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Relationship of Pedagogical Barriers and Coping Strategies to the Job Satisfaction of Public School Teachers

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ABSTRACT

Stress and Coping Theory suggests that teachers' satisfaction depends both on the demands they face and on how they cope with them. This descriptive-correlational study examined the relationship of pedagogical barriers and coping strategies to the job satisfaction of 170 public school personnel in Alabel District, DepEd Schools Division of Sarangani Province, during School Year 2025–2026. Respondents were selected by stratified random sampling and answered pilot-tested scales on barriers in mathematics teaching, coping strategies, and job satisfaction (α = .87 to .91). Data were analyzed using weighted means, chi-square, and correlation. Barriers were Very High in four of five domains, led by socio-economic barriers (*M* = 3.46), lack of teaching resources (*M* = 3.43), and curriculum constraints (*M* = 3.39); learners' financial difficulties (3.52) and the need to improvise (3.51) were the most pressing indicators. Coping strategies were Very High (*M* = 3.48 to 3.56), with adaptive and resilience-based strategies strongest and colleague feedback and differentiation weakest. Job satisfaction was Very High (*M* = 3.32 to 3.54), anchored in collegial relationships and lowest for career advancement. All profile variables except sex were significantly associated with the three variables. Barriers, coping strategies, and job satisfaction were significantly interrelated ($r = .68$, $p = .001$), although pairwise coefficients were not reported. The results are consistent with a stress process in which active coping preserves satisfaction under heavy, largely structural demands. A professional development program that strengthens collaborative coping and institutional support is proposed.

Introduction

Job satisfaction is one of the most important conditions for keeping good teachers in the schools that need them most. Teachers who are satisfied with their work environment, opportunities for growth, relationships, and recognition are more engaged and less likely to leave, whereas chronic stress erodes engagement and fuels the wish to quit (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017; Kokkinos, 2007). In schools serving Indigenous Peoples (IP) learners, the sources of stress are numerous: learners' poverty, scarce materials, a crowded curriculum, low learner motivation, and cultural and linguistic distance between teacher and class (Cubi & Rollo, 2025; Nazarita & Morales, 2025).

Whether such conditions reduce satisfaction depends partly on how teachers respond to them. Stress and Coping Theory holds that the effect of a stressor depends on how it is appraised and on the coping efforts it triggers (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Teachers who solve problems adaptively, seek support from colleagues, build positive classrooms, vary their instruction, and

stay resilient may keep their satisfaction intact despite heavy demands (Chan et al., 2021; Amoroso, 2025). This reasoning implies that barriers and coping should both be related to satisfaction, but the relationship has rarely been tested among Filipino teachers in IP contexts.

This study examined the relationship of pedagogical barriers and coping strategies to the job satisfaction of public school teachers in Alabel District, DepEd Schools Division of Sarangani Province, in School Year 2025–2026. It asked: What barriers in mathematics teaching do teachers perceive, and how severe are they? What coping strategies do they use? How satisfied are they with their jobs? Which personal and professional characteristics are related to each? Are barriers, coping strategies, and job satisfaction significantly related? The findings informed a professional development program for the district.

Literature Review

Stress, appraisal, and coping. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) defined coping as the changing cognitive and behavioral efforts people make to manage demands appraised as taxing or exceeding their resources. Problem-focused coping acts on the source of stress, and emotion-focused coping regulates the feelings it produces. Among teachers, cross-cultural studies identify workload, student behavior, and lack of resources as common stressors and show that problem-solving and social support are effective responses (Chang & Chan, 2015). Teachers who coped flexibly during the COVID-19 crisis showed greater resilience (Chan et al., 2021), and coping repertoires that combine professional support with problem-solving characterize resilient teachers in diverse Philippine schools (Amoroso, 2025; Suttles, 2024).

Pedagogical barriers as stressors. The barriers studied here are recurring stressors in mathematics teaching. A mismatch between teaching styles and learners' preferred modes frustrates learners and complicates instruction (Cardino Jr., 2020; Cardino Jr. & Ortega-Dela Cruz, 2020; Ako et al., 2025). Shortages of materials, technology, and infrastructure force constant improvisation (Ansah et al., 2020; Akon-Yamga et al., 2024; Pasayloon, 2023). Learners' anxiety and negative attitudes reduce participation (De-la-Peña, 2021; Rehman, 2025). Overloaded and rigid curricula pressure teachers to rush (Karikari et al., 2020; Brantuo et al., 2023), and learners' poverty limits their readiness and attendance (Ng et al., 2021; Uddin, 2024).

Coping strategies as resources. Teachers draw on adaptive problem-solving, including models that integrate mastery learning and problem-based instruction (Kantathanawat et al., 2025; Didham, 2020); professional development and peer collaboration, which provide skills as well as emotional support (Wabingga, 2025; Long, 2024; Victorian Department of Education, 2025); positive classroom environments, which reduce disruptions and buffer burnout (Smith & Hoy, 2022; Classroom Management Center, 2025); varied instructional approaches, which raise learner engagement and lower teacher burnout (Shi et al., 2025; Yang, 2024); and a positive, resilient outlook supported by social connectedness (Fabrigas & Paglinawan, 2025; Versfeld, 2025).

Job satisfaction as an outcome. Satisfaction reflects how teachers appraise their working conditions, growth opportunities, relationships, and recognition. Stress and low self-efficacy predict emotional exhaustion and motivation to leave (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017), job

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stressors predict burnout (Kokkinos, 2007), and burnout is linked to broader mental health problems among teachers (Ferguson, 2022). Collegial support and positive classroom climates, in contrast, sustain commitment (Smith & Hoy, 2022). Constructivism provides the pedagogical rationale for the coping strategies studied, since learner-centered and adaptive teaching helps learners construct understanding even under constraint (Simon, 1995; Mangwende & Maharaj, 2020; Jamaluddin, 2024).

Methodology

Design and respondents. The study used a descriptive-correlational design. Through stratified random sampling, 170 respondents were drawn from public schools serving IP learners in Alabel District: 15 school heads, 50 non-IP mathematics teachers, 10 IP teachers, and 95 other public school teachers.

Instruments. The questionnaire contained a profile sheet (age, sex, civil status, ethnicity, educational attainment, school, years in teaching, grade level handled, and number of seminars and trainings) and three Likert-type scales. The barriers scale, adapted from Ako et al. (2025), Cardino Jr. (2020), and Nazarita and Morales (2025), covered five domains. The coping scale, based on Stress and Coping Theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and recent applications (Chan et al., 2021; Cubi et al., 2024), covered five dimensions. The job satisfaction scale covered work environment, professional growth and development, interpersonal relationships, and recognition and motivation. Means were interpreted as Very High (3.26–4.00), High (2.51–3.25), Fair (1.76–2.50), or Low (1.00–1.75). In a pilot test with 30 teachers from Malapatan District, Cronbach's alpha was .89 for barriers, .91 for coping, and .87 for job satisfaction.

Procedure. After the Schools Division Superintendent granted permission, the researchers met school heads and teachers, explained the study, and obtained consent. Questionnaires were administered on dates arranged with each school to avoid disrupting classes. Initial hesitation, conflicts with community events, and the remoteness of some IP schools were managed through assurances of confidentiality, flexible scheduling, and planned travel.

Analysis. Frequencies, percentages, and weighted means were computed. The Shapiro–Wilk test indicated normal distributions for coping (p = .112) and job satisfaction (p = .145) but not for barriers (p = .031). Chi-square tests were used for profile relationships and correlation for the relationship among the three main variables, with α = .05.

Ethics. The study was approved by an ethics review committee. Participation was voluntary and based on informed consent, data were anonymized and secured in accordance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012, and the instruments were reviewed for cultural sensitivity with input from community leaders.

Results

The Respondents

Most respondents were aged 30 to 49 (74.12%), female (61.18%), and married (64.71%). All had pursued graduate study: 37.65% had master's units, 36.47% a master's degree, 22.35% doctoral units, and 3.53% a doctorate. Experience was concentrated at 6 to 10 years (34.12%)

and 11 to 15 years (32.94%). Over half taught in elementary schools (55.29%), and 64.70% had attended seven or more relevant seminars and trainings. Cebuano was the most common ethnicity (54.12%), and 29.41% were classified as non-IP.

Pedagogical Barriers

Table 1

Pedagogical Barriers in Mathematics Teaching per Indicator

Domain and Indicator	Mean	Level
Mismatch between teaching and learning styles	**2.81**	**High**
Students struggle when traditional methods are used	2.91	High
Students' performance suffers due to mismatched approaches	2.88	High
Teaching style often conflicts with students' preferred learning styles	2.84	High
Difficulty adapting lessons to diverse learning styles	2.76	High
Rarely adjusts teaching methods to individual needs	2.65	High
Lack of appropriate teaching resources	**3.43**	**Very High**
Often improvises due to limited resources	3.51	Very High
Resource shortages hinder lesson delivery	3.47	Very High
Lacks sufficient instructional materials for math lessons	3.42	Very High
Technology resources are inadequate for effective teaching	3.38	Very High
Students lack access to supplementary materials	3.36	Very High
Negative attitudes and low motivation	**3.28**	**Very High**
Negative attitudes affect classroom participation	3.34	Very High
Students' lack of confidence impacts performance	3.30	Very High
Students show little interest in mathematics	3.28	Very High
Struggles to inspire enthusiasm for math	3.26	Very High
Motivation levels are low during math lessons	3.21	High
Curriculum-related constraints	**3.39**	**Very High**
The curriculum is overloaded with content	3.45	Very High
Feels pressured to cover topics quickly	3.41	Very High
Time allocation is insufficient for mastery	3.39	Very High
Curriculum rigidity reduces flexibility in teaching	3.36	Very High
Curriculum demands limit innovative teaching	3.33	Very High
Socio-economic barriers	**3.46**	**Very High**
Students' financial difficulties affect learning	3.52	Very High
Poverty impacts students' access to resources	3.48	Very High
Students face challenges beyond the classroom	3.46	Very High
Lack of parental support hinders progress	3.44	Very High
Socio-economic issues reduce attendance	3.39	Very High

Note. 3.26–4.00 = Very High; 2.51–3.25 = High; 1.76–2.50 = Fair; 1.00–1.75 = Low.

Barriers were Very High in four domains and High in one (Table 1). In descending order, the domains were socio-economic barriers (M = 3.46), lack of teaching resources (M = 3.43), curriculum-related constraints (M = 3.39), negative attitudes and low motivation (M = 3.28), and mismatch between teaching and learning styles (M = 2.81). The highest single indicators were learners' financial difficulties (3.52), improvising due to limited resources (3.51), and poverty limiting access to resources (3.48); the lowest were rarely adjusting methods to individual needs (2.65) and difficulty adapting lessons to diverse learning styles (2.76).

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Coping Strategies and Job Satisfaction

Table 2

Coping Strategies and Job Satisfaction of the Respondents by Dimension

Variable	Dimension	Mean	Level
Coping strategies	Adaptive problem-solving techniques	3.55	Very High
	Professional development and peer collaboration	3.49	Very High
	Building positive classroom environments	3.56	Very High
	Employing varied instructional approaches	3.48	Very High
	Maintaining a positive attitude and resilience	3.55	Very High
Job satisfaction	Work environment	3.40	Very High
	Professional growth and development	3.32	Very High
	Interpersonal relationships	3.54	Very High
	Recognition and motivation	3.40	Very High

Note. 3.26–4.00 = Very High; 2.51–3.25 = High; 1.76–2.50 = Fair; 1.00–1.75 = Low.

All coping dimensions were Very High (Table 2), ranging from 3.48 for varied instructional approaches to 3.56 for building positive classroom environments. The highest coping indicators were adjusting strategies when problems arise (3.62), encouraging respect among students (3.61), and staying motivated despite challenges (3.59); the lowest were seeking feedback from colleagues (3.42) and differentiating instruction (3.44). All job satisfaction indicators were also Very High, from 3.32 for professional growth and development to 3.54 for interpersonal relationships. Good relationships with colleagues (3.58) was the highest satisfaction item and opportunities for career advancement (3.28) the lowest.

Profile Variables and the Main Variables

Table 3

Significance of Chi-Square Tests Between Profile Variables and the Main Variables

Profile Variable	Barriers	Coping	Job Satisfaction
Age	Sig. (.03)	Sig. (.02)	Sig. (.02)
Sex	ns (.12)	ns (.14)	ns (.15)
Civil status	Sig. (.04)	Sig. (.03)	Sig. (.04)
Ethnicity	Sig. (.02)	Sig. (.02)	Sig. (.02)
Highest educational attainment	Sig. (.01)	Sig. (.01)	Sig. (.01)
School	Sig. (.01)	Sig. (.01)	Sig. (.01)
Years in teaching	Sig. (.02)	Sig. (.02)	Sig. (.02)
Grade level handled	Border. (.05)	Sig. (.04)	Border. (.05)
Relevant seminars and trainings	Sig. (.01)	Sig. (.01)	Sig. (.01)

Note. Sig. = significant at $\alpha = .05$; Border. = $p = .05$, treated as significant in the source analysis; ns = not significant. Values in parentheses are p values.

Age, civil status, ethnicity, educational attainment, school, years in teaching, and seminars and trainings were significantly related to barriers, coping, and job satisfaction (Table 3). Grade level handled was significant for coping ($\chi^2 = 9.64$, $p = .04$) and at the .05 boundary for barriers

($\chi^2 = 8.91$) and satisfaction ($\chi^2 = 8.76$). Sex was not significant for any variable ($p = .12$ to .15). The largest chi-square values were for seminars and trainings (15.27, 16.53, and 16.82).

Relationship of Barriers and Coping to Job Satisfaction

The test of relationship among barriers, coping strategies, and job satisfaction produced $r = .68$ ($p = .001$), a moderately strong, positive, and significant relationship, and the null hypothesis was rejected. The source reported this single coefficient for the three variables together; separate coefficients for barriers and satisfaction, coping and satisfaction, and barriers and coping were not reported.

Discussion

The stressors teachers face. The pattern of barriers matches what Stress and Coping Theory would call chronic environmental demands. The three most severe domains, learners' poverty, shortage of resources, and curricular overload, are persistent and largely outside teachers' control (Uddin, 2024; Akon-Yamga et al., 2024; Karikari et al., 2020). The fact that teachers most strongly agreed that they "often improvise" describes a daily, effortful form of coping with scarcity. In contrast, the lower ratings for style mismatch suggest that teachers believe they can largely adjust their own methods, an appraisal that, in Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) terms, treats that demand as controllable. The learners' financial hardship and low confidence are also consistent with the long shadow of the pandemic years, when Filipino students' mental health and learning suffered (Panela, 2025b).

How teachers cope. The strongest coping strategies were problem-focused (adjusting strategies, adapting lessons, creating supportive classrooms) and emotion-focused (staying motivated, persevering, remaining optimistic). This combination is typical of resilient teachers (Chan et al., 2021; Amoroso, 2025) and matches the strategies Filipino teachers in remote schools describe, such as positive self-talk, time management, and reliance on professional networks (Fabrigas & Paglinawan, 2025). The relatively weaker use of colleagues' feedback and differentiation suggests that collaborative and pedagogical coping resources are less developed than individual ones. This matters because peer collaboration provides emotional as well as informational support (Wabingga, 2025; Long, 2024) and because differentiation addresses the style mismatch directly (Goyibova, 2025; Ojer, 2025). Teachers on Samar who carried out action research during the pandemic likewise depended on peers and mentors to overcome institutional and personal barriers (Panela, 2025e).

Why satisfaction stays high. Teachers reported Very High satisfaction despite Very High barriers. Their satisfaction rests most on relationships with colleagues, which supports the view that social resources buffer stress (Smith & Hoy, 2022; Versfeld, 2025). It is weakest for career advancement and for support from administration, which are institutional rather than interpersonal sources. The teachers' extensive graduate study and frequent training may raise expectations for advancement that the system has not met, and unmet expectations of this kind are a recognized source of emotional exhaustion and attrition (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017; Ferguson, 2022).

The relationship among the three variables. The significant positive coefficient ($r = .68$) indicates that barriers, coping, and satisfaction move together. The most coherent reading,

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consistent with Stress and Coping Theory, is that heavier barriers prompt more intensive coping and that active coping preserves satisfaction (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Chang & Chan, 2015). This interpretation must remain provisional. A single correlation cannot describe three relationships, so it is not possible to tell whether coping is positively related to satisfaction, whether barriers are positively or negatively related to it, or whether coping mediates their association. Because barriers were not normally distributed, a rank-based coefficient would also have been more appropriate. The finding nevertheless supports the view that coping cannot be separated from the barriers that prompt it or from the satisfaction it protects.

Profile variables. The significant relationships for training, school, and educational attainment suggest that professional resources shape the whole stress process, from how barriers are perceived to how teachers cope and how satisfied they feel (Golledge, 2025; Papp & Cottrell, 2021). School-level differences reflect unequal resources and communities (Omoeva, 2021; Jornet, 2025), and ethnicity reflects the different positions of IP and non-IP teachers (Cubi et al., 2024). The absence of sex differences indicates that men and women experience these conditions similarly; confirming that the scales function equivalently for both groups, as done in a Rasch-based gender analysis of a teacher empowerment scale, would strengthen this conclusion (Panela, 2025a). Because chi-square tests do not reveal direction, claims that particular age, civil status, or experience groups cope better cannot be drawn from these results.

Implications. The results support a professional development program that strengthens teachers' coping resources where they are weakest, namely peer feedback, differentiation, and institutional support for growth, while also reducing the structural barriers that generate stress. The proposed program addresses both through eight components: culturally responsive pedagogy, resource management and technology integration, student motivation and engagement, curriculum mapping, community and parental engagement, peer collaboration and mentoring, resilience and stress management, and career progression with recognition. Its design should build on an assessment of teachers' current competencies, as done for basic education teachers on Samar Island (Panela, 2025d). Its wellness component can also consider supports beyond conventional workshops, such as the AI companion device that university teachers reported using to manage workplace stress (Panela, 2026).

Conclusion

Public school teachers in Alabel District experience Very High pedagogical barriers, mainly socio-economic, material, and curricular, and they cope with them at a Very High level through adaptive problem-solving, positive classroom environments, and resilience. Their job satisfaction is Very High, resting on collegial relationships and weaker in career advancement. Personal and professional characteristics other than sex are related to barriers, coping, and satisfaction. Barriers, coping strategies, and job satisfaction are significantly and positively interrelated, consistent with a stress-and-coping process in which teachers' efforts preserve their satisfaction.

The district should implement the proposed professional development program, with particular emphasis on peer feedback structures, differentiated instruction, resource sharing, curriculum mapping, and career and recognition pathways. School heads should create time and structures

for collaboration, and resilience programs should be institutionalized. Programs should also prepare teachers to support learners still affected by the disruptions of the pandemic (Panela, 2025c). Future research should estimate the pairwise relationships among barriers, coping, and satisfaction, use rank-based methods where data are non-normal, and test coping as a mediator.

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