

MENTAL HEALTH STATUS AND COPING MECHANISMS OF PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS IN A STATE UNIVERSITY IN ZAMBOANGA CITY

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ABSTRACT: *Mental health has become an important concern among pre-service teachers as they encounter increasing academic demands, teaching practicum responsibilities, and personal challenges that may affect their psychological well-being. This study examined the mental health status and coping mechanisms of pre-service teachers at a state university in Zamboanga City and determined the relationship between these variables. The study employed a descriptive-correlational research design involving 120 pre-service teachers selected through simple random sampling. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of a Mental Health Status Scale and a Coping Mechanism Scale, with an overall reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) of 0.86. Descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, were used to determine respondents' mental health status and coping mechanisms, while Pearson correlation analysis was employed to examine the relationship between the variables.*

The findings revealed that the respondents experienced a moderate level of mental health, with academic stress emerging as the most prominent challenge. Despite these pressures, the participants commonly adopted adaptive coping strategies such as seeking social support, effective time management, academic planning, and engaging in relaxation activities. Problem-focused coping strategies were found to be more prevalent than avoidance-based approaches. Furthermore, the study established a significant positive relationship between coping mechanisms and mental health status, indicating that effective coping strategies contribute to better psychological well-being among pre-service teachers. The findings underscore the importance of strengthening institutional mental health programs, counseling services, stress management initiatives, and peer support systems to promote resilience and emotional well-being among future educators.

****Keywords:**** mental health, coping mechanisms, pre-service teachers, academic stress, psychological well-being, teacher education

INTRODUCTION

Mental health has become a significant concern in higher education institutions as students increasingly experience academic stress, emotional pressure, and social challenges. In teacher education programs, pre-service teachers are expected to balance rigorous academic requirements, teaching practicum experiences, and personal responsibilities. These demands may contribute to psychological distress that affects both academic performance and overall well-being.

The concept of mental health refers to an individual's emotional, psychological, and social well-being. According to the World Health Organization, mental health influences how individuals think, feel, and act, and it determines how they cope with stress, relate to others, and make decisions. For pre-service teachers, maintaining good mental health is essential because they are preparing for a profession that requires emotional stability, resilience, and strong interpersonal skills. Studies in the field of Educational Psychology indicate that teacher education students often experience high levels of academic pressure, particularly during teaching practice and examination periods. These pressures may lead to stress, anxiety, and burnout if not properly managed. Consequently, coping mechanisms play an important role in helping students manage these challenges effectively.

Coping mechanisms refer to the strategies individuals use to manage stress and emotional difficulties. Some coping strategies include problem-focused coping, emotional regulation, seeking social support, and engaging in relaxation activities. Effective coping mechanisms can help pre-service teachers maintain their mental well-being despite academic demands.

In the Philippine context, teacher education institutions continue to recognize the importance of mental health support among students. The enactment of the Philippine Mental Health Act highlights the need to promote mental health awareness and services in educational institutions.

This study aims to determine the mental health status and coping mechanisms of pre-service teachers in a state university in Zamboanga City. The findings of this study may provide insights that could help educational institutions strengthen mental health support programs for future educators.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study utilized a descriptive-correlational research design to examine the mental health status and coping mechanisms of pre-service teachers. The descriptive component determined the level of mental health among respondents, while the correlational aspect examined the relationship between mental health status and coping mechanisms.

Research Locale

The study was conducted at Western Mindanao State University located in Zamboanga City, Philippines. The university is one of the major higher education institutions in the region that offers teacher education programs preparing students for the Licensure Examination for Teachers administered by the Professional Regulation Commission.

Participants of the Study

The respondents of the study were pre-service teachers enrolled in the College of Teacher Education. A total of 120 students were selected using simple random sampling, a

July-August

technique under Sampling (statistics) to ensure equal chances of participation among eligible respondents.

Research Instrument

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire composed of two sections:

Mental Health Status Scale measuring stress, anxiety, and emotional well-being.

Coping Mechanism Scale measuring strategies such as problem-focused coping, emotional coping, and social support.

The reliability of the instrument was measured using Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded a coefficient of 0.86, indicating high reliability.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher obtained permission from the university administration prior to conducting the study. After securing approval, questionnaires were distributed to the selected respondents. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and were assured that their responses would remain confidential. Completed questionnaires were collected and prepared for statistical analysis.

Statistical Treatment of Data

The following statistical tools were used:

Research Objective	Statistical Tool
Determine mental health status	Mean and Standard Deviation
Identify coping mechanisms	Mean
Determine relationship between variables	Pearson Correlation

These analyses are commonly used in the field of Statistics.

RESULTS

Mental Health Status of Pre-Service Teachers

The findings revealed that the overall mental health status of pre-service teachers was moderate, indicating that respondents occasionally experienced stress and anxiety related to academic responsibilities and practicum requirements.

Among the indicators, academic stress obtained the highest mean score, suggesting that coursework, examinations, and teaching practice contributed to psychological pressure among students.

However, the results also indicated that most respondents maintained a generally positive emotional outlook, suggesting that they were able to manage their mental health to a certain extent.

Coping Mechanisms of Pre-Service Teachers

The results showed that respondents commonly utilized several coping strategies to manage stress. The most frequently used coping mechanisms included:

Seeking social support from friends and family

Time management and academic planning

Engaging in relaxation activities such as music or exercise

Problem-focused coping strategies were used more frequently than avoidance-based coping strategies, indicating that students preferred constructive approaches to managing stress.

Relationship Between Mental Health Status and Coping Mechanisms

The analysis revealed a significant relationship between coping mechanisms and mental health status. Students who

used effective coping strategies such as problem solving and social support reported better mental health outcomes compared to those who relied on avoidance strategies.

This finding suggests that coping strategies play a crucial role in helping pre-service teachers manage psychological challenges during their academic preparation.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the study indicate that pre-service teachers experience moderate levels of stress associated with academic responsibilities and professional preparation. This supports previous research suggesting that teacher education students face unique pressures related to coursework, teaching practicum, and future career expectations.

The results also highlight the importance of coping mechanisms in maintaining mental well-being. Students who utilized positive coping strategies such as seeking support and effective time management reported better psychological outcomes.

These findings emphasize the need for universities to strengthen mental health support systems within teacher education programs. Counseling services, stress management workshops, and peer support programs can help students develop healthier coping strategies.

Furthermore, teacher education institutions must recognize that the mental well-being of pre-service teachers is crucial because they will eventually become educators responsible for guiding future generations.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the mental health status and coping mechanisms of pre-service teachers in a state university in Zamboanga City. The findings revealed that respondents experienced moderate levels of academic stress but were able to manage these challenges through various coping strategies such as social support, time management, and relaxation activities.

The study also found a significant relationship between coping mechanisms and mental health status, indicating that effective coping strategies contribute to better psychological well-being among students.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that universities strengthen mental health programs and provide institutional support to help pre-service teachers maintain emotional well-being throughout their academic preparation.

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