Head Valuing Teachers' Importance	<p><i>"I am a SPED teacher but if I am a school head, communicate to teacher in a way I will be able to determine how my teacher is going through in life. So, from then on, I can help her in dealing with what causes her stress and improves her life."- MCBMCS/T3</i></p> <p><i>"By direct and active listening to their situations, be able to anticipate their needs, especially when they verbalize it." - BEES/HT1</i></p> <p><i>"A school head plays a huge role in the management of stress and quality of life of teachers. I can help my teachers by maintaining an open communication line between me and my teachers. In this way, they are always free to speak their minds and, in that case, they will feel valued and appreciated." - MLES/T1</i></p> <p><i>"Give the teacher time to do the different task one at a time. Give work before the deadline period."- SAAES/T3</i></p> <p><i>"By providing meaningful evaluation through TA and establish open communication."- BPAES/ HT1</i></p>

"I see to it that I value their time for themselves. When it's not working hours, as much as possible I do not give them tasks to do. I also do not disturb them during Saturdays and Sundays or holidays to give them quality time with their families. I also make sure that tasks given to them are within their job descriptions as teachers and whenever there are instances that they must go beyond, I always ask for their thoughts first and consider their feelings." - PES/P1

Subtheme 2: School Head Valuing Teachers' Importance

A good school head always sees his or her constituents as partner in the The second subtheme, **School Head Valuing Teachers' Importance**, highlighted how administrative support—or its absence—shaped teachers' pandemic experiences. Participants emphasized that school heads who maintained "open communication lines" (MLES/T1), practiced "direct and active listening" (BEES/HT1), and respected teachers' personal time by not "disturb[ing] them during Saturdays and Sundays or holidays" (PES/P1) created environments where teachers felt valued and appreciated. One teacher articulated the ideal approach: "communicate to teacher in a way I will be able to determine how my teacher is going through in life. So, from then on, I can help her in dealing with what causes her stress and improves her life" (MCBMCS/T3).

These findings resonate with Ertürk's (2021) research demonstrating that school administrators' supportive behaviors significantly predict teachers' job satisfaction and subjective well-being. The present study extends this work by contextualizing these dynamics within the unique stressors of a global pandemic. Pressley (2021) similarly found that administrative support served as a critical predictor variable for teacher stress during COVID-19, with teachers needing support during this unprecedented time. The current findings suggest that supportive communication from school heads—characterized by active listening, anticipation of needs, and respect for boundaries—functioned as a protective factor against pandemic-induced stress.

Theme 2: Teachers and School Heads' Adjustments During Pandemic

The second theme captured the adaptive strategies employed by educators as they navigated the uncertain terrain of pandemic teaching. The subtheme **Different Faces of Pandemic Adjustment** revealed the multifaceted nature of this adaptation process. Participants described the pandemic period as "stressful" (CBES/T1), requiring daily adjustments while acknowledging that outcomes depended on "how an individual handles it" (PIS/T1). One participant provided a comprehensive assessment of the pandemic's cascading effects: "It will be difficult to provide basic services, which will decline the health status of an individual. Family members will not get prestigious jobs due to lack of good education. The limited amount of income will not be sufficient for saving of the family having low quality of life" (RdCES/T2).

These findings align with Forrest's (2022) observation that the pandemic posed severe challenges to health systems and economies worldwide, with young people particularly exposed to unemployment, lost earnings, and reduced

opportunities. The present study extends this analysis to the teaching profession, documenting how educators' quality of life directly impacted their "level of happiness and daily productivity at work" (CES/T1). The findings also corroborate In and Series's (2021) documentation of declining enrolment and educational disruption, as teachers grappled with the challenge of reaching students "stuck in their houses for more than 2 years" (PIS/T1).

Table 2. Thematic Analysis for the Second Theme

Subtheme	Significant Statements
1) Different Faces of Pandemic Adjustment	<p><i>"Yes. Because pandemic period is stressful and we need to adjust our everyday life."</i> - CBES/T1</p> <p><i>"Yes, because not having enough knowledge to make video lesson like the others."</i> - SAAES/T1</p> <p><i>"Yes, it does. But sometimes it depends on how an individual handles it. Every individual has an ability to make their work easier in their own simple way."</i> - PIS/T1</p> <p><i>"It will be difficult to provide basic services, which will decline the health status of an individual. Family members will not get prestigious jobs due to lack of good education. The limited amount of income will not be sufficient for saving of the family having low quality of life."</i> - RdCES/T2</p> <p><i>"Yes, having - low quality of life affects my everyday life because the quality of life is an important thing that affects the level of happiness and daily productivity at work."</i> - CES/T1</p>
2) Empowering the Teaching Community	<p><i>"Be a motivating force to improve their lives. Empathy is something that can help teacher they are not alone."</i> - MLES/T1</p> <p><i>"I know the importance of recognizing and addressing the harmful effects of stress on the well-being of my teachers. And as a school head, giving them continuous support in terms of providing them with different programs and activities that will help lessen their stress."</i> - MCBMCS/T3</p> <p><i>"I will give activities that the teachers less stress and encouraged them to joint fellowship, activities to boost their faith and sustain spiritual needs."</i> - SAAES/T3</p> <p><i>"I think making decisive decision and the ability to respond the problem."</i> - BPAES/ HT1</p> <p><i>"Active listening and being supportive to their needs align to effectively and efficiently finish their job."</i> - BEES/HT1</p>

"I see to it that I provide guidance to a particular task or work they are stressed at. Whatever help I could extend to make their work lighter, I would gladly share. If a task is not much of an urgency, then I tell them to work on it little by little until it's done."- PES/P1

Subtheme 2: Empowering the Teaching Community

The subtheme **Empowering the Teaching Community** illuminated the specific strategies school heads employed to support their staff. Participants described the importance of being "a motivating force to improve their lives" (MLES/T1), providing "continuous support in terms of programs and activities that will help lessen their stress" (MCBMCS/T3), and offering "guidance to a particular task or work they are stressed at" (PES/P1). One school head emphasized the importance of "active listening and being supportive to their needs align to effectively and efficiently finish their job" (BEES/HT1).

These findings support Jacoby's (2021) recommendation that prioritizing professional development opportunities targeting teacher growth and building upon demonstrated competencies is essential. Khan and Uzair-ul-Hassan (2021) similarly found that school heads should be trained on establishing democratic relationships and behaviors with teachers to heighten morale. The present study contributes to this literature by documenting how these empowering practices manifested during crisis conditions, with school heads facilitating fellowship activities, providing technical assistance, and making "decisive decision and the ability to respond the problem" (BPAES/HT1) central to their leadership approach.

Theme 3: Work and Leadership Behavior

The third theme examined the intersection of workload demands and leadership practices in shaping teacher stress and well-being. The subtheme **Stress of Extra Workload of Teachers** revealed the multifaceted nature of pandemic-era professional demands. Participants described stress from "teaching, more paper works, and the likes" (CBES/T1), with technology-related challenges particularly salient for those who were "not being a techy person" (SAAES/T1). One participant provided a comprehensive inventory of stressors: "Managing student behavior, taking on extra work due to staffing shortages, supporting students' mental health and well-being, and very low salaries" (RdCES/T2).

These findings align with Cabalida et al. (2022), who documented that teachers faced pervasive stressors including tight deadlines, techno-overload, and unaddressed emotional needs. The present study extends this research by capturing teachers' nuanced responses to these demands. While some participants experienced workload as "overwhelming and stressful" (CES/T1), others demonstrated remarkable resilience, noting that "it is part of work. As a professional you should know how to handle it. Handling pupils and paper works must be done with patience" (PIS/T1). This variation in response aligns with Asio and Jimenez's (2021b) finding that despite pandemic challenges,

teachers maintained adaptive coping strategies including proper sleep and religious practices.

Table 3. Thematic Analysis for the First Theme

Subtheme	Significant Statements
1) Stress of Extra Workload of Teachers	<p data-bbox="544 439 1388 506"><i>"Yes. Being a teacher is stressful. Stress with teaching, more paper works, and the likes."</i>- CBES/T1</p> <p data-bbox="544 551 1388 618"><i>"Not being a techy person stresses me a lot of stress me a lot."</i>- SAAES/T1</p> <p data-bbox="544 663 1388 775"><i>"Of course, yes!! Managing student behavior, taking on extra work due to staffing shortages, supporting students' mental health and well-being, and very low salaries."</i> - RdCES/T2</p> <p data-bbox="544 819 1388 887"><i>"Yes, I feel stressed as a teacher. It is inevitable when the tasks or the work is overload."</i>- CES/T1</p> <p data-bbox="544 931 1388 1043"><i>"There are times that I feel stressed, but it is part of work. As a professional you should know how to handle it. Handling pupils and paper works must be done with patience."</i>- PIS/T1</p>
2) Empathy, Sensitivity, and Conducive Workplace	<p data-bbox="544 1055 1388 1122"><i>"Yes, there is a need that teacher feels a school head's empathy towards life."</i> - MCBMCS/T3</p> <p data-bbox="544 1167 1388 1357"><i>"I am fully aware that my teachers are experiencing stress at work, it is inevitable. And as a school head, I will take an effort to provide them a positive working environment and part of this is accommodating them with care and acknowledging their needs as teachers."</i>- MLES/T1</p> <p data-bbox="544 1402 1388 1469"><i>"Yes... given enough time to spent weekend to her/his family ...I give equal task and division of work."</i>- SAAES/T3</p> <p data-bbox="544 1514 1388 1559"><i>"Offer constructive advice."</i>- BPAES/ HT1</p> <p data-bbox="544 1603 1388 1749"><i>"Yes. Make the workplace as conducive and as light as possible. Always provide technical assistance on tasks given to them. Make them feel that you work with them and that they are not working for you. Be a servant leader."</i>- PES/P1</p> <p data-bbox="544 1794 1388 1861"><i>"Yes, motivate them and support their strengths so that they can function more effective and efficiently."</i>- BEES/HT1</p>

Subtheme 2: Empathy, Sensitivity, and Conducive Workplace

The second subtheme, **Empathy, Sensitivity, and Conducive Workplace**, illuminated how school heads' interpersonal qualities shaped the work environment. Participants emphasized the importance of feeling "a school head's empathy towards life" (MCBMCS/T3) and the need for administrators to "provide them a positive working environment and part of this is accommodating them with care and acknowledging their needs as teachers" (MLES/T1). School heads described concrete practices including ensuring teachers had "enough time to spent weekend to her/his family" (SAAES/T3), offering "constructive advice" (BPAES/HT1), and making "the workplace as conducive and as light as possible" (PES/P1). One school head articulated a servant leadership philosophy: "Make them feel that you work with them and that they are not working for you. Be a servant leader" (PES/P1).

These findings resonate with De Castro and Jimenez's (2022) research demonstrating that school principals' attributes and 21st-century leadership skills significantly influence teacher performance. The emphasis on empathy and sensitivity aligns with Jimenez's (2021b) findings regarding the importance of emotional intelligence in educational leadership during crisis. The present study extends this literature by documenting specific practices through which school heads created psychologically safe environments, including providing technical assistance, motivating teachers, and supporting their strengths so they could "function more effective and efficiently" (BEES/HT1).

The findings also connect to broader literature on teacher well-being. Chitiyo and Pietrantoni (2019) emphasized that educators, like children, can experience traumatization when lacking social and emotional support. Mhlaba and Rankhumise (2022) found that mentoring raised awareness and equipped teachers with skills that strengthened their emotional and psychological well-being. The present study suggests that school heads who provided such support—through empathy, sensitivity, and conducive workplace conditions—helped buffer teachers against the psychological toll of pandemic teaching.

DISCUSSION

In summary, the three themes emerging from this study—pandemic experiences and communication, teachers and school heads' adjustments, and work and leadership behavior—align with and extend existing literature on teacher stress, quality of life, and educational leadership during crisis. The findings underscore that: (1) Pandemic experiences significantly diminished teachers' quality of life and elevated stress levels (consistent with Rabacal et al., 2020; Oducado & Estoque, 2021), with effective communication from school heads serving as a protective factor (consistent with Pressley, 2021; Ertürk, 2021); (2) Adaptive adjustments required both individual resilience and institutional support, with empowering leadership practices—including continuous support programs, active listening, and technical assistance—facilitating teacher adaptation (consistent with Jacoby, 2021; Khan & Uzair-ul-Hassan, 2021); and (3) Work and leadership behavior intersected in complex ways, with workload stressors compounded by pandemic demands while empathetic, sensitive

leadership created conducive work environments that buffered against stress (consistent with Cabalida et al., 2022; De Castro & Jimenez, 2022; Mhlaba & Rankhumise, 2022).

These findings collectively underscore the urgent need for leadership development programs that equip school heads with skills to not only manage tasks but genuinely support the human beings in their charge. As the Behavioral Leadership Theory suggests, such behaviors can be observed, taught, and developed (Mulholland, 2019), offering a pathway toward transforming schools into environments that foster resilience and well-being for all.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on this study's findings, the pandemic greatly lowered teachers' quality of life and increased their stress, as they struggled with new teaching methods, excessive technology use, endless paperwork, and the challenge of teaching students who were stuck at home for years. However, good communication from school heads helped ease this burden—when school heads listened well, respected teachers' personal time such as weekends and holidays, and communicated openly, teachers felt valued and experienced reduced stress. Supportive leadership further made adaptation easier, as effective school heads helped teachers adjust by offering continuous support, group activities, technical assistance, and quick problem-solving; being kind, sensitive, and creating a positive work environment were essential, not optional. Although workload remained heavy—with too much work, lack of staff, the need to support students' mental health, and low pay being major stressors—teachers coped differently: some felt overwhelmed, while others showed patience and professionalism, demonstrating that both personal coping ability and school support matter. Finally, leadership style directly affected teacher outcomes, as school heads who acted as servant leaders—working with teachers instead of making teachers work for them—created a safe and positive workplace, and their empathy and sensitivity led to less teacher stress and better job performance.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. For School Heads and Administrators. Institutionalize open and empathetic communication by establishing regular, structured check-ins with teachers that prioritize active listening, creating safe spaces where teachers can verbalize stressors without fear of judgment or reprisal.
2. For Educational Policy Makers and District Leaders. Establish crisis-responsive policies by developing formal guidelines for future crises that explicitly address teacher workload, mental health support, and communication protocols between school heads and teachers.

FURTHER STUDY

For Future Researchers. Conduct longitudinal studies that investigate whether the stress and quality-of-life effects observed during the pandemic

persist in post-pandemic settings and identify which leadership practices have lasting protective effects. Also, explore resilience factors by examining why some teachers adapt successfully while others remain overwhelmed, focusing on individual, organizational, and community-level variables.

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